Impact of Individualistic and Collectivistic Orientations on Work Attitudes and Behaviors among Fitness Club Employees in the U.S. and South Korea

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Cultural values an individual holds have a significant influence on one's work attitudes and behaviors (Hofstede, 1980). In particular, as individualistic and collectivistic orientations are said to be closely related to psychological processes (Oyserman & Lee, 2008), they are frequently discussed in relation to work attitudes and behaviors (Murphy, Ramamoorthy, Flood, & MacCurtain, 2006). According to Triandis (1995), distinction between individualism and collectivism is made based on four features: the sense of self, goals to pursue, attitudes and norms, and rational and relational interactions. In an individualistic culture, an individual is viewed as independent from others; one sets personal goals and work toward them without approval of others; one's behaviors are the results of personal preference; and one keeps the relationships with others as long as needed for personal purposes. However, in a collectivistic culture, one is viewed as interdependent with others; one tends to integrate other people’s goals when forming own goals; one’s behaviors are the results of expected norms; and one exhibits relational orientation in relationships. Due to these differences between individualistic and collectivistic orientations, researchers have used this dimension when conducting cross cultural studies and have found significant impact of this value on work attitudes and behaviors (Murphy et al., 2006).

Much research that used the individualistic and collectivistic orientations focused on comparing work attitudes and behaviors at a national level because each country is represented by one dominant cultural value (e.g., Chelladurai & Ogasawara, 2003; Glazer, Daniel, & Short, 2004). However, some researchers have suggested that the cultural values should be also examined at the individual bases due to intra-cultural differences (Triandis, 1995; Ramamoorthy & Flood, 2002). Therefore, the current study attempts to investigate the effects of individualism and collectivism on the relationships between perceived support, affective commitment, intention to leave, and work effort at both national and individual levels. More specifically, perceived support that comes from three sources (i.e., coworker, supervisor, and organization) is expected to have a positive influence on affective commitment. In addition, affective commitment would positively influence employees’ level of work effort while they would negatively influence employees’ intention to leave the organization. Whereas it is speculated that the relationships between the constructs would be significant in both individualistic and collectivistic groups, the strength of the relationship would be different due to differences in cultural value.

The purposes of the current study are threefold; (a) to statistically examine the structural relationships among the latent constructs within the model among American and Korean fitness club employees, (b) to compare the model fit and the strength of the relationships among the constructs in these two culturally different groups of fitness employees, and (c) to test a moderating effect of individualism and collectivism on the relationships between the constructs.

The participants were recruited from the employees of fitness clubs in the U.S. and South Korea including administrative staff, fitness instructors/trainers, sales people, and front desk employees. The total sample size for the study was 784 (American = 454, Korean = 330). Web based survey and paper based survey were utilized to collect data, and the questionnaire included 48 items measuring perceived support, affective commitment, work effort, turnover intention, individualism, collectivism in addition to background information. For Korean sample, the questionnaire was back translated as recommended by Brislin (1986). The response format for the survey was a seven-point scale ranging from very strongly disagree (1) to very strongly agree (7). For data analysis, first, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) were conducted for each group to examine measurement model and structural relationships between constructs. Then, Multiple-group CFA was used to confirm the factor structure of the proposed measurement model across groups. After measurement invariance was established across groups, multiple-group SEM was conducted to examine the proposed relationships among the constructs across groups. In addition, regression analyses were conducted, as an alternative after dropping individualism, to examine the moderator effects of collectivism.

The results from the single-group CFA showed that the model fit reasonably fit both in American and Korean groups.
However, the construct of individualism was eliminated due to lack of measurement invariance between American and Korean groups and inadequate reliability. The modified CFA demonstrated a reasonable model fit for American and Korean groups. In addition, the single-group SEM showed that the model fit reasonably in both American and Korean groups. Multiple-group CFA showed that measurement invariance existed between American and Korean groups. Multiple-group SEM revealed that the structural relationships between the constructs in the model were equivalent in both groups. The regression analyses demonstrated that the moderating effect of collectivism was significant only in the relationship between affective commitment and work effort in Korean group. The nature of the interaction indicated that when affective commitment was high, those high on collectivism exerted more work effort than those with low collectivism. However, when the level of affective commitment was low, those high on collectivism exerted much more work effort than those low on collectivism.

The results of the study contribute much to sport management literature in several ways. First, the current study is the first attempt to examine the difference in the structural relationships among the proposed constructs at the national and the individual levels in the domain of sport. In addition, the findings from the measurement model suggest that each construct included in the proposed model has approximately the same meaning to Korean fitness employees. In fact, no previous studies examined if the meaning of these constructs are the same in culturally different people. From a practical standpoint, the findings of the study indicate that support available at workplace is an important predictor of employees’ affective commitment to the organization regardless of cultural and country membership; therefore, guiding managers in their human resource practice. Future studies should refine the individualism scale and investigate individual level difference using multiple-group analysis. Also, future studies should compare the applicability of the proposed model in different occupations within sport domain. Detailed results and implications will be discussed in the presentation.