

**Social Exchange and the Team: A Study of Player-team Dyads in Intercollegiate Athletics**

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**Organizational theory/culture**  
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The Social Exchange Theory (SET) was developed as an outgrowth of the sociological properties of “interpersonal relations and social interactions,” in the mid nineteen hundreds (Blau, 1964, p. 4). Based on an amalgamation of utilitarianism and behaviorism (Cook & Rice, 2003), the SET propagated from various views of actors situational responses to one another. The examination of such interactional responses between actors allowed early scholars in the field (e.g., Homans, Blau, and Emerson) a means to “explain (various) fundamental processes of social behavior” (e.g., power, social status, justice, etc; Cook & Rice, 2003, p. 54) and led to theoretically viable justifications for social conduct (Blau, 1964).

As the social exchange construct developed, primarily through the work of Homans (1961) and Blau (1964), a distinct classification scheme of social behavior and interactions took shape. Such a scheme allowed for relationships, motivations, and outcomes to be studied in-depth, and with respect to their dyadic nature. Marking the growth and acceptance of the sociologically based work, business scholars set about adapting various exchange constructs for their own application. In this context, social exchange came to describe an amalgamation of organizational interactions (Blau, 1964; Eisenberger et al., 1986). More specifically, organizational scholars placed particular importance on two exchanges titled leader-member exchange (LMX) and perceived organizational support (POS; Settoon et al., 1996). Furthermore, scholars continually noted the importance commitment played in both exchange processes (e.g., Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Defined as the exchange relationship between employees and the organization (Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002) that leads to the employees general beliefs in how much the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001), POS has been applied to a great extent in business literature (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). In this manner, “employees’ general perception of the degree to which the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being” (Wayne et al., 2002, p. 590) is gauged and often times associated with various outcomes. More specifically, POS is often evaluated in conjunction with individual productivity, as it has been shown that social support strengthens the output of individual members of an organization (Blau, 1964).

Seeking to adapt the theoretical principles to the field of sport, scholars began to apply the construct of POS and more broadly based social exchange constructs to sport organizations, teams, and participants (Crone, 1999; Greenberg, Mark, & Lehman, 1985; Johns, Lindner, & Wolko, 1990). Accordingly, sport literature defined POS relationships to be between an employee, i.e., an athlete (Sage, 1973) or a coach (Rocha & Chelladurai, 2011), and the organization, i.e., the sport team (Sage, 1973) or the sporting body (Rocha & Chelladurai, 2011).

Studies of the construct in sport follows organizational literature which suggests the POS of the aforementioned “employees” has an effect on individual performance (Rocha & Chelladurai, 2011; Woodman & Hardy, 2001). More specifically, Rocha and Chelladurai (2011) tested the application of POS within collegiate coaches and found POS operated through affective commitment to increase coaches’ performance as measured by athletic success. Additionally, Woodman and Hardy (2001) found in studying organizational stress in elite athletes, that when an athlete felt the organization did not support their desire to obtain a given goal, the athlete was more likely to experience increase levels of stress and decreased levels of performance.

Though the construct of POS and the application of the SET are well noted in these pieces, overall their examination in current sport scholarship is lacking. One area in particular in which use of these exchange constructs is found wanting is in the study of intercollegiate student-athletes and the various dyadic partners they have. Moving such a notion forward, this work sought to address the found lack of literature, speaking to the application of the SET to athletes themselves.

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Focusing specifically on POS, the work tested social exchange theory's assertion, as well as business scholarship findings that demonstrate positive perceptions of organizational support result in greater levels of individual performance (Bau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Rhoades et al., 2001). Within this framework, Sage's (1973) classification of players as employees and teams as organizations was applied. Additionally, Blau's (1964) depiction of exchange processes was utilized, leading to the suggestion that the exchange itself does not lead to increase levels of performance but rather that it operates through the creation of normative and affective commitment to increase levels of individual performance.

Taking such theories into consideration, we hypothesized that student-athletes with greater perceptions of POS would have higher levels of commitment to their teams, which would ultimately lead to higher levels of individual athletic performance.

To test our hypotheses an instrument was established to measure student-athletes' perceptions of POS, their overall commitment to their team, and their individual performance. The instrument was then administered to student-athletes participating in varsity sports at a large, Division 1 institution. Of the 615 surveys distributed, 151 (24.6%) usable surveys were returned and utilized for the study.

Within the instrument, Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) was adapted and used to measure student-athletes' perceptions of the quality of support received from their team. To measure student-athletes' perceptions of their athletic performance, Williams and Anderson's (1991) instrument, constructed to measure job performance through assessing individual performance and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) was adapted and used. Finally, affect commitment (AC) and normative commitment (NC) were also evaluated. The scales used were adapted from Meyer et al. (1993), and looked to measure the degree of emotional attachment and feelings of obligation student-athletes had towards their teams. Changes were made when adapting items as deemed necessary so that each better fit the context of the study.

Upon collection of the data, confirmatory factor analysis was run to verify the loading of individual items onto their given constructs. Items that did not load appropriately were subsequently dropped, and not included in any additional analysis. Cronbach's alphas of each construct were then calculated as a means to establish reliability. Findings demonstrated that each construct was reliably measured (POS  $\alpha = .877$ ; AC  $\alpha = .764$ ; NC  $\alpha = .863$ ; Individual performance  $\alpha = .786$ ; OCB  $\alpha = .811$ ). Following this basic statistical analysis, a correlation matrix was produced and utilized to test the hypothesized relationships through use of structural equation modeling (SEM).

While the analysis of the proposed relationships is still underway, we anticipate that our findings will mirror those present in social exchange and business literature. Accordingly, we believe a strong positive significant relationship will be found between student-athletes' perceptions of POS and commitment as a whole and that a similar significant positive relationship will be found between commitment as a whole and individual performance. Following the completion of our analysis, we will engage in a discussion of the practical implications of our results. More specifically, we will focus our conversation on the value of high quality team interactions in generating individual athletic performance at the intercollegiate level. Discussions will also focus on the application of the SET in intercollegiate athletics and will offer suggestions for practitioners. Finally, potential future studies will be discussed.