Passion at Work: Evidence from Team Sport Organisations

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In the sport management literature, there has now been an increased attention to psychologically-related constructs within the workplace context such as commitment (e.g., Turner & Chelladurai, 2005), satisfaction (e.g., Hall, Bowers, & Martin, 2010; Parks & Para, 1994), burnout (e.g., Danylichuk, 1993), identification (Swanson & Kent, 2014) and/or motivation (e.g., Cleave, 1993). Vallerand (2010), however, argues that these constructs fail to offer a nuanced perspective on processes leading to both adaptive and maladaptive outcomes that are inherent in the way the construct of passion has been conceptualized. To this end, and despite the increased focus on attitudes in the workplace, we know little about employees’ passion in the sports industry. The purpose of this research is to address this void.

Passion has mostly been examined in the context of non-work activities such as gambling (Mageau et al., 2005; Rousseau et al., 2002), internet use (Tosun & Lajunen, 2009), leisure (Stenseng, 2008), or digital gaming (Wang & Chiu, 2007). Interestingly, organizational and management scholars outside sport have now started examining the attitude of passion in the context of workplace at both the conceptual (e.g. Zigarmi et al, 2009; Vallerand & Houlifort, 2003) and empirical levels (Caudroit et al., 2011; Forrest, Mageau, Sarrazin, & Morin, 2011; Ho, Wong, & Lee, 2011; Marques, 2007; Neumann, 2006). Beyond the scholarly community, practitioners have emphasized not only the personal benefits of being passionate about one’s job (Boyatzis et al., 2002), but also the organizational gains that result from companies having passionate employees (Bruch & Ghoshal, 2003; Moses, 2001).

However, in the context of sport, the examination of passion has been empirically limited to soccer fans (Vallerand et al., 2008) and professional athletes (Donahue et al., 2009; Vallerand et al., 2006; 2008), thereby neglecting the team sport organizations’ administrative personnel. Even when the concept of passion emerges as one of the key internal factors regarding, for example, the implementation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs (e.g., Babiak & Wolfe, 2009), this finding is more from the sports consumer’s perspective, and therefore relates to the wider external environmental factors of the sport industry itself. A notable exemption in this regard is the recent work by Anagnostopoulos, Byers, and Shilbury (2014), who reported the concept of passion as an intrinsic stimulus for managerial decision-making within the charitable foundations of professional team sports organizations, yet without measuring the extent to which managers therein are passionate about their jobs.

This work is set out to address this shortcoming. In particular, the purpose of the present study is threefold: (1) to explore the applicability of Vallerand et al.’s (2003) dualistic model of passion in the context of sport organisations’ managerial and administrative personnel; (2) to compare the construct of passion between employees who work for the ‘parent’ professional teams and their counterparts who consist of the workforce of the teams’ charitable foundations; and (3) to explore the potential effect of work-related contextual variables on employees’ passion for work.

According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), people engage in activities (leisure, work etc.,) to satisfy important needs such as autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Passion largely stems from SDT, and has been defined as a strong inclination towards an activity that one enjoys, finds important and in which one invests time and energy (Vallerand et al., 2003). Although work is not always an important and enjoyable activity in people’s life, there are individuals that value their job highly and becomes part of their identity (Vallerand & Houlifort, 2003). In this case, the work can become a passionate activity, and depending on the level of internalization, it can be distinguished to harmonious and obsessive passion, known also as dualistic model of passion (Vallerand, 2010). In the case of a controlled internalization process, the work tends to “control” the employee (i.e., obsessive passion),
While in harmonious passion the individual has the control of the work and a better balance with other life activities (Vallerand et al., 2003).

A survey was developed incorporating the passion variable using the 12-item scale developed by Vallerand et al. (2003) to measure the passion experienced by individuals in the two different organisational settings. The particular instrument has two components: harmonious and obsessive passion towards the job. Besides the passion scales, the survey contained measures related to demographic variables (e.g., age, gender and education), to employment position in the organization and to previous job experience. The survey was distributed online to full time employees who work in the English soccer clubs and their respective charitable foundations. 177 respondents returned the survey completed (138 males, 39 females) and the data were statistically analyzed in Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and analysis of variance, using SPSS and Amos 18.0. To determine the effect of contextual variables on the passion for the job, t-test and ANOVA were also used.

Overall, respondents from either type of organization have a very high passion, and show high harmonious and low obsessive passion towards their job. Preliminary results also show that the type of organization (i.e., soccer club vs. charitable foundation) does have an effect on both the harmonious and obsessive passion experienced by the employee, with foundation employees to present themselves significantly more harmoniously passionate (M=4.08, SD=.49) toward their job compared to ones working for the ‘parent’ clubs (M=3.82, SD=.61). However, the age, education level, size of the sport organization and the length of the job experience do not have an effect on the levels of either harmonious or obsessive passion experienced by the employees. The present study offers useful empirical insights about the way employees in the sport industry perceive their work, and thus responds to calls for closer attention to HRM-related issues within the context of team sport organisations (Todd & Kent, 2009). More detailed results along with theoretical and managerial implications will be presented.

Selected References


Vallerand, R. J., & Houlfort, N. (2003). Passion at work: Toward a new conceptualization. In D. Skarlicki, S. Gilliland, & D. Steiner (Eds.), Research in Social Issues in Management (Vol. 3); (pp. 175-204). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing Inc.