Leadership Impact on Employee Fulfillment in Multi-Sport Major Games: A Phenomenographical Research Study

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Kenney (1998) defines workplace fulfillment as the degree to which employees experience work that is emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually engaging or fulfilling, where organizations utilize employees’ talents and abilities, employees’ core values are reflected in the organization, and employees feel connected with others working on worthwhile endeavours. Furthermore, Davenport (2015) notes that workplace fulfillment is directly related to the degree to which employees expend positive energy toward their work and productivity goals and experience levels of stress and satisfaction. Employee perceived workplace fulfillment, or how employees perceive leaders and organizations as fostering fulfillment in the workplace, requires theoretical exploration and practical consideration, given the potential positive implications that such consideration may have on sport organizations and industry leaders. Leadership, defined as “a multilevel leader-follower interaction process that occurs in a particular situation where a leader and follower share a purpose and jointly accomplish things willingly” (Peachy, Zhou, Damon & Burton, 2015), is found to positively contribute to the presence of employee perceived workplace fulfillment (Rahimnia & Sharifirad, 2015).

Despite this relationship and the theoretical and managerial significance of leadership and workplace fulfillment concepts, they have been seldom discussed in the sport management literature. Therefore, the purpose of this presentation is to discuss preliminary findings of a study that explore the impact of leadership on the development of employees’ perceived workplace fulfillment in the Major Games industry. This particular industry—which includes, but is not exclusive to, Olympic/Paralympic Games, Pan/Para Pan American Games, and Commonwealth Games—is specifically chosen as the study context due to its unique environmental features. For example, the environment is characterized as being highly susceptible to change and one in which Games’ employees have complex working relationships. Moreover, the Games themselves often, if not always, have a short and temporary life span. As Parent, Olver, & Séguin (2009) note, researchers rarely focus on leadership, human resources, and employee relations’ topics within the Major Games context. Given this lack of focus, sport management academicians and Major Games’ practitioners may benefit from the results of this exploratory study.

With the Major Games context comes many situational variables influencing leader-employee relations, leader power, and task structures (Parent et al., 2009). As such, an improved understanding of leader influence on (employees’ perceived) workplace fulfillment is required. Workplace spirituality, defined as “the recognition of an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community” (van der Walt & de Klerk, 2014, p. 381), serves as the theoretical framework through which workplace fulfillment is examined. While employees who lack such workplace spirituality are noted to experience higher levels of stress-related illness, burnout, and absenteeism, organizations that do foster workplace spirituality experience increased productivity, creativity, employee fulfillment, and organizational profitability as a whole (Suárez, 2015; van der Walt & de Klerk, 2014).

Three research questions guide this exploratory study, including: 1) is perceived workplace fulfillment important to Major Games employees?; 2) what role do Major Games leaders play in the development of employee perceived workplace fulfillment, if any?; and 3) how may leaders aid in establishing and developing subordinates’ experience with workplace fulfillment? To examine and answer these research questions, the first researcher applied a qualitative research design with a phenomenographical methodology and invited those previously employed in one or more Major Games events, from 2010 to the present time, to participate in the study. Specifically, the first author utilized purposive, homogeneous sampling to invite 20 employees of the middle manager and coordinator level positions to participate. The first author developed a semi-structured interview guide based on the workplace spirituality and
fulfillment frameworks to collect primary data through recorded interviews, which were later transcribed verbatim. To analyze these data, the first author used open coding and thematic data analyses to discover emergent themes.

In this presentation, the researchers will present the preliminary findings from their analysis and follow with a discussion of the findings’ implications toward salient recommendations for leaders of Major Games’ contexts. Findings contribute to new theoretical understanding in the field by illuminating current research gaps and discussing the value of increased workplace spirituality towards increasing Major Games’ employees perceived workplace fulfillment. Additionally, the researchers will outline future research initiatives, given their intent to further incite leaders toward developing a culture of workplace fulfillment among Major Games’ employees.