“I Love My Job, I Love My Job”: Exploring Workplace Spirituality and Employees’ Workplace Experience in the Major Games Context

Lindsay Smith, Brock University
Kirsty Spence (Advisor), Brock University

Management - HRM (Olympic Sport) Thursday, June 7, 2018
20-minute oral presentation (including questions) 1:20 PM
Abstract 2018-042 Room: Acadia B

Sport management scholars and practitioners equally recognize sport industry employees as often working long hours within low salary positions (Kellison, Kim, & Magnusen, 2013). Scholars recognize Major Games organizations as specifically unique, given these organizational environments are characterized as high velocity (i.e., in which fast paced decision making is typical) and as extremely susceptible to change (Parent, Olver, & Séguin, 2009). Such environments—including but not exclusive to Olympic/Paralympic Games, Pan/Para Pan American Games, and Commonwealth Games—are additionally associated with unique organizational stressors experienced by employees, including: workload, time constraints, role ambiguity, job insecurity, and work-life conflict (Odio, Walker, & Kim, 2013).

Van der Walt and de Klerk (2014) define workplace spirituality as “the recognition of an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community” (p. 381). Employees attribute workplace spirituality to their feelings and experience of interconnectedness with the world and living things, from which they are rendered ultimately more satisfied and fulfilled at work (Pawar, 2014). Through their experience of workplace spirituality, employees furthermore enjoy increased productivity, creativity, and profitability outcomes (van der Walt & de Klerk, 2014), contrary to employees who work within organizations in which they lack feelings and experience of workplace spirituality. In such workplaces, employees experience higher levels of stress-related illness, burnout, and absenteeism (Suárez, 2015). As such, the degree to which employees perceive leaders as fostering a climate of workplace spirituality requires theoretical exploration and practical consideration, given the positive associations between employees' experience of workplace spirituality and their overall positive workplace experience and associated outcomes (Pawar, 2014; van der Walt & de Klerk, 2014).

The purpose of this presentation is to explore the influence of workplace spirituality on employees’ workplace experience in the Major Games context. As the central proposition of this study was that employees better serve organizations when their own needs are met, we assert that employees working within the Major Games environment particularly benefit from outcomes associated with workplace spirituality, given the unique, aforementioned organizational characteristics. This study was framed with a qualitative research design and a phenomenographical methodology, thereby utilizing purposive, homogeneous sampling to invite via email or LinkedIn messages 20 employees of both middle-manager and coordinator level positions, previously employed in one or more Major Games events from 2010 onward to participate in the study. After developing a semi-structured interview guide which included questions related to employees’ perception of their experiences of the Major Games environment and workplace fulfillment and to leaders for whom they worked, the first author collected primary data through recorded interviews, yielding 234 transcribed (verbatim) and typed pages of data. Furthermore, the first author used open coding and thematic data analyses (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) via Nvivo 11 software to discover emergent themes and to yield results.

Employees' experience of workplace spirituality aids in the development of positive workplace experience through characteristics including: improved employee work quality, value congruence, life satisfaction and subjective wellbeing (van der Walt & de Klerk, 2014; Suárez, 2015). In this presentation, we explore the role of characteristics found in this study to positively influence employees' workplace. From the thematic analysis exacted, we found participants experience characteristics of workplace spirituality specifically through experiencing value congruence and sense of community among Major Games’ organizations and among their work teams. While participants largely acknowledged their work experiences to have occurred within a positive Major Games working environment, they noted that this environment was possible on the occasion when their personal values aligned (e.g., through feeling a
sense of achievement and purpose) with the event’s mission. Additionally, participants noted that when a sense of community developed (e.g., through the development of relationships with colleagues, leaders, and stakeholders), this represented as both a demonstration of workplace spirituality and as a pivotal contributor to their positive workplace experience.

In this presentation, we present the study's findings and follow with a discussion of the implications for both Major Games practitioners and sport management scholars. By exploring the relationship between workplace spirituality and value congruence and sense of community, we discuss the value of leaders fostering a culture of workplace spirituality towards the outcome of Major Games employees’ positive workplace experience. To outline implications to the sport management literature, we both detail the theoretical contribution of these research findings within the sport management literature and outline future research initiatives related to inciting Major Games' leaders to develop a culture of workplace spirituality to benefit employees’ workplace experience.