Scale Design: An Ideological Psychological Contract in Youth Sport

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The recent focus on ethical leadership in sport (Burton & Welty Peachey, 2014) has further highlighted the importance that people (including volunteers) are placing on ensuring the values of sport are aligned with their own. Recent sexual harassment, doping, and human rights activism in sport, for example, have caused greater focus on the values around sport and the human resources that occupy sport organizations. As such, research is needed to explore behaviour as a result of met or unmet values expectations between an individual and an organization.

In light of this focus on expectations in and around sport, psychological contract theory provides a useful framework for examining the sport volunteer work environment. To date much of the research has conceptualized psychological contracts using Rousseau’s (1995) framework (O’Donohue & Nelson, 2007) of transactional and relational expectations. Transactional contracts have been defined as short-term and explicit in nature, whereas, relational contracts are characterized as long-term and focused on socio-emotional exchange (Millward & Hopkins, 1998). This characterization of the psychological contract however has been critiqued as being inadequate (Arnold, 1996; Guest, 1998; Coyle-Shapiro et al, 2004) especially for volunteers because their “engagement [often] reflects an alignment of their values and motivation with those of the organization” (Nichols, 2012, p. 997). Thompson and Bunderson (2003) proposed an expansion of the traditional psychological contract to incorporate the notion of an ‘ideology-infused’ psychological contract. The ideological contract has been characterized as “credible commitments to pursue a valued cause or principle” (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003, p. 574). According to psychological contract theory, the perceived fulfillment (expectations met) of a psychological contract positively impacts an individual’s attitude and behaviour; whereas unmet expectations are likely to lead to negative attitudes and/or behaviour (Conway & Briner, 2005).

The psychological contract is specific to the implicit and explicit promises between an organization and employee or volunteer, and thus may be unique to a particular context (e.g., Guest & Conway, 2002; Rousseau & Schalk, 2007; Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998). It is important to understand the features or elements of a contract in a given context and even a particular role (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998). Research to date on the psychological contract in the sport setting has often been delimited to exploring relational and transactional contracts. However, it has been proposed that ideological contracts may assist in explaining why one may view their contract as being breached in the absence of mistreatment, or why one may continue with an organization despite a breach of their transactional or relational contract (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003). As such, the purpose of this study is to explore the content of the ideological psychological contract within the youth sport volunteer coaching environment.

Two research questions were advanced within this broad purpose: (1) what is the ideological psychological contract of volunteer youth sport coaches?; and, (2) what is the ideological psychological contract of community sport clubs?

To serve the purpose, a survey comprising three sections (organizational and respondent characteristics, expectations of coaches/clubs, perceived coach/club expectations of self, and outcome of intent to remain a coach/administrator) was developed. The survey items were generated based on eight identified values expectations espoused by coaches and club administrators in community sport organizations (safety, accuracy of participant evaluation, lifelong sport participation, enjoyable participation experiences, competitive participation experiences, club development, PSO/system alignment, and diversity; Authors, 2017). An item review and collapse response took place between the authors, where a total of 32 items were derived with four items representing each of the identified values. This 32 item version of the survey was distributed to a panel of experts in order to review the relevance and appropriateness of the items (DeVellis, 2012). From the expert review of items, minor wording adjustments were made, and the final 32 items have been uploaded to a secure online survey distribution site.
The survey will be distributed to coaches and administrators of volleyball clubs in one Canadian province (N~400). Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) will be performed to determine the underlying factor structure of the ideological psychological contract measures for both coaches and administrators developed in this study. Descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis will be used to examine the nature of the ideological psychological contract, and variation by organizational or respondent characteristics. Further, a correlation analysis will be run with each factor derived from the EFA and our outcome of intent to remain a coach/administrator. This step will be taken to assess the criterion validity of the factors (DeVellis, 2012).

The results are expected to contribute to the theoretical understanding of psychological contracts in the youth sport context. Specifically, the results will advance theory and research with the examination and assessment of the nature of ideological psychological contracts for coaches and administrators in this particular sport context. The results will have further practical implications as they will provide insight into the explicit or implicit values expectations of community sport organization administrators and volunteer coaches. Upon determining these values-based expectations, sport administrators may use human resource management strategies (e.g., orientation, training, and recruitment) to communicate and emphasize organizational values to coaches.