Authentic Leadership and Job Engagement: An Empirical Examination into the Development of Creative Sport Employees

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As scholars continue to explore the value of positive emotions and behaviors in sport organizations (e.g., Kim, Kim, Newman, Ferris, & Perrewé; Oja, Kim, Perrewé, & Anagnostopoulos, 2019), creative behavior remains an understudied construct despite its value to the sport industry. To this point, sport employees who are able to make effective decisions and develop unique solutions to complex problems are valuable (Choi, Martin, & Park, 2008). Moreover, successful change and innovation are required for organizational survival, effectiveness, and competitive advantages (Jafri, Dem, & Choden, 2016). Due to the paucity of studies examining sport employees’ creativity, an investigation into the determinants of sport employees’ creative behaviors is valuable.

In this study, both authentic leadership and job engagement were used to predict creative behaviors. Authentic leadership is defined as “a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates” (Luthans & Avolio, 2003, p. 243). Additionally, authentic leadership promotes engaged workers (Liu et al., 2017). Job engagement is defined as “a positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state of work-related wellbeing” (Leiter & Bakker, 2010, p. 1) and should influence “the production of novel and useful ideas” (i.e., creativity; Farmer, Tierney, & Kung-McIntryre, 2003, p. 619) as engaged employees are likely to have increased motivation to pursue unique ways to achieve work related goals. Lastly, job engagement is likely to mediate the relationship between authentic leadership and creativity, as job engagement could represent the emotional and behavioral mechanism produced by authentic leadership that facilitates creative behaviors.

A total of 308 sport employees participated in the study. A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to evaluate the measurement model, and a subsequent structural model was built to test the relationships between latent variables and mediation effects. The final measurement model had acceptable fit statistics (CFI = .95; TLI = .94; RMSEA = .047; SRMR = .05). In the structural model, the model fit was adequate (CFI = .95; TLI = .94; RMSEA = .05; SRMR = .05). All relationships were significant, as was the indirect effect (γ = .09, Confidence Interval [CI] 95% [0.014-.178]), but the relationship between authentic leadership and creative behaviors was insignificant (γ = -.02, p = .75). Given the significant indirect effect and the lack of a relationship between authentic leadership and creative behaviors, full mediation was evaluated and confirmed (γ = .09, CI 95% [0.013-.171]; Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010).

The findings of this study add to the evolving literature concerning creativity and leadership in the sport industry. Based on the results, it appears that job engagement serves as an explanatory variable whereby authentic leadership’s influence on sport employee creativity is explained by the benefits of job engagement. As such, job engagement emerges as a meaningful variable that can provide a deeper explanation for positive outcomes. Accordingly, this study offers a pathway for future research involving leadership’s effect on creativity in the sport workplace.