

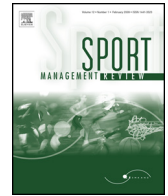


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Passion and pride in professional sports: Investigating the role of workplace emotion

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ABSTRACT

The current study examined the influence of passion and pride on employees of professional sport organizations. Anecdotally, much has been noted about the role that emotions play in making the sport industry one of the world's largest and most visible. However, empirical investigation is lacking in relation to those who choose a career in this environment. Results from an analysis of 933 employee survey responses representing 89 teams across 5 leagues suggest that passion and pride play an important role influencing commonly-assessed workplace attitudes and behaviors. Notably, obsessive passion seems to work in a distinctly positive fashion within professional sport workplaces, as compared to its negative influence on employees within other non-sport industries researched previously.

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1. Introduction

Sport and emotion are inextricably linked (Vallerand, 1983; Vallerand & Blanchard, 2000). For individuals in various roles (e.g., participant, coach, fan, etc.), emotion is at the core of the sporting experience (Duquin, 2000), and the passion that sport engenders is regarded as a distinguishing characteristic of the industry (Stewart & Smith, 1999). Sport and emotion have been studied from multiple perspectives (e.g., sociological, psychological, and physiological), and in relation to numerous subjects such as pride, performance, culture, and fan experience (Duquin, 2000; Vallerand & Blanchard, 2000). The sport management literature has also addressed the study of emotion, primarily through the lens of consumer behavior and its association with fan-related attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Wann, Dolan, McGeorge, & Allison, 1994).

Over the past decade there has been an increased emphasis in the mainstream management literature on the study of emotion in organizational life (e.g., Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002; Barsade & Gibson, 2007). The basis of this trend is that strong feelings are often present when individuals confront work issues related to organizational performance (Barsade & Gibson, 2007), and that emotion (affect) plays an important role for key workplace attitudes and behaviors (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002). With the close association between sport and emotion, it seems plausible that emotion could also be an important element within the context of the sport workplace. While sport management has established a strong research paradigm for individuals external to organizations, enhanced focus is needed on the role that emotion might play with regard to those working inside sport organizations (Todd & Kent, 2009). For example, Taylor, Doherty, and McGraw (2008) suggest that the

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passion surrounding sport in general might also be reflected in employees working in the sport industry. They note examples of “ . . . irrational passions and emotional attachments, despite the often variable quality of the product” (Taylor et al., 2008, p. 2), and suggest that evidence provided from studies of job satisfaction and volunteering patterns may be indicative of a similar irrationality amongst the sport industry workforce. Todd and Harris (2009) suggest that the pride of sport employees can be a psychological benefit which leads to increased levels of satisfaction and performance. Their investigation of pride amongst employees of professional sport teams, and its impact on the development of organizational identification, suggests that this element of emotion may be similar to passion in its particular relevance to employees within sport.

With sport being so closely intertwined with the concept of emotion, the lack of attention given to its role in sport organizations is surprising. Other than Todd and Harris (2009), the study of pride and passion in the workplace is notably absent in the sport management literature. This study provides initial research to establish a baseline understanding of the role that these emotional constructs play in the sport workplace environment. Despite the fact that these emotional elements are often said to be distinguishing aspects of our field (e.g., Stewart & Smith, 1999; Taylor et al., 2008), the current study makes one of the first attempts to explore these concepts empirically in relation to organizational behavior. As passion and pride are generally considered distinctly critical concepts in the sport context, it is proposed here that these constructs may also be particularly relevant for sport employees. The main purpose of the study is therefore to investigate the extent to which these affective constructs are linked to the organizationally-relevant outcomes of commitment, satisfaction, involvement, and organizational citizenship behavior. For this initial investigation of emotion in the sport workplace, we included these specific outcomes due to their theoretical connection to passion and pride, their prevalence in the mainstream management literature (Schleicher, Hansen, & Fox, 2011), and their specific relevance for employees working in the sporting environment (e.g., Doherty, 1998; Todd & Kent, 2009).

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Overview of the conceptual model

Our conceptual model of affective influence in the sport workplace is shown in Fig. 1. The general premise for this model is based on previous management literature suggesting that constructs of emotion lead to organizationally-relevant attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002). More specifically, this line of research suggests that positive emotions lead to positive outcomes, whereas emotions with a negative connotation are negatively related (or unrelated) to positive consequences (e.g., Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002; Vallerand, 2010). As outlined above, the affective predictors chosen for the current study include both passion and pride. As will be outlined in more detail below, passion is conceptualized to have two distinct forms. Although not always the case, harmonious passion is primarily considered to be a ‘good’ or positive emotion, whilst obsessive passion is generally considered as more of a ‘bad’ or negative emotion (Vallerand, 2010). In the current study, we also consider pride to be a positive affective construct due to its positive relationship with desirable outcomes in previous research (e.g., Todd & Harris, 2009). We further propose that passion and pride will lead to both attitudinal and behavioral outcomes.

For our initial assessment of the influence of the affective constructs, we include established outcomes which are theoretically connected to the predictors. The attitudinal outcomes include organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job involvement, which are three of the most highly researched attitudes in the employee literature and generally considered as desirable in the organizational setting (Schleicher et al., 2011). With regard to behaviors, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is considered a key construct based on its important connection with organizational effectiveness, and is also one of the most heavily researched behaviors in the employee literature (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). The

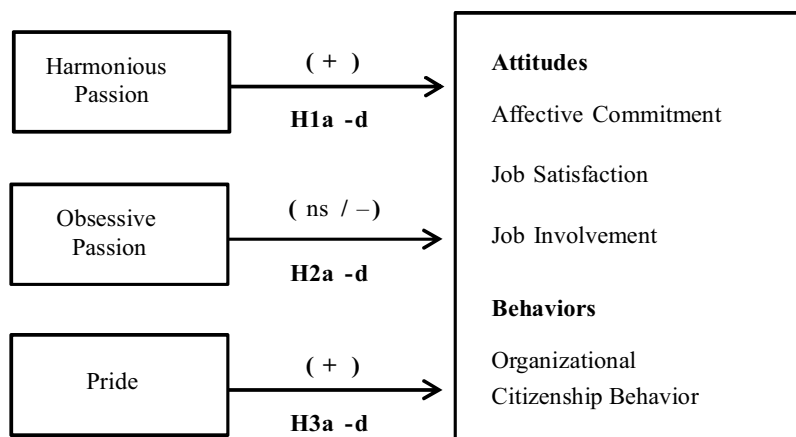


Fig. 1. A model of affective influence on organizational outcomes in professional team sport organizations.

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