The construct known as “grit,” initially developed by Duckworth (2016), has begun to receive increasing attention in the general business management literature (e.g., Jordan, Ferris, Hochwarter, & Wright, 2019; Jordan, Wihler, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2019). One particular issue these authors have investigated is the refinement of the definition of grit in order to improve the validity of the construct and to improve application within the organizational behavior paradigm. Additionally, grit has not seen specific examinations in the sport management discipline despite the applicability of the construct within the sport industry. The germane qualities of grit in the sport workplace are grounded in motivation theory and goal setting (Jordan, Ferris, et al., 2019). Grit could offer a unique perspective into developing sport employee motivation by exploring how goals are set and adjusted. As such, this study was created to examine grit in the sport workplace and to determine the current applicability of grit’s definition with sport employees.

Duckworth (2016) originally defined grit as the perseverance and passion for long-term goals. However, this definition has taken considerable criticism. Jordan, Ferris, et al. (2019) argued for the removal of perseverance in terms of grit’s measurement and definition due to a lack of empirical support. Instead, the authors offered a definition that was centered on “one’s ability (a) to set and pursue purpose-driven long-term (higher-order) goals and (b) to effectively readjust short-term (lower-order) goals…” (p. 325). Restated, gritty individuals are able to alter day-to-day goals as needed in order to achieve goals that are more meaningful and enduring. In the sport industry, a gritty sport employee would be able to change their everyday behaviors in order to achieve long-term personal or professional goals. Consequently, such employees are in a near-constant state of personal improvement, which has potential benefits not only for themselves but also for their sport organization.

As part of ongoing data collection, semi-structured interviews are being conducted with full-time sport employees working in various college athletics departments and for professional sport organizations. An interview guide was developed based on the relevant literature on grit (e.g., Dartu, Yuen, & Chen, 2017; Duckworth 2016; Weisskirch, 2018; Jordan, Ferris, et al., 2019; Jordan, Wihler, et al., 2019). To improve distinction, the guide also included questions pertaining to constructs that are similar to grit (e.g., psychological capital and passion). Data collection will conclude when data saturation is achieved (Jones, 2015). Thematic analysis will be used to analyze the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012).

In all, a better understanding of sport employee grit will create opportunities to improve the experiences of employees and enhance organizational outcomes. This could be done with future studies that measure grit’s relationship with relevant employee and organizational outcomes. As sport organizations continue to seek innovative ways to improve their outputs, grit offers a person-centric mechanism to not only develop their human capital but also to enhance the experiences of their athletes, coaches, and consumers as a result of gritty employees’ motivation to seek continual improvement and attain higher-order goals.