From the Ground Up: A Model for Improving Organizational Performance Through Sport Employee Growth

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As the study of sport and leisure continues to evolve, its design and management has become a relevant consideration (Kleiber, 2020). The notion of employee growth has also become a focal point in the development of sport organizations (Kim et al., 2019). The purpose of this study is to outline the need for—and dynamics of—a conceptual model of sport/leisure employee growth and then examine its applicability with the sport industry. The first model component is meaningful work. Signifying a sense of purpose (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003) and a calling to a profession (Dik & Duffy, 2009), meaningful work represents an initial impetus for growth as those who view their work as meaningful are likely to have a stronger desire to accumulate professional knowledge (Hislop et al., 2018). Further, the meaningful work of sport employees has been thought to foster personal capacity (Kim et al., 2019). The second model aspect, knowledge acquisition, is derived from the knowledge management paradigm (Delshab et al., in press; Hislop et al., 2018). The desire for knowledge acquisition represents sport employees’ initiative to grow their proficiencies. The third component is innovativeness, which represents the tangible products and ideas that result from sport employees’ knowledge acquisition (Hoeber et al., 2015; Wemmer & Koenigstorfer, 2016). As one acquires knowledge, they are able to elevate their skillsets and abilities, which in turn produce creative thoughts, ideas, and eventual tangible innovations (Hislop et al., 2018). Moreover, sport employees’ knowledge acquisition and innovation processes can facilitate personal growth, and their expanded contributions to the sport organization could produce a sense of meaningful work. In this way, the model is positioned as a sustainable growth process in that sport employees’ innovations then can serve as an impetus for renewed meaningful work perceptions. The model also includes multiple antecedents and outcomes. One antecedent is job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), which would seemingly initiate a sense of elevated meaning (Berg et al., 2013), and allow for knowledge attainment and innovation as job crafting demands self-initiative to accomplish tasks. The other antecedents include overall job design (Oldham & Fried, 2016) and leaders’ support for innovation and development (Winand & Anagnostopoulos, 2017). The outcomes of the model are employees’ psychological well-being (PWB; i.e., human development; Kim et al., 2019), consumers and participants’ subjective well-being (SWB; i.e., happiness; Ryan & Deci, 2001) as increased functionality from employees should result in augmented experiences for patrons, and an improved overall organizational performance given the enriched functionality within the organization (Winand et al., 2010). The development of the conceptual model serves as a framework for enhanced organizational performance by cultivating a human capital advantage for sport organizations due to escalated employee growth (Winand et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2019). The previously established subcomponents of the model (i.e., meaningful work, knowledge attainment, and innovativeness) enable its implementation and eventual modification to the nuances of the sport industry. Further, the scope of the model provides opportunities for future studies to examine the proposed relationships and other potential mechanisms to enhance sport employees’ growth.