

12-31-2024

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Recommended Citation

Magnusen, Marshall (2024) "Perspectives on Passion in Sport Management Research," *Journal of Applied Sport Management*: Vol. 16 : Iss. 4.

<https://doi.org/10.7290/jasm16opdu>

Available at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/jasm/vol16/iss4/1>

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Perspectives on Passion in Sport Management Research

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Abstract

The focus of this special issue is to continue to broaden discussions of passion in sports to management contexts with sport personnel rather than marketing contexts with sport consumers. This is done through an offering of several “think pieces” with the goal of inspiring new and creative scholarship about passion in sport work environments.

Keywords: CSR, grit, employees, job seekers, organizational behavior

There is no shortage of interest in sports. People around the world love sports and are drawn to them for pleasure, entertainment, and enjoyment. Many people are also drawn to sports as a place to work and make a living, which has led to increased interest among management scholars to better understand what exactly attracts people to jobs in sport and whether sport job seekers and employees function differently than individuals outside the sport industry. Such curiosity about what drives attraction to careers in sports has led interested researchers (e.g., (Hawzen et al., 2018; Magnusen & Todd, 2015; Swanson & Kent, 2017; Oja et al., 2020; Todd & Harris, 2009) to consider the role of passion and how sport job seekers and employees may be influenced by passion in ways not experienced by individuals outside the realm of sports. Though promising, the existing body of research about passion in the sport workplace remains comparatively underdeveloped and in need of more widespread attention and exploration. Accordingly, the goal of this special issue is to create awareness and elevate discussions of passion in sports through “think pieces” that offer creative perspectives and beneficial research recommendations about passion in sport work environments.

The first paper from Anagnostopoulos covers the interaction between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and passion in the workplace. Per the focus of the special issue, he explores employee passion rather than sport consumer or participant passion and how CSR initiatives may inspire greater passion for employees’ careers in sport. Additionally, rather than Vallerand et al.’s (2003) dualistic model of passion, Anagnostopoulos approaches passion using signaling and social exchange theories. All of this is being done to showcase how CSR initiatives may drive substantive changes in how employees experience passion for their careers and transform the professional landscape of the sport industry.

The special issue also includes several conceptually similar but distinctive conceptualizations of passion in the sport industry. The second article provides the first conceptualization of passion, with Doh, Kim, and Oja choosing to focus on work passion and coaches. Specifically, the authors provide a model that integrates work passion with three types of intelligence (i.e., cultural intelligence, digital intelligence, and emotional intelligence). Identification shapes work passion while personal interests and experiences shape the three types of intelligence. The end results of work passion and intelligence are innovative work behaviors and enhanced psychological well-being.

Next, Oja and Jordan tackle the concept of “dark” grit in sport employees. They argue that passion is a key component of grit but that grit, though beneficial, has an inflection point where it can be a negative. Consider an employee being unable to disengage from sport enjoyment (i.e., not knowing when to quit). Given the area of grit, positive or negative, is only minimally explored among sport employees, the authors call for research in this area with particular attention being given to the clearly defining, conceptualizing, and measuring the concept.

The fourth paper by Kim, Do, and Doh explores sport employees’ passion for their work using the context of intercultural sport events. The authors provide a framework grounded in self-determination theory. Their conceptualization of passion looks at key antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes. Similar to the Doh et al. piece, the authors are concerned with the connection between passion and outcomes such as well-being and improved work performance.

The fifth and sixth papers also provide conceptualizations of passion in the sport workplace with an explicit focus on sport job seeker and/or sport employee passion. The fifth piece by Swanson is distinc-

tive in its approach to passion because the focus is on passion and leadership. Indeed, Swanson persuasively argues that sport employees often have passion, and that leadership is a driver of this passion. He explores how different types of leadership (e.g., emotionally intelligent leadership) may be better situated to influence sport employee passion than other types of leadership.

Like the fifth piece, the final piece on passion by Qi, Magnusen, and Todd also explores passion in the workplace of sport. Whereas Swanson focused on passion and leadership and Doh et al. looked at passion and intelligence, Qi et al. question the widespread and near uniform application of the dualistic model of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) to sport contexts. They look to the past and then point to the future of sport passion research that should more frequently incorporate the concept of work passion, given it may better explain passion in sport contexts than other viewpoints.

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