Sports Team’s Well-being: 
An Integrative Perspective of the Role of Conflict and Emotional Intelligence on Trust and Happiness

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Introduction and Conceptual Model Development
The concept of well-being has been considered an important factor for explaining human satisfaction and happiness. This well-being is a combination of two aspects of happiness (objectivity and subjectivity) (Alatartseva & Barysheva, 2015), and it consists of past and current experience as a form of good and bad (Kahneman, 1999; Kahneman & Riis, 2005). Alatartseva and Barysheva (2015) suggest the objectivity of well-being relates to the materialistic quality of life while the subjectivity of it relates to an individual’s psychological experience. Traditionally, organizational studies have underscored the importance of psychological well-being of individuals to understand individuals’ job performance and satisfaction (Atkins, Marshall, & Javalgi, 1996; Lee & Woo, 2017; Wright & Cropanzano, 2004). Fundamentally, any form of organization has sub-organizational structures in the form of departments and teams consisting of two or more individuals. It indicates that we need to understand how individuals manage their happiness by interacting with other members in the sub-organization (team) and what kind of elements can be either positive factors or negative factors to achieve both individuals’ objective and subjective happiness.

Particularly in sports, a player’s well-being within a team is crucial since each player serves an entertaining service to himself/herself and/or to a team’s fans in sports game service, implying that the role of sports players is equivalent to that of frontline employees in service organizations. For example, Harris, Wheeler, and Kacmar (2009) argued that employees who happily engage in their organization tend to have a higher job satisfaction and perform a better service to their customers (Lapiere & Hackett, 2007; Paulin, Ferguson, & Bergeron, 2006). In other words, the players who are highly satisfied and highly engaged in a team are more likely to highly perform in a game, conjecturing the importance of players’ happiness (i.e., well-being) to provide a quality service to his/her fans. As the literature suggested, players’ happiness (and well-being) in sports teams helps improve the satisfaction of stakeholders such as team members and their fans. Accordingly, this study focuses on the investigation of what kinds of antecedents and mediator can affect the degree of happiness to investigate a series of factors on influencing happiness at the individual and team levels.

Organizational research has highlighted on conflict and emotional intelligence as antecedents to measure the resultant outcomes such as trust (and engagement) and satisfaction (and happiness) in the workplace (Dirks & Skarlicki, 2009; Kacmar, Bachrach, Harris, & Noble, 2012; Yakovleva, Reilly, & Werko, 2010). For example, Barczak, Lassk, and Mulki (2010) argued that emotional intelligence can offset the potential problems among team members’ idiosyncratic goals and perceptions that intrigue conflict, miscommunication, and misunderstanding. From a dichotomized dimension of happiness (i.e., good or bad), it implies that emotional intelligence can yield conflict and vice versa; moreover, those problems are likely derived from an individual’s different role when an individual interacts with other members to achieve an ultimate goal pursued by a team as a whole (Biddle, 1986).

On the negative end of the spectrum, conflict is one of the most unavoidable problems and has the potential to produce negative outcomes, hindering individual and team outcomes. It affects the shape of individuals’ attitudes and behaviors, and his/her respective group performance as a whole. Conflict, up to a certain level, and with early resolution, has potential to be healthy and positive for teams (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Conflict is commonly derived from equivocal situations by increasing an individual’s decisional uncertainty (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987). These equivocal situations likely occur when there are existing different roles/norms (Amason & Sapienza, 1997; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Patterson, Carron, & Loughead, 2005), using multiple information sources (Daft & Macintosh, 1981; Hertzum, 2002; Kacmar et al., 2012), and utilizing vocal and gestural communication skills (Bidell, Sani, Mahpeykar, & Parvizpoor, 2014; Preja, 2013). Biddle (1986) argued that role theory is an important concept in sports because human beings behave in ways that are different.
and predictable depending on their roles in given situations, which implies that high emotional intelligence can reduce equivocality derived from role conflict by sharing information and binding trust (Butler, 1999). Daft and colleagues extensively investigated the effects of entropic information sources on the effect of both managers’ performance and organizational performance (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Daft et al., 1987; Daft & Macintosh, 1981), and argued that high equivocality of information decreases the performance of manager and organization as a whole. Preja (2013) examined the outcomes of effective communication between verbal and non-verbal methods and concluded that both dimensions of communication methods are correlated and the effectiveness of each method can be different, dependent upon the context in sport (e.g., the number of team members; Bidel et al., 2014). Both studies suggest that high emotional intelligence reduces equivocality derived from information source (e.g., coach vs. teammates) and communication methods (e.g., vocal vs. gestural). If equivocality is not reduced and remains high, this situation can negatively affect performable happiness and negatively induce the building of perceived trust (Zeffane, Tipu, & Ryan, 2011).

On the positive end of the spectrum, emotional intelligence is an increasingly important concept in management to reduce potential conflicts, resulting in high organizational performance (Goleman, 1998, 2001). Emotional intelligence consists of five dimensions including empathy, motivation, self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skill. Goleman’s classification of emotional intelligence construct covers both individual and group levels of experienced emotional competencies to anticipate the consequence of organizational performance. Barczak et al. (2010) argued that emotional intelligence is vital to normative team performance. Moreover, Barczak et al. (2010) ascertained that interpersonal trust between team members plays a crucial role to strengthen their teamwork (Jones & George, 1998), and the trust grounds in both emotional bonds and perceived competent performance among members. These arguments suggest that the level of perceived trust mediates the relationship between the antecedents of happiness (emotional intelligence and equivocality) and the consequence of happiness (performable happiness) (e.g., Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In line with Barczak and colleagues, George (2000) argued that highly emotional intelligent leaders positively enhance their followers’ productivity and therefore the emotional intelligence contributes to leaders creating a vision that motivates he/she’s followers to attain the vision. These findings suggest that emotional intelligence helps increase the engagement among team members as well as the success of the team as a whole, surmising an improvement of sports teams’ trust building and well-being at both individual and team levels (Thiel, Griffith, & Connelly, 2015).

Trust is an important outcome of the antecedent of happiness as well as a mediator in the relationship between the antecedent and consequence of happiness to enhance an individual’s and team members’ reciprocity and ultimate satisfaction in performance (Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002; Chou, Cheng, Huang, & Cheng, 2006; Dirks, 2000; Falk & Fischbacher, 2006; Gilstrap & Collins, 2012; Lau, Liu, & Fu, 2007; Yakovleva et al., 2010). Prati et al. (2003) argued that individuals must be emotionally intelligent to prove themselves as trustworthy and accountable to teammates and coaches. This relationship leads to the conclusion that high emotional intelligence positively induces the building of perceived trust. Moreover, trust includes both level of trust for self and others and the expected performance of self and others (Feather, 1982). Feather (1982) suggests that high-level trust for both self and others positively influences the achievement of an individual’s and organizational valued goals (i.e., happiness in both life and workplace). For example, Simmel (2004) argued the high-level of trust means that team members do not have to continually search for proof of intentions of other team members. In a similar vein, Prati et al. (2003) argued that performance advantages can, in turn, result. These two studies imply that strong trust positively links with performable happiness in a game.

From the literature review, we propose the hypotheses in the causal relationship from the antecedents (conflict and emotional intelligence) to the resultant consequences (trust and happiness) at both individual and team levels as below.

**Proposed Hypotheses and the Conceptual Model**

Hypothesis 1. Emotional intelligence reduces equivocal factors derived from role conflict, information
Hypothesis 2. Emotional intelligence positively affects performable happiness.
Hypothesis 3. Emotional intelligence positively induces the level of trust.
Hypothesis 4. Equivocal factors negatively affect performable happiness.
Hypothesis 5. Equivocal factors negatively induce the level of trust.
Hypothesis 6. Strong trust positively relates to performable happiness.
Hypothesis 7. The level of trust mediates the relationship between the antecedents of sport team’s well-being (emotional intelligence and equivocal factors) and the consequence of sport team’s well-being (performable happiness).

Based on the proposed causal relationship, we provide an integrated model as shown in Figure 1. Figure 1 represents the relationship between those variables by applying to college athletes and sports teams.

**Figure 1. An Integrated Model of the Relationship between Antecedents and Consequence of Well-being at Individual and Team Levels**

**Proposed Sampling Plan and Methodology**

The proposed model parsimoniously explains how and why athletes do or do not experience performable happiness. To measure our integrated model, we will conduct a technique of structural equation modeling (SEM) that fits to examine our integrated multivariate model in a parsimonious way (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Related to the sampling plan, we aim to acquire participants who are college athletes in the Midwest region of the United States. Particularly, we plan to distribute the online survey through the Minnesota State University system. For conducting the online survey, we intend to use Qualtrics with coordinating a full randomization and filtering inadequate responses to minimize online experimental noises (e.g., Podsakoff et al., 2003: Common Method Biases).

**Conclusion**

The proposed integrated model provides the reason that happiness should be considered when studying sports and athletes’ well-being and what kinds of both positive and negative factors determine the degree of trust and happiness in sports teams (Figure 1). Performable happiness is an ultimate consequence of athletes’ well-being. Performable happiness is achieved through the culminated experience of objective happiness (normative team...

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performance), subjective happiness (perceived performance and cohesiveness), and overall satisfaction belonging to a team. The antecedents that determine an athletes’ well-being comprise of the equivocal factors and emotional intelligence. The equivocal factors reducing athletes’ performable happiness include norm/role, information source (coach vs. teammates), and communication method (vocal vs. gestural). Emotional intelligence is comprised of five constructs: self-awareness, self-regulation, social skill, and empathy. Trust includes level of trust for self and teammates, and expected performance. The mediating factor of trust can reduce the negative effects of the equivocal factors and enhance the effects of emotional intelligence on athletes’ performable happiness.

References


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Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners: This study is beneficial to understand team dynamics in college sports athletes in terms of how to positively maintain the college athletes’ emotional well-being.

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