

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

Drew Sannes, sannesdr@mnstate.edu  
Wooyang Kim, wooyang.kim@mnstate.edu

## **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 (Lapierre & 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, Lask, 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, & Loughhead, 2005), using multiple information sources (Daft & Macintosh, 1981; Hertzum, 2002; Kacmar et al., 2012), and utilizing vocal and gestural communication skills (Bidel, 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

source, and communication method.

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.

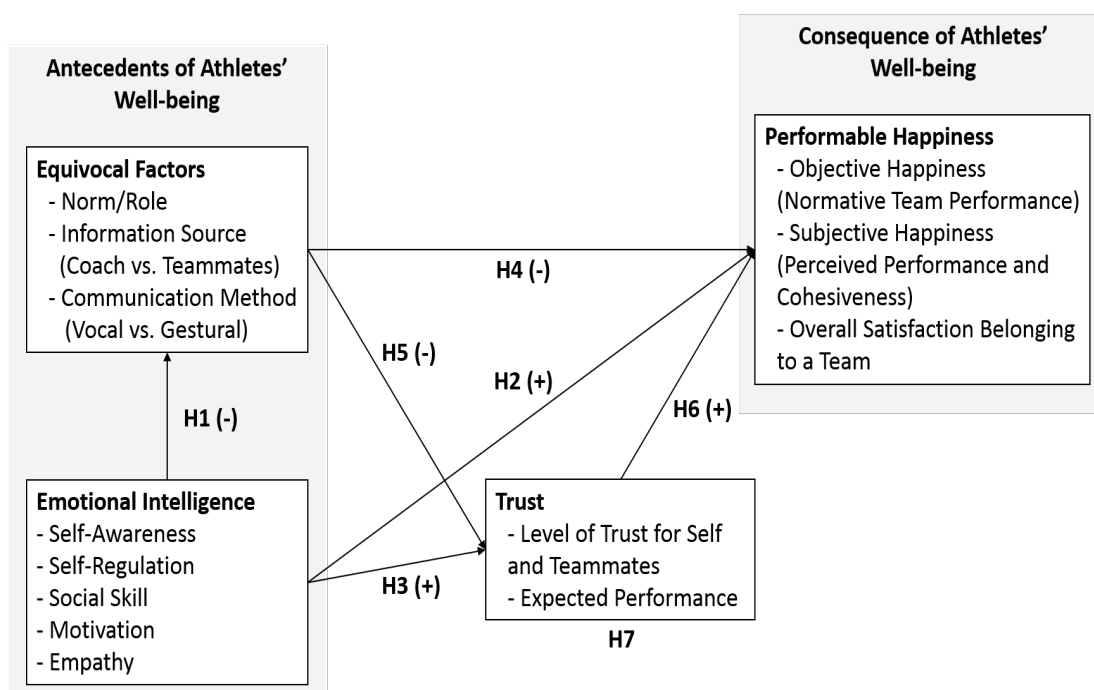
Hypothesis 5. Equivocal factors negatively induce the level of trust.

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

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

- Alatartseva, E., & Barysheva, G. (2015). Well-being: Subjective and Objective Aspects. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 166. 36-42.
- Amason, A. C., & Sapienza, H. J. (1997). The effects of top management team size and interaction norms on cognitive and affective conflict. *Journal of Management*. 23(4). 495-516.
- Aryee, S., Budhwar, P. S., & Chen, Z. X. (2002). Trust as a mediator of the relationship between organizational justice and work outcomes: test of a social exchange model. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. 23(3). 267-285.
- Atkins, P. M., Marshall, B. S., & Javalgi, R. G. (1996). Happy Employees Lead to Loyal Patients. *Journal of Health Care Marketing*. 16(4). 14-23.
- Barczak, G., Lassk, F., & Mulki, J. (2010). Antecedents of team creativity: An examination of team emotional intelligence, team trust and collaborative culture. *Creativity and Innovation Management*. 19(4). 332-345.
- Biddle, B. J. (1986). Recent developments in role theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*. 12(1). 67-92.
- Bidel, T., Sani, M., Mahpeykar, S. M., & Parvizpoor, E. (2014). The relevance of communication skills and conflict management strategies between individual and group sports teams' coaches. *Advances in Environmental Biology*. 8(23). 115-118.
- Butler Jr., J. K. (1999). Trust expectations, information sharing, climate of trust, and negotiation effectiveness and efficiency. *Group & Organization Management*. 24(2). 217-238.
- Chou, L.-F., Cheng, B.-S., Huang, M.-P., & Cheng, H.-Y. (2006). Guanxi networks and members' effectiveness in Chinese work teams: Mediating effects of trust networks. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*. 9(2). 79-95.
- Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1984). Information Richness: A New Approach to Managerial Behaviour and Organizational Design. *Research in Organizational Behavior*. 6. 191-233.
- Daft, R. L., Lengel, R. H., & Trevino, L. K. (1987). Message Equivocality, Media Selection, and Manager Performance: Implications for Information Systems. *MIS Quarterly*. 11(3). 355-366.
- Daft, R. L., & Macintosh, N. B. (1981). A Tentative Exploration into the Amount and Equivocality of Information Processing in Organizational Work Units. *Administrative Science Quarterly*. 26(2). 207-224.
- Dirks, K. T. (2000). Trust in leadership and team performance: Evidence from NCAA basketball. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 85(6). 1004-1012.
- Dirks, K. T., & Skarlicki, D. P. (2009). The Relationship Between Being Perceived as Trustworthy by Coworkers and Individual Performance†. *Journal of Management*. 35(1). 136-157.
- Falk, A., & Fischbacher, U. (2006). A theory of reciprocity. *Games and Economic Behavior*. 54(2). 293-315.

- Feather, N. T. (1982). Action in Relation to Expected Consequences *Expectations and Actions: Expectancy-Value Models in Psychology*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Harris, K. J., Wheeler, A. R., & Kacmar, K. M. (2009). Leader-member exchange and empowerment: Direct and interactive effects on job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and performance. *Leadership Quarterly*. 20(3). 371-382.
- George, J. M. (2000). Emotions and leadership: The role of emotional intelligence. *Human Relations*. 53(8). 1027-1055.
- Gilstrap, J. B., & Collins, B. J. (2012). The Importance of Being Trustworthy: Trust as a Mediator of the Relationship Between Leader Behaviors and Employee Job Satisfaction. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*. 19(2). 152-163.
- Goleman, D. (1998). What makes a leader? *Harvard Business Review*. 76(6). 93-102.
- Goleman, D. (2001). An EI-based theory of performance. In C. Cherniss & D. Goleman (Eds.), *The emotionally intelligent workplace: How to select for, measure, and improve emotional intelligence in individuals, groups, and organizations* (1 ed., pp. 27-44). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Greenhaus, J. H., & Beutell, N. J. (1985). Sources of Conflict between Work and Family Roles. *Academy of Management Review*. 10(1). 76-88.
- Hertzum, M. (2002). The importance of trust in software engineers' assessment and choice of information sources. *Information and Organization*. 12(1). 1-18.
- Jehn, K. A., & Mannix, E. A. (2001). The dynamic nature of conflict: A longitudinal study of intragroup conflict and group performance. *Academy of Management Journal*. 44(2). 238-251.
- Jones, G. R., & George, J. M. (1998). The experience and evolution of trust: Implications for cooperation and teamwork. *Academy of Management Review*. 23(3). 531-546.
- Kacmar, K. M., Bachrach, D. G., Harris, K. J., & Noble, D. (2012). Exploring the role of supervisor trust in the associations between multiple sources of relationship conflict and organizational citizenship behavior. *Leadership Quarterly*. 23(1). 43-54.
- Kahneman, D. (1999). Objective Happiness. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Well-Being: Foundations of Hedonic Psychology* (pp. 3-25). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Kahneman, D., & Riis, J. (2005). Living, and thinking about it: Two perspectives on life. In F. A. Huppert, N. Baylis, & B. Keverne (Eds.), *The science of well-being* (pp. 285-304). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lapierre, L. M., & Hackett, R. D. (2007). Trait conscientiousness, leader-member exchange, job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behaviour: A test of an integrative model. *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology*. 80(3). 539-554.
- Lau, D., Liu, J., & Fu, P. (2007). Feeling trusted by business leaders in China: Antecedents and the mediating role of value congruence. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*. 24(3). 321-340.
- Lee, Y. H., & Woo, B. (2017). Emotional Intelligence, Emotional Labor, and Emotional Exhaustion among

Korean Fitness Employees. *Journal of Global Sport Management*. 2(1). 65-78.

Morgan, R. M., & Hunt, S. D. (1994). The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing. *Journal of Marketing*. 58(3). 20-38.

Patterson, M. M., Carron, A. V., & Loughhead, T. M. (2005). The influence of team norms on the cohesion–self-reported performance relationship: a multi-level analysis. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*. 6(4). 479-493.

Paulin, M., Ferguson, R. J., & Bergeron, J. (2006). Service climate and organizational commitment: The importance of customer linkages. *Journal of Business Research*. 59(8). 906-915.

Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J.-Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 88(5). 879-903.

Prati, L. M., Ceasar, D., Gerald, R. F., Anthony, P. A., & Buckley, M. R. (2003). Emotional intelligence, leadership effectiveness, and team outcomes. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*. 11(1). 21-40.

Preja, C. A. (2013). Verbal and non-verbal communication in sports culture. *Palestrica of the Third Millennium Civilization & Sport*. 14(3). 239-243.

Simmel, G. (2004). *The Philosophy of Money* (4 ed.). New York: Routledge.

Thiel, C., Griffith, J., & Connelly, S. (2015). Leader–follower interpersonal emotion management: Managing stress by person-focused and emotion-focused emotion management. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*. 22(1). 5-20.

Wright, T. A., & Cropanzano, R. (2004). The Role of Psychological Well-Being in Job Performance: A Fresh Look at an Age-Old Quest. *Organizational Dynamics*. 33(4). 338-351.

Yakovleva, M., Reilly, R. R., & Werko, R. (2010). Why do we trust? Moving beyond individual to dyadic perceptions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 95(1). 79-91.

Zeffane, R., Tipu, S. A., & Ryan, J. C. (2011). Communication, commitment & trust: Exploring the triad. *International Journal of Business and Management*. 6(6). 77-87.

**Keywords:** *communicational equivocality, conflict management, emotional intelligence, happiness, trust*

**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.

**Author Information:**

Drew Sannes is a graduate student in the Master of Business Administration program at Minnesota State University at Moorhead as well as a captain on the Women's Basketball team at the same school.

Wooyang Kim is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Minnesota State University at Moorhead. He has published his research in marketing journals and conference proceedings as well as serves as a reviewer in the marketing journals and conferences.

**TRACK: Sports Marketing**