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## A Theoretical Framework of Sports Team's Well-Being: An Integrative Perspective of Emotional Intelligence and Equivocality on Trust and Happiness


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# A Theoretical Framework of Sports Team's Well-Being: An Integrative Perspective of Emotional Intelligence and Equivocality on Trust and Happiness

## **Cover Page Footnote**

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# **A Theoretical Framework of Sports Team's Well-Being: An Integrative Perspective of Role Equivocality and Emotional Intelligence on Trust and Happiness**

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**Abstract** – The purpose of this study is to develop and provide an integrative conceptual model of sports teams' well-being to achieve a win-win situation of happiness for all stakeholders of sports teams, grounded in role theory and commitment-trust theory. We first conceptualized the well-being as an ultimate consequence by exploring sub-dimensions of happiness and provide relevant propositions linking with the respective antecedents. Second, we explored the effect of antecedents of sports team's well-being in the spectrum of the anchor between positive and negative sides on the resultant outcomes – i.e., trust and happiness. Third, we examined the role of trust as an intermediating factor in the relationship between the antecedents and sports team's well-being. Then, we proposed an integrative conceptual model of sports teams' well-being to understand a mechanism among relevant measurements. Literature suggests that two ambivalent components affect the level of psychological satisfaction and happiness by trading off the effect of each dimension, and those two contributing factors include equivocality having a negative characteristic caused by different role, multiple information sources and communication methods while emotional intelligence entails a positive characteristic comprised of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Then, those ambivalent antecedents affect the strength of trust (level of trust for self and teammates regarding expected performance) and ultimately determine student-athletes' well-being (objective performance, cohesiveness, and overall satisfaction belonging to a team). Particularly, trust mediates the relationship between the antecedents and student-athletes' well-being by diluting negative factors while intensifying positivity. The theoretical and practical implications of this conceptual model are discussed.

**Keywords** – Emotional Intelligence, Equivocality, Trust, Student-Athletes' Well-Being

**Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners** – This study is important to intra- and extra-organizational stakeholders related to collegiate sports to comprehend an importance of student-athletes' wellbeing and sports audience engagement.

Note: The early version of this study was published and presented in the Proceedings of the 2017 Atlantic Marketing Association Conference.

## Introduction

The concept of well-being has been considered an important factor for explaining the quality of life as a form of satisfaction and happiness. This well-being is a combination of two aspects of happiness (objectivity and subjectivity) (Alatartseva and Barysheva, 2015), and it consists of past and current experience as a form of good and bad (Kahneman, 1999; Kahneman and 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, and Javalgi, 1996; Wright and Cropanzano, 2004; Lee and Woo, 2017). Fundamentally, any form of organization has sub-organizational structures in the form of departments and teams consisting of two or more individuals. This 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 both intra- and extra-organizational stakeholders (e.g., self, team members, athletics department, and fans) in sports events, implying that the role of athletes is equivalent to that of frontline employees in service organizations. Sports are often viewed as a social activity, signifying the importance of athletes' well-being from the standpoint of sports fans to enhance social interactions in sports events (Smith, 1988). Any form of social structure comprises of interpersonal interactions, signaling the importance of managing happiness through interactions in the immediate socio-environments and understanding the factors to achieve overall happiness (Ryff and Singer, 1998). 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 (Paulin, Ferguson, and Bergeron, 2006; Lapierre and Hackett, 2007). In other words, athletes who are highly satisfied and highly engaged in a team are more likely to highly perform in competition, articulating the important role of athletes' happiness to provide a quality performance to fans as an entertainment service. As the literature suggests, athletes' happiness (and well-being) in sports teams helps improve the satisfaction of stakeholders such as team members and their fans.

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 (Kacmar et al., 2012; Dirks, 2000; Dirks and Skarlicki, 2009; Yakovleva et al., 2010). For example, Barczak, Lassk, and Mulki (2010) argued that emotional intelligence can counteract the potential problems among team members' idiosyncratic goals and perspectives that intrigue conflict, miscommunication, and misunderstanding. Role theory provides a solid theoretical foundation in the areas of emotional intelligence and equivocality, as it argues that the different behaviors of individuals are predictable given their role in certain situations (Biddle, 1986). These studies suggest that high emotional intelligence can reduce equivocality derived from role conflict, necessitating strong teamwork derived from interpersonal

dependence (e.g., trust). From a dichotomized dimension of happiness e.g., good or bad), it implies that emotional intelligence can yield conflict and vice versa, in which the problems likely arise from diverse responsibilities held by team members when interacting to achieve a common goal (Biddle, 1986). As literature suggested, trust would be vital to maximize team happiness by resolving conflicted individual interests. For example, Morgan and Hunt (1994) argued that trust mediates the relationship between individual commitment and organizational performance, providing a theoretical cue of its mediating effect on the relationship between emotional intelligence and equivocality as antecedents, and happiness as a consequence of athletes' well-being.

Therefore, this study aims to develop and provide an integrative conceptual model of sports teams' well-being to achieve a win-win situation of happiness for all stakeholders of sports teams, grounded in role theory and commitment-trust theory. We first conceptualize the wellbeing as an ultimate consequence by exploring sub-dimensions of happiness and provide relevant propositions linking with the respective antecedents. Second, we explore the effect of antecedents of sports team's well-being in the spectrum of the anchor between positive and negative sides on the resultant outcomes – e.g., trust and happiness. Third, we examine the role of trust as an intermediating factor in the relationship between the antecedents and ultimate consequence of sports team's well-being. Then, we propose an integrative conceptual model of sports teams' well-being to understand a mechanism among relevant measurements. Lastly, the theoretical and practical implications of this conceptual model are discussed.

## Literature Review and Model Development

### Happiness

Happiness, along with satisfaction, has been explained using the concept of well-being (Kahneman and Riis, 2005). Well-being combines two aspects of happiness (objectivity and subjectivity) (Alatartseva and Barysheva, 2015) and consists of past and current experience with regards to good and bad forms (Kahneman, 1999; Kahneman and Riis, 2005). Little research in organizational studies has accentuated the importance of psychological perspectives of well-being of individuals to understand job performance and satisfaction (Atkins et al., 1996; Wright and Cropanzano, 2004; Lee and Woo, 2017). It suggests researchers need to understand how individuals manage their happiness through interactions with other members of the affiliated team as a whole. Also, the lack of research requires clarification of what kinds of elements can be either positive factors or negative factors to achieve both individuals' objective and subjective happiness. Happiness is ultimately the culmination of optimized levels of emotional intelligence, equivocality, and trust so as to enhance an individual's commitment toward an organization and prove his/her real performance in a workplace.

Pertaining to sports, athletes' well-being within teams is critical because each athlete plays an important role in sports game services. Individually, athletes serve an entertaining service to himself/herself and/or to a team's stakeholders, equating athletes' roles to that of frontline employees in service organizations. The well-being of athletes from the standpoint of sports fans is further signified when viewing sports as a social activity. The frequency of interactions between individuals in life indicates crucial importance to understand how individuals manage happiness in said interactions. Happily engaged employees tend to have higher job satisfaction and better service performance to customers in an organizational context (Paulin et al., 2006; Lapierre and

Hackett, 2007; Harris et al., 2009). Relating to sports, highly satisfied and engaged athletes within teams are more likely to highly perform in competition, increasing the importance of athletes' happiness (e.g., well-being) to provide quality service to fans (Matsuoka, Chlladurai, and Harada, 2003).

Athletes can only achieve true happiness via well-being when they have clearly defined roles and the traits of both trust and commitment are present. For this reason, both role theory and commitment-trust theory are used as a foundation for this study. Biddle's role theory applies to sports because athletes behave in ways that are different and predictable depending on their roles in given situations (Biddle, 1986). Athletes follow both informal and formal roles within their teams and typically know what roles their teammates hold. Emotionally intelligent athletes more often experience role clarity, leading to increased role efficacy and happiness (Bray and Brawley, 2002; Leo et al., 2015). The presence of both commitment and trust is also crucial to achieve a high level of happiness for athletes within teams. The presence of both commitment and trust within teams likely induces higher performance and satisfaction of individuals and the overall team (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Commitment-trust theory nicely complements role theory because athletes' informal roles must include both commitment and trust to provide themselves and the overall team with a higher chance of success. In turn, performance advantages and happiness can result.

Alatartseva and Barysheva (2015) defined the objectivity of well-being relates to the normative quality of life such as winning competitions – e.g., visibly valuable objects (Kahneman, 1999). This single view of happiness likely overlooks psychological and emotional happiness such as pleasures derived from experience – e.g., invisible but emotionally attached objects. Alatartseva and Barysheva (2015) classified the subjectivity of well-being as an individual's psychological experience (Kahneman and Riis, 2005). The existing literature suggests that athletes' objective happiness can be measured by normative team performance by win and loss record while subjective happiness can be studied by the factors of perceived performance and cohesiveness as an overall emotional state (Lee and Woo, 2017). As a result, the conceptualized dimension of sports teams' well-being comprises of three sub-dimensions of happiness being satisfied: objective, subjective, and overall happiness. In this study, we name happiness as performable happiness encompassing the three dimensions of happiness as an integrated form to represent attainable organizational performance to achieve ultimate well-being in sports' teams.

## Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence, on the positive end of the spectrum, characterizes dispositional traits of individuals to determine the level of ability in problem-solving. It has been increasingly highlighted in organizational studies as a key driver to reduce potential conflicts, resulting in higher organizational performance (Goleman, 1998; Goleman, 2001). Goleman (1998) originally developed five dimensions of emotional intelligence: *self-awareness*, *self-regulation*, *motivation*, *empathy*, and *social skills*. Based on the five dimensions of emotional intelligence suggested by Goleman (1998), Afzalur Rahim et al. (2002) studied the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management among seven countries and redefined each dimension as follows:

1. Self-awareness: The ability to attune one's emotions, moods, and impulses derived from one's experience and reasoning.

2. Self-regulation: The ability to handle one's emotions and impulses at the neutral or positive level when confronting the unpredictable situations.
3. Motivation: The ability to keep concentrating on ultimate goals regardless of situations preventing the success of the goal.
4. Empathy: The ability to understand one's feelings received in the form of verbal and gestural information to proffer emotional aid and comprehend other's emotions and behavior.
5. Social skills: The ability to cope with confronting problems without degrading others to avoid potential biases entailing negativity and ineffectiveness in works required collaboration.

This classification of emotional intelligence construct covers both individual and group levels of experienced emotional competencies to anticipate the consequences of organizational performance (e.g., trust as strong bond of relationship and satisfaction as happiness). For example, Barczak et al. (2010) argued that emotional intelligence is vital to normative team performance. In addition, Barczak et al. (2010) ascertained that interpersonal trust between team members plays a crucial role to strengthen teamwork (see, also Jones and George, 1998), and the trust grounds in both emotional bonds and perceived competent performance among members to affect normative team performance (e.g., objective outcomes). In line with Barczak and colleagues, George (2000) argued that emotionally intelligent leaders positively enhance their followers' productivity, allowing leaders to create a vision that motivates their 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, and Connelly, 2015).

Combining these findings together, the causal relationships suggest that the level of perceived trust mediates the relationship between the antecedents of happiness (emotional intelligence and equivocality) and the consequence of happiness as performable happiness in a team. The findings would be explained by commitment-trust theory (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), which accentuates the mediating role of relationship commitment and trust to delineate the effective relationship marketing among retailers. Morgan and Hunt (1994) underscored that trust helps increase relationship commitment to achieve a common goal while decreasing performance uncertainty and conflict by holding shared value and efficient communication method and reducing opportunistic behavior derived from conflicting interests by different roles. This implies the level of perceived trust mediates the relationship between the antecedents of happiness and the consequence of happiness. Based on this generalizable notion of causal relationships, we delineate the detailed causalities between emotional intelligence and its sequential consequences.

## Relationship with equivocality

Emotional intelligence and equivocality are both antecedents of the consequence of athletes' well-being, but emotional intelligence would have a role to reduce potential equivocality in a team, group, or organization that entails different individual interests associated with team's goal. In sports contexts, athletes and coaches whom portray the constructs comprising emotional intelligence have high/low emotional intelligence, creating a higher/lower chance of reduced equivocality derived mainly from different roles, information sources, and communication methods as the members of a team. Equivocality indicates a level of the understandability of

meaning by interpreting immediately ambiguous contexts. The existing research considered equivocality as must-avoidance factors delivering conflict situations in order to achieve efficiency and stability of communicational uncertainties in the given information caused by different roles (Daft and Lengel, 1984; Daft, Lengel, and Trevino, 1987). For example, Daft et al. (1987) argued that informational conflicts increase a perceived risk to make a proper decision making due to an increment of indecisiveness from conflicting interpretations. This implies that different role causes a situation of informational conflicts based on each team member's interest or intention, and accordingly, an information receiver likely struggles with the information giver when requiring an immediate decision making for better team performance. Roles in sports tend to be identified by the position athletes hold and specific behaviors expected of them to require fulfillment of individual athlete's role in a team so as to accomplish a team's common goal (Eys and Carron, 2001). Each athlete holds a specific role that determines how they should behave in different situations. If athletes' emotional intelligence is high, they can better handle what roles they are given and attempt to accommodate to any equivocality within the roles (Biddle, 1986; Yang and Mossholder, 2004).

Equivocality can also surface when arising the reliability and importance of the information sources. In sports, different information sources would typically be coaches and/or other team members (e.g., team's captain or not, and interpersonal relationship) to determining the informational credibility or importance, resulting in hesitation of decision making perceived as a conflicted situation. For example, when an athlete acquires new information, it is typically obtained from a coach or other team members, and particularly in the competition, the received information cues can become entropic particularly in the exigent competition for a winning game (e.g., shoot or pass ordered from different sources). That is, the information from multiple sources creates high unsureness to determining on how to deal with the controversial interpretation to conclude as a better choice to maximize team's performance (Daft and Lengel, 1984; Daft et al., 1987). In addition to the information sources, effective communicators significantly reduce equivocality because they can 'tune in' to others' emotions and then use that information to help influence the other person to choose the best course of action (McPheat, 2010). For example, Kettinger and Li (2010) argued that information has a subjectively communicative nature in terms of informational exchange (e.g., different interpretations for the same information), suggesting that an effective interpersonal communication relies on the appropriateness of communication methods to improve holding objectivity of the given information. This suggestion implies that communicative competency needs to adapt to the emotional contexts of exchanges, focus on attaining the objective by acknowledging others' views, and easily demonstrate empathy and appreciation of others' views. Ineffective communicators tend to transfer a message of entropy to its audience, whereas effective communicators can clearly and empathetically explain athletes' roles within the team, reducing equivocality.

As organizational studies suggested, emotional intelligence is originated from the innateness of self while equivocality is derived from immediate environmental contexts. This suggestion implies mutually countervailing forces between emotional intelligence and equivocality as concurrent antecedents to regulate organizational performance such as trust (e.g., engagement) and satisfaction/happiness in the workplace. Also, the literature suggests a relatively clear causal relationship between those forces, indicating that an individual's disposition (e.g., emotional intelligence) interacts with responding by environmental factors (e.g., the level of equivocality caused by others or external contexts) to determine their best choices. Therefore,



*Proposition 1:* Emotional intelligence reduces equivocality derived from role conflict, information source, and communication method.

## Relationship with trust

Trust views as an expectation or belief toward another person having good intentions to achieve better group performance and requires an interpersonal relationship as a prerequisite condition to describe trust (Dirks, 1999; Dirks, 2000). This view gives a relevant foundation that trust would have a level between self and teammate interactions in sports teams, and in the interdependent relationship, each party expects counterpart's performance associated with the degree of individual's belief. For example, Butler (1999) also defined trust as the "willingness of individuals to expose themselves or become vulnerable to others." In addition, Prati et al. (2003) argued that trust results from the transaction of emotion and behavior among team members, including attitudes, moods and values. Combined together, the implication is that based on the level of trust, individual has a somewhat preexistent expectation from the received information to perform the next step of resultant outcome and ultimately affect the level of dissonance by evaluating the gap between expectation and actual performance. This implication suggests that trust would be a mediator between the equivocality and emotional intelligence, and happiness representing well-being. For example, individuals who have a high emotional intelligence would create a high level of trust since the individuals develop a stronger interpersonal relationship with others over time to behave vulnerably (George, 2000) by increasing team effectiveness (Tekleab, Quigley, and Tesluk, 2009). In this regard, individuals must be emotionally intelligent to prove themselves as trustworthy and accountable to teammates and coaches (Prati et al., 2003). Moreover, when an individual has self-confidence, this individual can provide strong trust by controlling one's own emotions to varying situations (McPheat, 2010). For example, Barczak et al. (2010) argued that team members will respect and appreciate trusted individuals allowing for higher interpersonal reliance. As the literature suggested, emotionally intelligent individuals more likely induce substantial trust by expected performance, resulting in athletes' strengthened mindsets toward challenges. Thus,

*Proposition 2:* Emotional intelligence enhances the level of trust within teams, including self and other team members.

## Relationship with happiness

Happiness occurs when individuals achieve both normative and subjective satisfactory outcomes. Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) argued emotionally intelligent leaders are able to emotionally arouse team members, persuading others to fully invest in the team. That investment made by athletes increases subjective happiness due to higher cohesiveness; all the athletes are equally committed to the team and the common goal (e.g., high quality of performance and team success). George (2000) also suggested that emotionally intelligent leaders can motivate collaboration by resolving conflicts while enhancing trust. For example, when athletes are emotionally intelligent, they will perceive their performance as being higher and will realize greater cohesiveness within the team. In similar vein, Lane et al. (2009) asserted that high emotional intelligence enables athletes to effectively control stressors in practice and competition, facilitating both individual and team normative success (e.g., objective outcome of

competition). Furthermore, if a team has an emotionally intelligent leader or team members, they can experience increased overall satisfaction of belonging to a team. From this perspective, George (2000) underscored that emotionally intelligent leaders who are passionate and energetic can better instill those feelings on others; likewise, agitated and unfriendly leaders negatively affect others. This suggests that emotionally intelligent leaders are more likely to create a cohesive and encouraging culture that motivates athletes to give their best efforts (Goleman, 2001). Positive or cohesive team culture induces high overall satisfaction of an athlete belonging to a team, whereas a negative team culture diminishes overall satisfaction (Whiting, Podsakoff, and Pierce, 2008). As a result, emotional intelligence contributes to increased happiness, both individual and team, by reducing negativity. And, the levels of the three dimensions of happiness are determined by the presence of emotional intelligence. Therefore,

*Proposition 3:* Emotional intelligence positively affects objective and subjective happiness, and overall satisfaction of belonging to a team.

## Equivocality

On the negative end of the spectrum, equivocality includes *ambiguity* and *conflict* in the immediate environment (Daft and Macintosh, 1981). Those dimensions of equivocality occur in interpersonal information exchange due to different roles, information sources, and communication methods because equivocality mandatorily involves interpersonal relationships in communication and different roles as a form of providers and receivers of information, resulting in subjective interpretations of the given information (Kettinger and Li, 2010). In the contexts of sports, clear communication and role are critical factors among team members to maximize team performance such as cohesiveness and competition (Leo et al., 2015; Preja, 2013).

Conflict is one of the most unavoidable problems and has the potential to produce negative outcomes, hindering individual and team outcomes (Leo et al., 2015; Ndubisi, Malhotra, and Miller, 2013). It affects the shape of individuals' attitudes and behaviors, and his/her respective group performance as a whole (Bradley et al., 2012; Sinha et al., 2016). Conflict, up to a certain level, and with early resolution, has potential to be healthy and positive for teams (Jehn and Mannix, 2001). Deutsch (1969) claimed that conflict can prevent stagnation, stimulate interest and curiosity, and provide a way for problems to be aired and resolved. Conflict is commonly derived from equivocal situations when subjectively interpreting the received information by increasing an individual's decisional uncertainty as a form of ambiguity and misunderstanding (Daft and Lengel, 1984; Daft et al., 1987; Daft and Macintosh, 1981). These equivocal situations likely occur when there are existing different roles and norms (McKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne, 1998; Amason and Sapienza, 1997; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Patterson, Carron, and Loughhead, 2005), multiple information sources are being used (Kacmar et al., 2012; Daft and Macintosh, 1981; Hertzum, 2002), and both vocal and gestural communication skills are utilized (Bidel et al., 2014; Preja, 2013). Those causes inevitably contain bilateral communication based on the relationship between two parties and entail subjective interpretations of information. That is, when individuals interpret the information, they are prone to accept information based on prior beliefs or knowledge in informational exchanges, and accordingly the interpreted information can be different between information providers and receivers due mainly to the different role and norm of each party (Kettinger and Li, 2010; Miranda and Saunders, 2003).

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 (Eys and Carron, 2001). Roles at the foundation level consist of fundamental skills independently carried out by an athlete, whereas at the intermediate level the athlete carries out tasks related to one's role responsibilities, and at the highest level, the athlete creates collective efficacy beliefs related to team behavior as a whole (Bray and Brawley, 2002; Leo et al., 2015). This implies that high emotional intelligence can reduce equivocality derived from role conflict by sharing information and binding trust (Butler, 1999) since emotionally intelligent individuals tend to provide a better control of equivocal situations by holding a clear role. Therefore, reducing communicative conflicts relying on roles is crucial to maintaining individual's happiness while high emotional intelligence can reduce these equivocal situations (Bidel et al., 2014). Role clarity is vital for athletes, increasing role efficacy and performance. To enhance performance, athletes must be aware of their role and their optimal emotional zones, also being able to stay within that optimal state during performance (Robazza, Pellizzari, and Hanin, 2004).

Daft and colleagues extensively investigated the effects of entropic information sources on the effect of both managers' performance and organizational performance (Daft and Lengel, 1984; Daft et al., 1987; Daft and Macintosh, 1981), and argued that high equivocality of information decreases the performance of managers and organizations as a whole. Preja (2013) examined the outcomes of effective communication between verbal and gestural 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: Bidet et al., 2014). Preja (2013) also argued that effective communication plays an important role to diminish communicative conflict, enhancing trust and involvement in the work (Thomas, Zolin, and Hartman, 2009). Both studies suggest that effective communication reduces equivocality derived from different information sources (e.g., coach versus teammates) and communication methods (e.g., vocal versus gestural). If equivocality is not reduced and remains high, it is likely to negatively affect performable happiness and negatively induce the building of perceived trust (Zeffane, Tipu, and Ryan, 2011). As a result, equivocal factors have an antithetical relationship with emotional intelligence to regulate the level of the resultant outcomes (e.g., trust and happiness/satisfaction).

## Relationship with trust

High equivocality negatively affects the level of trust athletes have for themselves and teammates. Information sources and communication methods associated with different roles are the biggest contributors of equivocality (Kacmar et al., 2012; Daft et al., 1987). Leaders' communication themes, such as "dominance, coercive power, lack of willingness to listen, lack of support or empathy and face threat," can destroy the level of trust for self and teammates (Zeffane et al., 2011, p.79). Individuals who pay attention to the quality of communication, rather than solely the frequency, can create a better atmosphere of trust (Butler and Cantrell, 1994; Thomas et al., 2009). Equivocal factors can cause athletes to reduce their belief in one's expected performance due to uncertainty caused by role, information source, and/or communication. As a result, the clarity of those causes is crucial to reduce equivocal factors while developing a cohesive and trusting team (Kacmar et al., 2012; Bray and Brawley, 2002; Daft et al., 1987; Preja, 2013, Tekleab et al, 2009). Therefore,

*Proposition 4:* Equivocality caused by different roles, information sources, and communication methods has a negative relationship with building trust at both individual and team levels.

## Relationship with happiness

As described above, equivocality in the form of role conflict will lead to less cohesiveness and possible personal conflicts within the team, reducing athletes' objective happiness and overall satisfaction belonging to a team (Bray and Brawley, 2002; Leo et al., 2015). Information sources (coaches and/or teammates) conveying information ineffectively can lead athletes to an ambiguous state from the entropic message (Kacmar et al., 2012). The entropic message will reduce athletes' performable happiness in all three areas (objective happiness, subjective happiness, and overall satisfaction belonging to a team) (Daft et al., 1987). Ineffective communication methods creating equivocality will also reduce athlete's performable happiness in all three areas (Bidel et al., 2014; Preja, 2013). Hence,

*Proposition 5:* Equivocality caused by different roles, information sources, communication methods creates a negative performance, at both individual and team levels, including objective, subjective and overall happiness.

## Trust

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, and Chen, 2002; Chou et al., 2006; Gilstrap and Collins, 2012; Dirks, 2000; Falk and Fischbacher, 2006; Lau, Liu, and Fu, 2007; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; 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 teammates regarding expected performance (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 (e.g., 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.

Morgan and Hunt's commitment-trust theory complements role theory as the theoretical basis of this study. Commitment-trust theory concluded that both commitment and trust must be present in relationships to produce a positive outcome. Athletes' informal roles must include both commitment and trust to provide themselves and the team with a higher chance of success. In a similar vein, Prati et al. (2003) argued that performance advantages can, in turn, result. Morgan and Hunt's work implies that the level of perceived trust mediates the relationship between the antecedents of happiness and the consequence of happiness. Although there are always other contextual factors contributing to the level of success for teams, Morgan and Hunt's and Prati et al.'s studies infer that strong trust positively links with performable happiness in competition. The presence of commitment and trust encourage individuals to work to preserve

relationship investments, producing outcomes that promote efficiency, productivity, and effectiveness (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). For example, effective cooperation within teams facilitates healthy competition among team members, increasing team and individual success (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

Trust is an outcome of the antecedent of happiness as well as a mediator between the antecedents and consequence of happiness to enhance an individual's performance (Gilstrap and Collins, 2012; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Prati et al. (2003) argued that emotionally intelligent individuals are more likely to share one's feelings and emotions to have positive attitudes toward others, enhancing intimacy of interpersonal relationship based on trust. This implies that high emotional intelligence positively induces the building of trust, which includes level of trust for self and teammates regarding expected performance (Barczak et al., 2010; Dirks, 1999; Dirks, 2000; McPheat, 2010; Tekleab et al, 2009). Also, Prati et al. (2003) argued that performance advantages can, in turn, result, implying that substantial trust entails performable happiness in sports. That is, trust directly affects athletes' performable happiness. Strong trust positively relates to performable happiness by means of objective happiness (normative team performance). Because high levels of trust essentially mean team members do not need to seek "continual proof of intentions of other team members" (Simmel, 2004), resulting in performance advantages (Prati et al., 2003). These findings suggest a resultant consequence of emotional intelligence and trust should be higher levels of team performance (Prati et al., 2003).

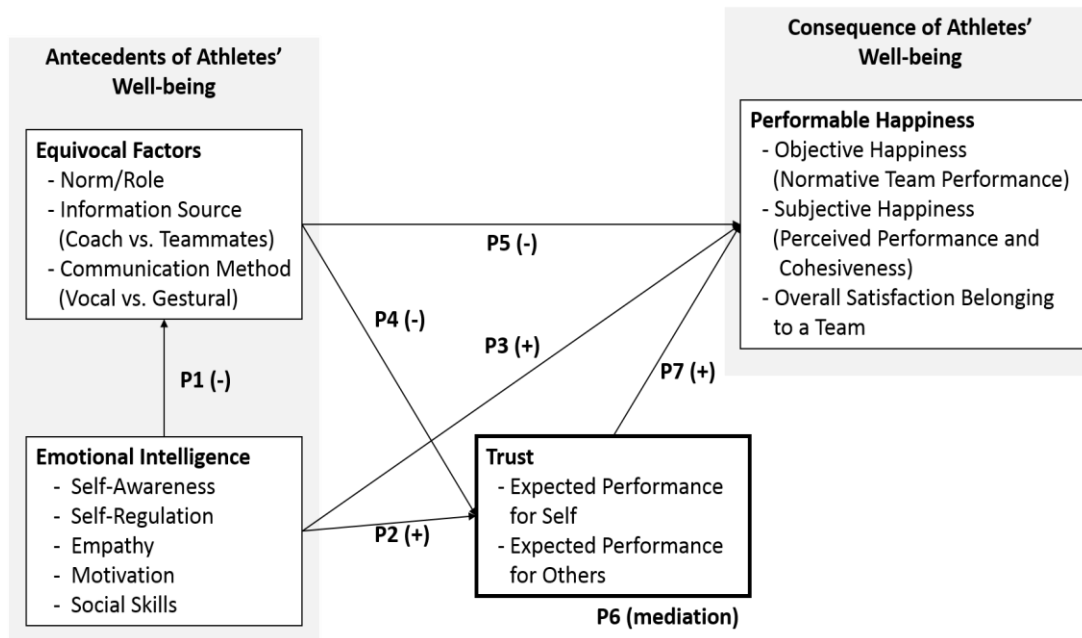
Solid trust also positively relates to performable happiness by means of subjective happiness (perceived performance and cohesiveness) (Barczak et al., 2010). Jones and George (1998) argued that a trustworthy environment should facilitate cooperative efforts and teamwork, causing team members to compromise in the presence of conflicts, enhancing freely exchanged information, and sacrificing personal needs and ego for the greater common good. Athletes who can trust their coaches respond positively to requests made by the coaches and feel more capable about achievement (Thiel et al., 2015). These findings imply that trust positively affects organizational commitment as a resultant outcome. Furthermore, Feather (1982) suggests that high-level trust for both self and others positively influences the achievement of individual and organizational valued goals, resulting in a win-win situation for all stakeholders of the organization (e.g., satisfaction and happiness). The existing studies suggest that the presence of trust positively relates to performable happiness as well as effectively mediates the relationship between the antecedents and consequence of well-being. Therefore,

*Proposition 6:* The level of trust plays a mediating role in the relationship between the antecedents and consequence of sports team's well-being by solidifying emotional intelligence while diminishing equivocal factors to achieve performable happiness in the team.

*Proposition 7:* Trust positively relates to performable happiness to build satisfactory outcomes for a team as a whole.

Based on the propositions, we depicted causal relationships among primary constructs to provide an integrated conceptual model as shown in Figure 1. Figure 1 represents the relationship among emotional intelligence, equivocality, trust, and performable happiness 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 Method and Sampling Plan

The proposed model soundly explains how and why athletes do or do not experience performable happiness, based on the two dominant theories in organizational studies and marketing. To measure our integrated model, we suggest conducting a technique of structural equation modeling (SEM) to explain a complex structural relationship among four latent constructs in measurements so as to investigate multiple relationships between *explanans* and *explanandum*. From these methodological advantages, an application of SEM fits to examine our integrated conceptual model effectively and efficiently as Morgan and Hunt (1994) claimed an importance of parsimony in the philosophy of science (p.31).

A suggested sampling plan in accordance with our purpose acquires participants who are college student-athletes in the Midwest region of the United States, and the participant recruitment process minimally in two schools would be an appropriate sampling strategy to help reduce common-method biases. As Podsakoff et al. (2003) argued, common method bias may be a concern when the data obtained are cross-sectional, self-reported data particularly in a single organization. Since the current study is in infant stage, it potentially causes a nature of common method biases, inducing a “potential artifactual covariance independent of the contents of the construct themselves” (Podsakoff et al. 2003, p.898). Its limitation lies in sampling; we suggested that researchers need to conduct two approaches to check potential bias of the data: 1) Harman’s single-factor (Ndubisi et al. 2013) and 2) Single-method-factor approaches (Podsakoff et al. 2003). In addition, our suggested method is an online survey method rather than traditional physical survey method, using online survey tools such as Qualtrics and Survey Monkey, so as to allow a

flexibility of the survey platform to coordinate a full randomization and filtering inadequate responses systems to minimize online experimental noises (e.g., Podsakoff et al. 2003).

In measuring the proposed constructs, the items used are grounded in existing literature. Based on the applied theories and measured constructs in the literature, we recommend utilizing the preexisting items by modifying to fit into the purpose of this study. The four constructs are: well-being/happiness, trust, equivocality, and emotional intelligence. The following studies would help to develop the items to be measured in the sports teams' well-being study: well-being/happiness (Alatartseva and Barysheva, 2015; Kahneman and Riis, 2005); trust (Morgan and Hunt, 1994); equivocality (Daft and Macintosh, 1981; Jehn and Mannix, 2001); emotional intelligence (Afzalur Rahim et al., 2002; Prati et al., 2003, Goleman, 2001).

## Discussion

The proposed integrated model emphasizes why happiness should be considered when studying sports and athletes' well-being and which factors, both positive and negative spectrums of the behavior, determine the level of trust and happiness within teams (Figure 1). Overall, performable happiness is an ultimate consequence of athletes' well-being, derived through the culminated experience of objective happiness, subjective happiness, and overall satisfaction of belonging to a team. Athletes' well-being is determined by its antecedents that have an ambivalent characteristic in the spectrum of positivity and negativity as trading off each characteristic, which includes emotional intelligence and equivocality respectively.

Trust is a resultant consequence of the antecedents and a mediator in the relationship between the antecedents and the performable happiness. It also plays a crucial role to enhance human bond in the interpersonal relationship to discard adverse effects while reinforcing constructive effects and ultimately achieve the goal. Accordingly, trust is a significant medium to bind internal dissonance to external contexts of an individual to remedy vulnerability of human-being so as to strengthen ties between individuals. Hence, both individual and team level of trust should be healthy to achieve student-athletes' well-being by rendering high emotional intelligence. And, teams with strong chemistry can dilute personal administrative difficulties to manage their emotions during sports.

The equivocality reducing athletes' performable happiness is derived from individuals' different roles, information sources (coach versus teammates), and communication methods (vocal versus gestural). Those three causes are interdependent with others and immediate environments, inevitably entailing interpersonal relationships and subjective interpretation of information associated with an individual's preferable communication methods. In contrast, emotional intelligence enhancing athletes' performable happiness consists of five dimensions of the personal ability to control emotions (self and others): self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. The first three components are more focused on self to achieve the best performance in the given task while the next two components are more concentrated on others to control an individual's emotion to collaborate with others to attain group goals. As a result, both antecedents underscore the interpersonal and interdependent relationship between an individual and others and need to offset the effect of equivocality by infusing that of emotional intelligence to achieve satisfactory outcomes for all.

In conclusion, both equivocality and emotional intelligence are important antecedents to determine the level of trust and happiness so as to achieve ultimate student-athlete well-being. The role of emotional intelligence is crucial to offset the negativity derived from equivocality as

well as boost the positivity occurred through trust and happiness. In other words, subjectively perceptual factors are important drivers to increase overall well-being of student-athletes rather than normatively certain factors, and when group factors dominate individual factors, the level of their well-being is maximized.

## Theoretical Implications

Our conceptual model provides several theoretical implications. First, Yadav (2010) highlighted the importance of a conceptual study and encouraged this type of a theoretical development to provide implicative frameworks for knowledge development. Yadav (2010) examined the publications in major marketing journals from 1978 to 2007 and found that conceptual papers have declined for thirty years, calling for revitalization of the conceptual articles. To develop a new theory, Yadav suggested the distinction between *the context of discovery* (e.g., the creative synthesis of existing ideas) and *the context of justification* (e.g., testing plausibility and acceptability of the synthesized idea) (Yadav, 2010, p.3). From this perspective, our study contributes the creative synthesis of existing ideas by integrating two theories: role theory in organizational studies and commitment-trust theory in marketing to explain college athletes' well-being. Second, we expand the limited body of literature on athletes' well-being by contributing to role theory and commitment-trust theory. In measuring organizational performance, the existing literature has overlooked a subjectivity of consequence – i.e., individual happiness in an organization. To fill out this gap, we extend knowledge of the interaction between the objectivity and subjectivity of happiness to understand the complex human behavior of interaction in a group that comprises of different individual interests. For example, role theory applied to sports accentuates the importance of role clarity to achieve role efficacy, leading to higher emotional intelligence and trust and even increased individual and team performance. Third, we examined not only individual happiness, but overall team happiness, which equates to organizational performance. In a similar vein, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) contributes to social and psychological contexts and supports task performance (Organ, 1997), and can easily be translated to a sports context. In an organizational context, employees engaged in OCBs devote more time and energy to one's organization (Bolino and Turnley, 2005); in a sports context, athletes who experience great happiness (e.g., well-being) are likely to devote more time and energy to one's team, increasing individual and overall team performance. While this paper focuses on the sports context, the concepts can easily be applied at the organizational level. Organizational emotional intelligence, equivocality and trust all exist and must be managed to produce high organizational performance.

## Practical Implications

This study also provides some implications to practitioners. First, our conceptual model helps managers/coaches better understand the importance of athletes' well-being, based on what factors attribute to the increase or decrease of athletes' well-being and performance of individuals and the team. In other words, it offers a deeper focus within teams on emotional intelligence and trust along with a reduction of equivocality. That is, when comprehending the mechanism of ambivalent components between emotional intelligence and equivocality, they are more likely to build a trust-based team as well as achieve team happiness. Accordingly, our conceptual model helps clarify how to encourage athletes' behaviors and emotional states to optimize individual and



team performance and well-being. Regarding athletes' happiness, emotional and subjective factors prove to be the most important factors to enhance trust and ultimately achieve happiness. Second, our conceptual model contributes to sports tourism. The literature of sports tourism suggests that increased performance of athletes positively affects the sports tourism sector. Sports tourism, as defined by Ross (2001), involves traveling to participate in or view *sport-related activities*. Sports tourism's main impacts are economic, cultural and general. Thus, economically, sports tourism fills hotels, restaurants and retail establishments; culturally, it boosts community spirit and assists in restoring cultural traditions; generally, it enhances a positive image for communities and increases community support for sports stakeholders. Matsuoka, Chelladurai, and Harada (2003) viewed the fans as customers/sport tourists and argued that team identification – favorite team's performance and game score – affects sports tourists' satisfaction and their revisit intentions of the team's games, implying an importance of objective happiness. Matsuoka et al. (2003) suggest that team's stakeholders should focus on the team's quality of play such as motivation, effort, perseverance, and teamwork (p.248). These findings suggest that highly satisfied and engaged athletes are more likely to be motivated and perform with high quality during competition. Moreover, this signifies the importance of athletes' happiness (i.e., well-being) to provide a high-quality service to fans (i.e., sports tourists) in order to increase fans' satisfaction and revisit intentions. In other words, increased athletes' well-being in sports ultimately helps improve intra- and extra-organizational stakeholders' satisfaction/happiness (i.e., team members and fans). Accordingly, to increase sports tourists' satisfaction and their motivation to attend competitions, this study focuses on investigating what antecedents affect the degree of happiness to explore a series of factors influencing happiness at the individual and team levels. Third, associated with the second contribution, a practical implication is increased engagement of sports audiences along with an increased audience size. The spectator sports industry has grown substantially over the last few decades and continues to grow (Matsuoka et al., 2003). Successful team performance and competition outcomes lead to higher spectator satisfaction and stimulate future attendance, whereas poor team performance and competition outcomes can lead to displeasure and lower attendance (Greenstein and Marcum, 1981; Hansen and Gauthier, 1989). Furthermore, team loyalty is a basic goal when trying to increase sports audience size and an effective way to do this besides winning competitions is by increasing the athletes' quality of play (Matsuoka et al., 2003), which positively correlates with athletes' happiness.

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