Differences in the Perceptions of Organizational Behavior in Nonprofit Sport Teams between Members and Athletes

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Abstract
The goal of the present study was to investigate differences between members and athletes in their perception of organizational behavior (OB) in nonprofit sport teams. The OB was examined based on the existing climate within the above mentioned sport teams. The participants were 356 individuals (142 members and 214 athletes) of non-profit sport teams. Their age ranged from 12 to 78 years (M = 24.44, SD = 14.41). To estimate ethical climate, a validated Greek version of the Ethical Climate Questionnaire was used, as this was adapted by Agarwal and Malloy for non-profit contexts. Findings revealed significant differences in the perceptions on ethical climate between members and athletes of nonprofit sport teams. Findings also revealed the dominance of caring climate and the existence of limited interests in principle climate.

Keywords: Organizational behavior, Ethical climate, nonprofit organizations, Sport

1. Introduction

Organizational behavior (OB) reveals the attitudes and behaviors of individuals and teams within an organization (Rocha & Turner, 2008). In order to interpret and assess the OB of individuals the concept of climate is used (Malloy & Agarwal, 2003). Research has shown that climate is a significant factor that influences productivity, satisfaction as well as the moral behaviour of the organization’s members (Malloy & Agarwal, 2003). It has also been supported that climate may hold a significant role in the manner in which members behave or are influenced to behave ethically or unethically (Stead, Worell, & Stead, 1990).

The organizational climate is a concept reflecting the content and strength of the prevalent values, norms, attitudes, behaviors and feelings of the people in an organization (McNabb & Sepic, 1995). Organizational climate is more interesting when there are ethical issues and the members of the organizations are asked to take decisions. The basic role to this direction holds the ethical conduct of the members (Victor & Cullen, 1987, 1988; Cohen, 1995). Falkenberg and Herrmans (1995) υποστήριξαν ότι “the informal systems [i.e. climate] are the dominant influence on behavior when ethical issues are resolved” (p. 140). Ethical climate is defined as a shared perception among organization members regarding the criteria (e.g., egoism, benevolence, and principle) and focus (e.g., individual, group, society) of ethical reasoning within an organization (Trevino, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006). Ethical climate studies have been linked to various forms of organizational behaviors (Joseph & Deshpande, 1997; Deshpande, 1996a, 1996b).

Victor and Cullen (1998) argue the ethical climate are multidimensional and represent normative control systems molded by societal norms, organizational form and certain firm specific factors. Ethical climate is theoretically based upon three classes of ethical theory: egoism, utilitarianism, and deontology
Knowing the characteristics of each form of ethical climate can contribute to better management of OB.

The notion of ethical climate has not received increased attention in the recently literature for non-profit sport organizations. The up to date studies have approached the moral issue through the investigation of perception of which is the dominant climate (Agarwal & Malloy, 1999), the investigation of factors that influence the perception of ethical work climate (Malloy & Agarwal, 2001, 2003), its relation to the goals of the organization (team) (Proios, Athanailidis & Arvanitidou, 2009), its relation to moral behavior (sportspersonship) (Proios, Gianiitsopoulou, & Efremidou, 2010) and other studies for the influence of caring climate on athletes’ behavior (e.g., Fry & Gano-Overway, 2010).

The central role in most if not all models of organizational behavior play the perceptions of the work environment, referred to generally as organizational climate (Rousseau, 1988). The understanding of the perceptions of members of an organization for the existing ethical climate is excellent for the promotion of ethical behavior contrary to the unethical behavior. Nevertheless, the importance of these perceptions is increased when there is an agreement in the perceptions of the recipients of the organizational climate. More specifically, the members of the team, i.e., the members that are in the administration, are the ones that determine the organizational climate, while the climate’s recipients are the athletes.

Despite all the above, it seems that OB has not attracted enough the focus on the investigation of sport management. Research on OB has focused more on work environment factors, particularly the attributes and leader behavior of the manager and less on the affective and behavioral outcomes of the work environments (Doherty, 1998). The aim of the present study is to investigate initially the perceptions (of members and athletes) on the ethical climate in their teams and then to make an effort to compare data from the above mentioned teams to reveal any differences between them.

2. Method

• Participants

The participants were 356 individuals (142 members and 214 athletes) of non-profit sport teams. Their age ranged from 12 to 78 years (M = 24.44, SD = 14.41).

• Procedure

The selection of sport organizations (teams) for the use of their members and athletes was random. Researchers, after visiting the offices of the nonprofit organizations, initially informed the members of the aim of the study and then asked them to fill out the relevant form. Regarding athletes, they filled out the form prior to practice. This procedure lasted approximately 10-15 minutes. It should also be noted that researchers made clear that participation at the study is voluntary and anonymous.

• Measures

In order to estimate ethical climate, a validated Greek version (Proios, Athanailidis, & Arvanitidou, 2009, Proios, Gianiitsopoulou, & Efremidou, 2010) of the Ethical Climate Questionnaire (ECQ, Victor & Cullen, 1987, 1988) was used, as this was adapted by Agarwal and Malloy (1999) for nonprofit contexts. The ECQ used in the present study includes 18 statements divided in five dimensions: Individual caring (4 statements), Machiavellianism (4 statements), Independence (2 statements), Social caring (4 statements) and Law and code (4 statements). Replies are given on a 5-point Likert-type from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Coefficient α was for Individual caring (.66), for Independence (.68), for Machiavellianism (.71), for Social caring (.69) and for Law and code (.68). Even though coefficient alpha appears to be lower than the acceptable (.70), for the present case they could be considered as relatively acceptable (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007).
Data Analysis

To investigate perceptions of members and athletes on the ethical climate in their organizations (athletic teams), descriptive statistics were conducted. Additionally and in order to check any significant differences between members and athletes nonparametric tests (2 Independent-Samples t-test) were conducted. This analysis was preferred since normality in the data were violated in the present study.

3. Results

Descriptive statistics (Table 1) revealed that members perceived the benevolent climate (social and individual caring) more intensely than athletes (social caring [M = 4.19, SD = .56] vs [M = 3.78, SD = .60], and individual caring [M = 4.11, SD = .69] vs [M = 3.81, SD = .56]). Similar picture was presented in principle climate (law and code, and independence) (see Table 1). On the contrary, in egoistic climate (Machiavellianism) descriptive statistics shown a dominance of the perception of athletes over members (M = 2.90, SD = .76 vs M = 2.39, SD = .76).

Additional statistical analyses using Mann - Whitney U test (Table 2) revealed statistically significant differences between the members and athletes in the five dimensions of the ethical climate (individual caring [z= -5.14, p < .001]; Machiavellianism [z= -5.34, p < .001]; independence [z= -1.94, p <.05]; social caring [z= -6.81, p < .001]; law and code [z= -5.53, p <.001]).

4. Discussion

The goal of the present study was to investigate possible differences between members and athletes regarding their perceptions on ethical climate in nonprofit sport teams. Findings revealed the existence of significant differences in perception of the existing ethical climate between the participants. The presence of differences in the perception on the ethical climate is possibly due to the different educational background of the participants. This is because nonprofit organizations are an intensively cognitively demanding environment (Malloy & Agarwal, 2001a).

More specifically, the findings of the present study revealed that that in nonprofit sport teams the benevolent climate is the dominant one. This is also supported by the findings of other studies (e.g., Agarwal & Malloy, 1999; Malloy & Agarwal, 2001b). Fry and Gano-Overway (2010) revealed that the same perception also exists between young athletes (10-17 years). These findings show that non-profit sport organizations, possibly ensure a likeable environment for sports since no motives such is payment, exist. Caring climate was found to have a positive relation to caring behaviours of coaches and co-athletes (Smith, Smoll, Barnett, & Everett, 1993; Smith, Smoll, & Curtis, 1979), as well as to enjoyment (Fry & Gano-Overway, 2010).

Nevertheless, according to the present findings there are significant differences in perception on the dominant benevolent climate between members and athletes. More specifically, while members realized the dominance of social caring climate against individual caring climate, nevertheless the perception of athletes was the other way round. This shows the need for members to take under consideration the views of athletes when they would like to create an ethical climate. This claim is enhanced by the finding that showed that in both cases the mean scores of members were significantly higher than those of athletes. It is supported though that the involvement of athletes in sport governance of sport is negligible (Malloy & Taylor, 1999). This is possibly due to the fact that the administrative cadre does not consider the opinion of the athletes as worthy of influence as the relative knowledge base is questioned (i.e., in the context of delivering sport, they are not significant others) (Malloy & Agarwal, 2001b).

The findings of the present study revealed that the two teams of individuals perceive the fact that the principle climate exists in their teams on a medium level, with a dominance of law and code climate and independence climate. This possibly reveals that decisions in nonprofit sport teams are not distinguished by the principle of justice as this is determined by the rules of the athletic institution (Rawls, 1971). An athletic
institution is the system of rules that defines offices and positions with their rights and duties, powers and immunities and the like. Based on the present finding we may also understand the claims supporting that competitive sport is an environment where athletes present a lower level of moral reasoning than their peers of the same age (Bredemeier, 1995). We could also consider that the presence of behaviours in sports relating to the reduced pro social (Kleiber & Roberts, 1981), and antisocial behaviors (Kohn, 1986), is probably due to the fact that in nonprofit sport teams there is an ethical climate where principles climate is limited. Weiss and Smith (2002) supported that moral atmosphere may hold an important role for moral actions by participants in sports. Considering the fact that within this climate as well, members present better mean scores in both climates against those of athletes, our previous claim regarding the need to take under consideration the perceptions of athletes in the formation of an ethical climate, is supported.

Finally and on the egoistic climate (Machiavellianism) findings based on the perceptions of members and athletes, is not a climate of special interest in the operation of nonprofit sport teams. This finding can be explained by the fact that in nonprofit sport everyone participates without expecting any material reward. This justifies the limited perception on the existence of egoistic climate, since this climate is primarily based on the maximization of self-interest.

In conclusion and based on the present findings we could claim that perceptions on ethical climate between members and athletes in nonprofit sport teams are significantly different. Also in sport teams there are limited moral perceptions relating to the climates of independence (individual freedom, responsibility), and law and code (formal policy and procedure).

References


### Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

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<th>Members</th>
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<th>Athletes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual caring</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>.56</td>
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<tr>
<td>Machiavellianism</td>
<td>2.39</td>
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<td>.76</td>
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<td>Independence</td>
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<td>.92</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social caring</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and code</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>.60</td>
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### Table 2: Independent-Samples t-test

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<th>M rank</th>
<th>U value</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Individual caring</td>
<td>Members 214.02</td>
<td>10150.00, p &lt; .001</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athletes 154.93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machiavellianism</td>
<td>Members 144.18</td>
<td>10320.50, p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athletes 201.27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Members 191.30</td>
<td>13376.50, p &lt; .05</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athletes 170.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social caring</td>
<td>Members 215.74</td>
<td>8202.50, p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athletes 142.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and code</td>
<td>Members 209.55</td>
<td>9507.50, p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Athletes 149.38</td>
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