

Examining factors affecting employees' participation in company sport and their influence on continued participation and life satisfaction

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Abstract

Purpose – A growing trend among employees is engaging in sports activities with their colleagues during non-working hours. Despite the popularity of company sports in contemporary organizations, there is a dearth of research attention on its facilitators and outcomes. Thus, this study aimed to identify factors influencing employee involvement in competitive company sports and how such involvement influences future participation and life satisfaction.

Design/methodology/approach – Within a concurrent explanatory mixed-methods design, we recruited 380 employees who participated in external competitive company sport leagues to complete a survey with open-ended questions. Once the data was collected, it was analyzed using both structural equation modeling and thematic analysis.

Findings – Quantitative results indicated that social support and work–life balance (WLB) positively influenced company sport involvement, ultimately enhancing life satisfaction and intention to continue. Qualitative findings revealed four higher-order themes: (1) encourage a healthier lifestyle, (2) time, (3) build bonds with colleagues and management, and (4) personal development.

Originality/value – This study contributes novel insights to incorporate sport management in organizations, highlighting the significance of company sport involvement.

Keywords Sport involvement, Human resource management, Organizational behavior, Mixed-methods, Life satisfaction

Paper type Research article

Employees have increasingly reported difficulty in managing work intensity, exacerbated by the demands of constant need for availability and the pressure to maintain top-notch customer service standards (Guest, 2002; Kubicek *et al.*, 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic, which led to city-wide lockdowns and physical distancing requirements, resulted in many employees transitioning to remote work (Franken *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, several companies have continued to implement permanent remote work or hybrid arrangements for their employees long after the height of the pandemic (Becker *et al.*, 2022). These arrangements have not only created physical separation between team members but also blurred the boundaries between work and personal life (Ugwu *et al.*, 2023). This lack of distinction has contributed to



employees' heightened stress levels, reduced job satisfaction and a negative influence on overall well-being (Irawanto *et al.*, 2021). At the individual level, social support has been recognized as a critical buffer against these negative consequences, mitigating workplace stressors (Baruch-Feldman *et al.*, 2002). Simultaneously, organizations have acknowledged the importance of fostering employee work-life balance (WLB) as a strategic priority, given its association with positive outcomes for both the individual and the organization (e.g. heightened work engagement, reduced turnover, enhanced family satisfaction; Dixon and Sagas, 2007).

Employee physical activity has emerged as a viable organizational initiative to address job stress, as 51% of US employers have incorporated wellness programs into their operations (Calderwood *et al.*, 2021a). These physical involvements aim to enhance employees' health and well-being yielding an array of benefits at both the organizational level, such as reduced absenteeism, and the individual level, such as boosted self-esteem (Burton *et al.*, 2014; Fox, 2003). For example, Sliter *et al.* (2014) found physical activity to be a buffer between employees' workplace stressors and individual outcomes (i.e. engagement and satisfaction). Active participants were able to alleviate the negative consequences of workplace stressors and experience their mood-boosting effects (Sliter *et al.*, 2014). Subsequently, researchers have recently begun to explore employees' ability to engage in physical activity through sport participation (Mutz *et al.*, 2020). However, as organizations seek solutions to improve employees' quality of life, researchers are exploring ways to increase employees' involvement in sport.

Company sport has recently been coined to explain employees' participation with their colleagues in organized sport activity, which can be in a competitive or non-competitive setting (Kim *et al.*, 2024). Although there is a growing popularity of company sport in organizations, the predictors and outcomes of employees' participation have yet to be thoroughly explored. As a result, this study addresses this gap by exploring both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of employees' participation in company sport. Specifically, it aims to elucidate the interplay between life satisfaction and employees' experiences in company sports.

Although company sport has been proposed as a strategy to enhance organizational performance within Kim *et al.*'s (2024) *management through sport* framework, the supporting evidence predominantly stems from conceptual discussions, with limited empirical investigation to substantiate these claims. For example, claims about the managerial implications of company sport often lack substantiation from data-driven analyses. To address and advance the literature, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach to capture the nuanced and context-specific dynamics of employee participation in company sport. The inclusion of qualitative methods enriches the understanding of participants' experiences, providing more profound insights into factors that might be overlooked.

The implications of this study aim to further understand how competitive company sport can be used to enhance the life satisfaction of employees. Life satisfaction is not limited to solely benefiting the employee but has been found to be a stronger predictor of job performance, which favors the organization. Furthermore, the implication of this study shows the importance of developing competitive company sport opportunities for employees and provides strategies that managers can implement to better support their employees' participation.

The purpose of this mixed-methods study is to investigate the factors regarding employees' participation in competitive company sport and how it influences continued participation and employees' life satisfaction. By integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, this study provides a holistic understanding of the predictors, outcomes and experiences associated with competitive company sport.

Literature review

Company sport involvement

Sport involvement refers to the degree to which individuals incorporate sport participation in their schedule that delivers hedonic value such as enjoyment, centrality through significance in

daily life and symbolic value reflecting self-expression (Beaton *et al.*, 2011). The hedonic value represents the enjoyment an individual experiences from the activity, and centrality indicates how significant the activity is in the individual's life (Beaton *et al.*, 2011). Lastly, symbolic value is related to a level of self-expression (Beaton *et al.*, 2011). Sport management literature has long explored sport involvement from the perspective of fan involvement and sport participation involvement (e.g. Inoue *et al.*, 2017; Panza *et al.*, 2020).

In an organizational setting, company sport involvement can be described as the extent to which employee participation in company sport activities becomes a central aspect of their work, impacting the hedonic and symbolic significance of their work (Doh *et al.*, 2024). This participation may serve to enhance both individual well-being and workplace dynamics. Research indicates that participation in company sport contributes to improved physical health (e.g. better cardiorespiratory fitness) and mental well-being (e.g. reduced stress), while fostering benefits such as stronger social connection and reduced absenteeism (Barene *et al.*, 2014). Workplace team sports, for example, have been explored as tools for promoting diversity, such as in financial organizations in South Africa (Joubert and de Beer, 2012).

Despite its potential, research on company sport remains underdeveloped, with many studies focusing narrowly on the effects of physical activity within workplace settings rather than distinguishing company sport as a unique organizational initiative (Brinkley *et al.*, 2017; Edwards and Rowe, 2019). Existing literature conflates general exercise, organizational wellness programs and company sport, leading to conceptual ambiguity. This study addresses these gaps by examining facilitators, constraints and outcomes of employee participation in company sport (Kim *et al.*, 2024). One of the popular forms of company sport involves participating in external company team sport leagues and tournaments with colleagues. This type of company sport has been categorized as company team sport leagues, which involve interaction with colleagues and a focus on competition (Doh *et al.*, 2024; Kim *et al.*, 2024). The events for company team sport leagues are typically organized by cities or local sport and recreation agencies. Despite the popularity of company team sport leagues, there has been limited research exploring the facilitators and outcomes of employees' involvement in such sporting events. The current research model incorporates two external factors for company sport involvement (i.e. social support and WLB) and three outcomes for work, company sport (i.e. intention to continue) and life (i.e. life satisfaction) (see Figure 1).

Social support

Individuals experience social support when they receive assistance or comfort from their family, friends, or individuals in their social network (Kim *et al.*, 2008). Previous research has utilized social support theory to explain this process, which provides emotional, informational,

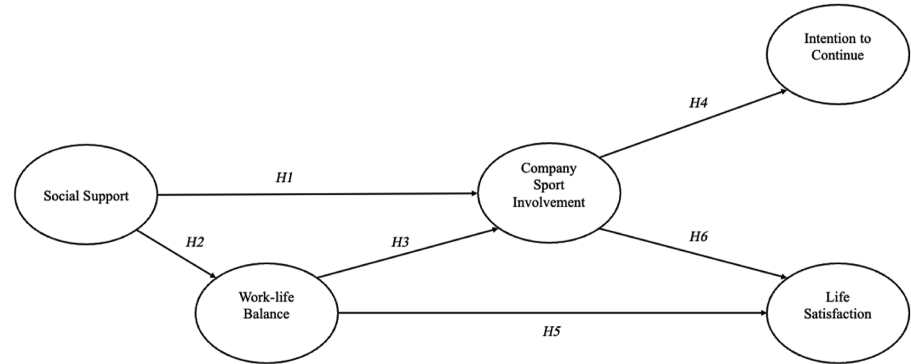


Figure 1. Proposed hypotheses model. Source: Authors' own creation

or tangible resources that allow individuals to cope with stress and adversity (French *et al.*, 2018). As a result, individuals perceive that they are loved, cared for and valued by others. Research has shown that social support is positively related to adults being more physically active. This aligns with research in the management literature that has extensively focused on the relationship between social support and improved mental and physical health (Labrague, 2021; Lindsay-Smith *et al.*, 2017). For example, employees with family support were less likely to experience burnout but were more likely to have higher levels of satisfaction with support from their supervisor (Baruch-Feldman *et al.*, 2002).

Support from significant others is an essential predictor of whether an individual adapts and adheres to physical activity. Previous scholars have explored social support-related factors such as parental and peer social support influencing one's sport involvement (Mellano and Pacewicz, 2023; Wang, 2023). In organizational settings, employees who recognize social support and the availability of leisure time after work have increased the possibility of employee participation in company sport activities (Puig-Ribera *et al.*, 2015). Accordingly, several studies highlighted social support's significance as a crucial resource for sport participation (e.g. Morgan and Giacobbi, 2006; Simons and Bird, 2023). The conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) posits that individuals can utilize their current resources (e.g. objects, states, conditions) to acquire new resources. Given this consideration, participating in company team sport leagues requires employees to dedicate their non-working hours to scheduled game times. In other words, having support from family and friends becomes imperative. Therefore, employees who perceive high levels of social support are more inclined to participate in company sports.

H1. Social support will positively influence company sport involvement.

Work-life balance

WLB is referred to as "the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth following an individual's current life priorities" (Kalliath and Brough, 2008, p. 326). Achieving WLB has been associated with increased employee satisfaction, reduced turnover and enhanced well-being. Key antecedents of WLB can be categorized into three discrete groups (Brough *et al.*, 2020): (1) work-related factors (e.g. job demands); (2) family-related factors (e.g. social support); and (3) other non-work-related factors (e.g. socio-economic status).

Many empirical studies have validated the importance of cultivating supportive networks to improve employees' WLB (e.g. Kalliath and Brough, 2008; Haar *et al.*, 2014). Support availability is linked to greater adaptability in managing work and life responsibilities. For example, a social support network increases WLB by fostering environments where employees feel empowered to communicate their needs and negotiate flexibility (Mazerolle and Goodman, 2013). Similarly, family support, such as emotional empathy from a partner or parents, enhances employees' ability to cope with work demands (Taylor *et al.*, 2021). Within sport settings, studies identify that collegiate coaches and trainers managing work-family demands report higher WLB when supported by supervisors and peers, positively impacting career satisfaction (Graham and Dixon, 2017; Taylor *et al.*, 2019). While these associations are well-documented, there remains a need to examine how different resources of support operate across specific workplace-based settings. In particular, limited research has explored the role of integrated support networks (e.g. combined work and family-based support) in shaping perceived WLB within employees' activities in their organization (e.g. company sport). Support from others can provide individuals with greater flexibility in managing work and non-work demands, thereby facilitating the maintenance of WLB.

In the case of the collegiate athletic training setting, having a head athletic trainer who advocated for WLB created a positive working environment for their employees, empowered employees to communicate their needs and negotiated flexible schedules, which enhanced

WLB. In parallel, family social support from a partner or parents who are emotionally empathetic and encourage employees to persist through work-related demands can assist in enhanced WLB (Taylor *et al.*, 2021). In this regard, employees who receive social support from colleagues, supervisors and family members are expected to perceive their work and non-work life as compatible.

H2. Social support will positively influence WLB.

The significance of investigating the outcomes of WLB, such as employee involvement and life satisfaction in organizational settings, has been emphasized across diverse fields, including applied psychology and human resources (Haar *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, prior studies suggest that WLB perceptions influence attitudes toward engagement in non-work life domains (e.g. Prakash, 2018). A positive perception of WLB fosters a mindset conducive to engaging in fulfilling non-work activities (Zheng *et al.*, 2015). When employees perceive their personal and professional lives to be well-balanced, they are more likely to experience psychological availability and intrinsic motivation to participate in leisure activities (Brown *et al.*, 2011; Russo *et al.*, 2016). In this sense, WLB perception may serve as a psychological foundation that encourages employees to engage in company sport as a meaningful extension of their balanced lifestyle.

H3. Employees' perception of WLB will positively influence company sport involvement.

Intention to continue

Intention to continue refers to a form of behavioral intention that encompasses an individual's attitude toward a specific action and the influence of the social environment on their behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1973). Drawing from self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000), the sustained participation in activities like company sport can be attributed to intrinsic motivation, which fulfills psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. Autonomous actions originate from intrinsic desire, competence emerges from self-belief in one's abilities and relatedness from a natural drive to connect with others and gain acceptance (Ryan and Deci, 2000). These factors collectively constitute intrinsic motivation for fulfilling basic psychological and social needs. Therefore, an individuals' intention to continue engaging in a specific activity is a voluntary choice shaped by their attitude towards that behavior, perception of their ability regarding the behavior and social environment.

Furthermore, engaging in ongoing physical activities has contributed to maintaining and improving physical and psychological well-being (Fox, 1999). Also, individuals can develop skills and establish relationships with their colleagues through a more extended engagement in such activities (Allender *et al.*, 2006). When employees voluntarily engage in company sport leagues, they are more likely to be motivated to continue participating in such activities (Kim *et al.*, 2009). Such motivation derives from the activity being a genuine pleasure, an integral part of employees' lives and an expression of their self-identity (Beaton *et al.*, 2011). Together, these factors create a sense of enjoyment, regularity and individual significance, which foster a stronger desire to maintain involvement in company sport (Allender *et al.*, 2006). Consequently, employees with more experience in company sport are anticipated to display an increased inclination to persist.

H4. Company sport involvement will positively influence intention to continue company sport participation.

Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction reflects individuals' overall evaluation of their quality of life, serving as a core component of subjective well-being (Diener *et al.*, 1985). Attaining WLB is critical for

individuals' well-being and life satisfaction (Haar *et al.*, 2014). Where work demands often eclipse personal time, attaining a harmonious balance between work and personal life has become increasingly significant (Hill *et al.*, 2001). WLB enhances life satisfaction by enabling individuals to allocate sufficient time and energy to valued life domains, such as leisure, family and health-enhancing activities (Bonebright *et al.*, 2000). In sport-related occupational contexts, employees such as coaches and athletic trainers have reported higher life satisfaction when they perceive a strong sense of WLB (Dixon and Sagas, 2007; Taylor *et al.*, 2019).

While this relationship is well-established, prior research has primarily examined it in high-stress professions or in general workplace settings. Little is known about how WLB contributes to life satisfaction in contexts where employees voluntarily engage in structured organizational leisure (e.g. company sport). In such settings, WLB may not only alleviate stress but also enhance employees' capacity to find purpose and enjoyment in both personal and professional domains. In the present research setting, WLB empowers employees to allocate resources (e.g. time, money and energy) between work tasks and non-work pursuits (e.g. company sports activities). When employees achieve this harmonious balance that resonates with their values and interests, they will likely experience satisfaction with their current life conditions.

H5. WLB will positively influence life satisfaction.

Cultivating a healthy work environment within organizations has been accentuated to promote employee well-being (Oja *et al.*, 2019). Participation in company sport may enhance life satisfaction through multiple pathways, including improved physical health, stronger social connections and alignment with personal values (Thøgersen-Ntoumani and Fox, 2005). Additionally, Sato *et al.* (2014) found that employees who engaged in physical activity expressed higher levels of life satisfaction compared to those who did not participate in such activities. Given these backgrounds, the positive influence of company sport involvement on life satisfaction can be attributed to various potential facets, encompassing employees' contentment from enjoying an active lifestyle, prioritizing playing sports and developing self-identity through participating in company sports. Consequently, we hypothesized that the extent of employee involvement in company sports would increase their life satisfaction.

H6. Company sport involvement will positively influence life satisfaction.

Method

Research design

The research design employed for this study is a concurrent mixed methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies simultaneously to provide a comprehensive understanding of the company sports phenomenon. We chose this research design because each approach only offers a glimpse of the topic, but the combination provides a more holistic and nuanced exploration of the phenomena (Creamer, 2017). Using two different approaches to collect data is essential for examining the convergence and divergence of research phenomena (Greene, 2007). In the quantitative strand, we tested structural equation modeling to see the relationships among social support, WLB, company sport involvement, intention to continue and life satisfaction. Consistent with the quantitative strand, we conducted the qualitative component using open-ended questions, which were appended to the survey for the same participants, to further understand the quantitative findings. Utilizing open-ended questions allowed participants to elaborate on their answers and captured insights into their specific experiences that cannot be gauged from a quantitative approach. Furthermore, convergent mixed-method designs are quite common in mixed-methods research, and this design allows us to triangulate the results from both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study (Poth, 2023; Shannon-Baker, 2023). In the present study,

the qualitative component also allows us to cross-validate or corroborate findings within a single study.

Participants and data collection

After receiving institutional approval, both the qualitative and quantitative strands of the study involved employing an online survey conducted over two weeks in May 2023. We recruited potential research participants through Prolific, an online recruitment platform that allows individuals to filter samples from its pool (Palan and Schitter, 2018). To establish our research pool, participants were selected based on several criteria: (1) employees who participate in company sport and (2) organizations with company sport club activities involving colleagues. Then, we established simple survey questions concerning whether employees participated in their company sport club and belonged to a competitive sport league. Based on the respondent's answers, we distributed a main survey link to individuals who fit the purpose of the study. To minimize common method bias, participants answered the randomly ordered questions (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The data collected was removed from the web-based server to ensure anonymity and prevent respondent recognition. The survey took approximately 15–20 min to complete.

Of the total sample ($n = 380$), 134 were women (35.3%), 245 were men (64.5%) and one participant (0.3%) answered as non-binary; their average age was 33.51 ($SD = 9.48$). Participants self-identified as White ($n = 193$, 50.8%), Black or African American ($n = 123$, 32.4%), Asian ($n = 26$, 6.8%), African Indian ($n = 13$, 3.4%), Native American ($n = 4$, 1.1%), Middle Eastern or North African ($n = 1$, 0.3%) and others ($n = 20$, 5.3%). The respondents reported living in Europe ($n = 131$, 34.5%), Africa ($n = 128$, 33.7%) and North America ($n = 121$, 31.8%). The respondents participated in the following sports: soccer ($n = 184$, 48.4%), basketball ($n = 49$, 12.9%), tennis ($n = 40$, 10.5%), golf ($n = 29$, 7.6%), volleyball ($n = 24$, 6.3%) and others ($n = 54$, 14.2%). Participants also reported exercising 3.83 times a week and participating in company sports 1.7 times a week.

Instrument

After an extensive literature review, we developed the final questionnaire (see Table 1). We assessed employees' social support by incorporating four items from Peeters et al. (1995). To measure employees' WLB, we employed four items from Brough et al. (2014). For company sport involvement, we modified nine questions from Beaton et al.'s (2011) scale, a second-order construct designed to measure participants' hedonic value, centrality and symbolic value. To determine participants' intention to continue company sport participation, we adapted three items from Wekesser et al. (2021). To assess participants' life satisfaction, we employed five questions from Diener et al. (1985). Except for social support and demographic items, all questionnaire items included a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), and social support followed on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely often*).

After answering quantitative survey questions, participants could further discuss their participation in company sport through four open-ended questions. Specifically, sample questions were: "In what ways has participation in company sport benefited you as an individual?", and "In what ways have your participation in company sport benefited you (i.e. work or life)?"

Data analysis

To analyze quantitative data, we conducted several data screening stages for structural equation modeling. First, we utilized the Qualtrics web-based survey platform to address univariate outliers and coding errors. Second, we assessed the multivariate normality assumption by computing Mardia's (1985) coefficients using Mplus 8. The multivariate

Table 1. Survey questionnaires

Constructs and items	β	CR	AVE
<i>Social Support</i>		0.83	0.63
My colleagues/supervisor/family pay(s) attention to my feeling and problems	0.76		
My colleagues/supervisor/family show(s) that they appreciate the way I do my job	0.83		
If it is necessary, my colleagues/supervisor/family give(s) me advice on how to handle things	0.79		
If it is necessary, my colleagues/supervisor/family help(s) me with a certain task	0.78		
<i>Work-life Balance</i>		0.82	0.54
I currently have a good balance between the time I spend at work and the time I have available for company sport activities	0.79		
I have difficulty balancing my work and company sport activities (R)	0.55		
I feel that the balance between my work demands and company sport activities is currently about right	0.68		
Overall, I believe that my work and non-work (e.g. company sport activities) life are balanced	0.88		
<i>Company Sport Involvement (Hedonic Value)</i>		0.86	0.67
Playing company sport is fun	(0.78) 0.59	0.77	0.54
Playing company sport is one of the most satisfying things that I do	0.91		
I really enjoy playing company sport	0.77		
<i>(Centrality)</i>	(0.89) 0.71	0.75	0.51
I find a lot of my life organized around playing sports with my colleagues	0.81		
Playing company sport plays a central role in my life	0.61		
I enjoy discussing playing company sport with others (e.g. friends, family, colleagues)	(0.77) 0.82	0.85	0.65
<i>(Symbolic Value)</i>	0.82		
Playing company sport says a lot about who I am	0.82		
Playing company sport says something about me	0.78		
Playing company sport gives others a glimpse of the type of person I am		0.92	0.80
<i>Intention to Continue</i>			
I intend to participate in company sport one year from now	0.90		
I plan to participate in company sport one year from now	0.92		
I am determined to participate in company sport one year from now	0.86		
<i>Life Satisfaction</i>		0.91	0.68
In most ways, my life is close to my ideal	0.85		
The conditions of my life are excellent	0.86		
I am satisfied with my life	0.91		
So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life	0.82		
If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing	0.68		

Note(s): β = standardized factor loadings; CR = construct reliability; AVE = average variance extracted; (R) = reverse-scored item

Source(s): Authors' own creation

kurtosis ($z = 1,233.77$, $p < 0.001$) and skewness ($z = 173.08$, $p < 0.001$) results were significant; thus, the data set violated the normality assumption. To address this issue, we employed a maximum likelihood with robust standard errors estimator. Third, we assessed the correlations among the latent factors to identify any concerns related to extreme multicollinearity or singularity. No correlations between the variables in our study exceeded a value of 0.85 (Kline, 2015), indicating no issues existed with extreme multicollinearity or singularity (see Table 2).

To assess the validity of a second-order construct and the full measurement model, we utilized a confirmatory factor analysis and examined the construct and model based on the global fit indices, including the comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (standard root mean square residual (SRMR)). CFI and TLI values greater than or equal to

Table 2. Constructs, means, standard deviation (SD) and correlations

Constructs	Mean	SD	1(a)	2(b)	3(c)	4	5
1. Social Support	5.60	1.01	1				
2. Work-life Balance	5.54	1.01	0.44**	1			
3. Company Sport Involvement	5.39	0.77	0.46**	0.40**	1		
(a) Hedonic Value	6.02	0.79	1				
(b) Centrality	5.06	0.99	(0.67**)	1			
(c) Symbolic Value	5.10	1.03	(0.52**)	(0.72**)			
4. Intention to Continue	6.03	0.99	0.32**	0.39**	0.46**	1	
5. Life Satisfaction	4.91	1.24	0.53**	0.50**	0.40**	0.19**	1

Note(s): Hedonic value, centrality and symbolic value are the subconstruct of company sport involvement

* $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.001$

Source(s): Authors' own creation

0.90, as suggested by [Hair et al. \(2010\)](#), and RMSEA and SRMR values less than or equal to 0.08, following the recommendation of [Tabachnick et al. \(2007\)](#), are considered acceptable. After verifying the validity of our data, we examined each item in the study to ensure that its factor loading value, which indicates theoretical agreement and relevance, met [Hair et al.'s \(2010\)](#) recommendation of being greater than 0.50. Lastly, we conducted tests to confirm the reliability and construct validity of the measures, including assessing the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). The CR and AVE values in our study exceeded the recommended levels of 0.70 and 0.50, respectively, indicating satisfactory reliability and convergent validity ([Hair et al., 2010](#)).

There is a potential that common method bias could develop from participants as measurements were gathered at a single point in time. To address this issue, we employed the common latent factor (CLF; [Podsakoff et al., 2003](#)). The result showed no significant difference between the full measurement model ($\chi^2 = 604.50$, $df = 261$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.06) and the model with CLF ($\chi^2 = 439.02$, $df = 229$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.03), indicating that common method bias was less likely to exist.

Regarding the qualitative data, we reviewed all responses to ensure that participants responded and provided context to the open-ended questions to be included in the analysis. We analyzed the qualitative data by using [Braun and Clarke's \(2006\)](#) thematic analysis procedure, which allows researchers to discover and analyze recurring patterns from the data. This process began with two researchers reading the participants' responses repeatedly to become acquainted with the data. Next, the researchers developed codes from the data and results of the quantitative strand and then classified the most prevalent ones into initial themes. The researchers ensured internal and external heterogeneity among other themes, the entire data set and the quantitative results. We then clarified, named and defined themes to provide boundaries. To enhance the trustworthiness of the qualitative analysis, we incorporated multiple steps. We utilized a peer debriefer to enrich the study's credibility, which validated the results and strengthened the thematic codes as suggested by [Gioia et al. \(2013\)](#). To enhance dependability, the researchers provided a thorough description of the methods to provide for study replication. The study's reliability improved through intercoder reliability, where two researchers analyzed the data independently and then discussed their findings until reaching full consensus on the themes ([Creamer, 2017](#)).

Results

Quantitative strand

We evaluated a second-order construct for company sport involvement ($\chi^2 = 80.31$, $df = 23$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR = 0.05), representing a good

model fit. We also evaluated our full measurement model ($\chi^2 = 604.50$, $df = 261$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.06), indicating a good model fit. After confirming the acceptability of the measurement model, we evaluated our hypothesized model that had acceptable fit statistics ($\chi^2 = 647.65$, $df = 264$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.08). The coefficients of all relationships, except for the moderating effect, in this study have positive and statistically significant (see Figure 2) paths from social support to company sport involvement (H1: $\gamma = 0.38$, S.E. = 0.07, $p < 0.001$), social support to WLB (H2: $\gamma = 0.45$, S.E. = 0.05, $p < 0.001$) and WLB to company sport involvement (H3: $\gamma = 0.29$, S.E. = 0.07, $p < 0.001$). The paths from company sport involvement to intention to continue company sport participation (H4: $\gamma = 0.52$, S.E. = 0.07, $p < 0.001$), WLB to life satisfaction (H5: $\gamma = 0.40$, S.E. = 0.05, $p < 0.001$) and company sport involvement to life satisfaction (H6: $\gamma = 0.26$, S.E. = 0.06, $p < 0.001$) were also statistically significant in the hypothesized paths.

Qualitative strand

Four higher-order themes emerged from the qualitative data analysis, which provided insight into the quantitative strand: (1) encourage a healthier lifestyle ($n = 187$), (2) time ($n = 173$), (3) build bonds with colleagues and management ($n = 85$), and (4) personal development ($n = 122$). These themes assist in addressing the research questions to understand employees' experiences and factors that prevent or encourage their company sport participation.

Encouraging a healthier lifestyle. Participants discussed sport's role in enhancing their life satisfaction through a healthier lifestyle. Among the responses, the most prevalent and recurring theme was that company sport involvement had encouraged healthier lifestyles in multiple ways. Consequently, following an in-depth analysis of the higher-order theme, we categorized encouraging a healthier lifestyle into three overarching subthemes: (1) physical well-being, (2) psychological well-being and (3) hedonic experiences. A total of 187 participants discussed aspects of a healthier lifestyle, spotlighting the diverse ways company sport involvement can contribute to fostering a healthier lifestyle.

Physical well-being. Participants ($n = 73$) noted involvement in company sport enabled them to exercise regularly, maintain an active lifestyle and stay in shape. P66 elaborated on the positive impact (i.e. physical well-being) associated with company sport involvement:

My job is primarily sedentary and requires me to sit in front of a computer screen for long hours since I'm an IT support administrator. Playing basketball during company sports events helps me to get active and engage in physical exercise, which is essential for maintaining a healthy body.

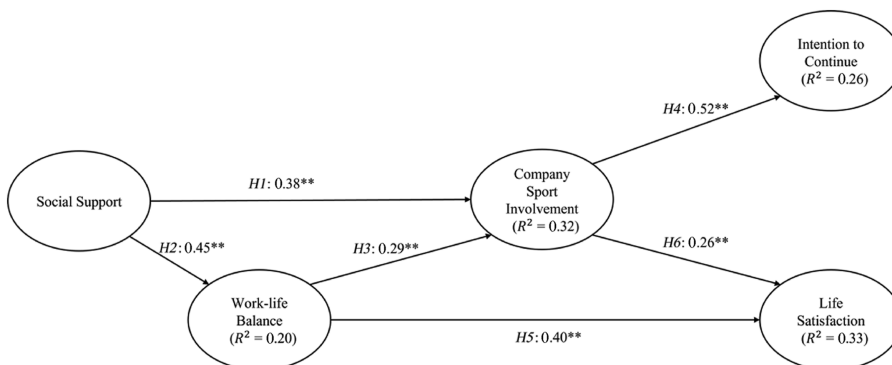


Figure 2. Hypotheses testing through structural equation modeling. Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$. Source: Authors' own creation

Further, respondents reported experiencing a virtuous cycle, where a healthy body led to a healthy mind and, subsequently, healthier relationships. P342 stated, “company sport has helped keep me fit, energetic and healthy throughout my daily life. It has also improved my mental health dramatically and has helped keep me social.” This theme aligns with the quantitative strand of the data analysis, which demonstrated a positive relationship between company sport involvement and life satisfaction. Respondents provided additional insights into how participating in company sports facilitated incorporating practices promoting their overall health and well-being.

Psychological well-being. Similar to physical well-being, our quantitative analysis demonstrated a significant emergence of the importance of psychological well-being outcomes associated with company sport involvement. Participants ($n = 66$) highlighted the implication of alleviating emotions and de-stressing, with many emphasizing the value of taking a break from work pressures to gain a sense of “peace of mind,” as described by P255. The statements by P139 and P411, consecutively, are exemplary in highlighting the transition of gaining psychological well-being by alleviating stress at an individual level and the improved psychological state influencing the work setting: “Allows me to alleviate stress that I find from work, so I am not as stressed at work,” “Has made my mental capacity increase and be in a better mood to tackle work challenges.”

Hedonic experiences. In congruence with the results of our quantitative strand, our qualitative data analysis revealed that participating in company sport positively influences employees’ psychological well-being. Specifically, respondents ($n = 48$) highlighted the benefits of company sport in helping them escape work demands and alleviate stress, which closely intertwines with the desire for hedonic experiences. These findings align with the quantitative results on company sport involvement outcomes, intention to continue and life satisfaction.

This finding reinforces the notion that company sport provides participants with enjoyable experiences, as evidenced by P22, who describes it as a “fun activity.” This finding suggests that company sport has an appealing and fun aspect that motivates participants to continue their involvement. Additionally, a notable outcome that emphasizes the power of the hedonic experience of company sport is a transformation in participants’ perception of work activities. As an example, P349 argued that the enjoyment derived from the company also benefited from perceiving work to be fun: “Work feels like play, because relationships built in the playing field are even in sync in the working environment and there’s harmony in my team and we get things done collectively.” The qualitative data aligns with the quantitative data analysis to further elucidate that company sport involvement provides enjoyment and contributes to overall life satisfaction, encompassing personal and work-related aspects.

Time. Our quantitative strand showed that WLB provided the ability to participate in company sport. The qualitative data analysis converges with the finding as participants portrayed time as both a hindrance and supported participation in company sport. Therefore, we discuss time in two subthemes: constraints and flexibility.

Constraints. This theme represents employees’ belief that work and life demands interfered with their involvement in company sport. The participants discussed how they desired to attend games or practices with their team. However, they prioritized handling work and family obligations. Company sport was considered a hobby in many regards compared to the participants’ other responsibilities. Once participants completed the duties from work and life, they could focus on their involvement in company sport. A total of 103 participants mentioned constraints related to time. P34 explained,

Sometimes when the stress is very high or some issue very difficult to solve, you need to focus on the problem and solve it as soon as possible and the priority is work and after that company sport, family is priority one.

Data also revealed that due to their demanding job, the limited time created a challenge to participate in company sport. P66 discussed, “my job can be demanding and often requires me

to work long hours, which can make it difficult to find time to participate in company sport events.” This theme creates a convergence with the quantitative data strand, which explored the relationship between WLB and company sport involvement, which possessed a positive relationship. The respondents provided further explanation to understand that participants prioritized their work and life obligations over company sport, which developed a challenge for involvement.

Flexibility. In contrast to the respondents discussing WLB barriers, participants ($n = 70$) expressed how support and preparation allowed them to engage in company sport. The participants explained that having family members that assisted them in managing life demands freed their time to participate in company sport. As explained by P218, “my wife is very encouraging, and she always supports me whenever I want to participate in company sports.” Additionally, participants discussed how the ability to manage their schedules allowed them to make the necessary adjustments to take part in company sport. This adjustment came in several forms, such as integrating company sport into their daily routines or other techniques to manage their time. P391 illuminated,

Engaging in company sports has allowed me to manage my time well. For example, if I know that there will be a training session today, I usually go to work thirty minutes earlier in order to avoid a backlog when I am about to attend the netball session.

However, the data analysis showed that in addition to support from family, the role of their organization proved influential. Some managers encouraged their employees to participate in company sport and provided them the ability to be flexible at work to do so. As a result, the participants found it easier to be involved in company sport. As explained by P56, “Our company strongly encourages employees to participate in company sports and will give us extra time to do so. This allows us to feel free to take the time to do so.” As the quantitative strand focused on support from family and friends, we discovered divergence in the data to show that research should also explore support from management.

Build bonds with colleagues and management. As participants engaged in company sports, they highlighted how their intention to continue participation allowed them to build bonds. This resulted in various individual and organizational outcomes (e.g. teamwork, friendships, networking and conflict resolution), as mentioned by participants ($n = 85$). P150 explained:

It builds bonds on teams because problem-solving is required when you are on a team together. Therefore, more work can get done and morale can also be generally higher. People will just look forward to going to work more because they feel a sense of connection to those who are at work with them.

Overall, participating in company sport allowed employees to engage with their colleagues by getting to know them outside of work. It allowed participants to foster relationships and get to know each other in a fun environment that made conversation easier for employees to connect with each other. But it also allowed employees to interact with individuals from different areas of the organization. Additionally, involvement in company sport allowed employees to develop friendships, as mentioned by P430, “I get to easily interact and build worthwhile friendships with like-minded people in the workplace.”

Data illustrated company sport as a place where employees could be exposed to upper management. This exposure allowed them to network with superiors within their organizations, which in return benefited their careers, as discussed by P112,

I don’t like playing favorite or getting free handouts but, in some ways, playing golf with your superiors has landed me in higher positions and work life has been pretty nice. In return helps with my family life because I have more perks such as time off, higher pay, and access to different networks that I can use to my advantage.

Employees can utilize company sport as a networking tool to build connections with individuals inside their organizations, which over time benefits their careers. P19 expresses,

“It has built bonds with people in my organization that I feel could not have been reached in the work environment alone.” Company sport can be utilized to equalize opportunities for individuals within the organization.

Personal development. The benefits in personal development contribute to general life satisfaction and increasing attachment to company sport involvement through ongoing participation, corroborating the quantitative findings. Specifically, two primary subthemes emerged regarding personal development: (1) skill development and (2) the enhancement of confidence to excel personally and professionally:

Developing skills. The participants ($n = 80$) acquired essential skills, including relationship-building, communication and collaboration, through their involvement in company sport. This skill development is not limited to individual abilities but also encompasses leadership roles, as respondent P89 noted that participation in company sport “has probably given me more leadership skills and enabled me to loosen up a bit.” Additionally, several respondents emphasized that company sport benefits extend to improved communication, team building and management skills. For instance, respondent P257 provided an exemplary explanation:

It has given me more confidence to aim higher and work my way through promotions and opportunities that have arisen. It has made me more skilled in interpersonal communications with others, allowing me to be an effective team leader as well as a team member.

Confidence. Confidence cultivation appeared as another salient facet of personal development that emerged from the qualitative data. Many respondents ($n = 42$) who discussed personal development emphasized that their involvement in company sport has bolstered their self-esteem and belief in themselves. As respondent P84 explained, “It has helped me to be more tolerant and proactive because I was a very introverted person.” Company sport can assist individuals in overcoming the barriers to interaction, regardless of their personality traits. Moreover, respondent P257’s follow-up response reinforced the idea that company sport can instill confidence, which in turn fosters resilience and motivation:

It has made me more confident, opened so many opportunities for me and is allowing me to feel like I am advancing in sports and work; it has helped me financially also. It overall makes me feel better about myself and I take the challenges head on and give myself goals to improve.

Discussion

This study obtained further insights into the role of company sport by investigating the influence of employees’ well-being and social support on their life satisfaction and intention to continue participating in company sport. We first proposed social support (i.e. family, friends) as an antecedent of involvement in company sport, and the results support H1. Participants described how support from family members allowed them to better manage their time and be more involved in company sport. This finding is consistent with those of previous research wherein social support served as an important resource for physical activities and thereby reinforced the concentration that employees aimed at sport participation (Calderwood *et al.*, 2021a). Given that support from family and friends encourages individuals to be more physically active (Bauman *et al.*, 2012), it can be a crucial factor in company sport involvement; that is, it affords employees more opportunities to engage in such activities.

A positive relationship was found between social support and employees’ WLB, thus confirming the validity of H2. This result supports those of previous studies (e.g. Giauque *et al.*, 2019), which consistently indicated that the capacity of employees to experience role balance arises from support from family and friends. The results also corroborate previous studies that employees who receive social support have positive physical and mental health (e.g. Nahum-Shani *et al.*, 2011). The support given by family and friends can favorably affect

other life-related outcomes, such as employees' life satisfaction and performance at work. More importantly, the present study obtained empirical evidence that active support from family and friends advances employees' role balance and helps them maintain engagement in work and non-work activities. This research also predicted a positive relationship between employees' WLB and company sport involvement (H3) and was furthermore confirmed through participants' open-ended responses. [Calderwood et al. \(2021b\)](#) have corroborated the association between such balance and employee participation in physical activities. The results of the current study thus provide conclusive evidence that employees' WLB favorably affects their company sport involvement.

Another noteworthy discovery indicated that the relationship between company sport involvement and the intention to continue participation is significant in the hypothesized direction, providing support for H4. This finding aligns with those of previous studies (e.g. [Jakobsson et al., 2012](#)), which demonstrated a positive association between the aforementioned variables on the basis of participants' attitudes and behaviors toward sporting environments.

In the company sport context, participants discussed their favorable experience derived from participation, which is essential for fostering the intention to carry on with such involvement. In relation to H5, employees' WLB and life satisfaction were significantly related. This result is consistent with the findings of [Haar et al. \(2014\)](#), who observed a positive influence of employees' WLB on their life satisfaction. Employees who maintain this balance are more likely to experience life satisfaction ([Dixon and Sagas, 2007](#)).

The positive link between company sport involvement and life satisfaction corroborates H6 and aligns with the responses from the participants. This finding also lends support to previous organizational studies focusing on sport activities (e.g. [Beaton et al., 2011](#); [Calderwood et al., 2021a](#)). Because physical activities can stimulate the perception of these pursuits as offering hedonic value, the centrality of participation in company sport and its symbolic value ([Beaton et al., 2011](#)) can be advantageous to employees' mental and physical health ([Calderwood et al., 2021a](#)). Company sports programs tend to enhance both physical and mental well-being (e.g. hedonic value, centrality) and foster social relationships with colleagues (e.g. symbolic value). As a result, they can positively influence life satisfaction.

Theoretical contributions

Our research contributes to existing scholarship in several ways. First, an important advantage of employing a mixed-methods design lies in its effectiveness in yielding profound and complex inferences that cannot be achieved through a single method ([Creamer, 2017](#)). These inferences clear the way for opportunities to conduct future research and enhance knowledge in the field ([Greene, 2007](#)). Our use of a mixed-methods approach enabled us to ascertain the participants' rationale for involving themselves in company sport from the perspective of WLB. Note, however, that company sport involvement can be regarded as an extension of non-work activities and may disrupt employees' role balance in general life. Even with the negative features of company sport involvement, the participants emphasized that this involvement can be a vital resource in the workplace and overall life, but they also highlighted the need for support from their family and friends to pursue such activities. Deriving these inferences using only one method would have posed considerable challenges. Despite the well-known effects of sport activities on improving physical and mental health ([Brown et al., 2011](#)), certain aspects of employees' well-being and potential outcomes have been insufficiently investigated on the basis of environmental factors, including social support, WLB and job stress. In line with this perspective, we advanced the literature by empirically testing management through sport. The findings from each method suggest that employees involved in company sport experienced ample benefits at work (i.e. personal development and bonds with colleagues and management) and in life (i.e. physical well-being and life satisfaction). As a result, we extend the literature by understanding how company sport can be used to enhance the experience and performance of employees, and workgroups, which benefits the overall organization.

Second, this research broadened the scope of COR theory by incorporating employees' involvement in company sports into the analysis of the issues of interest, considering the role of such involvement both in the workplace and in their personal lives. Although an environment (i.e. social support, WLB) is recognized as a crucial avenue for company sport participation (Lin *et al.*, 2014), this study sheds light on the broader significance of this activity as an essential resource for enhancing employees' physical and mental health in the workplace and their individual lives. This participation can also be viewed as a means of promoting the hedonic value, centrality and symbolic value of company sport activities. Furthermore, having opportunities to play company sports with colleagues encourages employees to lead healthier lifestyles and allows them to develop bonds with management and their peers. By exploring the roles of company sport in employees' lives and workplaces, this study expanded the range of sport activities that can be included in research on organizational behaviors.

Finally, this study is significant in that it identified the spillover effect of company sport involvement on other domains of employees' personal lives. Sport involvement has been a subject of investigation in sport management, particularly in connection to consumers' loyalty and their future behaviors (Inoue *et al.*, 2017). Beaton *et al.* (2011) suggested that sport involvement serves as a method for assessing individuals' involvement in sports activities as a pivotal element of their lives, offering both hedonic and symbolic value. From this viewpoint, our findings are meaningful in that they clarified that employees can enjoy playing sports with their colleagues and experience satisfaction with their lives because of enhancements to their physical and mental health. Overall, this study provides empirical evidence of how employees attain life satisfaction by participating in company sports activities. Additionally, it extends the literature on sport involvement in organizational settings.

Practical implications

The findings of this study show the various benefits that employee participation in company sport has for the individual and organization. As a result, organizations should consider encouraging the development of company sport teams in various leagues. They can complete this act through a standardized process to ensure everyone in the organization has the opportunity to participate. This could begin with garnering the interest of sports that employees would be interested in participating in and then creating teams to compete in local sports leagues (e.g. park and recreation, private leagues).

However, to maximize the benefits of employee participation, it is imperative that organizations consider employees' social support and WLB. Organizational personnel can accomplish this by providing flexibility in employees' schedules. Participants stated that they were able to engage in corporate sport because they were able to meet the demands of the job by going to work early when there was practice or a game. Essentially, the flexibility allowed them to better manage their schedules so that the demands of work and life did not prohibit their ability to participate.

Limitations and future research

Similar to all research endeavors, this study has its limitations. First, we solely relied upon analyzing responses to open-ended questions for the qualitative strand. While the significance of the qualitative strand stems from its robust data collection (i.e. 380 participants) and rigorous analysis (i.e. 1,520 answers), the absence of in-depth interviews with company sport participants limited the inclusion of additional perspectives. Furthermore, another limitation of this study is its limited generalizability to populations of company sport participants beyond the sample region in Europe, Africa and the United States. There can be discrepancies in the concept of company sport across various regions and the factors influencing participation based on distinct cultural, social, or organizational contexts. For example, East Asian countries (e.g. Korea, Japan) are well known to have a strict hierarchical organizational structure (Froese *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, employees

could perceive company sport involvement as unfavorable, the opposite of the current study.

Third, in a similar vein, our study showed a narrow demographic representation of the participants, which limits generalizability. Specifically, the primary focus of the study was on a narrow age group with an average of 33.51, thereby neglecting the inclusion of individuals from a diverse range of generations. By incorporating better representatives of generations, such as Generation Z (those born in the mid-1990s to early 2010s) and older generations (e.g. Baby Boomers or Generation X), we could have had an opportunity to examine potential age-related disparities and unique perspectives among employees of separate age and status within an organization.

In response to these limitations, we suggest that future research embrace the following recommendations: First, employing semi-structured interviews or observations on company sports participation among employees should be executed to integrate various qualitative data sources. This merger of multiple data sources can enrich the study's value through validation and triangulation (Creamer, 2017). Second, include data on company sport participants from diverse regions to improve the generalizability of findings on company sport involvement. Adding distinct cultures and organizational characteristics will enhance our understanding of how cultural and social contexts influence participants' perceptions. Furthermore, comparative studies between the current study and new regions can offer valuable insights into changes in company sport practices and their influences on employee involvement.

Conclusion

Company sport has garnered significant attention from many organizations and employees in the workplace. To examine the impact of company sport on employees' attitudes and behaviors, we conducted a mixed-methods approach. Through integrating multiple methods, we discovered the influence of participating in company sport on employees' overall well-being and identified strategies to enhance the promotion of such initiatives. Overall, this study offers a comprehensive perspective for understanding company sport in an organizational context.

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