

Human Resource Retention in Sport: The Impact of Self-Reflective Job Titles on Job Burnout and Security

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Abstract

Research Question: Despite some management practices that have been identified in the field of human resource retention (HRR) in sport, little is known about the individual practices, especially selecting self-reflective job titles (S-RJTs), and their impact on HRR reflectors. To fill this gap, this study presents retention guidelines by considering the effect of S-RJTs on job burnout and security, through the use of a HRR framework.

Research Methods: Using a quasi-experimental design, one hundred eighty paid sport staff (school sport team coaches, public fitness trainers, local sport team coaches, and recreational department employees) working in the sport organizations located at remote areas were randomly assigned to experiment ($n = 92$) and control ($n = 88$) groups. The participants were asked to respond to the job burnout and job security questionnaires in Time 1 (at the beginning of the study) and Time 2 (five weeks later).

Results and Findings: Results indicated that those professional paid sport staff creating S-RJTs reported less emotional exhaustion and more feelings of job security and continuity over a five-week period, whilst depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment did not change.

Implications: Referring to individual manipulation, S-RJTs can thus be considered as an effective instrument of HRR in sport, but there may be different types of S-RJTs, which need to be triangulated with the nature of the job title, the mission of the organization, and a person's personality.

Keywords: Sport employees, retention, job titles, emotional exhaustion, job security.

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Job retention refers to the particular pressures associated with how specialized persons stay in sports jobs (Ridinger et al., 2017). Employees psychologically and physically build a conceptual framework of organizational and individual factors to maintain satisfaction in a challenging workplace (George, 2015; Loghmani et al., 2021b). Hence, human resource retention (HRR) would be considered as an important potential outcome of a purposeful human resource strategy when employees are placed within a stressful environment and as a consequence experience psychological and physical pressures. Literature shows that HRR in sport can be reflected by decreasing job burnout, turnover intentions (Goodger et al., 2007), intention to leave (Turner & Chelladurai, 2005), and increasing job security (Dhanpat et al., 2019; Lee & Chelladurai, 2018). However, sport scholars have mainly divided reflectors of HRR into separate groups of athletes (Lopes & Vallerand, 2020), sport volunteers (Cuskelly et al., 2006; Wicker, 2017) and coaches (Lee & Chelladurai, 2018; Darvin, 2020), whilst there is little evidence investigating the job burnout and security among paid staff in sport organizations including paid coaches, public fitness trainers, and sport department employees (Goodger et al., 2007; Lopez et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2018; Taylor et al., in press).

Even though job security and retention in sports volunteers may be affected by organizational and managerial strategies (Cuskelly et al., 2006), Cuskelly and Hoye (2013) argued that organizational and managerial support programs do not shape the foundation of HRR among sport officials. Therefore, the concepts of job security and job retention are changeable between paid staff and volunteers in sport settings. Similar findings have been revealed in Webb et al.'s (2020) research, because today's employees – especially paid staff – individually,

psychologically craft their work to achieve favorable job outcomes (Loghmani et al., 2021a; Oldham & Fried, 2016). Furthermore, sport management related literature shows that job burnout and security is affected by individual differences such as gender, age, number of work hours (Darvin, 2020; Kelley, 1994; Sagas et al., 2006), marriage status (Turner & Chelladurai, 2005), work-related factors including work-family interface (Taylor et al., in press), workaholism, work-family conflict, family-work conflict and work engagement (Lopez et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2018), and job demand-resource balance (Alarcon, 2011). However, none of the above factors are under the control of people working in sport organizations. Despite researchers identifying the individual characteristics of people (i.e., emotional intelligence, Lee & Chelladurai, 2018) and managerial performance (i.e., organizational support, Kilo & Hassmén, 2016), in order to reduce job burnout and increase job security among sport employees, the knowledge gap persists regarding how individual practices may lead to job retention in sport employees.

In addition, the HRR literature in sport shows that the previous studies have mainly investigated western cultures and developed countries (Cuskelly & Hoye, 2013; Lopez et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2018; Taylor et al., in press; Webb et al., 2020), whereas sport management related research from different cultures is scarce. For example, research based in the middle east has been neglected by sport scholars. As a middle eastern country, 'Iran' has been chosen for this study because Iranian sport governance is strongly influenced by the Islamic government and the political system (Dousti et al., 2013). As a result, Iranian sport organizations, at both community and national level, must abide by the Islamic rules (Boroujerdi & Rahimkhani, 2016). Moreover, Dousti (2012) outlined that the Iranian sport system faces challenges that relate to the lack of programs available in sports club, poor educational opportunities available to improve the quality

of sport managers and increase the number of highly qualified professionals in the field, low private and voluntary investment in the sport industry, and a lack of recognition of sports being an important component of the curriculum at public schools (Dousti, 2012). Such issues can impose work pressures on people working in the Iranian sport organizations. For this reason, the present study considers Iran as a developing country and investigates the Iranian paid sport staff as a middle eastern sample to provide research evidence from a different culture. Therefore, three main gaps remain in our understanding regarding how HRR in sport may be achieved: (a) among sport paid staff, rather than athletes and volunteers; (b) through individual practices (a bottom-up process), and (c) within a middle eastern context (i.e., Iran). These gaps in the literature provided an opportunity to offer guidelines concerning how professional sport paid staff can be individually retained in sport workplaces demonstrating considerable tension and different culture.

The most important individual practice identified by previous research is related to self-reflective job titles (S-RJT) that can suggest methods to reduce emotional exhaustion (Grant et al., 2014). S-RJTs have been described as “a self-generated designation for a work role that is personalized to capture the way an employee adds unique value to the organization” (Grant et al., 2014. p. 1202). The S-RJTs are quite different to formal job titles because they represent the identities of employees. In accordance with Grant et al. (2014), employees select the S-RJTs to: (a) give themselves an opportunity for self-expression and self-affirmation, (b) increase comfort with others and reduce power distance across hierarchical lines, and (c) increase interpersonal engagement and enthusiasm from others. The above mechanisms make S-RJTs a powerful psychological tool for employees to individually reinforce their identities, cope with the destructive effects of and remain in a stressful workplace. However, it is unclear whether S-RJTs

have the ability to build motivation around the intention to continue, thereby retaining under pressure employees in their jobs. Nevertheless, the functions of S-RJTs are not definite in sport contexts and need to be tested in ways that can represent the HRR instrument in high tension sport workplaces. To this end, the overarching question of the present study is whether we consider S-RJTs as an individual practice of HRR in sport? Hence, we examined the effects of S-RJTs on job burnout and job security among paid sport staff working in stressful jobs or workplaces.

Review of related literature

Job titles: definitions, perspectives, and outcomes

When individuals join an organization or are promoted within one, job titles are often assigned to them (Berry & Sanchez, 2019). Generally, job titles refer to “a recognized shorthand for describing a set of responsibilities held by one employee which communicates the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics that employees who hold the job are likely to possess” (Grant et al., 2014, p. 1201). The words of job titles are the symbols which share the meanings regarding work roles and the relevant attributes of those who assume them (Martinez et al., 2008). For example, the title of *coach* is almost invariably interpreted as a sport team leader (Abrantes et al., in press). In terms of work roles, a coach is someone who plans the tactical strategy in order to achieve success in sport competition. It is assumed that a coach is highly smart, professional, skilled, qualified, and calm under pressure (Hill & Sotiriadou, 2016).

Research shows that even in face-to-face meetings, not only the name of people, but also the job titles of employees have been considered as polite introductions (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). These titles contain information about knowledge, skills, and abilities, status and power level, and responsibilities which provide values to the respective job titles (Martinez et al., 2008).

However, job titles are not the same concepts from the perspective of organizations and employees. For example, organizations can inflate job titles to respond positively to business demands and environmental changes (Martinez et al., 2008), whereas employees create S-RJTs to provide an opportunity to reduce negative job outcomes (Grant et al., 2014). Referring to different job titles for the same job, job title inflation “may contain more or less value to the title-bearer, the title-bearer’s customers, and others that deal with the title-bearer, because it misapplies the job titles to work role and title-bearers” (Martinez et al., 2008, p. 20).

In other words, job title inflation is a top-down process, whereas S-RJTs is a bottom-up process that employees undertake individually within workplaces. Job titles are the formal words limited to job description and skills, while self-reflective titles connect the job titles and employees' identities in ways that can affect the fundamental human motive to self-express and communicate the employees' identities and values to others (Brewer, 2009). S-RJTs can also build a title-organization-person (TOP) fit referring to substantive adaptation between the nature of selected S-RJTs, organization's purposes, and individuals' personalities. TOP fit processes focus on meeting organizational and human resource goals for individuals who are likely to suffer from emotional trauma or mental health related conditions (Grant et al., 2014). This process takes place with employees who follow the organizational hierarchical pathways and thereby do not feel role ambiguity and conflict.

In addition to TOP fit, S-RJTs contain three mechanisms used by employees, namely self-verification, psychological safety, and external rapport. First, self-verification mechanisms, are related to employees' identities which are recognized and validated by others (Cable & Kay, 2012). Second, psychological safety refers to employees who feel comfortable taking interpersonal risks (Edmondsson, 1999) which are related to identity accommodation (Grant et

al., 2014). Finally, external rapport refers to identity utilization (Grant et al., 2014) and concerns interactions with outside organizations as it refers to the experience of smooth and positive interactions with others (Bernieri et al., 1996). Grant et al. (2014) developed the theory of S-RJTs, with self-verification and psychological safety believed to mediate the effect of S-RJTs on emotional exhaustion. Grant also suggested that this kind of S-RJT can be practiced within a workplace where psychological and physical tension exists. The S-RJT is considered a valuable theory for employees experiencing stressful workplaces and operating under work pressures, as other job-related theories do not provide specific guidelines for HRR. For example, job characteristics (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) and job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) theories developed a new pathway for increasing the motivational aspects of employees, rather than individual retention (Bruning & Campion, 2018; Lazazzara et al., 2020). Specifically, job characteristics manipulated by the management reinforce growth satisfaction (Grant & Parker, 2009), internal work motivation (Loghmani et al., 2017) and job performance (Bakker et al., 2012). Conversely job crafting, which refers to re-shaping the job boundaries by employees themselves, fosters the psychological states of meaningfulness and thereby job satisfaction and organizational outcomes (Loghmani et al., 2021a; Zhang & Parker, 2019). Grant et al.'s (2014) theory not only provided an opportunity and critical principles for HRR in other areas, but also drew a pattern for HR managers to foster employees' ability to cope in high-pressure workplaces.

Job burnout

Maslach and Jackson (1986) found that, “burnout is a tridimensional syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment” (p. 134). Moreover, Schaufeli et al. (2009b) reported that some countries consider it as a medical diagnosis and others used it as a “socially accepted label that carries a

minimum stigma in terms of a psychiatric diagnosis” (p. 204). However, researchers tried to conceptualize job burnout through social exchange (Schaufeli et al., 2006) and job demands-resources (Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli et al., 2004) model of burnout. Specifically, Schaufeli et al. (2009a) suggested that job burnout may be predicted through increasing job demands and decreasing job resources. Even though the research surrounding job burnout has mostly been conducted within human service occupations (Maslach & Leiter, 2016), this negative phenomenon has been observed among sport paid staff as a unique type of stress syndrome (Koustelios, 2001). In spite of various athlete burnout models and perspectives including the cognitive-affecting model (Smith, 1986), the commitment-based model (Schmidt & Stein, 1991), the psychological perspective (Lopes & Vallerand, 2020), and the person-centered approach (Gustafsson et al., 2018), previous research has considered coaches as the main type of paid staff in sport organizations (Darvin, 2020; Goodger et al., 2007; Kilo & Hassmén, 2016). Extant research has also investigated whether employee burnout in sport organizational levels is associated with managerial factors, such as a top-down processes of job design and individual differences (Doherty, 1998). From an organizational behavior point of view, key stressors in sport include role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload, job scope and time pressures (Goodger et al., 2007). As these stressors are experienced by individuals, they shape the specific emotional states in employees that can lead to burnout (Danylchuk, 1993).

Doherty (1998) identified individual differences (i.e., sex, age, number of work hours, work experience) and work-related factors (i.e., job design and type of position) leading to stress and thereby burnout amongst sport employees. In terms of gender differences, female sport coaches were found to experience more emotional exhaustion and burnout than male sport coaches, due to number of hours (Kelley, 1994; Sagas et al., 2006), salary and the process of

recruitment (Darvin, 2020). When discussing job design factors, research shows that lack of job satisfaction related to supervision and nature of work is considered as a potential cause of emerging job burnout among campus recreation employees (Kaltenbaugh, 2009). In addition, increased job demands and a lack of job resources (e.g., lack of feedback from supervisor, lack of social support and lack of job control) relate to employee burnout (Alarcon, 2011), as these factors rooted in job design theory do not lead to job satisfaction and internal work motivation among sport employees (Loghmani et al., 2017). In terms of work-related factors, Taylor et al. (2018) showed that job burnout can be affected by workaholism and work-family conflict among intercollegiate athlete department employees. In another study, Taylor et al. (in press) investigated campus recreation and leisure employees and found that the relationship between workaholism and job burnout can be facilitated by work-family interface. In addition, job burnout among collegiate recreational employees can be anticipated by family-work conflict and work engagement (Lopez et al., 2020). Thus, the job burnout perceived by sport employees is a phenomenon related to either managerial performance or demographic characteristics and individual differences, rather than individual actions in the workplaces. Therefore, research has also begun to explore how job burnout could be reduced among sport employees (Kilo & Hassmén, 2016; Lee & Chelladurai, 2018).

As researchers have identified the individual and organizational antecedents of job burnout, recent studies focused on individual and organizational features to explain how job burnout could be reduced. Lee and Challadurai (2018), for instance, suggested that emotional intelligence may be considered as an individual factor that can significantly reduce job burnout through three forms of emotional labor (increasing deep acting and genuine expression, and decreasing surfacing acting) among high school sport coaches. On the other hand, research has

shown that organizational support for sports coaches reduces their job burnout and turnover intentions (Kilo & Hassmén, 2016). Similar to the literature associated with the antecedents of job burnout, the above studies also show that reducing job burnout is out of the control of sport employees as emotional intelligence refers to the nature of people, and organizational support is linked to managerial performance. Thus, the role of individual practices (i.e., S-RJTs) on reducing job burnout, suggested as a more effective way for positively building individual job outcomes (Grant et al., 2014), have been neglected in previous studies on sport employee job burnout. Removing job burnout factors may help employees to reduce work-family conflict (Taylor et al., 2018) and turnover intention (Lee & Chelladurai, 2018), thereby increasing job security among paid staff in sport.

Job security

Employees' subjective expectations of their employment stability and job continuity in an organization is reflected as job security (Probst, 2003). In other words, security in work is described as “a psychological state in which employees vary in their expectations of future job continuity” (Altinay et al., 2019, p. 1531). According to Meltz (1989), when employees perceive security in their work, they remain in the same organization. In contrast, job insecurity may lead to job loss strain, low job satisfaction, low organizational commitment (Adkins et al., 2001), and higher levels of actual and intended turnover (Ito & Brotheridge, 2007). Literature demonstrates that job security is considered the most important job retention factor (Altinay et al., 2019; Dhanpat et al., 2019) since it is positively related to employees' intention to stay (Mohsin et al., 2013; Mohsin et al., 2015). Previous research has emphasized the importance of managerial strategies for creating job security in employees and retention practices in sport settings such as planning, orientation, training and support (Cuskelly et al., 2006), organizational support

programs (Cuskelly & Hoye, 2013), and supportive structures at local and national levels (Webb et al., 2020). In addition, Turner and Chelladurai (2005) suggested that enhancing the organizational commitment of athletic department coaches would reduce their intentions to leave and increase job security. However, a knowledge gap remains regarding the effects of psychological job design strategies on job security among employees. Addressing this knowledge gap will contribute to building effective human resources in sport and creating guidelines of retention, because perceived job security leads to job satisfaction, work engagement, well-being, and intention to continue (Altinay et al., 2019; Ito & Brotheridge, 2007).

Rationale and research hypotheses

As discussed, HRR in sport organizations has mainly been identified as an effective human resource strategy which can be affected by the nature and character of employees, as well as organizational factors. However, the related literature is mostly limited to a top-down process (managerial strategies) of HRR surrounding athletes, sport volunteers and coaches, with the individual practices of HRR among sport paid staff neglected in previous studies. However, extant literature demonstrates that HRR has been reflected by two important concepts of job security and job burnout, both requiring manipulation through psychological states (Lee & Chelladurai, 2018). Grant et al. (2014), by demonstrating the mediated role of self-verification and psychological safety, showed that S-RJTs reduce emotional exhaustion. This lack of knowledge concerning bottom-up processes of HRR among paid sport staff and how sport employees can individually manage themselves and remain in high tension workplaces led us to examine the effects of S-RJTs on decreasing job burnout and increasing job security as reflectors of HRR in sport. Therefore, we postulate that S-RJTs can be effective instruments for HRR, in

that they are able to influence job burnout and the security of paid sport staff, resulting in the development of research hypotheses (RHs):

RH 1: S-RJTs significantly reduce job burnout.

RH 2: S-RJTs significantly enhance job security.

Method

Research design

The present study employed a quasi-experimental design. This approach offers many benefits of true field experiments for strengthening casual inference in settings with high external validity (Campbell & Stanley, 1966).

Research context: Remote area

As self-reflective job titles have been considered as an intervention (an instrument of HRR) that could enhance job security and reduce job burnout, it was necessary to start with a context in which sport paid staff were likely to experience sufficiently high baseline levels of burnout and exhaustion to prevent floor effects from masking changes (Grant et al., 2014). To this end, we focused on remote areas, since these settings are related to more tension (Kungwansupaphan & Leihaothabam, 2016). Furthermore, employees working in the remote communities are subject to negative occupational outcomes including occupational stress (Lenthall et al., 2018) and perceived abuse, due to dealing with particular contextual factors such as difficult or violent clients (Green et al., 2003), poor facilities, lack of co-workers in the workplace, and poor social services (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Accordingly, we selected an Iranian province (Guilan) as the location for this study. In the next stage, we referred to the last updated report (Law 68-1: Iranian social services by-laws, 2016) of the Iranian home affairs

department to identify the remote areas of the Guilan province. Based on the community division reports, there were 54 remote suburbs in the province of Guilan, at the time of the study. These suburbs are based on a lack of social services such as medical, cultural, economic, and sporting facilities and transportation infrastructures. Literature shows that such areas may lead to inequity and cause employees to experience stressful workplaces (Green et al., 2003; Lenthall et al., 2018). Thus, HRR in these areas is essential to ensure that the remote area is one of the most important contexts which may lead to sport employees' burnout and turnover.

Participants, procedures, and data collection

As we were investigating strategies of HRR in a remote sport context, we focused on those individuals who were working in sport industry. Four kinds of sports jobs were identified, namely “school sport team coach”, “public fitness trainer”, “local sport club coach”, and “recreational department employee”. The qualified sport coaches employed by the Iranian ministries of sport and education are sent to remote areas in Guilan province to provide professional services for school students, sport club athletes and local people. The recreational department employees are the qualified sport science graduates who do the administrative tasks and duties for the local sport offices. Therefore, all identified participants for this study have sport science degrees and are considered as professional paid sport staff. Of the 346 paid employees working in 54 remote areas, 221 individuals agreed to participate in this study, with an initial agreement rate of 64%. Participants were then randomly assigned to experiment and control groups in order to achieve approximately equal numbers of potential participants in each of the two groups. The selected remote areas were randomly divided into two regions, with 27 areas assigned to each research group. Accordingly, 106 employees participated in experiment conditions and 115 employees in the control group.

At the next stage, research questionnaires were distributed in person among all 221 participants, using self-generated identification codes for to linking participants' pre-test and post-test responses (Grant et al., 2014; Yurek et al., 2008). Data collection in the pre-test stage (entitled Time 1) lasted 17 business days. Box plot analysis of measures showed that there were 29 outliers from both experiment groups ($n = 8$) and the control group ($n = 21$) in data which may affect the homogeneity of participants in Time 1. Hence, these data were removed, leaving 192 participants in the experiment ($n = 98$) and control ($n = 94$) groups.

In the experimental group, the principal researcher with two assistants gave a 15-minute presentation about the application of S-RJTs at workplaces, and then invited research participants to produce a thought shower regarding the possibilities for their own titles. This process has been recommended by Grant et al. (2014) to foster and develop personal S-RJTs. Some representative examples included: devoted bodybuilder, guarantor of health (public fitness trainer who gives more time than formal sessions), child psychologist, messenger of happiness, unarmed commander (school sport team coach who deals with children and their parents who are suffering negative economic situations), scientific manager, sport minister (sport coach who strives to train and develop players), and sport practitioner, health facilitator (local recreational department employee who struggles with obtaining more sport facilities for people in the region). To clarify how self-reflective titles might be appropriate to use, we added two open-ended questions at the bottom of the questionnaires for the paid sport staff who participated in the experiment group. The questions have been included at Time 2 and contained, "how do you feel about your selected S-RJT", and "how have others reacted?".

The post-test (Time 2) research questionnaire was redistributed among 192 research participants after five weeks. This period of time was selected as it was longer than 1-3 weeks

which is a common timeframe in quasi-experiments focused on reducing burnout, and it was shorter than long period which may be affected by a number of history threats (Grant et al., 2014). This stage of the data collection was conducted in person over 14 business days. Of the initial collected questionnaires ($n = 192$), 12 participants did not provide identification codes or respond to key variables. This resulted in a final sample of 180 participants (81.5 % response rate compared to Time 1) and comprised 92 and 88 participants in the experiment and control group respectively. The number of participants in this study represents an adequate sample size, because previous studies have considered at least 50 participants for each group in quasi-experimental field-based design (Berga et al., 2021; Dehn et al., 2022; Grant et al., 2014). Research participants (school sport team coaches, public fitness trainers, local sport team coaches, and recreational department employees) were similar across both groups in terms of number, age, and job experience (see Appendix. A).

Measures

As the official language used in the Islamic Republic of Iran is Farsi, all measures were translated into Farsi and translated back into English to evaluate the appropriateness of the initial translation into Farsi. This process was undertaken by four separate individuals who were familiar with both the Farsi and English languages. No noteworthy mistakes were observed. Furthermore, the results of Cronbach's Alpha (see Table 2) indicate that there is adequate reliability for all research variables in both Time 1 (pre-test) and Time 2 (post-test).

Job burnout. The Maslach burnout inventory (MBI) (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) was used to measure job burnout. This instrument has been previously tested for validity and reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha ranging from .69 to .90 among university physical education personnel (Danylchuk, 1993). The MBI is composed of three subscales namely, emotional

exhaustion (nine items), depersonalization (five items), and personal accomplishment (eight items). Some examples of emotional exhaustion subscales are related to feelings of being emotionally exhausted because of the work, “I feel emotionally drained from my job”. In terms of depersonalization, research participants were asked to describe their feeling regarding, “worry that job is hardening emotionally”. Finally, reduced personal accomplishment refers to feeling a lack of competence and achievement such as, “cannot easily understand customer's feeling”. Research participants were asked to respond to 22 items on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (Never) to 6 (everyday).

Job security. To measure the perceived job security of research participants, we used the ten-item scale of job security developed by Oldham et al. (1986) on a 7-point Likert scale with anchors ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). This instrument has been previously tested for validity and reliability ($\alpha = .87$, Altinay et al., 2019; $\alpha = .90$, Kraimer et al., 2005). Some examples of the job security scale items were, “I am secure in my job”, “I will be able to keep my present job as long as I wish”, “I am confident that I will be able to work with my organization as long as I wish”, and “my job will be there as long as I want it”.

Data analysis

As the present study was a quasi-experimental field-based design, two types of analyzes have been produced. At the pre-test data collection (Time 1), we performed box-plots to identify outliers. Furthermore, an independent sample *t*-test was conducted to ensure that there was no difference between the experiment and the control group in job burnout and job security. At the next stage (post-test data, Time 2), we tested H1 and H2 by conducting a series of 2×2 repeated measure analyzes of variance within the subject of time (pre- and post-test) and between the subject of conditions (experiment and control) for the dependent variables of job burnout and job

security. In order to interpret the significant interactions and to calculate effect size, a paired sample *t*-test and a repeated measure analysis of variance were performed.

Results

Descriptive analysis

Means and the standard deviation of all study variables are displayed in Appendix B. In order to ensure that there are no substantial deviations from normality, we analyzed skewness and kurtosis. These results showed that all scales are within the -2.0 to 2.0 ranges and confirmed the normality in the data. Prior to testing the research hypotheses, the independent sample *t*-test results of the first survey indicated that the participants of the experiment and the control group did not differ in job burnout (emotional exhaustion [$t = .34, n.s.$], depersonalization [$t = .18, n.s.$], personal accomplishment [$t = -.84, n.s.$]), and job security ($t = .52, n.s.$). Further, correlation results show that there are no associations between job security and job burnout components, but there is a weak relationship between depersonalization and emotional exhaustion both at Time 1 (.25) and Time 2 (.21). Additionally, there are strong associations between job security and all three components of job burnout, especially emotional exhaustion in pre- and post-test scores. Full results are displayed in Appendix C.

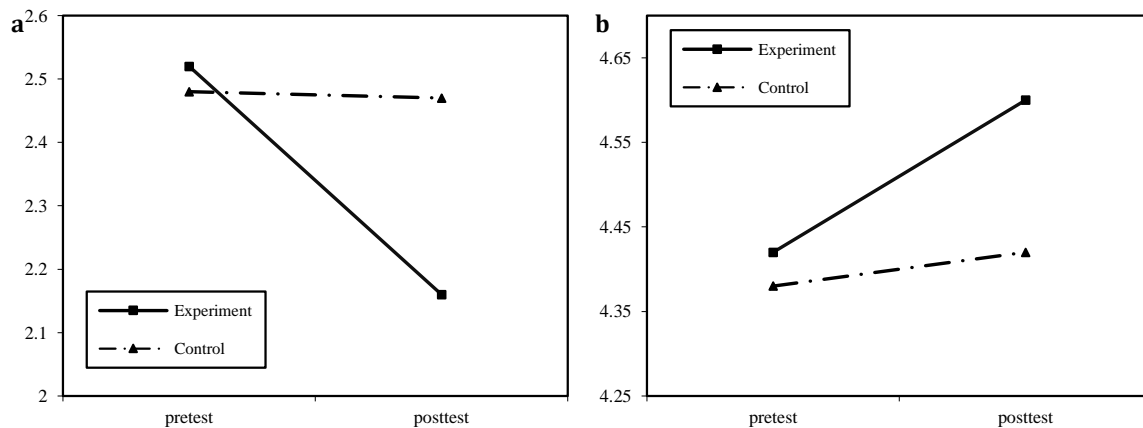
Main effects

Comparing experiment and control groups, a repeated measure analysis of variance showed significant time \times condition interactions in predicting emotional exhaustion (*Wilk's* $\lambda = .78, F[1, 178] = 50.60, p < .001, \eta^2 = .22$) and job security (*Wilk's* $\lambda = .97, F[1, 178] = 5.08, p < .025, \eta^2 = .03$). We interpreted the significant interactions by conducting paired sample *t*-tests within each condition over time. These analyzes showed that participants in the experiment

condition decreased significantly in emotional exhaustion ($t = 8.38, df = 91, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [.27, .44]$) and increased significantly in job security ($t = - 4.37, df = 91, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.25, -.09]$), whereas participants in the control group did not show statistically significant changes. Furthermore, an effect size, based on F -ratio of df and df_R , was employed by repeated measure analysis of variance (Field, 2013), which was the case for emotional exhaustion ($F[1, 91] = 70.34, p < .001, r = .66$) and job security ($F[1, 91] = 19.15, p < .001, r = .42$) in the experiment group. Thus, these results support the research hypotheses, such that S-RJTs reduced the subscale of emotional exhaustion for job burnout (H1), and enhanced job security (H2). The results supporting H1 indicate that the S-RJTs affect the emotional exhaustion after five weeks, but do not change other job burnout components. Moreover, the concept of job security has significantly increased for those who practiced the S-RJTs for five weeks, supporting H2. These changes have been illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Pretest and posttest mean ratings resulting intervention of S-RJT for: (a) emotional exhaustion, and (b) job security



Note. Separated lines refer to assigned research groups.

Open data

Reviewing the answers to the open-ended questions shows that the paid sport staff have reported a positive psychological experience over five weeks through the use of their selected S-RJTs. The recreational department officer working in a local sport office who selected “sport practitioner” as their S-RJT described that, “...when using my S-RJT, I was always reminding myself of that title during a day – both inside and outside the organization. As a result, I could feel that I have a special job and a positive impact on others”. This point is supported by the experiences of a public fitness trainer, “...when using the title of ‘guarantor of health’ during the fitness class, I could see that the clients were more serious with me and my job”. Moreover, a school volleyball team coach reported that the use of a S-RJT helped maintain focus when working;

I selected the S-RJT of ‘unarmed commander’ to inform the principal, colleagues, and parents that I might make mistakes in my job as I do not have enough facilities (e.g., safe net posts, appropriate ground for volleyball, lack of accessibility to medical centers, when something happened for school volleyball players). I was trying to say the potential mistakes and player injuries were not on purpose, because I am doing my best. This helped me to calm down and focus on my job.

Despite the challenges identified the volleyball coach was able to keep calm and focus on the role that they undertook. Moreover, a local football club’s coach who selected the title of “sport minister of a specific region” described that their S-RJT helped improve their perception of the importance of their role, and this meant that others also started to appreciate their work;

...prior to selecting the S-RJT, I imagined that, as a representative of sport affairs, my attendance in the council is not important. But now I feel that I am one of the most important members of the council cabinet and my colleagues are showing their respect for my advice. When I shared my S-RJT to others, everybody mocked me. However, they believed in me as a minister of sport over time and I am very happy for this.”

The above quotations showed that the participating paid sport staff perceived their S-RJT helped to project an important identity which led to more positive work experiences.

Discussion

This quasi-experimental study found partial support for the research hypotheses. Participating paid sport staff who individually created S-RJTs perceived increased job security and felt less emotional exhaustion five weeks later, while those individuals participating in the control group did not. In the subsequent sections, we discuss how this study: (a) contributes to the literature on HRR in sport through testing a new instrument and developing a new framework, (b) provides practical implications by presenting managerial guidelines, and (c) suggests potential future directions in accordance with research limitations.

Theoretical implications

This study extends the concept of HRR and its reflectors, job burnout and security, within the sport management literature in several ways. Firstly, this study offers evidence for a possible reason for the retention of paid sport staff in their jobs. To the best of our knowledge this study is the first study that (a) discusses a bottom-up process of HRR within a sport-related population; and (b) fills an important gap by testing the antecedent instrument of HRR (S-RJTs) in order to reduce job burnout and increase job security. The findings of the present study have revealed that S-RJTs can be considered as an area of strength for HRR in sport due to the reduction of

emotional exhaustion and enhanced job security. Individuals who create S-RJTs in a stressful workplace reported feeling less emotional exhaustion, as they analyzed how their selected S-RJTs help them reframe their work. In accordance with the open data, the S-RJT changes the employees' attitudes towards the job and most importantly, it ensures that employees act based on the new identity they have identified. Moreover, the story of the school volleyball team coach shows that the S-RJT removed the negative effects of the work environment through decreasing job demands and increasing job resources, ensuring that employees can focus on their identity at work, rather than job stressors. Thus, based on job demands-resources theory (Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli et al., 2004; Schaufeli et al., 2009a), employees can proactively and individually align their job demands and resources with their desirable identity through selecting a unique S-RJT.

In contrast, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment were not related to the creation of S-RJTs. These dimensions of job burnout may relate to demographic characteristics of sport employees such as work experience, number of work hours (Alarcon, 2011; Darvin, 2020), type of position, age, and sex (Doherty, 1998; Goodger et al., 2006; Koustelios, 2001), managerial actions including organizational support (Cuskelly et al., 2006; Kilo & Hassmén, 2016), individual's thinking and personality (Prooijen & Nippenberg, 2000) and work-family conflict, family-work conflict and workaholism (Lopez et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2018; Taylor et al., in press), rather than individual practices like S-RJTs. Therefore, the findings of the present study extend the sport management literature, particularly related to one of the three dimensions of job burnout (emotional exhaustion), which can be affected by individual practices of HRR.

Although S-RJTs did not reduce depersonalization and did not change diminished personal accomplishment, they may foster a feeling of job security. The process provides an opportunity for managerial HRR strategy in sport, because professional sport workers feeling security in their jobs intend to continue and stay in their jobs (Altinay et al., 2019; Mohsin et al., 2013; Mohsin et al., 2015). In accordance with TOP fit, it seems that the type of S-RJTs selected by research participants are similar in terms of achieving job security and reducing emotional exhaustion. In addition, the findings revealed that reducing emotional exhaustion may be enough for building job security, as evidence showed the positive relationship between job burnout and turnover intentions (Lee & Chelladurai, 2018). Thus, the increasing job security after a 5-week intervention of S-RJTs can depend on reducing emotional exhaustion, rather than depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment. In other words, the relationship between job burnout and turnover intentions identified by Lee and Chelladurai (2018) is principally affected by emotional exhaustion through S-RJTs among employees working in sport organizations. This finding also showed that psychological practices are more effective than organizational support programs and structures identified by Cuskelly and Hoye (2013), Kilo and Hassmén (2016) and Webb et al. (2020). Comparing previous evidence and the present study, we contend that the HRR in sport focuses on the differentiation of human resource reactions to organizational and individual practices in ways that volunteers in sport clubs may perceive managerial practices (Wicker, 2017). This study found that individual practices, in the form of S-RJTs, affect the job attitudes of the paid staff by reducing emotional exhaustion and enhancing the job security and intention to continue.

The second theoretical contribution of the present study pertains to the importance of a TOP fit process within sport management literature. In accordance with TOP fit, sport employees

need to select the S-RJTs which are both in line with the organization's purposes and their own personalities, in order to avoid any perceived ambiguity regarding the role, resulting in conflict if their S-RJTs do not align with the mission of the organization. TOP fit describes why depersonalization and personal accomplishment did not change in professional sport workers who created S-RJTs. We argue that, according to TOP fit, there are various types of S-RJTs with differences in terms of feelings and their consequences. Depending on TOP fit, a change in depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment of employees, is a challenge for managers as they may have been shaped before employment by individual (Goodger et al., 2007; Darwin, 2020; Sagas et al., 2006), organizational (Kilo & Hassmén, 2016) and work-related (Lopez et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2018; Taylor et al., in press) factors. We, therefore, conclude that reducing the above factors leading to job burnout and turnover intentions may facilitate the process of TOP fit and, thereby enable selection of the most appropriate S-RJTs. When employees choose the S-RJTs complying with TOP fit, they are more likely to react favorably to HRR reflectors, such as job burnout and security.

Consequently, this study adds TOP fit process and selection of S-RJTs, as individual practices via a bottom-up process, within the sport management literature, facilitating the relationship between individual, work-related and organizational antecedents with HRR reflectors, such as job burnout and security among paid sport staff. However, the aforementioned relationship can also occur in reverse. If sport employees can adapt themselves within an organization and through the job title selected through TOP fit process, the antecedent factors leading to job burnout and turnover intentions would no longer be effective. For example, selected S-RJTs through TOP fit build positive psychological states in paid sport staff, enabling an ability to cope with work-family conflict, work-family interface, workaholism, number of

work hours, and even gender issues. Hence, we argue that there can be a two-way relationship between antecedent factors, TOP fit, S-RJTs and HRR reflectors such as job burnout and security in the paid sport staff population.

The third contribution of this study enables a unique perspective to interpret the significance of career stages within sport management literature. Referring to work experience (Fried et al., 2007), the career stages can be considered as individual factors affecting job burnout and security. This research shows that change in job security and intention to continue may be affected by career stages, with early career employees internally motivated and later career employees externally motivated to stay in their jobs (Loghmani et al., 2021a). This study investigated the feeling of job security among later career paid sport staff (according to demographic results) and within remote areas, and we argue that S-RJTs may overcome a lack of external motivation. Hence, it is important to acknowledge that S-RJTs are a useful instrument and psychological strategy of HRR in sport workplaces and particularly for those employees who experience psychological pressures.

As previous studies on job burnout and security in sport were based on review (Doherty, 1998; Goodger et al., 2007; Koustelios, 2001) and quantitative (e.g., Lopez et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2018; Taylor et al., in press) research, the fourth contribution of the present study pertains to unique method analysis. The longitudinal, quasi-experimental design research method was employed in this study to empirically investigate the effect of S-RJTs on HRR reflectors such as job burnout and security. The research method employed is important as it provides an opportunity to extend previous findings by showing the real consequences of the HRR instrument over a five-week period.

Practical implications

The focus of this study has practical implications from both individual and organizational outlooks. From an individual perspective, the present research has shown that paid sport staff can actively affect their own jobs by attributing unique values. Sport managers can also remind staff about their identities in challenging workplaces in ways that feel less emotional and lead to lower levels of exhaustion. Organizations may benefit through existing employees having less emotional exhaustion and increased job security. These types of human resources (paid staff) show additional effort (Koster & Fleischmann, 2017) and have the intention to continue (Mohsin, 2013). This study also suggests that sport managers should focus on psychological job interventions, rather than organizational and management practices and programs. To this end, we recommend that sport managers in remote areas invite their paid sport staff to create S-RJTs in line with TOP fit implications. We also encourage managers to organize the educational courses regarding how to choose the S-RJT on a regular basis. Apart from positive outcomes, managers should monitor the self-reflected titles to ensure that they are matched with the organization's mission and the employees' personality by conceptualizing the TOP fit process among employees. If such monitoring is not undertaken, managers should not expect any improvement in feelings of depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment amongst their employees. Moreover, one of the most important aspects of TOP fit pertains to individuals (players, parents, athletes) who deal with sport organizations and their expectation from employees. Hence, it is expected that sport managers invite the organizations' clients to share their expectations, experiences, and stories and help their employees select the S-RJT.

Limitations and future research directions

The present study found that S-RJTs did not mitigate all components of burnout. There are reasons that may explain these results, either related to types of S-RJTs or HRR elements. It

seems that S-RJTs lead to identity accommodation and feelings of comfort in taking interpersonal risks in order to reduce emotional exhaustion (Edmondsson, 1999; Grant et al., 2014). In addition, S-RJTs may contribute to the development of self-efficacy through a sense of achievement leading to personal accomplishment (Nwankwo et al., 2013), and reduce role ambiguity and conflict at work which may reduce depersonalization (Totawar & Nambudiri, 2012) among employees. This study focused on the general workings of S-RJTs and found that the selected titles did not reduce depersonalization and did not change diminished personal accomplishment. As Grant et al. (2014) analyzed the mediating role of the three mechanisms of S-RJTs (self-verification, psychological safety, external rapport), future research should intentionally divide these mechanisms and separate their effect on HRR outcomes. Combining the mechanisms and type of S-RJTs will enable expansion of the TOP fit process by identifying the types of S-RJTs that lead to unique outcomes at both organizational and individual levels. For this reason, we suggest that future research should test the mechanisms of TOP fit by identifying various types of S-RJTs, exploring their impact in relation to individual and organizational outcomes. Moreover, because we also found that TOP fit process facilitates the relationship between antecedent factors and job burnout and security, it would be worthwhile for future research to investigate the mediating role of TOP fit process and S-RJTs in the relationships between individual (gender, age, work experience, number of hours), work-related (workaholism, work-family conflict, work-family interface, family-work family, job characteristics) and organizational factors with HRR reflectors, including job burnout and security among paid sport staff. Furthermore, future research should conduct an exploratory study to identify other possible elements of HRR in sport.

Second, this study has been conducted within a remote context and among non-professional paid staff. The mechanisms of HRR differ between amateur and professional sport workers (Lopes & Vallerand, 2020; Ridinger et al., 2017), the research surrounding the effect of S-RJTs on HRR elements among professional paid staff (e.g., elite athletes, coaches and referees) and within professional environments in sport. It would be helpful to expand our knowledge concerning how various kinds of sport employees select S-RJTs and react to them. Furthermore, researchers could compare the effect of S-RJTs on job outcomes between voluntary and paid staff in community sport clubs, as there are differences in terms of management practices in volunteers (Cuskelly et al., 2006) and professional paid staff (Cuskelly & Hoye, 2013, Webb et al., 2020).

The third limitation is related to the reaction of employees to challenging jobs. Consistent with findings of the present study, if employees select a personal S-RJT and use it everyday, they tend to react differently to stimulating job characteristics in ways that reduce the impact of external motivation. This challenges the career dynamic perspective developed by Fried et al. (2007). For this reason, we predict that job design theory needs to be refined through a combination of its literature and recent evidence, to redevelop models of employees' reaction to jobs. To this end, we suggest scholars propose a refined profile of job design in sport by focusing on job title evidence and employees' reactions. The research participants were in the middle of their career, according to demographic results, which may mean that their reactions differ to those who are at an early stage of their career (Cuskelly & Hoye, 2013; Fried et al., 2007). Hence, the fourth limitation of this research focuses on those sport employees who are in the early stages of their career and may need to intentionally continue in their jobs. Finally, we strongly encourage researchers to continue exploring sport management topics in middle eastern

contexts, as the sport management literature can be enriched through collecting and analyzing the data from a different and novel sport governance and cultural perspective.

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Appendix A*Demographic information of research participants*

Research participants	S-RJT group (<i>n</i> = 92)			Control group (<i>n</i> = 88)		
	<i>n</i>	Age years M (SD)	JE years M (SD)	<i>n</i>	Age years M (SD)	JE years M (SD)
School sport team coach	35	37.54 (8.27)	12.14 (8.38)	39	36.97 (9.29)	11.72 (8.08)
Male	18	38.06 (8.41)	12.33 (9.33)	24	36.42 (8.28)	11.08 (7.66)
Female	17	37.00 (8.36)	11.94 (7.52)	15	37.87 (11.00)	12.73 (8.90)
Public fitness trainer	21	39.76 (6.51)	14.29 (6.76)	17	40.53 (8.09)	15.06 (6.72)
Male	14	39.07 (6.10)	13.43 (6.04)	11	40.64 (8.05)	15.45 (6.63)
Female	7	41.14 (7.58)	16.00 (8.24)	6	40.33 (8.93)	14.33 (7.44)
Local sport club coach	14	43.71 (9.07)	18.57 (6.92)	13	38.92 (11.18)	14.31 (9.41)
Male	10	44.40 (9.28)	18.30 (6.94)	7	44.29 (11.92)	17.57 (10.56)
Female	4	42.00 (9.62)	19.25 (7.89)	6	32.67 (6.50)	10.50 (6.80)
RDE	22	34.45 (9.82)	10.41 (9.28)	19	40.58 (10.83)	16.42 (9.71)
Male	14	35.43 (10.53)	11.50 (9.50)	12	41.67 (12.08)	17.00 (10.40)
Female	8	32.75 (8.84)	8.50 (9.18)	7	38.71 (8.82)	15.43 (9.10)

Note. S-RJT = Self-Reflective Job Titles, JE = Job Experience, RDE = Recreational Department Employee.

Appendix B*Means, standard deviation, and Cronbach's Alpha of all study variables by condition*

Study variable	Condition	S-RJT group (<i>n</i> = 92)			Control group (<i>n</i> = 88)		
		M	SD	α	M	SD	α
Time 1:							
Emotional exhaustion		2.52	.66	.86	2.48	.79	.94
Depersonalization		2.65	.63	.92	2.63	.68	.91
Reduced Personal accomplishment		4.84	.42	.75	4.89	.41	.89
Job security		4.42	.54	.83	4.38	.55	.85
Time 2:							
Emotional exhaustion		2.16	.53	.95	2.47	.73	.86
Depersonalization		2.74	.66	.74	2.61	.65	.81
Reduced Personal accomplishment		4.89	.43	.87	4.93	.37	.94
Job security		4.60	.47	.82	4.42	.50	.81

Note. S-RJT = Self-Reflective Job Titles, M = Means, SD, Standard Deviation, α = Cronbach's

Alpha.

Appendix C*Correlations across conditions (n = 180)*

	EE _{T1}	1	2	3	4	5	6
Time 1:							
1. Depersonalization	.25**						
2. RPA	-.13	-.13					
3. Job security	-.12	-.02	-.02				
Time 2:							
4. Emotional exhaustion	.86**	.27**	-.13	-.12			
5. Depersonalization	.21*	.81**	-.23*	-.01	.21*		
6. RPA	-.11	-.01	.41**	.05	-.07	-.04	
7. Job security	-.02	.05	-.03	.70**	-.02	.07	.01

Note 1. EE = Emotional Exhaustion, RPA = Reduced Personal Accomplishment.

Note 2. Bolded number refers to significant correlation, * = $p < .01$, ** = $p < .001$ (2-tailed test).