Coach as CEO: Developing a Work-Family Balance Taxonomy for Sport Executives

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Sport organizations continue to focus on strategies for improving work-life balance, yet achieving balance for those working in sport remains elusive. The literature outside of sport suggests understanding work-life balance patterns of executives may be of particular importance (e.g., Shaw & Leberman, 2015; Stock, Bauer, & Beiling, 2014). In college sport, some have argued that head coaches, particularly those in the NCAA Division I setting, should be considered top-executives (Holmes, 2010; Humphreys, Paul, & Weinbach, 2016; Morrow & Howieson, 2018; Soebbing, Wicker, & Watanabe, 2016; Soebbing & Washington, 2011). Head coaches face extremely demanding job pressures including time and people pressures, visible results, multiple and competing stakeholders, and information overload (Authors, in press; Humphreys et al., 2016; Morrow & Howieson, 2018; Mayo, Pastor, Cooper, & Sanz-Vergel, 2011; Soebbing et al., 2016; Soebbing & Washington, 2011). Consequently, the coaching role can cause strain between work and life roles, leading to high levels of stress and exhaustion, ultimately impacting individual health, performance, and tenure (Amstad et al., 2011; Dixon et al., 2008; Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Huml et al., 2020; Graham & Dixon, 2017; Taylor et al., 2019). Stock et al. (2014) derived five typologies of work-life management among executives across industries in Europe. The current study builds on this typology, situating it in the context of sport, and exploring both the fit of the taxonomy in this context as well as specific extensions and applications thereof. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to leverage Stock et al.’s (2014) taxonomy of executives’ work-life balance styles to examine the strategies of top-level successful head sport coaches.

Following a qualitative descriptive approach (Sandelowski, 2000, 2010), this study utilized in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a sample of 30 mid-late career head coach executives. The sample for this study is part of a large dataset from which one article is currently in press (Authors, in press). The mean age was approximately 50 years old with a strong representation of both male and female coaches (18 male, 12 female). The coach executives in this study employed a variety of tactics for work-life balance, which fit into six categories, including the Segmentor, Spillover Afflicted, Compensator, Work Accommodator, Family Accommodator, and Spillover Successful. The first five categories were consistent with the findings from Stock et al. (2014). However, the sixth is a new category consistent with Lambert’s (1990) conceptualization of the spillover type, where the outcomes from spillover can be both positive and negative. More in-depth examples of each category will be provided during the conference. In general, the data revealed involvement in multiple life roles does create conflict and a need for intentional management strategies toward successful work-life balance. Practically, this study provides a helpful taxonomy for tailoring human resource management policies and practices for this valuable employee segment. Theoretically, this study helps inform ways to move the literature beyond strictly a focus on role conflict and into a role balance perspective. It also provides insight into the ways that scarcity and enhancement role theories interact in context.