

Examining Role Conflict among Division III Head Men's and Women's Basketball Coaches

Corinne Farneti, Ohio State University
Keith Christy, Ohio State University
Brian Turner, Ohio State University (Advisor)

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It is not uncommon in a typical Division III institution for a head coach to report to various individuals, such as athletic administrators (i.e., athletic directors and assistant athletic directors), the department chair (if the coach is also teaching), and another coach (if the coach is an assistant in another sport). This complex hierarchy can often lead to conflicting roles for many of its members. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to examine organizational structure and role conflict in Division III athletics, while determining to what extent and in what ways coaches experience this conflict.

There has been a vast amount of research done on role conflict over the years, though little regarding role conflict in intercollegiate athletics (Jones, 1993; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). Role conflict occurs when an employee receives mismatched job expectations or requests, as explained by Oliver & Brief (1977-78). Issues such as power, structure, chain-of-command, and span of control were examined to establish a framework for the context of role conflict. A number of past studies have indicated that role conflict can lead to a decrease in job satisfaction and performance, which in turn, increases the intent to leave (Jones, 1993).

For this study, 500 men's and women's Division III basketball coaches were randomly selected to participate in the study. In addition to picking a sport in which both genders participate, the researchers chose basketball because it is sponsored by more institutions (and there are a similar number of schools that sponsor both men's and women's teams). Items for the instrument were generated from previous conflict and ambiguity questionnaires developed by Rizzo et al. (1970) and Johlke and Duhan (2001).

The results of this study showed no significant differences in coaches' perceptions of role conflict between male and female coaches, as well as between coaches of men's basketball and women's basketball. Regarding antecedents, teaching responsibilities were significantly related to role conflict; the more classes an individual taught per year, the more role conflict they had within the organization. The findings of this study also showed that role conflict was significantly related to overall job satisfaction and turnover intentions of the respondents, with role conflict explaining 29% and 20% of variance in these consequences, respectively. Lastly, results of the study found that role conflict was significantly related to coach's performance.

From a practical standpoint, understanding role conflict and its correlation with job satisfaction, turnover intention, performance, teaching responsibilities, and tenure should be of interest for athletic directors and administrators alike. By understanding the relationship between role conflict and its antecedents and consequences, administrators can save the institution money. The costs an organization would incur to hire and train an individual would most likely be more than to keep a current employee. Other implications and future research studies will be discussed.