Managing Work and Family Across Time: Examining Daily Fluctuations in Balance, Conflict, and Enrichment Among High School Coaches

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Sport management scholars continue to examine the interaction of the sport industry and the work-family interface (Dixon & Bruening, 2005), especially among coaches. Previous studies suggest that both women and men report experiencing work-family conflict (Schenewark & Dixon, 2012), that coping strategies differ based on gender (Bruening & Dixon, 2007), and that cohort effects strongly influence experiences of work-family conflict (Dabbs et al., 2016). However, less is understood about how work-family balance, conflict, and enrichment may fluctuate for an individual over a given period of time.

The purpose of this study was to highlight the natural ebbs and flows of work-family conflict, balance, and enrichment for individuals working in sport. To that end, high school varsity coaches from the southeast United States with at least one child living in the home were invited to participate in this study. Ecological Momentary Analysis (EMA) served as a methodology for examining the experiences of participants over a ten-day period. Participants (n=243) answered a baseline questionnaire measuring work-family balance, conflict, and enrichment. After which they were invited to answered similar questions again at random times throughout the ten-day period. One data collection period has already taken place during spring 2018, a second data collection will take place in the fall of 2018. Once data collection is complete, multilevel modeling will be utilized to measure the variability among participants.

Initial results from the spring data show a strong contrast between participant’s baseline questionnaire and their daily EMA responses. The mean score for baseline work-family conflict was approximately 69.79 out of 100 (higher scores indicating higher levels of conflict), but the mean score from the daily EMA questions reduced to 30.05. This suggests that the coaches in this study were not experiencing high levels of work-family conflict from morning to night, every single day during the ten-day period. Instead, the initial data suggests that individually perceived levels of conflict vary and fluctuate for participants based on the situation of any given day. The same type of variation was also seen for levels of perceived enrichment, but levels of perceived balanced remained fairly consistent with a baseline mean of 83.22, and a daily EMA mean of 81.15. It is expected that the second round of data collection will provide additional insight into these trends.

The preliminary results indicate the need to further explore the dynamics of work-family conflict across time to capture the lived daily experience among coaches. Previous work examining the work-family interface in sport have focused on explaining the experiences of work-family conflict, balance, and enrichment. To this end, studies have used participant reflection, memory, and past experiences. This study contributes to the literature by providing insight into the daily lived experience of balancing work and family. By utilizing an EMA methodology and capturing participant responses multiple times each day over a period of time, this study begins to highlight how levels of balance, conflict, and enrichment vary in meaningful patterns, which when measured over time, can give meaningful insight into the work-family interface.