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## Coach as CEO: developing a work-family balance taxonomy for sport executives

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### ABSTRACT

**Rationale/Purpose:** Much work in sport management demonstrates the importance of the work-life interface across positions in sport, including investigations of coaches, front office staff, and training staff. However, ongoing arguments suggest that understanding the work-family balance patterns of executives may be of particular importance. The purpose of this paper is to identify patterns of work-life balance strategies among successful executive sport managers.

**Design/Methodological Approach:** Following a qualitative descriptive approach this study utilized in-depth semi-structured interviews with a sample of 30 mid-late career head coach executives.

**Findings:** The results revealed a typology of six prevalent strategies for work-family balance: Segmentor, Successful Spillover, Spillover Afflicted, Compensator, Work Accommodator, and Family Accommodator.

**Practical Implications:** This study provides a helpful taxonomy for tailoring human resource management policies and practices for this valuable employee segment.

**Research Contribution:** From a theoretical perspective, this study helps inform ways to move beyond strictly a role conflict and into a role balance perspective. It also provides insight into the ways that scarcity and enhancement role theories interact in context.

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Work-life balance; coaching; human resource management; qualitative

Sport organizations continue to focus on management strategies for improving work-life balance, yet the actual experience of balance for those living and working in sport remains elusive. Family-friendly policies such as flexible work arrangements, family leave, and family travel arrangements, aim to provide employees with assistance in managing both their work and family responsibilities (Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2017; Taylor et al., 2019). Further, enhancing work-family balance is part of

improving employee well-being, which is linked to positive individual and organizational outcomes such as job and life satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational and career tenure (Amstad et al., 2011; Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Dixon & Sagas, 2007). From a human capital perspective, work-family benefits and programs are a way to bolster investment in human talent, and to attract and retain valuable employees (Becker, 1962; Butts et al., 2013). However, evidence also suggests that work-family policies are not

universally helpful or applicable across contexts or positions (Amstad et al., 2011; Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Shaw & Leberman, 2015; Taylor et al., 2019). Thus, there is a need to continue to refine theory and practice in this realm, uncovering assumptions and realities that may hinder or aid the relevance of work-life supports as well as the effectiveness of work-family functioning.

Much work in sport management demonstrates the importance of the work-life interface across positions in sport organizations. Research in this area includes examination of coaches, front office staff, sport clubs, referees, and training staff (e.g. Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2017; Hong et al., 2019; Huml et al., 2020; Leberman & Palmer, 2009; Mazerolle & Eason, 2016; Mazerolle et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2019). However, ongoing arguments in the sport management and more general human resource management literature suggest that understanding the work-life balance patterns of executives may be of particular importance, especially that of a chief executive officer (CEO) (Kasper et al., 2005; Shaw & Leberman, 2015; Stock et al., 2014). Stock et al. (2014) note three reasons for the need to examine work-life balance among CEO positions. First, the job demands of CEOs are different from those of other employees. Second, the CEO positions are central to organizational performance. Third, CEO work-life balance may have underlying mechanisms that are different than those of other employees.

Before examining these three reasons in more detail, we first need to define the CEO position relative to the sport industry. In professional sport organizations, positions such as president, vice-president clearly are considered executive-level positions. In college sport, Athletic Directors and various Associate/Assistant would be considered executive-level positions, with the Athletic Director typically considered to be the CEO of the entire department.

However, in both professional and college sport, recent arguments have been made for head coaches, particularly those in the NCAA Division I setting, to be considered as top-executives of their individual programs (Holmes, 2010; Humphreys et al., 2016; Morrow & Howieson, 2018; Soebbing et al., 2016; Soebbing & Washington, 2011). Humphreys and colleagues (2016) describe the parallels well. They state:

The head coach must determine a strategic direction for the football program, devise game plans analogous to making day-to-day operational decision, hire and manage a large number of assistant coaches, recruit players, manage large scale tutoring operations that keep players academically eligible to compete, deal with the media, and perform the role of public face of the football program. The head coach must also interact with alumni and donors and ensure that the football program is both successful and stays within NCAA regulations. Head football coaches at top programs earn salaries commensurate with corporate CEOs; top coaches earn millions of dollars per year in salaries as well as significant performance bonuses and additional compensation from media appearances and camps (p. 483).

While Humphreys included only head football coaches, the same argument could be made for head coaches of other sports, as the job demands and responsibilities for their individual programs are parallel even if the salary and media attention is not (Cunningham & Dixon, 2003; Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2017; Shaw & Leberman, 2015). Given this parallel of CEO and head coach, we refer to head coaches throughout this paper as organizational executives, or coach executives.

As such, executives' job demands place these individuals' profession into direct competition with family obligations (Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2017; Kasper et al., 2005). This is likely exacerbated in sport jobs, where coaches and other sport providers' hours are unpredictable, extensive, and involve numerous nights and weekends (Dixon &

Bruening, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2017). Top executives in and out of sport face extremely demanding job pressures including stresses of time and people, visible results, multiple and competing stakeholders, and information overload (Dabbs et al., 2020; Humphreys et al., 2016; Mayo et al., 2011; Morrow & Howieson, 2018; Soebbing et al., 2016; Soebbing & Washington, 2011). These high demands seem increasingly to conflict with changing demands of postmodern families, where both parents are expected to be involved and engaged in family responsibilities (Aumann, Galinsky, & Matos, 2014; Dabbs et al., 2020; Galinsky et al., 2011; Graham & Dixon, 2017). This ongoing high pressure and direct conflict can cause strain between work and family roles, leading to high levels of stress and exhaustion that can ultimately impact 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). These kinds of job demands have led sport managers to suggest that CEOs need more individualized attention in performance management than other sport management positions (Greenberg, 1992; Soebbing & Washington, 2011).

In addition, executive positions are central to organizational performance. A plethora of work in sport management, particularly in sport economics, ties executive performance and turnover to organizational performance (e.g. Audas et al., 2002; Holmes, 2010; Martinez & Caudill, 2013; Soebbing & Washington, 2011). While some evidence suggests that turnover of CEOs (especially if they are poorly performing) can enhance organizational performance (e.g. Pfeffer & Davis-Blake, 1986), others suggest that coaching turnover hurts performance (Audas et al., 2002) and that the culture built from long-term coaching tenure is paramount to organizational success (Smart & Wolfe, 2000). Thus, finding ways to improve retention of successful CEOs seems of utmost importance to organizations.

Third, executive employees' management of work-life balance may differ from that of other employees. Stock et al. (2014) argued that in addition to the powerful performance pressures for CEOs, these individuals occupy isolated positions at the top of their company or team such that they lack the same kinds of social and peer supports available to other employees. In addition, these executives face enormous pressure from subordinates, athletes, external stakeholders, and the media to "exhibit impressive behaviors while remaining in full control of their emotions" (p. 1816), thus, minimizing their options for releasing the stress and strain from high and competing demands. At the same time, executives may have some liberties that other positions do not afford. For example, executives often have great freedom in configuring their work day and work week (e.g. Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Dabbs et al., 2020) to accommodate multiple demands. In addition, the compensation level of most executives often affords them access to external supports (e.g. housekeeping, administrative assistance, nannies) that are not available to other employees (Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Dabbs et al., 2020; Stock et al., 2014).

In sum, understanding and working to improve the work-life balance of executives could be a valuable tool for leveraging human capital. As Stock and colleagues (2014, p. 1816) argued: "Organizations might benefit particularly from fostering top executives' work-family balance. Identifying human resource management measures that best fit the needs of a company's top management requires knowledge of the peculiarities of top executives' work-family balance." Toward continuing to build a fully developed theory of work-family balance in sport, the purpose of this paper is to identify patterns of work-life balance strategies among successful executive sport managers. To that end, we aim not necessarily to provide in-depth descriptions of each role management type, but more so to understand the overall profiles across the

sample to help develop an industry-specific taxonomy of work-family balance strategies that could guide both theory and practice.

## Contributions

Chalip (2006) suggested that one way to build sport management theory is what he termed a “derivative model.” That is a model whereby mainstream management theory is intentionally examined within a sport management context to “determine the degree to which theories borrowed from mainstream social science are apt descriptors of sport phenomenon” (p. 3). Indeed, this model has proven useful for other inquiry in the work-family interface, where scholars have found distinct antecedents, consequences, contextual influences, and experiences of sport managers (coaches, trainers, referees, front office staff) relative to employees in other industries. This study allows us to continue to build sport-specific theory in the area of work-family balance by examining the management strategies of sport executives (specifically head coaches) relative to those in other industries.

Second, the focus of this study is on the mechanisms of work-family balance. This adds to previous inquiry (e.g. Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Hong et al., 2019; Huml et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2019) that typically examines work-family conflict. That is, the premise of the current study is that work-family balance is more than simply a reduction of conflict, and that employees can reach some level of success in managing the demands of both roles (Valcour, 2007), which leads to enriched satisfaction in both work and life domains. Dixon and Bruening (2007) argued that more work examining active management of work-family balance was needed in sport, especially considering the specific contextual complexities of the sport industry.

Third, this study builds on Bruening and Dixon’s (2008) examination of the work-family interface throughout the lifecourse by

including both men and women, and by examining the strategies of experienced executive level coaches at mid-late career. This previous work included coaches at earlier career and life stages, all of whom were under the age of 40, and whose children ranged in age from 6 months to 10 years-old. Examining mid-late career coaches who have successfully navigated work and family for an extended period of time will lend insight into how people make choices and develop sustainable management strategies toward work-family balance.

## Theoretical framework

Role theory provides a widely used framework to study work-family tension across disciplines (Goode, 1960; Graham & Dixon, 2017; Kahn et al., 1964; Stock et al., 2014). It is concerned with the “study of roles, or patterns of behaviors that are characteristic of persons and context” (Biddle, 2013, p. 20). Role theory suggests individuals occupy numerous life roles (e.g. parent, spouse, volunteer, professional). As people manage and fulfill the obligations associated with life roles, at times they can experience conflict between the roles (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003).

As such, most role conflict studies are based in scarcity theory. Scarcity theory posits that resources like time, energy, and attention are finite (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Powell, 2003). Labeled the resource drain (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000), the more roles a person has to fulfill and the greater his or her involvement in each role, the more the person depletes their personal resources for other life roles (Stock et al., 2014). For example, when an individual has high workplace demands, they will use more resources on the work role and deplete resources from other roles (e.g. family and leisure). Scarcity theory asserts roles remain separate, and individuals create an environment where roles do not overlap.

Research also shows involvement with multiple roles can be beneficial, where one life role can enhance another life role by providing energy and resources (Graham & Dixon, 2017; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Stock et al., 2014). While some empirical evidence supports the value of the work-life interface, this perspective has received relatively less attention in the literature, with most studies focused not on how to build successfully in both domains, but moreso on simply reducing and resolving conflict between domains (Stock et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2019).

What is needed, then, is a more comprehensive role theory-based framework to study the work-family interface, specifically one that accepts and helps to explain experiences of both conflict and enrichment for people as they work to manage life roles (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2017; Huml et al., 2020; Stock et al., 2014). Situating the development of this framework in the lives of mid-late career organizational executives like collegiate head coaches would be helpful not only because these employees face considerable demands, pressures, and expectations in both realms, but also because they have likely developed strategies over time that they can reflect on in terms of successes and challenges they have faced.

### ***Work-family balance strategies***

Eckenrode and Gore (1990), Edwards and Rothbard (2000), and Lambert (1990) argued there are four basic mechanisms for managing multiple roles: spillover, segmentation, accommodation, and compensation. Although all four of these strategies are seen throughout the sport management literature, there is no comprehensive understanding of the relative use of these various strategies and how they may differ among executives according to demographic and sport profiles.

In brief, the spillover mechanism suggests the experiences and role obligations of one

domain can cause emotions, attitudes, behaviors, and skills to spill into another life domain. Spillover can have a positive or a negative effect on work or family life domains. In sport this mechanism has been observed in several settings, including athletic training (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016).

A segmentation strategy is one where individuals actively work to keep their life domains compartmentalized. The goal of this mechanism is especially aimed toward managing their work-related stress. Some in sport describe using this mechanism via technological distancing (e.g. turning phone off, not checking email), even if only for short times, to reduce work stress (Graham & Dixon, 2017; Taylor et al., 2018). Others describe strict boundaries between work and family realms as a way to create separation, and personal time as an effective application of the segmentation mechanism (Mazerolle et al., 2012).

Accommodation strategies rely on limiting involvement in one domain in order to meet demands in the others. In previous studies in sport, this strategy is most frequently seen in limiting family demands to meet work demands (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Mazerolle & Eason, 2016; Taylor et al., 2018, 2019). However, limiting work involvement to engage more with family has also been seen in some cases (Joncheray et al., 2019).

Finally, a compensation strategy is not necessarily focused on time or demand management, but on finding satisfaction in one realm or the other. For example, if work success is limited, a parent may try to find more satisfaction in the family realm. Some evidence for this mechanism has been seen by coaches coping with on-field losses by engaging in the family realm to find support (Graham & Dixon, 2017).

Leveraging these four types of mechanisms for balancing work and family, Stock et al. (2014) derived five typologies of work-family management among executives across industries in Europe. The taxonomy of their five



balancing strategies are described in [Figure 1](#). 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.

## Method

A qualitative descriptive approach was utilized to illustrate and interpret the experiences and behavioral tendencies of collegiate coaches

who are in their mid and late career stages. This methodology provides insight into an area of study by providing description, context, and basic interpretation of how the people in a study live their lives (Sandelowski, 2000, 2010).

## Participants

The sample for this study is part of a large dataset from which one article is currently in press (Dabbs et al., 2020). The current study

Typology	Definition
The Spillover Afflicted	This type is extremely involved in his or her work and comparatively satisfied and successful in this role, though these top executives also try to participate to some extent in family life. These multiple life roles result in inter-role conflict, especially work-to-family. Thus, executives of this type experience difficulties in meeting the conflicting demands of each role successfully (as indicated by their average personal accomplishment and high conflict). The work and family domains are not separated but highly blended, influencing each other, such that thoughts and feelings spill-over from one domain to the other. (p. 1828)
The Segmentor	This type tries to engage equally in both roles, with only average satisfaction and accomplishment at work. The extremely high segmentation of the work and family domains is characteristic, such that the segmentor actively attempts to exclude work issues from the family domain and succeeds in reducing inter-role conflict. Active segmentation is a method for coping with work stress, though this coping method also entails psychological disengagement from work, that is, relatively low job involvement. (p. 1828-29)
The Work Accommodator	This type merges fully into his or her work role, which leads to very high accomplishments. The intrinsic and extrinsic rewards of fulfilling the work role are associated with positive mood-like states such as job satisfaction, but the emphasis on the work domain produces comparatively low functioning at home. The relatively low segmentation of work and family domains shows that work accommodators are always engaged in their work issues, and family life is less important (i.e. relatively low family involvement). This type does not suffer from comparatively poor functioning at home or high inter-role conflict; instead, he or she gains complete satisfaction from his or her work life. (p. 1829)
The Family Accommodator	This type achieves the highest score on family involvement and shows a relatively high segmentation of work and family domains. Similar to the work accommodator, the family accommodator expends his or her limited energy by trading off between life roles, but in this case, he or she limits involvement in the work domain to accommodate the family domain. Accordingly, this type exhibits high family involvement and high segmentation, while also neglecting work-related duties, as indicated by low work involvement. This focus on family life creates some conflict between work and family life (p. 1830).
The Compensator	This type tries hard to perform well in the work domain and invests energy to fulfil high demands with high job involvement, but these efforts are often in vain, according to the low personal accomplishment ratings. Although work is an important part of his or her life, the compensator does not feel powerful or productive. Occupied with work, this type neglects the family domain, such that high work involvement seems to capture all his or her energy and prevents engagement in family life, which creates conflict. The lack of rewards in either domain produces negative moods, including dissatisfaction. (p. 1832).

**Figure 1.** Work-Life Balance Management Types of Top Executives (Stock et al., 2014).

is distinct from the previous study, even though they both draw from the same set of data. Because of the size of the overall data originally collected, it was not possible to create a single manuscript which included all the findings in a “clear, digestible, and meaningful” way (Fine & Kurdek, 1994, p. 371). That is, the previous study from this data set (Dabbs et al., 2020) examined the experiences of mid and late career head coaches through the lens of the Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) and specifically focused on career needs of experienced head coaches. Because the focus of the current study is on the way mid and late career head coaches manage various life roles, this distinct inquiry was warranted to further the scientific conversation.

To gain further insight into the role management strategies of mid-late career coaches, a sample group was assembled through purposive sampling. The individuals in the sample were 35 years or older, with a least one child. The initial sample group individuals were compiled from researchers’ personal networks, consisting of 8 coaches and 2 sport administrators. From this starting group, the snowball sample group grew to 30 head coaches that represented a variety of sports and NCAA conferences. Participant and recruitment continued until data was saturated and no new themes were emerging (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The mean age was approximately 50 years old with a strong representation of both male and female coaches (18 male, 12 female). The mean number of years coaching of the group was roughly 23.

### ***Instrument and interview process***

Interviews were conducted in a way to help interviewers understand “not just the traditional ‘what’ of everyday life, but ‘how’” these coaches lives occur (Sandelowski, 2000, 2010). Semi-structured, 40–75 min, majority in-person interviews with the head coaches

created the platform. Twenty-one interviews took place in the coaches’ office, nine of the interviews took place via telephone, Skype, or FaceTime. To increase confidentiality, participants were given the option to use a pseudonym or first name only, in addition to removing identifying factors.

After receiving IRB approval, written consent was obtained and interviews were conducted with audio recording. Open-ended prompts were given to the coaches to inquire more about their career, daily routines and scheduling, and goals in both work and family domains. More detailed questions followed, derived from work in work-life theory in sport (e.g. Dabbs et al., 2016; Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2017) and KCM sport studies (Dabbs & Pastore, 2017; Shaw & Leberman, 2015), including “What do you think about your work and family roles?”, “What is required of you?”, and “Is there ever tension between the two?”

### ***Data analysis***

After interviews were transcribed, the researchers checked the accuracy of the transcriptions by listening to the interview audio files while reading through the matching conversation. Not only did this check for accuracy, it also helped the researchers become more familiar with the data. In addition, transcripts were sent back to participants for member checking, which increases the trustworthiness and reliability of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Once the transcripts were finalized, each member of the research team analyzed the data using a theoretical coding procedure done by hand for each unit of data (Miles et al., 2013). The theoretical coding was deductive in nature, based on the general work-family balance strategies proposed by Eckenrode and Gore (1990), Edwards and Rothbard (2000), and Lambert (1990) well as the executive management taxonomy presented by Stock et al.



(2014). In coding the larger data set toward the specific purpose of the current study, the researchers focused on questions centered around the following: “Describe the various roles in your life” “How do you manage all the roles in your life?” “Describe a typical day in and out of your playing season.” Even though a deductive strategy was used, the researchers remained open to emergent themes that differed from the taxonomy of executives created by Stock et al. (2014).

Each interview was coded in the same process whereby descriptors from the existing taxonomy were utilized to code the current data. Each potential meaning unit was labeled with a single descriptive code (Miles et al., 2013). For example, in the Spillover Afflicted type, phrases denoting tensions in balancing both realms, struggles and/or guilt in “not meeting the demands of conflicting roles” and the blended nature of their multiple roles were used to codify coaches into this role management type. As another example, in the Work Accommodator type, overall phrases and themes that indicated consistently high engagement with work and low engagement with family were utilized to categorize these individuals into this type.

After each individual on the three-member research team completed coding, the team discussed discrepancies in codes and finalized themes to reach inter-coder agreement (Saldaña, 2015; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). This consensus-based agreement approach ensures investigator triangulation, which results when there are multiple perspectives and conclusions from the data, which come together through conversation and discussion. Overall this approach can add credibility and in-depth analysis to a study (Carter et al., 2014; Denzin, 1978). A similar approach with qualitative studies has previously been used in sport research (e.g. Braun et al., 2016; Coyle et al., 2017)

The researchers also remained sensitive to differences between the two populations. As noted in the results below, one new theme –

Successful Spillover – emerged in the data. This theme and its meaning will be discussed in the results below. Each of the profiles is presented below in Figures 2–7.

## Results

Table 1 shows a summary overview of the six work-life balance management strategies for the coach executives in this sample. Figures 2–7 describe the sample and the profiles for each coach, including their pseudonym, sport coached, age, number of children, and number of years in their career. Each participant is also presented with a representative quote, describing their experiences and approach to the work-life interface.

As seen in the results, all five of the work-family balance strategies developed by Stock et al. (2014) are represented in the data. In addition, a sixth profile Successful Spillover, emerged from the data. This profile shares similarities with the Spillover Afflicted in that the coaches in this type are highly involved in their work role and quite satisfied and successful in this role. They also describe how work and family domains are not necessarily separated but highly blended, influencing each other, such that thoughts and feelings spill-over from one domain to the other. Coach executives in this type also report that they also strongly participate in family life. For example, Jamie described how her favorite experiences involve her family at the NCAA tournament. Likewise, both Jackie and Jordan described the joy and satisfaction of having their families be integrally involved with their respective lacrosse teams. These coaches described their management using terms like “integral, powerful, living it, energy and excitement, and wanting family involved.”

While these life roles result in inter-role conflict, especially work-to-family, unlike the Spillover Afflicted type, these coach executives report that they have found success in meeting the demands of each role, they are

Coach Information	Work-Life Typology	Representative Quote
Allen Women's Soccer  Age: 67 # of Children: 3 # of Years in Career: 42	Work Accommodator	I have very few family responsibilities. This is where the work/life balance for a coach is a nightmare. If I want to continue to succeed, I've got to outwork my opponents, which means, almost all the domestic responsibilities fall to my wife. I could pour into this and maintaining a capacity to compete, despite being under-gunned financially and with facilities.
Ben Men's and Women's Swimming and Diving  Age: 50 # Children: 4 # Years in Career: 28	Work Accommodator	We got married on a Saturday, Sunday we were both in the dorms. I was running swim camp, because I thought that's what needed to be done. Never took a honeymoon, still haven't to this day.
Chris Softball  Age: 62 # of Children: 2 # Years in Career: 20	Work Accommodator	The tension is usually more work into family, because phone calls, emails or issues that have to be addressed come when family should be getting the attention. It can be a little frustrating because they will cross and kind of fall apart on top of each other.
Caleb Football  Age: 57 # Children: 3 # Years in Career: 22	Work Accommodator	<p>I try to find those times that we [family] can spend together and touch each other on a personal level, but a lot of times that I'm home, I'm really not there.</p> <p>I could be gone for five days during the week. My wife handled the family and I handled the work and that's how it was.</p>
Lauren Track & Field  Age: 51 # of Children: 1 # Years in Career	Work Accommodator	Our meets are really long so I feel like I don't ever have a weekend. "You're not supposed to be working. Why are you on your phone, why are you on the computer?" I get it from the family side. But when athletes call me and I come over at 3 AM, I treat them as if they're my own.
Milo Men's and Women's Track & Field  Age: 48 # Children: 2	Work Accommodator	Sometimes I want to be at a recital but I want make sure I'm doing well in this business to the point where I can move up and also make life more comfortable. I think that's just life. I can't be at two places at once, but I want to make sure I was at this place, to ensure I can be at more in the end.

**Figure 2.** Work Accommodator Work-Life Typology for Coaches.

satisfied with both roles, and that they cannot envision life differently than blending both roles. Consider for example, the quote from Jamie, who explained how she arranged her schedule to manage both work and family, or that from Drew who described how he wanted his staff to have more balance, and is very mindful of creating that both for himself and his staff (See Figure 4).

With the addition of this emergent type, the data suggest that six work-life balance strategies are employed by this mid-late career group of coach executives. As seen in Table 1, the most frequently noted profile in this sample of mid-late career head coaches was that of Work Accommodator ( $n = 11$ ). This was also the most skewed profile in terms of gender, with 9 males and 2 females

# Years in Career: 23		
Michelle Women's Rowing  Age: 38 # of Children: 2 # Years in Career: 15	Work Accommodator	What's more important, my son's seventh birthday or 14 recruits? Of course it's my son's birthday. In the moment there's certain things it's hard to back out of. It's hard for me because I feel this tremendous amount of pressure.
Mac Men's Soccer  Age: 56 # Children: 2 # Years in Career: 30	Work Accommodator	If you chose to miss those things [kid's stuff] which I have, I'm not sure that everybody chooses to do that. But it's a consuming profession.
Maddox Baseball  Age: 41 # Children: 4 # Years in Career: 10	Work Accommodator	I've lost a marriage over this [coaching job], a lot of it probably had to do with this profession. I invest so much time in this program that it takes away from my wife and I need to do a better job of giving her more time.
Nolan Men's Lacrosse  Age: 39 # Children: 2 # Years in Career: 15	Work Accommodator	Get home, bring my laptop home every night, bring my phone with me everywhere, try to lock in the best I can to my wife and kids from like 5:30 to 7:45 and oftentimes that's interrupted by phone calls and texts but try to be as intentional as I can.  It's not how it should be, you'd think that family would come first and job second but as a competitor and who I am it just doesn't.
Troy Golf  Age: 51 # Children: 2 # Years in Career: 18	Work Accommodator	There is tension or struggles with the time commitment of the job. Missing kids sporting events. Not being able to get to a lot of their sporting events because of the time commitments.

**Figure 2.** Continued

represented. Consistent with Stock et al. (2014), coach-executives in this profile describe themselves as highly involved in their work, not highly involved in their families, unapologetically competitive, “not there” at home (physically and/or mentally), all sport consuming, and dependent on their spouse/partner for balancing demands across domains (see Figure 2). Interestingly, and not described in the business executive taxonomy, the coach executives also describe how their children “understand” or “accept” their work-family balance strategy and their consistent choice of work over family demands. This appears to be a way to

explain or defend their strategy, often in terms of reaching an ultimate pinnacle where they will then be able to better attend, include, and provide for their family role demands.

The second most noted profile was Spillover Afflicted (See Figure 3), with 6 coaches reporting management strategies of this type. There were 4 females and 2 males represented. The Spillover Afflicted type descriptions of themselves include a sense of constant tension (pull, stretch, strain) between roles, and high levels of guilt and dissatisfaction at their ability to manage their demands well. As

Coach Information	Work-Life Typology	Representative Quote
Brittany Equestrian Age: 59 # Children: 1 # Years in Career: 28	Spillover-Afflicted	I have role tension all the time. All the time and guilt on both sides. I need to be at my son's football game, but I've got to be at practice because we're getting ready to compete. I need to be at a team meet or function, but my son needs me.
Mary Men's & Women's Swimming & Diving Age: 40 # Children: 2 # Years in Career: 17	Spillover-Afflicted	I don't get to see my kids on Monday, Wednesday and Fridays until about five to 6PM at night. But on Tuesdays and Thursdays I take them to school in the mornings. So that is a balance for me. I don't get to see them everyday but I do two days. I never mind if my family spills into work. I certainly also feel like the job obviously runs into family time, definitely.
Denise Softball Age: 47 # Children: 2 #Years in Career: 22	Spillover-Afflicted	The tension between work and family comes with time, not having enough for everything. I watch film because you know the programs you're competing against are doing the same thing, and so you've got to be able to dedicate time to that. My daughter feels that the most that I'm home, but not home.
David Baseball Age: 61 # Children: 3 #Years in Career: 35	Spillover-Afflicted	There were certainly times when logistically, my youngest daughter's going to volleyball tournament and you can't go, we've got practice. So that's more of an internal struggle for me, is this the right thing for the team? When the game's over, practice's over. I'm often times the first coach out if I've got stuff that I'm going to do with the family.
Heidi Synchronized Swimming Age: 57 # Children: 3 # Years in Career: 30	Spillover-Afflicted	Most difficulty part is that balance of making sure that I'm there for both sides. I've actually said to people "It's frustrating sometimes to be taking care of someone else's children at the expense of maybe taking care of my children" or giving my team more of my time. And I've missed something in my kids, or vice versa.
Miles Women's Soccer Age: 43 # Children: 2 # Years in Career: 23	Spillover-Afflicted	I experience tension as the stress piles up. We say the word, "Balance," but it's fictitious. I can't allow myself to be so out of balance that it has deleterious effects on my health, on my relationship with my wife and my ability to do my job effectively. To parent effectively.

**Figure 3.** Spillover Afflicted Work-Life Typology for Coaches.

Miles described, the idea of balance between work and family, for these types, was “fictitious.” While they are successful at work, they seem to constantly feel that they are not doing enough for their families, and that they are exhausted, struggling, unhealthy.

The next two categories, Successful Spillover ( $n = 5$ ) and Segmentor ( $n = 5$ ) had nearly equal representation by gender. The Successful Spillover type (see [Figure 4](#)), as described above, describe themselves as involved in both realms, but enjoying the benefits of both,

Coach Name	Work-Life Typology	Representative Quote
Jamie Women's Basketball  Age: 53 # Children: 2 # Years in Career: 30	Successful Spillover	My most favorite experiences have to do with family and NCAA tournament. I've always made time for my kids and seen their athletic or academic pursuits because I learned that you work by objectives, you can arrange your schedule. As a head coach I loved being able to arrange my schedule.
Jordan Men's Lacrosse  Age: 50 # Children: 5 # Years in Career: 26	Successful Spillover	I have no regrets for what I've been through with losing my son because I was always home for dinner, bedtime, bath time, all of that. Kids would go to bed and I'd be on the phone at 8:30 making recruiting calls. Family just gets to be a part of it. I want it all-inclusive. The word family is just a word unless you live it.
Jeff Women's Lacrosse  Age: 45 # Children: 2 # Years in Career: 15	Successful Spillover	I feel like I have my family here as much as I can. It really is intertwined. We've incorporated them [family] into our culture. They are intertwined with my kids. It's family philosophy on both sides.
Jackie Women's Lacrosse  Age: 47 # Children: 3 # Years in Career: 26	Successful Spillover	I have two kids and I didn't know I was pregnant yet, but was pregnant at that championship game with my third child, so just having my kids kind of run on the field and feel the energy and excitement that the team had just created by winning this national championship was pretty powerful.
Drew Football  Age: 48 # Children: 3 # Years in Career: 22	Successful Spillover	As the program leader, I am very mindful of work-family balance. I think that's one of the reasons we don't have a lot of turnover here. I love my staff and I want them to have more balance. Our families are around all the time. I want the kids here; I want the wives here. I want everybody here.

**Figure 4.** Successful Spillover Work-Life Typology for Coaches.

generally successful in both realms, and satisfied with their dual-role lives.

The Segmentor type (see Figure 5), in contrast to the Spillover, attempts to manage the two roles by separating, or segmenting them. The individuals in this type describe their style as “keeping them separate,” “avoiding cross-over,” “really being where you are,” and “compartmentalizing.” These coach executives describe strategies such as utilizing the drive to/from work to decompress or transition, compartmentalizing time at home for family activities like meals or homework, and even ensuring time for themselves to stay healthy and exercise. While these coaches seem to recognize the difficulty in achieving optimal separation of roles/realms, they indicate that this seems to be a successful coping strategy as they did not use the same kinds of terms

like guilt, tension, and strain as in the Spillover Afflicted type.

Finally, the least prevalent profiles were those of Compensator ( $n=2$ ) and Family Accommodator ( $n=1$ ). The Compensator type (see Figure 6) looked for satisfaction in one realm where it was lacking in another. The two participants in this sample that fit this profile, were slightly different in their expressions of compensation. James expressed involvement at work, but focus on emotional fulfillment from family. Larissa however, expressed feelings of constantly shifting involvement from one domain to the other, ultimately being satisfied with neither. Both of these individuals express a negative mood, and feelings that they are not powerful or productive, which is similar to the compensators in the Stock et al. (2014) study.

Coach Name	Work-Life Typology	Representative Quote
Amanda Softball  Age: 47 # Children: 2 #Years in Career: 28	Segmentor	Finding that balance of when those [family and work] aren't supposed to cross over, I learned early on when you do leave, do your best to leave everything here. It's nobody's fault here that when you go home that you won or lost. In my opinion you have to be able separate in that 10 to 15 minute drive home.
Hal Women's Volleyball  Age: 47 # Children: 2 # Years in Career: 17	Segmentor	You have a bad match. You carry some of that home with you, just like you have a bad day at work. I try to decompress and keep them separate, but occasionally if somethings going on at work you may not be completely attentive at home and vice versa.
Jacob Golf  Age: 55 # Children: 2 # Years in Career: 22	Segmentor	I hope that I can separate [work and family]. I have to remember he's still my 22 year old son. When you're home, you're home and when you're at work, you're at work. You can't be half in, half out at both places. Then you don't do quite as well.
Kathy Cheerleading  Age: 43 # Children: 2 # Years in Career: 18	Segmentor	After practice, I typically go home and be the mom. We have family dinner, we do homework, and after the kids go to bed, if there are recruiting calls, I'll try and do it after the kids go to bed, unless it's preplanned.
Mitch Men's Soccer  Age: 47 # Children: 3 # Years in Career: 18	Segmentor	Creating balance in being a coach and working in a job like college coaching with that, making sure that I'm still present with my family. We talk about being where your feet are. Being able to compartmentalize the intensity of a game and then move on.

**Figure 5.** Segmentor Work-Life Typology for Coaches.

Coach Name	Work-Life Typology	Representative Quote
James Men's & Women's Track & Field  Age: 51 # Children: 2 # Years in Career: 20	Compensator	I don't work as many hours at the office. I can't. I owe that much to my family, and I just do a lot of extra stuff at night when they're asleep. My sources of enrichment is now family related. As I've gone through my career, the family has grown, so that becomes an important time.
Larissa Women's Volleyball  Age: 41 # Children: 1 # Years in Career: 18	Compensator	It is constantly feeling like when you're at home you're not doing a good job at work, and then when you're at work you're not doing a good job at home. There's always a feeling of guilt and feeling like you never have enough time or enough of you to go around and be your best. I'm everything right now in this moment, and I can't do it. I can't be a coach.

**Figure 6.** Compensator Work-Life Typology for Coaches.



Coach Name	Work-Life Typology	Representative Quote
Sarah Women's Track & Field  Age: 62 # Children: 2 # Years in Career: 35	Family Accommodator	It is accepted that you're not going to be at some things. It was less important to me what our conference finish. When the kids were growing up, I was not just going through the motions. I was doing the best job that I could. But you cared less because you saw the bigger picture.

**Figure 7.** Family Accommodator Work-Life Typology for Coaches.

**Table 1.** Coaches Work-Family Balance Typology ( $N = 30$ ).

WFB Typology	Total Participants	Male	Female
Work-Accommodator	11	9	2
Spillover Afflicted	6	2	4
Successful Spillover	5	2	3
Segmentor	5	3	2
Compensator	2	1	1
Family Accommodator	1	0	1

Perhaps not surprisingly, there was only one participant in the sample that could be described as a Family Accommodator (see Figure 7). The Family Accommodator described limiting investment in the work domain, suggesting that she cared less about the team's conference finish because she saw the bigger picture of needing balance. This focus created tension between work and family, especially in feeling guilty about performance at work.

While some management strategies had greater representation based on gender, one thing to note from the data is that there is no emergent pattern according to sport, age, length in career, or age/number of children in terms of the work-family balance strategies utilized. The lone Family Accommodator was a female, and the majority of the Work Accommodators were male. The other profiles were more evenly represented by gender.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to leverage Stock et al.'s (2014) taxonomy of executives' work-life

balance strategies to examine the strategies of successful head coaches. Not surprisingly, the data revealed that involvement in multiple life roles does create conflict and a need for intentional management strategies toward successful work-life balance. Managing multiple roles appears to be a complex and ongoing process that requires planning, implementation, and constant adjustment.

The coach executives in this study employed a variety of tactics for work-life balance, and those seem to fit into six broader categories. Stock et al. (2014) sample resulted in a taxonomy of five management strategies, whereas this sample suggested the existence of a sixth, the Spillover Successful. This is consistent with Lambert's (1990) conceptualization of the spillover type, where the outcomes could be both positive and negative. Although multiple strategies were utilized, some appear to be more successful than others. For example, Segmentor and Successful Spillover represent very different strategies of balancing, but both show high levels of satisfaction in both roles and in feeling successful at the balance of thereof. Work Accommodators, the most prevalent type in the sample, also report success, but moreso in the work realm at the typically unapologetic expense of family.

Given the demands and high levels of institutional control in sport (Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2017; Huml et al., 2020; Morrow & Howieson, 2018; Taylor et al., 2019), it makes sense that the Work Accommodator strategy is heavily represented among these successful coaches. In fact, as mentioned

earlier, the sport management literature is full of examples of work-family conflict where coaches feel trapped in their work cycles, feeling they have very little time for family (Bruening & Dixon, 2007, 2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2007). This strategy tends to be particularly utilized by men, which would be consistent with Graham and Dixon's (2017) findings among high school coaches. In both studies, institutional, social, and individual factors combined to press men into choosing this strategy for managing work and family, especially when children were younger. In this data set, the pattern seems to continue among more established coaches with older children, as it is a life-style that they feel not just they, but their whole family has become accustomed to.

In previous studies (e.g. Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2017; Mazerolle et al., 2012) sport managers' narrative of "my family understands," the prevalence of this strategy, and the juxtaposition of this strategy with a sport ethic of the need for sacrifice (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Taylor et al., 2019) combine to normalize the Work Accommodator strategy, and in some ways sets it up as the best approach. However, the data from this study strongly suggests that there is no one "right" way to successfully manage a sport career, in terms of work-life balance. Across participants, see a variety of strategies, and some of them quite successful in terms of managing work and family across a career. For example, both the Successful Spillover and the Segmentor strategies profile coach executives who claim the ability to find involvement and satisfaction in both realms.

The existence of six different work-family balance strategies across this sample suggests that there are multiple ways of successfully managing the work-life interface, and it suggests that if we could help coach executives identify their preferred management style, we could provide more tailored approaches from both an organizational and an individual perspective.

### ***Contributions to theory and practice***

In terms of building theory, the findings from this study indicate that understanding the complexities of the work-family interface remains a challenge for individuals and organizations. The larger theoretical approaches of role scarcity and role enhancement are clearly not mutually exclusive (Stock et al., 2014). Instead, both the taxonomies and the individual coach examples demonstrate that roles can both drain and enhance, draw from and contribute to an individuals' overall life satisfaction and perceived success. This suggests that as scholars, we need to continue to look beyond conceptualizations of work-family conflict, and build toward more proactive frameworks that acknowledge the conflict, but also promote the benefits of multiple roles, and practical strategies toward valuing and managing multiple life roles.

This study builds on previous conceptualizations of work-family balance strategies (e.g. Eckenrode & Gore, 1990; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Lambert, 1990) in the context of a highly visible and high-pressure work environment. The emergence of different types of profiles in this sample, compared to previous studies (Stock et al., 2014) demonstrates the importance of accounting for various types of work-family balance strategies across professions, and across individuals. It identifies the need for examining contextual factors that may inform individuals' perceptions of their available options for role management. Are there cultural or organizational assumptions or norms that restrict individual views of effective or even available strategies? Are the assumptions or norms gender based? How can they be both identified and mitigated?

In terms of practical applications, clearly it is difficult to successfully manage both work and family in this highly demanding profession. However, the data from this study supports the bulk of work in sport management that suggests sport organization can and need to make a place for family because of the positive

effects on coaches, players, and the program. Multiple roles build satisfaction, capacity, and perspective. In fact, some evidence suggests that family can also be a buffer toward sport personnel tipping from engagement into workaholism (Huml et al., 2020). While challenging, this study supports the need for organizations and individuals to work together to support multiple roles, and highlights the value both for individuals and organizations of doing so.

Previous literature in sport management suggests that many of the traditional work-life supports offered by organizations are not utilized or effective for executives (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; 2008; Dixon et al., 2008; Graham & Dixon, 2017). This study supports those findings. For example, some traditional supports such as flexible hours, autonomy, or family leave already are available to these executives, or are not helpful due to the overall demands of their job. As many of these executive coaches report, they often can work when and how they want, but it does not decrease the amount of work or the pressure to do their work at a very high level. This finding underscores the need to continue to examine more tailored approaches for executive coaches, one that emphasizes a fit between organizational offerings and individual needs and resources (Dabbs et al., 2016; Lambert, 1990; Stock et al., 2014).

Thus, one possible application of this taxonomy is for organizations to utilize the taxonomy to work with executive coaches to identify their own preferred work-family balance strategy. Then, examine together mechanisms for support. For example, individuals who prefer to segment, could benefit from organizational supports that help them to truly segment. These might include after-hours do not disturb policies and technological support (see also Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Individuals who prefer Spillover may benefit from coaching on boundary skills, or in relieving

competitive guilt (Bruening & Dixon, 2007, 2008). It appears that all balancing types could benefit from system-wide or institution-wide policies like mandatory dead periods that would equally impact all coaches and help relieve pressure to constantly compete and compare (Huml et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2019). As organizational supports are developed that match individual strategies, this could lead to more innovation of work-family policies, and could also develop into some generalizable patterns that could be shared across the industry.

### ***Limitations and directions for future research***

This study contains the perspectives of head coaches as CEOs of their individual programs. Clearly, these are not the only executive level positions in college sport, nor of sport organizations more broadly defined. Thus, future research should examine other CEO roles within sport to build a more robust model of this work-family balance typology. Second, this study examines individuals navigating roles. When managing multiple roles, future research should examine contextual factors that may inform individuals' perceptions of their available options for role management. Are there cultural or organizational assumptions or norms that restrict individual views of effective or even available strategies? Are the assumptions or norms gender based? How can they be both identified and mitigated? Further, this study, and other sport management research is limited on understanding the perspective of the family/spouse. Future research may seek to identify and understand work-life balance strategies from the partner's and/or children's perspectives.

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