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ARTICLE

# Working in the Sport Industry: A Classification of Human Capital Archetypes

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As thousands of professionals are drawn to work in the sport industry known for celebrity, action, and excitement, a growing body of literature on the industry's culture describes a field fraught with burnout, stress, and difficulty balancing work–family responsibilities. Given this contradiction, there is a need to better understand employee experiences. Thus, the authors utilized a human capital framework to develop employee archetypes. Results from a latent cluster analysis of National Collegiate Athletic Association athletics department employees ($N = 4{,}324$) revealed five distinct employee archetypes utilizing inputs related to human capital development and work experiences (e.g., work–family interface, work engagement, age). Consistent with creative nonfiction methodology, results are presented as composite narratives. Archetypes follow a career arc from early-career support staff to late-career senior leaders and portray an industry culture wherein the human capital is largely overworked, underpaid, and replete with personal sacrifice and regret.

***Keywords:*** cluster analysis, human resource management, intercollegiate athletics, job satisfaction, organizational culture, work–family issues

Thousands of young professionals are drawn to the allure of the sport industry as an avenue to pursue a career aligning with their fan interests and within a field known through media portrayals of celebrity, action, and excitement. Indeed, the sport industry has steadily grown over the last 50 years, with the North American market projected to garner $80.3 billion in revenue in 2022 (Gough, 2019). Mirroring this economic growth, the number of jobs in sport and entertainment have grown steadily, with projections of 852,000 jobs by 2028 in the United States alone (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). However, media portrayals of sport careers may not tell an accurate story of the day-to-day experiences of those who work in sport. In fact, a growing body of literature on sport industry culture describes a field fraught with high levels of burnout, stress, turnover, discrimination, and difficulty balancing work and family responsibilities (e.g., Dixon & Bruening, 2005, 2007; Taylor, Huml, & Dixon, 2019; Walker & Melton, 2015).

Thus, there is a need to better understand the experiences of sport industry employees. Human capital theory is an essential framework for understanding employee and organizational behavior, and is leveraged in this study. However, rather than following previous investigations by examining aspects of employee behavior in isolation, this study builds employee archetypes across several dimensions that are important to employee experiences and outcomes. In so doing, we are able to illuminate experiences of those working in this distinct field. These findings will inform the support and career guidance for young professionals and sport managers as they strive to reach their full individual and organizational potential (Marescaux, De Winne, & Sels, 2013).

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## Theoretical Framework

Schultz (1961) defined human capital as the knowledge and skills individuals acquire through education and training as a form of capital and posited that this capital was a deliberate investment that yields returns for the organization. Research suggests that when human capital is effectively utilized, outcomes can be profitable not only for the individual, but also for the organization and society. These outcomes include improved skills, attitudes, knowledge, and motivations that are necessary for economic and social advancement (Schultz, 1961). As such, human capital theory suggests that if management invests in human capital, it can create an organizational competitive advantage (Nafukho, Hairston, & Brooks, 2004).

Human capital theory helps identify human capital needs and illuminates strategies and tactics for meeting those needs and identifying ways human capital can enhance organizational performance (Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006; Wright & McMahan, 2011). While research utilizing human capital theory has reported a strong relationship between human resource practices and firm performance, explaining how individual human capital emerges into collective firm performance remains a ripe area of inquiry (Fulmer & Ployhart, 2014).

One explanation of how human capital directly impacts firm performance is through the process of emergence—the embodied knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes of individuals transform into collective human capital (Ployhart & Moliterno,

2011). Ployhart and Moliterno (2011) argued that two factors impact the ability for individual-level capital to emerge into something that is of value to the firm: the organizational environment (e.g., climate, work complexity) and supportive psychosocial emergence-enabling states. That is, more complex environments make it more difficult to enable human capital emergence. Furthermore, organizations must uncover the appropriate managerial and individual supports that allow the individual-level capital to emerge as something that enhances organizational value.

This process, therefore, is predicated on understanding the organizational environment, as well as employee traits, needs, and motivations, then investing in mechanisms to support and develop employees accordingly so they can reach their full potential (Fulmer & Ployhart, 2014; Marescaux et al., 2013), which may include improving health and well-being, autonomy, inclusivity, opportunities for growth, and work–life balance (Dixon & Bruening, 2007). Approaches to development and support can vary widely in form, but include tactics such as human resource management policies and practices, supervisor support, career counseling, training, and development (Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Marescaux et al., 2013).

A number of scholars have pointed out the difficulty in understanding the needs and supports of human capital at the individual level, especially in today's increasingly diversified workforce (e.g., Stock, Bauer, & Bieling, 2014). However, building typologies of human capital along relevant dimensions, based in authentic accounts of employee experiences, could aid in understanding patterns of work experiences and then designing supports that enhance both individual and organizational outcomes (Marescaux et al., 2013). This can be especially important for groups, such as women, who may not be able to take advantage of certain organizational benefits. Research has demonstrated work–family spillover, and distribution of organizational benefits impact male and female employees differently and can reinforce sex segregation (Clark, Rudolph, Zhdanova, Michel, & Baltes, 2017; Dixon & Bruening, 2005; Heymann, 2016; Hulls, Richmond, Martin, & de Vocht, 2020).

Therefore, in this study, creative nonfiction methodology (Barone, 2008; Smith, McGannon, & Williams, 2015) was utilized to understand the experiences of labor (i.e., intercollegiate athletic department employees), under the premise that with this information we can better support, develop, and manage employees. While it is important to understand these experiences in every industry, the context of sport provides a compelling rationale to explore labor experiences as the sport industry is highly competitive and complex, and foundational literature documents high levels of burnout, turnover, and difficulty balancing work and family responsibilities (e.g., Dixon & Bruening, 2005, 2007; Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011; Taylor et al., 2019).

## Human Capital Expectations in the Sport Context

Over the last several decades, research into the particular sport employee subculture of coaching has proliferated (e.g., Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2017). Understanding elements of the subculture that inform profession norms is valuable not only toward building sport-specific theory, but also in designing organizational systems and practices that meet the particular needs of that subculture (Chalip, 2006). However, coaches represent only a fraction of the workforce. Thus, it is important to expand our understanding of the sport workforce beyond the subculture of coaching to include the front office, including jobs like marketing, ticket sales, customer service, event management, facility management, sport medicine, and communications. These subareas encompass the bulk of jobs within the sport industry and have common crossover to sporting careers outside of this study's sample.

This study builds on current human resource management studies in sport in three important ways. First, it extends the understanding of work experiences beyond the already well-developed literature in coaching (e.g., Dixon & Bruening, 2005, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2017) to include a broad array of positions in sport. Second, much of the work on employee behavior in sport management has focused on practices that impact employees rather than the employees themselves. For example, we know that workaholism impacts burnout, and that work engagement, supervisor support, and work–life conflict impact satisfaction, but we know much less about the individual characteristics of employees that are related to these work factors (Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Dixon & Sagas, 2008; Taylor et al., 2019). Furthermore, we know little about how factors like burnout, workaholism, or work–family conflict manifest across various jobs, career stages, and demographic characteristics like age and gender. This study includes a focus on employee characteristics in building comprehensive employee profiles. Third, the study of work experiences that contribute to human capital development, while prolific, has often been examined in isolation (cf. Fulmer & Ployhart, 2014). Instead, this study utilizes important constructs related to human capital in combination with each other, and with employee characteristics, to build a comprehensive picture of employee experiences in sport.

While any number of aspects could describe individual employee experiences, meta-analysis of employee experiences reveals that five aspects of employment—work–family conflict (WFC), family–work conflict (FWC), workaholism, work engagement, and burnout—have been shown to strongly impact levels of employee health and well-being, satisfaction, turnover intentions, and productivity (Clark, Michel, Zhdanov, Pui, & Baltes, 2016). Therefore, these aspects (described below) form the dimensions by which we aim to build a better understanding of employee experiences in sport.

***WFC and FWC.*** The WFC and FWC represent conflicting roles between an individual's work and family responsibilities that arise due to the finite amount of time, forcing a person to prioritize work over family (WFC) or family over work (FWC; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). As such, researchers have characterized the relationship between work and family as tense and conflicting, suggesting that as a person is pulled into one realm, it can lead to negative consequences in the other (Byron, 2005). Challenges related to WFC and FWC have been found in numerous industries; however, the conflict between these two domains may become increasingly problematic in industries with a culture that pressures employees to commit an extreme and unorthodox number of working hours with high job expectations, such as sport (e.g., Dixon & Bruening, 2007).

Indeed, research within the sport industry suggests coaches and athletic trainers experience high levels of WFC and FWC (e.g., Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2017; Mazerolle et al., 2018). It is likely that WFC and FWC will also impact other sport employees, but there is little investigation into the specific ways that these life realms interact and how they impact front office sport employees whose jobs may differ from coaches. This study helps build an understanding of a much larger and broader sample of job types within the sport industry along this important dimension.

***Workaholism.*** Workaholism is defined as "the compulsion or the uncontrollable need to work incessantly" (Oates, 1971, p. 11), with workaholics being described as obsessively committed to their work (e.g., spending a substantial amount of time on work-related duties, and thinking about work even when they are not working;

Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). Furthermore, workaholics have been found to show a willingness to engage in work-related duties more than necessary by creating excess paperwork and redundant work-related processes in attempts to maximize their time spent focusing on work (Schaufeli, Bakker, van der Heijden, & Prins, 2009). Workaholism can lead to a number of negative consequences, including increased job-related stress, decreased mental health, counterproductive work behavior, increased conflict between work and family responsibilities, feelings of guilt and anxiety, and burnout from their job (Clark et al., 2016; Schaufeli et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 2019).

Similar to WFC and FWC, workaholic tendencies can be impacted by a stressful work environment or organizational cultures that have high work expectations (Clark et al., 2016). In addition, personality dispositions such as perfectionism, striving against others, and proving oneself have been shown to be predictive of workaholic tendencies (Clark et al., 2016). As such, individuals working in the sport industry may be more prone to workaholism, as many coaches and other sport personnel often describe themselves as possessing these characteristics (Graham & Dixon, 2017). In spite of the ripe conditions for sport employees to display workaholic tendencies, research on workaholism in sport is just now emerging in earnest (e.g., Taylor et al., 2019). Following this promising line of inquiry, the current project seeks to extend our understanding of the experience of workaholism among sport employees, especially as it interacts with other work-related constructs such as WFC and burnout.

***Work engagement.*** Schaufeli et al. (2002) define work engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p. 74). The positive work behaviors associated with work engagement are promoted by appropriate rewards, recognition from superiors, as well as perceived support and justice (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Research on work engagement suggests engagement can lead to positive outcomes such as increased organizational commitment and job satisfaction, a more trusting relationship between employee and employer, and decreased turnover intention (Clark et al., 2016).

Again, there has been limited scholarly work on work engagement within the sport industry. Interestingly, what work has been conducted, has focused on how to increase employee engagement, without recognizing the potential negative outcomes of overengagement (e.g., Cunningham, Sagas, Dixon, Kent, & Turner, 2005). Thus, it is critical to better understand sport employees' experiences regarding workplace engagement as both the positive and negative outcomes associated with the concept are important for organizational success.

***Burnout.*** Burnout can be defined as "a state of exhaustion in which one is cynical about the value of one's occupation and doubtful of one's capacity to perform" (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996, p. 20). Increased job demands and a lack of workplace resources have been shown to increase burnout levels within employees. These include number of work hours, time-related pressure, an overload of work demands, emotional demands of the job, lack of social support, and lack of job control (Alarcon, 2011). High workplace demands, coupled with a lack of job resources, can cause a deterioration of the physical and emotional health of the employee, and negatively impact organizational effectiveness through collectively reduced job performance and job turnover (Schaufeli et al., 2009).

Studies on burnout within sport illustrate it is increased by unrealistic job demands, nontraditional and/or excessive work hours, lack of work support, and inconsistent feedback (Gustafsson, Lundkvist, Podlog, & Lundkvist, 2016). Goodger, Gorely, Lavallee, & Harwood, (2007) recommended further research into burnout to understand these experiences, especially work examining sport-related vocations. This study responds by examining burnout and other factors in the work experiences of a broad sample of sport employees.

## Describing Employee Experiences: An Archetypes Approach

The current literature demonstrates specific employment experience dimensions that impact employee outcomes including WFC and FWC, workaholism, burnout, and work engagement. Building on this research, there is a compelling need to: (a) examine these constructs as they relate to each other and (b) examine them as they relate to specific work and life factors (e.g., gender, age, relationship status, race/ethnicity, children, position, years working in intercollegiate athletics, and flexibility of work). By addressing these two specific gaps in the literature, we should be able to better understand the experiences of labor (i.e., intercollegiate athletic department employees) and support the development of our human capital. Toward this aim, we utilize an archetype approach founded on cluster analysis and presented through creative nonfiction (CNF).

Archetypes were identified through latent class cluster analysis as this method facilitates the classification of employee experiences into groups in which the number of groups as well as their forms are unknown a priori (Vermunt & Magidson, 2002). Upon completion of group classification, qualitative insights were presented in the form of composite nonfiction stories for each of the emergent archetypes. The CNF is well accepted in social science research as an analytical tool drawing on common features in qualitative research and art in representing reality through landscape, portraiture, and a dynamic interaction between context, time, and space (Barone, 2008; Smith et al., 2015). It is a form of analytic methodology that utilizes stories to present data. The CNF has been employed widely by social scientists and is emerging within sport research (e.g., Schinke et al., 2017). In order to illuminate employee experiences across several dimensions and address contradiction in media and scholarly portrayals, a storytelling approach was chosen. Specifically, CNF was selected as the best way to present our data because CNF can (a) provide a rich portrayal of complex lived experiences, (b) directly present respondent narratives, (c) protect anonymity, and (d) stimulate vicarious learning and emotional reactions for readers (Smith et al., 2015).

It is important to note the distinction between "creative nonfiction" and "creative fiction." The CNF stories are founded on data gathered by the researcher—established on fact, versus fiction (Sparkes, 2002). Differing from other forms of qualitative data representation, composite CNF uses actual data to amalgamate multiple voices and intersecting themes into one composite narrative of synthesized accounts (Blodgett, Schinke, Smith, Peltier, & Pheasant, 2011; Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997; Spalding & Phillips, 2007). Details of the data that form our narratives, and the method through which the archetypes were derived are included below. This two-step archetype approach with latent cluster analysis and CNF allows examination of employee experience dimensions in aggregate while incorporating additional personal and career lifespan factors.

# Method

## Data Collection

Utilizing Qualtrics software (Salt Lake City, UT), we distributed an online survey to the entire population of National Collegiate

Athletic Association (NCAA) athletic department employees whose e-mail addresses were available on their department's staff directory. The initial e-mail included information about the study, Texas Tech University institutional review board information, informed consent, and a link to the anonymous survey. Institutional NCAA division information was collected in order to classify respondents into specific subsectors of the sport industry. One week after initial distribution, a reminder e-mail was sent to nonrespondents, and 1 week after the reminder e-mail was sent, we closed the survey and downloaded the data from Qualtrics into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Chicago, IL).

## Participants

Intercollegiate athletics was selected as a context for this study because it compromises such a large labor pool in the U.S. sport system, and the jobs within this setting range from entry level to executive, across an array of job types (e.g., marketing, event management, operations, finance, development). The sample consisted of 4,324 intercollegiate athletic department employees with just under half holding titles in middle management (e.g., assistant coaches; assistant directors of compliance, operations, academic support, etc.; full-time athletic trainers, and department coordinators). Division I non-Power-Five conferences (e.g., Ivy League, Mountain West Conference) were most well represented in the sample (51.9%), and at the personal level, just over half of respondents identified as men (54.3%), 87.3% as White/European American, and 57.9% reported not having children. A complete listing of the nominal demographic variables is listed in Table 1. The age of participants ranged from 22 to 75 years old ($M = 35.98$, $SD = 11.2$) and experience working in a collegiate athletic department ranged from the first year on the job to 56 years of experience ($M = 10.72$, $SD = 9.1$).

**Table 1 Nominal Participant Demographics ($N = 4,324$)**

| Demographic category | *n* | % |
|---|---|---|
| Position | | |
| Middle management | 1,996 | 46.2 |
| Support staff | 1,016 | 23.5 |
| Head coach | 593 | 13.7 |
| Senior leadership | 535 | 12.4 |
| Graduate assistant/student worker | 184 | 4.3 |
| NCAA Division | | |
| Division I non-Power-5 | 2,244 | 51.9 |
| Division I Power-5 | 1,237 | 28.6 |
| Division II | 392 | 9.1 |
| Division III | 451 | 10.4 |
| Gender | | |
| Men | 2,346 | 54.3 |
| Women | 1,972 | 45.6 |
| Other | 6 | 0.1 |
| Race | | |
| White/European American | 3,773 | 87.3 |
| Black/African American | 225 | 5.2 |
| Hispanic/Latino/Latina | 121 | 2.8 |
| Biracial | 99 | 2.3 |
| Asian | 39 | 0.9 |
| Other | 38 | 0.9 |
| American Indian/Alaska Native | 17 | 0.4 |
| Pacific Islander | 12 | 0.3 |
| Children | | |
| No | 2,536 | 58.6 |
| Yes, younger than 18 | 1,172 | 27.1 |
| Yes, older than 18 | 367 | 8.5 |
| Yes, younger and older than 18 | 163 | 3.8 |
| Currently expecting | 86 | 2.0 |
| Relationship status | | |
| Married | 2,129 | 49.2 |
| Single | 1,375 | 31.8 |
| Long-term relationship | 705 | 16.3 |
| Divorced | 114 | 2.6 |
| Sexual orientation | | |
| Heterosexual | 4,139 | 94.0 |
| Gay/lesbian | 193 | 4.4 |
| Bisexual | 55 | 1.2 |
| Other | 17 | 0.4 |

*Note.* NCAA = National Collegiate Athletic Association.

## Measures

To measure a variety of constructs fundamental to the development of the employee archetypes, we utilized well-established instruments including the WFC and FWC scales (Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996), the Work Addiction Risk Test (Robinson, 1999), the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (Kristensen, Borritz, Villadsen, & Christensen, 2005), and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). These scales (each discussed below), in addition to 11 demographic questions and one open-ended question, comprised the entire content of the instrument.

Upon compilation of the survey, we consulted a panel of experts to review the instrument for ease of completion and content validity relative to our study purpose. The panel included sport management scholars, current athletics administrators, and coaches who supported the instrument's content with a few minor wording and distribution suggestions. We then conducted a pilot test of the instrument with a random sample of 250 athletic administrators. No concerns or issues arose in the pilot study, so we then distributed the survey to the entire target population ($N = 33,194$). After correcting for missing data, we utilized a total of 4,324 completed surveys for analysis, giving a final response rate of 13.03%. This response rate is similar to previous studies in the college sport context utilizing survey methods (e.g., Weight, Cooper, & Popp, 2015).

The FWC scale measures the degree to which an individual's family interferes with their work responsibilities (e.g., "Family-related strain interferes with my ability to perform job-related duties"). Conversely, the WFC scale assesses the degree to which an individual's work interferes with their family responsibilities (e.g., "Things I want to do at home do not get done because of the demands my job puts on me"; Netemeyer et al., 1996). Each scale includes five items measured with a 5-point Likert scale and has been previously established as valid and reliable with alphas ranging from .82 to .90 (Netemeyer et al., 1996).

The Work Addiction Risk Test is a 25-question survey utilizing a 4-point Likert scale (Robinson, 1999) with previously

tested validity and reliability measures (α = .88) utilized in studies exploring workaholism (e.g., Ng, Sorenson, & Feldman, 2007). Given the purpose of this study, we used only the compulsive tendencies subscale. Previous work has demonstrated a high correlation of this subscale with the entire scale, as well as high levels of subscale reliability and validity, suggesting it is acceptable to use the single subscale, instead of the entire inventory, and garner sufficient results (Schaufeli et al., 2009).

The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory includes 19 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale. This instrument has strong validity and reliability measures with alpha levels for the scale ranging from .85 to .87. The scale has been utilized in previous studies of employee burnout (e.g., Kristensen et al., 2005) and has been utilized in sport management research with strong psychometrics (Taylor et al., 2019).

Finally, the 9-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) measures employees' sense of positive fulfillment from work activities on a 7-point Likert indicator with subscales including vigor, dedication, and absorption. As with the other scales, the UWES-9 has been tested extensively for reliability and validity, with alpha levels ranging from .89 to .96 across 25 studies (Schaufeli et al., 2006).

Following the quantitative portion of the survey, participants were invited to share additional thoughts through an open-ended question. Specifically, respondents were asked, "Is there anything you want to add related to work–life balance as it pertains to working in intercollegiate athletics?" Forty percent of sample ($n$ = 1,724) provided narrative responses ranging from a few words to a few paragraphs (average of 40.5 words per respondent) which translated into 128 single-spaced pages of text (69,752 words). The CNF narratives were formed from these open-ended narratives.

## Analysis

Archetypes were created based on exploratory two-step cluster analysis of the quantitative survey data from 4,324 NCAA Division I athletics department staff in order to reduce the data into summary variables and frame underlying athletics department employee experiences (Vermunt & Magidson, 2002). Variables in the best-fitting five-cluster model are listed in Table 2. Cluster validity was addressed through a silhouette coefficient measuring the cohesion and separation of the clusters $s(i) = 0.3$, indicating "fair" cluster quality (Vermunt & Magidson, 2002). This coefficient is indicative of the difficulty of grouping heterogeneous individuals (Franke, Reisinger, & Hoppe, 2009). Given the purpose of the analysis to provide a framework for presenting grouped narrative experiences, the authors were satisfied with this measure as the practical significance is strong. As an additional test of cluster independence, analysis of variance and chi-square analyses were run on each of the cluster input variables. Each of the inputs, their input predictor importance, and the results of these tests are listed in Table 2.

Upon creation of the archetypes, qualitative narratives were organized by cluster and coded independently by two members of the research team. Researchers utilized memoing to add a layer of extract meaning from the data and facilitate direction for the second round of review (Birks, Chapman & Francis, 2008). Themes and patterns were established to guide the second-round review and representative quotes were selected to exemplify each of the emergent themes (Barone, 2008). Then, one member of the research team systematically compiled and presented themes one archetype at a time in the form of composite nonfiction stories (Gutkind, 2005). The researcher began by reviewing the demographics of each archetype as drawn from cluster analysis data, then sought to embody this perspective in the compiling of quotes. The archetype stories contain 97.9% of actual survey-response content. Of the 3,970 words within the archetype stories, 3,887 were direct quotes from the participants. The creative element in CNF simply involved piecing the narratives together into a seamless portrayal of the participant's lived experiences (Barone, 2008; Smith et al., 2015).

# Results

Five distinct employee archetypes emerged which yielded significant differences in the cluster input variables with the strongest five inputs including employee age, presence of and age of children, presence of a flexible work schedule, position of employment within intercollegiate athletics, and years working in intercollegiate athletics, each with input predictor importance metrics of 1.0. Other inputs ranging in importance from 0.07 to 0.23 include burnout, FWC, WFC, gender, work engagement, and workaholism (see Table 2). Sexual orientation and race were not included in the best-fitting model but were included in the results to facilitate participant identity shaping. Each of the cluster inputs and their between-archetype variance is visually represented in Figure 1.

## Employee Archetypes

Consistent with CNF methodology (Barone, 2008), results are presented as composite narratives of emergent themes using data from the employees included in each cluster. Quotes from multiple respondents are tied together by the researchers through connecting words (Gutkind, 2005). The order of presentation follows a career arc from early-career support staff to midcareer employees with different work–life situations, to late-career senior leaders.

***Early-career support staff.*** The early-career support staff archetype was most heavily influenced by age ($M$ = 27.64, $SD$ = 4.76), position (63.5% support staff), years working in intercollegiate athletics ($M$ = 4.85, $SD$ = 3.34), and lack of children (96%), each of which had input predictor importance factors of 1.0. This group was mostly comprised of interns, graduate assistants, and entry-level employees who were 61% female, 52.9% single, and 94.3% heterosexual. This group had the highest level of racial diversity with 83.2% White/European American and 11.3% Black/African American. In fact, over one third of the non-White participants were represented in this archetype. The group reported moderate amounts of WFC, workaholism, and burnout and lower levels of work engagement and FWC. Below is the CNF narrative for this archetype.

*There is no balance working in athletics. It is all work all the time. Even when I'm at home I'm thinking about a coach calling or texting me about something. I dread every time my phone goes off because I know there's a greater than 50% chance it is about work no matter where I am or what I'm doing. Since training camp started two months ago, I have not been grocery shopping, gotten a haircut, furnished my apartment, or registered my car. I wake up at 6:00 am, get to work at 7:15 am, stay there until 9:00 pm, and go home and go to sleep seven days a week. On game days I haven't gotten home before midnight yet. Sometimes I only get two hours of sleep between shifts, and I have to sleep in the office. Some of our GAs actually live in the office not because they want to, but because they can't afford rent.*

*I got into this industry to be around sports, but don't feel like I'm really part of the team. I put in as much work as the coaches without having a connection to the games or players. I actually barely get to see any of the games. I find myself sacrificing sleep, friends, and leisure activities, but in my mind it's worth it for the*

**Table 2 Cluster Inputs, Values, Predictor Importance, and Statistical Tests of Variance/Independence**

| Cluster input | Total 100% (4,324) | Early-career support staff 25.7% (1,112) | Midcareer, no children 18.5% (799) | Midcareer, no flexibility 15.6% (675) | Midcareer parents 21.3% (992) | Late-career senior leaders 18.9% (816) | Input predictor importance | $F/\chi^2$ | *p* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | 35.97 (11.19) | 27.64 (4.76) | 29.71 (5.82) | 33.06 (7.27) | 38.89 (6.61) | 52.61 (9.07) | 1.0 | 1926.2 | .000 |
| Children | No 54.5% | No 96% | No 100% | No 62.8% | Yes, <18 years 94.8% | Yes, >18 years 45% | 1.0 | 5731.5 | .000 |
| Flexible work | Yes 67.6% | Yes 53.6% | Yes 100% | No 96% | Yes 97.6% | Yes 76.7% | 1.0 | 2476.8 | .000 |
| Position | Middle management 46.2% | Support staff 63.5% | Middle management 100% | Middle management 75.6% | Middle management 45.6% | Senior leader 31.5% | 1.0 | 3413.0 | .000 |
| Relationship status | Married 49.3% | Single 52.9% | Single 51.8% | Married 49.6% | Married 93.2% | Married 69.1% | 1.0 | 1768.2 | .000 |
| Years in ICA | 10.74 (9.10) | 4.85 (3.34) | 6.40 (4.58) | 9.18 (6.22) | 13.08 (6.83) | 21.58 (11.32) | 1.0 | 832.2 | .000 |
| Burnout | 2.84 (0.68) | 2.96 (0.65) | 2.76 (0.65) | 3.17 (0.67) | 2.75 (0.62) | 2.59 (0.68) | 0.23 | 88.4 | .000 |
| Family–work conflict | 2.05 (0.90) | 1.86 (0.75) | 1.91 (0.82) | 2.15 (0.97) | 2.42 (0.98) | 1.94 (0.88) | 0.17 | 64.7 | .000 |
| Work–family conflict | 3.75 (0.99) | 3.75 (0.94) | 3.63 (0.97) | 4.22 (0.82) | 3.81 (0.93) | 3.48 (1.12) | 0.16 | 60.2 | .000 |
| Gender | Men 54.3% | Women 61.0% | Women 50.1% | Men 64% | Men 67.8% | Men 56.4% | 0.14 | 205.3 | .000 |
| Work engagement | 5.11 (0.87) | 4.93 (0.86) | 5.23 (0.82) | 4.85 (0.94) | 5.22 (0.78) | 5.29 (0.84) | 0.12 | 45.7 | .000 |
| Workaholism | 2.91 (0.68) | 2.90 (0.47) | 2.88 (0.51) | 3.09 (0.48) | 2.91 (0.49) | 2.82 (0.50) | 0.07 | 28.6 | .000 |
| Sexual orientation[a] | Heterosexual (94.0%) | Heterosexual (94.3%) | Heterosexual (89.5%) | Heterosexual (95.8%) | Heterosexual (98.3%) | Heterosexual (93.6%) | 0.00 | 27.0 | .001 |
| Race[a] | White (87.1%) | White (83.2%) | White (85.0%) | White (89.9%) | White (89.7%) | White (88.5%) | 0.00 | 26.6 | .147 |

*Note.* Ordinal variables include age, years working in ICA, burnout, family–work conflict, work–family conflict, work engagement, and workaholism. The means (SDs) and analysis of variance values are listed in the table. Nominal variables include children, flexible work, position, gender, sexual orientation, and race. The modal category and percentage along with chi-square values are listed in the table. ICA = intercollegiate athletics.

[a]Sexual orientation and race were not included as inputs in the best-fitting model, but were included in the results to facilitate participant identity shaping.

*end result. I'm trying to out-last and out-perform other professionals my age, make good connections, and learn as much as possible. I've just come to the conclusion that work-life balance will likely be impossible for the next two to five years. I often worry about how I'm shortchanging my future self when it comes to my health, happiness, family, and relationships, but this is just temporary, and it will get better. I always think to myself that I am lucky at this stage of my life to be single. I couldn't imagine doing what I do if I actually had a family. I have noticed that most of the women in the department are in their 30s, 40s, and 50s and still do not have a family. That is the unfortunate reality of being a woman working in collegiate athletics. It seems nearly impossible to be both a caregiver for your family and a coach or administrator for your university.*

*Sometimes working in athletics doesn't feel like work and it can be very rewarding . . . but we don't get paid nearly enough for the time and energy we put in and it starts to take its toll. It would all be easier to accept if we were compensated appropriately for the time we put in. I worry a lot about finances, and compensation is a major reason why I do not fully enjoy my work. I feel my time as well as my coworkers' time is undervalued. I wish the department heads and higher-ups would reward those of us in the trenches for the rigorous work we do. They also seem physically and emotionally exhausted a lot, but they don't have as much of a financial burden as those of us just starting out—they are able to monetarily afford to farm out their general life responsibilities. With my current salary I cannot afford to pay off college loans and live . . . so I just keep going deeper into debt in hopes that eventually it will get better. I'd like a part-time job to earn extra money, but it's hard to find a flexible enough one, and I really don't have the time. Even in the off-season when hours are a bit reduced, I can never truly count on time-off, because my direct supervisor and the head coach completely control my schedule. Their lack of communication or planning creates a ripple-effect on the entire staff and athletes. Coaches and administrators often do not communicate in a timely manner which forces those who work for them to have to make a mad dash to get ready on short notice or not have the ability to take advantage of an off day. They think "oh hey, let's do this" which is always a very last-minute request. They don't understand the multitude of pieces/people that go into making their requests happen.*

*A lot of the balance starts at the top. If your boss stays long hours, you are expected to as well. Their choices determine our*

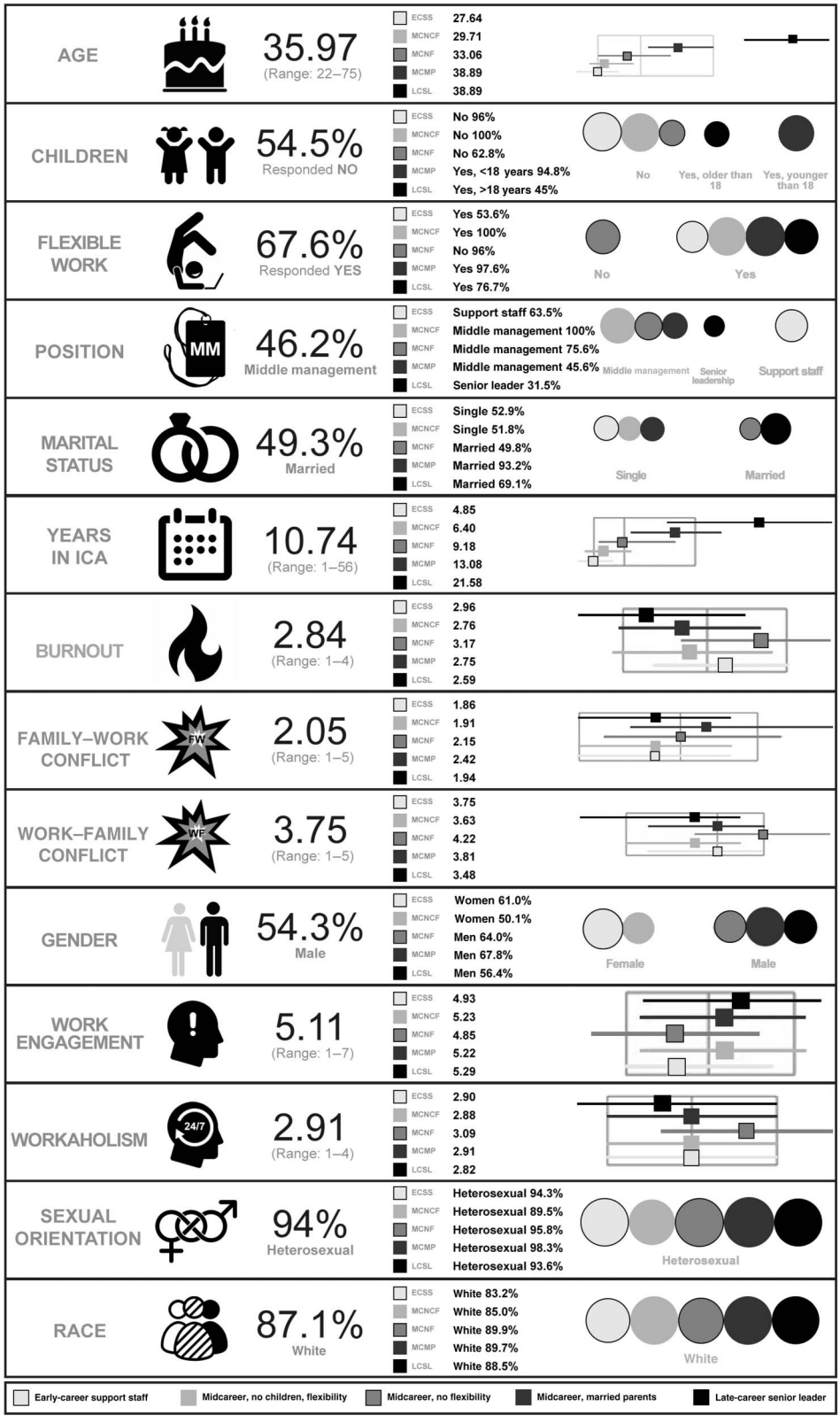


**Figure 1** — Visual archetype comparisons by independent variables. ICA indicates intercollegiate athletics.

*schedule. We are severely understaffed, often forgotten, and generally underappreciated. It typically feels like I'm drowning. I inquired about work life balance once and was told I was in the wrong profession for that. Those that don't care are typically single or divorced with no family. Therefore, they think everyone should constantly be in the office and not at home. Even when I attempt to leave after a 10-hour day my boss often makes me feel guilty, but I work hard for each student athlete. At the end of the*

*day, that purpose makes the sacrifice more tolerable and bearable for a future in the industry and a more stable work-life balance down the road—it's just the price that must be paid to work in athletics.*

***Midcareer, no children, flexibility.*** The midcareer, no children, flexibility archetype was most heavily influenced by age ($M$ = 29.71, $SD$ = 5.82), position (100% middle management), years working in intercollegiate athletics ($M$ = 4.85, $SD$ = 3.34), lack of children (96%), and flexible work schedule (100%) each of which had input predictor importance factors of 1.0 (see Figure 1). This group was mostly comprised of assistant directors, assistant coaches, full-time athletic trainers, and department coordinators. This group had a 50–50 gender split, were 51.8% single, 85% White/European American, with 9.1% Black/African American, and 89% heterosexual. This midcareer, no children, flexibility archetype reported low amounts of FWC and burnout and reported high levels of work engagement. This group had the highest levels of gay/lesbian (7.7%) and bisexual/other (2.8%) workers. The CNF narrative for this archetype is below.

*I love my job—but you have to be a workaholic to succeed. I am able to immerse myself in my current work. I currently work 9am–8pm and am gone every Saturday from November to March. My out-of-season work schedule helps make up for the time I spend working during the season, but I still put in 40+ hours a week in the off-season. This is my passion and I need to give up a lot of myself in other aspects of my life to feel like I'm doing my job. If I give up, then I am essentially giving up on my "dream"—so it puts a lot of pressure on me to be successful.*

*The expectation is to put your personal life second to work always, and when everyone else is doing it, you feel like you have to do it as well . . . even if you know it's not healthy. I know that my competition is out putting hours in, so if I do not do the same I will fall behind which could jeopardize my employment. It's not a job, it's a lifestyle, and this lifestyle is a choice that we sign up for and know what we're getting into. It only works if you feel it is something you're meant to do rather than a place to collect a paycheck.*

*If you're not prepared to put work first, family second, don't enter college athletics. I've seen many people who cannot handle the demands of the field. Those folks seem to fade away quickly and find work elsewhere. I chose this career. I am single and don't have a family. I can see how it would be more challenging to balance things if you had kids. I don't feel that I could do my job well, continue to make the program better, and have kids at my current institution with my accepted responsibilities. Many who burnout are people who don't continually bring positive energy every day and realize that being happy about the lifestyle is a choice.*

*I do a job many people would love to have . . . and most often I feel lucky, but I also experience plenty of frustration and stress because of how little we make for how much we work. If you make it past a certain number of years, there may still be times you feel like quitting, but it becomes more difficult to do so. Working in athletics is exhausting, but if you compare the hours worked to the benefits received, usually you can see the balance. Though sometimes the hours are long, the perks of the job—the connectedness and pride you receive, the thrills of the season, and the winning feelings that you get—make it worth it. Being able to take off early when needed makes up for having to stay late, and I feel accomplished when I finish everything knowing that I am helping athletes.*

*I think the leaders in our department do a superb job at acknowledging our long work hours and realizing that we put a lot of effort in. I have been kicked out of the office before by my boss on a nice day because everything will never get done. Having a boss who values balance helps our staff. I am able to have a good life and work balance due to being surrounded by amazing team members. We're at work so often that our families become our co-workers and our co-workers mix with our actual families which creates one big group of loved ones. If you work with coworkers that make work enjoyable, it is worth being tired and spread thin. Due to the number of hours we work, we are able to take off whenever we need to for our personal life, and having a flexible schedule helps a lot.*

***Midcareer, no flexibility.*** The midcareer, no flexibility archetype included five inputs with predictor importance at the 1.0 level including a lack of flexible work schedule (96%), position (75.6% middle management), age ($M$ = 33.06, $SD$ = 7.27), years working in intercollegiate athletics ($M$ = 9.18, $SD$ = 6.22), and lack of children (62.8%), though there was inconsistency in the children variable as 36.1% of employees within this archetype had children younger than 18 years living at home. This group was mostly comprised of assistant directors, assistant coaches, full-time athletic trainers, and department coordinators, primarily male (64%), heterosexual (95.8%), with the majority married (49.6%) or in a long-term relationship (16%), with 32.7% single. This was the least racially diverse cluster with 89.9% of the workers White/European American and 6.2% Black/African American, representing close to the same lack of racial diversity as the final two mid/senior-level archetypes. Members of this archetype reported high levels of burnout, WFC, and workaholism and moderate levels of work engagement and FWC. The composite narrative of this midcareer, no flexibility archetype follows.

*I enjoy what I do, and I am proud to say that I've succeeded in the industry, but it has certainly cost me on the personal side of my life. I signed up for this, and I knew what I was getting into, but loving something isn't the same as living something, and I am beginning to constantly question how long I can do this as a profession because of the work-life balance. The months on end without a single day off (including nights and weekends) are frustrating. I have no relationships, friendships, or children because I work twice the average person with no days off for months, so I don't have time to cultivate a personal life. I've missed too many weddings, funerals, baptisms, or birthdays of family and friends in order to watch a losing sport to count. I am no longer included in any plans because I have always had to refuse by saying "sorry, I have to work." I used to get asked by friends and family when my next "day off" will be. I always have to answer that I don't know, could be Thanksgiving, could be Christmas, or might have to wait until the second week in May. Working in athletics is rewarding, but it certainly is a time devotion. With the nature of my position here, and in talking to many others who hold my role at other schools, I find it seemingly impossible to pursue a successful romantic relationship. I notice a lot of my older colleagues who work in athletics are single, and that worries me. I've had several relationships fail because the lack of time commitment I was able to put forth into it. It's mind-numbing to think about.*

*I have anxiety about having children due to the demands and inflexibility of the job. I don't know how people who have families can sustain working in collegiate athletics. When it comes time to starting a family, I can't imagine how this will be sustainable. I have found that friends and colleagues in this profession usually decide whether or not they want to stay in or get out around the ages of 30–35. It is too hard on family life with all of the travel and hours. My female coaching friends get out, but my male coaching*

*friends don't seem to feel the same pressure. Their spouse is the one to make the change.*

*I was taught that there is no such thing as work-life balance within athletics—it is what it is, and we all knew it going in . . . so it's hard to complain because everyone else is putting in the same amount of hours. There is a lot of pressure to constantly work, and even if there is room to come up for air, I feel guilty taking a day. The elimination of any balance prevents reflection on your work and how to make your team better. If you can never get out of the trenches, how do you know you are still fighting the right battle?*

*I feel like there are things that could be done to make it better. Every department is under-staffed. Just a few more people would make the work-load much more manageable. I also wish we got paid overtime or even by the hour. For the amount of hours we put in, there are many of us who make less than minimum wage. Also, if we got paid by the hour, there might be more consideration about how to reduce the work-loads because it would actually be costing the department money to have us work 100-hour weeks. I would like to add a mandatory day off in-season. Just one. I would also be more satisfied and motivated in my job if there was support to be physically fit. It's really frustrating to work in athletics but not have time to exercise. I'd even be happy if we could get incentives like food in order to keep us going during some of the longer stretches!*

*My boss is old-school and he feels like if you're not in your office you're not working . . . but with the nature of our business, it's tough sometimes to work until 11 pm for a basketball game and be back at work the next morning at 8:30 am. Again, it's one of those things that is just understood when you get in this business. If some degree of flexibility were built in, it might be worth it . . . but you are expected to do your job whether you are sick, tired, or just plain exhausted. There is almost no time for family life or hobbies that I used to enjoy. It's taken a toll on my health and stress levels. I love this industry and I love the kids I work with, but I often find myself asking if it is worth it. Working in athletics is a lifestyle of hard work, grinding, grueling hours, and sacrificing everything for the job. We're overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated, and my time is probably coming to an end in the next year or two because I see my peers thriving socially and personally while my career feels like it's stagnant or moving backwards. I imagine even if I were to get out of athletics, the relationships that I've already lost would be hard or impossible to rebuild. Pursuing a career in athletics is the biggest single regret of my life.*

***Midcareer married parents.*** The midcareer parents archetype was built with primary inputs including children living at home (94.8%), marital status (93% married), a flexible work schedule (97.6%), age ($M = 38.89$, $SD = 6.61$), position (45.6% middle management), and years working in intercollegiate athletics ($M = 9.18$, $SD = 6.22$). This group included a variety of organizational positions including middle managers, head coaches, senior leaders, and support staff. This group was nearly completely heterosexual (98.3%) and two-thirds (67.8%) male, with high levels of FWC and work engagement and moderate levels of burnout and workaholism. This group also lacked in racial diversity with 89.7% White/European American and 7.5% Black/African American workers. The CNF narrative from this archetype is below.

*Marry the right woman, have the right boss, work in the right culture, and love what you do, and you can have an incredible quality of life. If you don't have all four of those things, don't do it – get out now and find another career or you will hate your job and regret choosing this career path on a daily basis. In order to have a fulfilling career in this industry and a family, your spouse has to be able to understand and support your dream, or it will cause marital stress or divorce because there is no such thing as work-life balance in sport. The industry is cutthroat, intense, and competitive. There are only so many jobs to go around and the people who are after these jobs are intensely competitive and willing to work far more hours than most. If you have balance, you are losing, and if you are losing, you are fired.*

*I know my wife prays for us to have a winning season every year. Every time we lose a game, I come home and see the fear in her eyes that I might get fired and our life that we love might change. Coaching in collegiate sports is one of the most stressful jobs not only on individuals but also the families that they support. It is a constant tug of war. When I am at work I am often missing activities at home. When I am at home there are usually events I could be attending. It's the weekends that are the toughest. When my family is off, I am working. When they are working is when I have flexibility to take time off. Your best recruit is a great wife that understands all the hats you wear.*

*I believe it is even more difficult for women, as their expectations are greater at home, and there is less acceptance of women balancing life than men in athletics. Very few women coach and as more men become deeply involved in shared parenting responsibilities, it will begin driving those male coaches out of the industry as well. With as many time demands as there are on the weekends, it becomes difficult to justify the time away from family and children. I think the pressure placed on women to be a "good mom" is nearly impossible to reconcile with the pervasive attitude in the industry that "this is what you signed up for." The balance between having to be present for children and spouse at home and also succeed at work can be very overwhelming. There is a sense of guilt either way. Being at work there's guilt you're not home seeing your kid grow up and being at home there's guilt you're not doing your job to its fullest. There is also a lot of inequality between promoting men and women. Women don't get as many opportunities because donor trips, in particular, are founded on good-ole-boy network relationships and interactions, and there is a significant gender divide when it comes to working in and supervising football.*

*When in-season, balance is nearly impossible. Out of season and summer is when many can make up for the excessive time they spent at work . . . but the downtime decreases every year, and for most, there is virtually no off-season. The NCAA has been so involved with student-athlete welfare, but it seems like they could care less about coaches and administration. The NCAA needs to stop us from killing ourselves by imposing additional mandatory dead periods in recruiting and reducing the amount of compliance paperwork and year-round practice/competition/contact hours. Without additional regulation, many department leaders make judgments about employees that are either not willing or able to stay all hours of the day, night, and weekend and often do not promote them as they deserve or have earned. If athletics had nighttime daycare it would make everything much easier! Those who make it work only seem to be able to do so because they have extremely supportive partners, local family, or retired parents.*

*I am fortunate to work in a department that supports having my children around. Department flexibility is a huge component in making a job in college athletics work. I can work while they are finishing homework. There are not many fields that afford you the opportunity to have your child around at work, and not sitting in your office type work, but being able to bring them with you at an event because you are an admin and they can sit down in the stands/bleacher. Certain schools make it harder than others. Certain head coaches make it harder than others. The key is*

*finding the right person to work for that understands what life is really about. Then hoping that person finds his/her way to a school that truly gets what it takes to win. For my family situation I must be in a department that truly allows families to be a part of what we do day in and day out. My AD actually encourages us to take breaks when we can and is always flexible and supportive whenever I have something family-related come up. My previous AD was not like that at all and I was miserable and dreaded going to work.*

*Ultimately, it is an extremely satisfying job as you get to see your hard work pay off on and off the court when athletes are successful. It is rare to have a job that can give you such a direct sense of pride, powerful results, and athletes that keep you energized. It is a very demanding job and is at times a physically and emotionally draining grind. I would be naïve to say that it does not have an impact on family life in a negative sense . . . but working in intercollegiate athletics provides access to unique experiences for my children as they grow up around our programs and student-athletes. Getting into intercollegiate athletics, you have to accept that you are not going to have a "normal" life. Few have the ability to manage the responsibilities of work and home, yet nothing is more fulfilling than the pursuit of a team goal with the support and investment of your family. There is nothing better. The satisfaction of seeing athletes grow, chasing goals as a team, and having young people for my kids to look up to makes "the grind" worth it.*

***Late-career senior leader archetype.*** The late-career senior leader archetype was most heavily influenced by children (76%), 45% of whom had children 18 years or older, 23% with children younger and older than 18, and 8% younger than 18. Additional significant inputs included age ($M = 52.61$, $SD = 9.07$), years working in intercollegiate athletics ($M = 21.58$, $SD = 11.32$), position (31.5% senior leader), and flexible work schedule (76.7%), each of which had input predictor importance factors of 1.0. This group was mostly comprised of senior leaders which included athletics directors, associate directors, head coaches, and some middle managers. This group was 56.4% male, 93.6% heterosexual, with 75.6% married (69%) or in a long-term relationship (6.6%), 16.4% single, and 7.8% divorced. Employees within this cluster were primarily White/European American (88.5%) and had the lowest representation of Black/African American workers (6.0%). The late-career senior leaders reported the highest levels of work engagement and lowest levels of burnout, workaholism, and WFC and FWC. The CNF compilation of archetype narratives is below.

*A work/life balance is very difficult to satisfy if you're going to excel in intercollegiate athletics, but the lack of balance is worth it. The rewards of the job outweigh the hours if you have a passion for your work. I love that I've never had to punch a clock. We get to go to games and call it work, we are immersed in an industry filled with intensity and passion, and we can build relationships with athletes, colleagues, fans, and donors that are enriching and last a lifetime. Although incredibly exhausting, there isn't anything I would rather be doing. If you go into athletics thinking you will work a regular 40-hour work week, you are either nuts or haven't researched the athletic field enough. This is not a job, it is a lifestyle. It's what we all sign up for, and we all have to pay our dues in the early years.*

*In my early years I experienced the intense stress of balancing work/family. My life situation is different now and my work is not as stressful. After becoming well-established in the profession, I began to invest more time in my personal health and well-being . . . taking time to walk, workout, etc. I now have a personal meeting for myself once a week for two hours. During that meeting I can do anything I want. I think it is also important to set your priorities early in your career. I chose not to pursue some opportunities because of my children, and these were the best decisions I have made. Decompressing in the summers has also been vital for me to stay in the industry. I see a trend of younger professionals leaving athletics because of the work/life balance issues, but in my department, I emphasize working smarter, not harder, and I encourage staff to bring children to work events, sneak away during the day if there is a late-night event, and take advantage of the flexibility that the around-the-clock job can afford. The first in—last out worker mentality will lead to a department full of burnout and turnover . . . and I hope more administrators are recognizing this.*

*As I've gotten older, the job has become more physically demanding. Also, there used to be a lot more down time out of season, especially in the summer. Not so much anymore—there is a mentality of being on call 24/7. These demands can take a toll on your marriage and family relationships as there is an expectation that the job is more important than the people in your life. I am very fortunate to have a spouse who understands the industry and the time demands, but I see the destruction the industry has had on families and personal lives all around me, and I've seen lot of regret by those who look back on their careers and would trade honors and accolades for a great home and family life. Many of my colleagues never had kids, got divorced, sacrificed relationships with their children, or never got married because to succeed in this business, your life revolves around it and you always have to put work above other things. The pressure, expectations, and time demands keep intensifying, and the resources have not kept pace at the lower levels in the department. The sports industry is not for everyone, but it was the path that chose me, I've managed to keep my sanity, and I have enjoyed the journey.*

## Discussion and Implications

Through the presentation and analysis of five sport employee archetypes, this research advances sport human resource management scholarship by: (a) extending the discussion to all types of sport employees; (b) examining characteristics of the employees themselves; and (c) examining individual, work, and work–life constructs in combination rather than isolation. The basis of human capital theory is to understand employee traits, needs, and motivations; invest in mechanisms to support and develop employees so they maximize individual human capital; then this aggregate impact will enhance overall organizational effectiveness (Fulmer & Ployhart, 2014; Marescaux et al., 2013; Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011). Below, we discuss insights for theory and practice from an exploration of employee archetypes.

### Early-Career Support Staff

Although employees within the early-career support staff archetype were the youngest and least experienced, they had above-average levels of WFC and burnout with below-average levels of work engagement. Unlike many high-profile positions within intercollegiate athletics, over 60% of the employees in this archetype were women, and they also had the highest levels of diversity. This suggests a "bottleneck" within intercollegiate sport, with women and Black/African American tending to be overrepresented in these entry-level positions, but fewer thriving at higher levels within the established work environment (Cook & Glass, 2014).

Extending this promotion bottleneck to include athletes, Black/African American represent the majority of players on

NCAA revenue-generating teams (NCAA Demographics Database, 2020), yet as compensation increases from athlete to entry-level employee all the way up to senior leader, there are fewer and fewer African Americans (Carter-Francique, & Richardson, 2016; Cooper, Nwadike, & Macaulay, 2017; Cunningham, 2010). These issues are likely compounded when intersectionality is considered, for sport is governed predominantly by heteronormative traditions which benefit the dominant group (i.e., heterosexual White men; Cunningham, 2010; Walker & Melton, 2015; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013).

Previous research by Dixon and Sagas (2008) found male athletic department employees were more likely to utilize work–life supportive benefits than their female colleagues, which may help explain why employees in the early-career support staff archetype reported such high levels of WFC and burnout with low levels of work engagement despite their limited time in the field. Furthermore, Heymann (2016) found that an unequal distribution of benefits commonly present within male-dominated organizations creates barriers for women and reinforces sex segregation. These employees also reported being overworked, underpaid, and susceptible to pressure from their boss (e.g., pressure to impress in hopes to move up within the organization). This pressure may have more influence on female employees, as previous research has illustrated that supervisor work–family support impacts male and female employees differently, showing that female employees' levels of negative work–family spillover are more significantly impacted by supervisor support (Clark et al., 2017). In addition, employees in this archetype expressed they were hopeful that by putting in the time, they would eventually "make it," making their current sacrifices feel temporary. The findings show some perceived competition whereby women feel they need to outlast other early-career support staff to reach the next archetype. Despite this effort, as we move into the more senior-level archetypes, we see a shift in the gender breakdown, suggesting more masculine characteristics may be preferred (Reid, O'Neill, & Blair-Loy, 2018). Those women who did find success may embrace "gender blindness" versus an emphasis on gender differences, as a gender-blind mentality has been linked to increases in women's confidence levels, agency, and action taking, especially in male-dominated organizations (Martin & Phillips, 2017). This finding demonstrates how the work culture within intercollegiate athletics can create a disadvantage for women, highlighting a need for more work supports for women entering the career field as has been suggested in other male-dominated industries (e.g., Heymann, 2016; Hulls et al., 2020).

From a theoretical perspective, these sentiments support the assertion that both the environment and the organizational supports impact human capital emergence (Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011). In this context, this group of employees felt the impact of the sacrificial culture and long hours on their own work experiences and chances for advancement (Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Taylor et al., 2019). However, a novel aspect in this study is that employees seem to also actively manage their careers toward their own human capital advancement. For example, employees in this archetype may be more likely than those in other archetypes to pursue training and development opportunities in order to enhance their skills and differentiate themselves from their peers and colleagues. They also may be willing to work while sick or exhausted in order to be seen by their superiors to ensure others know they are giving maximum effort.

From a practical perspective, the sacrificial and competitive culture of sport seems to create a context where early-career employees are motivated to grow, but constantly strained in the process. This, coupled with their expressed desire for training, suggests that at this stage, employees would benefit from practices that enhance their job-related capacity and help them advance in the organization. These might include tuition discounts/reimbursements for education, or perhaps company-provided development opportunities (Dixon et al., 2008). Employees at this stage may also benefit from formal and informal mentoring that drives both support and access for career advancement, particularly for those underrepresented groups that may need access to the power networks more readily available to others (Shaw & Leberman, 2015).

## Midcareer Middle Management

Employees in middle management positions fell into one of three midcareer archetypes differentiated primarily by work flexibility and parenthood: no children with a flexible schedule, no flexibility, or parents. Although the employment positions of the individuals in these three groups were similar, their experiences in the workplace were extremely different.

***Flexibility.*** Comparing the groups that primarily differed on responses to their employer allowing flexibility within their work schedule, those with reported flexibility collectively displayed below-average levels of WFC and burnout with above-average levels of work engagement, whereas the archetype in their mid-career with no flexibility archetype reported the exact opposite (i.e., above-average levels of WFC and burnout with below-average levels of work engagement).

From a theoretical perspective, the mid-career flexibility/no-flexibility archetypes strongly highlights the need for appropriate employee supports toward human capital emergence across the career (Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011). It appears that beyond simply the need for support for employees, tailored supports are useful for different employee groups and career stages. While early-career employees seem to need training and help advancing, members of this archetype expressed the importance of supervisor support, behavior modelling, and verbal encouragement for employees to take time off and practice healthy behaviors. These organizational supports were heralded as important differentiators in employee experiences (Dixon & Warner, 2010; Marescaux et al., 2013).

In practical terms, echoing foundational research on sport industry employees (e.g., Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2007), the importance of schedule flexibility was highly salient. Even though they struggled with the long hours, they felt flexibility was absolutely essential to their functioning. While the role of supervisor support has been examined in this context (e.g., Dixon & Sagas, 2008), very little effort has been made toward the investigation of healthy practices such as taking time off, which seems contradictory to the competitive work environment in sport and the belief that working more hours leads to better work performance. Clearly there is room for advancement of both theory and practice in human resource management by understanding these kinds of human resource management practices that contribute to the overall health and well-being of employees, even if they run counter to competitive sport ethos.

***Family, children, and parenthood.*** In addition to flexibility, the other primary input that differentiated the midcareer archetypes was their parenthood. This group had a mixed experience with above-average levels of WFC and work engagement with below-average levels of burnout. This seemingly contradictory finding has been supported in previous literature, but not in a single study. That is, the presence of children in the home is associated with higher

WFC (Taylor et al., 2019), but engagement with family has been described as a way to "stay sane" in the fast-paced industry of sport (Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Graham & Dixon, 2017). Our study supports that high conflict and low burnout can coexist, and that WFC may actually serve as a buffer to burnout.

From a practical perspective, supports for this group seem to emerge both within and outside the organization. Employee-provided supports such as employee-sponsored child-care, flexible schedules, and even implementing mandatory days off for staff (similar to those utilized by the NCAA to help protect college athlete's time) were all mentioned as potential supports toward improving the capacity and longevity of human capital (Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011). Outside of work, many in the "midcareer, parents" archetype described their incredibly supportive spouses who allowed them to be completely work-absorbed. Often times, this was men making this comment about a supportive spouse/partner, as just over 66% of these responses were made by men. Research from other industries (e.g., business) has reported similar finding, suggesting a supportive spouse (typically a woman) is critical to male managers' career success (Heikkinen & Lamsa, 2017; Ocampo, Restubog, Liwag, Wang, & Petelczyc, 2018). These findings highlight gender norms of men expecting the contributions of supportive spouses/partners such that they can focus fully on their jobs, while women often have to find a "happy medium" of job and home responsibilities without requiring a supportive spouse/partner to assist.

Literature within the sport industry, in addition to some of the overt statements within this archetype, suggests the influence of gender roles is tightly wrapped within this discussion. Miller (2009) discussed strong gender-role expectations in the sport industry where men are not encouraged to be co-parents with their partners or to be developmentally involved with their children. Similarly, Graham and Dixon (2017) found male coaches sought out understanding partners who "know the responsibility" that comes with being a coach's partner (i.e., taking on majority of the parenting and household duties due to the time required for the coach to be successful). This literature supports archetype statements about "marrying the right woman," and observations of increased cultural strain for women who are parents. Organizations may benefit from exploring how to help employees build support networks using both work and nonwork supports toward improving their employment experiences and addressing unique challenges for women within the workplace (Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Graham & Dixon, 2017; Kim, Kim, Newman, Ferris, & Perrewe, 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Rodrìguez-Sánchez, Gonzáles-Torres, Montero-Navarro, & Gallego-Losada, 2020).

It is important to point out additional nuances relative to the discussion of family and children between the three midcareer archetypes. Those within the no children, flexible schedule archetype discussed how they chose this career, decided not to have children, and believed they could not do their job sufficiently with children. They acknowledged the expectation to put one's personal life second to work always, even if it is not healthy (Dixon & Bruening, 2005, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2017; Mazerolle et al., 2018). The midcareer parents reported a buffering effect of their families toward burnout in their careers. The midcareer, no flexibility group, however, reported above-average levels of WFC and burnout with below-average levels of work engagement. Interestingly, 37.2% of those in this group reported children in their homes. They expressed the relentless pull of their job and extreme sacrifices and negative impacts the job imposed upon their lives. These employees were bitter, disengaged, and many on the brink of leaving the industry, recognizing the destruction their career had caused.

Consistent with other studies in this area, many of the individuals within this archetype (the mid-career, no flexibility group) expressed regret, sadness, and turmoil relative to the continual prioritization of work over family (Byron, 2005; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). These findings suggest it is not family, or even WFC that is the critical influence of work outcomes. Rather, it is the perceived flexibility given by employers or by the individuals themselves to make room for family and the role of the individual sport employee in their family in their demanding work life that appears to be the critical factor (Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Taylor et al., 2019). Clearly, more nuanced investigation, thinking, and theorization in the work–life interface is needed to understand the role of family as a buffer toward work overcommitment, as well as the role of flexibility and rest toward overall longevity of employees in this industry. Tailored human resources practices are only a beginning point for unpacking this complex phenomenon.

### Senior Leaders

Finally, employees in the senior leaders' archetype were able to "stick it out," find a work–family balance, and endure over their career span. These individuals had the highest levels of work engagement paired with the lowest levels of burnout and workaholism. They also reported below-average levels of WFC and FWC. Similar to the midcareer, parents' archetype, it is likely employees in this archetype have extremely supportive spouses so they can devote much of their time to work, or they get divorced (or never marry) because they have chosen work over family (Graham & Dixon, 2017). Many of the employees in this archetype expressed regret about choosing work over family, but said they paid their dues and their work experience has improved. The lack of women within the senior leaders' archetype, coupled with this group exhibiting improved work–family interface and the likelihood of a supportive partner further underscores that women are often at a disadvantage within the organizational structure of intercollegiate athletics. Furthermore, socially constructed gender norms appear to create barriers for them reaching this archetype that, ironically, would provide the social supports that could help them combat these gender norms through better work–life balance and an opportunity to improve their work engagement (e.g., Hindman & Walker, 2020).

From both a theoretical and practical perspective, this later-career group remains underexplored (Hartzell & Dixon, 2019; Shaw & Leberman, 2015). In fact, Darcy, McCarthy, Hill, and Grady (2012) argued that while late-career employees may be the most committed and valuable in the organization, their needs in terms of supportive organizational practices are the least understood. This study suggests these employees have "figured it out" or outlasted others. It is possible that there are late-career supports such as those related to mentoring, authenticity, or building a legacy that could help employees not only stay engaged, but also find new meaning in their work and in investing in others (Shaw & Leberman, 2015). Understanding the ways that these employees have navigated the industry landscape would be insightful for informing the kinds of supports needed toward improving the emergence of human capital in practical ways.

## Conclusions and Future Recommendations

The findings suggest employees at every level of intercollegiate athletic departments have at times felt overworked, underpaid, and

undervalued, and many feel it continuously. This systemic culture is problematic for an industry looking to recruit and retain employees that are diverse, highly motivated, and durable as research suggests that the demanding climate of collegiate sport may have long-term negative effects such as burnout, which can lead to premature departure from a career (e.g., Dixon & Bruening, 2005, 2007; Taylor et al., 2019). However, these employees also reported passion for working with college athletes. Although there are challenges associated with working in intercollegiate athletic departments (e.g., long hours, low pay), these challenges may be negated for employees who are truly passionate about their work. Building on human capital theory and an understanding that people are assets that can be developed, if we are able to understand what factors contribute to success as well as employee health and well-being, we can foster environments that enhance these factors.

The archetypes detailed in the results provide important information regarding career progression and life stages of employees within intercollegiate athletic departments, which yields important theoretical contributions. In addition, the results highlight concerns (e.g., employee exploitation) of lower level employees at the benefit of those who have "survived" the difficult work environment. Examining these archetypes also helps identify organizational barriers faced by women entering the field of intercollegiate athletics. While women are eager to join the workforce in college sport, they often face a number of barriers as early-career support staff, leading to dwindling numbers as employees attempt to outlast their peers to climb their career ladder (Forsyth, Jones, Duval, & Bambridge, 2019; Hindman & Walker, 2020). These findings highlight the need for examining supports and organizational culture changes to ensure women are able to rise in the organizational ranks at a similar rate as men. We also suggest that future studies go beyond gender norms and explore barriers faced by employees/archetypes based on their race, ethnicity, or culture (e.g., Agyemang & Singer, 2014).

Despite the important contributions provided by this study, there are limitations. Although a large number of sport employees participated, the data captured using a cross-sectional design only represent their perceptions for a moment in time, which limits our ability to predict behavior over time. Longitudinal data collection or a research design that follows individuals or cohorts of employees would be helpful for overcoming this limitation.

Additional research should address how race and sexual orientation impact employee experiences in the sport industry, which were conspicuously absent within participant narratives. This absence does not mean these factors are not meaningful or salient, but rather the survey prompt did not elicit responses addressing this important issue. Research documents sport being governed by heteronormative traditions that favor the dominant group and marginalize, oppress, and "protect" minority groups (Cunningham, 2010; Schull, Shaw & Kihl, 2013; Walker & Melton, 2015; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). This was present within the current study as almost 90% of the sample was White/European American and over 90% of the sample was heterosexual. Intentional examination of underrepresented minority work experiences will provide intersectional insight into developing human capital within this distinct work environment.

Future research should examine additional work experiences and behaviors (e.g., turnover intent, coping strategies) of employees across the sport industry in order to continue to build more complete archetypes of employees. Although research across different sectors of the sport industry suggests a similar culture (i.e., long hours, low pay), it would be worthwhile for researchers to explore different levels of sport (e.g., professional sport, recreation) in order to decipher similarities and differences across the industry. A number of participants used language of "work as a lifestyle," which may imply the pressure for an all-consuming lifestyle that is not necessarily isolated to specific institutions, but is rampant within the entire vocational outlet. A future examination of workplace culture, especially an overwork culture, across intercollegiate athletics would be meaningful. Finally, a future study would be well positioned to examine antecedents to these outcomes and the involvement of coping strategies used to improve or worsen work experiences in the industry with deeper exploration of emergent variables of significance (e.g., flexibility, family, and gender).

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