Antecedents for Interrole Conflict in the High School Teacher/Coach

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Abstract

Antecedents for interrole conflict between the teaching role and coaching role for the high school teacher coach (TC) were examined. It was expected that younger TCs, those in smaller schools, TCs with more coaching jobs, or TCs with an unbalanced role preference will experience more conflict between the teaching and coaching role. Using regression analysis, the results suggest that school size, age, role preference, and number of coaching jobs were significantly related to total interrole conflict. Surprisingly, the relationship between the number of coaching jobs and interrole conflict was negative, when it was hypothesized to be positive. Discussion of the impact of each antecedent is given.

An important and frequently studied relationship in the world of high school coaching is the effects of coaching on teaching, and vice-versa. Past studies have found role overload, role ambiguity, and interrole conflict to be common experiences for the teacher/coach (Capel, Sisley, and Desertrain, 1987; Drake & Hebert, 2002; Locke & Massengale, 1978). While some work has been done advancing the presence and consequences of role conflict, less work has been done on the antecedents to role conflict for the high school teacher/coach (TC). Therefore, to add to theory on interrole conflict and to practically assist managers of athletics with supervision of personnel, it is beneficial to examine factors that may correlate with interrole conflict. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of various characteristics —specifically, age, school size, role preference, and number of coaching roles—on interrole conflict between the teaching and coaching roles of high school teacher/coaches.

Conceptual Background

Teaching and coaching

Teachers in primary and secondary schools represent 4% of the U.S. civilian workforce (Ingersoll, 2002) and teachers that coach may be the largest sub-group within high school teachers (Sage, 1987). Additionally, The National Federation of State High School Associations reported over 6.9 million participants in high school sport during the 2003-2004 school year (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2004). Therefore, TCs have an opportunity to influence a large number of youth, both in the classroom and in the athletic arena.

Both in qualitative and quantitative studies, coaching and teaching have been found to be stressful careers, prone to role overload (Capel et al., 1987; Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998; Locke & Massengale, 1978; Massengale, 1981; Scantling, & Lackey, 2005). Studies of teachers have not produced the same results as those of TCs, and one might expect that the population characteristics of TCs to be different than those non-coaching teachers. For example, teachers are frequently studied in the stress literature, and they have repeatedly been found to be high in stress and burnout (see Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998 for analysis). However, Drake and Hebert (2002) cited literature that TCs are lower in burnout than teachers (e.g., Capel et al., 1987 among others). An additional difference is that many TCs enter teaching in order to continue to be involved in sports through coaching (Sage, 1987); whereas, regular teachers would not have that motivation.

Unlike most of their major college counterparts, a majority of high school coaches work a full time job in addition to their coaching duties as schools frequently attempt to fill their coaching positions with teachers (Covell, 1998). This "double duty" could predictably cause role overload for the school employee (Locke & Massengale, 1978, Templin, 1989). As mentioned above, interrole conflict between the teaching and coaching role—along with possible intrarole conflict for multiple-sport coaches—has been shown to be an area of high organizational stress (Locke & Massengale, 1978). In spite of the stress, many TCs report high satisfaction in coaching, (Sage, 1987).

Although it is considered a part-time role, the coaching role frequently is the dominant role as social support, and intrinsic and extrinsic rewards are associated more with coaching by TCs (Sage, 1987). Often TCs have admitted to giving the coaching role greater attention and effort (Drake & Hebert, 2002; Sage, 1987); this may be especially true as the coaching role becomes an identity for the TC. Moreover, the TC may be more well-known for his/her coaching role throughout the school and community (Sage, 1987). As the coaching role becomes more salient, it is possible that it would become firmly established as the more preferred role. Of interest to the current study is what the relationship is between role preference and interrole conflict for the high school coach.

Interrole conflict

Interrole conflict is the simultaneous occurrence of two (or more) sets of pressures or expectations such that compliance with one would make compliance with the other role difficult (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal, 1964). Significantly, the consequences of interrole conflict include lower job satisfaction and higher turnover intentions (Hom & Kinicki, 2001). Because of the unique pressures and commitments involved in teaching and coaching, high school TCs report high levels of interrole conflict (Locke & Massengale, 1978; Sage, 1987). Since the teaching profession reports a high amount of turnover (Ingersoll, 2002), it is not surprising that high amount of TCs express a desire to leave either the coaching role, teaching role, or both (Sage, 1987). Therefore, it is beneficial to examine possible antecedents to interrole conflict.

A review of the literature suggests several antecedents to role conflict. Role overload leads to greater perceived role conflict (Kahn et al., 1964), which aligns with past research on TCs (Locke & Massengale, 1978). The more coaching roles one experiences, the more overload is expected in the coaching role, and the greater frequency that an individual coach will deal with members outside the school (i.e. officials, parents, fans, coaches) and within the school (i.e. other coaches, athletic director, transportation director, players). Consequently, the number of coaching roles is expected to relate positively to interrole conflict.

Additionally, the size of the school is expected to be related to interrole conflict for multiple reasons. Logically larger schools have a greater number of teachers able to cover teaching and non-teaching responsibilities. For example, a math department with two teachers will have to prepare for a variety of classes and have to divide up various administrative duties. A math department with eight individuals could allow for specialization in the teaching assignment, and teachers can divide up committee membership and other administrative duties among more people. Within the coaching role, larger schools are more likely to assist coaches in administrative duties such as field or gym maintenance. Larger schools will also likely have a larger coaching staff within sports to divide up administrative and coaching duties. Because role overload can lead to role conflict (Kahn et al., 1964), school size is expected to relate negatively to interrole conflict.

In reviewing the effects of age, Locke & Massengale (1978) found that the amount of experience related to role conflict. One might expect that since age would generally relate to experience, that younger TCs would report higher amounts of interrole conflict than older TCs. This

may be because when one has recently entered the teaching and coaching profession, all teaching lessons, scouting reports, practice schedules, and other preparations must be created. During subsequent seasons these items only need modification and less time can be spent in doing them. Therefore, since time requirements may be lowered, role conflict should be lower. An additional reason that age would be related is that older TCs have managed to cope with the two roles or else they may have already withdrawn from one, or both, of the roles. Therefore it is expected that age will be negatively related to interrole conflict.

In a study on small college TCs, Decker (1988) examined the effects of the TCs role preference between teaching, coaching, or both, on various facets of role conflict. When more effort is exerted toward one role or more satisfaction is gained from one role, an individual may perceive the "lesser" role as conflicting with the preferred role (Ryan & Sagas, 2006).

Marks and MacDermid (1996) found that the more mindful an individual is of all the roles, the more likely the individual will be to fully engage in all roles. This positive role balance allows individuals to approach roles with attentiveness, while those with a negative role balance will disproportionately give some role(s) significant attention while fully disengaging or becoming apathetic in the performance of other roles (Marks & MacDermid, 1996; Voydanoff, 2002). Therefore, it is expected that a coaching preference or strong teaching preference will be negatively correlated with interrole conflict.

As a review, interrole conflict has been shown to be a source of stress in various professions and to lower job satisfaction. Specifically, TCs are especially vulnerable to conflict between the coaching and teaching role. The hypothesized factors that correlate to role conflict will now be examined.

Hypotheses

The first two factors that are expected to correlate with higher interrole conflict are the size of the school and the number of coaching jobs because of the number of tasks involved. As previously mentioned, it is expected that in larger schools, a larger staff will allow for greater specialization within a role and a greater ability to share work with other members. Within the coaching realm, a track coach at a small school may only be part of a staff of two or three. Therefore a coach may have to prepare distinct workouts for various events (e.g. hurdlers, throwers, and jumpers). Whereas a school with a larger staff may allow a coach to focus in on one specific event (e.g. sprinters) which would allow for less time spent planning each workout. Additional roles may be accumulated for coaches at smaller schools if the coach also must perform maintenance on the field/court, be the athletic trainer, and be responsible for equipment repairs. Larger schools are more likely to have individuals assist in this area, or have a larger staff to distribute the work load.

In the same way that larger staffs in the coaching role may reduce the number of tasks, teachers in the classroom may also benefit by working at a larger school. For example, in a math department with only two or three teachers, the teachers are more likely to teach and prepare for a greater number of subjects each day than a school district with five or six math teachers. When administrative duties and committee responsibilities are added, it is not difficult to expect that teachers at small schools may be expected to fulfill a greater number of roles. This role overload may lead to greater role conflict (Kahn et al., 1964).

Therefore, because of the reasons mentioned above, TCs at smaller schools will be expected to experience more interrole conflict. The following is offered to assist this relationship.

Hypothesis 1: For the high school teacher/ coach, size of school is expected to negatively correlate with interrole conflict.

It is reasonable and logical to expect that as an individual takes on more roles, there is a greater potential for interrole conflict. Therefore, as a TC accumulates a greater number of coaching roles, the potential grows for conflict between the teaching and coaching role. Additionally, the TC who may feel overwhelmed by the number of coaching roles can easily withdraw from one or two coaching jobs as coaching contracts generally are signed for each individual sport. Therefore it is expected that a TC who has a greater number of coaching roles will perceive a greater amount of interrole conflict between the teaching and coaching role. The following is offered to assist in this relationship.

Hypothesis 2: For the high school teacher/ coach, the number of coaching roles will be positively correlated to interrole conflict.

The next factor that is expected to correlate with interrole conflict is age. While this has been supported in past role conflict studies (e.g. Nevill & Damico, 1977) several major reasons are offered for this relationship. First, with age comes experience, and for younger TCs a greater amount of time in preparation is expected, while for older TCs a familiarity with the classroom and high school sports would likely decrease the need for extensive preparation.

A second reason for lower perceived conflict among older TCs could also be attributed to older individuals have had a greater opportunity to attain preferred teaching and coaching roles while younger TCs may have to "pay their dues." During this time for younger TCs, the assignments may not be what they desire.

A final suggestion offered by Nevell & Damico (1977) is that extraneous factors such as starting a family or young children may cut down on a young teacher's opportunity or desire to take work home. For consideration of all these factors, age is expected to be a factor in the TCs perception of interrole conflict. The following is offered to assist in this relationship.

Hypothesis 3: For the high school teacher/ coach, age will be negatively correlated with perceived interrole conflict.

The final variable, role preference is built on the works of Decker (1988) and Marks and MacDermid (1996) mentioned previously. It is expected that those TCs that show a balanced preference will perceive less conflict as they are able to more fully engage in both roles. The following is offered to assist in this relationship.

Hypothesis 4: For the high school teacher/ coach, TCs that show a balanced role preference will perceive less conflict than other TCs.

To assist in review, Figure 1 has been provided to summarize the expected relationship between the independent variables with interrole conflict. The +/- signs show the expected positive/negative relationships between the variables. Measures used shall be explained in the following sections.

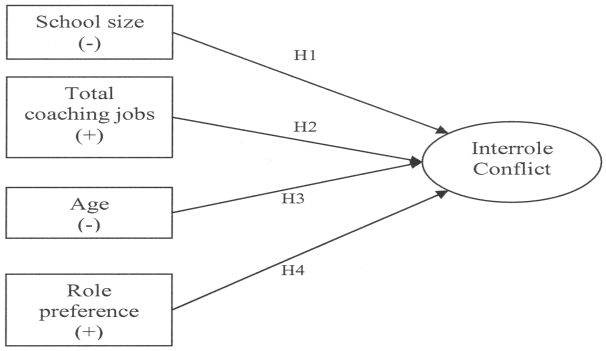
Methodology

Participants

The data were collected through a web-survey questionnaire as part of an overall study on interrole conflict. After receiving an email pre-notice of the survey, 635 coaches received the web address and password to the web-based questionnaire in an email. After an initial follow up, a second follow up allowed TCs the option of requesting a paper form of the questionnaire. Of this sample, 153 web-based questionnaires were started, with 135 satisfactorily completed. Twelve respondents requested and returned paper questionnaires. A total of 147 surveys were usable (23%).

While a low response rate could affect the generalizability of a study (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000), the response rate is consistent or better than many other web surveys (Crawford, Couper,

Figure 1—Hypothesized Figurative Model of Independent Variables with Interrole Conflict.



& Lamias, 2001), and not unusual for these types of surveys (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). However, one benefit of the web-based survey is the ability to glean information from respondents who abandon the survey before completion, allowing an examination of information that would not be possible in a paper and pencil questionnaire (Crawford et al., 2001). While non-respondent information may not be known, it is possible to compare four groups of respondents to check the representativeness of the participants with an early response group, late response group, paper and pencil response group, and an abandonment group. In an examination of the four groups, no significant differences between groups was found for the first seven questions that composed the first computer page. This suggests that a non-response bias may not be a problem in the study data (Miller & Smith, 1983).

Measures

To assess interrole conflict, ten questions were modified from a questionnaire developed by Kopelman, Greenhaus, & Connolly (1983) used to assess work-family conflict. This questionnaire has been used by others in studies of interrole conflict, including Hom and Kinicki (2001) in a study on turnover within organizational sciences, and has been found to have a coefficient value (Cronbach's α) between 0.78 and 0.90 (Fields, 2002). As the original instrument was developed for work-family conflict, the modification of the instrument to measure interrole conflict seemed appropriate, as work-family conflict is a special type of interdomain conflict (Kirchmeyer, 1992).

Interrole conflict was the mean between two facets: Teaching interference with coaching and coaching interference with teaching. Reliability estimates for both facets of interrole conflict were acceptable for (Cronbach $\alpha > .83$).

Total number of coaching jobs was the sum of head and assistant coaching positions. Age was grouped into four categories of approximately ten years each. This is similar to Nevill and Demico (1977) who portioned age into three groups in their study of role conflict in women. Specifically, TCs under 34 were scaled as a 0, 35-44 scaled as a 1, 45 to 54 were scaled as a 2, and 55 and up were scaled as a 3. School enrollment size was a five item scale approximately based on school classification system of one of the high school state associations. The smallest school size received a scale of 0, while the largest was scaled a 4.

Role preference was measured by asking TCs to rate themselves along a scale from one to seven. The variable was transformed to a dichotomous variable split between those who showed an equal preference for teaching versus those who showed preference for coaching or teaching. For scoring purposes, those TCs that showed a teaching or coaching preference received a 1, whereas those who were neutral or balanced in their preference scored a 0.

Data Analysis

Linear regression was used for the testing of the hypotheses. While bivariate correlations only compare the relationship of two variables in isolation, regression allows an entire system of variables to be statistically analyzed to determine if a hypothesized model represents the data under investigation (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000).

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 1. It was predicted that role preference, age, school size, and number of coaching jobs would be significantly related to interrole conflict. Regression results indicate support for the expected impact of the variables on interrole conflict. Standardized beta weights for the variables include role preference ($\beta = .21$), total coaching jobs ($\beta = -.19$), age ($\beta = -.25$) and school size ($\beta = -19$) ($p < .05$ for all variables; $R^2 = 16\%$). Results indicate that TCs that preferred coaching or teaching experience more conflict than those who showed no preference or a balanced preference. As a reminder, those who showed a preference were scored with a 1 compared to a 0 score for those with a balanced preference. Likewise, age and school size were significantly and negatively related to interrole conflict. The number of coaching jobs was significantly related to interrole conflict, but unexpectedly in the wrong direction, as it was expected that more jobs would mean more interrole conflict. Therefore hypotheses 1, 3, and 4 were supported, and hypothesis 4 showed a significant relationship, but not in the expected direction predicted by the hypothesis.

Discussion

Past work on interrole conflict has focused predominantly on the consequences within a job situation (e.g. Hom & Kinicki, 2001), or the special case of work-family conflict (e.g. Greenhaus & Beutel, 1985). For TCs interrole conflict between the coaching and teaching role has been perceived to be problematic at the high school level (Locke & Massengale, 1978; Sage, 1987). Therefore, an examination of possible antecedents may assist in a practical and theoretical sense.

The first hypothesis was built on a comparison to school size and perceived interrole conflict. It was expected that TCs in smaller schools would take on more tasks and administrative/custodial type of duties than their counterparts at larger schools who would likely benefit from larger staffs. Larger staffs likely met a delegation of responsibilities, not only in coaching, but also in the classroom. Results confirmed hypothesis 1 as a significant and negative relationship was found within the regression model, suggesting that TCs at smaller schools perceive more interrole conflict between teaching and coaching.

The relationship between the number of coaching jobs and interrole conflict was the basis for the second hypothesis. A positive correlation was expected showing that more coaching jobs led to more perceived conflict. Although the relationship was significant, it was negative, suggesting that those TCs who take on more coaching jobs experience less conflict. While this was unexpected, there may be some possible explanations for the relationship.

First, it may be that coaches who have felt overwhelmed with multiple coaching jobs in addition to a full time teaching jobs attempt to alleviate the conflict by withdrawing from a coaching responsibility. While this may be a solution for part of the school year, the TC may still feel conflict during the season. A second related explanation may be that those TCs who

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations, of All variables used in analysis (N = 147)

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4
1. Interrole conflict	3.57	1.42				
2. School size	2.71	1.32	.-12*			
3. Total coaching jobs	1.54	.62	-.16**	-.12*		
4. Age	1.15	.98	-.26***	-.03	.02	
5. Role preference	.60	.49	.19**	.11*	.07	-.07
Notes. * p < .1. **p <.05. ***p<.01. R^2= 15.8%.						

have found a way to cope with the intense role load continue to coach for multiple seasons. Their coping methods may include differential commitment (Sage, 1987) which allows a partial withdrawal from one of the roles—usually the teaching role—to handle the conflict. Or, the TC may be outstanding in delegation or planning and able to handle multiple roles. Indeed further examination is necessary to explain this result.

Another possible explanation is that those individuals who spend off-season time preparing for the new role do not have an established time to work on their coaching role. More coaching roles may not mean more time, but instead more regularity of the roles. Whereas during the season, a coach feels justified in establishing time to prepare for the coaching role, out of season the work may continue for the coach, however the justification and establishment of time may have lessened.

The third hypothesis was built on the relationship between age and interrole conflict with older TCs perceiving less interrole conflict than younger TCs. As predicted, this relationship was significant within the regression model. As age is often highly correlated with experience, the experience within the classroom and athletic arena are expected to assist in preparation and coping with interrole conflict. Additionally, extraneous factors may also affect the TC role conflict as younger TCs may be more likely to have young families at home. This may reduce work time away from the school which forces the TC to feel conflict between the other significant roles.

Finally, hypothesis 4 was a prediction that individuals that showed a balanced preference for both the teaching and coaching role perceived less interrole conflict than those who showed a preference for either teaching or coaching. Again, a possible explanation is that as preference for one role grows, the balance is lost. Therefore, the less preferred role may be *perceived* to be conflicting with the preferred role (often teaching). This may be that those TCs who have a balanced preference are able to engage better while performing one of the roles. This partially aligns with Marks and MacDermid's (1996) suggestion that individuals with disproportionate role balance are more likely to disengage from the less preferred role.

Taken collectively, the results indicate some suggestions for theory building and practical application. For athletic directors and principals, little can be done to control school size and the age of an individual. However, it is important to be aware that younger teachers may benefit from extra assistance, including mentorship. Also, the results suggest that some individuals are certainly

able to continue coaching multiple sports, while others are unable to do so. Additionally, it is often a common practice in high schools for coaches who are out-of-season to assist other sports (e.g. weight room supervision, crowd control, or scoreboard operator). Yet, it is important to realize that out-of-season coaches may not be able to fulfill all these duties. Finally, it is important to hire individuals with a strong commitment to both roles and to educate TCs of the importance of both roles within the educational system. Overemphasis on the coaching role, or belittlement of the coaching role, will likely lead to more conflict between the two roles. The most practical benefit these results suggest is the importance of role balance.

For theory building, a benefit of the results may be an understanding of role accumulation based on the size of business/school in role conflict. Therefore an individual who has many tasks, especially those non-related, may find him/herself more overwhelmed by the tasks than a specialist.

However, the results of the role preference may be beneficial to those exploring the way multiple roles affect each other. Commonly studied in work-family conflict, the balance/preference given to the roles may have a significant effect both positively and negatively. Unfortunately, most studies on role conflict or enrichment only look at two roles—work and family. However, the study of TCs may be more beneficial as TCs would likely have three significant roles—teaching, coaching, and family. Certainly further work in this area is warranted.

Limitations and future recommendations

Certain care needs to be considered when reviewing the results. As two of the continuous variables were categorized, more variance, and stronger validity should be found maintaining those variables as continuous. Additionally, the measuring tool for role preference needs to be modified as a single item scale may not be accurate or strong enough to capture the unique variance of individuals. Finally, as previously mentioned, a lower response rate than desired was found. However, a benefit of using a web-based survey allowed for testing the generalizability of respondents through the comparison of four unique groups: early responders, late responders, paper-and-pencil responders, and abandonment non-responders. No differences were found among any of the groups which suggest adequate generalizability.

However, in spite of these weaknesses, this research establishes the need for future study in interrole conflict. Specifically, the school-size effect, which implies that those who specialize in few items will experience less conflict than those who must do many tasks, should be examined in the future. Additionally, the differences between in-season conflict versus off-season conflict may prove beneficial.

In addition, the effects of role balance needs further exploration, especially on the impact on conflict and enrichment between roles. Currently, promising work is being done on the way roles enrich other roles (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Rothbard, 2001; Voydanoff, 2002) and role balance will likely play a prominent role in this venture.

Additionally, the effects of the community and type of schools could be considered in future research. Future research questions could explore the effects of private versus public schools and subject area taught. As previously mentioned, because of the number of young lives that are impacted by TCs and the high turnover intentions of teachers and TCs (Ingersoll, 2002; Sage, 1987; Snyder, 1972), general quality of life indicators should be researched. (Van Der Doef, & Maes, 2002).

Summary

For high school teachers and coaches, interrole conflict is stressful and prevalent (Capel et al., 1987; Locke & Massengale, 1978). In examining possible antecedents to interrole conflict in TCs, regression analysis was used to show that age, school size, and role preference were found to significantly relate with interrole conflict.

Unexpectedly, number of coaching jobs was negatively related to interrole conflict with those TCs coaching fewer sports perceiving more interrole conflict. Future research should examine these results for practical and theoretical purposes.

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