

The Role of Work and Family Autonomy to Promote Work-Nonwork Balance within College Sport

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Abstract

Employees are constantly considering their work and family needs when constructing and completing their daily tasks. Organizations can ease these stresses by embracing family-friendly policies or increasing their employees' flexibility on where, how, and when they address their work responsibilities. These changes will influence how an employee perceives their organization's support of family responsibilities, termed as family-support organizational perceptions. Family-supportive organizational perceptions (FSOP) has been defined as an employee's global perceptions on how supportive their organization is to the employees' family (Allen, 2001). FSOP research has increased in recent years (e.g., Casper et al., 2018) but there are still gaps within the literature that need further exploration. One such relationship that is especially important is the relationship between FSOP and employee autonomy (Thompson & Prottas, 2005). Work (or job) autonomy signifies to what degree an employee has control over how, when, and where a task is completed (Clark, 2001; Thompson & Prottas, 2005). Therefore, work autonomy can include several workplace flexibility options, such as remote work, and/or hybrid work options, and an employee's perceived control over their schedule. Work autonomy has been a more established concept in recent research (i.e., Casper et al., 2018), but there hasn't been a structured concept describing family autonomy. These concepts are paramount within the sport industry, especially the college sport industry, where they are substantial concerns about lack of work-nonwork balance (Huml et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2019; Weight et al., 2021) and family conflict arising from the lack of balance (Bruening & Dixon, 2007, Graham & Dixon, 2017). Therefore, we proposed the following hypotheses:

- H1: FSOP will indirectly relate to global balance through work autonomy.
- H2: FSOP will indirectly relate to global balance through family autonomy.
- H3: FSOP will indirectly relate to person-organization fit through work autonomy.
- H4: FSOP will indirectly relate to person-organization fit through family autonomy.

The purpose of this study is to examine how employee autonomy (work and family) can explain the benefits of family supportive organizational perceptions in the workplace. The sample consisted of 510 athletic department employees. The racial diversity of our sample is consistent with larger population statistics of intercollegiate sport (Lapchick, 2019). Measures used included the FSOP shortened scale (Wayne et al., 2013), work scheduling autonomy subscale (Breugh, 1985), newly-created family scheduling autonomy scale, global balance subscale (Wayne et al., 2021), and person-organizational fit (Cable & DaRue, 2002). We ran structural equation models to assess the relationship between FSOP, work autonomy, family autonomy, global balance, and person-organization fit. We used maximum likelihood estimation and MPlus version 8.8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2021).

Results showed FSOP had a significant, indirect relationship to global through both (a) work autonomy and (b) family autonomy. Additionally, FSOP had a significant, indirect relationship to P-O fit through work autonomy but was non-significant through family autonomy. The findings

show the importance of work and family autonomy as a means for employees to achieve global balance. Autonomy is allowing the employee to choose the where, when, and how they are completing their work. Indeed, the malleability of autonomy helps the employee to change the environmental ingredients necessary for them to achieve important work goals, a difficult daily schedule, altered life dynamics (children, aging parents, medical emergency), or other events. The introduction of family autonomy helps expand this discussion beyond workplace dynamics and into the employee's familial responsibilities. Similar to the theoretical benefits of work autonomy, increased family autonomy is providing the employee with more environment control to maximize their positive outcomes. Regarding P-O fit, the contrasting results shed important theoretical light on how employees perceive control over different life roles and how it aligns with P-O fit. Employees may hold their employer to a higher standard than their family when considering P-O fit. Whereas their employer's organization needs to provide the flexibility to achieve more non-work activities, but those same expectations are not conveyed on their family.