

Harmony in my practice, conflicts in my head: Values squeeze and job satisfaction of strength and conditioning coaches



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INTRODUCTION: Professional integrity has been related to espoused personal values, moral concerns and deeds (e.g. Orvik et al, 2015). Personal values can in turn shape professional and ethical behaviours, and how individuals conceptualize, contemplate, and prioritize their work.

Some professions face organizational constraints where organizational values are at odds with personal and professional values, a situation described as values 'squeezing' (Orvik et al, 2015) or 'refraction' (Wright et al, 2017). These elements of professionalism are rarely explored in strength and conditioning (e.g. Massey & Maneval, 2014).

Not surprisingly, it is unclear how strength and conditioning coaches (SCCs) acquire and apply professional values, and how they reconcile personal and professional values with organizational values.

PURPOSE: This exploratory qualitative study sought to understand the professional values of SCCs and their relationship to personal and organizational values.

METHODS: Using convenience sampling, eleven full-time SCCs (M= 7.3 yrs. experience) from US NCAA Div-1 collegiate athletic programmes, agreed to participate in face-to-face interviews. These sought interpretations of personal and professional values in their workplaces.

Using grounded theory, we transcribed and analyzed interviews with open coding, then focused coding to 'sift, sort and synthesize' key themes (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138).

Participants shared:



- a professional value of beneficence
- that organizational expectations were often perceived to conflict with personal values
- their frustrations at the perceived status of the profession – they want to be professionally respected
- focusing on micro-credentialing & boundary work to enhance professional credibility



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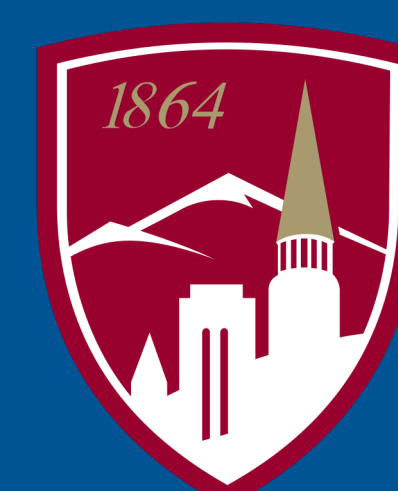
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FINDINGS:

The SCCs professed that they:

- held strong nurturing values acquired organically and often influenced by family and early mentors
- sought to facilitate holistic athlete wellness and wellbeing as well as performance objectives.
- often noticed 'values squeeze' when reconciling their work with the agendas and expectations of sport coaches
- experienced conflict with personal values relating to athlete care, and professional ideologies and values concerning best practice; e.g. management of injured athletes and use of conditioning to promote toughness
- perceived organizational misconceptions of their knowledge, skills, expertise and role that likely impacted on work conditions, expectations, and values' conflicts
- typically focused on protecting and advancing the integrity of their profession through educating others about the knowledge, skills, and capabilities of S&C professionals
- often sought to improve the standing of S&C by seeking input through 'seats at the table' within organisations, and by attempting to build harmonious interprofessional interactions within their organisations.

CONCLUSIONS:

- The intersection of personal and professional values were often a reason for choosing and enjoying S&C.
- Values squeeze was a source of disquiet, if not discontent, for some, which contributed to professional marginalization.
- There was confidence that educating others within organisations offered a positive pathway forward for S&C.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION:

- Improved communication, self-reflection, and educating others, allows SCCs to share their professional values with decision makers, and may help to reduce or remove values squeeze and improve the standing of the profession.