Impacts of Organizational Culture on Employee Turnover

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[Video Presentation](#)

Recent work on the college sport industry suggests "the Great Resignation is alive and well in college athletics", and because of the COVID-19 Pandemic, there is an "exhausted workforce" with many "ready to leave the industry" (Weaver, 2022, para. 1). Further, Huml and Taylor (2022) found a two-year turnover rate of 48% within college athletic department employees, which is double that of similar industries such as corporate sport business (27.75%) and higher education (14.2%). For this study, we examined the experiences of current athletic department employees across several organizational culture and climate variables including job autonomy, schedule control, work social support, family-friendly culture, job security and load, overwork climate, turnover intent. Next, we interviewed former college sport employees who left the industry to better understand their employee experiences and organizational culture and climate that ultimately led to their departure from the industry.

Quantitative Findings

A quantitative survey, housed in the Qualtrics survey platform, was sent to full-time employees who work in six NCAA Division I conferences. These conferences were selected as they were deemed most like the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC). Approximately 1,300 full-time employees completed the survey. There was an even split between men and women respondents (48.1% men, 49.9% women, .1% transgender men, .2% nonbinary, 1.7% prefer not to answer). Most participants self-identified as white (81.7%), with 7.5% identifying as Black/African American, and less than 5% identifying as American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Hispanic/Latino/a, Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, Bi/Multiracial, or preferred to self-describe. The average age of participants was 36.97 years old (SD = 11.13), and they had an average tenure in the industry of 11.68 years (SD = 9.32) and had worked in an average of 2.7 athletic departments (SD = 1.71). These demographics align with previous research from the college athletics industry (Lapchick, 2023, Taylor et al., 2023).

Quantitative measures in the survey examined the following variables: job behaviors, job satisfaction, family-supportive supervisor behaviors, perceived organizational support, work-family culture, global balance, job insecurity, quantitative workload, and turnover intent. For ease of understanding (as each variable is measured on a different scale), variable ranges and means appear in the table below. In all instances, higher means indicate perceived higher levels of the variable (e.g., a higher mean on the job control variable indicates higher perceptions of job control among participants). Overall, employees report high levels (as indicated by means over the halfway point) of job support and control, family-supportive supervisor behaviors, perceived organizational support, and work-family culture. Job insecurity and turnover intent are low. Conversely, the mean for quantitative workload is high, indicating an elevated level of required work for participants.

Variable / Range and response options	Mean
5-point, strongly disagree – strongly agree	
Family supportive supervisor behaviors, emotional support subscale	3.99
Family supportive supervisor behaviors, instructional support subscale	3.95
Family supportive supervisor behaviors, role model subscale	3.63
Family supportive supervisor behaviors, creative SF management subscale	3.50
Global balance	3.30
6-point, totally disagree – totally agree	
Job control	4.79
Job strain	3.72
Job support	4.48
Organizational turnover intent	2.79
7-point, strongly disagree – strongly agree	
Job satisfaction	5.43
Perceived organizational support	4.52
Work-family culture, managerial support subscale	4.78
Work-family culture, career consequences subscale	4.46
Work-family culture, organizational time demands subscale	3.54
3-point, yes, I'm not sure, no; Items are additive, range = 0-27	
Job insecurity	9.18
5-point, less than once/month or never – several times/day; Items are additive, range = 5-25	
Quantitative workload	17.90

When examining for impacts of job insecurity via regression analysis, job support (-), family supportive supervisor behaviors (+), perceived organizational support (-), the organizational time demands subscale of work-family culture (-), and workload (+) all had a significant impact. Additionally, job control (+), job strain (-), job support (+), the role models subscale of the family supportive supervisor behaviors (+), perceived organizational support (+), all work-family culture subscales (+ / -), and workload (-) all impact global balance.

Qualitative Findings

Recognizing the high turnover rate in the industry, the second part of the study focused on understanding *why* individuals were leaving the industry. Eighteen (nine men, nine women) former college sport employees from various institutions were interviewed. To be included in the study, individuals had to have previously worked in a collegiate athletic department for five or more years and had left the college sport industry. Themes derived from interviews can be used for athletic leaders to consider how to develop a work environment conducive to employees' evolving career and life priorities, career development, and job satisfaction. Each theme is represented with a descriptor and quote to capture the essence of the theme.

Evolving Career Priorities

Participants described how their career goals and priorities changed as they aged, got married, or started families, seeking a more balanced lifestyle.

> "My life pretty much revolved around my work... and then when I had my first child... that's when things really started to pivot for me when it comes to priorities and work." (Tina)

Desire for Growth and Autonomy

Participants reflected on their desire to find roles that offer greater professional growth.

> "I was done with the level of work that I was doing... I'm a person who constantly wants to grow…There's no training for the athletic department employees... There's a little bit of a disconnect on the employee experience between the university." (Francie)

Perception of Age and Career Longevity

Aging impacts how participants view their long-term careers in athletics, particularly when balancing family life and physical or emotional well-being.

> "For 27 years, I couldn't plan anything around Christmas time... my kids have never had a regular Christmas." (David)

Job Satisfaction and Perceived Value

Despite the challenges, participants often feel a sense of purpose and satisfaction from their roles, especially when they feel valued. However, when recognition is lacking or responsibilities increase without support, job satisfaction diminishes.

> "I was managing really important relationships and really important revenue streams, but it was just like, yeah kid, you just go down there and let us know if you need anything…You get a $5,000 raise and a $100,000 worth of work." (Bobby)

Application of Results

The findings from the quantitative and qualitative studies indicate college sport employees continue to engage in a high workload described by many in the qualitative study as a reason for leaving the industry. Additionally, while current employees indicated a high level of job support, control and family-supportive supervisor behaviors, and work-family culture, our interviews with former employees highlighted the unspoken "work first, personal life second" culture in college sports as either reasons for leaving or, after leaving the industry, they recognized how much of their personal life they had lost while working in college sports. These findings provide direction for the college sport industry to improve the retention of talented employees. Taking a proactive, action-oriented approach, we suggest three areas of action for the college sport industry, acknowledging career and life transitions, creating space for, and being intentional with learning and development programming for college sport professionals, including providing pathways for professional growth, and providing opportunities for college sport professionals to be recognized and shown they are valued.

Acknowledging Career and Life Transitions

College athletic department leaders need to acknowledge employees face many shifting life priorities (i.e., marriage, personal growth, etc.) in their professional careers which may require shifts in their work desires and needs. To assist with the life transitions, leaders should consider ways to accommodate the employee's life changes.

Being Intentional with Learning and Development Programing
College athletic department employees want to grow as individuals and leaders in both their respective areas of expertise and as professionals. As an industry, college athletics needs to incorporate a model similar to the private sector and make an intentional effort to provide holistic learning and development programming for their employees.

Providing Opportunities for Growth and Recognition
Many former college sport employees left the industry because they were not recognized and did not feel valued. The college sport industry needs to train leaders on how to recognize and show value to their employees.