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Creating a Healthy Space: Forensic Educators' Sensemaking about Healthy Tournament Management Practices



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Organizations are increasingly becoming concerned with the health and well-being of their members. To address these issues, organizations are creating wellness initiatives. One organization concerned with the well-being of its members is collegiate forensics. Forensic organizations have been working since the late 1990s to create formal and informal wellness initiatives to address the health of students and educators at forensic tournaments. The purpose of this study is to explore how collegiate forensic educators understand and implement these initiatives and the tensions they encounter. Collegiate forensic educators who host tournaments completed an open-ended qualitative questionnaire about formal and informal wellness initiatives. The findings suggest that educators struggle with the costs and logistics of tournaments and implementing these initiatives.

Keywords: forensics, wellness programs, health communication, organizational sensemaking

Health and wellness continues to be an important topic for businesses and universities as administrators reflect on the physical, mental, and economic strain poor health habits have on organizational member productivity (Anderson, Harrison, Cooper, & Jané-Llopis, 2011; Bopp & Fallon, 2013; Farrell & Geist-Martin, 2005; Geist-Martin & Scarduzio, 2011; Jack & Brewis, 2005; Langille et al., 2011; Michaels & Greene, 2013; Reger, Williams, Kolar, Smith, & Douglas, 2002; Watson & Gauthier, 2003). Not surprisingly, there is a reciprocal relationship between work and health; increasing work hours and work-related stress leads to poor health and poor health contributes to decreases in productivity and work quality and increases in absenteeism (Farrell & Geist-Martin, 2005).

These concerns have prompted administrators to encourage the adoption and implementation of organizational wellness initiatives. These initiatives can include fitness and nutrition classes, health referrals, ergonomic equipment, and employee assistance programs to address drug and alcohol abuse (Farrell & Geist-Martin, 2005); some organizations are even building on-site wellness centers so members can exercise before, during, or after work (Zoller, 2004). These initiatives, which often offer members bonuses for weight loss and the implementation of healthy habits, are designed to



promote health and wellness as well as increase productivity (McGillivray, 2005). From an organizational member perspective, these initiatives can increase satisfaction with work and the organization (Grawitch, Trares, & Kohler, 2007). Grawitch, Trares, and Kohler (2007) cautioned, however, that although it is important for organizations to implement initiatives to promote health, it is equally important to focus on the needs of organizational members (subordinates and supervisors) when designing the programs. For example, considering members' interests, level of health, and what they hope to get out of a wellness initiative should be taken into account when designing these programs in order to maximize involvement. Likewise, understanding how supervisors implement wellness programs, encourage participation among organizational members, and address problems is important to success.

One organization that has engaged in a discussion of wellness is the forensic organization. The forensic organization is a complex web of systems and subsystems (Holm & Miller, 2004), governed by formal and informal rules, rituals, and practices. Be it the larger forensic organization (represented by professional organizations such as the American Forensic Association and National Forensic Association) or individual teams,

There is a reciprocal relationship between work and health; increasing work hours and work-related stress leads to poor health and poor health contributes to decreases in productivity and work quality and increases in absenteeism.

communication scholars have examined a number of organizational communication issues related to the membership, practice, and pedagogy of forensics, including organizational culture (Derryberry, 1994; Doty, 2008; Friedly & Manchester, 2005; Miller, 2005; Parrott, 2005; Rowe & Cronn-Mills, 2005),

socialization and identification (Carmack & Holm, 2005; Croucher, Long, Meredith, Oommen, & Steele, 2009; Croucher, Thorton, & Eckstein, 2006), mentorship and leadership (Nadolski, 2006; Walker & Walker, 2013; White, 2005), and group dynamics.

Although the forensic organization is not completely analogous to other organizations (for example, students are not the same as workers), many of the same guiding organizational principles are at play. More importantly, the forensic organization and workplaces share a similar concern: the health and well-being of their members. The health of students and coaches in particular is important to maintain the well-being of the activity, meaning that the implementation of formal and informal health practices is of concern for forensic educators. An odd paradox exists in forensics; it is not uncommon to see competitors speak about the importance of health issues during competitive speaking rounds and then step out to smoke cigarettes and go all day without eating or eating poorly. The health and wellness of forensics competitors and educators has been a long discussed topic in the forensics community. Indeed, the topic was deemed so important that *National Forensic Journal* devoted a special issue to it in 2004. Most of the forensics research on health and wellness focuses on the negative impact of forensics competition



and coaching on physical and mental health (see Carmack & Holm, 2013, 2015; Dickmeyer, 2002; Leland, 2004; Olson, 2004b; Trejo, 2004).

Although the forensics community has discussed issues of wellness on the community, communication researchers have yet to explore how wellness initiatives are understood and implemented by forensic educators. The purpose of this study is to explore how educators understand and implement formal and informal healthy tournament management policies and the tensions that exist as they attempt to enact the practices. After a brief discussion of organizational approaches to wellness and the study methodology, I discuss forensic educators' understandings of healthy tournament practices. I conclude with a discussion of the findings.

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Literature Review

Wellness initiatives are typically guided by two philosophical approaches to health promotion (Shain & Kramer, 2004). The first philosophy assumes health is the result of individual characteristics and behaviors. This philosophy emphasizes personal health capital, or the idea that an individual can accrue benefits from making personal changes (such as replacing soda with water). This perspective often relies on a series of incentives and punishment to encourage organizational members to engage in health behaviors (Anderson et al., 2011). Examples of this include paying (or giving "health bonuses") organizational members who lose weight, stop smoking, or use in-house workout facilities. This philosophical approach can backfire, however, if the incentives and punishments are not in line with organizational members' beliefs about the organization. In 2013, Pennsylvania State University employees rebelled against a new university mandated wellness initiative that required employees submit to an annual biometric screening or pay a \$100 a month insurance charge (Flaherty, 2013). Administrators and the university's health insurance company also tried to charge a monthly \$75 surcharge to all employees who smoked. The wellness initiative was eventually discontinued, in part because of employees' actively providing false answers to the screening tool.

The second wellness philosophy approaches health and wellness from a more holistic view, assuming that health and wellness are the result of internal and external factors (Shain & Kramer, 2004). External factors can include a number of different things, such as socioeconomic status, access to healthy food and activities, and positive organizational attitudes toward organizational member wellness. Organizations with cultures that foster a positive wellness climate report more success in the implementation and impact of wellness initiatives (DeJoy & Wilson, 2003). The second philosophy is in line with many communication scholars, who argue that wellness be viewed as an organizational, not an individual, issue (Farrell & Geist-Martin, 2005; Geist-Martin, Horsley, & Farrell, 2003).



Communication researchers examining wellness initiatives have almost exclusively focused on organizational members' reasoning for using and understanding of wellness programs (Farrell & Geist-Martin, 2005; Parker, 2009; Parker & Spinda, 2007; Zoller, 2003, 2004). Relying on case study approaches, researchers have identified a number of often conflicting communication issues which influence the acceptance of wellness initiatives. One of the major concerns is a disconnect between the meaning of the wellness initiative and how members make sense of the initiative. Organizations often publicly tout wellness initiatives as a way to promote healthy behaviors (Langille et al., 2011), including the importance of socializing and "having fun" with other organizational members (Farrell & Geist-Martin, 2005). However, this is not always how organizational members perceive them. Supervisors and subordinates both reported that the main message communicated is one of cost reduction (Parker, 2009; Parker & Spinda, 2007). In these instances, the health and wellness of organizational members is not communicated as an organizational priority.

Tied to the meaning disconnect is organizational members' attitudes about wellness initiatives. Although communication researchers suggest that organizational members are not outright hostile to wellness initiatives, attitudes are also not positive. At best, organizational members appear to be skeptical or ambivalent about these initiatives (Parker, 2009). In more extreme cases, as Zoller (2003, 2004) found, organizational members believed the programs were designed to divide members, creating resentment and concertive control (where peers, rather than managers, control each other; Barker, 1993). These organizational members believed that wellness initiatives were just another way for the organization to control and discipline them. These ambivalent and negative attitudes may be a result of organizational members' needs not being incorporated in the wellness initiative design process (Grawitch et al., 2007). Zoller's (2003, 2004) participants specifically stated that they would be less skeptical about these initiatives if they had been included.

Another conflicting communication issue is structural constraints. Organizational members reported the ways organizational life is structured makes it too difficult to participate. These reasons included job demands, shift schedules, and heavy workload (Parker, 2009). All of the wellness programs these authors examined involved optional member participation, meaning that organizational members could decline participation in these programs. In some cases, members did not want to spend "free time" with other organizational colleagues (Parker & Spinda, 2005). Why participate in something extra if there is no reason or requirement to do so? This also contradicts the public message some organizations use to promote wellness initiatives as social opportunities (Farrell & Geist-Martin, 2005).



Wellness in the Forensic Organization

In his poetic reflection on forensics and wellness, Alexander (2004) paints a picture of what competitors and coaches encounter on a weekly basis:

But I am thinking about donuts for breakfast, fast foods for lunch and pizza for dinner. I am thinking about late tournament ends and early beginnings. I am thinking about district wide travel in university cared for vehicles. I am thinking about long drives and late night departures. I am thinking about seat belts. I am thinking about Minnesota winters and rocky terrains. I am reminded of accidents, and injuries, and deaths. I am thinking about the caution of caring and the culpability of not caring. (p. 9)

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Alexander's poem critically questions the health choices competitors and coaches are presented with when attending a tournament. Forensic educators are not ignorant to these dilemmas. For example, Trejo (2004), while reflecting on an anecdote where she encountered competitors eating pecans off the ground because of the lack of food options at a tournament, argued that coaches can directly control nutrition at tournaments and promote healthy behaviors. Eating habits is only one issue encountered by members of the forensics community. Stress, mental health issues such as depression, weight gain and loss, and malnutrition are also concerns (Alexander, 2004; Dickmeyer, 2002; Leland, 2004; Trejo, 2004). Most of the examinations of these issues are presented in the form of personal narratives, so the extent to which they are experienced by coaches and students nationwide is unclear. In one of the few empirical studies of forensic educators and health, coaches reported high levels of stress and burnout, which contributed to them actively considering leaving the activity (Carmack & Holm, 2013, 2015). Coaches reported receiving some social support from colleagues and families (Carmack & Holm, 2013, 2015), but because the lack of wellness in forensics is a systemic problem (Olson, 2004b), social support will not be enough to address these health issues.

Poor eating habits, stress, mental health issues such as depression, weight gain and loss, and malnutrition are concerns for members of the forensics community.

As a response in the 1980s and 1990s to the growing concern of the health of forensic educators and students, the American Forensic Association crafted the AFA-NIET wellness initiatives for tournament hosting in 1997 (AFA, 1997).¹ Designed to be a guide for forensic educators in the quest for health promotion, the AFA-NIET tournament director wellness initiative is comprised of eight recommendations which outline strategies for tournament direction and planning. The recommendations include (1) considering regional activity when scheduling a tournament, (2) scheduling tournament

¹ A wellness initiative for coaches and directors was approved in 1998.



rounds to start no earlier than 8:00 am and no later than 6:30 pm, (3) scheduling in meal breaks for competitors, (4) making available healthy food choices during the tournament, (5) hiring enough judges so that coaches can have judging breaks, (6) providing a lounge area for competitors, coaches and judges to rest, (7) promoting activities that encourage wellness, and (8) offering competitors alternative options to pentathlon sweepstakes so that competitors do not have to enter as many events (Workman, 2004). Olson (2004a) described in more detail how forensic educators could integrate wellness into tournaments, heavily emphasizing the importance of providing food, beverages, and breaks for students. To date, the AFA-NIET wellness initiative is the only publicly available health-related organizational document from any forensic organization.

Organizational Sensemaking

Examining how organizational members understand organizational policy, practices, and beliefs and how that understanding impacts how members exist in the organizational world is the foundation of Weick's (1995) organizational sensemaking perspective. Weick (1979) originally posited that the hallmarks of organizational life—ambiguity, uncertainty, and disruption—ruled members' understanding and action. As members of an organization, members must find ways to reduce uncertainty, turn ambiguity into concrete action, and calm disruptions. To be successful in any organization, all members must find a way to “wade into the ocean of events that surround an organization and actively try to make sense of them” (Daft & Weick, 1984, p. 286). Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) argued that two questions helped organizational members: (1) how does something come to be an event for organizational members? and (2) what does the event mean? There are a number of different events which members encounter, including the creation and implementation of formal and informal organizational policies and practices (Dougherty & Smythe, 2004).

Organizational sensemaking operates under two major premises. First, in order for members to make sense of organizational life, they must follow a sensemaking “recipe”, formal and informal guides to help them interpret, enact, and maintain the rules,

Although many forensic competitors and educators may be able to articulate healthy practices, there are still well-established unhealthy shared experiences, such as smoking circles between rounds.

practices, and beliefs of the organization (Weick, 1995). Importantly, these “recipes” may not always reduce uncertainty, and in some cases, may create more ambiguity for organizational members (Heiss & Carmack, 2012). Members of the forensic organization are presented with a number of formal

and informal “recipes”, which mostly guide the competitive performances of students. As Paine (2005) pointed out, there are just as many informal rules for competition as there are formal rules, which often create ambiguity for student competitors. Second, it is



shared experiences, more than shared meaning, which creates the “glue” that connects organizational members and the organization (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). In the case of wellness in forensics, shared experiences and shared meaning are sometimes at odds. Although many forensic competitors and educators may be able to articulate healthy practices, there are still well-established unhealthy shared experiences, such as smoking circles between rounds. Integration of tournament wellness practices help to create shared experiences; the more students and educators attend tournaments with wellness practices, the more likely they might be to try to implement these at their tournaments.

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Organizational sensemaking is made of up seven properties: social activity, identity, retrospection, continuous, enactment, plausible, and cue extraction (Weick, 1995). First and foremost, organizational sensemaking is a social activity; it cannot occur with consideration of how organizational members experience organizational events with others. This is evident at the forensic tournament, where teams come together to not only compete but also to celebrate the activity. Identity is concerned with how organizational member situates themselves in the organization based on their interactions with others. How members define themselves in relation to the organization influences how they make sense of specific organizational events. Farrell and Geist-Martin (2005) argued that wellness is an organizational issue because it involves the integration of individual identities and organizational ideologies. For example, in the case of forensic wellness initiatives, the ways in which educators define their identities as coaches, educators, and mentors may influence how they enact healthy practices. In other words, do educators feel like it is part of being a forensic educator to worry about the health of competitors? Sensemaking is inherently retrospective because members make sense of things after they happen; however, it can also be prospective because organizational members use past events to anticipate how to respond to future events (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking is also a continuous act where contextualization is important given that past events influence present events.

How organizational members enact or carry out organizational practices and beliefs is highly influenced by organizational narratives (Weick, 1995). These narrative accounts of events, passed down to new organizational members, are instrumental in teaching members how to perform certain roles or carry out initiatives. The forensic organization has a long and rich history of using narrative to communicate organizational life to members (Orme, 2012). It is possible that tournament direction narratives may include discussions of healthy practices, and eventually become an engrained part of those narratives. Tied to enactment is cue extraction, where organizational members must determine what is important in a narrative. Many rules, practices, and beliefs are not explicitly communicated and it is up to the organizational member to determine what is important. Finally, organizational sensemaking emphasizes plausibility of interpretation. Sensemaking is not as much concerned with “accuracy”, primarily because members’



different identities and understanding of events makes it too difficult to determine a “correct” interpretation (Weick, 1995). Instead, sensemaking is concerned with whether the interpretation of an event is appropriate given the context of the event. In the case of wellness initiatives, this could be accomplished with how educators make sense of how they enact certain practices which speak to the spirit of a formal or informal policy. All of these properties are important for making sense of participation in the forensic organization and for how forensic educators make sense of organizational rules, policies, and practices.

Communication researchers have primarily examined how organizational members make sense of organizational wellness initiatives (Farrell & Geist-Martin, 2005; Parker, 2009; Parker & Spinda, 2007; Zoller, 2003, 2004) or the communicative strategies managers use to garner worker compliance (Freimuth, Edgar, & Fitzpatrick, 1993). Missing from the conversation is the impact of wellness policies on organizational practices and how managers implement these policies. Although communication scholars have been slow to develop an elaborate literature base on the role of communication in wellness initiatives, the examination of how formal and informal wellness practices are used to improve the health of forensic participants and educators is needed. Although forensics is not completely congruous to some of the organizations previously studied, the uniqueness of the forensic organization, coupled with the fact that formal and informal wellness practices exist, make it worthy of study. Specifically, this study is interested in the communicative practices and organizational tensions educators encounter when enacting these wellness practices. The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do forensic educators make sense of healthy tournament management practices?

RQ2: What tensions exist in attitudes about healthy tournament management practices and implementation?

Methods

Participants

Fifty-two collegiate forensics educators (21 females, 31 males) who host tournaments completed the online qualitative survey. Ages ranged from 20 to 64 years, with a majority falling in the 25 to 34 age range ($n = 21$). Participants were predominantly Caucasian ($n = 43$); a majority of participants had earned a Master's degree ($n = 22$) or doctoral degree ($n = 18$). Participants were primarily midlevel career coaches, coaching between four to six years ($n = 9$) and between seven and nine years ($n = 9$), or senior level coaches, coaching between 16 and 20 years ($n = 9$) or more than 20 years ($n = 9$). Participants' schools were affiliated with a wide range of forensic organizations,



including American Forensic Association ($n = 7$), National Forensic Association ($n = 9$), CEDA ($n = 18$), Pi Kappa Delta ($n = 4$), National Christian College Forensics Association ($n = 3$), National Parliamentary Debate Association ($n = 3$), Phi Rho Pi ($n = 3$), and other ($n = 5$).

Participants were also active in tournament direction. Forty-three participants had hosted a tournament in the last five years and 38 are hosting a tournament the year of data collection (2012-2013 competitive season). Directors host a variety of tournaments, including single school tournaments ($n = 35$), swing tournaments ($n = 22$), and state or nationally affiliated tournaments, such as state tournaments, Districts and/or MAFL ($n = 24$). Of the forensic educators hosting a tournament this year, 18 are hosting a single school tournament, 11 are hosting a swing tournament, and eight are hosting a state or nationally affiliated tournament. Nineteen directors are also hosting multiple tournaments, ranging from hosting 2-5 tournaments this competitive season, while 22 participants are hosting a tournament not associated with their university.

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Data Collection Procedures

After receiving university IRB approval, participants were contacted via e-mail and through forensics and communication list-servs. This ensured that educators from across the country and who were members of any of the forensic organizations were invited to participate. Forensic educators interested in participating were provided a Qualtrics link to an online open-ended qualitative survey. The open ended questions asked participants about their knowledge of healthy tournament policies, implementing of healthy tournament policies, healthy behaviors on teams, and benefits and challenges associated with implementing healthy tournament policies. Participants were also asked a number of demographic questions as well as to report on demographics about their teams and tournament direction.

Data Analysis

A constant comparative method was used to analyze open-ended survey answers (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), starting with data “reduction” and “interpretation.” A constant comparative method, as a part of grounded theory, requires researchers to “take control of their data collection and analysis, and in turn these methods give researchers more analytic control over their material” (Charmaz, 2002, p. 676). Taking control of data in an emergent thematic analysis meanings engaging in open coding to identify potential categories, refining and combining those categories into themes, and providing explanations for what themes mean (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). The constant comparative method allows researchers to identify recurring patterns of behavior and meaning in the participants’ accounts and performances. After reading all questionnaire responses, I began the “reduction” and “interpretation” stages of data, characteristic of the constant comparative method. The analysis process begins by manually coding the data. Constant



comparison of these data was continued until “theoretical saturation” was achieved (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 110). Organizational sensemaking emerged after the analysis as a theoretical lens through which to make sense of the findings. The themes presented emerged from the constant comparison of data. Reoccurring, repetitious, and forceful comments were showcased in the analysis in an attempt to explain the themes from the discourse (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). Comments are presented as written by participants; spelling, grammar, and mechanics are presented without editing.

Results

Twenty-two participants (55%) were aware of formal healthy tournament policies issues by the American Forensic Association (AFA), yet surprisingly, 67% of participants reported implementing healthy tournament policies, regardless if they were an AFA-affiliated school. Participants all identified health as the primary benefit to these policies. As one participant succinctly noted, “Everyone is happier when healthier.” Forensic educators saw the everyday health of competitors and coaches as a gateway to the health of the activity; many noted that healthy students perform better and are more likely to stay in forensics, healthy judges wrote better ballots, and healthy coaches are less burnt out. As one participant commented, “I think it’s better for the students and makes our activity more sane [sic] for schools and coaches.”

Forensic educators see two primary elements to healthy tournament management policies: time and food. A healthy tournament space is one that encourages healthy behaviors in competitors and coaches and is a well-balanced event. However, they negotiate balancing the benefits of implementing healthy tournament practices and the constraints of running an efficient tournament. Two tensions emerged from participants’ comments: (1) the price of health and (2) scheduling health.

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The Price of Health

Implementing wellness practices at tournaments is an expensive endeavor. For many of the participants, wellness was primarily implemented through food. Participants identified providing healthy food options to competitors, coaches, and judges as key to healthy tournament practices. The challenge became how to provide healthy food options for participants while finding money to cover the cost of food. One forensic educator told the story of supplying his team members with miniature Snickers bars and granola bars to help fuel students who do not have time to eat. These little actions are important, because as several participants noted, teams might not have time to eat a complete meal until after the tournament ends that day (which could be 8:00 pm or 9:00 pm). One forensic



educator provided an extensive list of what is needed for healthy food options: “food or time for students/coaches to get something to eat...healthy snack, providing water.” As many of the educators pointed out, providing food for competitors and coaches leads to higher quality presentations and ballots.

Forensic educators offer a number of options for competitors, coaches, and judges to eat during the tournament. Many of the educators noted that they provide breakfast for competitors and have healthy food options in the judges’ lounge. These are free to participants, but are an added expense to educators. One participant said,

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We provide food (nearly always free) to tournament participants. Sometimes pizza but I like to try to do Chinese food whenever possible. We also provide a breakfast (combination of good for you and bad for you foods) and snacks throughout the day.

Another educator “provide[s] cookies and lemonade and ice tea just as finals are being posted.” Although the first forensic educator points out that they do not always provide the healthiest options, it is important to note that this food is nearly always provided free of charge to competitors, coaches, and judges.

Although forensic educators recognize the importance of providing food options for competitors, coaches, and judges, they wrestle with the costs associated with providing healthy food. One participant articulated this tension: “Healthier food is typically more expensive and when working on a shoestring budget, something has to give.” As many directors are forced to do more with less (travel to tournaments, pay entry fees, etc. with smaller budgets), justifying the extra costs of paying for fresh fruit, vegetables, and bottled water is an added expense that may be the first to be cut. For another participant, the cost of food is compounded by university regulations:

Another major obstacle is that many universities require that we cater our events through their local food service, often raising the cost even further without really providing any major health benefit (healthy food isn’t healthy if the kids don’t eat it!) .

Some forensic educators have identified ways to offset the costs of food by including “admission to our cafeteria for tournament participants as part of the individual’s entry fees” or by “charg[ing] \$3 extra per person for lunch.” Many participants, however, say they “eat the cost” of providing healthy food options because it is important for competitors to be able to eat.

Scheduling Health

A second tension which arose for forensic educators is balancing how to create a healthy schedule with the demands of finding time for multiple events, running swing tournaments, and finding enough judges to judge events. One of the recommendations of



the AFA-NIET wellness initiatives is to offer tournaments which do not exceed 12 hours and provide coaches at least one round off from judging. Many educators strive to meet these standards, as one director pointed out, “Provide a reasonable tournament schedule that allows for breaks for judges...Rounds shouldn’t begin before 8:00 am and shouldn’t run more than 10-11 hours that day.” From scheduling in lunch and snack breaks to scheduling rounds to only have five competitors so that the rounds are shorter, forensic educators attempt to design tournaments which encourage healthy competition and healthy behavior.

For many of the participants, it is not enough to just schedule tournament days to be less than 12 hours or give coaches a round off. An important part of attending tournament is the energy needed to travel and many forensic educators take that into consideration when designing schedules and assigning judging. One educator stated that they try “to get people out in time to have a safe, earlier drive home”, while another explained, “I try hard to keep the coaches with the longest drives after the tournament out of the final rounds.” Although they do not specifically state it, travel requires healthy drivers (coaches and students); by giving coaches a chance to have a break, they can rest and safely return home.

Forensic educators run into problems however, when they attempt to integrate healthy tournament practices in the face of real logistical constraints. One participant clearly articulates the many constraints educators encounter when designing a schedule:

It’s not always possible to get enough rooms at the times we need them, thus tournaments run later than desired...The tournaments I run in this way are all 3 round/semifinal in IE and either 4/4 or 6/4 in parli, with additional events as well. People don’t want 4 day tournaments, yet want to be able to do myriad events (at one tournament, students choose to do as many as 9 events in a weekend, something I don’t encourage, but they can do so). It takes time to do those things.

The pressure to run multiple events was named as one of the major stressors for trying to

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include healthy tournament strategies in the schedules. Forensic educators described frustrations with attempting to allow students to compete in multiple events (although sometimes limiting the number of events per students) or to compete in both individual events and debate.

More than the pressure of managing multiple events, educators identified the culture of competition as a major constraint to implementing healthy tournament practices. As one participant bluntly stated,



People continue to assume only “more” is “more” with number of events per weekend versus well being and quality of events. The emphasis is on quantifying the experience. People thing [sic] more rounds per dollar is a better justification than the quality of the experience. Also as people travel to fewer tournaments they need more rounds per experience to compensate.

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The ramifications of this tension are not lost on forensic educators, as they often find themselves changing schedules from three rounds to two rounds, hosting more swing tournaments, and limiting the number of entries a school can have. One educator’s comment illustrates the negative impact of balancing the culture of competition and healthy tournament practices:

Honestly, I think the never ending quest for AFA legs drives the “hurry up and get another tournament in” mentality. I grow weary of TDs [tournament directors] starting awards by saying, “I know its [sic] been a long day so I’ll hurry through this,” and attitudes like that seem to belittle the entire tournament process. If we don’t look at the tournament like a celebration of our student’s work, we will shortchange their experience in whatever ways possible.

Discussion

This study explored how forensic educators make sense of healthy tournament management practices and the tensions that arise as they attempt to implement these policies. Not surprisingly, participants struggled with the logistical issues associated with tournament scheduling, which confirmed Schnoor’s (2004) concern about implementing healthy practices. Schnoor (2004), although supportive of healthy tournament practices, was concerned especially about the logistics of hosting a tournament that allotted numerous breaks and did not overwork students and educators while still providing students numerous competitive opportunities. Participants added to the conversation with their discussions of the tensions associated with the cost of implementing healthy practices.

Awareness is an important organizational sensemaking factor to the success of healthy tournament factors. It was surprising that almost half of participants were unaware of such formal or informal practices. There are a number of reasons for why this may be the case, including not being an AFA-affiliated school or attending AFA-affiliated tournaments, or newness to tournament direction. Moreover, the lack of other forensic organizational policies about wellness initiatives could contribute to lack of awareness. Even if a school is not an AFA-affiliated school does not mean the school’s forensic educator has not been exposed to wellness initiatives or healthy practices. Lack of knowledge about healthy practices does not mean that forensic educators are not implementing these practices. Participants in this study, although not always being aware of formal organizational policies about health and wellness, were implementing healthy



practices at tournaments. The question then becomes: how can the forensics community raise awareness so that more members engage in these practices?

Tied to the discussion of awareness is the role of forensics organizations in creating initiatives and recommending health promotion practices. Some participants questioned whether this was even a topic appropriate for the forensics community to address. Scholars exploring wellness programs posit that these programs serve as a way to monitor and control workers (Jack & Brewis, 2005; McGillivray, 2005). Some organizational wellness programs discipline members who do not enact healthy behaviors, issuing sanctions or charging fees for those who do not lose weight, quit smoking, or eat healthy. This is not the case for forensic organizations, as the wellness initiatives are recommendations and there are not sanctions for educators who do not design tournaments to follow these recommendations. However, the participants' questions are valid. What is the role of the national forensic organizations and educators in promoting healthy behaviors? Olson (2004b) argued that educators are their team's role models, meaning they have a responsibility to promote and model health behaviors. But, can we expect them to promote healthy behaviors if they do not enact them, as well?

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The tensions related to the logistics of healthy tournament practices were particularly enlightening when considering the approach many coaches and students take to qualifying for nationals. Although educators are sensitive to their students' needs, the qualifying rules for national tournaments such as the AFA or NFA national tournament might not match forensic wellness initiatives. Be it working toward legs for AFA or qualifying enough events to triple or quadruple a student in one flight at NFA, the qualification requirements might make it difficult for educators to schedule tournaments where students are able to take advantage of healthy tournament practices. Can a team be nationally competitive and still maintain the health of students and educators?

Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations associated with this study. First, the sample size is small and only directors on forensic list-servs received the call for participants. It is possible there are more forensic educators who are not on the list-servs who could have participated in this study. The study was also limited to educators who had hosted a tournament during a specific time frame (2007-2013); coaches who took time off from hosting during that time were not able to participate in this study. Finally, I also did not ask about educators' funding for hosting; tournament budgets could impact how they are able to implement healthy practices.

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This study explored only one part of educators' forensic jobs—tournament direction. I did not ask questions about how educators encourage and implement healthy practices during practice or in students' non-forensics lives. Moreover, I did not focus on the personal healthy practices educators used themselves when not at tournaments. It might not matter if educators implement healthy tournament practices if they are not engaging in healthy practices when not at tournaments. One specific voice missing from this study is that of the forensic student—the person for whom wellness tournament practices were initially created. How do students feel about the integration of wellness tournament practices? Do they even know they exist?

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This study serves as a beginning to exploring the role of health and wellness in the forensics community. Because of the limited research on issues of health and wellness in forensics, there are many directions for future research. Specific to this line of research, scholars need to explore the health and wellness of competitors and their understanding of tournament wellness practices. Many participants mentioned that information about healthy tournament practices were communicated to competitors and coaches either in the invitation or the schematic. It would be interesting to study the messages in those documents to see how forensic educators are framing healthy tournament practices. Tied to this, we also need to explore team approaches to health. Implementing healthy tournament practices is one part of a competitor's wellness experiences, but what about when competitors are not travelling? The forensics community has long been interested in the well-being of its members. Understanding the organizational sense-making surrounding healthy tournament practices is a step in the right direction in order to understand the complex health discourses that impact competition and coaching.





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