

Impact of Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict on the Organizational Commitment of Managers

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Abstract— Development of human resources is essential for any organization that would like to be dynamic and growth oriented. Human resources development systems aim at creating such a climate that will likely increase organizational commitment and reduce occupational stress of the employees. Organizational commitment is sine qua non of a good manager who provide purposeful direction to the organization and manages its survival and growth. Managers widely differ in their commitment to their organization. Due to the increased job complexities and economic pressure, stress has become common in organizations. Stress in work place have a significant impact on commitment for organization. It can harm organizational commitment of employees. Major source of stress in the work environment is the work role or roles assigned to each employee. They can create stress as they conflict with the employees' own needs, values or abilities.

In the present study, an empirical attempt has been made to examine the impact of role ambiguity and role conflict on the organizational commitment of managers. For this Organizational commitment Scale developed and standardized by Meyer and Allen (1984) and Occupational Stress Index developed and standardized by Srivastava and Singh (1981) were administered on a sample of 200 managers of Tata Refractory Ltd., Belpahar, Jharsuguda, Orissa.

The appropriate statistics used in this study are mean, standard deviation, and critical ratio to find out the impact of role ambiguity and role conflict (two components of occupational stress) on the organizational commitment of managers.

The obtained results revealed the significant adverse effect of roe ambiguity and role conflict components of occupational stress on the organizational commitment of managers.

Keywords: Managers, Occupational Stress, Organizational Commitment, Role Ambiguity, Role Conflict.

I. INTRODUCTION

Organizational Commitment

Recently, organizational commitment attitude has emerged out of the research literature as being important to understanding and predicting organizational behavior. As an attitude, organizational commitment is most often defined as the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization (Porter & Smith, 1970). It can be characterized by at least three factors:

- (1) A strong desire to remain a member of a particular organization;
- (2) A willingness to exert high levels of effort on behalf of the organization; and
- (3) A definite belief in, and acceptance of, the values and goals of the organization.

In other words, this is an attitude reflecting employees' loyalty to their organization and is an ongoing process, through which organizational participants express their concern for the organization and its continued success and well-being.

The more committed an employee is to the organization, the greater the effort expended by the employee in performing tasks. In addition, highly committed workers are likely to remain with the organization for longer periods of time.

Finally, given the contribution a highly productive trained employee can make to an organizational productivity, keeping such an employee should be a high priority for the organization. Even non-organizational factors such as the availability of alternatives after making the initial choice to join an organization, will affect subsequent commitment.

This multidimensional nature of organizational commitment has led to growing support for a three-component model proposed by Meyer & Allen (1991). The three dimensions are as follows: -

- 1) Affective commitment involves the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization
- 2) Continuance commitment involves commitment based on the costs that the employee associates with leaving the organization.

3) Normative commitment involves the employee's feelings of obligations to stay with the organization.

There is considerable research support for this three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment.

Organizational commitment can be thought of as psychological attachment to, or identification with an organization. It reflects the degree to which the individual internalizes or adopts characteristics or perspectives of the organization.

The word commitment is often used in everyday language to denote the 'sense of being bound emotionally or intellectually to some course of action' (American Heritage Dictionary, 1979) which may include a person's relationship with another individual, group or organization.

Porter et al (1974) have defined commitment as, "The strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization. "

Sheldon (1971) & Buchanan (1974) saw commitment as "partisan, affective attachment to the goals and values of an organization; to one's role in relation to the goals and values and to the organization for its own sake, apart from its purely instrumental worth."

These two views of commitment have dominated the literature. The first sees commitment as affective or attitudinal.

On the other hand, Becker (1960) regarded commitment as behavioral rather than attitudinal. According to this view, the individual is bound to the organization through extraneous interests (e.g. pensions, seniority) rather than favorable affect toward organization.

O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) felt psychological attachment to the organization as degree to which individual internalize or adopts characteristics or perspectives of the organization.

Mowday and his associates (1982) have established role states as an antecedent of organizational commitment.

Mathieu & Zajac (1990) have talked about three specific role states, role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload. Employees working on enriched jobs and employees reporting low levels of role conflict and ambiguity tend to be more committed. They found negative correlation between stress and organization commitment.

Begley & Czajke (1993) concluded that stress increased job displeasure only when commitment was low.

Occupational Stress (Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity)

Stress is something which makes one feel uncomfortable. It creates imbalance and individual tries to restore the state of balance. Stress was introduced into behavioral sciences by Hans Selye in 1936. He is regarded as the father of modern stress research.

Caplan (1981) defined stress as a condition in which there is a marked discrepancy between the demands made on an organism and the organism's capacity to respond to the consequences which will be detrimental to the organism's future in respect to condition essential to its well-being.

Cox (1978) defined stress as perceptual phenomenon arising from a comparison between the demand on a person and his ability to cope. An imbalance in this mechanism when coping is important gives rise to experience of stress and stress response.

Occupational stress can be considered as an accumulation of stressors, job related situations that are considered stressful "by most of us".

It can also be defined as the interaction of work condition with characteristics of the worker such that the demands of work exceed the ability of the worker to cope with them.

Beehr & Newman (1978) outlined the symptoms of occupational stress under three categories, i.e. psychological symptoms, physical symptoms, and behavioral symptoms.

Occupational stress can be understood in terms of symptoms that describe an individual such as ulcers and depressed mood or increased hostility. However, occupational stress can also be defined by individual performance in work environment such as increased absenteeism or loss of productivity.

Recent years have shown an increased interest in the use of role theory to describe and explain the stresses associated with membership in organizations. Within an organizational context the term "role" can be defined as a set of expectations applied to the incumbent of a particular position by the incumbent and by role senders within and beyond organizational boundaries (Gross, Mason & Mc Eachers, 1958). In many instances, the incumbent personalizes the position (Graen, 1976) so that individuals in the same position will exhibit different effective behaviors. It is this range of freedom in role performance which allows people to fill a role without experiencing role strain. Individuals frequently are confronted, however, with situations where they may be

required to play a role which conflicts with their value systems or to play two or more roles which conflict with each other. Additionally, the single and multiple roles which confront the individual may not be clearly articulated in terms of behaviors or performance levels expected. The former situation is referred to as role conflict and the latter as role ambiguity (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinns, Snack & Rosenthal, 1964).

More specifically, **role conflict** is defined as incongruity of the expectations associated with a role. Several types of role conflict have been identified:

- (a) Intra sender role conflict- incompatible expectations from a role sender
- (b) Inter sender role conflict-expectations from one role sender which are incompatible with those from another role sender.
- (c) Person role conflict- incompatibility between the expectations held by the role incumbent and expectations otherwise associated with his/her position.
- (d) Inter role conflict- role pressures stemming from one position incompatible with the role pressures arising from a different position.
- (e) Role overload- expecting the role incumbent to engage in several role behavior, all of which may be mutually compatible in the abstract, within too short a time period (Kahn et al, 1964)

Role conflict has been demonstrated to be correlated with lower commitment to the organization (Baird, 1969)

Role expectation conflict arises as individual employees have multiple roles (family, work, professional, recreational, club, community, and so on) and these often make conflicting demands and create conflicting expectations. One way to deal with this stress is to eliminate those expectations from the role which are likely to conflict with other expectations. This is the process of role shrinking which is the act of pruning the role in such a way that some expectations can be given up. This may help to avoid the problem, but it is a dysfunctional approach since the advantage of a larger role is lost. However, if role linkages are established with other roles, and the problem is solved by devising some new ways of achieving the conflicting expectations, the individual can experience both the process of growth as well as satisfaction.

Generally, **role ambiguity** has been defined as the degree to which clear information is lacking regarding (a) the expectations associated with a role, (b) methods for fulfilling known role expectation and/or (c) the consequences of role performance.

Role ambiguity results from inadequate information or knowledge to do a job. This ambiguity may be due to inadequate training, poor communication, or the deliberate withholding or distortion of information by a coworker or supervisor. In any event, the result of role conflict and ambiguity is stress for the individual and there is a substantial body of research indicating undesirable outcomes for the individual and the organization.

The usual approach for role ambiguity is to make all clear by putting various things on paper. This is role prescription. The various expectations are defined more clearly. Or, the individual may remove ambiguity by fitting into the role as described in some expectations. This is the process of role taking. Both are avoidance strategies. An approach strategy may be to seek clarification from various sources and to define the role in the light of such clarifications.

An effective management of stress involves directing stress for productive purpose, preparing role occupants to understand the nature of stress, helping role occupants to understand their strengths and usual styles, and equip them to develop approach strategies of coping with stress.

Occupational stress is an inevitable, even at times necessary, element of the work environment, but it does not have to translate into organizational dysfunction nor medical, psychological, or behavioral distress. Organizational protection and work environment prevention come first in managing occupational stress but must be supplemented because of individual differences. Organizations and individuals can mitigate these disorders through preventive stress management and enhanced wellbeing.

By taking up few organizationally relevant psychological variables like occupational stress and organizational commitment, this study purports to make a humble contribution in the vast pool of knowledge.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the present study was to examine the impact of role conflict and role ambiguity components of occupational stress on the organizational commitment of managers.

III. HYPOTHESES

In the direction of available literature concerning the relationship between organizational commitment and role conflict and role ambiguity areas of occupational stress, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

III.I There is significant difference between the mean organizational commitment scores of high and low role conflict component of occupational stress groups.

III.II There is significant difference between the mean organizational commitment scores of high and low role ambiguity component of occupational stress groups.

IV. METHODOLOGY

An attempt has been made to examine the impact of role-conflict and role-ambiguity components of occupational stress on the organizational commitment of managers.

The organizational commitment has been treated as dependent variable while role-conflict and role-ambiguity are treated as independent variables. Two groups were identified, i.e. high and low on the basis of median scores obtained on each independent variable.

The mean, Standard Deviation (S.D.) and Critical Ratio (C.R.) were computed to find out the impact of role-conflict and role-ambiguity components of occupational stress on the organizational commitment of managers.

V. SAMPLE

The study was conducted on 200 managers incidentally selected from Tata Refractory Ltd., Belpahar, Jharsuguda, Orissa. TRL is India's premier manufacturer of refractories. It was established in 1958 as a joint venture of Tata Steel and Didier Werke, AG, Germany. Outside India, TRL's refractories have found ready acceptance in International market affirming its world class reputation and commitment to the core. The age of the respondents ranged between 24 to 60 years with the average age of 38 years. Their monthly income ranged from Rs. 6000/- to Rs. 20000/- with average monthly income of Rs. 12000/- Their qualifications ranged from Graduates, Eng. Diploma, ICWA, ACA to MBBS. All the managers included in the study were married males.

VI. PROCEDURE

The managers of TRL, Belpahar have been contacted one by one and requested to participate in the research study as subject for academic purpose. The subjects were asked to fill up personal data sheet. Occupational stress profile and organizational commitment scale were administered to them. They had to respond on the questionnaire as per the instructions written for each questionnaire. The respondents were asked not to leave any item unanswered and give their candid responses as the information thus sought will be kept confidential and used for research purpose only.

VII. TOOLS USED

To study the variables in the present research work, the following psychometric devices were utilized:

VII.I. OCCUPATIONAL STRESS INDEX (OSI)

The level of occupational stress was assessed with the help of occupational stress index developed and standardized by Srivastava and Singh (1981). It consists of 46 statements with five alternative responses, namely, strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, and strongly disagree.

The index assesses perceived stress arising from the 12 dimensions of job life. The dimensions are role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, unreasonable group and political pressure, under participation, responsibility for persons, powerlessness, poor peer relations at work, intrinsic impoverishment, low status, strenuous working conditions, and unprofitability.

Reliability of Occupational Stress index was determined by computing Cronbach's alpha coefficient which was found to be $r=0.90$. the internal consistency of the test was determined by computing odd-even method was found to be .935 (corrected by S.B. Formula).

Validity: Index of homogeneity and internal validity of individual items was determined by point biserial co-efficient of correlation (r_{pb}). The values of point biserial co-efficient ranged from .36 to .59.

Scoring: Out of 46 items constituting the index, eighteen items were 'false-keyed' and remaining 28 items were 'true-keyed'. The possible scores for each item were ranged from one to five (strongly agree to strongly disagree). The index scores ranged in ascending order for the 'true-keyed' items and in descending order for the 'false-keyed' items.

The occupational stress scores will be determined by arithmetic summation of the scores endorsed to all the forty-six items. Thus, the maximum possible scores will be 230 and the minimum 46. The lower scores indicate lower degree of occupational stress and the higher scores higher degree of occupational stress.

VII.II. ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT SCALE

The level of organizational commitment was assessed with the help of organizational commitment developed by Meyer and Allen (1984). It consists of 16 items with 7 alternative responses, namely, strongly disagree, disagree, uncertain, undecided, agree, slightly agree, strongly agree. The 16 items comprising the two scales Affective Commitment Scale (ACS) and Continuance Commitment Scale (CCS) were factors analyzed using maximum likelihood estimation followed by varimax rotation. Two factor analysis were performed. The first specifying two factors (as suggested by Meyer & Allen (1984) and the second forcing no specific number of factors. In the two-factor solution the 8 ACS items loaded on the first factor. Six of eight CCS items loaded strongly on the second factor. Respondents were required to give responses in degree of their agreement or disagreement with each statement by indicating one of the seven alternatives.

Reliability: Internal consistency reliability estimates (Cronbach's Alpha) were calculated for the two scales:

- (a) Affective Commitment Scale (ACS)
- (b) Continuance Commitment Scale (CCS)

Reliability coefficient for these scales were .88 and .70 respectively.

Scoring of Organizational Commitment Scale: Out of 16 items constituting the scale, four ACS items were 'negative' and remaining four were 'positive' in which 1,2,4 and 8 numbered items were negative and 9, 13, 14 and 16 items were positive.

In this organizational commitment scale, negatively worded items reversely scored prior to data analysis.

VIII. RESULTS

The results are presented in a tabular form here. The appropriate statistics used in this study are mean, standard deviation, and critical ratio.

VIII.I. TABLE OF RESULTS

TABLE-1

Significance of Difference (C.R.) between organizational commitment scores of managers in low and high occupational stress (role conflict area) groups

Group	N	Mean	S.D.	C.R.	Df	p
LOS: Role conflict	92	81.22	9.02	9.7307	198	0.01
HOS: Role conflict	108	67.87	11.43			

LOS- Low Occupational Stress

HOS- High Occupational Stress

The above table indicates that the mean organizational commitment scores of low occupational stress group because of role conflict is higher as compared to high occupational stress group. The mean difference is found to be significant at 0.01 level. It means those managers who have low level of occupational stress due to role conflict show high level of organizational commitment and vice versa.

TABLE-2

Significance of Difference (C.R.) between organizational commitment scores of managers in low and high occupational stress (role ambiguity area) groups

Group	N	Mean	S.D.	C.R.	Df	p
LOS: Role ambiguity	90	80.94	8.68	8.9757	198	0.01
HOS: Role ambiguity	110	67.35	12.03			

LOS- Low Occupational Stress

HOS- High Occupational Stress

The above table indicates that the mean organizational commitment scores of low occupational stress group because of role ambiguity is higher as compared to high occupational stress group. The mean difference is found to be significant at 0.01 level. It means those managers who have low level of occupational stress due to role ambiguity show high level of organizational commitment and vice versa.

VIII.II. DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

Human resources, unlike other resources, have rather unlimited potential capabilities. This human potential can be used only by creating a climate that can continuously identify, bring to surface, nurture and use capabilities of people.

Though every employee in an organization works with similar tools, machines and materials, yet individual differences in their level of performance are quite evident.

The research evidence demonstrates negative relationship between organizational commitment and both absenteeism and turnover.

William & Hazer (1986) say that a committed employee has willingness to extend efforts on behalf of the organization and give something of themselves in order to help the organization succeed and prosper. Commitment leads to identification of the employee with the goals and values of the organization. Organizational facilitation of employee commitment is sensible for committed employees are more likely to accept pay cuts or transfer without quitting. A genuine belief in the value of the project, a desire to receive career recognition, or a generalized belief that one should be committed to all work activities could all be sources of commitment for managers.

A recent survey showed that 70% to 90% of us feel stressed at work. Examination of the effects of stress on human behavior has attracted an increased interest in recent years. Buck (1972), Kahn and his associates (1964), House and Rizzo (1972), and Sales (1970) view organizational stress as dysfunctional for organization. Occupational stress is viewed as disruption in individual's psychological and/or physiological homeostasis that force them to deviate from normal functioning in interactions with their jobs and work environment.

The results shown in Table-1 and Table-2 indicate that high occupational stress groups pertaining to role conflict and role ambiguity are accompanied by low organizational commitment scores as compared to the low occupational stress groups pertaining to role conflict and role ambiguity. The critical ratio between organizational commitment scores of high and low occupational stress groups (role conflict and role ambiguity) are statistically significant. The result indicates very clearly that the organizational commitment of low occupational stress (role conflict and role ambiguity) group is better than those who have high occupational stress (role conflict and role ambiguity).

Role conflict tends to exist when a particular individual in a particular work role is torn by conflicting occupational demands or doing things he doesn't want to. Kahn et al. (1964) found that men who suffered more role conflict had higher job-related tensions.

Major source of stress in the work environment is the work role or roles assigned to each employee. They can create stress as they conflict with the employees' own needs, values or abilities. Multiple roles may contain internal conflicts because the role

is defined by more than one role sender. More specifically role conflict is defined as incongruity of the expectations associated with a role.

Role conflict has been demonstrated to be correlated with lower commitment to the organization (Baird, 1969).

The problems of role ambiguity in organizational setting have received greater attention in recent years. Role ambiguity as a component of occupational stress resulting from the increased complexities of the modern work, culture, and organization. It has an impairing effect on the various factors essential to promote organizational affective commitment, which refers to a psychological attachment and involvement to the organization.

Kahn and his associates (1964) reported that high levels of role ambiguity were related to low levels of work motivation, job satisfaction, low confidence in the organization, high degree of job-related tension and greater fertility.

Role ambiguity has been demonstrated to be correlated with lower commitment to the organization (Baird, 1969).

The results in Table-1 lead us to conclude that our hypothesis that **“There is significant difference between the mean organizational commitment scores of high and low occupational stress groups with reference to their occupational stress pertaining to role conflict”** is confirmed.

The results in Table-2 lead us to conclude that our hypothesis that **“There is significant difference between the mean organizational commitment scores of high and low occupational stress groups with reference to their occupational stress pertaining to role ambiguity”** is confirmed.

Human resource is the key resource for any organization which cannot be overlooked even in today's modern, advanced technological era. Although the entire emphasis is still to improve the quality which in essence means customer satisfaction which is achieved through people by continuous improvement creating an environment where each individual employee is committed to seeking ways of enhancing performance.

The increased complexity of work organizations combined with the significant technological changes that have taken place in recent years, make the notion of commitment especially important. In its study about the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the business and workforce environment, HR consulting firm Mercer found that more than 40% of businesses experienced a moderate to high impact on how their infrastructure handled the culture and workplace change to working virtually.

Positive organizational commitment tends to improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness by contributing to resource transformations, innovativeness, and adaptability. Commitment attitudes appear to develop slowly but consistently over time as individuals think about the relationship between themselves. Organizations value commitment among their employees which is typically assumed to reduce withdrawal behaviors such as lateness, absenteeism, and turnover and improve performance. In addition, committed employees may be more likely to engage in extra role behaviors such as creativeness and innovativeness which are often what keeps an organization competitive. Employees truly committed to the goals and values of an organization are more likely to participate in organizational activities. From a larger perspective, a society as a whole tends to benefit from employee's organizational commitment in terms of higher national productivity.

Having surveyed the available literature on organizational commitment, it has been observed that organizational commitment studies, being negligible especially in Indian context, requires much more attention as this is very necessary for organizational growth and development, and, in turn, the growth of national income at large.

IX. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future researches can be conducted on the organizational commitment of different levels of managers of public and semi-public sector organizations and on other samples like workers and supervisors. Other relevant variables, namely, family size of managers, religion, family, and social responsibilities, psychological well being of managers, marital status of managers etc. can also be taken into consideration. A similar study on female managers should be conducted. Other personality, situational, and attitudinal dimensions may be studied and their relationship ascertained.

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