

## A Comparative Review on the Prevalence of Role Conflict in Corporate Organizations

**Sukanksha Singh**

*Research Scholar*

*Amity University, Lucknow*

**Dr. Alka Singh Bhatt**

*Assistant Professor*

*Amity University, Lucknow*

### **Abstract:**

*In sociological terms, roles are important guidelines for behaviour and can be defined as a set of expectations applied to the incumbent of a particular position by the incumbent himself and by role senders within and beyond the organization. Individuals are frequently confronted with situations in which 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. This situation has been termed as role conflict. A role is defined as a pattern of behaviours and role conflict is the incompatibility of demands faced by an individual. Role conflicts cause a negative effect in the workplace when it comes to group dynamics. Conflicting roles can be confusing for the employee and can cause stress and burnout. Role conflicts are different for everyone and each individual affected by the role conflict at work reacts differently. Although role conflict has been studied extensively over the years with respect to organizational sciences, it still remains a topic of interest for researchers due to its omnipresence in all spheres of the organization. The purpose of this paper is to review and develop a better understanding of the role conflict variable and the extent of its significance in corporate organizations.*

**Keywords:** Role conflict, role ambiguity, role theory, organization, productivity

### **INTRODUCTION**

Before delving into the understanding of role conflict, it is essential to understand what does one mean by 'role'. A role is a pattern of connected behaviors, rights, obligations, beliefs, and norms as conceptualized by people in a social situation. Roles may be achieved or ascribed or they can be accidental in different situations.

- An *achieved role* is a position that a person assumes voluntarily which reflects personal skills, abilities, and effort.
- An *ascribed role* is a position assigned to individuals or groups without regard for merit but because of certain traits beyond their control, and is usually forced upon a person.

- Roles can be semi-permanent or transitory

When a person is taking on different roles, certain situations take place like role confusion, role conflict, role enhancement and role strain.

Conflict among the roles begins because of the human desire to reach success, and because of the pressure put on an individual by two imposing and incompatible demands competing against each other. The effects of role conflict, as found through case-studies and nationwide surveys, are related to individual personality characteristics and interpersonal relations. Individual personality characteristic conflicts can arise within personality role conflict where "aspects of an individual's personality are in conflict with other aspects of that same individual's personality". Interpersonal relations can cause conflict because they are by definition "having an association between two or more people that may range from fleeting to enduring, which can cause that conflict."

Example: "People in modern, high-income countries juggle many responsibilities demanded by their various statuses and roles. As most mothers can testify both parenting and working outside the home are physically and emotionally draining. Sociologists thus recognize role conflict as conflict among the roles corresponding to two or more statuses".

The discipline of group dynamics in psychology recognizes role conflict within a group setting. Members of a group may feel that they are responsible for more than one role within this setting and that these roles may become disagreeable with each other. When the expectations of two or more roles are incompatible, role conflict exists. For example, a supervisor at a factory may feel strain due to his or her role as friend and mentor to the subordinate employees, while having to exhibit a stern and professional watchful eye over the employees.

## **SOURCES OF ROLE CONFLICT**

One of the main causes of role conflict is role ambiguity, which is the lack of certainty in what a certain role in an organization requires. This can be the result of poor communication of job duties or unclear instructions from a supervisor. This can lead to role conflict when there are contradicting ideas as to what tasks are supposed to be accomplished. Team members can then be uncertain of their role and their teammate's roles to the team and team objectives begin to conflict with one another.

The solution to this problem and role conflict as a whole can come from role clarity. As its name suggests, role clarity is clearly defining roles and objectives so as to reduce role conflict and role ambiguity. To do this, employers need to clearly communicate with employees as to the goals of a project. Also, employees should be fully aware of their role in the group and their responsibilities. It is helpful if one develops and maintains a working environment where workers have communication and if needed, feedback can be provided. Encouragement is another form of clarity. If one has a question or is not clear about a specific role that has been given to them, workers can communicate. Make sure the person understands their roles and

duties to avoid any mistakes that can occur, and ensure that workers have an up-to-date role so they can manage their roles accordingly.

There are also role conflicts that occur in the workplace when:

- A person's values don't align with the company
- Roles are not well-defined
- Employees are asked to do something that doesn't match their job description or title

If your values don't match your employer's or the organization you work for, there will be conflict at work. You might feel torn and experience stress.

If roles are not well-defined, there is also the possibility that you will feel stressed and burn out quickly. It's difficult to do your job when the lines are blurred and you don't have a clear idea of what your role is. Sometimes employees are tasked with things that don't fall under their job description. If this happens once or twice, it's probably no big deal. But when this occurs on a regular basis, that's when role conflict occurs in the workplace.

Following have been identified as major sources of role conflict:

- Role requirements which involve coordination responsibilities across organizational boundaries are primary sources of role conflict.
- Role conflict appears in linking roles which involve integration of activities up and down the chain of command.
- Role conflict is directly related to the degree of innovation or creativity required by the role.
- The degree of formal authority and status of role sender relative to that of the focal person may be another source of conflict.

## TYPES OF ROLE CONFLICTS

**Inter-role Conflict:** This type of conflict occurs when an individual occupies two or more roles whose expectations are inconsistent. A corporation president is expected, in that role, to take part in social engagements to promote the image of the corporation. This may be in conflict with his or her role as a parent, in which he or she is expected to spend more time with his or her children to be an ideal parent

**Intra-role (Person-Role) Conflict:** This type of role conflict occurs when the role requirements are incongruent with the focal person's attitudes, values, and professional behavior. For example, intra-role conflict occurs when an organizational member is required to enter into price-fixing conspiracies, which are not congruent with his or her ethical standards.

**Intra-sender Conflict:** This type of conflict occurs when a role sender requires a role receiver (i.e., the focal person) to perform contradictory or inconsistent roles. For example, a role sender

may request the role receiver to do something that cannot be done without violating a rule, yet the role sender attempts to enforce the rule.

**Inter-sender Conflict:** A role receiver experiences this type of conflict if the role behavior demanded by one role sender is incongruent with the role behavior demanded by another role sender(s). A person who often experiences role conflict, for example, is a foreman, who receives instruction from a general foreman that may be inconsistent with the needs and expectations of the workers under the former.

One response to role conflict is deciding that something has to go. More than one politician, for example, has decided not to run for office because of the conflicting demands of a hectic campaign schedule and family life. In other cases, people put off having children in order to stay on the fast track for career success. Even the roles linked to a single status can make competing demands on us. A plant supervisor may enjoy being friendly with workers. At the same time, distance is necessary to evaluate his staff.

An individual can alter external, structurally imposed expectations held by others, regarding the appropriate behaviour of a person in his or her position. The most effective alteration is change in the workplace. If the job is a "family-friendly" environment, the needs of a parent may be met easier. One of the biggest stress-relievers for working parents is paid time off including family sick days. Parents may feel trapped if they need to stay home with their child but knows that missing a day of work will, in return, dock them a day of pay. If they have a few days of paid leave they will be able to take care of their child and not have to worry about losing money for doing so. Another workplace support of work-family conflict is child care. Some jobs have a day-care facility on site or nearby, assisting parents in knowing their children are well taken care of while they are working. The latter example distributes role expectations to others in order to alleviate role conflict.

"Another approach involves changing one's attitude toward and perceptions of one's role expectations, as opposed to changing the expectations themselves. An example is setting priorities among and within roles, being sure that certain demands are always met (for example, the needs of sick children), while others have lower priority (such as dusting furniture). There is a difference between role conflict and role ambiguity. Role ambiguity is when the employee's role isn't clear. This can cause role conflict in the workplace, but not always. Role conflict is more about contradictory job requirements or roles. It's important to define the two so that you can recognize when there is role conflict.

You might be experiencing role conflict in the workplace if you're feeling overly stressed or burned out. Many people may think "all jobs are stressful, why does my experience need attention?" The problem with that line of thinking is that it negates the feelings of stress and overwhelm you feel. Yes, everyone deals with stress in their jobs. If your work environment is so stressful that you feel on edge all the time and so overwhelmed that it's hard to do your job, you may be experiencing role conflict.

If you're feeling torn or like you're serving two masters, it's time to address role conflict at work. It's not easy to do, especially if you're in a managerial role and have to handle other people's stress and potential role conflicts as well. But role conflicts can lead to a toxic work environment.

## HOW TO RESOLVE ROLE CONFLICTS IN WORKPLACES

While it's a natural human tendency to avoid uncomfortable conflict with others, that tactic won't work in the long term. By the time a clash comes to HR's attention, it's often too late—such as when a valuable employee is quitting. Even seemingly small conflicts can be important because they're often really about larger issues. A good place to start is by realizing that, even though people may shy away from it, conflict is actually normal and healthy. In fact, many believe it's a vital ingredient to organizational success. Experts have found that the most effective teams are those in which members feel safe enough to disagree with one another. A culture where dissent is allowed, or even encouraged, can spur innovation, diversity of thought and better decision-making.

- Define your roles. You have to understand the boundaries that your roles play on a day-to-day basis. It would be much easier if you are comfortable where you set your priorities at given times and situations. Choose the roles that you are best at, and those that you consider your second or your third.
- Familiarize yourself with the people related to the roles you are playing. Coming to terms with the limits of your strengths and weaknesses as a role player would indicate that you know where the other players stand. Interacting with them on a healthy middle ground could ease tension. Avoid going against somebody in a given situation when you are not familiar with the consequences of such action. Agree to disagree.
- Understand your need to play a given role. The gravity of need one has to do in order to execute his roles is important not only to himself but for those who are around him. Be mindful of why you are playing the role, and for whom or what you do it for.
- Set standards for your roles. Too much of one may conflict with the other. A proper balance is needed. Time management is a great help. Set standard time limits for the different roles you are playing. Other roles may need longer time to play for the other to flourish.
- Listen to others when they are talking or explaining things. Do not interrupt while others are speaking. Try to understand them as much as possible. They would do this in turn for you. Do not let your biases and anger get the better of you.

The key ingredient to managing role conflict at work is communication. Clear communication about expectations is important for managing conflicting roles. Have conversations with your supervisor about your roles. Try to resolve the conflict between the two of you. Make sure you get clear answers about what your roles are. If you're asked to do something that doesn't fit your job description, speak up and find an appropriate way to resolve the situation.

When addressing role conflicts in the workplace, it's important to know when to speak up. If your performance is suffering and you're burning out quickly, it's time to talk about your experience.

Respectful communication is key when addressing role conflicts in the workplace. Avoid instructions. Instead, try asking for cooperation. Foster positive interaction with your coworkers by showing interest in them as people. Ask about their vacation. If they have a picture of a dog on their desk, inquire about the dog. Small things like this add up to a more positive work environment. If your work environment is positive, you'll feel less stressed and will be able to communicate more clearly about what your role is and how you fit into the work environment. Hence by adopting certain measures, role conflicts can be well resolved at the workplace.

## REFERENCES

- Adams, J. S. The structure and dynamics of behavior in organizational boundary roles. In M. D. Dunnette (Ed.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology*. Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1976, Pp. 1175-1199.
- Bullock, R. P. *Social factors related to job satisfaction: a technique for the measurement of satisfaction*. Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University, Bureau of Business Research, Monograph No. 70, 1952.
- Caplan, R. D. *Organizational stress and individual strain: a social-psychological study of risk factors in coronary heart disease among administrators, engineers and scientists*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1971.
- Rizzo, J. R., House, R. J., & Lirtzman, S. E. Role conflict and ambiguity in complex organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1970, 15, 150-163.
- Tosi, H. W. Organizational stress as a moderator of the relationship between influence and role response. *Academy of Management Journal*, 1971, 14, 7-20.
- Pondy, L. R. Organizational conflict: concepts and models. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1967, 12, 296-320.
- Pruden, H. O., & Reece, R. M. Interorganizational role-set relations and the performance and satisfaction of industrial salesmen. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1972, 17, 601-609.
- Carlson, Dawn S., and K. Michele Kacmar. 2000. "Work-Family Conflict in the Organization: Do Life Role Values Make a Difference?" *Journal of Management*, 26(5): 1031-54. DOI:10.1016/S0149-2063(00)00067-2.
- Goode, William J. 1960. "A Theory of Role Strain." *American Sociological Review*, 25(4): 483-96.
- Netemeyer, Richard G., James S. Boles, and Robert McMurrian. 1996. "Development and Validation of Work-Family Conflict and Family-Work Conflict Scales." *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 81: 400-409.