

ROLE AMBIGUITY VERSUS JOB EMBEDDEDNESS; MEDIATION OF INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of role ambiguity and interpersonal conflict on job embeddedness. The study also investigates the mediating role that interpersonal conflict plays between role ambiguity and job embeddedness. Data for the study was obtained from the service sector organizations. Data collected from 245 respondents using voluntary cross-sectional online survey method. The analysis was carried out using regression and process macro. Results revealed that interpersonal conflict at the workplace plays a reflective role between role ambiguity and job embeddedness. The results have also supported findings of previous literature. Besides this study making a theoretical contribution, it also provides an insight into various practical implications to practitioners.

Keywords: Role ambiguity; interpersonal conflict; job embeddedness; turnover intention

Introduction

“Take care of employees and they will take care of your business,” says Richard Branson. Organizational innovation mainly results from the presence of innovative employees who can carry out the vision of their management in a unique manner. Therefore, employers are expected to take care of their employees in a way that encourages the latter to stay at their workplace to perform (Li *et al.*, 2016). Organizations that focus more on employee-centered policies encourage their employees in various ways. Researchers believe that by applying job embeddedness theory organization can increase human and social capital at organization. These organizations are usually in a better position to utilize the capabilities of their workforce. Employees compare their capabilities with the rewards they receive from the organization. If they believe that there is a fair balance between their capabilities and the rewards they have received, there are more chances of that these employees will stay satisfied and loyal to the organization. However, one often finds employees leaving organizations rapidly. Therefore, “why do people leave?” is a question that often poses a serious dilemma to organizations, and researchers have focus on it for decades (Mitchell and Lee, 2001). Researchers have found that there are many reasons behind employee dissatisfaction and conflicts, which cause employee turnover (Kaur, 2013). When Mitchell tried to describe the model for voluntary turnover and involuntary turnover, the focus was mainly on the question “why do people leave?” It was found that, not only employees but even they themselves know more about staying rather than leaving organization (Lee, Burch and Mitchell, 2014). They termed these reasons to stay at organization as “job embeddedness” which is an attachment with the organizations that can make employee stay at organization. It constitutes many influences, which are classified as link, fit and sacrifice that makes employees stay on at organizations. The concept of staying at organizations actually embeds employees with the organization, which distinguishes it from the concept of turnover. The factors that lead to job embeddedness of employees are both on-the-job and off-the-job. Allen (2006) stated that on-the-job factors are more influential than off-the-job ones (Allen, 2006). Unpleasant events and problems at the job loosen the embeddedness of employees toward the organization (Lee *et al.*, 2004) (Penney & Spector, 2005). These unpleasant events and problems at the job usually occur when performance benchmarks are not met and when employees think that rewards, they

have received were less than their capabilities.

Role ambiguity is when there is lack of clear set of information about their roles, procedures or rule to reach a specific goal. In other words lack of information or ambiguity about role expectations, process, procedure, behavior and priorities at the organization is known as role ambiguity (Singh, J., Rhoads, 1991; Sawyer, 1992). The main reasons why role ambiguity exists is lack of documentation, technological advancements, new techniques for business processes, and changes in organizational environment (Srikanth and Jomon, 2013; Khan *et al.*, 2014). Role ambiguity creates ambiguity among employees about their behavior at the organization and it is likely to cause dissatisfaction (Sawyer, 1992). Because when there is no guidance on rule and procedures employee is expected to be more likely confused in understanding the instructions which makes them perceptible to errors and mistakes. Such dissatisfaction stemming from role ambiguity may lead to unpleasant events or problems at work place because of the confusion about their job description (Rashed Alshery, Ahmad and Kaid Al-Swidi, 2015). Researchers feel that it creates inability to perform productively at work place, due to which there is high probability of turnover among such employees having role ambiguity (Rashed Alshery, Ahmad and Kaid Al-Swidi, 2015). It is an organizational factor and creates fear among employees regard performance at work place and at times overlapping roles may create interpersonal conflicts among employees (Soltani *et al.*, 2013; Clercq, Haq and Azeem, 2019). Interpersonal conflict is incompatibility, collision or disagreement between two or more than two individuals; where they have different opinion and do not fulfill other's expectations. According to Bao *et al.* (2016) "Interpersonal conflict is an interaction of interdependent people who sense disagreement and opposing interests, incompatibility and the possibility of interference, and negative emotion from others (Bao *et al.*, 2016). Keeping in view the importance of role ambiguity, organizations today use integrated practices such as high performance work practices to reduce role ambiguity (Naeem *et al.*, 2019). Reduced role ambiguity will improve interpersonal relations and reduce interpersonal conflicts. Employees who are having lesser role ambiguity will be having lesser chances of errors and mistakes at work place and enable them to perform well at workplace. Employee finds such work places more pleasant and have higher job embeddedness, where they are more focused towards their job and can perform well with lesser role ambiguity and conflicts. According to Khorakian, Nosrati and Eslami (2018) conflict reduces employee fit and links at the work place and may result in turnover intention (Khorakian, Nosrati and Eslami, 2018). Therefore, reduced interpersonal conflict has an influence on job embeddedness.

1. Theoretical framework

Kahn *et al.* (1964) introduced the concept of the role stressor and mentioned two variables, which cause stress, namely role conflict and role stressor; these concepts are inherently negative. A role stressor may include many uncertainties surrounding the task at hand, objectives to achieve during the job, and ambiguities regarding responsibilities associated with the job. All these role stressors lead to unclear expectations of supervisor and colleagues. Role stressor comprises role ambiguity and role clarity. Whereas researchers also believe that role stressors are one of the causes of turnover intention, especially in the hotel industry (Karatepe, 2013). Therefore, organizational HR departments work for the betterment of employee, they directly look in to job, its characteristics and organizational practices which influences. Vinh Q. Nguyen (2010) investigated that human resource practices and job characteristics plays an important role in influencing job embeddedness of employee (Vinh Quang Nguyen A, 2010). By amending the job and organizational variables HR departments try to influence people and their performance. Ferreira *et al.* (2016) are of the view that job embeddedness as a mediator can lessen the detrimental effects of task characteristics on employee turnover intention (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017). When organization improve the ambiguities about the role, they will be achieving standard of performance with employee satisfaction. Researchers who worked on role ambiguity and job embeddedness found

that reduced role ambiguity can lead to improved job embeddedness at work place (Ghadeer and others, 2018).

Hypothesis 1: Role ambiguity will be negatively related to the level of job embeddedness.

Schmidt et al. (2012) found that role ambiguity can lead to conflict among employees because employees may not be able to fulfill all the expectations of their role (Schmidt et al., 2012). When such conflicts are allowed it may cause distress and employee depression (Schmidt et al., 2012). Studies suggest that when an individual is uncertain about organization's expectation regarding role, it causes depression and anxiety and there is ample evidence that when a person is depressed it leads to conflicts. Interpersonal conflict also stems from stress and depression, which in turn creates dissatisfaction on the job, reduces commitment towards the organization and lowers performance levels (Harris, Harvey and Kacmar, 2011). Researchers are of the view that role ambiguity may result in addition to psychological pressure and stress on employees from their supervisors (Omisore and Abiodun, 2014) (Kivuruusu et al., 2016). Therefore, many firms try to foster positive interpersonal relationships among employees as a number of studies have found that a lack of such interpersonal relationships is an important reason behind job stress (Yongkang et al., 2014). Researchers have studied the impact of role stressors in creating interpersonal conflict, which consequently causes turnover intention, lower retention and employee turnover (Sliter et al., 2011; Camarero et al., 2014). Singh (1993) also noted that in critical tasks role stressors can be a source of frustration, which leads to turnover intention (Singh, 1993). Therefore, we hypothesized that role ambiguity will positively affect interpersonal conflict.

Hypothesis 2: Role ambiguity will be positively related to the level of interpersonal conflict.

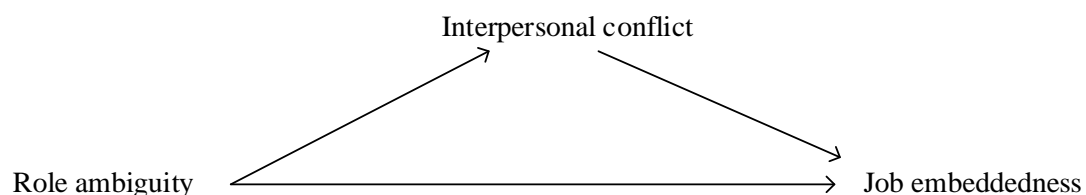
Reduced conflicts will enhance the link and fit of employee within the organization and will improve embeddedness at workplace. Employees with lesser interpersonal conflicts will have better compatibility or comfort with an organization and environment (Young et al., 2013). Besides that reduced conflict, lesser stress will enable the employee to have better links at community having hobbies, involve in community activities etc. Higher level of links and fit of employee will improve more attachment which will serve as sacrifice. Therefore, in this study we will try to analyze the impact of role conflict on interpersonal conflict in pursuit of the current model and its impact on job embeddedness. Here we will also assume that interpersonal conflict will have a negative relation with job embeddedness as it is positively related to role ambiguity at work as a mediator between role ambiguity and job embeddedness. Therefore, we can hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3: Interpersonal Conflict will be negatively related to the level of job embeddedness.

Hypothesis 4: Interpersonal conflict will be mediating the relation between role ambiguity and job embeddedness.

Conceptual model of the study is given in Fig-1:

Fig 1 Conceptual model of the study



2. Methodology

This research used correlational design to study the impact of role ambiguity on job embeddedness mediated by interpersonal conflict. The data for the study is obtained from service sector organizations during first quarter of 2018 using online survey tools. All the variables are measured using developed reliable and valid scales. A five-point Likert scale has been used ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree for role ambiguity and job embeddedness whereas for interpersonal conflict a Likert scale ranging from “1=Never, 2=Once or Twice, 3=Once or Twice a Month, 4=Once or Twice a Week, 5=Everyday” has been used. To analyze the mediation of interpersonal conflict between relation of role ambiguity and job embeddedness, PROCESS MACRO 3.1 has been used. The following scales are used to measure the variables:

For role ambiguity, the six-item scale of C David Shepherd & Leslie M Fine (1994) has been used (Shepherd and Fine, 1994). Based on previous method and contextual theoretical framework, role ambiguity is used as a single construct.

For interpersonal conflict, a four-item scale has been adopted from Valentina Burk Lee (2006) (Lee and Lee, 2006). Interpersonal conflict is also used as a single construct in research.

For job embeddedness, a seven-item scale has been used, which is adopted from Crossley et al. (2007) (Crossley *et al.*, 2007).

3. Analysis and results

The results obtained have been depicted in Table 1, which gives the mean, standard deviation, correlation analysis and reliability test results. From the results we find that a correlation exists between role ambiguity and interpersonal conflict, role ambiguity has correlation with job embeddedness; and interpersonal conflict is correlated with job embeddedness. The results also indicate that role ambiguity and interpersonal conflict have a positive relation as they have a positive correlation of (0.609) whereas both role ambiguity and interpersonal conflict have negative correlation with job embeddedness of (-.560) & (-.508) respectively. Hypothesis testing is analyzed through regression analysis with the accepted with the reliability testing having Cronbach Alpha of 0.60 whereas from Table 1 it is found that all the items have acceptable Cronbach Alpha of more than 0.9.

	1 (RA)	2 (IPC)	3 (JE)
Role ambiguity (RA)	.934		
Interpersonal conflict (IPC)	.609**	.934	
Job embeddedness (JE)	-.560**	-.508**	.925
Means	2.479	2.694	3.307
Standard deviations	0.985	1.151	0.976

Note. ** p < .01

In Table 2, regression analysis shows that role ambiguity has a direct significant relation having ($\beta=0.711$, $t=11.954$, $R^2=0.370$) and supports Hypothesis 1. Table 2 shows the statistics ($\beta=-.554$, $t=-10.524$, $R^2=0.313$), which supports our hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 3 as shown in Table 2 regression analysis of interpersonal conflict and job embeddedness, where ($\beta=-.431$, $t=-9.196$, $R^2=0.316$) shows significant relation, thereby supporting hypothesis 3.

Table 2 Results from the regression analysis

Hypothesis	β	<i>t</i> -statistics	Significance level (β)	R ²	F	Significance level (F)
1	-.554**	-10.524	.000	.313	110.756	.000
2	.711**	11.954	.000	.370	142.893	.000
3	-.431	-9.196	.000	.258	84.569	.000

Note. ** $p < .01$

The results from testing the indirect effect of role ambiguity on job embeddedness mediated by interpersonal conflict are given in Table 3. The results revealed that role embeddedness had a significant indirect effect on job embeddedness mediated by interpersonal conflict ($\beta = -0.1605$, $p < .05$), which supports hypothesis 4. Therefore, there is empirical support for H1, H2, H3 and H4 and all can be accepted.

Table 3 Indirect effect role ambiguity and job embeddedness

Variable	Standardized effects (β)	Indirect	SE	95% biased corrected confidence interval	
				Lower Bounds	Upper Bounds
RA- IPC-JE	-.1605*		.0514	-.2703	-.0692

Note: Role ambiguity (RA) (Independent variable)

Interpersonal conflict (IPC) (Mediator)

Job embeddedness (JE) (Dependent variable)

Bootstrap standard error (SE)

Number of bootstrap samples are 5000

Where ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

4. Conclusion and implications

The study innovatively expands the literature based on the previous studies regarding job embeddedness, interpersonal conflict and role ambiguity. It has theoretically contributed to job embeddedness literature by empirically identifying that a reduced level of role stressor and interpersonal conflicts can contribute towards increasing job embeddedness at the workplace and that is postulated in H1 and H3, and emphatically supported. The study also revealed that role ambiguity is one of the factors that influences interpersonal conflict as postulated in H2. Beside this, the study also revealed the reflective role of interpersonal conflict by identifying that it mediates the relation of role ambiguity and job embeddedness.

As a practical contribution we can see from the study that the level of interpersonal conflict may be reduced by providing clear information to employees about their roles and task authority, as well as clarifying the processes, procedures and targets to reduce employee role ambiguity. Previously it had been found that high performance work practices, especially training and performance appraisals highly influence role ambiguity. With reduced role ambiguity and non-overlapping roles at the workplace, employees will be well aware of their domains and procedures to achieve their targets, which will ultimately put their focus on achievement of targets and will help them avoid unnecessary interpersonal

conflicts at the organization. With a decreased level of interpersonal conflicts at the workplace, the focus will remain on the achievement of organizational targets rather than on resolution of conflicts raised due to increased role ambiguity. Reduced role ambiguity will directly and indirectly help organizations achieve increased employee job embeddedness and reduced interpersonal conflicts. Therefore, it is highly recommended for organizations to have clear documentation and make it easy for employees to access these documents, which should mainly include job descriptions, policies and procedures, both long term and short term targets for employees, schedule of power etc. Beside these documentations, organizations must encourage integration of human resource practices for timely update and support of employees.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Table 1 Correlations, descriptive statistics and reliability

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