

Stress Management among the Government Officers

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Abstract- The present study aims to examine the organizational role in causing stress to the government officers. The sample consists of 87 officers serving in the government departments. They have been assessed for their organizational role stress utilizing the Organizational Role Stress (ORS) scale. The result reveals that while inter role distance, role expectation conflict and role erosion are the main sources of stress felt by the officers, personal inadequacy, role ambiguity and resource inadequacy are the least felt stresses. On the basis of these findings, a comprehensive human resource development strategy can be evolved to deal with the impact of organizational role stress in the government departments.

Index Terms- Stress, organization, role, government officers.

I. INTRODUCTION

Role is the position one occupies in a social system, and is defined by the functions one performs in response to the expectations of the significant members of a social system, and one's own expectations from that position in office.

Role and office or position are two separate concepts, though two sides of the same coin. According to Katz and Kahn, "Office is essentially a relational concept, defining each position in terms of its relationship to others and to the system as a whole. While office is a relational and power-related concept, role is an obligatory concept."

A role is not defined without the expectations of the role senders, including the role occupant. The position of a personnel manager may be created in an organization, but his role will be defined by the expectations, stated or unstated, that different persons will have from him, and the expectations that he, in turn, has from the role. In this sense, the role gets defined in each system by the role senders and the role occupant.

The concept of role is vital for the integration of the individual with an organization. The organization has its own structure and goals. Similarly, the individual has his personality and needs (motivations). All these aspects interact with each other and to some extent get integrated into a role. Role is also a central concept in work motivation as it is only through this that the individual and organization interact with each other.

An organization can be defined as a system of roles. However, a role in itself is a system. From the individual's point of view, there are two role systems : the system of various roles that the individual carries and performs, and the system of various roles of which his role is a part. The first, we will call role space and the second, a role set.

Each individual occupies and plays several roles. A person can be a daughter, a mother, a salesperson, a member of a club, a member of a voluntary organization and so on. All these roles

constitute the role space of that person. At the centre of the role space is the self. As the concept of role is central to that of an organization, so also the concept of self is central to the several roles of a person. The term 'self' evolves from past experience with other persons and objects. Self can be defined as the experience of an identity arising from a person's interaction with the external reality, things, persons and systems.

A person performs various roles that are centered around the self and are at varying distances from the self and from each other. These relationships define the role space, which then is a dynamic inter-relationship between the self and the various roles an individual occupies.

Similarly, role set is a pattern of inter-relationships between one role, called the focal role, among many others. In a role set map, the focal role is in the centre.

The concept of role widens the meaning of work and the relationship of the worker with other significant persons in the system. The concept of job is more prescriptive in nature, while role includes more discretionary part of work. A job assumes the relationship of the worker with his supervisor whereas the role emphasizes his relationship with all those who have expectations from him, as he has from them. Recently, much emphasis has been given to the development of roles and making them more effective in an organization.

To sum up, the concept of role goes beyond the individual job holder and indicates a need to involve other significant persons in defining role requirements. The focus on roles can be useful in planning organizational effectiveness. Herzberg (1968) drew attention to the need for humanizing jobs and giving more dignity to them. The work redesigning movement highlighted the need for involving job holders in work related decisions and give them more autonomy in work related matters.

Organizational Role Stress

Modern life is full of stress. As organizations become more complex, the potential for stress increases. Urbanization, industrialization and increase in scale of operations are some of the reasons for rising stress. Stress is an inevitable consequence of socio-economic complexity and, to some extent, its stimulant as well. People experience stress as they can no longer have complete control over what happens in their lives.

There being no escape from stress in modern life, we need to find ways of using stress productively, and reducing dysfunctional stress.

Several terms that are synonymous with stress, or similar in meaning, have been used. In order to avoid confusion, we will use the following terms: stressor for stimuli that induce stress; stress for the affective (emotional) part in the experience of incongruence; symptoms for the physiological, behavioural and conceptual responses or changes; and coping for any behaviour

that deals with the emotional component in the experience of incongruence. The term stress will be used here to refer to such terms and concepts as strain, pressure, etc.

Even as stress is inevitable in today's complex life, so is it necessary for human progress. It is like a musical instrument, where as optimum stress is needed to produce good music; loose wires (less stress) would not produce the notes, and too much tautness (too much stress) might result in screeching. A distinction has been made between productive or functional stress (stress for creative work, entrepreneurial activities, Olympic competitions, etc) and dysfunctional stress (stress of boredom, unmanageable conflicts, over-work, etc). The former has been called eustress and the latter distress.

As already stated, role can be defined as a set of functions, which an individual performs in response to the expectations of the significant members of a social system, and his own expectations about the position that he occupies in it. The concept of role, and the two role systems (role space and role set) have a built-in potential for conflict and stress.

Role Space Conflicts

As mentioned earlier, role space is the dynamic relationship between the various roles an individual occupies and his self. It has three main variables: self, the role under question, and the other roles he occupies. Any conflict among these are referred to as role space conflict or stress. These conflicts may take several forms, illustrated below :-

(a) **Self – Role Distance.** This stress arises out of the conflict between the self-concept and the expectations from the role, as perceived by the role occupant. If a person occupies a role that he may subsequently find to be conflicting with the self-concept, he feels stressed. For example, an introvert, who is fond of studying and writing, may develop a self-role distance if he accepts the role of a salesman and realizes that the expectations from the role include meeting people and being social. Such conflicts are fairly common, although they may not be so severe.

(b) **Intra-Role conflict.** Since an individual learns to develop expectations as a result of his socializing and identification with significant others, it is quite likely that he sees a certain incompatibility between the different expectations (functions) of his role. For example, a professor may see incompatibility between the expectations of teaching students and of doing research. These may not be inherently conflicting, but the individual may perceive these as incompatible.

(c) **Role Stagnation.** As an individual grows older, he also grows in the role that he occupies in an organisation. With the individual's advancement, the role changes; and with his change in role, the need for taking on a new role becomes crucial. This problem of role growth becomes acute especially when an individual who has occupied a role for a long time enters another role in which he feels less secure. The new role demands that an individual outgrows the previous one and takes charge of the new role effectively. This is bound to produce some stress. In organizations that are fast expanding, and which do not have may systematic strategy for human resource development, managers are likely to experience this stress of role stagnation when they are promoted.

(d) **Inter-Role Distance.** When an individual occupies more than one role, there are bound to be conflicts between them.

For example, a lady executive often faces a conflict between her organizational role as an executive and her familial role as a wife and mother. The demands on her time by husband and children may be incompatible with organizational demands. Such inter-role conflicts are quite frequent in the modern society, where an individual is increasingly occupying multiple roles in various organizations and groups.

Role Set Conflicts

The role set consists of important persons who have varying expectations from the role that an individual occupies. The conflicts which arise as a result of incompatibility among these expectations by the significant others (and by the individual himself) are referred to as role set conflicts. These conflicts take the forms mentioned below :-

(a) **Role Ambiguity.** When an individual is not clear about the various expectations that people have from his role, he faces role ambiguity. Role ambiguity may be due to lack of information available to a role occupant, or his lack of understanding of the cues available to him. Role ambiguity may be in relation to activities, responsibilities, priorities, norms or general expectations. Generally, role ambiguity is experienced by persons occupying roles that are newly created in organizations, roles that are undergoing change, or process roles with less clear and less concrete activities.

(b) **Role Expectation Conflict.** When there are conflicting expectations or demands by different role senders (persons having expectations from the role), the role occupant experiences this type of stress. The conflicting expectations may be from the boss, subordinates, peers or clients.

(c) **Role Overload.** When a role occupant feels that there are too many expectations from the significant others in his role set, he experiences role overload. Role overload has been measured by asking questions about people's feelings on whether they can finish work given to them during a modified work day and whether the amount of work they do might interfere with how well it is done. Most executive role occupants experience role overload. Role overload is more likely to occur where role occupants lack power, where there are large variations in the expected output, and when delegation or assistance cannot procure more time.

(d) **Role Erosion.** A role occupant may feel that the functions he would like to perform are being done by some other role. Role erosion is the individual's subjective feeling that some important expectations that he has from a role are shared by other roles within the role set. Role erosion is likely to be experienced in an organisation that is redefining its role and creating new roles.

(e) **Resource Inadequacy.** Resource inadequacy stress is experienced when the resources required by a role occupant for performing his role effectively are not available. Resources may include information, people, material, finance or facilities.

(f) **Personal Inadequacy.** When a role occupant feels that he does not have enough knowledge, skills or training to undertake a role effectively, or that he has not had time to prepare for the assigned role he may experience stress. Persons who are assigned new roles without adequate preparation or orientation are likely to experience feelings of personal inadequacy.

(g) **Role Isolation.** In a role set, the role occupant may feel that certain roles are psychologically closer to him, while others are at a much greater distance. The main criterion of distance is the frequency and ease of interaction. When linkages are strong, the role isolation will be low and vice versa. Role isolation can therefore be measured in terms of existing and the desired linkages.

Stress In the Government Departments

Stress and stress related disorders are on the rise in the government departments. Though stress during war or counter insurgency operations is understandable, it is becoming apparent that service life even in the absence of such situations is stressful. The military personnel have higher job stress than their civilian counter parts. Large number of the service men experiment significant work stress. Some feel stress has led to emotional distress and some feel that work stress was severe enough to affect their emotional health. The organisation is also characterized by little autonomy and long hours of work. These factors contribute to job stress. Since most of these studies have been conducted in the west, I decided to investigate the stressors amongst government officers in our country.

II. METHODOLOGY

Hypothesis

It was hypothesised that :-

- (a) There will be a some level of stress among government officers.
- (b) There will be difference in the various types of stresses among senior, middle and junior level officers.

Participants

87 government officers from senior, middle and junior levels participated in the study. The average age of participants was 35 years, with junior most officer being 22 years and the senior most being 58 years. All the participants were graduates.

Procedure

Subjects were administered “Organizational Role Stress (ORS) Scale” developed by Dr Udai Pareek, (1988).

Measures

The self administered 50 item scale is intended to assess the following ten types of organizational role stresses :-

- (a) **Role Space Conflicts**
 - (i) Role stagnation (RS).
 - (ii) Self role distance (SRD).
 - (iii) Inter role distance (IRD).
- (b) **Role Set Conflicts**
 - (i) Personal inadequacy (Pin).
 - (ii) Role ambiguity (RA).
 - (iii) Role isolation (RI).
 - (iv) Role overload (RO).
 - (v) Resource inadequacy (RIn).
 - (vi) Role expectation conflict (REC).
 - (vii) Role erosion (RE).

ORS is a 5-point scale (0-4), containing five items for each role stress and a total of 50 items. Thus the total score on each role stress ranges from 0 to 20. The retest reliability of this scale ranged from .37 to .73. For validity, item-analysis found all correlations significant at 0.001 levels. Factor analysis revealed that all factors together explain about 95% variance.

Statistical analysis of data to study organizational role stress was by descriptive statistics; mean, minimum and maximum score for each ORS variable was calculated.

III. RESULTS

Table 1 furnishes the descriptive statistics.

Table 1 : Descriptive Statistics

ORS Variables	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Role Space Conflicts			
RS	6.6	.00	18.00
SRD	7.16	.00	20.00
IRD	9.15	.00	20.00
Role Set Conflicts			
Pin	4.21	.00	16.00
RA	4.63	.00	20.00
RI	5.97	.00	18.00
RO	6.18	.00	20.00
Rin	6.57	.00	20.00
REC	7.97	.00	19.00
RE	7.82	.00	20.00
Total	66.31	.00	191.00

Mean score of 66.31 for total ORS is high. This can be compared with the figure 41.95 for the mean score of total ORS in a study of 221 management executives reported by Pestonjee. The comparison of mean role between government departments and management executive is given at Table 2.

Table 2 : Comparison

ORS Variables	Government officers (a)	Management (b)	Difference (c) = (a-b)
Role Space Conflicts			
RS	6.6	3.56	3.04
SRD	7.16	3.54	3.62
IRD	9.15	6.87	2.28
Role Set Conflicts			
Pin	4.21	2.66	1.55
RA	4.63	2.29	2.34
RI	5.97	4.78	1.19
RO	6.18	3.4	2.78
RIn	6.57	3.90	2.67
REC	7.97	4.01	3.96
RE	7.82	6.94	0.88
Total	66.31	41.95	24.36

IV. DISCUSSION

One of the less explored aspects of organizational stress is role stress with special reference to the government departments. Mostly combat stress and post traumatic stresses are studied exhaustively in relation to government officers. However, results of this study clearly indicate that like any other organization i.e. aviation and railways (Dhadda N.1990), public sector employees (AK Srivastava 1997), management executives (Pestonjee 1992), the organizational role stress among officers in the government departments was found to be high.

While Inter role distance, Role expectation conflict, Role erosion were main stresses felt by the government officers ; Personal inadequacy, Role ambiguity and Resource Inadequacy did not much stress them.

Role Space Conflicts

(a) Role Stagnation

(i) **Definition.** Role stagnation occurs when an individual who has occupied a role for a long time is made to take on another role wherein he feels less secure.

(ii) **Value.** 6.66, Average.

(iii) **Reasons.**

(aa) Dynamic organisation.

(ab) Frequent transfers.

(ac) Zero error syndrome.

(ad) Divergent tasking (operations, training and administration).

(iv) **Management.**

(aa) High level of adaptability through selection and training.

(b) Self Role Distance.

(i) **Definition.** This stress arises out of the conflict between the self concept and expectation from the role as perceived by the role occupant.

(ii) **Value.** 7.82, Average.

(iii) **Reasons.**

(aa) Organisational requirements.

(ab) Variation in self concept and organizational assessment.

(ac) Divergent deployment in varying Terrain.

(ad) Divergent tasking, from war to disaster management.

(iv) **Management.**

(aa) Suitably counseling the officer to enhance his self concept.

(ab) Impart adequate training specific to the role.

(c) Inter Role Distance.

(i) **Definition.** This stress arises when an individual is made to occupy more than one role.

(ii) **Value.** 9.15, Highest.

(iii) **Reasons.**

(aa) Shortage of officers in the government departments.

(ab) Heavy work load.

(ac) These personnel one required to handle multiple tasks across the country (operational, administrative and training)

(iv) **Management.**

(aa) Make genuine efforts to reduce shortage of officers.

(ab) Impart training on multiple role performance.

Role Set Conflicts

(a) Personal Inadequacy.

(i) **Definition.** When a role occupant feels that he does not have adequate knowledge, skills or training to handle a role effectively, he experiences personal inadequacy stress.

(ii) **Value.** 4.21, Lowest.

(iii) **Reasons.**

(aa) Good selection and training.

(ab) Adequate assistance from with the organisation.

(ac) Good work culture and environment.

(iv) **Management.**

(aa) Further emphasis on selection and training.

(ab) Improvement in the work culture.

(b) Role Ambiguity.

(i) **Definition.** When an individual is not clear about the various expectation that people have from his role, he faces role ambiguity stress.

(ii) **Value.** 4.63, Low.

(iii) **Reasons.**

(aa) Well defined tasking.

(ab) Adequate briefing before assigning, tasks.

(ac) Good selection and training.

(iv) **Management.**

(aa) More emphasis on briefing.

(ab) Greater emphasis on quality training.

(c) Role Isolation.

(i) **Definition** In a role set, the role occupant may feel that certain roles are psychologically closer to him, while others are at a much greater distance. The main criterion of distance is the frequency and ease of interaction. When linkages are strong, the role isolation will be low and vice versa. Role isolation can therefore be measured in terms of existing and the desired linkages.

(ii) **Value.** 6.48, Low.

(iii) **Reasons.**

(aa) Limited interaction among certain role occupants.

(ab) Spatial separation among role occupants geographical proximity.

(ac) Lack of communication.

(iv) **Management.**

(aa) Enhance frequency of interaction.

(ab) Organise frequent formal and informal meetings.

(ac) Streamline feedback system.

(d) Role Over Load.

(i) **Definition.** When a role occupant feels that there are far too many expectations from the significant others in his role set, he faces role overload stress.

(ii) **Value.** 6.18, Average.

(iii) **Reasons.**

(aa) Generic resilience and good work culture.

(ab) Good training imparted to officers.

(iv) **Management.**

(aa) Prioritise assignments.

(ab) Emphasis on time management.

(e) **Resource Inadequacy.**

(i) **Definition.** When resources required by a role occupant for performing his role effectively are not available, he experiences resource inadequacy stress.

(ii) **Value.** 5.97, Low.

(iii) **Reasons.**

(aa) All resources are made available generally.

(ab) Nevertheless, time is at premium invariably.

(iv) **Management.**

(aa) Judicious allocation of resources.

(ab) Optimum utilization of available resources.

(ac) Timely allocation and utilization.

(f) **Role Expectation Conflict.**

(i) **Definition.** This stress is generated by different expectations from the role occupant by different significant persons and the role occupant's dilemma as to how to manage them.

(ii) **Value** 7.97, High.

(iii) **Reasons.**

(aa) High expectation from the role occupant.

(ab) Multi tasking from the various persons.

(iv) **Management.**

(aa) Prioritising the work.

(ab) Good training.

(g) **Role Erosion.**

(i) **Definition.** This type of role stress is the function of role occupant's feeling that some functions which should properly belong to his / her role are transferred to / or performed by some other role.

(ii) **Value.** 7.82, high.

(iii) **Reasons.**

(aa) Multi tasking of the role occupant.

(ab) Hierarchical structure of working in the government departments.

(ac) Frequent transfer from one establishment to another.

(ad) Various types of works to be performed by each officer.

(iv) **Management.**

(aa) Postings for longer durations.

(ab) Officers specialise in particular type of work / task.

(ac) Continuity in similar type of work / task.

V. CONCLUSION

Overall organizational role stress was reported to be high among officers in the government departments. The result reveals that while inter role distance, role expectation conflict

and role erosion are the main sources of stress felt by the government officers, personal inadequacy, role ambiguity and resource inadequacy are the least felt stresses.

On the basis of above findings, a comprehensive human resource development strategy in the government departments be evolved so that impact of organizational role stress felt by role occupants is reduced.

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