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# OCCUPATIONAL ROLE STRESS AND JOB SATISFACTION IN EMPLOYEES OCCUPYING BOUNDARY SPANNED ROLES: AN OVERVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

*Occupational Role Stress is framework to identify the factors causing role stress among employees occupying a role. This scale is widely used by researchers to identify the stressors in a role. This has been used to identify stressors in boundary spanned roles of IAF officers who are spanners involved in development of highly technological systems with the association of scientists of DRDO labs and Public Sector Undertakings. The co-relation of the stressors with job satisfaction is measured by the Job Satisfaction Survey developed by Paul Spector. The physiological stress level is measured by the Perceived Stress Scale developed by Sheldon Cohen. In this paper the concept of evaluating role stress and its effect on job satisfaction and perceived stress is discussed in detail.*

## KEYWORDS

stress, occupation role stress, job satisfaction, boundary spanned roles.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

rganisations have many of their employees deployed across various places to achieve the organisation goals. The employees come from varied background of this country and many join at a very young age. Every organisation has its own culture and employees are groomed to the culture and ethos of the organisation. Many employees are assigned roles which demands interfacing with people of other organisations. For example, a large number of defence officers are engaged in working together with employees of public sector undertakings and private enterprises in development and trials of new weapon systems, transfer of technology from foreign firms. They also interact with personnel of DRDO labs for research and development of new systems and work on various projects.

Dealing with organisations which have a different work culture than that of parent organisation can lead to increased job stress. An employee gets accustomed to the working culture and environment of the parent organisation over the years and when assigned a role to interact with people from different organisation which has a different working culture can lead to frustration and stress. Deadlines, operational urgency, lack of resources, lack of autonomy, lack of understanding of the requirements by members of other organisations, delays, frequent failures etc can lead to occupational role stress. There are possibilities of conflicting demands placed on such employees by the parent organisation and members of the organisation they mostly interact with. People specially engaged in projects have ambiguous role requirements which may conflict with the requirement of the parent organisation. Employees may be required to assume different kind of roles in their job to suit the organisational requirements.

The occupational role stress can lead to frustration and can adversely affect the job satisfaction. Job satisfaction has different facets like pay, supervision, environment, communication etc. Although it can be measured by asking an employee how he feels about his job, but the different facets in a job can give better understanding of the job satisfaction if the management wants to improve the level of satisfaction for its employees. Although there are many factors which affect the job satisfaction, stress can alone overwhelm all the other factors and affect adversely. A dissatisfied employee can not only harm his own health but can have negative effect on the performance of the organisation and may lead to even sabotage.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1 STRESS

The word is derived from the Latin word "Stringere" – which means to draw tight. The term stress was first introduced by Hans Selye in 1936 in the field of life sciences. In the physiological sense, Selye propounded 'stress' as a nonspecific response of the body to any demand made on it. He theorized that to a broad array of stressors and concluded that the body's way of responding is surprisingly same. It indicates that a wide variety of stressors are capable of producing same stress response like effort, fear, success and fatigue (Selye, 1956). Stress is a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with and opportunity, demand or resource related to what the individual desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important (Stephen, et al., 2013).

Stress is expressed in the form of overwhelming exhaustion, feeling of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2001). Stress is conceptualized from three different perspectives namely, (a) stimulus perspective (b) response perspective and (c) psychodynamic perspective (Pestonjee, 1999). As a stimulus, stress has been used to describe situations in the external environment characterized as new, forceful, fast changing, demanding, sudden or unexpected (Beehr, 1985).

Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health (mental and physical) and even injury (Mamta, n.d.). Job stress is also defined as 'a situation when job-related factors interact with a worker to change (i.e. disrupt or enhance) his or her psychological and/or physiological condition, such that the person (i.e. mind or body) is forced to deviate from normal functioning' (Beehr & Newman, 1978).

Today the word 'stress' has become a major concern for every organisation. Ignoring stress has major consequences for an organisation by way of increased health costs, absenteeism, substance abuse and can even lead to sabotage. Stress always has a negative connotation and is believed to be caused by something bad to the individual by the organisation or the environment. But there is also a positive stress called *eustress* in contrast to *distress*. *Eustress* which is called positive stress is required in any organisation without which can lead to boredom, lack of focus and depression. Stress can be defined as and 'adaptive response to an external situation that results in psychological and/or behavioural deviations for organisational participants (Luthans, 2010). Excessive stress can lead to burnout. The difference between stress and burnout is that 'stress is normal and often quite healthy. However, when the ability to cope with stress reduces in individuals it can lead to burnout (Grensing, 1999). Stress stimuli can be due to threat of failure, unpleasant agents and rapid social changes (Lazarus, 1966). We can see job stress as a "process in which stimuli in the work place cause employee to experience serious psychological discomfort or ill health" (Beehr, 2001). From a response

perspective, stress can be seen as an imbalance between the demands to make an adaptive response and the capacity of the individual, higher the difference between requirements and resources the higher will be stress (Srivastava, 1999).

Individuals under too much stress would display lack of concentration, focus, anxiety and have adverse health condition like sleeplessness, backaches, headaches etc. There are various factors which causes stress and the factors may be external to the organization or internal, the social environment the individual interacts, or from within the individual. The organisational stressors may include administrative policies, organisational structure and design, organisational processes, working conditions. The working environment plays a major role in the organisation for individuals which can lead to stress and burnout.

The short term response for stress management in individuals can be "Flight-or-Fight" response as termed by Walter Cannon in 1915. He described the Flight-or-Fight response as a physiological reaction that occurs in response to a perceived harmful event, attack or threat to survival. Hans Selye is considered to be the father of stress research had observed that the body of an organism would respond to any external source of stress with a predictable biological pattern in order to maintain the internal homeostasis. The response of the body to maintain the internal homeostasis is called as "General Adaptation Syndrome". This was a model which describes stress comprises of three phases of response. They are: **Alarm Stage, Resistance Stage and Exhaustion Stage** (Selye, 1976).

Stress can contribute to health problems such as headaches, high blood pressure, heart problems, and skin conditions. Stress may also influence cognitive processes because it is associated with elevated levels of cortisol, a hormone that can influence brain functioning. High level of stress can lead to cardiovascular problems, musculoskeletal problems, immune system problems, gastrointestinal system problems. It can also lead to psychological problems like anger, anxiety, depression, nervousness, irritability, depression, tension, boredom. Individuals are prone to exhibit aggression, hostility which can lead to poor decision making. Since many personnel have to deal with emergency situation in their work place, stress can impact their alertness and decision making leading to dangerous situations and safety hazard. Research shows that work is, for most people, the most important source of stress in life (Stephen, et al., 2013). The total number of working days lost in UK due to stress related illness in 2015/16 was 11.7 million days (Health, 2016). Schuler defines stress "as a dynamic condition in which an individual is: (a) confronted with an opportunity for being/having/doing what he desires and/or (b) confronted with a constraint on being/having/doing what he desires and/or (c) confronted with a demand on being/having/doing what he desires and for which the resolution often is perceived to have uncertainty but which will lead (upon resolution) to important outcomes" (Schuler, 1980). Many treat stress as a stimulus variable and define it as "any vigorous, extreme or unusual stimulation, which, being a threat causes some significant change in behaviour" (Miller, 1969).

### 2.1.1 OCCUPATIONAL ROLE STRESS

Occupational Role Stress is the stress experienced due to occupation of an organisational role (Srivastava, 1999). Perceived stress related to occupational conditions such as role conflict, role ambiguity, group and political pressures, role overload, responsibility for persons, powerlessness, under participation, poor peer relations, low status, intrinsic impoverishment, unprofitability and strenuous working conditions have been assessed (Srivastava, 1981). Occupational role stress take places if there is mismatch between one's job resources and circumstances and his/her abilities (Holmlund, 2005). The organisational climate and social support also has a great impact on the stress level of the employees. (Cooper, 1976) classified stress as intrinsic to a job or role, career growth, relationship with colleagues and organizational climate and structure as five main clusters of work stressors. (Srivastava, 2009) found that the role of an employee in the organization may create conditions that cause stress for employees at work affecting the quality of work life. Such Organizational role stress has been found to be negatively related to managerial effectiveness. (Srivastava, 1981) reviewed that perceived stress is related to work conditions such as role ambiguity, role conflict, political and group pressures, role overload, responsibility for persons, powerlessness, under participation, deprived peer relations, low status, intrinsic impoverishment, unprofitability and strenuous working conditions. (Schuler, 1982) acknowledged relationship, job qualities, organizational structure, career development, physical qualities, change and role as major categories of job stressors. (Cummins, 1990) recommended role conflict and ambiguity, work overload, underutilization of skills, resource inadequacy and lack of participation as the main categories of work stressors. Workplace stress is vague concept that has come to mean a number of things. It is defined as "characteristic of the job environment which make demands on (tax or exceed) the abilities or resources of the people for meeting the demands or which may otherwise threaten attainment of people's need" (Abramis, 1994).

### 2.2 BOUNDARY SPANNED ROLES

Boundary spanned roles are job positions where individual employees are required to come in direct contact with the public or employees of other organisations which are also called boundary roles. Today is the era of multi-team systems and the requirement of continuous innovation. Since boundary spanners have role senders located in external organizations as well as in their own organization, conflicting and misunderstood expectations for role performance often are sent to the boundary spanner. Conflicting demands can result in strong role pressures in boundary span roles.

Effective boundary management not only directly benefits team effectiveness, but also—since team boundaries are important for knowledge transfer within and between organizations, for organizational innovation and for protection against outside threats—translates into improved organizational learning and effectiveness (Jennifer, 2007). Boundary spanning behaviours also include conflict management, member co-ordination and goal setting. Because boundary-spanning activities are taxing and can directly compete with internally directed activities for time and attention (Katz, 1978). Research has found boundary-spanning roles to have negative effects for their incumbents. Since boundary spanners have *role senders* located in external organizations as well as in their own organization, conflicting and misunderstood expectations for role performance often are sent to the boundary spanner. These conditions have been found to result in strong and conflicting role pressures and tensions for incumbents of boundary-spanning roles (Keller R. H., 1974).

### 2.3 JOB SATISFACTION

The term job satisfaction was termed by Hoppock who reviewed 32 studies on job satisfaction conducted prior to 1933 and observed that job satisfaction is a combination of psychological, physiological and environmental circumstances that cause a person to say, "I am satisfied with my job". Such a description indicates the variety of variables that influence job satisfaction but tell us nothing about its nature (Hoppock, 1936). Job satisfaction is also defined as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (Locke, 1976). In simple terms, job satisfaction explains what makes people want to come to work. What makes them happy about their job or not to quit their job?

(Nash, 1985) has extensively reviewed the nature of job satisfaction in the industrial world and found that job satisfaction is attributed not only to one but many factors and varies in its impact on individuals satisfaction with life because work varies in importance from individual to individual. He also found that people who take their job as prime interest experience high level of job satisfaction. Their job satisfaction will be further enhanced if they are doing work that is utilizing their skills. He also found that job satisfaction is an indicator of employee's motivation to come to work and it changes with age and employment cycle. He also concluded that certain organizational characteristics influence job satisfaction, and one of the major factors is the intrinsic nature of the job itself. An individual who genuinely likes the content of the job will be more satisfied with the job. In terms of preferences, he said that industrial workers want job with high pay, high security, promotional opportunities, fewer hours of work and friendly supervision. Finally, he found that if it demands considerable effort to get a job (through education, experience or achievement), if one can make a lot of money at it, if one cannot think of an alternative, then one should be highly satisfied with the job. He also stated in his findings that factors that influence job satisfaction differ from men to women in terms of importance of ranks. Generally, men rank security first, followed by advancement, type of work, company, pay, co-worker, supervision, benefits, and duration of work and then working condition. Whereas women rank type of work first, followed by company, security, co-workers, advancement, supervision, pay, working condition, duration of work and then benefits.

Satisfaction is also operationalized as a discrepancy and defined as the extent to which reward actually received meet or exceed the perceived equitable rewards. The greater the failure of actual rewards to meet or exceed equitable rewards the more dissatisfied an employee will be (Porter, 1985). The concern of job satisfaction can be based on the focus of employee or organisation. The humanitarian perspective says that people deserve to be treated fairly and with respect. Job satisfaction is a reflection of good treatment. It is an indicator of emotional wellbeing or psychological health. Also, the utilitarian perspective is that job satisfaction can lead to behaviour by employees that affects organisational functioning (Spector, 1997).

Job satisfaction is about how people feel about their jobs and different aspects of their job. Most recent study on job satisfaction focus on cognitive process instead of the perspective of need fulfilment. Job satisfaction is mostly seen as an attitudinal variable. This perspective has become predominant in the study of job satisfaction. Most of the studies use the facet approach to find out which aspect of the job produce satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Facets which are usually studies are pay, fringe benefits, co-workers, nature of work, supervision, promotion etc.

**3. OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the paper is:

- (a) To develop a concept for evaluating the occupational role stress among employees in boundary spanned roles.
- (b) To identify the occupational role stressors in boundary spanned roles.
- (c) To develop a concept to evaluate the relationship between occupational role stress and job satisfaction.

**4. METHODOLOGY**

**4.1.1 OCCUPATIONAL ROLE STRESS (ORS)**

One of the widely used Occupational Role Stress framework was developed by Udai Pareek (1983). This framework has ten different stressors identified which are given below:

- (a) **Inter-Role Distance (IRD):** An individual carries out more than one role in similar or different capacities. Stress arises when the demands of these different roles creates conflict. Stress arises when a person cannot balance the different roles and he feels it is important to do justice to all the roles.
- (b) **Role Stagnation (RS):** As an individual grows in an organisation, he expects his career to grow too. Stress due to role stagnation sets in when people feel that they have limited or no career growth in their organisation.
- (c) **Role Expectations Conflict (REC):** Stress arising out of conflicting expectations or demands by different role senders creates Role Expectations Conflict stress.
- (d) **Role erosion (RE):** When some important roles are given to or done by others, which should have been part of the individual’s role, role erosion stress takes place.
- (e) **Role Overload (RO):** When people are faced with multiple obligations or demands, which is more than the time available, role overload stress sets in.
- (f) **Role Isolation (RI):** The stress resulting due to a situation when an individual feels isolated with other roles in the organisation due to poor communication, hierarchy, or organisational climate is termed as Role isolation.
- (g) **Personal Inadequacy (PI):** The stress arising due to the feeling in a person that he/she does not have the required skills and training to effectively perform the role is termed Personal Inadequacy.
- (h) **Self-Role Distance (SRD):** This kind of stress arises when an individual fails to identify with the role he occupies or feels he is not fully utilised. This is essentially a conflict arising out of mismatch between the person and his job.
- (i) **Role ambiguity (RA):** Lack of clarity in the role occupied or poor feedback about one’s performance can result in stress due to role ambiguity.
- (j) **Resource Inadequacy (RIin):** When adequate resources are not provided to a role occupant for performing the role effectively, it results in stress due to resource inadequacy.

The ORS scale can be adopted from the ORS Manual of Udai Pareek, which has five questions for each of the above role stressors to be responded on a Likert Scale. So a total of 50 questions are used to evaluate the above role stressors.

**4.1.2 JOB SATISFACTION SURVEY**

Few of the existing and most used scales for evaluating job satisfaction are:

- Job Descriptive Index (JDI) by Smith, Kendall and Hulin 1969
- Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) by Weiss, Dawis, England and Lofquist 1967
- Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) by Hackman and Oldham 1975
- Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) by Paul E Spector 1985

All these four surveys use the facet measures of job satisfaction. For the purpose of this study, the JSS can be considered. This survey assesses nine facets of job satisfaction. Each facet has four items and hence a total of 36 questions. It uses a summated rating scale format. The total satisfaction score can be computed by adding the score of all the items. The JSS yields 10 scores. Each of the nine facet produces subscale score and total of all items produces total score. The questionnaire has some of the items scored in the positive and some in the negative direction. Before the items are totaled, the scoring for the negatively worded items have to be reversed.

The Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) developed by Paul Spector is used to measure the level of job satisfaction in the boundary-spanned role of the officers of IAF (Spector, 1997). The JSS measures job satisfaction in nine facets as well as the overall satisfaction. The nine facets with brief description is given in the Table 4.1 below:

**TABLE 4.1: FACETS OF JOB SATISFACTION AND ITS DESCRIPTION (Spector, 1997)**

Facet	Description
Pay	Satisfaction with pay and pay raises
Promotion	Satisfaction with promotion opportunities
Supervision	Satisfaction with person’s immediate supervisor
Fringe Benefits	Satisfaction with fringe benefits
Contingent Rewards	Satisfaction with rewards(not necessarily monetary)
Operating Conditions	Satisfaction with rules and procedures
Co-Workers	Satisfaction with co-workers
Nature of Work	Satisfaction with the type of work done
Communication	Satisfaction with the communication within the organisation

**5. CONCLUSION**

Stress has become one of the major health hazards today for every individual. Organisations can be a cause for stress in its employees and therefore it is obliged to identify the stressors and take steps to mitigate the stressors. The study can help organisations to identify the stressors in the role and take appropriate steps by adopting policies which help in reducing the role stress and increasing job satisfaction which ultimately increases morale and motivation of its employees. The scores can be analyzed to identify the major stressors and their inter-relations among themselves. Also the scores can be analyzed to find the co-relation of the stressors and job satisfaction. Many studies have been carried out to identify the role stressors in organisations, but this is an attempt to conceptualize the study of Occupational Role Stress in boundary Spanned Roles and its relationship with Job Satisfaction.

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