



**IMPACT OF RELATIONAL DEMOGRAPHY
ON ROLE AMBIGUITY & ROLE CONFLICT:
A STUDY OF J&K PUBLIC CORPORATION EMPLOYEES**

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to investigate the impact of relational demography on role ambiguity & role conflict among the employees of J&K Public Corporation. Data were collected from 175 employees of J&K State Road Transportation, J&K Cements Limited, J&K State Forest Corporation and J&K State Industrial Development Corporation using census method. The results of one way ANOVA, t-test and multiple regression indicated that the demographic variables such as gender, age, educational levels, length of association, marital status, number of dependents and income of employees plays a significant role in the perception of role ambiguity and role conflict among employees.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Research on unraveling the complex effects of workplace demographics like age, gender, race, tenure, education etc. has grown exponentially in the past two decades, reflecting enduring academic interest in the topic (Joshi et al., 2011). Recent investigations have examined the effects of individuals' demographic attributes on outcomes such as performance (Waldman & Avolio, 1986), satisfaction, turnover (Mobley, Horner & Hollingsworth, 1978), selection decisions (McIntire, Moberg & Posner, 1980), promotion decisions (McIntire, Moberg & Posner, 1980), leadership (Blau, 1985; Parsons & Liden, 1984 and Steckler & Rosenthal, 1985), work attitude and conflicts (Pelled et al., 1999 & Jehn et al., 1999). Waldman and Avolio (1986) documented a pattern of decreases in performance at higher ages when performance was measured by supervisory ratings and gender was found reliable to predict out group leadership

status (Duchon, Green and Taber, 1986). Relational demography refers to similarities or differences between an individual and others on such factors as age, gender, race, religion, education and occupation. In this paper the term relational demography is used to refer to the comparative demographic characteristics of members or employees who are in a position to engage in regular interactions.

Organizational conflict can be regarded as a dispute that occurs when interests, goals or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible with each other (Henry, 2009) or because of the scarcity of freedom, position and resources. Task-related conflict involves frustration, distrust, annoyance & tension based on perception of disagreements about the activity or content issues, viewpoints, ideas, opinions, goals & decisions, as well as procedures and choices for task accomplishment. Examples of task conflict are conflicts about the distribution of resources, procedures & policies, judgments and interpretation of facts (Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Affective conflict is emotional related and refers to disputes in interpersonal relationships when group members become aware that their feelings and emotions to those issues are dissonant, also leading to frustration, distrust, annoyance and tension. Examples of relationship/affective conflict are conflicts about personal taste, political preferences, values and interpersonal style. According to role theory, role ambiguity refers to the lack of specificity and predictability for an employee's job or role functions & responsibility (Kahn et al., 1964 and Beehr, 1976). Role ambiguity has been defined as 'the extent to which a worker understands the requirements of his or her job' (Rousseau, 1978) or 'lack of clarity with respect to expected performance, or the methods to be used to do the work and to the consequences of the performance' (Graen, 1976). The negative consequences of role ambiguity result from the fact that people often feel stressed when they lack precise knowledge of the goals they have to reach and this feeling interferes with goal accomplishment (Breugh & Colihan, 1994). Several studies found that role ambiguity reduces satisfaction with the immediate supervisor, colleagues, salary, opportunities for advancement and with work itself (Rousseau, 1978; Eisher & Gitelson, 1983; Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Lysonski, 1985; Glisson & Dudck, 1988; Cutnmings et al., 1989; Sawyer, 1992 and Breugh & Colihan, 1994). According to role theory, role conflict results from two or more sets of incompatible demands involving work-related issues (Kahn et al., 1964 and Katz & Kahn, 1978). De Wit & Greer (2008) found that both informational diversity (e.g. tenure, educational background) and social category diversity (e.g. gender, age) are positively related to task conflict. However, when analyzing specific characteristics, a negative relation with task conflict was found for educational background and age. Relationship conflict was positively associated with tenure, informational and social category diversity.

1.2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Relational demography theory proposes that individuals experience more positive outcomes with other individuals who are similar to them than with those who are dissimilar (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989 and Judge & Ferris, 1993). There is empirical evidence to show that increased diversity or demographic differences in dyads, groups and organisations are related to increased conflict, lower levels of social integration and performance and a higher turnover rate (Milliken & Martins, 1996; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998 and Riordan, 2001). Chatman & Spataro (2005) further suggested that when demographic differences are salient in the dyad or group, individuals may focus on personal rather than collective goals.

Most of the research on organizational demography focuses primarily on age and tenure as the primary variables in assessing demographic effects (e.g., McCain, O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 1983; Wagner, Pfeffer & O'Reilly, 1984 and Zenger & Lawrence, 1989). Pfeffer (1983) suggested that one can describe an organization in terms of a number of demographic distributions, including sex and race, age or tenure distribution or educational levels of the workforce. Tsui & O'Reilly (1989) argued that the focus on age and tenure may have limited potential in assessing the full impact of demography. They found differences in education, sex and race between members of superior-subordinate dyads to be associated with heightened role ambiguity, unfavorable performance evaluations and a lower level of attraction by the superiors to these subordinates. Jehn & Neale (1999) related conflict with the three-types of workgroup diversity included in their model (informational, social category and value diversity), task interdependence and task type, observing a positive association between informational diversity (education & function) and task conflict, which the authors pointed as possibly beneficial for group outcomes. In contrast, social category diversity (gender and age) was positively associated with affective conflict, which could be more detrimental to group performance. Lisa (1996) in a study of 42 blue-collar groups revealed that gender and tenure dissimilarity increased the perception of emotional conflict, indirectly reducing individual ratings of group productivity. These results suggest a process by which relational demography may indirectly affect members' confidence in their group. When supervisors and subordinates have a common background, their language patterns are apt to be parallel, fostering communication and reducing the likelihood of misunderstanding each other (Zenger & Lawrence, 1989). Wesolowski & Mossholder (1997) found that within the superior-subordinate dyad, racial diversity is correlated with a subordinate's perception of justice, conflict and job satisfaction. In this manner, gender and race similarity may help to make interactions between supervisors and subordinates rewarding, positive experiences.

Considering the influence of demography on group processes, in the present paper, we aim to study the relation between some demographic factors, namely educational background, gender, income, length of association and age on the role ambiguity & role conflict. Since relational demography has become a common characteristic of organizational life and conflict is an inevitable phenomenon of the employee's interaction, a better understanding of the relation between these variables can support the managing of employees, groups and diversity in a more constructive way, in order to reach their whole potential.

1.3 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Organisational conflict is the occurrence of real or perceived differences in members' values, goals or beliefs which influence their emotions, work environments and/or abilities to work together (Jameson, 1999 and Kolb & Putnam, 1992). Conflict is positively related to centralisation of authority, division of labour, decreased use of rules & procedures within the organisation and lack of participation (Cohen & Bailey, 1997). Differences in job tenure, education level (March & Simon, 1958), gender & race (Lincoln and Miller, 1979) leads to low communication (Zenger & Lawrence, 1989) between members of a dyad resulting in high role ambiguity and high role conflict (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1969). People of different ages, technical orientations, levels of work experience and social back- grounds may experience tension in a department as differing perspectives are applied to problems (Corwin, 1969). Conflict can also

be caused as a result of lowered employee compliance with rules & regulations, distortion of organisational goals, unprofessional behaviour and neglect of work tasks (Amason & Schweiger, 1994). Unclear accountabilities, mismatched expectations, inadequate resources & support, lack of communication and mismatch skills/ values/ attitudes for job often leads to conflict. Thus, it is hypothesized that

H₁: Differences in relational demography in a superior- subordinate dyad is positively associated with the role ambiguity experienced by the subordinate.

H₂: There exist significant mean difference regarding role conflict experienced by subordinates sub-divided into educational background, gender, income, length of association and age.

H₃: High level of organisational conflict is dependent upon organizational complexity, communication, rules & regulation and participation

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The primary data were gathered through a self- developed schedule sub-divided into personal information and dimensions of role-conflict & role-ambiguity on ordinal scale generated from research articles of Ghorpade et al. (2011), Tang & Chang (2010), Koustelios et al. (2004), Shenkar & Zeira (1992) and Kelloway & Barling (1990). Items on ordinal scale were collected on five point Likert scale (5 < ----1 >) where 5 denotes strongly agree and 1 denotes strongly disagree. Questions relating to personal information and suggestions were kept open ended. The secondary information was collected through books, journals, reports, internet and other unpublished documents pertaining to organisational behaviour.

The designed schedule, after pre testing and refinement, was distributed among all the employees of four J&K Public Corporations i.e., J&K State Forest Corporation, J&K State Road Transport Corporation, J&K Cement Limited and J&K State Industrial Development Corporation numbering 242 but effective response was received from 175 respondents (Table 1). The collected responses were reduced into few manageable and meaningful sets through factor analysis (SPSS, 16.5 version). It was carried with Principal Component Analysis along with orthogonal rotation procedure of Varimax for summarising the original information with minimum factors and optimal coverage. The statements with factor loading less than 0.5 and Eigen value less than 1.00 were ignored for the subsequent analysis (Hair et al.,1995). The statements retained after purification pertaining to conflict were 24 divided into four factors. Factor-wise, items were organizational complexity (11), communication (5), rules and regulations (4) and participation (4) . The KMO value and Bartlett's test of sphericity (Chi square values) of conflict dimensions revealed the sampling adequacy for the factor analysis.

To check the internal consistency in the data collected, Cronbach Alpha has been worked out wherein the value about 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978) is generally considered as acceptable criterion. The Alpha value of conflict dimension was 0.912 which is more than the acceptable criterion thereby demonstrating internal consistency. Factor-wise, Cronbach value arrived was 0.897(F1), 0.737(F2), 0.742(F3) and 0.87(F4). Various statistical tools like mean, multiple regression and one way ANOVA were used to analyse the data and to draw meaningful conclusions.

TABLE 1: LIST OF SAMPLE CORPORATIONS AND RESPONDENTS

S.No	List of J&K Corporations	Sampling Technique	No. of Employees	Effective Response
1.	J&K State Forest Corporation	Census	114	71
2.	J&K State Road Transport Corporation	Census	48	44
3.	J&K Cement Limited	Census	40	28
4.	J&K State Industrial Development Corporation	Census	40	32
	Total		242	175

1.6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

ROLE AMBIGUITY AND ORGANISATIONAL CONFLICT

Table 2 shows the output from independent t-test measuring significance of mean difference between operation level management & top level management with regard to ten statements of role ambiguity namely, 'The organisation lacks effective communication', 'The department lacks rules & regulations', 'Job description is not clearly defined', 'Incentives are not linked with performance', 'There is no parity between authority & responsibility', 'Responsibilities are not clear', 'Policies & guidelines are incompatible to performance', 'Disagreements concerning procedures, policies & allocation of resources create administrative conflicts', 'Differences of opinion create role ambiguity among employees' and 'Management does not consider issues from the employee's point of view'. For the test, lower & middle level employees are designated as operating level management whereas top level management included upper, top and board level management. As evident from the table, there exists significance mean difference between operating and top management employees' perception about three statements of role ambiguity, as value of $p < 0.05$ level of significance. The three statements are 'Responsibilities are not clear', 'The department lacks rules & regulations' and 'Management does not consider issues from the employee's point of view'. For the remaining, no significant mean difference exist between top and operating management with regard to seven statements of role ambiguity. Thus, the hypothesis 'Difference in relational demography in a superior-subordinate dyad is positively associated with the role ambiguity experienced by the subordinate' holds true for three dimensions and rejected on seven dimensions.

IMPACT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS ON ROLE CONFLICT

Table 3 shows out put from F-test calculated by using one way ANOVA through SPSS (version 11.5). The mean impact of role conflict was judged across employees subdivided into five different socio-economic dimensions. Levene's test was designed to test the hypothesis that the

variance of groups is same. In case of income, designation, number of dependents, age, length of association and qualification wise, the variance of groups are same as the value of the significance is greater than 0.05. As evident from the table, except for designation and length of association, no significant mean difference exists among respondents subdivided into age, designation, qualification and number of dependents. Thus the hypothesis, 'There exists significant mean difference regarding role conflict experienced by employees subdivided into educational background, income, designation, qualification, length of association and age' is rejected in case of four dimensions and accepted for two dimensions.

FACTORS INFLUENCING ORGANISATIONAL CONFLICT

Table 4 shows the results of step wise regression analysis using 24 items grouped in four factors to predict the dependent variable causing organisational conflicts. The results of regression analysis enticed four independent factors as significant predictors of organisational conflict in the regression model and these predictors are: 'Organisational complexity', 'Communication', 'Participation' and 'Rules and regulation'. The value of R as 0.646, 0.743, 0.775 and 0.783 signify the co-relation between predictor and the outcome. 'Organisational complexity' followed by 'Communication' then by 'Participation' and finally by 'Rules and regulation' have emerged as the strongest predictors as confirmed by its relative R^2 values. The total variability in conflict accounted for by these four independent variables is 60.4%. Change in R^2 is found to be significant as the values of F are well below 0.05% significance level. The value of Durbin-Watson being close to 2 is also indicative of the fact that errors in regression are independent. Thus, the hypothesis 'High level of organisational conflict is dependent upon organizational complexity, communication, participation and rules & regulation is true for all the four factors.

CONCLUSION & LIMITATIONS

In sum, this study represents an initial research effort to identify impact of relational demography on role ambiguity & role conflict. This investigation is also the first to focus on organisational conflicts in J&K Public Corporations because of complexities involved in the process, unstable economic environment, consistent dismay performance, undue political interference in functioning and neglect of organisational factors such as organisational structure, work systems, organisation culture & behaviour etc. Results showed male employees working at upper level, within the age group of 35-45 yrs with 3-4 dependents and 5-10yrs of association have tendency for experiencing organizational conflict. The reasons identified for such conflicts are role ambiguity & role conflict sub divided into factors like organizational complexity, communication, participation and rules & regulations. Dealing with conflict in the workplace may be the most important function that leadership must learn to handle rather than to avoid. Managers must cultivate enhanced feelings of loyalty among employees by reinforcing corporate value, elimination of numerical quotas to measure a day's work, involving employees to solve problems instead of enforcing on them and clearly communicate work priorities & responsibilities. In addition, effective managers must 'provide feedback on how well employees follow through' and treat people as partners.

The study focused on impact of relational demography on conflict & ambiguity only and future studies could be conducted to verify the dynamic nature of diversity and its effects on group

processes such as intragroup conflict, stress, leadership, motivation, working relationships etc. Another important aspect to be considered in future researches is the unclear influence of mediating or moderating effects of group diversity on job outcomes (e.g., group performance, job satisfaction, group involvement, organizational commitment, absenteeism, turnover). Similar studies can also be conducted on MNCs and private sector employees by collecting data from multiple sources.

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TABLE 2: MEAN PERCEPTION BETWEEN TOP AND OPERATING LEVEL EMPLOYEES WITH REGARD TO DIMENSIONS OF ROLE AMBIGUITY USING INDEPENDENT T-TEST

S.No.	Statements of Role Ambiguity	Designation of Employees	Mean Level	t- test	Significance (2 – tailed)	Result
1.	The organisation lacks effective communication	Operating Level	2.9506	.186	0.852	Insignificant
		Top Level	2.8462			
2.	The department lacks rules & regulations	Operating Level	2.7099	.045	0.006	Significant
		Top Level	2.6923			
3.	Job description is not clearly defined	Operating Level	2.8519	.220	0.826	Insignificant
		Top Level	2.7692			
4.	Incentives are not linked with performance	Operating Level	3.0802	.008	0.994	Insignificant
		Top Level	3.0769			
5.	There is no parity between authority & responsibility	Operating Level	2.8889	.313	0.755	Insignificant
		Top Level	2.7692			
6.	Responsibilities are not clear	Operating Level	2.6481	.524	0.001	Significant
		Top Level	2.4615			

7.	Policies & guidelines are incompatible to performance	Operating Level	2.5926	.376	0.707	Insignificant
		Top Level	2.4615			
8.	Disagreements concerning procedures, policies & allocation of resources create administrative conflicts	Operating Level	2.6728	-.752	0.453	Insignificant
		Top Level	2.9231			
9.	Differences of opinion create role ambiguity among employees	Operating Level	3.1481	.184	0.854	Insignificant
		Top Level	3.0769			
10.	Management does not consider issues from the employee's point of view	Operating Level	3.4198	-.95	0.032	Significant
		Top Level	3.4615			

Level of significance at 95%

TABLE 3: OUTPUT FROM F-TEST

Variable	Description of Variable	Mean	Nature of Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Designation	Lower	3.43	Between Groups	101.771	3	33.924	86.292	.000
	Middle	3.18	Within Groups	67.225	171	.393		
	Upper	4.11	Total	168.995	174			
	Top	3.00						
	Board	1.00						
Qualification	Matric	3.43	Between Groups	4.017	4	1.004	1.035	.391
	Graduation	3.10	Within Groups	164.979	170	.970		
	Post graduation	3.68	Total	168.995	174			
	Others	4.33						
Age	Below 25 yrs	4.00	Between Groups	3.674	4	.918	.944	.440
	25 – 35 yrs	3.38	Within Groups	165.322	170	.972		
	35 – 45 yrs	3.33	Total	168.995	174			
	45 – 58 yrs	3.31						

No. of dependents	1 – 2	3.17	Between Groups	6.503	4	1.626	1.701	.152
	3 – 5	3.38	Within Groups	162.492	170	.956		
	5 – 10	3.42	Total	168.995	174			
Income	Rs. 4,000- Rs. 10,000	3.51	Between Groups	.199	2	.100	.101	.904
	Rs. 10,000- Rs. 15,000	3.33	Within Groups	168.796	172	.981		
	Rs. 15,000- Rs. 20,000	2.90	Total	168.995	174			
	Above Rs. 20,000	3.31						
Length of association	1 – 5 yrs	3.08	Between Groups	12.378	4	3.094	3.359	.011
	5 – 10 yrs	3.81	Within Groups	156.617	170	.921		
	10 – 15 yrs	3.86	Total	168.995	174			
	Above 15 yrs	3.23						

Level of significance at 95%

**TABLE 4: REGRESSION MODEL SUMMARY (WITH COEFFICIENT) OF CONFLICT AS DEPENDENT VARIABLE
(STEP-WISE MULTIPLE REGRESSION METHOD)**

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimation	β	t	Sig. level	Durbin-Watson
1.	.646 ^a	.417	.414	1.06734	.360	6.115	.000	2.036
2.	.743 ^b	.552	.547	.93893	.221	3.440	.001	
3.	.775 ^c	.601	.5943	.88883	.266	4.464	.002	
4.	.783 ^d	.614	.605	.87682	.158	2.391	.018	

a. Predictors: (Constant), Organisational complexity

b. Predictors: (Constant), Organisational complexity, communication

c. Predictors: (Constant), Organisational complexity, communication, participation

d. Predictors: (Constant), Organisational complexity, communication, participation, rules & regulation

e. Dependent Variable: High level of organisational conflict is dependent upon organizational complexity, communication, participation and rules & regulation