

## A Holistic Approach to Determine the Relationship of Sociobiographical Variables with Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict

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**Abstract:** This study focuses to determine the relationship of socio-biographical variables on role ambiguity and role conflict amongst the subordinate staff of Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The current study consisted of 368 subordinate staff selected randomly from different units in the university. Role ambiguity and role conflict scale developed by Rizzo in 1970 was used to explore the experiences of subordinate staff. Data was analyzed by means of Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The result showed that male, married, younger in age, graduate, lower income and job tenure group of people experiencing higher degree of role ambiguity with their counterparts. Further, contrasting results have been identified in the case of role conflict expect with gender categories. The results of this investigation provide some suggestions for managerial effectiveness to alleviate role ambiguity and role conflict at workplace.

**Key words:** Role ambiguity, role conflict, gender, income, experience, qualification

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### INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, role ambiguity and role conflict creates unusual synchronize at the workplace. The changes advocates hostile relationship including stress, anxiety, worries and strain among not only among people working in business sectors but found also amongst the subordinate staff of educational sectors. The ministry of higher education in kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established with an aim to increase the overall growth and well-being of Saudis and opening various new universities to promote the culture and integrity of the nation. Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University is the new university and still in the infant stage where various courses are offered to provide ample human capital in the nation as well as international level. Such goal cannot be achieved without the support of non-teaching staff. However, conflict, ambiguity and hostile work environment that inhibit people to achieve the goal of the organization requires clear information and role to eliminate constraints to perform.

When the employees are not giving clear job descriptions and responsibilities, multiple task without proper instructions, role ambiguity will take place among the employees. Luthans (2000) rightly pointed that role ambiguity has been found due to inadequate knowledge or information to carry out the task. The reasons for such

ambiguity may consists of inadequate knowledge or information to perform the task. Moreover, Rizzo *et al.* (1970) stated “ role ambiguity as reflect certainty about duties, authority, allocation of time, and relationships with others; the clarity or existence of guides, directives, policies; and the ability to predict sanctions as outcomes of behavior”. In addition, the roles and responsibilities pertaining to job in a situation of role ambiguity, the duties and achievements related to job obligation are not completely understand and the significances of role actions cannot be assumed (Sinha and Subramanian, 2012). Zhao and Rashid (2010) described “ role Ambiguity as the absence of satisfactory information which is required in order for persons to accomplish their role in a satisfactory manner”.

It is noted that when the responsibilities of the individual are not rightly or properly defined, role conflict will emerge. Conflicts can be seen in the form of disagreement which indicates issues related to task and interpersonal and emotional issues which lead to conflict. It has been noticed in the organization that conflict sometimes considered as constructive at optimum level or normal range but beyond such point conflict may become dangerous. It can be positive when it defeats organizational sluggishness and makes to development of the organization. Various researchers defined role conflict in a different ways. Kahn *et al.* (1964) has been explained

“role conflict as the simultaneous occurrence of two or more role pressures so that the compliance with one makes it more difficult to comply with the other”. Rizzo *et al.* (1970) role conflict can be stated as “The contradicting roles carried out by an individual in an organization”. Cooper *et al.* (2001) is opined role conflict as “reflects incompatible demands on the person (either within a single role or between multiple roles occupied by the individual) which can induce negative emotional reactions due to the perceived inability to be effective on the job”. Rahim (2002) said that conflict can be conceptualized as “an interactive process manifested in disagreement, incompatibility, or dissonance between or within entities of social such as organization, group, individual etc”. Jones (2007) has been defined role conflict as “the person may be caught between in the crossfire between two supervisors or the needs of two function group”. Onyemah (2008) defined role conflict as “a feeling of being torn in multiple directions, unable to find a way to make every role partner satisfied”.

**Literature review:** In the areas of management and social sciences, various researchers revealed that role ambiguity and role conflict has directly or indirectly relationship with negative feelings of various aspects of job related variables (Rizzo *et al.*, 1970; Zhao and Rashid, 2010; Cooper *et al.*, 2001; Khattak *et al.*, 2013; Kahn *et al.*, 1964; Safaria *et al.*, 2011; Zakari, 2011; Pareek, 1993; Singh, 1998; Singh *et al.*, 1994; Yousef, 2000; Aziz, 2003; Karimi *et al.*, 2014; Malik, 2011; Idris, 2011; Jex and Bliese, 1999; Judeh, 2011; Quarat *et al.*, 2013; Vanishree, 2014; Kahtani and Allam, 2015a).

Zakari (2011) initiated a study among nursing faculty in Saudi Arabia and highlighted that role conflict was found to be correlated with all the facets of commitment while role ambiguity was identified inverse relationship with normative and continuance commitment. Wu and Norman (2006) explored inverse relationship between role conflict and ambiguity and job satisfaction. Judeh (2011) conducted a study to identify the mediating impact of role conflict and role ambiguity on employee socialization and organization commitment among telecom communication employees in Jordan. The result of the study revealed that role ambiguity and role conflict has emerged as significant mediators of the relationship between employee socialization and organization commitment. Celik (2013) has observed that the partial and full mediation of depersonalization and emotional exhaustion consequences from the result of role conflict on the job performance of an individual.

Recently, Zhou and coauthors conducted a study of middle level employees in Chinese local government with

an aim to probe the relationship among role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload and job stress. Result of their study revealed that pressure of time was found to be weighty related with role conflict & overload and job stress and job anxiety was observed positively and significantly related with role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload. Vanishree (2014) revealed that role conflict and role ambiguity and work overload produce job stress among employees resulting in mental block, poor concentration and decision making skills. Karimi *et al.* (2014) initiated a study among nurses in the hospital of Iran and identified significant positive relative relationship between role conflict, role ambiguity, occupational stress and role overload. Recently, Kahtani and Allam (2015b) explored that strategy a facet of defensive communication climate was found inverse relationship with role ambiguity among the university subordinate staff.

**The aims of the investigation:** In recent years, across the world researchers and academicians perceived that role stress particularly role ambiguity and role conflict is mounting up at place of work, thereby such variables not considered as the major concern for the research in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Hence, the present investigators begun a study among supporting staff from various departments of Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University to explore their experiences related to occurrence of role ambiguity and role conflict. Indeed, the present investigators aimed to explore the impact of some socio-biographical variables on role ambiguity and role conflict among subordinate staff working in the various unit of Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Sample:** The current study comprises of 368 subordinate staffs were chosen randomly from various divisions of Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

**Tools:** Role Ambiguity Scale measured by six items and role conflict was measured by eight items espoused from an instrument developed by Rizzo *et al.* (1970). The items of the scale has to be rated on 5 point rating scale ranging from 1 = very false to 5 = very true. The reliability of the scale was found to be .78 and .82 for role ambiguity and role conflict respectively.

**Biographical Information Blank (BIB):** The investigators prepared biographical information blank to gather in background information of the subjects such as gender, social status, age, educational level, income, tenure of the work etc.

**Data analysis:** Descriptive statistics methods was applied in order to get better assessment of level of role ambiguity and conflict in accordance to understanding of socio-demographic variables.

**Ethics:** The present researchers provided the information about the purpose of the study to all participants and respondents were informed that their response will be kept strictly confidential and will not be revealed their responses to any one at any circumstances and informed them that this research findings will be used for academic purpose only.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Table-1 illustrates that mean and sd of role ambiguity and role conflict amongst male and female subordinate staff at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University. The mean score male and female on the role ambiguity (13.6 and 12.99) and role conflict (21.95 and 21.84). It is evident from the result that male participants were found to be slightly higher role ambiguity as well as role conflict. Indeed, the explicit result can be depicted from the Fig. 1.

The aforementioned Table 2 shows that married group of employees scored 13.45, which is little higher degree of role ambiguity than single and widower. But in

the case of role conflict widower experienced higher level than married and single subordinate staff of the university. Moreover, clear findings have been illustrated in Fig. 2.

It is evident from the Table 3 and Fig. 3 that less than 25 years aged group of employees experienced higher level of role ambiguity whereas between 41-50 years aged group employees felt lesser degree of role ambiguity. As far as role conflict is concerned, between 41-50 years aged group respondents observed higher degree of role conflict.

Table 1: Showing mean and std. deviation of gender with role ambiguity and role conflict among subordinate Staff of prince sattam bin abdulaziz university (N = 368)

Groups	No of respondents	Mean (role ambiguity)	SD (Role ambiguity)	Mean (role conflict)	SD (role conflict)
Male	189	13.60	4.71	21.95	6.90
Female	179	12.99	4.24	21.84	6.34

Table 2: Showing mean and std. deviation of social status with role ambiguity and role conflict among subordinate staff of prince sattam bin abdulaziz university (N = 368)

Groups	No of respondents (N)	Mean (role ambiguity)	SD (Role ambiguity)	Mean (role onflict)	SD (role conflict)
Single	149	13.10	4.62	21.64	6.74
Married	211	13.45	4.40	22.01	6.56
Widower	8	13.12	5.05	23.62	6.58

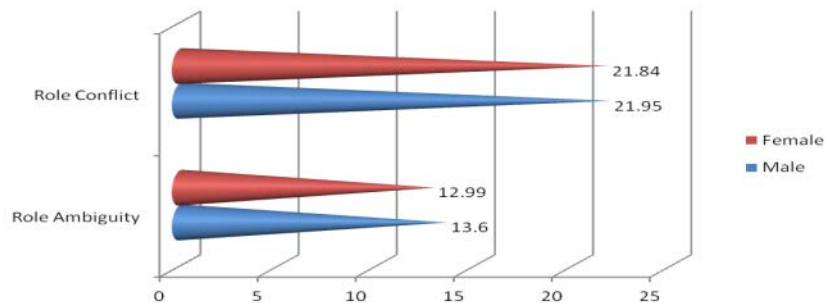


Fig. 1: Showing Mean of gender with role ambiguity and role conflict

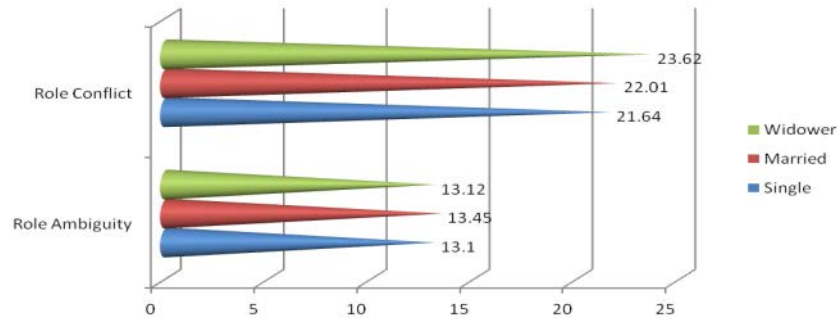


Fig. 2: Showing Mean of social status with role ambiguity and role conflict

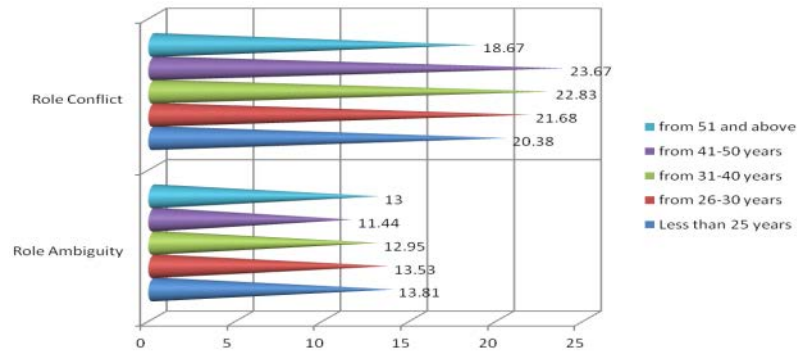


Fig. 3: Presenting Mean of different age group of employees with role ambiguity and conflict

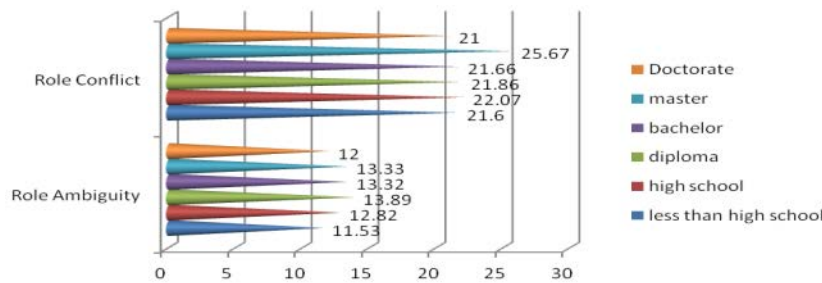


Fig. 4: Presenting mean of educational level of employees with role ambiguity and role conflict

Table 3: Showing Mean and std. deviation of different age group of employees with role ambiguity and role conflict (N = 368)

Groups	No of respondents (N)	Mean (role ambiguity)	S.D. (Role ambiguity)	Mean (role onflict)	S.D. (role conflict)
<25	42	13.81	5.75	20.38	6.54
From 26-30	211	13.53	4.22	21.68	6.50
From 31-40	94	12.95	4.67	22.83	6.86
From 41-50	18	11.44	3.25	23.67	6.73
From 51 and above	3	13.00	1.73	18.67	4.61

Table 5: Showing Mean and std. deviation of income level of employees with role ambiguity and role conflict (N = 368)

Income in riyals	No of respondents	Mean (role ambiguity)	SD (Role ambiguity)	Mean (role conflict)	SD (role conflict)
less than 4000	30	12.57	5.68	22.67	8.53
4001-6000	113	13.40	3.89	20.99	6.60
6001-9000	203	13.39	4.55	22.17	6.43
9001 and more	22	13.05	5.29	23.00	5.35

Table 4: Showing Mean and std. deviation of educational level of employees with role ambiguity and role conflict (N=368)

Educational level	No of respondents (N)	Mean (role ambiguity)	S.D. (Role ambiguity)	Mean (role onflict)	S.D. (role conflict)
Less than high school	15	11.53	3.64	21.60	8.74
High school	76	12.82	3.99	22.07	6.31
Diploma	106	13.89	4.78	21.86	6.69
Bachelor	161	13.32	4.60	21.66	-
Master	9	13.33	4.35	25.67	5.67
Doctorate	1	12.00	-	21.00	-

Table 4 and Fig. 4 reveals that diploma qualified respondents were experiencing higher level of role ambiguity than other education level of employees. It is noted that less than high school education level of employees felt lower degree of role ambiguity. Furthermore, master level of employees reveals higher degree of role conflict and only doctorate degree respondents observed lower level of role conflict.

It is observed from the Table 5 that role ambiguity perceived by the employees more whose salary is between 4001-600 Saudi Riyals whereas less than 4000 Saudi Riyals income group employees felt lesser level of role ambiguity. The aforesaid table also reported that the employees who are getting more salary found higher degree of role conflict. However, clear findings have been drawn in Fig. 5 for better understanding.

Table 6 and Fig. 6 reveals about the job tenure of the employees related to role ambiguity and conflict. Results identified that that between 2-4 years of job tenure of employees experienced higher level of role ambiguity whereas 7 years and above experienced group of employees felt lesser degree of role ambiguity. As far as role conflict is concerned, 7 years and above group of respondents observed higher degree of role conflict.

It is noted from the findings that male perceived higher degree of role ambiguity and role conflict. The result might be attributed that male employees performing

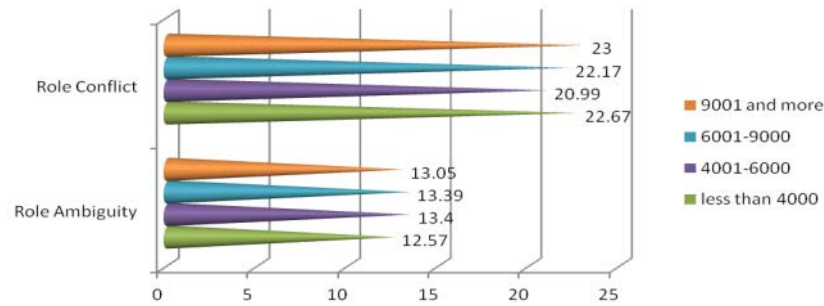


Fig. 5: Presenting mean of income with role ambiguity and role conflict of employees

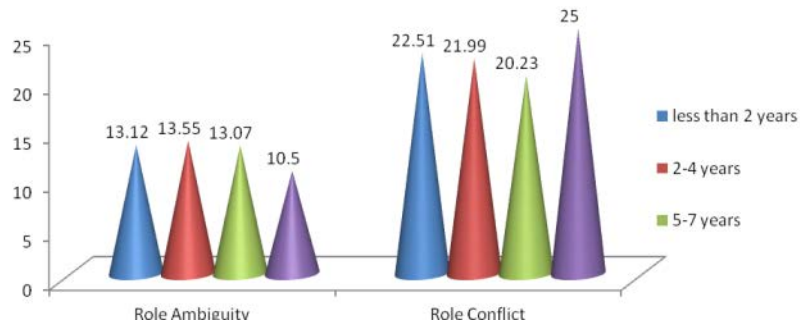


Fig. 6: Presenting mean of job tenure with role ambiguity and role conflict of employees

Table 6: Showing Mean and std. deviation of experiences of employees in the present job with role ambiguity and role conflict (N = 368)

Experiences in Years	No of respondents (N)	Mean (Role ambiguity)	SD (Role ambiguity)	Mean (role onflict)	SD (role conflict)
less than 2	127	13.12	4.40	22.51	6.33
2-4	178	13.55	4.50	21.99	6.83
5-7	61	13.07	4.68	20.23	6.40
from 7 and above	2	10.50	6.36	25.00	9.89

divergent roles in various spheres of life such as home, society and workplace which exhausted their enthusiasm as well as energies and minimized the psychophysical abilities comparatively to female employees and forced to experience role ambiguity and conflict. While in the case of social status, married employees' perceived higher degree of role ambiguity due to many responsibilities such as family, take care their siblings and lack of organizational instructions might put them in the higher role ambiguity. However, widower perceived higher degree of role conflict than their counterparts. The result might be attributed that widower did not get ample recognitions in the society due to cultural errors which they required for survival and leads to role conflict. Results showed that age group <25 years reported highest level of role ambiguity. The results might be interpreted that due to unable to adaptation of work environment and work culture, lack of good understanding with superiors, lack of ambitions and lack of willing to take responsibilities. Whereas, age group

between 41-50 years employees have more responsibilities to take care families and even the organizational demands might leads to role conflict. The current study also identified that diploma employees, the employees getting salary between 4001-6000 Saudi Riyal and 2-4 years' experience people are perceiving higher level of role ambiguity than their counterparts. In glimpse, it can be said that such employees working in a new university which considered as an infant stage might not able to provide clear instructions to their subordinates due to lack of training, orientation, explicit policies and rules. Whereas, master qualified employees, 9000 and above Saudi Riyal income and experiences from 7 and above years of employees perceived higher degree of role conflict than their counterparts. The results may be attributed that Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University is one of the emerging and growing university in the Kingdom where employee have their own perceptions such as incompatible policies and guidelines, mismatch attitude or behavior with the another group or colleagues, unwanted demands by various people at work, lack of resources and unsupportive superiors.

### CONCLUSION

The findings of the current research drawn following conclusions. Male employees showed greater degree of role ambiguity and role conflict than female. Married employees were found to be higher level of role ambiguity

and widower showed greater degree of role conflict than their counterparts. Less than 25 years of age, diploma qualified, salary between 4001-6000 Saudi Riyal and experiences between 2-4 years found higher degree of role ambiguity. Age from 41-50 year, master education, salary between 9000 and above and experiences between 7 and above years showed higher degree of role conflict than their counterparts.

### **SUGGESTIONS**

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one of the richest oil producing country where government is opening number of universities to promote the integrity, culture and uplift the inhabitants of the nations through educations. Thereby, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University also trying to achieve the mission and vision of the country through providing quality educations to the students. As we know that every organizations/institutes, the role of subordinates considered as a backbone of the organization and it will not be possible to complete the task without the support of these employees. Hence, it is the responsibilities of the higher officials to minimize the role ambiguity and role conflict through clear guidelines, instructions, socialization process, provide training and orientations, establish proper communications, provide conducive work culture or environment and provide facilities to achieve the objectives of the organization. Indeed, like other disciplines of knowledge this research has an avenues for other investigators for future research to focus on relevant issues of population to verify the generalization of the investigation.

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