Faculty Role Perceptions at University Level

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Abstract

This study was designed to explore the role perceptions of faculty members at a public sector university of Pakistan focusing on role conflict, role ambiguity and faculty satisfaction. The opinions of personally approached 299 teachers were surveyed through a questionnaire. The data was analyzed by calculating frequency of responses, mean and standard deviation, and by applying t-test. The results showed existence of role conflict, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction on the part of faculty of the university. Gender-wise and subject-wise differences were observed in the faculty perceptions on role conflict and role ambiguity. As regards job satisfaction, both Arts and Science teachers held similar views but male teachers' perceptions were significantly different from their female counterparts. It is recommended that university management must focus on clear job description, provision of required resources, effective supervision, and employee-sensitive HR policy.

Key Words: Role conflict, Role ambiguity, Job satisfaction, Higher education, Academic performance.

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Introduction

Organizations in world today are giving increasing emphasis on employees' welfare and job satisfaction which is largely affected by the nature of job and work conditions. With reference to Hackman and Oldham (1980), Robbins and Judge (2008) have identified five core dimensions of job: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback. The first three dimensions are important for meaningfulness of work while autonomy and feedback are related respectively to responsibility for the work outcomes and actual results of the work activities. Stress, which is defined as "physiological and psychological responses to excessive and usually unpleasant situation" (D. Schultz & S.E. Schultz, 2004, p.353), is a common and inevitable element of employment and work places. Stress has both

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negative and positive effects on employees. While literature provides substantial evidence about negative relation between stress and employee's performance, positive stress helps to react quickly and vigorously in emergencies, perform well under pressure, meet deadlines, understand potentials in academics/ career etc., push one's limits, and put enthusiasm and variety in life (Schafer, 1998). According to Greenberg (2009), sources of stress at work include intrinsic factors of job, role in organization, career development, relationships at work, and organizational structure and climate.

Role-related stressors are "associated with social roles, which are social positions with clustered expectations" (Schafer, 1998, p.500). Role problems that may cause occupational stress include "role overload, role insufficiency, role ambiguity and role conflict" (Greenberg, 2009, p.322). Role conflict and role ambiguity are the role stress variables which are most widely studied and discussed by researchers (Tang & Chang, 2010). Shenkar and Zeira (1992) emphasize studying the role conflict and role ambiguity in a multinational perspective because it may result in expanding the scope of role theory beyond uni-national companies and increasing insight into international management studies. This study is an attempt to investigate role conflict and role ambiguity involving the faculty of a public sector university in Pakistan. The findings of this study would be a valuable addition to the literature in role theory, one of the least researched areas in Pakistan.

Role conflict is defined as "job roles that interfere with on another" (Drafke, 1998, p.332) and "incompatible expectations associated with a social position, such as student, employee, or mother" (Schafer, 1998, p.499). The disparity between job requirements and employee's personal values may create state of role conflict (D. Schultz & S.E. Schultz, 2004). Role conflict occurs when compliance with one role obligations makes it more difficult for an individual to comply with another (Robbins & Judge, 2008). The research studies on role conflict suggest that role conflict being stressful causes mal-integration in the work place, poor performance, lower institutional commitment and higher rate of resignations (Corbin, 1998).

With reference to Kahn et al. and Beehr, Tang and Chang (2010) define role ambiguity as "lack of specificity and predictability for an employee's job or role functions and responsibility" (p.870). Role ambiguity is associated with unstructured and poorly defined tasks (D. Schultz & S.E. Schultz, 2004), and employee's unawareness about the nature of job and his position in the organization (Drafke, 1998). Role ambiguity may also be the result of changes in the external environment and the subsequent reactions within the organization (Forte, Hoffman, Lamont, & Brockmann, 2000). Recognizing the work of industrial-organizational psychologists, Breaugh and Colihan (1994) have pointed out three components of role ambiguity: i) Performance criteria ambiguity, which is related to uncertainty about the standards used to evaluate a worker's job performance; ii) Work method ambiguity, which is

related to uncertainty about the methods or procedures appropriate to the successful performance of the job; and iii) Scheduling ambiguity, which is related to uncertainty about the timing or sequencing of work.. Referring to several authors, Bauer (2002) has identified other elements of role ambiguity: expectation ambiguity (what should be done), priority ambiguity (when it should be done), process ambiguity (how it should be done), and behavior ambiguity (behaviors that should be exhibited). Role ambiguity and role conflict are external factors of job satisfaction, and lead to lower job satisfaction (Drafke, 1998).

Job satisfaction is defined as "a positive feeling about one's job resulting from evaluation of its characteristics" (Robbins & Judge, 2008, p.48). The significant determinants of job satisfaction established in previous researches may include reward system, power distribution, self-esteem and need for achievement (Chen & Silverthorne, 2008). Job satisfaction may be affected by stress arising from employee's attempt to resolve the role conflicts and from ambiguity about autonomy in resolving these conflicts. Jobs vary in terms of amount of stress and satisfaction one may derive from the financial benefits and opportunities for professional growth. Compared with other occupations, college professor is one of the least stressful jobs (D. Schultz & S.E. Schultz, 2004; Greenberg, 2009).

Teachers' role perceptions, which may operationally be defined as "specific behaviors expected in a teaching position in an institution of higher education as understood by a faculty member" (Corbin, 1998, p.9), are affected by several groups/ individuals who may constitute the role set of a faculty member. They include departmental colleagues, college or university, immediate supervisor, faculty member himself or herself, and students (DeVries, 1975). This study examined the faculty role perceptions at The Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB), a public sector university operating in Southern Punjab with over 400 teachers and 12,000 students.

Objectives of the Study

This study was designed to explore the role perceptions of faculty members at a public sector university of Pakistan focusing on role conflict, role ambiguity and faculty satisfaction. The opinions of teachers working in different departments of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB) were surveyed through a self-administered questionnaire and compared in terms of gender and subject (Arts or Science). Based on the findings of the study, some suggestions are also put forward. This study was focused specifically on the following research questions:

1. What is the distribution of faculty members' time for various academic and administrative tasks?

2. What are the perceptions of faculty members regarding role conflict, role ambiguity and job satisfaction?

3. Is there any difference in the perceptions of male and female teachers about the core themes?

4. Is there any difference in the perceptions of Arts and Science subject teachers about the core themes?

Research Methodology

The target population for this research was full-time teachers of IUB. Being descriptive in nature, this study employed survey method to collect data from faculty members of 29 teaching departments of IUB. Out of 299 teachers who returned the questionnaires, majority were male (65.6%), having M.A./M.Sc. degrees (58.5%) and were teaching at master level (51.5%). Almost 40% respondents belonged to 31-40 year age group and 38.8% had 1-5 year teaching experience. Distribution of sample by designation shows that 48.5% teachers were Lecturers, 31.1% Assistant professors, 10.4% Associate professors, and 10% Professors. A marked majority of faculty members (81.1%) were working under semester system and 59.2% were using English as medium of instruction. The respondents from 29 departments were grouped into two broad subject areas i.e. Arts and Science. As a whole, 55.9% Science and 44.1% Arts teachers responded to the questionnaire.

The Research Instrument

The questionnaire, used as a research tool for this research, consisted of two parts. Part I contained demographic information including gender, age, qualification, designation, experience, department, level of teaching, medium of instruction, examination system, number of taught classes, and time distribution for different academic tasks. Rizzo, House & Lirtsman's (1970) scale was adapted and included in part II of the questionnaire. The scale of Rizzo et al. (1970) is the most popular tool among the researchers who are interested in studying role stress (Bauer, 2002; Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Tubre & Collins, 2000). Five questions relating to faculty satisfaction with their present job were also added in this part. On five-point Likert scale, the response options for 34 statements ranged from very false to very true. In this part, 15 items were related to role conflict, 14 to role ambiguity and 5 to faculty satisfaction. The content and face validity of the questionnaire were established through experts' judgment. The scale included in part II of the questionnaire is considered reliable as the Cronbach Alpha value was noted 0.92.

Collection and Analysis of Data

The process of data collection lasted for two months (from March to April 2009). For data collection, an effort was made to approach personally

all the faculty members of the university. The number of totally distributed questionnaires, however, was 354 and the return rate was found to be 79.48% (N = 299). The return rate was increased by paying more than one visit and giving reminders through telephone calls to the respondents. The respondents were given enough time for completing the questionnaires.

In order to arrive at findings and conclusions both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed by using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences-Version 14 (SPSS). Personal information of the respondents were worked out through frequency distribution and percentage. The mean response value along with standard deviation was calculated to see teachers' extent of agreement with each statement. For each of three clusters, the numerical values were summed up and t-test of independent samples was employed to find out difference in the faculty perceptions by gender and subject. Statistical significance for t-test was determined at 0.05 alpha level.

Results and Discussion

This study investigated the perceptions of faculty about their roles in the university academic environment through a questionnaire. Teachers were also asked about their workload and distribution of their time for various academic tasks (shown in Table 1). The results show that almost half of faculty members (48.1%) taught 150-200 classes per year.

Table 1

Distribution of Teachers' Professional Time

N = 299

Tasks	Professional Time (%)					Mean
	1-20	20-40	40-60	60-80	80-100	
1. Teaching	19.4	26.8	23.1	30.4	0.3	2.66
2. Student advising	56.6	24.1	7.7	2.3	0.3	1.48
3. Administrative tasks	58.2	40.8	0.7	0.3	Nil	1.43
4. Evaluation	81.9	14.4	1.7	1.7	0.3	1.24
5. Research	92.6	4.7	1.3	0.3	1.0	1.12

Majority of teachers tend to spend their 1-20% time in student advising (56.6%), evaluation (81.9%), research (92.6%) and administrative tasks (58.2%). As regards teaching assignment, 30.4% respondents allocate 60-80% time whereas 26.8% spend 20-40% time. It may be derived from the mean scores that student advising (Mean = 1.48) is the task in which teachers were mostly engaged after teaching (Mean = 2.66). In line with the observations of various authors about weak research base in Pakistani universities (For example Ali, 2005; Iqbal, 2004; Isani & Virk, 2005), research for the IUB faculty was found to be the least preferred activity (Mean = 1.12) in terms of time allocation.

Table 2

Overall Mean Response Values for Three Components

Variables	Mean
1.Role conflict	3.67
2. Role ambiguity	3.45
3. Faculty satisfaction	3.69

Table 2 shows overall mean response values for three variables under study. The mean scores for role conflict (3.67), role ambiguity (3.45) and faculty satisfaction (3.69) are greater than neutral mean value (3.0). The results indicate the existence of role conflict and role ambiguity for the faculty of IUB. This finding contradicts with the conclusion of Corbin (1998) who surveyed faculty role perceptions of community colleges in USA and found that college teachers were generally satisfied with their roles. Negative relation between role conflict and job satisfaction and between role ambiguity and job satisfaction has been reported by a number of authors (Andy, 2003; Fisher, 2001; Gregson & Wendell, 1994; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Rebele & Michaels, 1990; Rizzo et al. 1970; Ussahawanitchakit, 2008). However despite higher mean values on both role conflict and role ambiguity, the IUB faculty exhibited their satisfaction with teaching and their jobs. Contrarily, Dilshad and Iqbal (2009) reported dissatisfaction of teacher educators at public universities in Pakistan.

In literature, few studies refer to positive relationship between role ambiguity and job satisfaction (Bauer, 2002). This study tends to support the findings of this line of research. There may be confounding variables that may mediate or neutralize the impact of role conflict and role ambiguity on job satisfaction. Possible moderators of role ambiguity may include employee's education, tenure, culture, gender, personality, need for clarity, empowerment, social support, task interdependence, group cohesiveness, and feedback/ communication (Bauer, 2002). The faculty's resilience and tolerance for role conflict and role ambiguity may be the reasons for IUB teachers' higher level of job satisfaction, which may be attributed to ethnic and cultural background of Pakistani society.

The t-test of independent samples was used to compare teachers' perceptions by gender and subject. The comparative data, presented in Table 3, depicts significant difference   in the perceptions of male and female faculty members on role conflict and role ambiguity. On contrary, Corbin (1998) concluded that there was no significant gender difference among

Table 3

Comparison of Faculty Perceptions by Gender

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	t-value	Sig.
Role conflict	Male	196	55.98		
	Female	103	52.62	2.241	.026*
Role ambiguity	Male	196	49.40		
	Female	103	46.75	2.055	.041*
Satisfaction	Male	196	18.55		
	Female	103	18.25	.401	.689

* = significant value at .05 level

college faculty on role conflict. It is clear from the mean values that male faculty, as compared to their female counterparts, faced greater role conflict and role ambiguity. In their study conducted on medical officers in Pakistan, Kazmi, Amjad and Khan (2009) also found that male doctors were more stressful than female physicians. However, no significant gender difference was observed about faculty satisfaction in the present study. This finding is consistent with Corbin's (1998) results that male and female college faculty members had no significant difference on job satisfaction. The mean scores show that male teachers were slightly more satisfied than female faculty members. It implies that male faculty members were relatively more tolerant towards role conflict and role ambiguity. In contradiction to present study's finding, Klenke-Hamel and Mathieu (1990) found greater job satisfaction among women in four different samples including, blue collar, secretarial staff, engineers, and university faculty.

Table 4

Comparison of Faculty Perceptions by Subject

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	t-value	Sig.
Role conflict	Arts	132	53.10		
	Science	167	56.19	-2.152	.032*
Role ambiguity	Arts	132	45.62		
	Science	167	49.96	-2.717	.007*
Satisfaction	Arts	132	19.03		
	Science	167	17.98	1.502	.134

* = significant value at .05 level

The comparison of faculty perceptions by subject is given in table 4. The t-statistics reveal significant difference in the opinions of Arts and Science subject teachers on role conflict and role ambiguity. In contrast to Arts subject faculty, Science teachers, as reflected by mean scores, experienced greater levels of role conflict and role ambiguity. No significant difference

came forth in the satisfaction of Arts and Science subject faculty. However, Arts teachers appear to be more satisfied than Science subject teachers. One of the obvious reasons for that may be the fact that Arts teachers found their roles relatively less conflicting and less ambiguous.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Teachers, being the core employees of universities, contribute significantly towards the achievement of organizational goals. The faculty work performance may be affected, among other factors, by the perceptions they hold about their roles and responsibilities. "It is likely that faculty role perceptions affect their teaching styles, and consequently, effectiveness of teaching" (Corbin, 1998, p.5). This study was undertaken to investigate the role perceptions of faculty members at a public sector university of Pakistan focusing on role conflict, role ambiguity and faculty satisfaction. The faculty perceptions were compared in terms of gender and subject. The results showed existence of role conflict, role ambiguity, and personal satisfaction on the part of faculty of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur. Gender-wise and subject-wise differences were observed in the faculty perceptions on role conflict and role ambiguity. As regards faculty satisfaction, both Arts and Science teachers held similar views but male teachers' perceptions were significantly different from their female counterparts. The clarification of expectations and job responsibilities from the supervisors is important in order to decrease role ambiguity-related stress of employees (D. Schultz & S.E. Schultz, 2004). It is further recommended that university management must focus on clear job description, provision of required resources, effective supervision, and employee-sensitive human resource management policy. Since this study was delimited to one university, the results may be generalized with caution. It would be desirable to conduct similar studies involving faculty of other public and private universities of Pakistan.

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