

## A Study on the Relation Between the Role Conflict and Ambiguity with the Burnout Among the Staffs of The Islamic Azad University of Shoushtar

Azam heidari, Alireza Kia

Islamic Azad University, shoushtar Branch, shoushtar, Iran

**Abstract:** This study is mainly focused on analyzing the relationship between the role conflict and ambiguity with the Staff's burnout of the Islamic Azad University of Shoushtar in 2012. The sample selected in this research is 200 staff of the Shoushtar's Islamic Azad University, who was selected randomly. The present research is an applied, descriptive and field research. The data analysis is a correlation type. In this research, the standard questionnaire (Rizzo, House and Lirtzman) is used to measure the conflict and role ambiguity and (Maslach and Jackson, 1993) to measure the staff's burnout. To extract the results of the questionnaires, the descriptive statistics (frequency tables, Percentages, means, etc.) And to do the hypothesis tests, the analytical statistics (Pearson correlation coefficient, analysis of variance, and regression,) were used. By the use of the above-mentioned statistical methods, and by the use of SPSS, the data were analyzed. The results showed that, there was a significant difference between the dependent and independent variables.

[Azam heidari, Alireza Kia. **A Study on the Relation between the Role Conflict and Ambiguity with the Burnout Among the Staffs of The Islamic Azad University of Shoushtar.** *Life Sci J* 2013;10(5s):97-102] (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 17

**Keywords:** role conflict, role ambiguity, burnout, staff

### 1. Introduction

Nowadays, all the main and essential activities of humans are achieved in the organizations, and life is completely impossible without the different educational, industrial, manufacturing, service, and military organizations. The studies have shown that despite all the chances that people's membership in different organizations influenced by working area provide, some concerns are created for these people. In fact, the main part of people's life is going on in the waking state in the workplaces. Moreover, the occupational activities have deep influence on the mental and physical health and the whole life, if the human interaction is deranged with the job and work environment for any reason, the stress and disorders in the physiological and mental functions are created (Lecca and Hadmount, 2010). A set of stressful factors is related to the job and work environment. The organizational psychologists have identified some of the stressful factors of the work environment, the most significant of which are; the type of job, role conflict, ambiguity conflict, excessive pressure, social care, and organizational changes (Bamber, 2006).

There are several degrees of mental pressure and stress in many organizations. Therefore, the present study is an effort in order to measure the level conflict and role ambiguity, analyzing the relationship between these two variables with the burnout, and presenting guidelines to cut or gradual elimination the factors through conducting the positive styles the organizational behavior.

What is clear nowadays, all the managers of workshops and manufacturing factories as well as the

commercial and administrative centers have found out that one should know the physiological, mental, and social aspects to make the human activities more effective, and to achieve the highest use of the most valuable shaping factor of the social identity, and the main supplier source of life. Therefore, it is a considering field to know the stressful factors and related dissatisfaction to anyone, while not only increasing the stress decreases the human performance in the work environment, but also it creates a vicious cycle in the family relations; the cycle in which, stress creates disorder in the mental and physical health of the individual. Fortunately, nowadays, people, organizations and societies are more aware of this phenomenon and the results, and of course this awareness has increased the attention to the stressful factors much more. In the recent years, the job stress and the side effects have turned into one of the main concerns of the organizational behavior.

The scientists know the identification of the psychological factors of the work environment, a method based on which one can achieve a correct understanding of the job stress. About this issue, the researchers have tried to identify the issues related to stress especially by the use of "role theory," and find out that to what extent the pressures resulted by role can be effective in creating job stress (Ross and Altmayer, 2006: 70).

The role theory tries to explain that how the social expectations can affect the staff's behavior. In accordance with any role, there are functional and behaviors and special approaches. If the necessary

conditions are not explained well for the roles, the identifications are covered by an aura of ambiguity. Learning roles have assisted the organizational theoreticians to find out many problems that exist in relation with the specifications of the role in organizations, including problems resulting from role conflict and ambiguity (Michell, 1998: 348). One of the major obstacles to the realization is conflict and inconsistency among people. Conflict is regarded as an inevitable part of the organizational life that is mostly created because of the organizational specifications.

Some researchers believed that through the specifications of the role theory one can explain the factors and issues related to job stress well. They believe that stress is the result of inconsistency between expectations and the individual's wishes with the expectations and wishes of the organization. The role conflict is said to the certain job status in which some part of the necessary information for doing the job is inappropriate, illusive, and insufficient. In other word, the role ambiguity is created when the individual's role is not clear or it is not clear that what responsibilities they have (Ross & Altmayer, Tr. Khajeh Pour, 2006). The role conflict also happens when accepting some of the job necessities is not in accordance with other job necessities. Studies show that the role ambiguity and conflict are among the most important factors of creating job stress and decreasing job satisfaction and interest. In addition to creating jobs dissatisfaction, it influences the individual's job function as well (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007).

The burnout is one of the common concepts in professional psychology, has such close ties with the individual's job specifications that some people know it as one of the inevitable side effects of the job stress and some equals with the job stress. In fact, the term burnout is a common term that is used to describe some kind of discomfort in occupations the staff of which has vast connections with others including people, customers, and patients. The scholars who study the burnout note that burnout is decreasing the power of consistency with the factors of job environment (Measles, 2001). However, it was imagined that burnout is only specialized in the human services jobs, but nowadays various studies show that burnout might happen in any job. Of course, the rate of income is higher in human services jobs (Spector, 2000).

Role conflicts happen when the suitable behaviors to play a role are not consistent with the suitable behaviors for another role (Boromand, 1997: 279). On the other hand, the type of problem is as important as or more important than the role conflict (Michell, 1998: 349). "Role ambiguity" is resulting

from insufficient information or lack of information about how doing a job. This ambiguity might be because of insufficient education, weak connection, deliberate isolation, or distortion of information done by a colleague or a supervisor (Lotanz, 1996:230). In this regard, various studies indicate that "burnout" is among the most significant negative side effects of conflict and role ambiguity in organizations.

Burnout is a consequence of the permanent job stress, which means that the individual feel stressed due to internal and external factors, which results in reducing the energy. In other word, burnout is a delayed response to the chronic stressful interpersonal factors in the field of occupation. The burnout is one of the main inevitable consequences of the job stress, and while this stress is not removed, it will continue. The first articles were written by Fredenberger (1975). According to Fredenberger et al., issues including reducing the emotions and lack of interest, and responsibility were studied and analyzed. The most common definition of burnout is related to Maslach and Jackson (1993), who defined it as a psychological syndrome composed of three dimensions of fatigue, depersonalization, and reducing the sense of personal accomplishment, which are created under his influence of various personal and situational factors. The central sign of fatigue is the emotional exhaustion, which is a general reaction to the stress and discharging the emotional resources in the individual. Depersonalization is the negative, cruel response to those who are usually the receptors of care and service, and points to the individual's approach to the client. This dimension burnout is completely special for the related jobs with the human services. Reducing the sense of personal accomplishment is reducing the sense of qualification and competence in completing the personal duties, and is a negative evaluation of self related to doing the job.

The results show that burnout causes destruction in the quality of services that is presented by the staff, and can be regarded as a factor for demoralization, and lack of responsibility. In addition to this, burnout is consistent with concerns such as physical fatigue, insomnia, excessive use of alcohol, drug as well as an outbreak of family problems (Maslach and Jackson, 1981: 99).

According to the studies done, the burnout among the staff of the service and care sector that are regarded as the first victims of burnout are significant in two ways: first, it influences the mental health of the individual and causes mental and physical symptoms, absence from work and changing the job. Second, it decreases the quality of services presented to the customers. The researchers believe that this issue is resulting from daily confront with stressful conditions and lack of positive condition in the work

environment. At this point, an intervention to decrease the burnout seems necessary. A type of intervention can be organizational intervention: such as encouraging for group work, participation of employees in decisions, job supports, reducing job conflicts and ambiguities, and increasing control over the occupational incidents. Another type of intervention is the psychological intervention to decrease the job stresses and increasing the compatibility in the work environment. The burnout is mostly observed among the teacher's occupations such as consultants, teachers, and physicians, and such cases. The burnout is associated with the role disorientation pressure, and weakness of job performance. Many Evidences show that burnout imposes consequences on organizations and staff; including changing jobs permanently, absence, plenty of leaves, declining the quantity and quality of work, excessive use of smoking. It is clear that these works and the related costs is noticed by the organization at first. Therefore, in the recent years and decades many of the organizations have tried to avoid the stressful factors (including role conflict and ambiguity) in the developed countries through such arrangements as assisting the staff (Ross & Altmayer, 2006: 189).

## 2. Material and Methods

Regarding the applicable strategy and statistical analysis of data this research is a correlation type. It is applicable because it is done to reply an organizational issue. Regarding time, it is a cross-sectional, field study. The population is 314 people and the sample includes 200 staff of the Islamic Azad University in 2012. In this research, the role conflict and ambiguity questionnaire was used. This test was designed by Rizzo House and Lirtzman (1970), and was first edited, and used by Nasrin Ershadi guided by Dr. Shekar Kan in 1990.

### Result:

**Table1-The Reliability Coefficients and the Validity of Role Ambiguity and Conflict Scales in the Present Study**

scale	Reliability Coefficients		Reliability coefficient Correlation with the Criterion Question
	Cronbach's alpha	Bisection method	
Role Specifications	0.846	0.814**	
Role Conflict	0.770	0.779**	0.622**
Role Ambiguity	0.824	0.738**	0.370**

To determine the reliability of the role conflict and ambiguity scale, the Bisection Method equals to 0.814, and Cronbach's alpha equals to 0.864 have been used, which indicate satisfied reliability coefficients. To calculate Cronbach's alpha and Bisection method, SPSS was used. Internal reliability was calculated as the following for each of the subtests: the role conflict 0.770, 0.779, role ambiguity 0.824, and 0.738. This test includes 20 articles, 9 of which are to measure the ambiguity, and the other 11 to measure the role conflict. This test is aimed at measuring ambiguity and conflict of the roles. The scoring system of this questionnaire is based on the 5 degree scale of Likert (the origin version has been a 4 degree).

Furthermore, the burnout questionnaire MBI of Mesles and Jackson, which is composed of 22 separate propositions, and has the three dimensions of burnout, was also used. 9 parts of it is related to the emotional fatigue, 5 parts to the depersonalization, and 8 parts to the personal accomplishment. This questionnaire measures the level of burnout in the sample group, and the questions are written about the personal emotions. The scale in this questionnaire is Likert's type, which is set in 5 levels rating from I'm completely satisfied till I'm completely dissatisfied. This questionnaire in this present research has been translated to Persian by Philian, 1992, which has a good reliability and consistency.

**Table 2. Reliability coefficient of the burnout**

Scale	Reliability Coefficients		Reliability Coefficient Correlation with the Criterion Question
	Cronbach's Alpha	Bisection Method	
Burnout	0.765	0.693**	0.681**
Burnout Resulting from the Emotional Fatigue	0.880	0.794**	
Burnout Resulting from the sense of alienation	0.890	0.810**	
Burnout Resulting from the Individual failure	0.902	0.857**	

In this research, the reliability coefficient of the burnout done by the two methods of Cronbach's alpha equals to 0.765 and Bisection method equals to 0.693, and the internal reliability done for each of the subtests by Cronbach's alpha and Bisection method is as the following respectively: for the emotional fatigue it is 0.880 and 0.794, the depersonalization 0.890 and 0.810, and the individual's failure is 0.902, and 0.857. Measles and Jackson calculated the internal reliability for each of the subtests as the following: for the emotional fatigue, it equals to 0.90, depersonalization: 0.79, the individual's failure 0.71. Moreover, reported the validity of this test by Cronbach's alpha 0.89, 0.78, and 0.83 respectively. By the way, this questionnaire has been used frequently by the Iranian researchers with more than 90% reliability. For statistical analysis of the data SPSS, twelfth version, Pearson Correlation Coefficient, the Regression, Variance analysis, and for the various comparisons, Scheffe post hoc test, and T-test, as well as the Cronbach's alpha and bisection were used to calculate the reliability coefficients. The results of the descriptive statistics achieved from the related data to the questionnaire of the role conflict and ambiguity equal to mean=55.65 and SD=11.005. Among the twofold dimensions of the role specifications, "role conflict" mean is 34.77, and "role ambiguity" mean is 20.88. Among the other descriptive findings, one can pay attention to the mean of staff's burnout which equals to 67.91 and the Standard Deviation equals to 7.43. Furthermore, the mean of burnout resulting from staff's emotional fatigue equals to 25.30 and the SD equals to 5.72. The mean of burnout resulting from the staff's alienation, or depersonalization equals to 10.79 and Standard deviation to 3.67. Moreover, the burnout resulting from the staff's individual's failure equals to 31.81 and the SD equals to 4.107. According to the results achieved from the Regression analysis through forward and stepwise, the multivariable correlation for the linear combination of the role conflict and ambiguity with the staff's burnout;  $MR=0.60$ ,  $RS=0.36$ , at the significance level of  $P<0.0001$ . Regarding the amounts of the RS it is found out that 36% of the burnout variance is explainable with the dependent variables. Moreover, the variable of role ambiguity and conflict as the dependent variables are respectively dependent for the burnout.

Furthermore, no significant difference was observed in the test of hypotheses with the T-test based on two dependent groups (married and single) (men and women), however, in this test a significant difference with a 95% significance level was observed at the burnout, emotional fatigue, and alienation scales. In addition, there was a significant difference in the individual's failure scale between men and

women at the significance level of 99%. Furthermore, there was no significant difference in the results of the variance analysis test of role specifications and burnout among none of the different age groups in the means of considerable scales. However, there was a significant difference among the three educational groups in the scales of alienation, role conflict, and burnout at a 95% significance level. Furthermore, there was a significant difference among the four occupational groups in the scales of alienation, individual's failure, and role ambiguity at a 95% significance level. In addition, there was a significant difference among the five different field activities groups in the scale of role ambiguity. Finally there was a significant difference among the four different groups based on job experience at a 95% significance level.

#### 4. Discussion

The review of the studies done in Iran shows that although a variable such as burnout has been studied frequently, the relation of such variables as role conflict and ambiguity with the burnout is one of the cases that has not studied yet. The findings of the present study are consistent with the findings of the studies done before, including the study of Melchior, Bours, Schmitz, and Wittic (1997) who has studied the burnout in the psychological nurses in a meta-analysis. Prosser et al. (1999) and Cliffder et al. (2001) measured the burnout with the MBI questionnaire, and in this study the scores of MBI dimensions are really close to the scores of the present study. There is no significant difference among the staff with the different age groups, regarding the dependent variables (role specifications, and the elements, and the burnout and the elements). Such an issue can be due to the equal work condition for the above groups. Furthermore, there is a significant difference among the staff of different groups regarding the educational level considering the role conflict and alienation, and the burnout. In other word, staffs holding the bachelor's degree and higher face with more alienation than the staffs holding the associated of arts (AA). The staffs holding the associated of arts (AA) degree enjoy more role conflict and burnout than the staffs holding the diploma and lower degrees.

There is a significant difference among the staffs of different occupational groups and between the scales of alienation, and individual's failure, and role ambiguity with a significance level of 95%. In other word, the worker staffs have a more alienation feeling than the staffs owning an organizational post higher than expert. Furthermore, staffs with an organizational post higher than expert in comparison with the experts enjoy the individual's failure much more; however, in

comparing these two groups the expert staffs enjoy more role ambiguity.

Furthermore, there is a significant difference among the staffs of the different work area groups in the scale of ambiguity. In other word, the staffs working in other areas enjoy more role ambiguity than the staffs in the educational area.

There was a significant difference among the staffs of different groups, based on the job experience, in the scale of an individual's failure. In other word, the staffs with a 16-20 year of job experience in comparison with the staffs with a 1-5 year of job experience feel more individual's failure emotion, and this result is inconsistent with the result of some authors. The sense of success, authority, and the sense of personal accomplishment are created when the individual can influence on the policies of the pleasant organization, and presents his own abilities, and achieves a positive approach about him and others. Furthermore, the ability to control the occupational incidences is one of the most important factors in the personal qualification. Therefore, it can be concluded that possibly some of the staffs are not able to prove their qualifications in the work environment, and this issue can be due to the lack of positive condition in the work environment. Furthermore, high levels of burnout in the dimension of failure can indicate a negative approach to the self and his occupation, and lack of interest in the job and lack of self-confidence.

The results extracted from parts A and B in the table (4-11) of the multiple correlation coefficients showed that 65% of the burnout variance is explainable by the dependent variables. The role conflict first, shows the significance and the role ambiguity, second shows the burnout.

Moreover, it is indicated that there is a significant difference between the role specifications (role ambiguity and conflict) with the burnout of the staffs. ( $p=0.000$ ,  $r=0.465$ ). It means that by increasing the role specifications, the staff's burnout increases as well.

In order to determine the correlation coefficients in the present study, the researcher found the resulting coefficients for the role ambiguity= 0.0370, role conflict=0.622,  $p=0.000$ . And in the burnout questionnaire the resulting coefficient was 0.481,  $p=0.000$ .

The results achieved from the statistical analysis of data by the use of T-test showed that there was no significant difference between the single and married people in any of the scales. Regarding the results observed in the scales of burnout, emotional fatigue, and alienation, there was a significant difference between men and women, at the significance level of 95%. In the individual's failure scale, there was a significant difference at the significance level of 99%.

In the scales of burnout, emotional fatigue, and individual's failure, women's success had the highest mean, and it is not so far from mind that women have the highest level of burnout, because in addition to the duties that women have on the work, they have some responsibilities at home, which increases the level of stress in them. In the scale of alienation, men have the highest mean. In this regard, Cliffden and T. Brack reported the level of burnout higher significantly in men than in women in the scale of alienation. These findings are consistent with the findings of "Khakpour, and Wat Kinz". Bracket postulates that men's work hours in comparison with the women can justify this issue, and through eliminating this factor, the difference between the two genders is removed. On the other hand, it can be noted that in addition to the occupational issues, men are the most responsible of the family; therefore, the mental and physical pressure is higher in them.

#### 1.4. Suggestions

The burnout causes consequences and costs on both the organization and on the mental-physical health of the personnel. The considerable prevalence of the burnout needs to be considered and scrutinized in the dimension of personal efficiency, including the organizational interventions. Most of the researchers believe that these interventions such as encouraging the group work, and the personnel's contribution in the decision-making policies, occupational supports, decreasing the occupational conflicts and ambiguities, and increasing control on the occupational occurrences, as well as the mental interventions, to decrease the occupational stress and increasing compatibility in the work environment should be done not only in the work environment, but also they should be taught to the personnel. Furthermore, setting the suitable educational courses and strengthening the connection between the levels and different organizational parts, to making the managers familiar with the preventing strategies of burnout and decreasing the role ambiguity and conflict can solve some of the problems.

What is general in all the suggestions is that the managers and personnel are suggested to communicate about the work expectations so that the role ambiguities and conflicts are removed and use the results in a positive way.

#### Acknowledgements:

Authors are grateful to Islamic Azad University, shoushtar Branch for financial support to carry out this work.



**Corresponding Author:**

Azam heidari

Islamic Azad University, shoushtar Branch, shoushtar, Iran

**References**

1. Bamber, M. R. (2006). CBT for occupational stress in health professionals: introducing a schema – focused approach, 1th, New York: Routledge.
2. Freudenberger, H.J (1975). The staff burn – out syndrome in alternative institutions, psychotherapy: theory, research and practice, Nol. 12, No. 1.
3. Freudenberger, H.J (1975). The staff burn – out syndrome in alternative institutions, psychotherapy: theory, research and practice, Nol. 12, No. 1.
4. Gajenddran, R., harrison, D. A. (2007). The good, the bad, and the unknowwn about telecommuniting; Meta analysis of psychological mediators and individual consequences, Journal of Applied psychology, 92(6), 1524- 1541.
5. Kilfedder, C.J., Power, K. G., & Wells, T.J. (2001) Burnout in Psychiatric nursing. Journal of Advanced Nursing, 34, 383 - 396.
6. Leka, S. L. & Houdmont, J. (2010). Occupational health psychology, 1th, Garsington: Blackwell publishing Ltd.
7. Maslach, c. and Jackson, S. E. (1993) manua of the maslach burnout inventory, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.
8. Maslach, c. and Jackson, S. E. (1981). “The measurement of experienced burnout Journalof occupational behavior, Vol. 2 Maslach, C. (2001). Job Burnout. Annual Review Of Psychology.
9. Prosser, D., Johnson, S., Kuipers, E., Dunn, G., Szmukier, G., Reid, Y., Bebbington, P., & Thornicroft, G. (1999). Mental health, “burnout” & job Satisfaction in a longitudinal Study of mental health staff. Social Psychiatry & Psychiatric Epidemiology, 34, 295 – 300.
10. Spector, P. (2000). Industrial and Organizational Psychology. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc Publishing Ltd.

2/25/2013