

ORGANIZATIONAL ROLE STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES: A HIERARCHICAL BASED STUDY OF SELECT PUBLIC SECTOR BANKS

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Organizational stress originates in organizational demands that are experienced by individual. Role stress depends on how the role occupant's feels about situations, constraints, opportunities or threats encountered during role performance. The study aims to find out the prominent role stressors and coping strategies in public sector banks among the three levels of bank officers i.e. Junior Level Management, Middle Level Management and Senior Level Management. This paper is based on an empirical study conducted on 135 employees randomly drawn from Indian Public Sector Banks. Organizational Role Stress Scale and Ways of Coping Checklist have been used to explore the level of role stress and to find the favored coping strategies to deal with stress. Statistical analytical tools like descriptive statistics and rank order correlation have been used for presenting the data. The results revealed that there are significant differences among the three levels of bank officers in relation to their experience of stress and adaptation of coping strategies.

Key Words: Organizational role stress, Coping strategies.

Introduction

Stress is unavoidable in modern life (Pestonjee 1992). According to Arnold (1960), Stress is any condition that disturbs normal functioning. Stress is neither a stimulus, nor a response, nor an intervening variable, but rather a collective term, which deals with any demands that tax the system (physiological, psychological or social) and the response of that system to the taxing demands (McLean 1979). Stress is dependent on the situation and individual reaction to the situation which depends on individual perception. Stress encountered in office gets added to stress at home and vice-versa. Upward spiraling of stress needs to be broken, lest it should manifest into an irreversible damage like burnout. Managing stress is extremely important for modern organizations to safeguard human wellbeing (Srivastav 1995) of organizational members, without which they can't maintain their effectiveness and productivity.

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Importance of studying stress

- Stress has harmful psychological and physiological effects on employees,
- Stress is a major cause of employee turnover and absenteeism,
- Stress experienced by one employee can affect the safety of other employees,
- By controlling dysfunctional stress, individual and organization can be managed more effectively.

(Steers 1981)

Stress in organizational roles

Organizational role represents an assigned position in the organization, which is defined by the expectations of the significant people. The role occupant performs in the organization to fulfill his/her role expectations (Pareek, 2004). Organizational roles have an in-built potential for stress. Stress resulting from the occupation of an organizational role and performing or not being able to perform therein is known as Organizational Role Stress (ORS) (Pareek 1983).

Role stress reflects the quality of role design in the organization. Well- designed organizational roles have a good matching between the organization and the individual. When roles are well-designed, role stress is low, role occupant is motivated and his/her role performance is high. The effectiveness of an organization is dependent on the effectiveness of its people (Pareek 1993, 2004). The examples of role-related problems in organizations (Srivastav 2006c) are: inadequacy of resources, lack of competence, excessive conflicts, unrealistic expectations, work overload, lack of recognition, growth or development etc.

Concept and framework of role stress

The following ten types of role stress are explained by the Organizational Role Stress Scale by Pareek (1983):

- **Inter-Role Distance (IRD)**

IRD arises due to difficulties experienced in balancing between organizational and non-organizational roles. For example, a manager in an office may not be able to devote adequate time to his/her family if the office role is excessively demanding.

- **Role Stagnation (RS)**

When a role occupant has not grown and develops in the role. He/ she keeps on

stagnating in the old role instead of making a transition to a new role. Lacks of opportunities for career growth also give rise to RS.

- **Self-Role Distance (SRD)**

SRD arises when strengths of a role occupant are not utilized in his/her role. When he/she is compelled to do what he/she dislikes, or when there are conflicts between the role and the role occupant in terms of image, value or needs.

- **Role Expectation Conflict (REC)**

REC arises due to conflicting expectation faced by a role occupant from his/her role senders. For example, a R&D manager may have opposite expectations from production and marketing managers in respect of pace of product development.

- **Role Erosion (RE)**

RE is experienced when credit for tasks performed in one's role is given to others or when some tasks belonging to one's role are performed by others. RE is common when an organization undergoes restructuring or up gradation of technology.

- **Role Overload (RO)**

RO is experienced when the role occupant feels that his/her role expectations are too many or too high.

- **Role Isolation (RI)**

RI arises when a role occupant does not have the needed communication and interaction with his/her set members (significant people having expectations from the role occupant).

- **Personal Inadequacy (Pin)**

PI arises when a role occupant does not have the competence, knowledge or skills required for effective role performance.

- **Role Ambiguity (RA)**

RA arises when a role occupant is not clear about his/her role expectations. Occupants of newly created or process roles often experience RA.

- **Resource Inadequacy (Rin)**

Arises when a role occupant feels that adequate resources (manpower, materials. Machines, tools etc) have not been provided for carrying out his/her role responsibilities.

Framework for measurement of coping strategies

• Ways of Coping Checklist

Ways of Coping Checklist (WCCL) (Folkman & Lazarus 1985; Folkman et al. 1986) measures the following eight coping strategies on a four point Likert scale (zero signifying 'not used' and three signifying 'used a great deal').

- 1 **Confrontive Coping:** Aggressive efforts aimed at changing the stressful situation.
- 2 **Distancing:** Efforts for disengaging oneself from the stressful situation.
- 3 **Self-Controlling:** Efforts to regulate one's own feelings.
- 4 **Seeking Social Support:** Efforts to seek informational and emotional support.
- 5 **Accepting Responsibility:** Acknowledging one's own role in the problem.
- 6 **Escape-Avoidance:** Wishful thinking.
- 7 **Planful Problem-Solving:** Deliberate efforts for addressing the problems causing stress.
- 8 **Positive Reappraisal:** Efforts to create a positive meaning by focusing on personal growth.

Objectives of the study

The study has precisely been conducted with the following specific objectives in view:

- To analyze the level of stress among the public sector bank employees;
- To identify prominent role stressors in public sector banks;
- To assess the differences that exist between the three levels of bank officers i.e., Junior Level Management, Middle Level Management, and Senior Level Management in relation to their experience of stress;
- To assess and analyze banking employee's stress coping strategies;
- To assess the differences that exists between the three levels of bank officers i.e., Junior Level Management, Middle Level Management, and Senior Level Management w.r.t coping strategies adopted by them.

Hypotheses of the study

On the basis of the above objectives, the following null hypotheses (H₀) and alternate hypotheses (H_a) are formulated:

“H₀₁”-There are no significant differences among the three levels of bank officers in relation to their experience of stress.

“Ha1”-There are significant differences among the three levels of bank officers in relation to their experience of stress.

“H02”-There are no significant differences in the strategies adopted by the three levels of bank officers to counter stress.

“Ha2”-There are significant differences in the strategies adopted by the three levels of bank officers to counter stress.

Research methodology

The design for the study is the survey research design. Pareek's (1983) Organizational Role Stress (ORS) Scale has been used for measuring role stress of employees. Ways of Coping Checklist (WCCL) by Folk man et al. (1986) was used to measure coping strategies used by employees. A sample of 135 banking employees was selected from four public sector banks (State Bank of India, Punjab National Bank, Canara Bank and Bank of India) from Delhi and Haryana region. Out of total, 35 were from senior level management and 50 each from middle and junior level management. The study used statistical tools such as descriptive statistics, rank order correlation and t test.

Results

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation and rank ordering of role stressors among bank employees. RO has emerged as the most potent stressor (9.85) followed by IRD (9.60) and RS (8.85) respectively.

Increase in volume of business of banks, intense competition, direct dealing with customers, increased expectation of customers for better service quality and last but not the least constant endeavor to cut cost via manpower trimming and layoffs are the possible reasons for role overload of employees. Work overload, longer hours, and tight schedule leaves less time for family and non-work commitment leading to higher score of IRD. Banking was originally a labor-intensive industry. But extensive computerization and frequent layoffs drained promotional opportunities, giving birth to Role Stagnation (RS).

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation and Rank Order of Role Stress Variables

| Role Stress Variables | Mean Score | S.D. | Rank |
|-----------------------|------------|------|------|
| IRD | 9.60 | 2.45 | 2 |
| RS | 8.85 | 2.17 | 3 |
| REC | 8.47 | 2.12 | 4 |
| RE | 8.10 | 2.60 | 5 |
| RO | 9.85 | 2.16 | 1 |
| RI | 7.18 | 2.95 | 6 |
| Pln | 6.53 | 2.34 | 8 |
| SRD | 6.70 | 2.70 | 7 |
| RA | 6.10 | 2.09 | 10 |
| Rln | 6.38 | 2.03 | 9 |

Hierarchy and stress

Table 2 shows mean and rank order of role stress variables of all the three levels. For junior level officers, Role Overload, Role Expectation Conflict, and Self-Role Distance are the main role stress variables. Role Overload, Inter-Role Distance, and Role Stagnation are the prominent role stressor among the middle level officers. Role Overload is the most prominent role stressor among the senior level officers followed by Inter-Role Distance, Role Erosion, and Role Stagnation.

Table 2: Mean and Rank Order of Role Stress Variables of different Hierarchical Levels

| Role Stress Variable | Junior Level Management(1) | | Middle Level Management (2) | | Senior Level Management (3) | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|
| | Mean | Rank | Mean | Rank | Mean | Rank |
| IRD | 7.20 | 7 | 9.87 | 2 | 9.44 | 2 |
| RS | 7.65 | 6 | 9.48 | 3 | 7.87 | 4 |
| REC | 9.15 | 2 | 9.24 | 4 | 7.49 | 5 |
| RE | 6.53 | 10 | 8.93 | 5 | 8.20 | 3 |
| RO | 9.86 | 1 | 9.94 | 1 | 9.97 | 1 |
| RI | 7.11 | 8 | 7.80 | 6 | 6.30 | 6 |
| Pln | 7.97 | 5 | 7.23 | 7 | 6.01 | 8 |
| SRD | 9.07 | 3 | 7.18 | 8 | 6.19 | 7 |
| RA | 8.28 | 4 | 6.64 | 10 | 5.23 | 10 |
| Rln | 6.87 | 9 | 6.76 | 9 | 5.95 | 9 |
| TORS | 79.69 | | 83.07 | | 72.65 | |

Table 3: Comparison of Role Stress Perception across Hierarchical Levels

| Role Stress Variable | Junior Level Management(1) | | Middle Level Management (2) | | Senior Level Management (3) | | t-value (1 & 2) | t-value (1 & 3) | t-value (2 & 3) |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-------|-----------------------------|-------|-----------------------------|-------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | | | |
| IRD | 7.20 | 2.20 | 9.87 | 2.60 | 9.44 | 2.13 | - 5.54 | - 4.71 | 0.83 (NS) |
| RS | 7.65 | 2.43 | 9.48 | 2.40 | 7.87 | 2.72 | - 3.79 | - 0.38 (NS) | 2.82 |
| REC | 9.15 | 2.48 | 9.24 | 2.65 | 7.49 | 2.10 | - 0.17 (NS) | 3.30 | 3.36 |
| RE | 6.53 | 2.57 | 8.93 | 2.28 | 8.20 | 2.25 | - 4.94 | - 3.21 | 1.46 (NS) |
| RO | 9.86 | 2.78 | 9.94 | 2.35 | 9.97 | 2.14 | - 0.16 (NS) | - 0.20 (NS) | - 0.06 (NS) |
| RI | 7.11 | 2.17 | 7.80 | 2.88 | 6.30 | 2.65 | - 1.35 (NS) | 1.49 (NS) | 2.48 |
| Pln | 7.97 | 2.48 | 7.23 | 2.32 | 6.01 | 2.42 | 1.54 (NS) | 3.62 | 2.32 |
| SRD | 9.07 | 2.81 | 7.18 | 2.75 | 6.19 | 2.56 | 3.40 | 4.90 | 1.70 (NS) |
| RA | 8.28 | 2.49 | 6.64 | 2.84 | 5.23 | 2.38 | 3.07 | 5.58 | 2.43 |
| Rln | 6.87 | 2.24 | 6.76 | 2.19 | 5.95 | 2.27 | 0.25 (NS) | 1.63 (NS) | 1.44 (N S) |
| TORS | 79.69 | 12.26 | 83.07 | 11.65 | 72.65 | 12.50 | - 2.41 | 2.57 | 3.89 |

Significant at 0.05 level (2 tailed).

Rank order correlation coefficient between MMG and SMG officers is very high 'R' = 0.952 (significant at 0.01 level). Rank order correlation coefficient between other two pairs i.e. (JMG & MMG, and JMG & SMG) is positive and insignificant. It shows that MMG and SMG officer's order of preference is significantly different from JMG officers.

Thus, the above analysis rejects null hypothesis "H01" and alternative hypothesis "Ha1" has been accepted that there are significant differences among the three levels of officers in relation to their experience of stress except on RO and RIn role stress variables. Rank order correlation of MMG and SMG officers shows that the rank order preference on various role stress dimensions is by and large, similar and difference in such experience is more or less in terms of quantity.

The study shows that the middle level officers experience more stress than the junior and senior level officers. Thus, it can be concluded that the experience of stress is not same but different for the officers at the three different levels. But the middle level officers, while suffering the stress factors that their juniors and seniors experience have a different source of stress. They are the bridge between the junior and senior level officers. The juniors do not interact with seniors for each and every duty; the middle level comes in contact with his senior every day. They have to satisfy the senior while fulfilling the demands of the juniors. Various studies conducted in this field (Sen 1981; Pestonjee 1991; Niranjana & Pattanayak 2002) also support the result of this study. The stress experienced by middle managers has been explained by Albercht (1979) in the

following way, *"In many ways, middle management can be one of the most frustrating areas of organizational life."*

Coping Strategies

The table 4 shows that Positive Reappraisal is the dominant strategy, followed by Planful Problem-Solving and Seeking Social Support. Rank at number three Seeking Social Support, indicated the importance of talking, discussing, sharing and solving problems and situations with people they trust to elevate the distressing effects.

Table 4: Mean, Standard Deviation and Rank Order of Coping Strategies

| Coping Strategies | Mean | Standard Deviation | Rank (overall) | Rank (within category) |
|-----------------------------------|-------|--------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Problem-Focused Strategies | | | | |
| Planful Problem-Solving | 9.41 | 2.02 | 2 | 1 |
| Confrontive Coping | 6.42 | 2.89 | 6 | 2 |
| Emotion-Focused Strategies | | | | |
| Self-Controlling | 8.08 | 2.34 | 4 | 3 |
| Accepting Responsibility | 5.53 | 2.90 | 8 | 6 |
| Distancing | 7.01 | 2.37 | 5 | 4 |
| Escape-Avoidance | 6.40 | 2.51 | 7 | 5 |
| Positive Reappraisal | 11.75 | 2.57 | 1 | 1 |
| Seeking Social Support | 8.58 | 2.83 | 3 | 2 |

Hierarchy and Coping Strategies

Table 5 presents a comparative picture of various coping strategies across hierarchical levels. Junior level officers rank Seeking Social Support as the prominent strategy, followed by Positive Reappraisal and Planful Problem-Solving. Positive Reappraisal followed by Planful Problem-Solving is the most preferred coping strategies adopted by middle level officers. Planful Problem-Solving is the most preferred strategy among senior level officers followed by Positive Reappraisal strategy.

Table 5: Mean and Rank Order of Coping Strategies of different Hierarchical Levels

| Coping Strategies | Junior Level Management (1) | | | Middle Level Management (2) | | | Senior Level Management (3) | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| | Mean | Rank (overall) | Rank (within category) | Mean | Rank (overall) | Rank (within category) | Mean | Rank (overall) | Rank (within category) |
| Problem-focussed Strategies | | | | | | | | | |
| Planful-Problem Solving | 9.19 | 3 | 1 | 9.57 | 2 | 1 | 10.75 | 1 | 1 |
| Confrontive Coping | 4.50 | 8 | 2 | 6.22 | 6 | 2 | 7.06 | 5 | 2 |
| Emotion-focussed strategies | | | | | | | | | |
| Self-Controlling | 9.15 | 4 | 3 | 7.76 | 4 | 3 | 9.67 | 3 | 2 |
| Accepting Responsibility | 5.56 | 7 | 6 | 5.51 | 7 | 5 | 5.76 | 8 | 6 |
| Distancing | 7.59 | 6 | 5 | 7.35 | 5 | 4 | 7.00 | 6 | 4 |
| Escape-Avoidance | 8.78 | 5 | 4 | 5.43 | 8 | 6 | 6.84 | 7 | 5 |
| Positive Reappraisal | 9.44 | 2 | 2 | 13.32 | 1 | 1 | 10.67 | 2 | 1 |
| Seeking Social Support | 10.00 | 1 | 1 | 9.08 | 3 | 2 | 9.12 | 4 | 3 |

Table 6: Comparison of Coping Strategies across Hierarchical Levels

| Coping Strategies | JMG (1) | | MMG (2) | | SMG (3) | | t-value | t-value | t-value |
|--------------------------|---------|------|---------|------|---------|------|------------|------------|------------|
| | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | (1 & 2) | (1 & 3) | (2 & 3) |
| Planful Problem-Solving | 9.19 | 2.98 | 9.57 | 2.81 | 10.75 | 2.57 | -0.66 (NS) | -2.58 | -2.34 |
| Confrontive Coping | 4.50 | 2.69 | 6.22 | 2.37 | 7.06 | 2.74 | -3.39 | -4.27 | -1.47 (NS) |
| Self-Controlling | 9.15 | 2.28 | 7.76 | 2.39 | 9.67 | 2.62 | 2.98 | -0.98 (NS) | -3.43 |
| Accepting Responsibility | 5.56 | 2.02 | 5.51 | 2.41 | 5.76 | 2.78 | 0.11 (NS) | -0.36 (NS) | -0.43 (NS) |
| Distancing | 7.59 | 2.91 | 7.35 | 2.88 | 7.00 | 2.56 | 0.42 (NS) | 0.98 (NS) | 0.60 (NS) |
| Escape-Avoidance | 8.78 | 3.08 | 5.43 | 2.98 | 6.84 | 2.78 | 5.53 | 3.03 | -2.23 |
| Positive Reappraisal | 9.44 | 2.64 | 13.32 | 2.90 | 10.67 | 2.78 | -6.99 | -2.25 | 4.25 |
| Seeking Social Support | 10.00 | 3.16 | 9.08 | 3.56 | 9.12 | 3.23 | 1.36 (NS) | 1.25 (NS) | -0.05 (NS) |

Significant at 0.05 level (2 tailed).

Rank order correlation coefficient between MMG and SMG officers is 0.905 (Significant at 0.01 level), between MMG and JMG officers is 0.762 (Significant at 0.05 level), and between SMG and JMG officers is 0.667 (Not Significant). Hence, it shows that rank order preference for various coping strategies is similar between MMG & SMG officers, and MMG & JMG officers.

In the category of Emotion-Focused Strategies, rank order correlation coefficient between SMG and MMG officers is 0.886 (significant at 0.05 level). Rank order correlation coefficient between JMG & MMG officers, and JMG & SMG officers though positive but insignificant in statistical terms.

Thus, the above analysis rejects null hypothesis "H02" and alternative hypothesis "Ha2" has been accepted that there are significant differences in the strategies adopted except Accepting Responsibility, Distancing, and Seeking Social Support by the three levels of bank officers to counter stress. Rank order correlation coefficients between the pairs show that the preference on various coping strategies is similar in the MMG and SMG officers, MMG and JMG officers and difference is only in terms of quantity. But in the group of Emotion-Focused Strategies, MMG and SMG officers both have significantly different preferences from JMG officers.

Findings of the Study

The findings of the analysis have been summarized below:

- 1) Role Overload (9.89), Inter-Role Distance (9.60), and Role Stagnation (8.85) are the prominent role stressors in public sector banks while Role Ambiguity (6.10) and Resource Inadequacy (6.38) are considered the least important role stress variables.
- 2) As regards, Total Organizational Role Stress, middle level officers (83.07) experiences higher stress as compared to other two levels. Junior level officers (79.69) are placed at the second position and senior level officers (72.65) at the last position.
- 3) The junior level officer's prominent role stressors are Role Overload (9.86), Role Expectation Conflict (9.15), and Self-Role Distance (9.07), while Role Erosion (6.53) and Resource Inadequacy (6.87) are the least important role stressors.
- 4) The middle level officer's experience more stress on Role Overload (9.94), Inter-Role Distance (9.87), and Role Stagnation (9.48), while Role Ambiguity (6.64) and Resource Inadequacy (6.76) are the least important stressors for them.
- 5) The major sources of role stress experienced by senior level officers are Role Overload (9.97), Inter-Role Distance (9.44), and Role Erosion (8.20) while Role Ambiguity (5.23) and Resource Inadequacy (5.95) are the least important stressors for them.
- 6) Person experiencing role stress uses the combination of Emotion-Focused and Problem-Focused strategies. Positive Reappraisal (11.75) is the dominant strategy and Planful Problem-Solving (9.41) is used as the back-up coping strategy. In the group of Emotion-Focused strategies, Positive Reappraisal (11.75) followed by Seeking Social Support (8.58) are the most favored strategies.
- 7) Seeking Social Support (10.00) is the most preferred strategy adopted by junior level

officers. Positive Reappraisal (9.44) is used as the back-up strategy by them. These two strategies are also dominant in the group of Emotion-Focused strategies.

- 8) Positive Reappraisal (13.32) followed by Planful Problem-Solving (9.57) is the dominant coping strategy of middle level officers. In the group of Emotion-Focused strategies, Positive Reappraisal (13.32) is the most preferred strategy followed by Seeking Social Support (9.08).
- 9) Planful Problem-Solving (10.75) is the prominent strategy of senior level officers. Positive reappraisal (10.67) is used as a back-up strategy. In the group of Emotion-Focused strategies, Positive Reappraisal (10.67) followed by Self-Controlling (9.67) are the most prominent strategies. MMG and SMG, MMG and JMG officers have significantly similar preference order for various coping strategies.

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