

Retrospective Study

Assessing Organizational Role Stress of Employees in Public and Private Sectors

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

Work plays a vital role in most people's lives, and thus the impact of stress in the workplace is a significant issue. Since organisational role stress (ORS) has detrimental effects on both the organisation and employee, managing role pressures has greater importance.

Objective

This study analysed the comparative organisational role stress between India's public sector and private sector workers. It also fulfilled its objective of ranking stressors to contribute to total ORS.

Materials and Methods

This descriptive-comparative analytical study selected 92 employees (41 private sectors and 51 public sectors) from different organisations in India. The study administered the organisational role stress scale developed by Udai Pareek to employees of both groups. For analysis independent sample *t*-test were used in the study.

Results

The study reveals that public sector employees score higher than private-sector employees in almost all scale dimensions other than role stagnation. Data analysis also inferred that inter-role stressor was the maximum contributor to overall organisational role stress, and the two groups differed most in the dimension of role overload.

Conclusion

These have important implications in policy-making to ensure enhanced well-being and productivity.

Keywords

Stress; Organisational role stressors; Causes of stress; Workplace stress; Coping strategies; Public and private sector; The stress of Indian employees.

INTRODUCTION

Hans Selye, a medical researcher, first used "Stress" to describe the body's response to stress. He defined stress as "the bodies in direct response to any need." Ivancevich et al¹ describe stress as "human interaction with nature".

Stress is a dynamic situation where a person faces many challenges while working. Eustress is a state of mind that occurs when stress causes frustration or achievement to become motivating. It is believed that this can be a desirable outcome of stress.

The inverted-U theory states that low or too much arousal leads to poor performance. On the other hand, moderate or too much arousal produces the highest performance levels.

Ivancevich et al¹ define stress as a response to a particular event or situation that places unique demands on them. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), eustress is a type of stress that produces a sense of satisfaction and achievement, triggering higher performance levels. It can also improve a person's health and productivity. Pestonjee² has identified three critical sectors of life in which stress originates. These are jobs of

the organization, the social sector, and the intrapsychic sector.

Causes of Stress

Stress can be caused due to various factors, known as stressors. These factors may be stressful triggers for one but not for someone else; individual differences exist regarding stressors. Stressors may also be internal or external to the individual. These stressors may be:

Environmental factors: Ivancevich et al¹ have identified societal, economic, financial, cultural, familial, and technological factors that significantly influence mental health (employees). Environmental stressors like family demands and obligations, economic and financial conditions, race, caste, creed, ethnic identity, relocation due to transfer cause adverse effects on individuals. Fluctuations in the market create economic ambiguities. When the economy is shrinking due to changes in the market, people become increasingly apprehensive about their job security. Political uncertainties may also cause some stress on people.

Organizational factors: Macro-level stressors can be pigeonholed into administrative policies and strategies, organizational structure and design, organizational processes, and working conditions. Examples of more particular jobs are performance, role ambiguity, conflict and overload, job insecurity, work-family conflict, environmental uncertainty, and situational constraints. A recent meta-analysis found each of these negatively related to job performance.³ Programs such as reengineering, restructuring, and downsizing have become commonplace due to intense pressures to outperform the competition of other organizations.

Layoffs, in particular, have taken and continue to hurt workers. The actual loss of employment, or even the threat of reduction, may put tremendous pressure on workers. "Job requirements" are related to one's job. They include job structure (their independent degrees, the variety of tasks, the level of automation), working conditions, and the actual work structure. Meeting lines can pressure people when they see the line's speed exceeding.

The "role requirements" are related to the pressures placed on a person as a function of their role in the organization. Conflict of a role creates expectations that can be difficult to reconcile or satisfy. The fullness of the role occurs when an employee is expected to do more than time permits. The ambiguity of the role means that the expected role is not well understood, and the employee is not sure what to do. People who experience high-status issues (such as regular working hours or responsibilities that require work) are also less likely to engage in active behaviors that reduce stress levels.

"Interpersonal demands" are pressures created by other employees. Lack of social support from colleagues and poor interpersonal relationships can cause stress, especially among employees with high social needs. A rapidly growing body of research has also shown that negative co-worker and supervisor behaviors, including fights, bullying, incivility, racial harassment, and sexual harassment, are especially strongly related to stress at work.

Group stressors: Hawthorne's studies have established the im-

portance of group cohesiveness, group norms, and the importance of group objectives to attain organizational goals. Lack of cohesiveness creates conflict.⁴ Employees must be given complete convenience to evolve themselves. People join the group for social security that should be provided. Managers must ensure that a job well done is recognized; this creates stress in the employees' minds. Interventions like group social events and group activities must be catalogued regularly. Managers should form the part of the group, which should not be based on rank and position. Employee morale must be kept high to avoid group stress.

Personal stressors: Personal life and events of official life cannot be separated. Circumstances of marriage, divorce, death in the family have a remarkable impact on the work situation. Personal life difficulties are highly stressful.

(a) Job Security: Job and career improvement can become the root of stress. Job security is one of the significant inconveniences for an employee in an era of volatility. Insecurity increases during times of recession. The prospect of losing a job, especially when an employee is the sole bread earner for the entire family, is very stressful. Another reason for job-related stress is promotion or enhancement of appointments. A person must have a job commensurate with his qualification. Promotion must be related to adaptability and competence, and due care should be employed in this regard. Nothing is more stressful than a junior employee being a senior to an equally competent person.

(b) Relocation: Relocation is related to transferring a person to a different place. Transfers upset the daily routine of individuals. The fear of working at a new location with other people is stressful. Unpredictability about the new work environment and creating new relationships cause anxiety. Transfer also creates problems for family members. It may be admission in schools, adjustment to the social environment, house, and even language. If a person has to search for a new job at a different location, the stress is even greater.

(c) Changes in life structure: Many facets of life such as socio-economic environment, culture, systems, religion, race, education, and interaction with society in different roles. If all these aspects are favorable, the stress is minimal; emphasis is also determined by a person's ability to cope with it and their faith. If a person's life is stable and moves slowly, there is less stress and more power to cope. At the same time, a person who has great ambition and moves at a fast pace cannot cope with stress.

Stress in Organisations

An organization can be defined as a system of roles. A role is a set of bonds produced by other 'important' ones. It is a group of tasks that any person performs in response to the expectations of others 'importance and what they expect from their position at work'.⁵

Organisational Role Stress

Pareek⁵ is considered a pioneer in organization role stress (ORS); he creates a framework that combines ten different pressures to assess how one perceives the Role of Organizational Role. They are as follows:

Inter Role Distance (IRD): The conflict that may arise when an individual attempts to play several roles, for example, the managerial role in an organization and family roles.⁶

Role stagnation (RS): An individual lacks progress and feels glued in the same role.⁷

Role expectation conflict (REC): A result of the different expectations an individual develops in their social setting and identification with other peers. Expectations individual expectations about their role may be unlike the expectations of associates or managers, which is likely to root stress.⁶

Role erosion (RE): An individual's perception that some functions in an organization belong to their role but shift to someone else.⁸

Role overload (RO): This happens when an individual with a specific role has problems executing the demands from other roles.⁹

Role isolation (RI): An undeviating consequence of poor cooperation and communication linkages between an individual's role and other roles in the organization.⁶

Personal inadequacy (PI): Arises when individuals do not possess the necessary skills to perform tasks expected to function within their roles.⁸

Self-role distance (SRD): The stress that occurs when the role of an individual does not comply with their personality.⁸

Role ambiguity (RA): The lack of information available for the employee required for adequate performance.¹⁰

Resource inadequacy (RIIn): It is experienced when resources such as human relations, buildings, infrastructure, materials, machines, tools, equipment, books, documents, and information an individual needs for executing the role are poorly provided.¹¹

Coping Strategies

Organizational level strategies: The organization plays a decisive role in ensuring a peaceful environment free of stress. There are two categories of events related to stress at the organizational level: the organizational structure and policy; and the personal development and growth that the job can provide. The following aspects must be carefully examined and evaluated for effectiveness and implementation.

- (a) Organizational goals must be in the domains of achievement. Plans any high goals put the employees under undue stress and create an unhealthy work environment.
- (b) Organizational policies should be clearly defined regarding training and development, promotion, leave, wages and salary administration, discipline, incentives, etc.
- (c) The informing channels must be set up distinctly to construe authority and responsibility. The principle of unity of command should adhere.
- (d) Stress is reduced by organizational structure, redesigning jobs, and improved communication.
- (e) Corporate policies, the physical work environment should be

suitable for higher productivity.

(f) Updated systems and processes increase efficiency.

(g) Organization must create a sound working environment.

(h) A career plan for managers must be developed and implemented in letter and spirit. Nothing demoralizes employees as poor developmental interventions.

(i) Employees must be empowered. They should be provided with suitable time-to-time counselling through advice, reassurance, good communication, the release of emotional tension, and clarified thinking. Re-orientation is essential to keep employees free of stress for increased productivity.

Individual-Level Strategies

Define objective for self: Every person must set for himself the object *vis-a-vis* the ability and skill one possesses. It is generally observed that individuals set high objectives for themselves to be achieved in a short period. They inhibit the inbuilt fear of failing. Setting up high standards without analyzing available resources leads to stressful situations. People must adapt their goals based upon available resources, 'time' being an essential resource in the era of volatility.

Social support: It is essential to keep close rapport with relatives. Closer to the workplace, develop a friendship with fellow workers who can help in times of crisis, stress, and strain. Social support can be quickly built by adhering to social functions, norms and following religious activities at the workplace. This will enable individuals to regain sulking self-confidence and build self-esteem.

Time management: It is necessary to plan time adequately. Time management can be for various aspects of life such as education, marriage, etc. The day-to-day level is related to the planning of daily events. Everyone should keep a diary where a work plan and progress should be seen when more than one job is needed at a given time; priority should be accorded to a comparatively important job. It is essential to keep up with the schedule of events as planned and ensure the same from the subordinates. This alleviates pressure on the work schedule and eases managing professional-personal workspace. It instils in an individual a habit of punctuality and a greater sense of responsibility and commitment to the organization.

The present study was designed to understand the concept of ORS by assessing its overall level amongst the employees in the public and private sectors.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Stress in the workplace is increasingly a critical problem for employees, employers, and society. Several aspects of working life have been linked to stress. Parts of work itself can be stressful, for instance, work overload.¹² In addition to that, role-based factors such as power role ambiguity and role conflict may also add to the problem.¹³

A study demonstrates stress in the workplace as a conflict of interest, overcrowding, social problems, family conflict, job instability, lack of independence, and responsibility for stress have

shown that conflict of interest and workload negatively impact job satisfaction.¹⁴ The role of the conflict has shown a negative impact on positive emotions in the workplace, while the burden of responsibility is positively affecting it. Overcrowding has disrupted negative emotions in the workplace, while the pressure of responsibility has negatively impacted. The type of contract did not significantly affect any one of the psychological reactions to occupational stress.¹⁴

In a study that assessed predictors of stress in United States (U.S.) physicians, it was found that job demand such as solo practice, work hours, time pressure, and lack of control over workplace hassles, lack of support from colleagues for balancing work and home were the major predictors of stress.¹⁵

A research study¹⁶ examined a sample of 559 civil servants and 105 private-sector employees to assess their risk profiles. They found that public sector employees face more pressure than private-sector employees.¹⁶ In data collected from 200 bank employees in Quetta, Pakistan, where 100 work in public sector banks and the remaining 100 in private sector banks, it is found that there is a significant difference in the level of stress in which both groups are under control and that public sector bank employees face a higher-level of stress in the workplace.¹⁷

However, in a study conducted by Dollard et al¹⁸ they report that workers in the private sector in Queensland, Australia, have made twice as much pressure claims as public sector workers.

A Survey of 84 public servants and 143 private-sector employees to assess any significant differences in their stress levels reveals no significant difference between employees based on sector. Still, there is a significant difference between genders, i.e., female employees are subject to more significant stress than males.¹⁹

Studies in India have also attempted to find a level of integration or find common relationships for stress and other dynamics such as organization, occupation, leadership, communication, and personalities.² Many administrative pressure studies have used the standard — masters, as a unit of their analysis. A few studies look at different levels of management in terms of the junior, middle, and senior management to identify or understand the other causes of stress in which they operate.²⁰

Ahmad et al²¹ examined stress levels among 30 managers from the public and private sectors, using the ORS scale to measure ten measures of role stress. Their research revealed a significant difference between the public and private sector workers in the three categories of role stress — role separation, role ambiguity, and degree of restraint. The authors also find an insignificant effect on a few background factors, such as age, level of education, income, marital status, and job experience.

A study assessing 120 managers from the public and private sectors found that the latter gained more points than ever before in areas such as the need for success and overall motivation.²²

Gemmil et al²⁰ investigated the relationship between role

stress and job satisfaction among bank officials. The author's findings show that role erosion and lack of resources are dominant pressures. In contrast, role ambiguity and conflict of role expectations are distant causes of role oppression in the sample population.

Sharma et al²³ focuses on managers and administrators of public and private pharmaceutical organizations to ensure the role of climate is promoted in four dynamic psychological factors: (i) job satisfaction, (ii) participation, (iii) segregation, and (iv) role depression. The research sample had 150 respondents, including 75 managers and 75 managers. Sharma's²³ findings show that employees of state-owned enterprises receive lower points and are significantly different from those of private organizations. However, public-sector employees receive very high marks for their roles.

There are different factors involved in role stresses, such as role overload, role conflict, and role ambiguity.²⁴ Studies also showed that working women were more inclined to job stress than non-working women. In addition, work-family conflict seems to impact the organizational role stress of working women.²⁵

Different studies have generated different results based on their particular contexts. Some studies altercate that public sector employees are vulnerable to greater organisational role stress while others assume the opposite. The literature review shows that work-related stress is almost equal in both the public and private sectors and that research on this topic remains a popular field of inquiry.

METHODS

Objectives

The main objectives of this practicum are as follows:

- i. To understand the concept of ORS.
- ii. To identify the stressors that have maximum contribution towards the overall ORS (based on rank order).
- iii. To assess the level of overall ORS among the employees in the public and private sectors.
- iv. To identify various coping strategies by reviewing the literature.

Hypothesis

H01: There is no significant difference in ORS amongst the public and private sector employees.

Research Design

Descriptive-comparative research design.

Variables

Independent Variable - ORS.

Dependent Variable - Public sector and private sector employees.

Participants

The participants in this study were adults working in different organizations. There were 92 participants, (51) are working in the

public sector and (41) are working in the private sector. There was no distinction for socio-economic status. The participants were of age group 22-60-years. For the data collection, purposive sampling was used as participants were selected to reach out for the research study. Consent of all participants involved was determined by the preliminary page of the Google Form. A briefing of the study survey was provided, and a question asked for their expressed opinion. Participants could proceed as long as they wished, and stop whenever they wanted. Informal consent was also obtained.

Measures

The ORS scale developed and standardized by Pareek⁵ was administered to collect the data consisting of 50 items and measuring 10 types of role stressors. The scale used a 5-point Likert scale where (1) is If you never or rarely feel this way; (2) is If you occasionally feel this way; (3) is If you sometimes feel this way; (4) is If you frequently feel this way and (5) is if you very frequently feel this way. The ORS scale has high reliability and legitimacy, and detailed procedures are used for different types of organizations. The fidelity coefficient is calculated for all ten paragraph pressures and the total role pressure. The scale was found to have an acceptable reliability level of 0.05. Cronbach’s alpha value of at least 0.70 is the basis for fidelity.²⁶ As cited from the study,²⁷ demonstrating the alpha value of 0.7 for all components is internally consistent. It is found that all of the average variance extracted (AVE) values are greater than the acceptable threshold of 0.5, so convergent validity is confirmed. Data extraction is performed strictly according to the guidelines and guidelines provided in the manuals and relevant material.

Procedure

Due to the nationwide lockdown, it was not feasible to physically reach out to the sample for collecting the data. In order to fulfil this, Google Forms were generated and sent to the targeted sample population using social media platforms. The participants were ensured that confidentiality would be maintained. The form was divided into two sections. Section - I of the form asked for informed consent, participant’s name, age, sex, working sector, working experience, and other demographics. Section - II of the form included 50 items of the ORS. After the completion of the data collection process, all the participants were thanked and were once again ensured that their confidentiality would be maintained. For statistical data analysis, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 21 version was used. A parametric test, namely an independent sample *t*-test, was used to derive the study results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to find the levels of organisational role stress between private and public sector employees. For the same, a Google form containing the questions of Pareek’s⁵ ORS scale was circulated among the participants. There has been ample scientific inquiry on the same, and this research is meant to add to the literature. It was hypothesized that there would be no significant difference between organisational role stressors between employees of the two sectors. The data were subjected to quantitative analysis wherein the mean, standard deviation, *p*-value, *t*-value was calcu-

lated. Findings show a significant difference between the stress levels about role erosion, personal inadequacy, self-role distance, role ambiguity, and total organisational role stress with the public employees facing more organisational role stress.

To rank various stressors contributing to the overall ORS, mean values and standard deviations were calculated, followed by the total ORS scale.

The stressor having the highest mean value is inter role distance, i.e., 14.15 (Table 1), implying that employees are subject to this stressor the most. Thus, rank one is allocated to inter role distance which arises from the conflict that may occur when an individual attempts to play several roles; signifying that the maximum respondents consider inter role distance to be the cause of ORS, followed by role overload, role stagnation, role isolation and so on. Role overload’s highest standard deviation value is 4.94 (Table 2), indicating that some groups experience role overload more than others.

Table 1. Overall Stressors Ranking Order		
Stressors	Average Score	Ranking
IRD	14.15	1
RS	13.59	3
REC	13.15	8
RE	13.12	9
RO	13.93	2
RI	13.53	4
PI	13.33	6
SRD	13.49	5
RA	13.16	10
Rin	14.15	7

In the current study, the public sector employees have experienced higher amounts of stress than the private sector ones in every respect of the dimension other than role stagnation, which may be attributed to the shortage of employment and job vacancies and the continuous output and market demands of the private sector. Consequently, the employees in such organizations feel overburdened with tremendous work pressure, feeling stuck in the same role,²⁸ where role overload and role stagnation are inversely associated with banking employees’ job satisfaction.

Detailed analysis of “*p*” and “*t*” values of all dimensions reveals varying trends. In terms of inter-role distance, there is no significant difference between employees of both sectors, which supports the findings of the study in which levels of inter-role distance were almost similar in private and public hospital nurses.²⁹ The findings for role stagnation also support that study, as differences are insignificant in both cases. However, the mean frequency of private-sector employees is slightly higher, contrary to the findings of the quoted research.²⁹

In this study’s role expectation conflict findings reflect no significant difference, albeit with the public sector employees scoring higher as per the mean of the dimension. This refutes the

Table 2. Independent Sample t-test

Stressors	Private Employees (n=41)		Public Employees (n=51)		t	p
	Mean (X)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Mean (X)	Standard Deviation (SD)		
IRD	14.05	6.229	14.24	3.502	-0.171	0.865
RS	13.80	5.849	13.41	3.330	0.383	0.703
REC	12.51	5.631	13.67	2.957	-1.188	0.240
RE	12.10	4.598	13.94	3.227	-2.173	0.033**
RO	13.24	6.256	14.49	3.535	-1.138	0.260
RI	13.10	5.949	13.88	2.882	-0.775	0.442
PI	11.51	5.187	14.78	3.613	-3.426	0.001**
SRD	12.46	4.032	14.31	2.534	-2.560	0.013**
RA	11.54	4.843	14.29	3.126	-3.115	0.002**
Rin	12.78	4.591	13.47	2.817	-0.843	0.402
Overall ORS	127.10	35.103	140.49	24.849	-2.063	0.043**

**p-value is significant at 0.05

study's findings in which role expectation conflict is significantly higher in employees of private banks than public banks.³⁰ Results for role erosion suggest a significant difference in this dimension, with public sector employees scoring higher on the score. These can be compared with the study that observed a significant difference in role erosion with private sector nurses experiencing more stress.²⁹

The findings for role overload support the observations of the study²⁹ wherein the difference between both sector employees on this is statistically insignificant. Referring to the same study, the findings refute the aforementioned role isolation, wherein the present study has found no significant difference between private and public sector employees. In terms of personal inadequacy, the findings of this study also refute that of the aforementioned, wherein the present study found a significant difference with public sector employees facing more of this stressor.

The study also found public sector employees scoring significantly higher in terms of self-role distance than³¹ stated that private bank employees score higher in this aspect. Role ambiguity scores of this study show that public sector employees score significantly higher, which is in contrast to the findings of these studies.^{29,32} Resource inadequacy results depict insignificant statistical differences between employees of both sectors, which supports the study's findings.²⁹

Overall organisational stress scores of both public and private sector employees were also computed, and results indicate the significant difference with public employees reporting higher-levels of organisational role stress. These findings support the observations from other studies.^{16,17,33} Overall, the results of this study showed significant differences between the sectors in some dimensions and insignificant statistical differences in others. However, the general trend shows that public sector employees score higher on an average and in several specific dimensions. This necessitates the need for investigative inquiry and corrective action to increase the well-being and productivity of the sector at large. Some coping strategies suggested as per available literature are establishing social rapport, precise organisational structure,³⁴ time

management,³⁵ having clearly defined realistic goals,³⁶ transparent communication policies,³⁷ support to employees in terms of counselling³⁸ and incentives, recognition of performance,³⁵ etc. These can help improve mental well-being, job satisfaction,³⁹ and productivity of the individual and organisation.⁸

CONCLUSION

The present study unravelled that public sector employees are under more organisational role stress than their private sector counterparts. Private sector employees have scored higher in terms of role stagnation. Figuring out the causal factor behind it will help boost productivity in the long run. Another important observation from the findings is that both sectors have scored significantly high in all dimensions, stating that working individuals are subject to high amounts of stress. Prolonged exposure to stress has negative consequences on an individual's mind and body, leading to job dissatisfaction and burnout. Thereby it is essential to inquire and correct the situation, some strategies of which have been mentioned.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A bigger sample could be taken to better understand organisational role stress. Follow-up interviews could be conducted with participants to gain more insight. Other demographic variables of marital status, designation, work tenure, etc., could be assessed to understand the relation of these variables to organisational role stress. Results of studies on similar lines could be used to formulate policies at the government level instead of the organisation's administrative grade. ORS scale designed by Pareek⁵ is a self-reporting questionnaire. Keeping in mind the limitations of this method, third-party rating or informant interviews could help judge the accuracy and relevance of individuals' responses. Correlation of organisational role stress with other organisational behaviour variables like job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, organisational commitment, employee turnover, etc., could be studied. Interventions like yoga, meditation, and relaxation techniques can positively impact employees' coping strategies.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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