



## Role Conflict's Role in Personal and Organizational Well-Being

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### ABSTRACT

Role conflict means the tension arising from contradictory expectations or demands within an individual's roles, can significantly impact both personal and organizational success. On a personal level, unresolved role conflict may lead to stress, burnout, decreased productivity, and career dissatisfaction. However, when managed effectively, it can foster personal growth, resilience, and improved problem-solving abilities, potentially enhancing career advancement. For organizations, role conflict can disrupt team cohesion, lower performance, and hinder collaboration. Conversely, when viewed as a challenge, role conflict can stimulate innovation, adaptability, and organizational development. The success of managing role conflict depends on the organization's ability to provide clear role definitions, open communication, and conflict resolution strategies. By effectively navigating role conflict, both individuals and organizations can mitigate negative outcomes while capitalizing on the opportunities for growth and improvement it presents.

**Keywords:** *Social Status, Social role, Social norms, Role conflict, Professional commitment, Job satisfaction.*

### (I) INTRODUCTION

Every individual in the society have to play different roles in life situations. Sometimes while performing two or more simultaneous work one may encounter with the situations like which should be my priority? What is more important? What should be adopted and what should to be let? This is a common condition of conflict which everyone has to face many times in day today life. The questions arises that, what is this condition? Why this happens? and, how to overcome it? In social context social status, social role and social norms are some basic concepts which are correlated with each other. Every individual in the society has a certain kind of status and according to status (position) he/she have to perform his/her role in the society. However there are certain rules and regulations to control such roles and behaviors, these are known as social norms. But while performing two or more simultaneous and contradictory roles when individual confuses about the preference of the role the situation arises is called role conflict. Detail explanation about these basic concepts is as follows.

#### **What is Social Status?**

Following are some definitions to understand social status.

- (1) According to Oxford dictionary social status is, 'the official classification given to a person, country or organization, determining their rights or responsibilities.'
- (2) Talcott Parsons defines, "A status is the positional aspect of the role."
- (3) Ralph Linton defines, "Status is the place in a particular system which a certain individual occupies at a particular time."

Above definitions clears that status is the positional aspect of the role one plays accordingly in a particular system at a particular time. Status may be assigned to a person, country or organization.

#### **What is Social Role?**

Let us try to understand with the help of following definitions.



- (1) According to oxford dictionary role means 'the function assumed or part played by a person or thing in a particular situation'.
- (2) Ralf Linton defines, "A role represents the dynamic aspect of position."
- (3) Ely Chinoy defines, "Role is the pattern of behavior expected or required of persons who occupy a particular status."

It is clear from the above definitions that the role is the functional aspect of the status one holds in any system or organization. It also a behavioral aspect of duties associated with a status. Thus status and role are complimentary to each other.

### **What is Social Norm?**

Following are some definitions of social norm.

- (1) Sheriff and Sheriff defined, "Social Norm is standardized generalizations concerning expected modes of behavior."
- (2) Harry Johnson defines, "A norm is an abstract pattern, held in the mind that set certain limits for behaviors."
- (3) Light and Keller defines, "Norms are the guidelines people follow in their relations with one another."

In the light of above definitions we can conclude about Social Norms that these are patterns of behaviors to play his/her role according to the status one held in a specific society. They may be called as 'standards of behaviors' in social life. But they may be different in different societies according to their standardized general concerns

### **What is Role conflict?**

- (1) According to Oxford dictionary role conflict means the situation in which a person is expected to play incompatible roles.'
- (2) According to dictionary of sociology, 'role conflict is a situation in which contradictory, competing, or incompatible expectations are placed on an individual by two or more roles held at the same time'.
- (3) Kahn et al. defines role conflict as the simultaneous occurrence of two or more pressures such that compliance with one would make compliance with the other more difficult.

Above definitions suggests that the role conflict is the situation when one feels pulled in different directions while performing two or more roles simultaneously. It is the situation in which one role effect on performance of another role because of their incompatibility or contradictions.

### **Concepts related to Role:-**

The following are some concepts related to role.

- (1) **Role Performance:-** The way a person actually plays one's role in a situation is role performance.
- (2) **Role Set:-** A set of role (role complex) centers around a particular social status which consist of a bundle of similar roles. Like a professor of university frequently gets involve in teaching, research, consultancy, administration, publication, examination, accordingly he possess a set of roles like teacher, researcher, counselor, administrator, publisher, examiner etc.
- (3) **Role Strain:-** A feeling of difficulty or stress in fulfilling the demands of one's status obligations or responsibilities.
- (4) **Role Exit:-** A process of disengagement from a role that is central to one's self identity, in order to establish a new role and identity.

### **Types of Role Conflict:-**

Following are main types of role conflict.

- (1) **Intra-sender conflict:-** This type of role conflict occurs when a role sender requires a role receiver to perform contradictory or inconsistent roles.  
Ex. A teacher expects from an average IQ student to top in exam which is not possible for him without violating rules but teacher also expect from him to avoid cheating.



(2) **Inter-sender conflict:-** A role receiver experience this type of conflict if the role behavior demanded by one role sender is incongruent with the role behavior demanded by another role sender.

Ex. The workers of a company under a supervisor perform their jobs according to their supervisor's instructions but when quality control inspector visits the unit he suggests a different way to accomplish the job.

(3) **Inter-role conflict:-** This type of conflict occurs when an individual occupies two or more roles which are incongruent to each other.

Ex. As the head of a firm a person is expected to take part in social engagements to promote his firm image. On the other side this may create conflict with his/her role as a parent which demands spend leisure time with the family.

(4) **Intra-role conflict:-** This type of role conflict occurs when the role requirements are incongruent with the focal person's attitudes, values and professional behavior.

Ex. A person honest with his job and following rules and job ethics when forced to indulge in unfair and unethical practices, he feels inter-role conflict.

(5) **Role overload conflict:-** When an organization member is required to perform number of roles sent by different senders, which taken as a set of role are too much to be accomplished by him/her, then the role overload situation arises.

(6) **Role ambiguity:-** it is refers to the lack of clarity in understanding what expectations or prescriptions exist for a given role. Role ambiguity occurs when the information either does not exist or is not properly communicated if it does exist.

#### **Consequences of role conflict (Personal):-**

Following are some personal consequences of role conflict.

(1) **Low job satisfaction:-**Because of role conflict situations at work place one feels pulled down in various directions and may not able to concentrate on his actual job, further this situation leads to job dissatisfaction in the worker and he/she may feel about leaving the job.

(2) **High degree of job related tension:-**The person having role conflict feeling may suffer by job related tension continuously and may not able to enjoy his/her personal and social life because he/ she carries his tension with him/her everywhere.

(3) **Low confidence:-**The person having role conflict feeling suffers from decreased level of confidence and underestimates himself/herself. This may affect normal performance of the worker and he/she may not able to utilize his/her maximum possible affords while performing duties. This condition may lead to un-completion of personal and organizational goals.

(4) **Avoidance:-**Due to role conflict situation person avoids to take challenges, to take risk and accept new responsibilities due to this behavior of avoidance he/she have to let many opportunities of professional growth and status up-gradation.

(5) **Withdrawal:-**When the conflicting situation about role reaches to its peak the person has no alternative but to leave the place and withdrawal of self from the environment where there is no space for improvement of conditions according him/her.

#### **Consequences of role conflict (Organizational):-**

Following are some consequences related to role conflict which effects on organizational structure and growth.

(1) **Quality of services:-**Employees having role conflict feeling may not able to perform their jobs with full dedication and due attention, this may affect the quality of services provided by the firm and damage of prestige of the firm in the market or society.

(2) **Organizational culture:-**More and more employees having role conflict feeling more the crises will occur. This situation is not in favor of organizational culture of the firm. This may lead to uncertainty and chaos among the employees and put hazard in the path to achieve organization goals.



(3) **Staff moral and performance:-**Role conflict situation put adverse effect on moral and performance of staff members of the firm. They feel neglected and side lined by the superiors. In this situation they do not feel attachment with their work place which leads to decline their performance.

(4) **Wastage of resources:-**Because of role conflict situations among the employees, the efficiency to complete assignment timely by maximum utilization of the resources is not possible to the firm. This may lead to wastage of resources and the balance of cost and return could not possible to maintain by the firm.

(5) **Hindrance to organizational goals:-**Role conflict situation among the employees effect on the efficiency and capacity of work. Because of this they may not able to utilize their maximum efforts to accomplish the tasks assigned to them. The tasks do not get done timely which increases the cost behind the product and ultimately decreases the profit. Wastage of time and resources, lack of healthy and professional organizational culture are the consequences of role conflict among the staff which leads to create hindrance to organizational goals.

### **Effects of role conflict:-**

Following are some positive as well as negative effects of role conflict.

#### **1. Leads to new ideas about role conflict**

Role conflict occurs when individuals face contradictory demands or expectations in their roles, either within a single organization or across different roles they hold in life. This situation can prompt new ideas or ways of thinking as individuals or teams try to resolve these conflicts. For instance, role conflict might lead someone to reconsider how they approach their work-life balance, find new ways to communicate with colleagues, or create innovative solutions to meet multiple demands at once. The tension between conflicting roles often sparks creativity and reflection, leading to novel approaches or problem-solving strategies.

#### **2. Stimulates creativity**

While role conflict can be frustrating, it can also act as a catalyst for creativity. When people experience tension due to competing expectations, they might be forced to think outside the box to come up with solutions that satisfy all the conflicting demands. This process of finding new ways to reconcile differences can lead to fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, or more adaptive strategies. In some cases, individuals or teams might develop better workflows, communication practices, or problem-solving techniques as a result of having to navigate role conflict.

#### **3. Motivates change**

Experiencing role conflict often forces individuals or organizations to rethink their current practices, expectations, or structures. This tension can act as a motivator for change, pushing people to re-evaluate their work processes, communication strategies, or personal goals. Organizations might introduce new policies or provide additional support to help employees better manage competing demands, while individuals might find new ways to adapt their roles or seek more balance in their lives. Change, when prompted by role conflict, can bring about improvements in both the work environment and the personal lives of employees.

#### **4. Promotes organizational vitality**

In some contexts, role conflict can contribute positively to an organization's vitality by encouraging diversity of thought, new ideas, and healthy debate. When employees are forced to reconcile conflicting demands, it can lead to a more dynamic and flexible work environment where creativity and innovation are valued. This can help organizations remain competitive, adapt to change, and evolve in response to external challenges. Role conflict can highlight areas where change or improvement is needed, leading to overall organizational growth and vitality.

**5. Helps individuals and groups establish identity**

Role conflict often forces individuals and groups to clarify their roles, responsibilities, and values. By navigating conflicts between roles, people may come to a better understanding of their core beliefs and the priorities that define them. For example, an individual juggling multiple work responsibilities may refine their sense of what is most important to them in their career and what boundaries they need to set. This self-awareness can help them define their professional identity more clearly. Similarly, groups may emerge with stronger identities as they work through collective role conflicts, enhancing team cohesion.

**6. Serves as a safety valve to indicate problems**

Role conflict can serve as a valuable signal that something is wrong or out of balance. It acts as a kind of safety valve, highlighting underlying issues within the organization or within an individual's responsibilities. For instance, persistent role conflict might indicate that workloads are not properly distributed, that communication channels are ineffective, or that organizational structures need to be reassessed. By identifying the root causes of role conflict, organizations can address the problems before they escalate into more significant issues, promoting long-term health and stability.

**7. Diverts energy from work**

When role conflict arises, it can cause individuals to feel distracted or stressed, leading them to expend energy trying to resolve the conflict rather than focusing on the actual tasks at hand. This diversion of energy can decrease productivity, cause burnout, or lead to disengagement, as individuals might prioritize resolving internal conflicts over completing their assigned work. The emotional and mental energy required to address role conflicts often leaves less capacity for the tasks directly related to the individual's role, reducing efficiency in the workplace.

**8. Threatens psychological well-being**

Chronic or unresolved role conflict can lead to significant psychological distress. The pressure of balancing conflicting expectations or duties can cause stress, anxiety, and a sense of being overwhelmed. If individuals feel they are constantly failing to meet expectations in one or more of their roles, it can erode their self-esteem, sense of accomplishment, and overall well-being. This can lead to burnout, depression, or other mental health issues if not addressed appropriately.

**9. Wastes resources**

Dealing with role conflict often requires resources—time, energy, emotional labor, and even financial costs—that could otherwise be spent more efficiently on productive tasks. When individuals or teams have to dedicate significant resources to navigating conflicting roles, it can result in a reduction of overall productivity and a waste of organizational resources. For example, leaders might have to spend more time addressing interpersonal issues or conflicts rather than driving innovation, leading to missed opportunities and inefficiencies.

**10. Creates a negative climate**

On the flip side, role conflict can create a negative or toxic work climate. If unresolved, it can lead to frustration, resentment, and interpersonal conflicts among employees. When people feel that their roles are unclear or that they are under constant pressure from competing demands, it can lower morale, reduce job satisfaction, and diminish trust among coworkers. This negative climate can permeate the organization and affect productivity, collaboration, and overall employee engagement.

**11. Breaks down group cohesion**

While role conflict can sometimes promote creativity, if it is not managed properly, it can also damage group cohesion. When team members experience role conflict and fail to address it constructively, the result can be fragmentation. Different members may focus on their personal concerns, leading to a lack of alignment and collaboration. This breakdown in





cohesion can weaken teamwork, reduce collective efficacy, and hinder the ability of the group to achieve common goals.

## **12. Can increase hostility and aggressive behavior**

If role conflict is not resolved, it can escalate tensions, resulting in hostility and even aggressive behavior among individuals or teams. Employees may feel resentful or defensive if they perceive that their roles are being compromised, misunderstood, or undermined by others. This can manifest in confrontations, passive-aggressive behavior, or other forms of interpersonal conflict. When individuals feel that their roles are under constant threat or that they are unable to perform to the expected standard, it can lead to emotional outbursts, hostile interactions, and a more combative work environment.

### **Techniques to overcome the problem of role conflict:-**

There are many techniques to overcome role conflict. Some of them are as follows divided as personal and organizational type.

#### **(A) Personal techniques:-**

Personal techniques to tackle role conflict includes following.

##### **(1) Aggressive Mechanism:-**

Aggressive mechanism to resolving role conflict is based on following methods.

(i) **Fixation:-**An individual keeps up a dysfunctional behavior that obviously will not solve the conflicts. He must take stapes and find out the real causes to resolve the problem.

(ii) **Displacement:-**An individual directs his or her anger towards someone who is not the source of the conflict. This is not the real solution to the problem. To resolve the conflict one's efforts should not be displaced from real causes of the conflicts.

(iii) **Negativism:-**A person responds with pessimism to any attempt at solving a problem. This may lead to increase in the complications of conflicts. One should observe the situations with positive outlook and intention of solving problem.

##### **(2) Compromise mechanism:-**

Compromise mechanism is based on following methods.

(i) **Compensation:-**One can attempt to make up negative situation by devoting himself or herself to another pursuit with increased vigor.

(ii) **Identification:-**An individual patterns his or her behavior after another.

(iii) **Rationalization:-**A compromise mechanism characterized by trying to justify one's behavior by constructing bogus reasons for it.

##### **(3) Withdrawal mechanism:-**

Withdrawal mechanism is based on following methods.

(i) **Flight/withdrawal:-**The act of physically escaping a conflict (flight) or psychologically escaping (withdrawal).

(ii) **Conversion:-**Conversion of emotional conflicts by expression in physical symptoms.

(iii) **Fantasy:-**The method of escaping from a conflict through day dreaming.

##### **(4) Other techniques:-**

Following are some other techniques used as per situation arises to solve role conflict issues.

(i) **Negotiations:-**A joint process of finding a mutually acceptable solution to a complex conflict.

(ii) **Avoiding:-**Deliberate decision to take no action on a conflict or to stay out of a conflict.

(iii) **Accommodation:-**Concerns that the other party's goals be met but relatively unconcerned with getting own way.

(iv) **Competing:-**Satisfying owns interests, willing to do so at other party's expenses.

(v) **Compromising:-**Each party gives up something to reach a solution.



(vi) **Collaborating:-** Arriving at a solution agreeable to all through open and thorough discussion.

**(B) Organizational techniques:-**

Organizations may apply following techniques to overcome the employees from role conflict situations.

**(1) Assigning congruent goal:-**

Tasks and goals expected to be completed should be achievable, within the capacities and congruent to the employee's skills and abilities.

**(2) Appropriate demands:-**

Employer should not place inappropriate demands for task compilation. Enough time should be given according to their physical limits and capacities.

**(3) Upgrading knowledge and skills:-**

To make familiar with new trends and skills, opportunities should be provided by employer for training and skill development to the employees at company's own cost.

**(4) Compensation and incentives:-**

There should be a fair and healthy system of compensation and incentives for good work and dedications of workers towards achieving the task, hard work and extra ordinary contributions.

**(5) Job satisfaction:-**

There should be good organizational culture at the work place, feeling of co-operation as the group and attachment to the firm as the employees. Due care should be provided by employer about medical facilities, recreation and pension schemes. These efforts may create job satisfaction among the employees.

**(6) Suggestion and complain box:-**

There should be a suggestion and complain box in the prime area of the company premises. A quick and time bound redress system should be followed to resolve the conflicts and problems faced by workers.

**(II) CONCLUSION**

Role conflict can have both positive and negative effects on individuals and organizations. On the positive side, when managed well, role conflict can serve as a powerful catalyst for creativity and innovation. The tension between competing demands or expectations can inspire new ways of thinking and problem-solving, leading to breakthrough ideas or improved processes. Additionally, experiencing and overcoming role conflict can drive motivation for change, pushing individuals to adapt, grow, and find more effective solutions. This process can energize an organization, promote its vitality, and foster a culture of continuous improvement. However, if role conflict is poorly managed, it can have detrimental consequences. Prolonged or unresolved conflict may create a toxic work climate, characterized by frustration, resentment, and disengagement. It can also erode group cohesion, leading to fragmented teams and poor collaboration. Furthermore, the constant stress of conflicting roles can harm individuals' psychological well-being, potentially leading to burnout, anxiety, or decreased job satisfaction. Ultimately, the impact of role conflict depends largely on how it is addressed. Organizations that view it as an opportunity for growth and provide support for individuals to navigate it effectively are more likely to benefit from the positive aspects of role conflict. In contrast, when role conflict is ignored or mishandled, it can become a major source of stress and inefficiency, undermining both individual and organizational performance. The key to managing role conflict effectively lies in recognizing its potential benefits and risks, and in fostering an environment where conflict can be channeled constructively rather than allowed to fester into a source of frustration.



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