

Role Overload: A Theoretical Evaluation in the Context of Cause-Effect

Günay EROL

Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University
ÜSET Vocational School
Nevşehir, Turkey
gunayerol@nevsehir.edu.tr

Yasin BOYLU

Gazi University
Faculty of Tourism
Ankara, Turkey
yasin@gazi.edu.tr

Extensive Summary

Introduction

Role expectations which come with the statuses of an individual are analyzed by the community and whether role expectations are fulfilled or not is observed (Linton, 1936). Thus an individual completely fulfills his or her role as long as he or she reflects the descriptions of his collective ‘adjectives’ on his or her behaviors. When it is considered that an employed individual’s role expectations include both workplace and out of work roles (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985), the individual is expected to exhibit behavior in accordance with both worklife and out of worklife statutes. A significant determiner for work and family life (Duxbury, Lyons and Higgins, 2008), role overload is related with worklife and out of worklife role demands and it is evaluated as a factor having an impact on these demands.

Role Overload Concept

Role overload is defined as ‘despite having too much to do, not having enough time’ by Duxbury, Lyons and Higgins (2008:126). Coverman (1989) defines role overload as an individual’s facing too many role demands in a very limited time period. Emphasizing especially time constraints, it is stated that an individual facing too many role demands may find time insufficient to fulfill these demands completely. Time concept which is also related to role overload is one of the factors causing role conflict. Accordingly, busy working hours required by work life are viewed as an obstacle to meet the requirements of out of work roles. Thus, the individual cannot find enough time for out of office roles and faces time pressure in meeting the requirements of the roles. Although this concept is emphasized as a type of conflict resulting from time in work-family conflict literature (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985), the excess of requirements of roles despite the limited time of an individual refers to role overload. Reilly (1982) approaches role overload as a kind of role conflict resulting from excessive demands on the energy and time of an individual. The source of the

mentioned problem is based on the perception that role requirements are too much in proportion to the resources (skills, time, resource, energy, etc.) of an individual (Jones et al., 2007).

The Extent of Role Overload: Work Life and Out of Work Life

Role overload is a concept that includes an individual's both work and out of work roles (Duxbury and Higgins, 2012). As stated by Duxbury, Lyons and Higgins (2008), time inadequacy for meeting the multi role demands of work and family life ascertains a time-based conflict perception on the individual. Time and energy resources are not enough to meet the requirements of multi role requirements of an individual sufficiently. Time spent to fulfill job requirements at work (Duxbury, Lyons ve Higgins, 2008), working fast, work excess, insufficient time, not having enough time to finish the work and conflicting demands (Karasek, 1979), the impact of working hours on family life (Major, Klein and Ehrhart, 2002; Parasuraman et al., 1996), trying to finish work in a limited period of time, not having enough resources to fulfill duties assigned during work hours and having to work out of working hours put employees in a tight spot in terms of time and energy. Thus increasing work demands may hinder the individual's out of work responsibilities (responsibilities such as spouse, children, parents and society) (Duxbury, Lyons and Higgins, 2008). Although these effects that cause pressure on individuals are generally associated with work-family conflict, there are studies (Bakker, Demerouti and Dollard, 2008; Frone, Yardley and Markel, 1997; Parasuraman et al., 1996) that strongly point out the relationship between the time spent on work demands and role overload and participation in family roles.

Duxbury, Lyons and Higgins (2008) who emphasize the relationship between role overload of demands in everyday life of an individual except the work life, indicate that these demands may have a broad content. These out of office demands are related to spouse, children, relatives, friends, society and the individual. Among these demands are responsibilities about family members such as housework, childcare, social imperatives and spare time activities (Geurts and Demerouti, 2003).

Conclusion

Role overload that emerges with especially insufficient time perception in the face of excessive role demands matters not only for individuals but also for organizations and society. In addition to being related to work and out of work life conditions, role overload is a factor that may adversely affect an individual's health, occupational and family variables, personal development and other role demands. Therefore, it is important particularly for employees to have sufficient resources to meet the requirements of work and family roles. Regulations such as working hours, taking a leave, defining work roles precisely, making job description, fair sharing of family roles between spouses, not hindering other role demands when carrying work roles into home may be effective to decrease role overload.