An Investigation of the Relationship between Role Ambiguity, Role Conflict, Workplace Friendship, and Loneliness at Work

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Abstract

In this study, the causality relations between role ambiguity, role conflict, workplace friendship, and loneliness in working life are investigated. The sample of the research comprises students who are registered in the Marmara University Social Sciences Institute Management and Organization Department, all of whom have a working life. First, the relationships between the variables were examined, and then the interaction between variables was analyzed with the structural equation modeling technique. In this context, the organizational culture sub-dimensions were taken as independent variables, and the organizational alienation sub-dimensions as dependent variables. According to the results of the research, emotional deprivation from the loneliness subscale in the working life has a significant relationship between the role conflict and the friendship subscale, and between the friendship perception and friendship perception. It has been determined that there is a significant relationship between social friendliness and role conflict and role ambiguity, workplace friendship subscales, friendship perceptions and friendliness. Likewise, there were significant relationships between friendship opportunities, role ambiguity and role conflict from workplace friendship sub-dimensions. According to these results, as the role conflict increases, the emotional deprivation increases; the increase in emotional deprivation also decreases the workplace friendship; increased role ambiguity increases social friendship, and social friendship increases workplace friendship.

Keywords: Role ambiguity, role conflict, workplace friendship, loneliness at work

1. Introduction

Most people have to take on different roles at various levels regardless of whether those roles are related to their work or not. They face very different and occasionally conflicting expectations due to their roles. Because of the fact that these expectations especially affect people's working life, the role expectations in many areas over the last two decades have been the subject of scientific work. Role ambiguity and role conflict are the most common studies among these.

Employees often run into a contradiction about their different role expectations coming from their families, friends, and managers and they do not know how to act when they are faced with insufficient and unclear information about the tasks, responsibilities, and objectives that they undertake. This situation can be explained theoretically by the concepts of role ambiguity and role conflict (Khan et al., 2014).

A person may be a worker in a workplace, a parent in family, and also a president in an association regarded as social activities. This person has to exhibit different behaviors due to these different roles that they undertake. When the distance between these differences is opened, that is,when an individual has to submit to the pressures of management in their work, when they have to show exemplary behavior to their family, and when they have to manage the association where they are president, they may experience role ambiguity and role conflict due to the differences of these roles. This may affect an individual's behavior in a negative way and cause problems in relation to the environment. Various studies have been carried out on the effects of role ambiguity and role conflict on issues such as job satisfaction, job performance, and tendency to leave work. In the present study, the relations between role ambiguity, role conflict, especially workplace friendship, and loneliness in working life are investigated.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Role Ambiguity

Role ambiguity is the inability of an individual to clearly understand what is expected of them in orderto fulfill their role requirements and feeling unsupported itself with the perception that a lack of necessary information to perform a job or the task of an individual. For example, that a salesperson is hesitant about what executives, customers, and friends are expecting from them is an example of role ambiguity (Onyemah, 2008). Employees are faced with role ambiguity when they do not have sufficient information about the roles expected of them within or outside of an organization. Role ambiguity for the working life is that 'expectations of itself are not clear and net in his job' (Karacaoglu and Cetin, 2015). In another definition of role ambiguity, it is expressed as the uncertainty about what is expected in one's job (Madera et al., 2013; Amyx et al., 2014). An individual experiencing role ambiguity may not be able to fully perceive their authority and responsibilities. Research has shown that a high level of role conflict and role ambiguity increases stress, anxiety, fear and hostility, and burnout and reduces job satisfaction and self-confidence and increases the tendency to alienate and leave work (Fatima' and Waliur Rehman; 2012:59). When individuals understand their roles well, roles become meaningful and they can meet the requirements of their roles, knowing the value of their role. According to Kahn (1964), who first studied role ambiguity, role ambiguity manifests itself in the following issues (Rogalsky et al., 2016);

a)   What is to be expected from the individual?
b)   How should the individual fulfill the requirements of the role?
c)   Whose expectations will be a priority?
d)   How do you assess the performance of the individual?
e)   What are the consequences of fulfillment of the responsibilities of the individual or not?
     In particular, role ambiguity about a job arises when an individual cannot clearly understand what authorities, and responsibilities related to a job are, when the approach of how to do their job is not clear, and when an individual cannot decide which tasks to prioritize.

2.2. Role Conflict

Role conflict is when an individual cannot understand what their role is; therefore, they have mixed sentiments because they cannot meet the expectations related their role. For example, role conflict is a situation wherein none of the expectations are met, when a salesperson thinks that the boss's expectations and desires are incompatible with the customer's expectations (Omyenah, 2008). If there are significant differences between the expectations, it can be said that there is a role conflict. Researchers who have conducted the first studies on this subject (House and Rizzo, 1072; Hamner and Tosi, 1973) have suggested that role ambiguity and role conflict are directly related to unwanted individual outcomes and they have stated that these outcomes are often expressed as anxiety from their job, job dissatisfaction, prejudice against the role source, and even a tendency to leave work. House and Rizzo (1972) suggested that role ambiguity is more prevalent than role conflict in terms of adverse effects. Hamner and Tosi (1973), on the other hand, claimed that role conflict in lower-level employees who are not in managerial positions is more important than job ambiguity as a sign of job satisfaction or dissatisfaction; whereas the opposite of this claim is true for those who work at the management level.

2.3. Workplace Friendship

Friendship is a phenomenon that is at the center of an individual's life, deepens through time, and is effective in shaping an individual's personality (Dickie, 2009). Doyle and Smith (2002) stated three important dimensions of friendship, as follows.

- There are significant differences in the approach of forming friendships among different social groups,
- There are no significant differences by gender related to the content of the friendship,
- Friendship experiences vary with age.

On the other hand, workplace friendship is a concept that is based on volunteerism, and it is expected to provide socio-economic benefits to the individuals (Dickie, 2009). Riordan and Griffet (1995) argued that the friendship environment in the workplace played a decisive role on the level of motivation, and job satisfaction by influencing individual's view about work, thus it also directly affects productivity. Although there are approaches that workplace friendships may be costly for an organization (Yager, 1999), there are also studies suggesting that friendship positively affects the organizational climate, work relations, and employees' work perspective (Song & Olshfski, 2008). The importance of examining workplace friendship is because it has behavioral dimensions, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and individual and organizational performance.

2.4. Loneliness at Work

People are social beings. Being with other people and loyalty area feeling that relaxes individuals, and reveals its performance (Lam & Lau, 2012). Individuals who cannot compensate for the need for socialization for various reasons may fall into negative emotions in various dimensions, such as emotional stress, loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Loneliness is caused by a 'gap between an individual's desire to reach and actually obtain (Tabancali and Korumaz, 2014). Loneliness may result in physical and psychological consequences, such as high blood pressure, negative effects on the immune system, stress, and psychological depression (Okamura et al., 2011). Studies (Mao, 2006) have revealed that individuals are more social in their private lives than their work lives and that the increase in computer and Internet jobs, and rising competition in the workplace, increase loneliness in working life.

3. Method and Findings

3.1. Sample

This research consists of graduate students from the Administration and Organization Department in Turkey. The sample of the research is composed of students who are registered in the Marmara University Social Sciences Institute Management and Organization Department. Out of the questionnaires sent to the students, 120 questionnaires were evaluated as not being returned to questionnaires, incorrect and incomplete filling or the result of extreme value analysis. The sample group consists of 120 graduate students consisting of 64 women and 56 men. The demographic characteristics of the sample group are shown in Table 1.

Table1.Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Demographic Characteristics of the Sample Group

Characteristic		1	2	3	4	5	Total
		Man	**Woman**				-
Sex	n	56	64				120
	%	46.7	53.3				100
Marital Status		**Married**	**Single**				-
	n	31	89				120
	%	25.8	74.2				100
		20-24	**25-29**	**30-34**	**35-39**	**40-44**	
Age		30	49	27	11	3	120
		25.0	40.8	22.5	9.2	2.5	100
Number of Children		**None**	**One**	**Two**			-
	n	105	10	5			120
	%	87.5	8.3	4.2			100
Total Professional Duration		**1-5 Years**	**6-10 Years**	**11-15 Years**	**16-20Years**	**20 +**	-
	n	73	27	8	8	4	120
	%	60.8	22.5	6.7	6.7	3.3	100
Professional Duration in Organization		**1-5 Years**	**6-10 Years**	**11-15 Years**	**16-20 Years**	20 +	-
	n	99	17	0	3	1	120
	%	82.5	14.2	0	2.5	0.8	100

3.2. Data Collection Tools

In order to prepare a questionnaire form and thereby to collect data, three different scales were used; role ambiguity and role conflict, workplace friendship, and loneliness in the workplace. In addition, demographic questions are arranged in the questionnaire in order to determine the demographic characteristics of the survey participants.

3.2.1. Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict

The role ambiguity and role conflict scale used in this research was developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970). There are a total of 14 items in the scale; it is divided into two sub-factors as role conflict and role ambiguity. 8 of 14 items in the scale of the five-point Likert type are related to role conflict and 6 items are related to role uncertainty. Cronbach's Alfa coefficients of sub-dimensions computed for scale credibility were found 0.784 for role ambiguity and 0.671 for role conflict. Cronbach's Alfa coefficient for the whole scale is 0.568.

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for scale validity, and sub-dimensions placed in original scale and a 2-itemstructure was confirmed after the second statement on role conflict in the 14-point structure was removed ($\chi2/df=2,056$, RMSEA=0.094; CFI=0.943, GFI=0.908)[1]. These findings show that the scale is valid and reliable.

3.2.2. Workplace Friendship Scale

The workplace friendship scale developed by Nielsen, Jex, and Adams (2000) consists of 12 items and two sub-dimensions.6 of 12 items in the scale of the five-point Likert type measure friendship opportunity scale and 6 items measure a sense of friendship. Cronbach's Alfa coefficients of sub-dimensions computed for scale credibility were found to be 0.744 for friendship opportunity and 0.856 for sense of friendship. Cronbach's Alfa coefficient for the whole scale is 0.867. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for scale validity, and sub-dimensions placed in original scale and a 12-item structure was confirmed ($\chi2/df=1,750$, RMSEA=0.079; CFI=0.943, GFI=0.908)[2]. These findings show that the scale is valid and reliable.

3.2.3. Loneliness in Workplace Scale

The loneliness in workplace scale developed by Wright et al. (2006) and conducted validity and reliability studies and adapted to Turkish by Dogan, Cetin, and Sungur (2009) is used.The loneliness in workplace scale was discussed with emotional deprivation and social friendship dimensions. 9 out of 16 items onthe scale of the five-point Likert type measure emotional deprivation sub-dimension and 7 items measure social friendship dimension. Cronbach's Alfa coefficients of sub-dimensions computed for scale credibility were found to be 0.656 for emotional deprivation and 0.537 for social friendship. Cronbach's Alfa coefficient for the whole scale is 0.667.

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for scale validity, and sub-dimensions placed in original scale and a 16-item structure was confirmed ($\chi2/df=1,990$, RMSEA=0.091; CFI=0.941, GFI=0.876). These findings show that the scale is valid and reliable.

3.3. Method

In this study, it is aimed to investigate causality relations between role ambiguity, role conflict, workplace friendship and loneliness in working life. With this aim, first the relationships between variables were examined, and then the interaction between variables was analyzed with the structural equation modeling technique. In this context, organizational culture sub-dimensions were taken as independent variables and organizational alienation sub-dimensions as dependent variables. In this study, the structural equation modeling (SEM) is used to investigate causality relations between role ambiguity, role conflict, workplace friendship and loneliness in working life. First the relationships between variables were examined, and then the interaction between variables was analyzed with the structural equation modeling technique. There are certain assumptions of SEM techniques, such as the other multivariate analysis methods. While there are different opinions on the SEM model technique, it is generally accepted that any sample volume fewer than 100 is considered small-sized, any sample volume between 100 and 200 is considered medium-sized and any sample volume higher than 200 is considered large-sized (Bayram, 2010:51), thus making this sample volume of 120 units is sufficient for SEM.

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[1] $\chi2$=Chi-Square; df=Degree of Freedom; CFI=Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA=The Root Mean Square Error; GFI=Goodness Of Fit Index.

Mardia kurtosis coefficient is the preferred method for the assumption of multiple normality within the framework of the view that there will be a very variably positive flattening distribution (Byrne, 2010: 103) that will occur for these items because the majority of the participants in the Likert-type scales choose the same scale score for certain items. According to the analysis result, the kurtosis value was calculated as 4,395 and the critical ratio (c.r.) 2,457> 1,96, and it was determined that the data set did not satisfy the assumption of the multiple normality. That's why the analysis was conducted with bootstrap maximum likelihood method instead of maximum likelihood method.Relations between the variables is presented in Table 2. According to the results, there are positive relations between role ambiguity and workplace friendship dimensions, whereas there are negative relations between workplace friendship and emotional deprivation that is a dimension of loneliness in workplace dimensions in work life. On the other hand, it was found that there were positive relations between role ambiguity sub-dimension and friendship opportunity ($r = 0.316$, $p <0.01$), and friendship perception ($r = 0.224$, $p <0.05$), that are sub-dimensions of workplace friendship. Similarly, it has been found that there is a positive relation between role ambiguity and social friendship ($r = 0.245$, $p <0.01$) that is a sub-dimension of loneliness inthe workplace. In the case of role conflict, there is a positive relation between role conflict and emotional deprivation that is a sub-dimension of loneliness in the workplace ($r = 0.197$, $p <0.05$). There are negative relations between friendship opportunity that is a sub-dimension of workplace friendship and emotional deprivation dimension ($r = -0.350$, $p <0.01$) that is a sub-dimension of loneliness in the workplace, and between friendship perceptions and emotional deprivation ($r = -0.456$, $p <0.01$). There is the same direction relation between friendship opportunity that is a sub-dimension of workplace friendship and social friendship ($r=0.534$, $p<0.01$) that is a sub-dimension of loneliness in the workplace, and between friendship perceptions and social friendship ($r=0.421$, $p<0.01$).

Table 2.Correlations between Variables

		Mean	Sd.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Role Ambiguity	3.9111	0.63802	1					
2	Role Conflict	3.0677	0.67905	-0.183[*]	1				
3	Friendship Opportunity	4.0722	0.56457	0.316[**]	0.144	1			
4	Friendship Perception	3.5069	0.82003	0.224[**]	-0.004	0.579[**]	1		
5	Emotional Deprivation	2.4704	0.49223	-0.160	0.197[*]	-0.350[**]	-0.456[**]	1	
6	Social Friendship	3.7500	0.45863	0.245[**]	0.139	0.534[**]	0.421[**]	-0.245[**]	1

[**] p< 0.01, [*] p< 0.05

The SEM model, which is used to investigate the causality relations between role ambiguity, role conflict, workplace friendship, and loneliness in working life, in the context of the specified relations, is shown in Figure 1 after the meaningless paths are removed. The model was formed by considering that role ambiguity and role conflict have a meaningful influence on workplace friendship and loneliness in workplace dimensions.

Figure 1.Effects of Organizational Culture on Organizational Alienation Behaviors
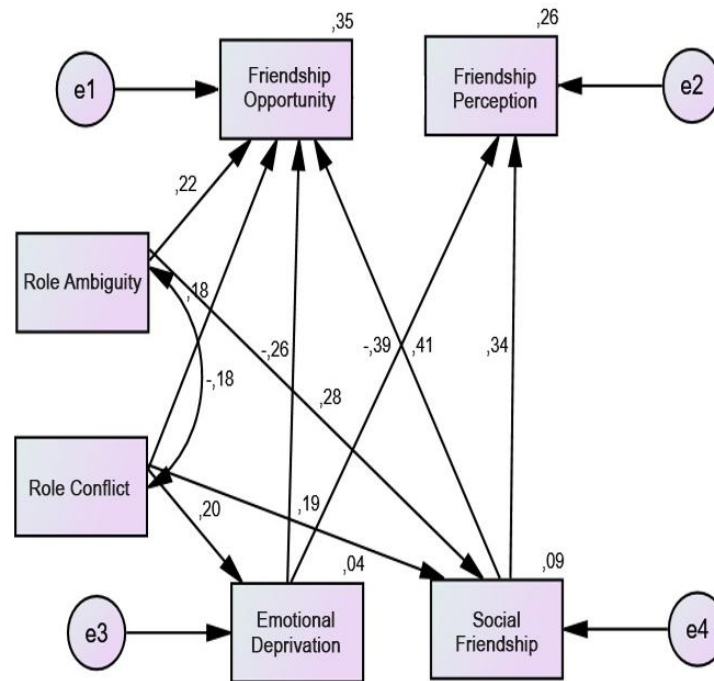
Goodness of fit values of the model shown in Table 3 demonstrate the goodness of fit of the model and verify the structural equation (Model: χ2/df=5,241, RMR=0.045, CFI=0.813, GFI=0.925).

Table 3.Goodness of Fit Indices of the Structural Model (Meydan and Sesen, 2011)

Fit Indices	Good Fit	Acceptable Fit	Results
χ^2 (CMIN)	**not meaningful**	-	31.207
χ^2/df (CMIN/df)	≤ 3	≤4-5	5.241
CFI	≥0.97	≥0.95	0.925
RMR	≤0.05	0.06-0.08	0.045
GFI	≥0.90	0.89-0.85	0.813

Goodness of fit of the model was evaluated with χ2 (Chi square), df (Degrees of freedom) and χ2/df ratio, RMR (Root Mean Square Residual), CFI (Comparative Fit Index) and GFI (Goodness of Fit Index) indices. According to Meydan and Sesen (2011), it is observed that all the goodness of fit indices is within the acceptable limits. Thus, the relationships between the variables in the model and the structures are verified. According to the results, there is a significance relation between emotional deprivation that is a sub-dimension of loneliness in the workplace and role conflict (β = 0.197, p <0.05), there is also significance relation between friendship opportunity (β = -0.263, p <0.001) that is a sub-dimension of workplace friendship and friendship perception (β = 0.388, p <0.001). The significance relation between social friendship that is a sub-dimension of loneliness in the workplace and role conflict (β= 0.190, p<0.05), role ambiguity (β= 0.280, p<0.01), friendship perception (β= 0.341. p<0.001) that is a sub-dimension of workplace friendship, and friendship opportunity were determined in the model. Similarly, significance relations have been revealed between friendship opportunity that is a sub-dimension of workplace friendship and role ambiguity (β= 0.219, p<0.01) and role conflict (β= 0.184, p<0.05) (Table 4). According to these results, as the role conflict increases, the emotional deprivation increases; the increase in emotional deprivation also decreases the workplace friendship. Increased role ambiguity increases social friendship, and social friendship increases workplace friendship.

Table4. Regression Matrix Related to Structural Equation Modeling and R^2 Values

Structural Relationships			Standardized Regression Coefficients (β)	Regression Coefficients	S_h	Critical Ratio	R^2
Emotional Deprivation	<	Role Conflict	0.197	0.142	0.065	2.187	0.039
Social Friendship	<	Role Conflict	0.190	0.129	0.060	2.146	0.095
Social Friendship	<	Role Ambiguity	0.280	0.201	0.064	3.153	0.095
Friendship Opportunity	<	Role Ambiguity	0.219	0.187	0.067	2.790	0.348
Friendship Opportunity	<	Role Conflict	0.184	0.148	0.063	2.351	0.348
Friendship Opportunity	<	Emotional Deprivation	-0.263	-0.292	0.084	-3.488	0.348
Friendhip Perception	<	Emotional Deprivation	-0.388	-0.625	0.127	-4.922	0.260
Friendhip Perception	<	Social Friendship	0.341	0.589	0.136	4.321	0.260
Friendship Opportunity	<	Social Friendship	0.409	0.487	0.092	5.262	0.348

In addition, it is seen that there is a mediation effect in the model. In order to be tested for the mediation effect, there must be a causal relationship between the independent variable and both the dependent variable and the mediation variable. However, there must also be a causal effect between the mediation variable and the dependent variable. When the mediation variable is included in the model, the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable completely disappears, then there is a full mediation effect, if the effect is diminishing, then there is a partial mediation effect (Gunay and Demiralay, 2016: 927). All of the parameters were found to be statistically significant in the estimation results of the model.14.8% of the variance explained for friendship opportunity variable that is a sub-dimension of workplace friendship is calculated by role conflict variable and 18.7% by the direct effect of role uncertainty. However, 2.1% of the variance explained for friendship opportunity variable is calculated by the role conflict variable and 9.8% by the indirect effect of role uncertainty. 1.3% of the variance explained for the friendship perception variable is explained by the role conflict variable and 11.8% by the indirect effect of role uncertainty. The effect of role conflict and role ambiguity on friendship perception that is sub-dimension of workplace friendship is realized by the full mediation effect of social friendship and emotional deprivation that are sub-dimensions of loneliness in the workplace. The partial mediation effect of loneliness in the workplace sub-dimensions is influential on friendship opportunity.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

Both role ambiguity and role conflict are important factors affecting employee performance negatively. Organizations are making great efforts to solve the problems that arise in this issue. In this study, which investigated the causality relations between role ambiguity, role conflict, workplace friendship and loneliness in working life, according to the results of the research, it is seen that there is a significant relationship between emotional deprivation that is a sub-dimension of loneliness in workplace and role conflict. This means that an individual with role conflict may be experiencing emotional deprivation and feel loneliness in the workplace. Individuals, who are experiencing emotional deprivation, experience a decrease in both their friendship opportunities and friendship perception in terms of workplace friendship. According to this result, emotional deprivation in the working life affects workplace friendship negatively.

According to these relations, as role conflict increases, emotional deprivation increases; the increase in emotional deprivation also decreases workplace friendship. Increased role ambiguity increases social friendship and social friendship increases workplace friendship. Loneliness in working life has both a partial and full mediation effect in terms of role conflict and role ambiguity. Loneliness in working life indirectly increases the influence of role ambiguity and role conflict on friendship perception due to the full mediation effect. It increases the influence of role ambiguity and role conflict on friendship opportunity due to the partial mediation effect.

It is understood that role ambiguity and role conflict have a positive effect on the emergence of workplace friendship opportunities. With emotional deprivation, the effect of role ambiguity and role conflict, increases further and this will affect workplace friendship negatively. In this case, it will bring about the tendency to leave work by causing individuals to become silent, decrease their individual performance, and decrease their organizational commitment and sense of belonging. On the other hand, with the mediation effect of social friendship, it will increase the level of workplace friendship perception and friendship opportunity. However, workplace friendship is a fine line that needs to be carefully considered. Workplace friendship brings support and sociality together. Although a friendly workplace is generally associated with positive organizational outcomes, social relationships can lead to costs as well as rewards. While workplace friendships that seem inevitable when considering the amount of time spent with colleagues, employees should also recognize the risks and respect the line between work and friendship (Kanbur, 2015: 50).In order to increase the efficiency in the workplace and to ensure that employees are happier and more productive, it is important that the results of these surveys are reflected on workplace relationships. Minimizing the factors that can lead role ambiguity and role conflict for employees, strengthening the friendship environment in the workplace, and the creation of social environments are important duties for executives.

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