



# Working Paper



TOP MANAGEMENT STRESSES: SUGGESTED  
HRD INTERVENTIONS

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## Top Management Stresses: Suggested HRD Interventions

by

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### Introduction

One of the major areas in which HRD interventions are needed relate to organisational role stresses. The concept of role has been suggested as a linkage between the individual and the organisation. In a situation where there is a fit between a person and the environment it would imply conditions that are described by Lofquist and Dawis (1969) as 'harmonious'. In such a situation, there would be low levels of stress as well as high levels of satisfaction (Van Harrison, 1978). Pareek (1981) on the basis of his theoretical speculation and statistical analysis has identified ten different type of role stresses prevalent in any organisational settings. These are described by him as follows:

#### 1. Inter-role distance (IRD):

An individual occupies more than one role at a time. His organizational role may often come into conflict with his family roles or with roles in other organizations or groups. The distance or conflict among these various roles represents to inter role distance.

2. Role Stagnation (RS):

This kind of stress is the result of gap between demand to outgrow his previous role and to occupy new role effectively. Such a type of stress results into perception that there is no opportunity for one's career progression. This perception may be more intense when the role occupant holds a role for longer period and enters in new role in which he feels less secure.

3. Role Expectation Conflict (REC):

This type of stress is generated by different expectations by different significant persons about the same role. It is possible that the significant persons differ in their expectation about the same role; and the role occupant is ambivalent as to whom to please.

4. Role Erosion (RE):

This type of role stress is the function of the role occupant's feeling that some functions which should properly be belonging to his role are transferred to/or performed by some other role. This can also happen when the functions are performed by the role occupant but the credit for them had gone to someone else.

5. Role Overload (RO):

When the role occupant feels that there are too many expectations from the significant roles in his role set, he

experiences role overload. There are two aspects of this stress, quantitative and qualitative. The former refers to having 'too much to do' while latter refers to 'too difficult'.

6. Role Isolation (RI):

This type of role stress refers to psychological distance between the occupant's role and other roles in the same role set. It is also defined as role distance which is different than inter role distance in the sense that IRD refers to the distance among various roles occupied by same individual. The frequency and ease of interaction among the roles is a measure of the strength of the linkage among the roles.

7. Personal Inadequacy (PI):

This type of stress arises when the role occupant feels that he does not have the necessary skills and training for effectively performing the functions expected from his role. This is found to happen when the organisation do not impart periodic training to enable the employees to cope with the fast changes both within and outside the organisation.

8. Self-Role Distance (SRD):

When the role, person occupies goes against his self concept, then he feels self role distance type of stress. This is essentially a conflict arising out of mismatch between the person and his job.

9. Role Ambiguity (RA):

It refers to the lack of clarity about the expectations of role which may arise out of lack of information or understanding. It may exist in relation to activities, responsibilities, personal styles and norms; and may operate at three stages:

- a) when the role sender holds his expectations about the role
- b) when he sends it, and
- c) when the occupant receives those expectations.

10. Resource Inadequacy (Rin):

This type of stress is evident when the role occupant feels that he is not provided with adequate resources for performing the functions expected from his role.

Although a great deal of speculation and description about the sources of stress and pressure for different levels of management is available special attention is usually paid to top level managers (Goldberg, 1978).

Methodology

- (A) Sample: Data for this study was collected from 221 top Managers (TM).

(B) Age Range: The age range of the sample was 33-57 years and the average age was 48.22 years. The sample group was dichotomized at the threshold age of 45 years.

Sl. No.	Job Category	Number	Mean Age (Years)	Range (in Years)
1.	Top Management of High Age Group (TM-HAG)	168	50.26	46 - 57
2.	Top Management of Low Age Group (TM-LAG)	53	41.75	33 - 45

**Instruments:**

'Organization Role Stress Scale' developed and standardized by Pareek (1981) has been used to obtain scores on different type of role stresses one encounters in his job. This scale measures ten different types of role stresses viz. interrole distance, role stagnation, role expectation conflict, role erosion, role overload, role isolation, personal inadequacy, self role distance, role ambiguity and resource inadequacy. There are 50 items in a questionnaire, 5 for each role stress, dimension.

The respondent is asked to mark 'Zero' if he rarely or never feels the way described in the item and 'four' if he very frequently or always feels the way described in the item. The total score for each item are obtained simply by adding the scores of each item to a particular area. Total role stress score is obtained by adding the scores of various dimensions.



Results:

In the present section under Table 1, we have given the mean value for the ten ORS dimensions in case of TM-LAG and TM-HAG (Table 1 to follow).

Table 1  
Mean Value for the ten ORS dimensions in case of  
TM-LAG and TM-HAG

TM-LAG (N = 53)			TM-HAG (N = 168)		
Sl. No.	Variables	Mean	Sl. No.	Variables	Mean
1.	IRD	7.19	1.	IRD	6.77
2.	RS	4.64	2.	RS	3.21
3.	REC	4.75	3.	REC	3.78
4.	RE	8.13	4.	RE	6.57
5.	RO	3.62	5.	RO	3.40
6.	RI	5.62	6.	RI	4.52
7.	PI	2.77	7.	PI	2.63
8.	SRD	4.62	8.	SRD	3.20
9.	RA	3.30	9.	RA	1.98
10.	Rln	4.74	10.	Rln	3.74
11.	ORS(T)	49.40	11.	ORS(T)	39.61

In Table 2 below we have recorded the dimension-wise mean scores of the Top Management Group.

Table 2  
Dimension-wise Scores (Mean) of Top Management  
Executives: (Both dichotomized groups are included)

Sl. NO.	Variables	Mean	Rank
1.	IRD	6.87	II
2.	RS	3.56	VI
3.	REC	4.01	IV
4.	RE	6.94	I
5.	RO	3.45	VIII
6.	RI	4.78	III
7.	PI	2.66	IX
8.	SRD	3.54	VII
9.	RA	2.29	X
10.	RIn	3.90	V
11.	ORS (Total	41.95	-

Analysis

The overall organisational role stress for Top Management Executives was found to be 41.95).

1. Inter-role Distance

The Top Management Scored high on this factor (6.87). This proves that the conflicts among the various roles they occupy is

great. They are unable to meet the demands of the different roles satisfactorily and the imbalance between the different roles they occupy creates stress and tension. They are unable to decide their priorities. The pressures to be a successful executive and a family man are equal. This might be responsible for a high IRD.

## 2. Role Stagnation

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The mean score of top executives on role stagnation was 3.56, which was relatively low. This indicates that top management feels that they have enough opportunities for progression. In most of the organisations they are provided with scope and opportunity to grow which in turn contributes to job satisfaction. Another point which is brought out is that low RS score shows that the top management moves from one role to another with ease; there is less insecurity in the new role one has to adopt. It may be accepted as a challenge or a reward for his skills, attitude, and abilities. Since the mean score is not really negligible it is possible that in certain organisations role stagnation does take place giving rise to dissatisfaction and stress.

## 3. Role Expectation Conflict:

The mean score of the top management executives on role expectation conflict was 4.01.

Role expectation arises when different expectations are generated by different significant persons about the same role.

This may happen frequently with the top management group. For example, Director - Production, may expect a top management executive to perform in a certain manner whereas, Director - Sales, may have a different view or definition of the roles and duties delegated to him. Under such circumstances the individual is not sure whom to please and what he is really expected to do. This conflict causes stress and tension which may affect the individual's performance as well as health. Besides, the individual is not sure as to what is expected of him he is unable to appraise his performance, and is always in a dilemma as to whether his superiors are satisfied.

#### 4. Role Erosion:

It was found that the score of top management executives on Role Erosion was the highest as compared to their scores on other role stress dimensions (6.94).

This high score points to the fact that the top management executives often develop the feeling that the function which actually they should be performing is being performed by someone else. They may feel they are being deprived of a chance to grow, or prove themselves solely on the grounds of favouritism or the whims of superior etc. It is possible that the interference of superiors causes hindrance in performing functions properly.

In some cases, it could also mean that the credit for performing some function is given to another individual who had nothing to do with it. For example, some suggestion is made by a top management executive which is accepted by the Board of the

Organization as being a very beneficial proposal but the credit for this may be taken by the superior to whom the executive reports. Thus he feels cheated and this leads to dissatisfaction.

5. Role Overload:

The score of top management executive on this factor was found to be 3.45.

Role overload is generally observed in two situations, one when the individual has "too much to do" (quantitative overloading) and secondly when the tasks to be done are "too difficult" (qualitative overloading). This role overloading is not so apparent amongst top management which means that one is not over taxed. Since he is in a high position he can delegate the work to his subordinates and simply see that his instructions are carried out. He may have the overall responsibility to see that work is done but he is not overloaded either quantitatively or qualitatively. He works in a relatively relaxed atmosphere without the tension of pending work or being unable to accomplish a difficult task.

6. Role Isolation:

4.78 was the mean score for the top management executives on the factor of Role Isolation which is relatively high.

Role isolation is also referred to as role distance and relates to the psychological distance between the occupant's role and other roles in the same role set. It refers to how closely

one is able to relate his role with that of his colleagues and subordinates. If the individual finds it difficult to interact with ease with others it means that the linkage among the roles is weak. This would imply that factors like cooperation, and smooth working of different roles as a unit is not possible. This could also lead to personal rivalries hampering the progress of the individual as well as the organisation. In case of top management executives this may be due the protocol they have to maintain with their subordinates. They are not able to interact and understand each other well. The top executives may refuse to see the subordinates view point and this may cause rebellious feelings in the subordinates. Even within the top management executives there may be psychological distance because of personal rivalries. Each individual wants to out class the other and often the progress of the organisation suffers because of such selfish motives.

#### 7. Personal Inadequacy:

This is not very prominent among the top management executives, the mean score is 2.66.

Most of the top management executives have reached their position on the basis of their skills, attitude, intelligence etc. Thus they do not feel inadequate in the role. They also attend training courses which helps them to keep abreast with new techniques and changes taking place both in and outside their organisation. Since they have reached their positions on the

basis of merit, they are self confident and able to meet the challenges of their job.

8. Self Role Distance:

When the role person occupies goes against his self concept, then he feels self-role distance type of stress.

The top management executives scored relatively low on this trait, their score was 3.54. Self role distance arises when there is a mismatch between the job and the person. But as already discussed most of top executives have attained their position on the basis of their merit and thus fit their jobs. They are able to adjust to the demands of their roles, and try to do justice to their job. Their self-concept and self-actualization needs are generally satisfied and this creates job satisfaction.

9. Role Ambiguity:

The role ambiguity score is the lowest (2.29) which goes to prove that the top management executives are very clear about the expectations and demands of their roles. They are given adequate information as to what is required of them. Their responsibilities and activities are clearly demarcated so that there is no ambiguity. There is no overlapping or encroachment into another's role territory.

#### 10. Resource Inadequacy:

The score on this dimension was 3.90. The performance of an individual or a department depends partly on the availability of adequate resources. This relatively high mean score shows that the top management are not really satisfied with the resources provided to them. The resources may be both human resources and material resources. In case the top management is not provided with adequate manpower, both quantitatively and qualitatively, they will not be able to function well. If they are short of manpower, there could be back log of work, besides the manpower present will be overworked and the output will be reduced. And if manpower provided is not fit for the job in terms of qualification, experience, etc. then also it can be a problem. On the other hand if material resources are not provided then also there is dissatisfaction. Pareek (1981) argued that in case of resource inadequacy, a person may turn hostile towards management for their failure to provide adequate resources in order to meet the job challenge effectively. Pestonjee and Singh (1981) observed that in any case role inadequacy might be accompanied with lower morale, job dissatisfaction and psychological strain and will have a bearing on the individual either in form of poor mental health or physical health or both.

#### Top Management-High Age Group vs Top Management-Low Age Group

##### (TM-HAG vs TM-LAG)

Table 1 summarises scores of mean pertaining to each factor of role stress including overall role stress for both dichotomized groups of top management personnel.



It can be seen from the table that on all the role stress factors including overall role stresses, TM-LAG scored higher than TM-HAG. When these apparent difference in mean scores were tested for statistical difference, role stagnation (CR = 2.38,  $P < .05$ ): role erosion (CR = 2.20,  $P < .05$ ), self-role distance (CR = 2.68,  $P < .01$ ) role ambiguity and overall role stress (CR = 2.33,  $P < .05$ ), were found to be significantly different indicating that younger managers (ie. below 45 years in age) experience the above types of role stresses as well as over all role-stress significantly more than their colleagues in the higher age group.

Implications:

On the basis of our findings it may be concluded that some HRD interventions to overcome role stresses are called for. We may suggest the following interventions:

1. It has been found that the major stress for the top management executives is due to Role Erosion. They develop the feeling that their worth or the importance of their role has lessened as compared to other roles. This is probably due to faulty integration in the organisation. HRD interventions should be aimed at improving this integration so that the self-concept of the executive is raised and so that his growth need and self-actualization needs are satisfied.

- ii. Appropriate training interventions are also required to overcome stresses. The 'personal inadequacy' is low in our sample. However, training is as important at the senior management levels as at lower levels.
- iii. Role Expectation Conflict is another cause for stress amongst the top management. Different significant persons generate different expectations about the same role.

Role clarity exercises should be undertaken so that the roles are clearly defined both for the executive as well as other significant persons. Detailed job description also has relevance in performance appraisal to make the role expectations clear both to the assessors and assessees.

- iv. Another role stress factor on which TM scored high was role isolation. Thus certain 'Communication Exercises' could be carried out like 'In-basket exercise' or 'Role Play' so that the 'communication gap' between the individuals is reduced. By role play if the top management puts itself in the role of the subordinates, they may realize the problems faced by the subordinate and understand them better. This was tend to reduce the distance between them.

v. Inter-role distance is also high for the Top Management Executives. HRD interventions in this area will help the individual to fulfil the demands of the different roles he occupies. For example a module on stress management will help them to discuss and analyse the organizational stresses in detail. These data may be compared with non-organizational stresses and viable strategies to bridge the gap between the two may be evolved.

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