



SOCIAL SUPPORT INFLUENCES ROLE CONFLICT AND DISENGAGEMENT AMONG ACADEMICIANS: FROM EDUCATION AND ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Role conflict is examined in relation to academic disengagement. Additionally, the study examines how social support modifies role conflict and burnout. A self-assessment questionnaire was administered to 334 academicians using a convenient sampling method. According to the study's results, disengagement and Role Conflict are positively associated. Further, social support moderates the relationship between Role Conflict and disengagement in education and academics. As well as making recommendations for future directions, the study includes practical implications for administrators, academicians, and policymakers in higher education.

Keywords: *Role Conflict, Disengagement; Social Support; Academicians;*

1. INTRODUCTION

Burnout is described as “a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity. Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources (F Khan. et al., 2014). Depersonalization refers to a negative, callous, or excessively detached response to other people, who are usually the recipients of one's services or care” (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Marek, 1993) pp. 20, 21). Reduced personal accomplishment is described as “a person's negative self-evaluation in relation to his or her job performance” (W. Schaufeli, Maslach, & Marek, 1993) p. 17).

Employees in today's fast-paced work environment are increasingly experiencing role conflict, which is considered a significant risk factor for burnout and disengagement. Because of their low workload, flexible working hours, and flexibility in their working hours, academicians are considered low-stress employees in an organization. While this may be the case, academicians are experiencing increased stress and burnout due to new challenges and standards, including administrative responsibilities, competition, and university rankings based on their performance and teaching output (Faisal Khan, Khan, Malik, & Qureshi, 2017). There is a tendency to quit the organization, or there are indications of physical and psychological harm. There has been widespread recognition of burnout as a chronic problem in every profession related to employees' work-related relationships and issues since the 1970s (Faisal Khan, Yusoff, & Khan, 2014). In this context, burnout refers to feelings of disinterest, performance reduction and weariness (tiredness). Burnout is multi-dimensional and encompasses emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Faisal Khan, Gul, Gul, & Naz, 2022; Faisal Khan., Rasli, Yusoff, & Ahmad, 2015). Role conflict is the negative psychological and physiological reaction when job demands exceed an employee's coping ability. Disengagement, or depersonalization, contributes to burnout, characterized by a negative attitude towards co-workers, a lack of control, and failures in the



workplace (Faisal Khan., Ali, Bashir, & Naz, 2021). Disengagement is also called burnout. Social support moderated the relationship between role conflict and burnout among higher education institutions. Moreover, burnout has been one of the critical concerns in psychology and management. Burnout harms employees and employers and can lead to organizational problems (Yusoff & Khan, 2013).

Research studies reveal that teaching is stressful and complex. It is common for academicians to suffer from stress and burnout as a result of many challenging activities and responsibilities on the job. In addition, role conflicts are associated with health problems, commitment, absenteeism, career development decisions, job satisfaction, and performance among academicians (F Khan, Sufyan, & Malik, 2020). There is a shortage of trained professionals to assist and support academicians within the institutes, causing them to quit their jobs. When highly qualified academicians leave, it is also detrimental to the organization and society. In this context, Farber adds that academicians lose their enthusiasm and idealism in teaching, negatively affecting the teacher-student association personally and academically. Further, burnout also reduces their efficacy and productivity (F Khan, et al., 2020).

Dermouti et al. (2001) say that resources can be physical, psychological, social, or organizational, and they can assist in completing a task, reducing demands, or stimulating growth (Faisal Khan., Rasli, Yasir, & Khan, 2019; W. B. Schaufeli & Buunk, 1996). Resources are also lacking, resulting in increased demands on individuals, which causes withdrawal tendencies. Job resources have a negative association with burnout. Therefore, the current study uses social support as a resource and investigates it as a moderator. This is in the relationship between the independent variable role conflict and the dependent variable disengagement.

Social support comes from colleagues, supervisors and friends, which motivates and inspires employees. Studies have shown that support groups reduce burnout better. It has been found that social support buffers stress' negative effects, not positive effects. Besides the study variables, Russell *et al.* The study's age, gender, and grade level affect academic burnout. In the same way, Maslach *et al.* Workers with higher expectations have higher stress levels than those with lower qualifications. In their studies, Haque and Aslam (2011) and Khan et al. (2013) Women are disengaged, have fewer accomplishments, and are more exhausted than men. Stress and burnout affect employees' health, interest and effectiveness. As a result, the researchers believe that more research is needed; however, the current study examines the degree of stress and burnout among academicians in Pakistani universities and determines whether social support modifies the relationship between the study variables. The study variables have been supported by the conservation resources theory, first introduced by Hobfoll and later proposed as a leading theory of stress and burnout. Hobfoll suggests in his study that "those without resources are likely to adopt a defensive posture to conserve their resources" (p.356). The current study is motivated by increased successes at the individual and organizational levels (Faisal Khan, Zahra, Bilal, Sufyan, & Naz, 2021). From previous studies, it was also found that Role Conflict and disengagement are closely correlated with each other. For more details, high conflict levels can cause work disengagement. When employees experience high-conflict levels, they may become disinterested or disengaged in their work, causing reduced productivity, poor job performance, and higher absenteeism rates. Additionally, prolonged exposure to role conflict can lead to burnout and physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion (Faisal Khan, Khan, Naz, & Rasli, 2016; Faisal Khan et al., 2014). Disengagement from work can also result in Role Conflict. Apathy, frustration, and boredom may accompany employees feeling disconnected from their work or organization, contributing to increased stress. This can create a cycle where role conflict leads to disengagement and more role conflict (Faisal Khan, Yusoff, Khan, Yasir, & Khan., 2014).

Based on a review of existing studies, in Pakistan's universities, role conflict and disengagement are high. These studies also show that research on stress and burnout among academicians is still needed. Maphalala concludes in his research study that stress has risen due to workload and time pressure, co-worker support, recognition, rewards, and compensation systems (Faisal Khan., et al., 2021; Faisal Khan., Rasli, & Zahra, 2020). According to researchers, this study will help

academicians in Pakistani universities. The study examines the relationship between stress and disengagement in burnout among academicians. We examine the effects of role conflict on workplace disengagement and social support as a moderator. This study has the potential to serve as a guide and would contribute to the body of knowledge about a safer and happier work environment. Individuals and organizations are negatively affected by role conflict and disengagement, so understanding it is important. A comprehensive approach is needed that addresses both individual and organizational factors, such as coping skills and job resources.

Based on the existing literature review, the following hypotheses have been developed;

H₁: There is a positive correlation between Role Conflict and disengagement.

H₂: A moderated relationship exists between role conflict and disengagement in the presence of social support.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study's findings are based on a quantitative method employing a questionnaire using the positivism philosophy. Data were collected from sample respondents in the selected area using the adapted questionnaire. The current study's population is academicians from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistan (Faisal Khan., Khan, & Naz, 2017). A simple random sampling has been used to select academicians, as those willing to understand and contribute to the research area are better placed to fill in the questionnaire. Three hundred thirty-four questionnaires were distributed in a timeframe of more than two months, and data was collected from 298 academicians, among the collected data. Two hundred ninety-eight questionnaires were considered for final data analysis using SPSS version 23.

The current study used valid and reliable instruments for role conflict, social support, em and disengagement. The study survey used the Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Agree (5) Strongly. Disengagement was calculated based on the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI). The inventory has eight items, both negative and positive items. The inventory is already valid and reliable, where the alpha value is 0.72 for disengagement (Faisal Khan, et al., 2016). The independent variable, role conflict, was measured through a valid, reliable questionnaire where several studies have used and demonstrated the alpha value of 0.76 (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). In last, social support was determined by two-sub dimensions: support from coworkers and supervisor. This scale consisted of six items having a reliability of 0.80 (Faisal Khan, Khan, Kanwal, & Bukhair, 2018).

3. DATA ANALYSIS

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted using SPSS to analyze data from the population of academicians. Table 1 provides reliability coefficients for the sample, which indicate that all values fall within acceptable limits. Table 1 shows the Pearson correlation between the variables. The study results show a positive relationship between role conflict and disengagement, incredibly and disengagement among academicians in the universities of Pakistan. Conversely, table 1 shows a negative relationship between social support, role conflict, and disengagement.

Table 1: Reliability Values and Correlation Analysis

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	RC	SS	DIS
RC	0.771	1		
SS	0.75	-.45*	1	
DIS	0.82	.40*	-.55*	1

Note: *Significant at $p < 0.001$, RC: Role Conflict, SS: Social Support, DIS: Disengagement

In the current study, the Hierarchal Multiple Regression analyses have been used to find the moderating relationship of social support on the relationship between role conflict and among academicians, as shown in Table 2. It is assumed that role conflict predicts burnout and social support moderates the relationship between role conflict and disengagement. From the data analysis, it has been shown that role conflict has a significant effect on disengagement (Beta =

0.167, $t= 1.608$, $p<0.001$) among the academicians and social support moderates the relationship between role conflict and disengagement.

Table 2 Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	Disengagement	
	Standardized B Coefficients	T-test scores
Role conflict	0.167	1.545
Adjusted R ²	0.608	
R ²	0.599	
F-Model	40.303*	
Role conflict	0.140	1.439
Social Support	-0.289	-3.067
Adjusted R ²	0.285	
R ²	0.123	
F-Model	18=7.333*	
Role conflict	0.121	1.201
Social Support	-0.254	-2.012
RC*SS	0.200	1.880
Adjusted R ²	0.333	
R ²	0.070	
F-Model	16.412*	

*Significant at $p<0.001$

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study examined the moderating effect of social support on the relationship between role conflict and burnout among university academicians in Pakistan. The study's relationship and support framework are based on the Job Demand Resources (JD-R) theory. As a result of the work of Demerouti et al. and Bakker and Demerouti, it has been determined that the JD-R model can be used as a theory. According to JD-R, as the level of demands increases, the level of outcomes increases, whereas as the level of resources increases, the level of outcomes decreases; therefore, the results and conceptual framework were also supported by this theory. Because burnout results from an imbalance between demand and resources within an organization, stress during a job plays a significant role in burnout outcomes. Burnout occurs when demand is high and resources are low in the studies of Maphalala (2014). As a result, academicians face challenges within their organizations, such as role conflict, role ambiguity, and workload (Faisal Khan, et al., 2017). Among the study variables were moderator variables, including social support. In the current study, social support appears to be a resource correlated with disengagement and role conflict. A low level of social support causes high levels of role conflict and disengagement, whereas a high level of social support causes low levels of role conflict and disengagement.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

According to the current study, role conflict and disengagement are complex and multifaceted phenomena. Studies have been conducted in various contexts, including the workplace, education, and interpersonal relationships. There were two main objectives of the current study: first, to examine the relationship and effects of the study variables on conflict and disengagement among academicians, and second, to conclude that when employees within an organization are stressed, disengagement will also increase. As a result, managers and policymakers need to schedule flexible work environments to improve employee performance and commitment. This is where the employees would avoid exhaustion, do their hard work, and improve their performance at individual and organizational levels. Second, the objective was to investigate the moderating effect of social support on the relationship between stress and burnout among academicians. In the study, stress



led to higher disengagement levels. Increasing social support, however, decreased stress and reduced disengagement. Another critical element in reducing employee stress and burnout is social support.

Furthermore, job demands such as role conflict refer to psychological stress that arises when a person faces conflicting expectations or demands from different roles. Disengagement, conversely, pertains to a decreased level of involvement, motivation, or commitment toward these roles. There is consistent evidence that higher levels of role conflict are associated with higher levels of disengagement. The ability to meet the demands of each role is compromised when individuals have conflicting responsibilities. Feelings of frustration, stress, and overwhelm can ultimately diminish their engagement and enthusiasm for their expected roles.

Furthermore, the direction and intensity of the relationship between role conflict and disengagement can vary based on individual differences, situational factors, and the strategies individuals employ to deal with role conflicts. Effective coping mechanisms are needed to mitigate the negative effects of role conflict on disengagement, such as time management skills, communication strategies, and boundary-setting techniques. Conversely, a lack of adaptive coping strategies can exacerbate the adverse effects, leading to increased disengagement and potentially affecting overall well-being. Organizations, educational institutions, and individuals should prioritize open communication, realistic goal-setting, and conflict-resolution skills to address and manage the detrimental consequences of role conflict on disengagement. Individuals can navigate conflicting demands more effectively by creating a flexible, understanding, and supportive environment. This will enable them to maintain a higher level of engagement in their various roles. A high impact of environment on academicians was demonstrated in the present study, which determined that teaching is a high-risk profession and academicians suffer from psychological distress and burnout. Conducted in Pakistan, this study has some limitations. A more complex, longitudinal, or representative sample is needed to understand burnout's concept and development better. This is because it may differ in the short and long term. In addition, it would be helpful to conduct a qualitative study. Lastly, the study used the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory to measure burnout and suggested using another instrument. Despite its limitations, the study's findings can help identify and inform policies and reduce role conflict and burnout.

Role conflict is a significant contributor to burnout in the workplace. Employees who experience high levels of role conflict are more likely to experience burnout. This leads to decreased job satisfaction, lower productivity, and a higher physical and mental health risk. Employers can reduce role conflict by offering workplace wellness programs, promoting work-life balance, and providing supportive management. By prioritizing employee well-being and reducing role conflict, employers can create a more positive and productive work environment that benefits both employees and the organization. Furthermore, role conflict and disengagement are closely intertwined; employers should work to minimize stressors and create a pleasant working environment to prevent disengagement and promote employee well-being.

The study has practical implications for individuals, policymakers and administrators. Individuals are more likely to burn out when their stress level is high because stress increases burnout, and exhaustion decreases burnout. Administration and policymakers are advised to improve the work environment to help each other reduce stress and burnout. A better working environment will increase efficiency and motivation toward academicians' responsibilities. In the current study, it was observed that social support could significantly impact disengagement. This is mainly in situations where individuals feel disconnected or isolated from others. Here are some ways social support can impact disengagement: Emotional support, Practical support and Informational support can benefit individuals struggling to navigate complex systems, such as healthcare or government benefits. Access to accurate information and guidance can help individuals stay engaged with the resources they need to thrive. In addition, friends, family, and community groups can prevent disengagement through social connections. Social connections provide a sense of belonging and help individuals feel more motivated to participate in community activities and pursue their goals. In addition, it was concluded that social support plays a critical role in preventing disengagement by



providing emotional, practical, and informational support. It also fosters social connection and belonging.

According to the researcher, future implications should be considered after the study. In the current study, the researcher recommended using a small sample size to increase generalizability, thus allowing for a more representative sample and increasing statistical power. According to the researcher, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) is widely used and validated for disengagement. Finally, the researcher recommended a longitudinal design to determine the causal relationship between role conflict and disengagement at work. When establishing causal relationships, longitudinal studies provide more robust results than cross-sectional studies. Fourth, the study suggested considering moderating variables such as job control and other resources, which can buffer the negative impact of role conflict on disengagement.

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