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Interpersonal Needs and Role Stress: Mediating Role of Role Clarity and Locus of Control Among Employees

Selvakumar K*, G Nagasubramaniyan

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences National Institute of Technology, Tiruchirappalli, India. *Corresponding Author's Email: mail2selvak@gmail.com

Abstract

Role Stress has been commonly associated with psychological strain and low job satisfaction in organizations. It occurs when employees are unclear about their expectations and demands of the role. It also affects team cohesion and employee morale while decreasing productivity. This study hypothesizes that meeting the interpersonal needs of the employees can reduce role stress and increase employees' overall well-being. It can be facilitated by increasing role clarity and understanding the employees' locus of control. This research examines the mediating effects of role clarity and locus of control in the relationship between role stress and interpersonal needs. The study uses data from a broad sample of employees from various organizations through a quantitative survey. The variables were assessed using self-administered questionnaires, and the results were obtained. The data was subjected to correlation and mediation analysis. There was a significant association between role clarity, interpersonal needs, and role stress. Mediation analysis revealed that only role clarity mediated the relationship between role stress and interpersonal needs. The results highlight the significance of meeting interpersonal needs and increasing role clarity in organizations. Understanding role stress and mitigating it using leadership strategies can improve the well-being of employees.

Keywords: Interpersonal Needs, Locus of Control, Organizational Setting, Role Clarity, Role Stress.

Introduction

Role stress is defined as the strain people feel when they are unclear about their demands, expectations, and duties. It is also used to indicate the stress experienced by an employee due to a high workload or their role in the organization. It can drastically impact employees' well-being, especially their engagement and productivity (1). Various theoretical frameworks provide valuable insights into understanding the role of stress in organizations. The Transactional Model of Stress is one of the theories that offers a dynamic framework for comprehending how people see and react to stress, particularly role-related stress (2). The Transactional Model discusses the coping mechanisms in an idiosyncratic manner and emphasizes the significance of cognitive evaluation in the perceived stress levels of a role-related demand. Organizational Role Theory (ORT) was developed in the 1960s, and it explains the significance of roles being clearly defined and communicated. Role overload mainly results from individuals taking up multiple roles in an organization and the interaction between these roles (3). The stress resulting from role conflict and ambiguity can be detrimental to employees and affect their psychological well-being. People who experience role stress are more susceptible to burnout, which is a condition of extreme and chronic stress that results in emotional, physiological, and mental exhaustion (4). A conceptual model proposed by Kelloway and Barling assumed that role stressors, such as role ambiguity and role conflict, mediate job-related affective well-being, contributing to the overall mental health of the employees (5). Anxiety, depression, gastrointestinal diseases, and cardiovascular disease are just a few of the health concerns that have been connected to chronic stress (6). Work performance can be negatively impacted by role stress in numerous ways. Researchers found that organizational role stress often decreases employee satisfaction (7, 8). Anton reviewed the influence of job stress on workers' behavior. Reduced job satisfaction and organizational commitment acted as a mediating factor between role stress and increased turnover intentions, which was found to be significantly predicted by by role conflict and ambiguity (9).

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It can also have a negative impact on the work environment, communication, and team dynamics. It can result in miscommunication and a failure to achieve shared goals. Researchers found that team role stress involving overload can impede group performance and learning (10).

Organizations should mitigate the stressors by identifying the root causes and planning intervention programs to minimize role stress. Positive Interpersonal Relationships at the workplace can act as a protective factor against role stress. Researchers found that positive co-worker relations can lower the levels of role stress (11). Moreover, social support can reduce role conflict and ambiguity (12). Additionally, interpersonal relations help reduce burnout and increase job satisfaction (13). Employees report lower stress levels and higher levels of overall job satisfaction in firms that prioritize work-life balance (14). Further, employees who believe they have a healthy work-life balance are less prone to burnout (15), and employees who experience significant social support at work are better able to manage stress and are more resilient when faced with obstacles at work (16).

Interpersonal Needs in Organizations

The basic social demands people try to satisfy through their relationships with coworkers are called Interpersonal Needs in organizations (17). The Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO) suggested that interpersonal needs can be three-dimensional, including inclusion, control, and affection (18). This approach assumes that the three needed aspects of openness, control, and inclusion are universal, required, and adequate to account for any personal connection. People satisfy their desire for affiliation through social interaction, engagement in events, and developing interpersonal relationships.

A few theories propose that interpersonal relationships primarily influence stress, and personal needs significantly moderate stress. Stress, in turn, affects employee performance (13). Employee happiness and job satisfaction are influenced by the quality of interpersonal relationships, which are essential to a company's environment. It directly affects employee engagement, retention, and general satisfaction (19). It fosters an environment where the focus is on the well-being of the employees. The relationship between work systems and employee well-being is mediated by workplace friendship (20). This study also found that even informal interpersonal relationships influence well-being significantly, and organizations should establish a work culture where such positive social interactions are encouraged (20).

Role Clarity

Role clarity is how people know their job duties, expectations, and organizational goals. It is an essential component of how organizations operate. Employees can better contribute to the organization's objectives by completing tasks efficiently, making sound judgments, and being transparent about their roles and responsibilities. Clear communication of job responsibilities and expectations can encourage employees to stay motivated (21). As per the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) idea, high-quality leader-member interactions are distinguished by open communication and collaboration of roles (22).

Role Clarity is a significant factor that reduces role stress (23-25). Role Clarity can impact role efficacy and role performance effectiveness. Employees collaborate more efficiently, and there is less miscommunication or conflict when everyone knows their organizational roles (26). Role clarity increases job satisfaction and reduces turnover rates (27).

Role-related elements at work can be defined and negotiated by managers and coworkers, which might impact an individual's ability to feel energized and satisfy their needs. Role clarity positively correlates with subjective vitality at work through better competence and higher autonomy (28). Furthermore, clearly defined jobs promote cooperation and teamwork inside the company (29). Well-defined roles make assigning responsibilities and coordinating efforts easier, allowing groups to collaborate effectively on common goals. It lessens the possibility of errors or disputes brought on by incomplete information by preventing misunderstandings or miscommunications that may occur when tasks are unclear (30). Organizations can address this by offering thorough job descriptions and updating them frequently to reflect any modifications to duties or responsibilities.

Regarding how employees view and handle role stress, the mediating functions of role clarity and locus are pretty influential. It is possible to reduce

role stress in employees by giving them a clear grasp of their tasks and objectives. Organizations can assist in alleviating these stressors by defining their roles clearly, resulting in a more favorable work atmosphere. Employees with defined responsibilities are more likely to feel competent, which increases overall satisfaction and minimizes the risk of burnout (23).

Locus of Control

Locus of Control indicates the degree to which people feel a sense of agency in their lives. People's locus of control can affect their performance (31), well-being (32), and work satisfaction (33, 34) in organizational settings. Employees with an internal locus of control were more likely to see possibilities in their surroundings and act on them (35). Those with an internal locus of control typically take the initiative when meeting their interpersonal needs. Additionally, people with an internal locus of control are better able to handle role stress (36).

Furthermore, it was found that when individuals face obstacles or unexpected events, their locus of control significantly influences their coping mechanisms, and individuals with an internal locus of control are more likely to use proactive coping methods whereas those with an external locus of control are more likely to use defensive or passive coping mechanisms (36). Studies have indicated that employees with an internal locus of control are frequently more involved and motivated at work. Individuals who think their efforts result in desired consequences are more inclined to establish and pursue goals (37).

Employees with an internal locus of control experience increased job satisfaction and motivation (38). People with an internal locus of control manage stress better because they think they can change their environment and overcome obstacles (39). However, because they feel they have little influence over their surroundings, individuals with an external locus of control could be more stressed out and have worse mental health. Because these workers may feel overburdened by work expectations that are beyond their control, this external perspective may lead to burnout.

In a study among managers, locus of control was used as a moderator between managerial effectiveness and role stress (40). The study revealed that role stress negatively correlated with organizational effectiveness. Furthermore, locus of control had moderating effects between managerial effectiveness and role stress. In another study investigating the effect of role conflict, external locus of control, neuroticism, and role ambiguity on job stress, the results indicated that role ambiguity, conflict, external locus of control, and neuroticism had a positive relation with job stress (41).

Need for the Study

The current study proposed that role clarity might play an important role in the relationship between interpersonal needs and role stress. Role stress in organizations has been one of the primary reasons for poor job quality and employee inefficiency. The unmet interpersonal needs through social interaction and employee communication can affect job and mental health issues, which are also well-documented. Previous studies have also indicated that role clarity is positively associated with job satisfaction. To fully comprehend the importance of role clarity in connection with stress in the workplace, it is critical to look at the pathways (i.e., mediation) that link interpersonal needs and role stress. Similarly, research has shown that locus of control (LOC) plays a significant role in mediating the relationship between role stress and job-related outcomes. There are mixed studies, both positive and negative effects of LOC on stress. This highlights the complex interplay between LOC, stress, and job satisfaction. Thus, the current study aims to understand the mediating role of LOC in the relationship between interpersonal needs and role stress. Moreover, no studies examined the mediating role of role clarity and LOC in this relationship.

Methodology

The present study aimed to identify the influence of interpersonal needs on role stress with role clarity and locus of control as mediators. Based on the extant literature, the following hypotheses were formulated,

- There is no significant relationship between Interpersonal Needs, Role Clarity, Role Stress, and Locus of Control.
- Role Clarity and Locus of Control mediate the relationship between Interpersonal Needs and role stress.

Participants and Procedure

Participants were recruited from Tamil Nadu state, southern India. Researchers contacted a few companies during the period from October to December 2023 regarding the collection of data, and an online survey through Google Forms was created. More than 200 employees from various companies across India were contacted, and the questionnaires were forwarded. To guarantee a high response rate, replies were tracked for the duration of the data collection. After the data was collected, it was scrutinized to get rid of any inconsistent or missing responses. The data from 120 employees were extracted after scrutiny, and statistical Analysis was performed to interpret the data, and the results were discussed.

Participants signed consent forms, and ethical guidelines such as voluntary participation and confidentiality were discussed. Demographic data, including age, gender, job title, department, years of service, and educational background, was collected to understand the sample composition and assess the impact of demographics on research variables. The initial set of questionnaires was created to evaluate the interpersonal needs of the participants. The purpose of the second series of questions was to gauge the participants' locus of control. Cross-sectional survey-based research such as the present one is typically exempted from the Institute Ethics Committee approval under 45 CFR 46.101(b). All procedures involving human participants in this research were in line with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments were followed.

Measures

The following measures used in the present study were specifically developed and validated in the Indian organizational context and showed adequate reliability and validity (42). Hence, we used the scale items without any modification or adaptation.

Interpersonal Needs Inventory (IPNI)

The Interpersonal Needs Inventory (IPN) was used to measure interpersonal needs (42). The questionnaire involves sixty questions measuring six interpersonal needs on a six-point scale. The responses range between 1= never to 6= usually. The scale demonstrated a good internal consistency evidenced by Cronbach's alpha value of 0.97.

Role Stress

The Role Stress Questionnaire (RSQ) is an extensively used instrument in the research community for assessing role stress in organizational contexts. It has a 5-point scale, and a high score indicates more role stress (42). The RSQ is intended to measure role overload, role ambiguity, and role conflict. The Cronbach's alpha of the RSQ was found to be 0.90.

Locus of Control

The Loco inventory (42), based on Levenson's model (43), was employed to measure the orientation of the employees. It is a 5-point scale with 30 items. It measures internality, externality (others), and externality (luck) and has 10 items for each category. The total score can range from 0 to 40 for each individual. The Cronbach's alpha of the Loco Inventory was found to be 0.92.

Role Clarity

The Role Clarity Questionnaire (RCQ) (42), which evaluates people's level of clarity about their organizational roles, consists of 15 questions with a five-point scale. The score can range from 0 to 75, with a higher score indicating more role clarity. The original score is compared with the converted scores to interpret an individual's score. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.72, indicating moderate reliability.

Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis was computed using SPSS version 25.0 software. The required results were obtained using statistical tools such as Pearson's product-moment correlation to find the correlation. Mediation analysis was conducted to see if Locus of Control and Role Clarity mediate the relationship between interpersonal needs and Role Stress.

Results and Discussion

The study sample consisted of wide demographic variations, as noted in Table 1. This table includes demographic information on the participants, such as age, gender, marital status, and educational background. A perusal of Table 1 shows that most of the participants are between 41 and 60 years of age. The gender distribution is approximately equal, with a slightly higher proportion of females (51.66%). Most participants are married (89.16%). Urban participants account for a higher share of the sample (54.16%) than rural participants (45.83%). While most participants are

high school graduates (39.16%), the sample consisted of undergraduate (28.3%) and postgraduate (6.6%).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Variables	N=120	Percentage
Age		
Below 40 years	6	5
41-50 years	42	35
51-60 years	68	56.66
Above 60 years	4	3.33
Gender		
Male	58	48.33
Female	62	51.66
Marital Status		
Married	107	89.16
Unmarried	13	10.83
Background		
Rural	55	45.83
Urban	65	54.16
Educational Background		
Primary School	31	25.83
High School	47	39.16
Undergraduate	34	28.33
Postgraduate	8	6.66

Table 2: Correlation between Interpersonal Needs, Role Stress, Role Clarity, and Locus of Control among the Employees

	Interpersonal Needs	Role stress	Role Clarity	Locus of Control
Interpersonal Needs	1			
Role stress	.229*	1		
Role Clarity	.218*	-.204	1	
Locus of Control	-.171	.293**	-.249**	1
Mean	260.60	88.32	56.78	96.49
Std Deviation	21.58	14.14	6.23	13.75

Notes: *Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
**Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The Pearson correlation was used to analyze the correlation between the study variables, and Table 2 shows the results. A perusal of the results indicates that interpersonal needs are correlated with role clarity (0.218) and role stress (0 .229) but not with locus of control (-.17). On the other hand, role stress was correlated with locus of control (0 .293) but not with role clarity (0.204). Role clarity is positively correlated with locus of control (0.249). Together, these results show that the positive correlation between interpersonal needs and role stress indicates that high interpersonal demands result in more role stress and in turn, role stress is positively linked to locus of control.

These results have been consistently discussed in the literature where increased needs are present, and if they are unmet, the employees end up with high levels of role stress. Role stress is more common among people, particularly in settings where their social connection and support requirements are not sufficiently met. Data from various industries discovered recurrent patterns indicating that unfulfilled interpersonal requirements lead to increased levels of role stress, implying that the social component of work plays a crucial part in comprehending role stress (44). They may become stressed when they operate in an atmosphere that does not offer enough chances for social connection or assistance from coworkers and superiors (45). Interpersonal needs did not correlate with the locus of control. While the locus of control and interpersonal interactions are crucial for understanding stress, various factors impact role stress and have been discovered they function through different mechanisms. Interpersonal needs were associated with social support and group dynamics, while locus of control was more closely tied to how people handle stress and make decisions (46). Role clarity and Interpersonal needs were positively correlated, which indicates that when the roles and responsibilities of an employee were clear, it helped the employee to meet their interpersonal demands. A positive correlation between employees' views of social support at work and role clarity was also found (47). According to the author, when workers clearly understood their responsibilities, they felt more supported by peers and supervisors, meeting their demands for acceptance and inclusion. His findings highlight how role clarity contributes to employees' perceptions of social support at work.

Role stress and role clarity were significantly correlated with locus of control. Role stress had a positive correlation with locus of control, whereas role clarity had a negative correlation. A meta-analysis that investigated the connection between locus of control and several work-related outcomes found that role stress, conflict, and ambiguity were more prevalent in people with an external locus of control (48). These results imply that the perception of external control increases the stress from ambiguous or contradictory job roles. The Job Demand-Control model further illuminates the relationship between role stress and locus of control (49). According to the model, individuals experience stress from job expectations (such as role overload) when they feel they have little control over their workplace. High expectations are better handled by those with an internal locus of control and who think they have some control over their working environment. On the other hand, when presented with reasonable expectations, people with an external locus of control feel more stressed. It is consistent with the literature showing a more significant correlation between role stress and external locus of control. Role Clarity was negatively correlated with locus of control. Research suggests that a stable work environment with well-defined goals and norms might help employees perform better by lessening the perceived impact of outside events on their work (50).

Table 3: Summary of Mediation Analysis with Role Clarity as a Mediator between Interpersonal Needs and Role Stress

Variables	**β**	**95% Confidence Interval**		**Z**
		Lower Limit	**Upper Limit**	
Indirect	-.06*	-.07	-.00	-2.16
Direct	.29**	.08	.29	3.70
IPN RC	.22**	.02	.09	3.38
RC RS	-.27**	-.94	-.23	-3.31
Total	.23**	.05	.25	2.91

Notes: IPN – Interpersonal Needs, RC- Role Clarity, RS – Role Stress; Parametric bootstrap with 1000 iterations were used, *p<0.05, **p<0.01

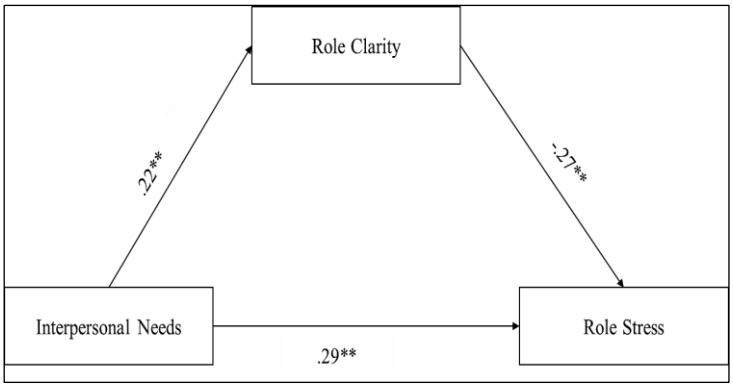

Figure 1: Path Diagram with Role Clarity as a Mediator between Interpersonal Needs and Role Stress

The summary of mediation analysis and the path diagram with role clarity as a mediator between interpersonal needs and role stress are presented in Table 3 and Figure 1, respectively. It is evident from the results that role clarity acted as mediator between interpersonal needs and role stress (β= -.06, 95%CI = -.07 to -.00). In terms of direct effect and its components, the interpersonal needs significantly increased the likelihood of role stress (β= .29, 99% CI = .08 to .29) and role clarity (β= .22, 99% CI = .02 to .09) suggesting a positive interaction. However, role clarity had a significant negative impact on role stress (β= -.27, 99% CI = -.94 to -.23). The overall model was substantial at 99% CI = .05 to .25 with β value of .23.

Employees who feel socially supported are better prepared to handle workplace expectations, reducing the impact of stress (21). Employees with higher interpersonal needs are more likely to think of role stress (β =.29). This association is due to the inherent need to maintain and manage relationships and social interactions at work (18). Employees strongly motivated to fit in and be accepted may experience severe stress due to perceived social failure or rejection. Furthermore, increasing effort to meet interpersonal demands can lead to role overload and worsening stress (49).

Role clarity had a significant negative influence on stress (β = -.27, 99% CI = -.94 to -.23), highlighting the relevance of well-defined roles about role stress. Role clarity can define their contributions to team efforts, increase productivity, prioritize activities, and reduce role ambiguity. Previous studies demonstrate that role clarity minimizes uncertainty (23). Workers with high interpersonal needs are inclined to inquire about and make clear their duties and obligations.

Table 4: Summary Mediation Analysis with Locus of Control as a Mediator between Interpersonal Needs and Role Stress

Variables	**β**	**95% Confidence Interval**		**Z**
		Lower Limit	**Upper Limit**	
Indirect	-.06	-.08	.00	-1.69
Direct	.29**	.09	.27	4.01
IPN - LOC	-.17*	-.21	-.02	-2.18
LOC RS	.34**	.10	.59	2.77
Total	.23**	.04	.25	2.93

Notes: IPN – Interpersonal Needs, LOC- Locus of Control, RS – Role Stress; Parametric bootstrap with 1000 iterations were used, *p<0.05; **p<0.01

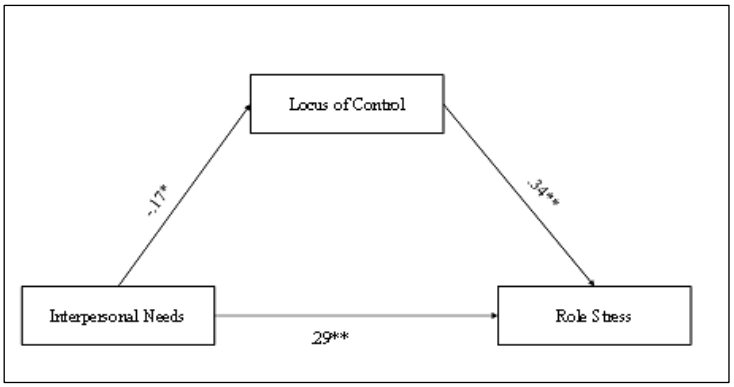

Figure 2: Path Diagram with the Locus of Control as a Mediator between Interpersonal Needs and Role Stress

Table 4 and Figure 2 present the summary of mediation analysis with locus of control as a mediator between interpersonal needs and role stress. The results showed no interaction effect, suggesting locus of control does not mediate between interpersonal need and role stress. Further, there existed a positive interaction between interpersonal needs and role stress (β= .29, 99% CI = .09 to .27), suggesting a significant direct effect along with the significance of the total interaction (β= .23, 99% CI = .04 to .25). Stress management depends heavily on social environment characteristics, in contrast to having such support, not having it can result in excessive neuroendocrine activation and the detrimental effects of stress (51). This can lead to hyperactivity of the sympathetic nervous system and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (52). It also affects how one perceives the available help received and integrates it into a social network.

Studies reveal that managers who meet their staff members' demands on a personal level, including giving them greater autonomy, can motivate them to emphasize productivity and efficiency foremost. Positive attitudes among employees are influenced by the efficient handling of work responsibilities. It is evident from the path diagram (Figure 2) that interpersonal needs had a negative impact on the locus of control (β= -.17, 99%CI = -.21 to -.02). The results highlight when a person has high interpersonal needs might experience weakened sense of control over their circumstances. In contrast, locus of control had a positive association with role stress (β= .34, 99%CI = .10 to .59). Employees with a high locus of control might also experience more role stress.

These results can be discussed in light of the demand and control model. According to Karasek's (49) demand-control paradigm, employees who experience high psychological demands and poor choice latitude, also called job control, are more likely to experience adverse health effects. The workload and intellectual needs of the job are referred to as high psychological demands.

In contrast, an employee's degree of control and discretion over their work duties and procedures is called decision latitude. This concept states that employees who work in low-control, high-demand jobs are more likely to have stress-related illnesses such as depression, anxiety, and cardiovascular disorders (53). High demands cause employees to feel helpless to change their work environment or reduce their workload, which exacerbates the stress brought on by a lack of control and can result in chronic stress and related health issues.

Significant direct correlations between the primary variables are frequently necessary for the locus of control to play its mediating role, which may not always exist (38). The interaction is more nuanced, and a simple mediation model cannot depict it. Resilience, social support, and coping can also influence role stress. The results partially confirm hypothesis 2, which states that role clarity and locus of control mediate between interpersonal needs and role stress.

In summary, interpersonal needs and role stress contribute to employee performance and well-being in numerous ways. While Role clarity is a significant mediator between interpersonal needs and role stress, locus of control requires further investigation. However, employees' locus of control plays a role in the level of their role stress, although it does not directly mediate the relationship between interpersonal demands and role stress.

Limitations and Future Directions

The study has certain limitations. The cross-sectional nature of this study precluded us from examining the causal relationships between the variables. Future studies could benefit from longitudinal designs to examine causality. The study's generalizability is limited due to its focus on IT employees, which may not cover other sectors. Further research should consider additional variables like leadership style and organizational culture. The sample size is also a concern due to self-reported data, which can distort outcomes. The reliability of future research can be improved by standardizing instruments or creating validated ones. Homogeneous samples may hinder generalizability, necessitating representative and diverse samples. The relationship between interpersonal needs, locus of control, and role stress in organizations needs further investigation across various contexts. Qualitative studies can be done to understand the variables from a phenomenological approach. Other psychological variables, such as emotional intelligence, resilience, and personality traits, should be studied in the context of this model.

Implications

The current study has wide-ranging applications across multiple areas of organizational life, such as improving performance, reducing costs, and creating healthier workplaces. The findings shed light on significant implications for both organizational effectiveness and individual well-being. The findings also highlight the importance of future intervention addressing approaches such as improving role design and clarity, enhancing communication and team dynamics, and matching employee interpersonal profiles to job roles to improve job-person fit. Moreover, the current study also emphasizes on promoting mental health and well-being initiatives among organizations.

Conclusion

Numerous factors influence employee well-being and productivity. Various other factors, such as the nature of the job, environment, and description of the roles, are essential in understanding the interplay of interpersonal roles and role stress. Certain types of organizations can have a high risk of developing role stress, so all possible factors should be considered when planning intervention programs. In conclusion, organizations should prioritize meeting the interpersonal needs of employees while providing a clear role description. They should mitigate role stress efficiently and create a thriving environment for employees. It provides organizations with sustainable growth in a dynamic business era.

Abbreviations

IPNI: Interpersonal Needs Inventory, Loc: Locus of Control, RCQ: Role Clarity Questionnaire, RSQ: Role Stress Questionnaire.

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None.

Author Contributions

Selvakumar K: Conceptualization, data collection, data analysis, wrote the first draft, G Nagasubramaniyan: Conceptualization, offered supervision throughout, offered critical suggestions on the first draft.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

Ethics Approval

Cross-sectional survey-based research, such as the present one, is typically exempted from the Institute Review Board approval under 45 CFR 46.101(b): Categories of Exempt Human Subjects Research. No animals were involved in the research. The ethical guidelines involving human subjects provided by the American Psychological Association were strictly followed.

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