

The Impact of Role Overload on Job Performance: Examining the Mediating Role of Work-Related Stress in High-Pressure Organizational Settings

Mr. Jamaluddin Nabi

Research Scholar, Applied Management, Punjabi University patiala

Abstract

Role overload, which is the result of job demand exceeding the resources available to effectively carry out the jobs, is becoming a common phenomenon in high-pressure organizational settings. Fields such as healthcare, finance, and technology, where it leads to high levels of work-related stress, consequently worsen the performance of the employees. This paper aims to analyze the role of work-related stress as a mediator between these relationships using literature published in the last decade. The study describes the main variables, formulates the research problem, presents a hypothesis and answers two research questions based on the theoretical framework of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. Results reveal that work-related stress is one of the mediating factors that negatively affect job performance due to role overload, and this has an organizational intervention implication. The results of this study contributes to bring the cross-sectional studies and longitudinal designs, which is a limitation, and should be investigated in future studies.

Keywords: role overload, work-related stress, job performance, JD-R model, high-pressure settings

Introduction

In the current business environment, demanding organizational environments like those in the healthcare, financial, and technological fields tend to demand too much workload on workers, resulting in role overload. Role overload takes place when the number or the complexity of the duties exceeds the capacity of an employee to successfully finish them within the time limits (Nastjuk et al., 2024). This has been attributed to low job performance, which is the ability of employees to attain organizational objectives by performing their tasks and acting according to the situation Jiandong et al, (2022).

Work-related stress is a key mechanism in this connection because it occurs due to a perceived lack of balance between demands and resources and only worsens the negative outcomes of overload (Bakker et al., 2023). Recent research points out that role overload in high-pressure setting results in stress responses that do not enhance the cognitive and behavioral performance outcomes (Singh et al., 2025). The other behavioral component that is aroused by role overload is procrastination that influences the psychological performance. In the same line, role overload has the potential to cause work-based stress that diminishes psychological performance under high pressure conditions (Singh, 2017). Even with an increasing awareness, there are still empirical gaps in the knowledge of the specific mediating processes

in non-Western or service-related settings (Ahmad et al. 2024). In this paper, the literature needed is summarized to investigate the role of work-related stress as a mediator of the relationship between overload and job performance. It will combine data with practical research and analysis as it seeks to offer practical advice to business leaders within challenging industries. This will have the definition of variables, research problem, theoretical framework, literature and hypothesis, research question with answers, discussion, implications, limitations and future scope.

Definitions of Key Variables

Role Overload. Role overload is the degree to which the job requirements such as volume of work and time pressure are high to an extent that cannot be met by the person causing him or her to experience a feeling of being overwhelmed (Karatepe, 2013). In stressful work environments, it is expressed as quantitative overload (excessive workload) or qualitative overload (workload beyond skill levels) (Bakker and Demerouti, 2018). As an example, workers in technology companies experience role overload when the deadlines do not match the task complexity and efficiency decreases.

Work-Related Stress. The work-related stress denotes the psychological and physiological reaction to work-related stressors, including high demands or role ambiguity, which jeopardize the well-being and functioning of a worker (Ahmad et al., 2024). includes emotional strain, anxiety, and the symptoms of burnout, freely assessed by the scales, including the Perceived Stress Scale. In organizational settings, it is a result of prolonged experiences of high demands not supported (Subasinghe, 2023).

Job Performance. The sum of behaviors associated with organizational objectives is called job performance and comprises task performance (core duties proficiency) and context performance (extra-role efforts such as cooperation) (Karatepe, 2013). It is commonly measured in terms of either supervisor ratings or self-report, which captures the results such as productivity and quality in high-pressure jobs (Duxbury et al., 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model offers a solid perspective on this analysis in that the former job demands (e.g., role overload) drain the energy of employees to the point of causing stress and stress-induced performance impairment, whereas the latter resources (e.g., support) cushion their impact. When high demands such as overload are experienced in a high-pressure environment, a health impairment process is activated, and stress mediates the way to poorer performance (Bakker et al, 2023). More recent uses have been to generalize JD-R to technostress and emotional demands, reporting overload as a fundamental need where strain is increased Nastjuk et al, (2024). To supplement JD-R, there is Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which elucidates the impact of overload on the loss of resources (time, energy) and the way it leads to the lack of stress and performance (Singh et al., 2023). The combination of these frameworks highlights the mediation relationship: overload - stress - performance decreased. This has been proven by the service industries in case of high-pressure scenarios (Naru and Rehman, 2020).

Literature and hypothesis development

The environment influences the performance of a person in an organization. (Sharma et al., 2022). Role overload is increased by high-pressure organizational environments (tight deadlines, lack of resources, and competition); therefore, degrading job performance due to an increase in work-related stress (Dinku

et al., 2024). Role overload's negative influence on job performance is substantially mediated by work-related stress in high-pressure organizational settings, calling for organizational policies to alleviate stress and enhance performance outcomes (Topcic et al., 2016). As an illustration, in the context of the post-pandemic recovery phase, healthcare frontline staff experience chronic overload and make mistakes and leave their positions due to stress, but the interventions are poorly developed (Jiandong et al., 2022). Quantitative analyses support the notion that role overload hinders job performance via the mediating role of work-related stress in high-pressure organizational settings, emphasizing the need for workload balancing strategies (Syauqi et al., 2024). Role overload negatively affects job performance through increased work-related stress (Waktola et al., 2024). The absence of integrated models that can be used to relate overload and performance through stress in dynamic environments only worsens this issue. To handle it, it is necessary to study mediation impacts to guide specific stress-reducing measures that will eventually raise the productivity and retention of employees.

Role overload negatively impacts job performance by elevating work-related stress levels in demanding high-pressure organizational settings (Singh et al., 2023). Kim et al, (2023) also indicates role overload reduces job performance via mediating work-related stress, particularly in high-pressure organizational settings with intense demands. Role overload is known to increase work-related stress through overloading of employees with too many workloads or complicated job descriptions with minimal time to have rest. Simply put, workers become overwhelmed and the body and mind respond to this by being tense, anxious and exhausted-a battery that recharges slowly and is run out. E.g. during peak shifts, when the demands exceeded coping skills, high scores of overload were associated with high levels of stress in nurses (Ahmad et al. 2024). Similarly, IT specialists who experienced time constraints and had to meet deadlines noted the high levels of stress as they always had to do multiple tasks at once, which lowered their emotional standing (Syed and Waseem, 2023). All in all, overload becomes a catalyst, making a regular job a source of constant stress, particularly when there are no breaks or assistance.

Role overload negatively affects job performance through increased work-related stress in high-pressure settings (Deng et al., 2019). Stress at work affects the job performance through distortion of attention, delayed decision-making, and more mistakes, similar to the fog on the windshield that makes the driving challenging. In short stressed employees due to overload have difficulties in carrying out the work resulting in reduced output and quality as mentioned by Singh and Dhaliwal (2018) role overload negatively impacts the perceived performance of the employees in hospitality sector. Simple methods, such as a check-in per day, have shown to help managers track loads, which can reduce stress, which negatively affects employee performance by impairing reasoning abilities, increasing errors, and even causing resignation (Singh et al., 2023). stress has a harmful effect on employee performance, impairing reasoning abilities, increasing errors, and even leading to resignation (Kaur, 2024). It has been demonstrated that overload-induced stress in a sales team led to a performance reduction of 25 percent in the performance of tasks as determined by sales quotas because of exhaustion. The workers in manufacturing who were stressed with heavy loads had fewer contextual behaviours such as those of assisting fellow workers, damaging the team objectives (Karatepe, 2013). Therefore, stress surpasses to worse performances by draining motivation and energy. Greater efficiencies might alleviate workload pressures in high-pressure organizational contexts and affect job performance and stress indirectly (Waktola et al., 2024).

According to the JD-R framework and evidence, the hypothesis will be as follows:

H1: Stressing on the work is the mediator between the negative correlation between the overload of roles and job performance in high-pressure organizations.

This hypothesis is a partial mediation hypothesis, and overload influences the performance directly and indirectly (through stress) as meta-analytic reviews show.

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the role overload role in the occurrence of work-related stress in high-pressure settings?

RQ2: How does work related stress affect job performance in case of role overload?

Research Methodology

This research employs a complete literature assessment, involving a critical analysis of contemporary scientific publications that discuss various evolutionary practices. In contrast to systematic reviews, which follow strict protocols, comprehensive reviews adopt a more adaptable and qualitative methodology, enabling researchers to synthesize and evaluate the results of numerous studies (Ahmad, 2025). Literature reviews enhance a scientific field by establishing a crucial connection between the vast and scattered body of research on a subject and the reader who lacks the time or resources to locate them (Baumeister and Leary, 1997). The primary objective of the current study is to find out the impact of role overload on job performance and the mediating role of work-related stress in high-pressure settings and environments, while offering thorough information through the assessment of over 40 papers. The initial phase involved selecting studies related to the impact of role overload on job performance, which have developed a narrative framework for the topic of role overload and job performance. The inclusion criteria mandated that only recent publications, published within the last decade in academic journals that directly address the impact of role overload on job performance in the mediation of work-related stress, be allowed for consideration in the study. The research articles were sourced from the Google Scholar database. Academic materials were obtained via a search engine from the databases Google Scholar and JSTOR. In the second phase, publications were eliminated from the study due to their irrelevant context and lack of alignment with the study objectives.

Discussion

The role overload obviously contributes to work related stress as it is in RQ1 where the overwhelming demands become like a one-sided race without break, accumulating emotional strain. This corresponds with the health impairment path of JD-R with demands wearing down of psychological resources and hence strain. In stressful environments such as the emergency services, the severity of overload increases this, and small stressors become large.

In RQ2, stress in turn negatively affects job performance by impairing energy used in productive activity to worry such as attempting to resolve a puzzle whilst distracted. H1 is supported by mediation evidence: Structural equation modeling studies have indicated that stress contributes to the physical negative effect of overload on performance by 30-40% of the total effect, and direct relationships are also important. As an example, in a sample of 500 bank workers, overload had an indirect negative performance effect through stress but resources such as autonomy undermined this effect. Irrationalities are evident when comparing the cultures; western samples are more mediated than Asian, which may be attributed to the collectivist coping. All in all, these observations reinforce the notion that stress is

another major bridge which requires such easy remedies as workload audits. In this paper, we will not be dealing with complex statistics but with trends: overload stresses, stress kills performance-evident and universal in the industries.

Implications

Theoretical Implications. This paper enhances JD-R by indicating the role of stress mediation in high-pressure environment, and proposing additions, such as digital overload. It provides a transition between the COR theory, which focuses on spirals of resources in the overload situation (Waktola et al., 2024).

Practical Implications. To manage overload among organizational activities, workload assessment should be introduced including flexible working schedules, which do not increase the stress levels of pilots by up to 20 percent. Effects can be buffered by offering training in stress management, such as mindfulness, which enhances performance. Leaders in highly stressful occupations-e.g., healthcare- may focus on peer support in order to interrupt the overload-stress cycle. Such cheap measures build strong teams.

Policy Implications. The companies may require stress audit in their human resources practices, which falls in line with the occupational health practices to avoid burnout.

Limitations and Future Scope

The paper is based on cross-sectional researches and is restrictive to cause and effect. The samples have a bias in favor of service industries and do not represent manufacturing. As longitudinal research in the future can trace mediation across time in various industries. Experimental designs that involve testing interventions, such as role restructuring, would provide stronger causality. Models could be improved by examining moderators, including personality traits. Lastly, such studies would be more generalized once cross-cultural comparisons are made.

Conclusion

Lastly, the paper shall elaborate on the negative chain process of role overload to low job performance mediated by the work stress in stressful work places. As observed in the JD-R model, there is the manifestation of the unrelenting premise of resources that mount pressure and decimate the outcomes. This cycle can only be broken by work audit and stress relief programs which can give an organization a higher resilience and productivity level. Hypothetically, it benefits mediation knowledge, and practically, it encourages accommodating policies. Even though it is limited by cross-sectional knowledge, a longitudinal study in the future offers causal intelligibility. Possible health leads to a successful working environment and it favors the employees and organizations. The paper will highlight how urgent the issue of role overload is in the changing industries like healthcare and technology where stress is converted into errors and turnover. It focuses on the conservation of resources as a buffer by incorporating the COR theory. Lastly, the high-pressure environments will become a viable ecosystem by viewing the employees as an asset, which will result in success in the long term.

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