

# Important Dimension for Planning the Effectiveness of the Person & the Organization: The Role

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## ABSTRACT

*Each individual occupies and plays several roles. All these roles constitute the role space of that person. At the center of the role space is the self. As the concept of role is central to that of an organization, so also the interpretations the person makes about referent. It is a cognitive structure that evolves from past experiences with other persons and objects. Self can be defined as the experience of an identity arising from a person's interaction with the external reality - things, persons and systems. It has several aspects. The more aspects there are in the role, the higher is the efficiency. These aspects are classified into three groups or dimensions: role making, role centering and role linking.*

## 1. Introduction

Human beings are, by nature, gregarious, and community or group life is one of the earliest and most enduring features of human existence on this planet. This natural inclination for living and working together with other underlies the prevalence of a variety of social groupings, such as, family, clan, community, friendship group, organization etc. these social groups are not merely a number of individuals collected at random but they are composed of individuals who are interrelated. The individuals are bound together in a network of relatively stable social relationships. Thus, our society is organizational with large and complex organizations dominating every sphere of human activity in almost all countries of the world, irrespective of ideological and other differences. Organizations, as such, have become the crucial factors affecting the quality of human life in the contemporary society.

So, what are those powerful constructs that we call organizations? They are groups of people who work interdependently toward some purpose. Organizations are not buildings or other physical structures. Rather, they consist of people who interact with each other to achieve a set of goals. Employees have structures patterns of interaction, meaning that they expect each other to complete certain tasks in a coordinated way—in an *organized way*.

In the words of Uma Sekaran an organization can be explained as a system with a purpose or a goal which has to be accomplished with the help of individuals who are operating in several subdivisions of the system and all of whom contribute to the main goal in some way or the other. In effect, we can define an organization as a purposeful system with several subsystems where individuals and activities are organized to achieve certain predetermined goals through division of labour and coordination of activities. Division of labour refers to how the work is divided among the employees and coordination refers to how all the various activities performed by the individuals are integrated or brought together

to accomplish the goals of the organization. In order to achieve goals every individual have to perform roles.

The concept of role forms a prerequisite for understanding the integration of the individual with the system (organization). The roles enable the individual to interact with and get (or not get) integrated with the system. When the individual does not get integrated with the system, the role becomes a source of stress.

## 2. Meaning & concept of role

Shakespeare said, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." Using the same metaphor, all group members are actors, each playing a **role**. By this term, we mean a set of expected behavior patterns attributed to someone occupying a given position in a social unit. The understanding of role behavior would be dramatically simplified if each of us chose one role and "played it out" regularly and consistently. Unfortunately, we are required to play a number of diverse roles, both on and off the jobs. As we'll see, one of the tasks in understanding behavior is grasping the role that a person is currently playing.

For example, Mr. Ram is a plant manager with RIL Industries, a large electrical equipment manufacturer in Punjab. He has a number of roles that he fulfills on that job, for instance, an RIL employee, member of middle management, electrical engineer and the primary company spokesperson in the community. Off the job, Mr. Ram finds himself in still more roles: husband, father, Rotarian, tennis player, member of the Country Club, and president of his homeowners' association. Many of these roles are compatible; some create conflicts. For instance, how does his religious involvement influence his managerial decisions regarding layoffs, account, and providing accurate information to government agencies? A recent offer of promotion requires Mr. Ram to relocate, yet his family very much wants to stay in Punjab. Can the role demands of his job be reconciled with the demands of his husband and father roles?

The issue should be clear: Like Mr. Ram, we all require to play a number of roles, and our behavior varies with the role we are playing. Bill's behavior when he attends church on Sunday morning is different from his behavior on the golf course later that same day. So, different groups impose different role requirements on the individuals.

### 2.1 Role Identity

There are certain attitudes and actual behaviors consistent with a role, and they create the **role identity**. People have the ability to shift roles rapidly when they recognize that the situation and its demands clearly require major changes. For instance, when union stewards were promoted to supervisory positions, it was found that their attitudes changed from pro-union to pro-management within a few months of their promotion. When these promotions had to be rescinded later because of economic difficulties in the firm, it was found that the demoted supervisors had once again adopted their pro-union attitudes.

### 2.2 Role Perception

Our view of how we're supposed to act in a given situation is a role perception. Based on an interpretation of how we believe we are supposed to behave, we engage in certain types of behavior.

Where do we get these perceptions? We get them from stimuli all around us—friends, books, movies, television. Many current law enforcement officers learned their roles from reading Joseph Wambaugh novels; many of tomorrow's lawyers will be influenced by watching the actions of attorneys in *Law & Order* or *The Practice*, and the role of crime investigators, as portrayed on the television program *C.S.I.*, is directing thousands of young people into careers in criminology. Of course, the primary reason that apprenticeship programs exist in many trades and professions is to allow beginners to watch an "expert," so that they can learn to act as they are supposed to.

### 2.3 Role Expectations

Role expectations are defined as how others believe you should act in a given situation. How you behave is determined to a large extent by the role defined in the context in which you are acting. For instance, the role of a U.S. federal judge is viewed as having propriety and dignity, while a football coach is seen as aggressive, dynamic and inspiring to his players.

In the workplace, it can be helpful to look at the topic of role expectations through the perspective of the **psychological contract**. There is an unwritten agreement that exists between employees and their employer. This psychological contract sets out mutual expectations—what management expects from workers, and vice versa. In effect, this contract defines the behavioral expectations that go with every role. For instance, management is expected to treat employees justly, provide acceptable working conditions, clearly communicate what is a fair day's work, and give feedback on how well the employee is doing. Employees are expected to respond by demonstrating a good attitude, following directions, and showing loyalty to the organization.

What happens when role expectations as implied in the psychological contract are not met? If management does not keep up its part of the bargain, we can expect negative repercussions on employee performance and satisfaction. When employees fail to live up to expectations, the result is unusually some form of disciplinary action up to and including firing.

### 2.4 Role Conflict

When an individual is confronted by divergent role expectations, the result is **role conflict**. It exists when an individual finds that compliance with one role requirement may make it more difficult to comply with another. At the extreme, it would include situations in which two or more role expectations are mutually contradictory.

Our previous discussion of the many roles Mr. Ram had to deal with included several role conflicts, for instance, Mr. Ram's attempts to reconcile the expectations placed on him as a husband and father with those placed on him as an executive with RIL Industries. The former, as you will remember, emphasizes stability and concern for the desire of his wife and children to remain in Punjab. RIL, on the other hand, expects its employees to be responsive to the need and requirements of the company. Although it might be in Mr. Ram's financial and career interests to accept relocation, the conflict comes down to choosing between family and career role expectations.

## 3. Definition of Role

Steven L McShane defines role as, a set of behaviors that people are expected to perform because they hold certain position in a team and organizations. Some roles help the team achieve its goals; other roles maintain relationships so the team survives and team members fulfill their needs.

Pareek defines role as a position which an individual holds in a system as determined by the expectations (of different significant persons, including him or herself) from that position.

## 4. Types of Role

Roles have been classified into three categories: basic, general and independent. Basic and general roles are interrelated. For example, while playing husband is a basic role, a working woman's husband forms a general role. A collection of such roles is designed 'role repertory'. Ruddock proposes the concept of role tree embodying a branching network. While this basic role corresponds to the trunk, the general roles are akin to the main branches. Likewise, the special and transient roles, coined by him, correspond to secondary branches and leaves, respectively.

## 5. Role Conflict

The concept of role involves the self, the other roles, the expectations held by the other roles and the expectations held by the self and this has built-in potential for conflict. The terms 'strain' and 'pressure' are used in literature to denote the impact of stress on the individual. Stress is a prerequisite for success of people in organizations. However, if the stress experienced by them exceeds a particular level, it may exert

adverse effect on their performance and psychological and physical health.

Pareek (1976) has discussed role conflict under two concepts of role systems – the role space and the role set.

**5.1 Role Space Conflicts:** Five main role conflicts in the role space of an individual have been identified. They are:

**5.1.1. Inter Role Distance (IRD)** - Conflicts may exist between two roles a person attempts to play. For example, executives often face conflicts between their organizational roles and their family roles.

**5.1.2. Role Stagnation (RS)** - As the individual grows physically, he also grows in the role he occupies in an organization. With the advancement of the individual, his role changes and with this change in role, the need for taking his new role becomes crucial. This is the problem of role growth. This becomes an acute problem especially when an individual has occupied a role for a long time and he enters another role in which he may feel less secure. However, the demand of the new role is for the individual to outgrow his previous role and occupy the new role effectively. This produces some conflict in the individual.

**5.1.3. Role Expectations Conflict (REC)** - Owing to individuals' expectations as a result of their socialization and identification with significant others, there is usually some incompatibility between a person's own expectations of a role and the expectations of others. For example, a professor may see incompatibility between the expectations of teaching students and that of doing research. These inherently may not be conflicting but the individual may perceive these as incompatibility.

**5.1.4. Personal Inadequacy (PI)** - If an individual has sacrificed his or her own interest, preferences and values for the job, it may be because of fears of being inadequate otherwise to fill the role. The fear of demotion or obsolescence is especially strong for those who have reached a career ceiling, and most people will suffer some erosion of status before they retire. The company tends to sense an employee's feelings of inadequacy and often hesitates to promote because of

it.

**5.1.5. Self Role Conflict (SRC)** - Conflict often develops between people's self concepts and their expectations of themselves in their job roles. For example, an introvert person may have trouble in the role of salesperson.

**5.2 Role Set Conflicts:** An individual occupying a particular role may have some expectations from his role. Interacting with him (persons in the role set or the individual) may have quite different expectations from him. Such incompatible expectations and other problems arising in the role set are called role set stress or conflicts. They are:

**5.2.1. Role Erosion (RE)** - Employees often feel that some functions important to their roles are being performed by someone else in another role. As much stress is experienced by people with not enough to do or not enough responsibility for a task as by those with too much to do. People do not like feeling underutilized.

**5.2.2. Role Overload (RO)** - When the role occupant feels that there are too many expectations, stress exists from "role overload".

**5.2.3. Role Isolation (RI)** - Role occupants tend to feel that those occupying other roles are either psychologically near or at a distance. The main criterion of perceived role – role distance frequency and cause of interaction. When linkages are strong, the role-distance is seen as low. In the absence of a strong linkage, the role distance can be measured in terms of the gap between the desired and existing linkages.

**5.2.4. Role Ambiguity (RA)** - When people are not clear about the expectations others have of them in their roles, whether due to poor feedback or poor understanding, they experience role ambiguity. Role ambiguity may be in relation to activities, responsibilities, personal style and norms.

**5.2.5. Resource Inadequacy (RIN)** - Resource inadequacy refers to people's feeling that they do not have adequate resources to perform their roles effectively, whether through lack of supplies, personnel, information in the system, or historical data, or through lack of knowledge, education or experience on their own.

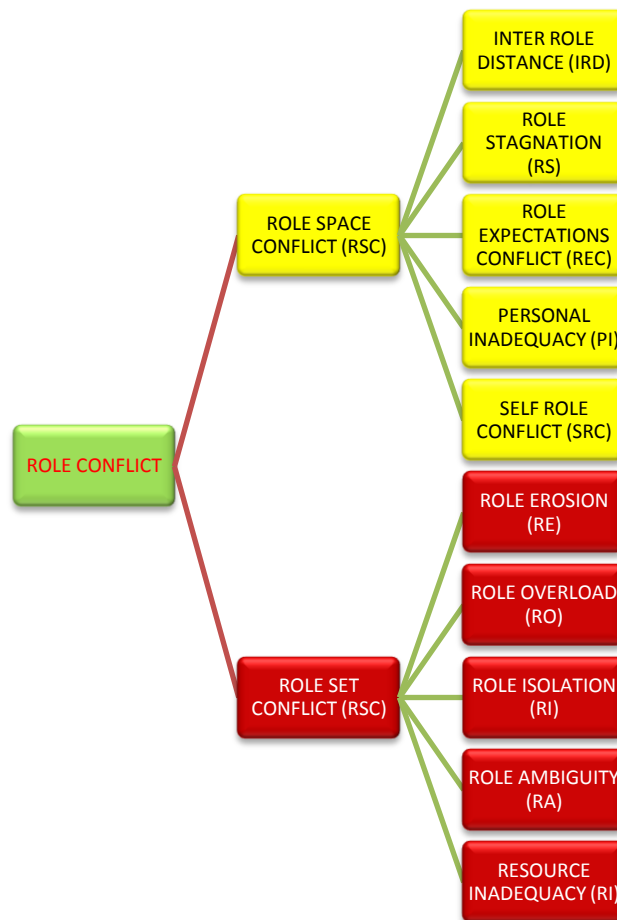


Fig. 5 Role Conflict {By Prof. (Dr.) Ashutosh Shukla}

**6. Role Efficacy**

The performance of a person working in an organization depends on his own potential effectiveness, technical competence, managerial experience, etc., as well as the design of the role that he performs in the organization. It is the integration of the two (the person and the role) that ensure a person's effectiveness in the organization. Unless a person has the requisite knowledge, technical competence and the skills required for the role, he cannot be effective. Equally important is how the role in the organization is designed. If the role does not allow the person to use his competence, and he constantly feels frustrated in the role, his effectiveness is likely to be low. The integration of a person and the role comes about when the role is able to fulfill the needs of the individual and the individual in turn is able to contribute to the evolution of the role. The closer that role taking (responding to the expectations of various other people) moves to role making (taking the initiative and designing the role creatively so that the expectations of others as well as of the role occupant are integrated), the more the role is likely to be effective. Effectiveness of a person in a role in an organization will depend on his own potential effectiveness, the potential effectiveness of the role and the organizational climate. The potential effectiveness can be called efficacy. Personal efficacy would mean potential effectiveness of a person in personal and interpersonal situations. Role efficacy would mean the potential of an individual occupying a particular role in an organization. Role efficacy can be seen as the psychological factor underlying role effectiveness. In short, role efficacy is the potential efficacy of the effectiveness of a role. It can be

increased through a joint effort of the role occupants, their managers and the organization (top management).

Role efficacy has several aspects (Pareek, 1980 a&b). The more these aspects are present in a role, the higher the efficacy of the role is likely to be. These aspects can be classified into three groups or dimensions viz. Role Making, Role Centering & Role Linking.

**6.1 Role Making:**

Role making involves active participation by the role occupant to define the role- the priorities, the ways in which they can be achieved, and ways of increasing the effectiveness of the role. The four dimensions of role making are as under:

**6.1.1. Self-role Integration (Vs. Distance)** - Every person has a particular strength, experience, technical training, special skills and some unique contribution that he may be able to make. The more that the person's role provides an opportunity for the use of such special strengths, the higher the role efficacy is likely to be. This is called self-role integration; the self or the person and the role get integrated through the possibility of a person's use of his special strengths in the role. If the person occupies role in which he is not able to use his talents or skills, he experiences self-role distance. Because we want our strengths to be utilized so that we can demonstrate how effective we can be, integration contributes to high role efficacy. There are two approaches to self role integration: careful selection and placement help to place suitable individuals in roles. However, another approach is more proactive: an attempt within an organization to discover what

strengths each individual has and how these can be utilized in the person's role. The organization can redesign roles to increase the responsibilities of the roles or to make the tasks more interesting or more meaningful to the role incumbents (Pareek & Rao, 1981).

**6.1.2. Proactivity (Vs. Reactivity)** - It means freeing oneself from, and taking action beyond immediate concerns. A person who is proactive functions at the feeling, thinking and action levels. It indicates a high level of maturity. If the person takes the initiative and does something independently to exhibit proactive behavior, his or her efficacy will be higher.

**6.1.3. Creativity (Vs. Routine)** - An opportunity to try new and unconventional ways of solving problems or an opportunity to be creative is also important. When the role occupant perceives that he does something new or unique in his role, his efficacy is high. The perception that he does only routine tasks lowers role efficacy, as does the lack of opportunity to be creative. Creativity can be developed through the joint efforts of employees and management. It needs to be reinforced: criticism of innovative attempts stifles creativity.

**6.1.4. Confrontation (Vs. Avoidance)** - The term 'confrontation' is used here in the sense of facing a problem and not attempting to escape from it. It does not mean shouting, express oneself aggressively, or being unwilling to explore. It does involve recognizing a problem, searching for alternative solutions (often with the help of others), and developing a higher level of collaboration. Openly sharing feelings is a necessary part of this process. The emphasis is on empathy rather than on aggression.

## 6.2 Role Centering:

A role occupant can take steps to increase his or her influence. One way to do this is to increase one's knowledge and skills. This process is called centering (making the role central), in contrast to merely accepting the role and performing it (role entering). The dimensions of role efficacy concerned with role centering are as follows:

**6.2.1. Centrality (Vs. Peripherality)** - Centrality is the perceived importance of a role. There are three ways in which a role is seen as important: if the role is linked with a larger cause, if the effectiveness of other role is seen as dependent on the performance of the role, and if the role occupants are identified as representatives of the organization, the role will be seen as important. If persons occupying various roles feel that their roles are peripheral, i.e., not very important, their potential effectiveness will be low.

**6.2.2. Influence (Vs. Powerlessness)** - Role efficacy increases in proportion to the person's ability to exercise influence or power in his / her role. The influence may be in terms of decision making, scheduling, processes, implementation, advice or problem solving. In relation to super ordination, roles in the public sector may be more efficacious because they influence a larger segment of society. On the other hand, if a person feels that he has no power in the role he occupies in the organization, the efficacy is likely to be low.

**6.2.3. Growth (Vs. Stagnation)** - The factor of self development is very important to role efficacy. When a role occupant has opportunities and perceives them as such to grow and develop in his or her role through learning new things, role efficacy is likely to be high. Similarly, if the individual perceives his or her role as lacking in opportunities for growth, role efficacy will be low. There are three dimensions of growth: current role, transition to the next role, and general development. Attention should be paid to all three. If a person feels that he is stagnating in a role without any opportunity to grow he is likely to have a low role efficacy.

## 6.3 Role Linking:

A role can be linked to other roles by interaction as well as by helping relationships. Linkage can be further extended to larger groups. The dimensions of efficacy concerned with role linkage are as under:

**6.3.1. Inter role Linkage (Vs. Isolation)** - The number of linkages between a role and other roles is measured against the desired amount by the role occupant. The dimensions of inter-role linkage are the level, the basis and the type of linkage. A role occupant desires to have linkages with roles at all three levels in his/her role set with senior employees and managers, with subordinate employees and with peers. Such inter linkages can have several bases. At least four seem to be important: *common goals, interdependence, empathy and crisis management*. The organization can do several things to promote inter-role linkage and to deal with areas of role isolation.

**6.3.2. Helping Relationships (Vs. Hostility)** - One important aspect of efficacy is the individual's perception that he or she is able to give and receive help. On the other hand, if no help is given when asked for, or if respondents are hostile, the perception of hostility or indifference decreases efficacy. A helping relationship requires both the expectation that help will be available when it is needed and the willingness to respond to the needs of others. A healthy helping relationship is a two-way process while a role occupant is ready to empathize, support and sacrifice his time, is also prepared to seek help from the other role occupant. Such mutuality should exist in all relationships, including the one between the boss and employees. The boss can (and should) also take the subordinates help various matters as much as he helps the employees.

**6.3.3. Superordination (Vs. Deprivation)** - Concept of Superordination comes from the concept of the super ordinate goals. Super ordinate goal is one that is valuable to two or more persons or the groups involved, which is sharable and which cannot be achieved by a single person or a group working alone. The term Superordination indicates the relevance of a person or role to a larger entity. Superordination may take several forms. Roles that give people opportunity to work for super ordinate goals have the highest role efficacy. Many people have voluntarily accepted reduced salary to move from private sector to the public sector because their new roles provided them an opportunity to serve the higher interest.

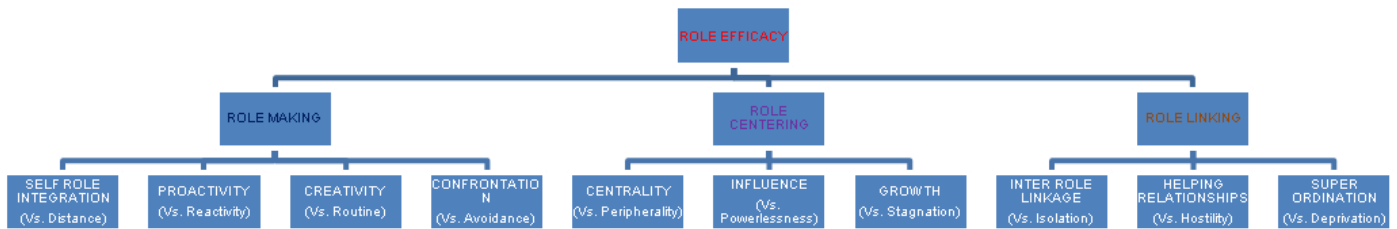


Fig. 6 Role Efficacy (By Prof. (Dr.) Ashutosh Shukla)

**7. Conclusion**

Indian mythology specifies all people play their roles in the drama of their lives overwhelmed by the super power of *Maya*. All of us are just actors playing our respective roles. The complexity of modern life is reflected in the multiplicity of roles that man has to perform in society. Life in the present times is characterized by the differentiation of roles and the increasing complexity of the role structure. One major problem that confronts man today is that of managing the complex structure of roles effectively by achieving an integration of the self with the various roles that he occupies. Such integration is not only necessary for the mental well being and personal effectiveness of individuals, but also important for the organization in making the best use of an individual's creativity and maximizing it through the process of synergy (Pareek, 1987). This is possible when a higher level of collaborative work is achieved

in an organization. The main problem for an individual is how to continue to live autonomously as a person and at the same time maximize the effectiveness of various roles, thereby integrating the self with the roles (which in turn need integration). Role is important to understand an organization and its effectiveness, as it is through the role that an individual gets linked with the system (of which he is a member). This linkage is a vital 'entity' which may help increase organizational effectiveness. There are inherent problems in the performance of a role in an organization giving rise to role stress. Classical organizational structure and control systems form a potent source of stress because they demand dependency, hamper initiative and creativity in role performance, and direct behaviors along narrowly defined channels. In this sense, role becomes an important dimension for planning the effectiveness of both the persons and the organization.

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