

An assessment of role stress experienced by management students in India- Suggestive measures and strategies

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INTRODUCTION:

Consistent increase in the rate of psychosomatic and mental diseases and the feeling of dissatisfaction with life in general among majority of people in present day world very well reflects the ill consequences for high psychosocial stress being experienced by the present generation. In the recent years while on one hand the quality of life has increased on the other hand the stresses involved too have gone up. Stress thus becomes inevitable in life, and with increasing problems, aspirations and uncertainties associated with socio-economic, political and cultural upheavals, it is only likely to increase.

Of late we have seen that there has been a movement towards greater accountability and transparency in higher education and therefore consideration of student issues becomes imminent. Today, every university administrator is aware of the challenges that higher education faces. Some of the traditional challenges are financial and managerial while the other contemporary challenges are how to strike a balance between knowledge and information. One of the most challenging aspects for current higher education institutes thus becomes proliferation of roles that members have to undertake during their everyday educational practice.

Stress has become an everyday word being used in the modern day world, yet remarkably few people use the term stress in a proper manner or even bother to attempt for a clear cut definition of the term stress. In Psychology stress refers to a 'state of organism resulting from some interaction with the environment.' The term stress has been originally derived from Latin, where it indicates hardship, strain, adversity or afflictions. Various terms have been used synonymously with stress, anxiety, frustrations, conflicts, tension, pressure and strain.

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Stress is a natural physiological mechanism that protects humans from danger since it acts as a precursor. The moment stress occurs, the human body prepares for quick action by releasing hormones that increase alertness and focus (National Institutes of Health [NIH], 2007). However, if the source of stress does not disappear, stress hormones can persist in the body. But if a stressful situation persists for a long period of time it may lead to a wide range of physical and psychological illnesses, such as obesity, gastrointestinal disorders, cardiovascular disorders, skin disorders, anxiety attacks, and depression (Everly & Lating, 2002; NIH, 2007; Weidner, 2000). which may affect some students adversely (Wright, 1967).

Stress may be defined as a response brought about by various external events (Selye, 1976) and can be viewed as a positive or negative experience. Fontana (1989) defines stress as a demand made upon the adaptive capacities of the mind and the body. There has been considerable amount of research on the stress levels of Engineering and Medical students and organizational stress, but not much work has been done on the stress levels of management students. And management being one of the most sought after courses today, the need for the study arises. Hence in this study an attempt has been made to determine the stressors affecting the management students in their day to day life and the methods to cope with them to help them become effective managers in future. Students are subjected to different kinds of stressors, such as the pressure of academics with an obligation to succeed, an uncertain future and difficulties of integrating into the system. The students also face social, emotional and physical and family problems which may affect their learning ability and academic performance. Too much stress can cause physical and mental health problems, reduce students' self-esteem and may affect students academic achievement. In recent years there is a growing appreciation of the stresses involved in management training. Being able to effectively cope with stress can be the first step to preventing psychological distress and development of a serious illness.

OBJECTIVE:

Management Education is an important component in overall education system in India and plays a vital role in bringing out socio-economic development of the country. Many management institutes have come up over the last few years in the country set up both by the private sector

and government institutions. And with the mushrooming population it becomes all the more easily to attract students. Obtaining a technical or management degree is considered very prestigious by the burgeoning middle class and is supposed to add to the upward mobility of the families in this status conscious society. Also once the male child has a good job he would be able to take up the financial responsibilities of the family, and for the female child a good degree is considered to be a passport to a good match. However many a times it so happens that the infrastructure and facilities may not be up to the mark and the students may not be able to get as good a job or position despite all the investments in terms of time, money etc. and this is where stress starts to set in. Over the past few years we have seen many reports in the media related to stress syndromes of the students. However not much work has been done on the stress levels of management students in India hence this study was undertaken to examine the levels of role stress among management students.

LITERATURE SURVEY

From their studies Kahn & Quinn, 1970: 41 conclude that role stress not only leads to tension and emotional reaction but also affects interpersonal relationships and leads to physical and psychological well being of an individual and his/her potential role/performance.

A number of studies have been conducted on role stress in organizations (for example, Kapur, 1969; Pestonjee & Pareek, 1997; Pattanayak, 2003; Aziz, 2003). Schuler et al. (1977) evaluate the impact of role stresses in organizations and maintain that they have been associated with negative work outcomes. Aziz (2004) investigates the intensity of organizational role stress among women information technology professional in the Indian private sector. He finds a difference in level of stress experienced by married and unmarried employees on several role stressors.

Stress among college students

The academic, socio-psychological and financial concerns that the students have are typical in nature. These years tend to be a period of immense change and adjustments in a young adult's life. This is the time when students have probably moved out of their homes for the first time leaving behind the sheltered life they have been so used to. They tend to form a new support system with their peers. The new intellectual rigors and academic demands that they are facing now in the professional courses are quite different from their earlier exposures. Many of these

professional courses are self –financed hence they tend to pose a heavy demand on home finances and more often than not the students have to take recourse to loans to finance the higher education. Any student has to play several roles and try and satisfy all the parties concerned – The role may be that of a good student with good academic performance, an ideal son/daughter with respect for family tradition, culture and values. In our Indian setup the student is also expected to take care of the family and help financially once he is settled with a decent job. He is also expected to be in tune with the times so as to be able to participate in student’s activities and be in stride with his peers. The different expectations and roles place many conflicting and even vague demands on his personality. These factors are likely to contribute to distress among a relatively large proportion of students, especially when coupled with the uncertainty of future employment opportunities and a fear of not meeting parental and social expectations

Management course in particular poses heavy demands on students in terms of time, money and other resources. They are also faced with new intellectual rigors and academic challenges that they may not have experienced earlier. Then there is the uncertainty of future employment opportunities and fear of not meeting social and family expectations. The students experience time pressure, social maladjustments, friendship issues, developmental challenges and romantic upheavals in their lives causing them stress at different points of time.

In a study conducted by Rakesh Kumar Agrawal and Shailendera Singh Chahar 2007” they explore the extent and types of role stresses present among the engineering and management students in India. The findings reveal that students are experiencing role overload, role stagnation and self-role distance. Male students experience higher levels of role stagnation than female students. However, no significant differences could be observed on any of the role stressors between first year students and their seniors, or between management and engineering students. The results are indicative of the social and educational environment prevailing in the country

A study was conducted by Pestonjee D M & Mishra Prabhat Kumar 1998, to examine the nature of role **stress** and job satisfaction among doctors, and to explore the relationship between these variables. To attain the objectives of the study, two psychometric instruments the **Organizational Role Stress Scale** (Pareek, 1983) and the Employees S-D Inventory (Pestonjee,

1981) were administered to the sample population to obtain data pertaining to **role stress** and job satisfaction variables. The data were analyzed in terms of the t-test and coefficients of correlation. Results of the study revealed no significant differences between the two groups except in the case of management area of job satisfaction and inter-**role** distance (IRD) dimension of **role stress**. Further, job satisfaction variables correlated negatively with all the dimensions of **role stress**.

“Organizational Role Stress among Indian IT Professionals” by Mohsin Aziz, 2003, wherein he has used the ORS Scale to measure the Role Stress of IT professional in India. According to Aziz, the mean ORS score of 70.16 confirms that information technology professionals are experiencing fairly high organizational role stress. He further adds that the role stressors that emerged as the top three contributors to overall organizational role stress were RIN, RS, and IRD, respectively.

Pestonjee D M & Singh 1987, in another study attempted to explore the interrelationship between job satisfaction areas and different factors of **role stresses** in EDP managers and system analysts from Public and Private computer organizations. For this ‘ORS Scale’ and ‘Job Satisfaction Inventory’ were administered. The findings revealed that EDP managers and system analysts of both, public and private organizations differ significantly in their perception of job area and management area of satisfaction. They also differ significantly on inter-**role** distance. In some comparison groups, they differed significantly in **role stress** factors like **role** expectation conflict, **role** overload, resource inadequacy, **role** stagnation and overall **role stress**

PRESENT STUDY:

For the present study 219 students were taken from a B Grade management school, (B-School) where most entrants have an average academic performance and majority hailed from small cities or big towns of India who have moved to Ahmedabad for pursuing management studies. They were graduates from different disciplines with little or no work experience and few students had taken education loan and therefore the expectation out of the course was high.

The students in self-financed, second rung B-schools are academically average and hail from diverse cultural and economic background. The sample consisted of students hailing from

different parts of the country most of them having moved away from their families for the first time.

The *Organizational Role Stress (ORS Scale-students version)* was used to determine the sources of stress among management students. Role can be defined as a set of functions which an individual performs in response to the expectations of the significant members of a social system and his own expectations about the position that he occupies (Pareek, 1993). Stress is built up in the concept of role. Whenever there is conflict between the self, the role under question and other roles that the person occupies, or where there is incompatibility amongst expectations by Individual or significant others, there is a potential for role stress. A role stress has been defined as 'anything about an organizational role that produces adverse consequences for the individual' (Kahn & Quinn, 1970: 41). Role is an obligation concept in which there are expectation from both the senders side and occupants side. The term "stress" will be used here to refer to such terms and concepts as strain and pressure. The concept of role is vital for the integration of the individual with an organization. The organization has its own structure and goals similarly the individual has his personality and needs (motivations). All these aspects interact with each other and to some extent get integrated into a role. Role is also a central concept in work motivation as it is only through this that the individual and organization interact with each other. Each individual occupies and plays several roles. The focus on roles can be useful in planning organizational effectiveness hence the concept of role assumes much importance. The concept of role and its two related aspects, **role space** and **role set**, have a built-in potential for conflict and stress

Role Space has three main variables: self, the role under question, and the other roles one occupies. Any conflict among these is referred to as role space conflict. These conflicts may take several forms as Inter-Role Distance, Self/Role Conflict, Role-Expectation Conflict, Personal Inadequacy, and Role Stagnation.

Role set is the role system within the organization of which roles are part and by which individual roles are defined. Role set conflicts take the forms of Role Ambiguity, Role Overload, Role Erosion, Resource Inadequacy, and Role Isolation. The above dimensions of conflict are worth considering in relation to organizational role stress

The 10 dimensions of the ORS Scale thus are:

1. Self –Role Distance (SRD)
2. Role Stagnation (RS)
3. Inter Role Distance (IRD)
4. Role Isolation (RI)
5. Role Ambiguity (RA)
6. Role Expectation Conflict (REC)
7. Role Overload (RO)
8. Role Erosion (RE)
9. Resource Inadequacy (RIn)
10. Personal Inadequacy (PIn)

DISCUSSION:

Though analysis of data on the basis of these variables does not show any significant statistical difference on any of the role stressor which means that the groups of role occupants in the management education system find themselves struggling equally to meet the varied role demands. But on relative comparison the responses on the various dimensions can help in identifying possible stressors for college students which can eventually help in developing stress intervention programs for business school. Hence on the basis of the findings we shall discuss the various stressors and the possible associated factors that are presumed to be causing these.

The findings of this study suggest as seen fig.1 that students are experiencing Role Stress, wherein **Role Overload (RO - 12%)** and **Inter Role Distance(IRD -12%)** have emerged as the most potent stressors followed by **Personal Inadequacy(PIN- 11%)** . The stressor having the least effect on the students was found to be **Role Ambiguity (RA- 8%)** which means the students are quite clear on the various expectations that the people have on them. They are clear on their activities, responsibilities, priorities, norms and general expectations. They are aware what they are supposed to do at what point of time.

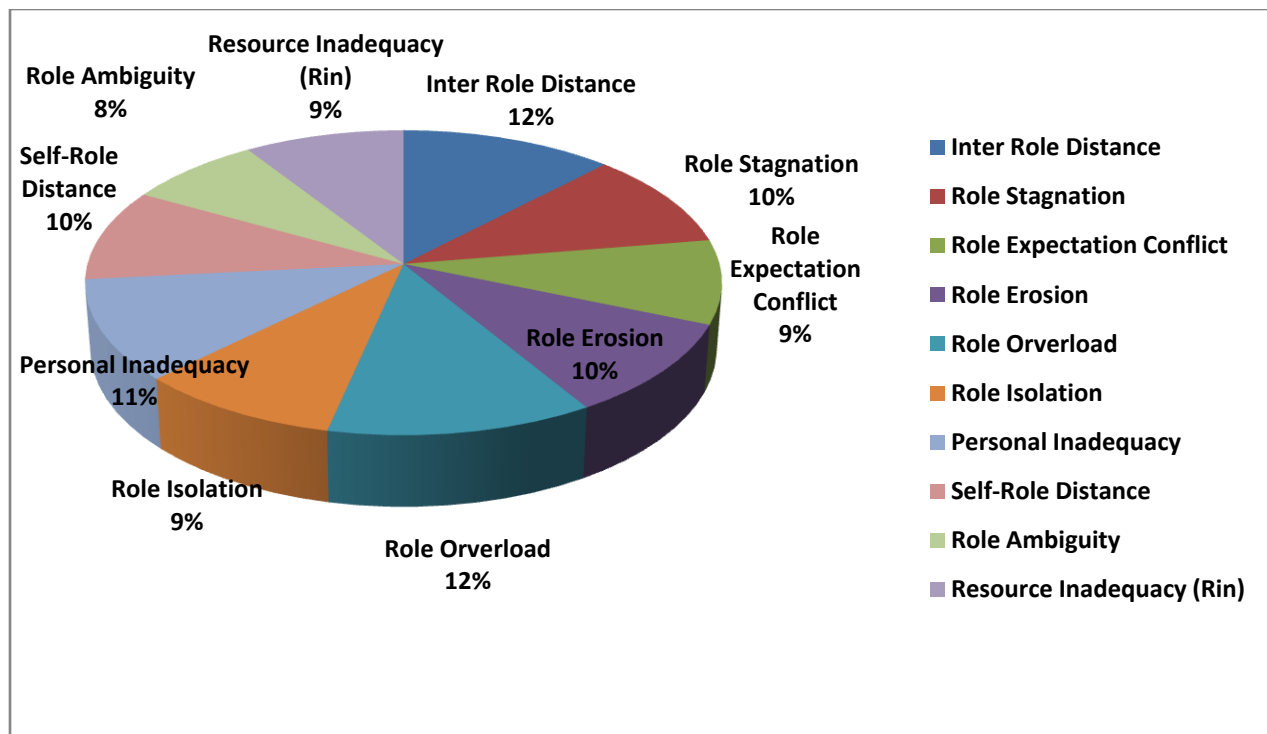


Fig.1

Role overload – 12% (RO) develops when the role occupant feels that there are too many expectations from ‘significant’ others in his role set. The students experience role overload in both its aspects – *qualitative and quantitative*. Possible reasons for high role overload within the students include the academic rigors and demands of the professional courses which the students were pursuing. Role overload is measured when questions are asked to students as to whether they can finish the work given to them during a modified work day and whether the amount of work they do might interfere with how well it is done. Role overload usually occurs when there are large variations in the expected output and delegation or assistance-ship cannot be sought. The academic burden seems very high to the students because, as already mentioned they come from varying academic backgrounds (like arts, science commerce with almost no previous exposure to any area of management, are academically average and to meet up with the market expectations and feedback, the course structure is designed such that industry requirement is met, which makes the course modules rigorous. Secondly, the methodology and scheme of continuous evaluation is also very different from the conventional academic method that the students have been used to uptill their graduation days. The pattern of assessment varies from presentations to

quizzes, written assignments to projects to ensure a holistic and 360 evaluation process. Many were also struggling to meet up with the standards they had set for themselves to satisfy their own dreams and that of their parents. Extracurricular activities too added to role overload being experienced by students. Therefore irrespective of their earlier academic performance and gender, the course workload distinctly stood out as the highest source of stress

Inter Role Distance - 12%(IRD) has also been experienced among the majority of the students. It occurs when an individual occupies more than one role thus resulting in conflicts. Such inter role conflicts are quite frequent in a modern society where the students are increasingly occupying multiple roles in various groups. For.eg. A student faces conflict between his role as a student where he has to perform well academically vs. his other roles towards family where he is expected to be an ideal son/daughter and in future share the family burden both financially and emotionally. He/she has to be in tune with the times to be accepted by his peers and at the same time be an active participant in students' activities. The demand on the time of students would be incompatible with the curriculum demands. To meet up with the demands of the course and recruitment, new responsibilities and staying away from home, the students' life-style undergoes a drastic change. And in this juggling of new roles he frequently finds himself/ herself very stressed out.

Personal Inadequacy -11% (PIN) has equally come up as a source of stress affecting majority of students. Students' experiences Personal Inadequacy wherein he student feels he is not well equipped in terms of knowledge, skills or training to perform the tasks assigned to him adequately. Or maybe since he has not had the time to prepare for the assigned role for effective performance hence he is experiencing stress. Also the medium of instruction being English may students from vernacular backgrounds with very little exposure to English had to put in extra hours simply to comprehend what was being taught and then to express their thoughts accordingly. Additionally, increased need for heightened interpersonal skills to cope up with the demand of management education contributes to stress among students. The focus of management education is developing student's aptitude beyond the academic boundaries to prepare them for a real life corporate situation which includes conflict resolution and team work.

Inability to establish healthy relationships within the group and respond positively to group dynamics adds to the increased stress levels of the students.

Role Stagnation -10% (RS): feeling of being stuck in the same role. As an individual grows older, he also grows in the role that he occupies in the organization. With an individual's advancement the role changes; and with his change in role the need for taking on a new role becomes crucial. This problem of role growth becomes acute when an individual who has occupied a role for a long time enters another role in which he feels less secure. The new role demands that an individual outgrows the previous one and takes charge of the new role effectively, which is bound to produce some stress during the period of transition. In the present academic rigors the students are so preoccupied with the jobs at hand that they hardly have time to go beyond the academic necessities hence many a times they feel that they are not learning the required skills other than academics to be able to be a better fit in the corporate world. This corresponds to the major stressor Role Overload wherein they hardly have the time to cater to personal intellectual growth. They are more focused towards trying to complete the academic requirements with comprehension, and at times without comprehension just because they have to do it.

Role Expectation Conflicts: - 9% (REC)

When there is conflicting expectation or demands by different role senders (persons having expectation from the roles) the role occupant experiences this type of stress. The conflicting expectation may be from peers, seniors, parents and teachers etc. Here in management education too it so happens that the students are faced with various conflicting demands from various groups of people around. And to satisfy these conflicting demands it becomes a real tough task. The students are at cross road as to whom to satisfy and whom not. They don't want to antagonize any person and at the same time it is too challenging to meet all demands, it is asking for too much and this causes the students some real stress.

All other factors like Role Expectation Conflict (REC), Role Erosion (RE), Role Isolation (RI), Self-Role Distance (SRD) and Resource Inadequacy (RI) have a moderate effect on the stress levels of students in management institutions and the students over a period of time are able to cope up on their own.

Suggestive Measures and Strategies

The changes taking place in the Indian economy and the world over have made the management jobs very attractive and lucrative over the past decade. The social upliftment as a result of a good management degree coupled with lack of alternative career options has been ascribed as a factor leading to students pursuing management in hordes even though their own aptitude may be more suited to their professions like art, culture, literature or humanities. The suggested remedies therefore would be:

Identification of aptitude:

Many a times students join management courses without giving a thought to the development of their own uniqueness hence during the course and even after wards they consider themselves to be gross misfits, inadequate to compete in the corporate arena, leading to lower self esteem and self concept. They feel socially rejected and isolated. All this leads to deeper psycho-social issues which needs to be addressed.

In India today, students have good opportunities to join professional degrees like Engineering, Management and Computers which provide with lucrative career opportunities but at the same time the student should seek a career or vocation according to his or her aptitude or nature and not due to social or family pressures.

Career guidance:

The parents should understand and accept their children as they are and not have unrealistic expectation from them. Proper career guidance needs to be given and the students should select their careers accordingly. During the process of selection we should look for people who are more thoughtful, more aware, more sensitive, more flexible and more adaptive capable of being moulded into global executives.

Integration of knowledge:

Research shows that the three elements required to build managerial capabilities are, knowledge, skills and attributes. With knowledge an individual is able to identify, analyze and develop workable solutions. He can communicate well and understand and assimilate the concepts of one functional area of business to another. Of late a growing need has been seen towards the inclusion of business management topics in other programs as well.

Attitude Building since childhood:

The attributes that help an individual become an effective leader are integrity, commitment to learning, reflective and creative thinking. Hence if we can integrate the process of attribute building into our curriculum right from school days the transition of an individual into any stream would be very smooth.

Modification of the Education System:

The findings of several studies suggest that there is an immediate need to modify education system wherein emphasis is not just on academics (text book learning) but more towards application of skills developed through these professional courses from the very beginning and the ability of the individual to adapt to the circumstances.

Integrating skills sets with the curriculum:

The focus on development of non-cognitive skills would include developing Interpersonal skills, social and oral communication, and flexibility. The students need to be imparted with administrative skills from the beginning itself, which implies – organizing, planning, decision making and creativity. The students also need to be sensitized towards the tolerance of uncertainty and resistance to stress. College festivals and socially relevant projects are an important part of management students life in India which helps the students develop all the above competencies hence the onus of making the students understand the importance of college festivals and helping them take an active part in it lies on the management of the institution and the faculties.

Financial Rearrangement:

Another study done on management students also suggests that work overload and pressure of loan repayment is too much hence the need of the hour is that courses be so designed that students feel least pressure and at the same time learn effective management skills in a conducive environment.

Emotional Support:

Research has shown that social and emotional support helps a person to effectively cope with stress. Persons maintaining close interpersonal relationships with friends and family are able to use more approach strategies. Social support includes material support (providing resources) and emotional support (listening to the person and encouraging him)

Hence it is recommended to incorporate training on coping strategies for stress management of students so that they are able to face the stressors of the corporate world effectively and take it in its stride.

The world going global it poses great challenges on future managers towards learning to cope effectively to come out with flying colours and take the world by the storm. One of the primary goals of management education is help students prepare for the real world (Lordan 1996). As facilitators therefore it becomes our major responsibility to help reduce these stressors by changing the system At the same time training our students and also making them understand, that with competition rising on all fronts the stressors have to be accepted as a part of our professional world but at the same time they need to develop coping strategies because in this world only the fittest survive.

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INDIAN PSYCHOLOGY