

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF ROLE AMBIGUITY AND WORKLOAD ON EMPLOYEE STRESS IN PROJECTIZED ORGANIZATIONS: THE MODERATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND TEAM SUPPORT

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of role ambiguity and workload on employee stress within projectized organizations, with a focus on the moderating effects of emotional intelligence and team support. In projectized organizations, where tasks and responsibilities are fluid and dynamic, role ambiguity and excessive workload can significantly contribute to employee stress. However, individual differences, such as emotional intelligence, and organizational factors like team support may alleviate or exacerbate these effects. By employing a mixed-methods approach, this research examines how emotional intelligence acts as a personal resource that buffers the adverse effects of role ambiguity and workload on stress, while team support serves as an organizational resource to enhance coping mechanisms. Data was collected from employees in project-based environments, and the results suggest that both emotional intelligence and team support play crucial roles in moderating the relationship between stressors and employee well-being. The findings offer valuable insights for organizations aiming to reduce employee stress by fostering emotional intelligence training and enhancing team dynamics. Practical implications and recommendations for managing stress in projectized settings are discussed, emphasizing the importance of supportive organizational practices.

INTRODUCTION

In projectized organizations, where work is structured around projects with defined goals, timelines, and deliverables, employees often operate under high-pressure environments. The dynamic nature of these organizations demands rapid decision-making, adaptability, and multitasking, which can inadvertently lead to stress. Among the many factors contributing to employee stress, role ambiguity and

workload are two significant determinants. Role ambiguity, characterized by unclear job expectations and responsibilities, creates confusion and reduces employee confidence, ultimately impacting individual and team performance. Similarly, excessive workload strains employees' capacity to manage tasks effectively, leading to burnout and reduced productivity.

While these stressors are prevalent in projectized organizations, their impact can be moderated by individual and organizational factors. Emotional intelligence, defined as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions, plays a critical role in helping employees cope with stress. Employees with higher emotional intelligence are better equipped to navigate the challenges posed by role ambiguity and workload, maintaining their performance under pressure. Furthermore, team support within project environments fosters collaboration and shared accountability, reducing the burden on individual employees and enhancing their ability to manage stress.

This study aims to examine the combined effects of role ambiguity and workload on employee stress in projectized organizations, with a focus on the moderating roles of emotional intelligence and team support. By investigating these relationships, the research seeks to provide insights into how project-based organizations can create supportive work environments that mitigate stress, improve employee well-being, and enhance overall project performance. Projectized organizations, characterized by their reliance on project teams and dynamic work environments, often demand high levels of flexibility, multitasking, and rapid adaptation from employees. However, such environments frequently expose employees to stressors, with **role** ambiguity and workload emerging as two critical contributors. Role ambiguity, where employees face unclear job expectations and responsibilities, leads to confusion, reduced morale, and diminished productivity. Simultaneously, excessive workload places significant pressure on employees, resulting in burnout and declining work quality. Together, these stressors negatively impact not only individual well-being but also overall organizational performance, jeopardizing the success of projects.

Despite recognition of these challenges, the factors that can mitigate their effects are not fully understood. Emotional intelligence, as a personal competency, and team support, as an organizational resource, have been suggested as potential buffers against workplace stress. Employees with high emotional intelligence may be better equipped to navigate the uncertainties of role ambiguity and the pressures of workload, while strong team support can foster a collaborative

environment that alleviates individual stress. However, the interplay between these moderating factors and the stress-inducing dynamics of projectized organizations remains underexplored.

This research seeks to address this gap by examining how role ambiguity and workload contribute to employee stress in projectized organizations, and how emotional intelligence and team support moderate these relationships. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for organizations aiming to enhance employee well-being, foster resilience, and optimize project outcomes in demanding and high-pressure environments.

This research has following tentative hypothesis

H1: Role ambiguity is positively associated with employee stress.

H2: Increased workload leads to higher employee stress.

H3: Emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between workload and stress, such that employees with higher emotional intelligence experience less stress.

H4: Team support moderates the relationship between role ambiguity and stress, such that higher team support reduces stress levels.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a quantitative research approach, adopting a cross-sectional survey design to explore the impact of role ambiguity and workload on employee stress within projectized organizations. The investigation further considers the moderating roles of emotional intelligence and team support in shaping these relationships. The cross-sectional design is particularly suitable for assessing the associations among the study variables at a single point in time, offering insights into the patterns that exist between workplace stressors and individual or organizational buffers.

To achieve these objectives, data will be gathered through a structured, self-administered questionnaire distributed electronically. The research targets employees working in projectized environments such as information technology firms, construction companies, and consulting organizations, where roles and workloads often fluctuate based on the demands of specific projects. A total of 300 participants will be selected using stratified random sampling to ensure a

representative distribution across various industries and job functions. This method allows for the inclusion of diverse perspectives and minimizes sampling bias, enhancing the external validity of the findings.

The questionnaire will consist of standardized instruments that have demonstrated strong psychometric properties in prior research. All items will be rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Role ambiguity will be measured using the Role Ambiguity Scale developed by Rizzo et al. (1970), which evaluates the clarity with which employees perceive their job responsibilities and expectations. Workload will be assessed through the Quantitative Workload Inventory (QWI), which captures the amount and intensity of work experienced by individuals. Employee stress will be measured using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), which provides a global assessment of how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded respondents perceive their lives to be. Emotional intelligence will be evaluated using the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte et al., 1998), a widely used measure of individuals' ability to perceive,

understand, and manage emotions. Finally, team support will be assessed through the Team Support Scale (TSS), which captures the degree to which employees feel supported by their colleagues within the team setting.

The survey will be disseminated online through email and professional networking platforms, allowing broad access and timely collection of data. Participants will be provided with informed consent information, ensuring ethical compliance, anonymity, and voluntary participation. Once the data is collected, it will be analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics will be used to summarize the sample characteristics and the distribution of key variables. To examine the hypothesized relationships and moderation effects, the study will employ moderated multiple regression analysis as well as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). These techniques will enable the researcher to explore both the direct effects of role ambiguity and workload on employee stress and the conditional influence of emotional intelligence and team support in moderating these relationships.

RESULTS

The following findings were made for a pilot study where the sample size was of 54 respondents only. The SPS analysis has been done on the same sample size and the results are reported and interpreted accordingly.

Table-1; Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (n = 54)

Variable	Category	f (%)
Gender	Male	33 (61.1%)
	Female	21 (38.9%)
Age	18-25 years	21 (38.9%)
	26-35 years	17 (31.5%)
	36-45 years	8 (14.8%)
	46 and above	8 (14.8%)
Experience	Less than 1 year	14 (25.9%)
	1-3 years	14 (25.9%)
	4-7 years	6 (11.1%)
	8+ years	20 (37.0%)
Designation	Team Member	22 (40.7%)
	Team Lead	16 (29.6%)
	Project Manager	8 (14.8%)
	Other	8 (14.8%)

The demographic profile of the study participants (n = 54) provides valuable insights into the composition of the sample. In terms of gender, most of the respondents were male (61.1%), while female participants accounted for 38.9% of the sample. This indicates a moderately gender-imbalanced workforce within the projectized organizations surveyed. The age distribution reveals that the largest age group was 18–25 years (38.9%), followed by those aged 26–35 years (31.5%). Respondents aged 36–45 and 46 years and above each represented 14.8% of the sample. These figures suggest that the workforce in the sampled organizations is relatively young, with over 70% of participants falling below the age of 36. Regarding work experience, the most frequently reported category was individuals with more than 8 years of experience (37.0%), followed by those with less than 1 year (25.9%) and 1–3 years of experience (25.9%). Only 11.1% of the respondents reported 4–7 years of professional experience. This reflects a mix of early-career and highly experienced professionals, with a comparatively smaller mid-level experience group. In terms of designation, the most common role among participants was that of a team member (40.7%), followed by team leads (29.6%). Project managers and those in other roles each constituted 14.8% of the sample. This distribution suggests that most respondents occupy operational or supervisory roles rather than senior managerial positions.

Table-2; Role Ambiguity across demographic (n = 54)

Demographics	f-values	p value
Gender	.11	.918
Age	.983	.408
Experience	.721	.544
Designation	.651	.586

For gender, the p-value is greater than 0.05, indicating that there is no statistically significant difference in Role Ambiguity between different genders. Gender does not significantly influence Role Ambiguity. Like Gender, the p-value for age is greater than 0.05, suggesting that age does not have a significant impact on Role Ambiguity. For respondent’s experience again, the p-value exceeds 0.05, indicating that experience level does not significantly affect Role Ambiguity. The p-value is greater than 0.05, suggesting that designation within the organization

does not significantly influence Role Ambiguity. Based on the results, none of the demographic variables (Gender, Age, Experience, and Designation) significantly contribute to explaining differences in Role Ambiguity.

Table -3; Workload Across Demographic Variables (n = 54)

Demographic Variable	F-value	p-value
Gender	1.78	.187
Age	2.02	.123
Experience	0.67	.577
Designation	1.76	.166

The p-value for gender is greater than 0.05, indicating that there is no statistically significant difference in Workload between different genders. Gender does not significantly influence Workload. Like Gender, the p-value is greater than 0.05, suggesting that age does not have a significant impact on Workload. Again, the p-value exceeds 0.05, indicating that experience level does not significantly affect Workload. The p-value is greater than 0.05, suggesting that designation within the organization does not significantly influence Workload.

Table -4; Emotional Intelligence Across Demographic Variables

Demographic Variable	F-value	p-value
Gender	0.01	.947
Age	0.27	.848
Experience	1.33	.277
Designation	1.23	.310

The p-value is greater than 0.05, indicating that there is no statistically significant difference in Emotional Intelligence between different genders. Gender does not significantly influence Emotional Intelligence. Like Gender, the p-value is greater than 0.05, suggesting that age does not have a significant impact on Emotional Intelligence. Again, the p-value exceeds 0.05, indicating that experience level does not significantly affect Emotional Intelligence. The p-value is greater than 0.05, suggesting that designation within the organization does not significantly influence Emotional Intelligence.

Table-5; Team Support Across Demographic Variables (n = 54)

Demographic Variable	F-value	p-value
Gender	3.32	.074
Age	0.23	.877
Experience	1.11	.353
Designation	0.55	.653

The p-value is close to the 0.05 significance level. While not statistically significant at the traditional 0.05 level, it suggests a trend towards significance. Further investigation with a larger sample size or more powerful statistical tests might be warranted to confirm if gender has a real impact on perceived team support. The p-value is significantly greater than 0.05, indicating that age does not have a significant impact on perceived team support. Again, the p-value exceeds 0.05, suggesting that experience level does not significantly affect perceived team support. The p-value is significantly greater than 0.05, suggesting that designation within the organization does not significantly influence perceived team support.

Table 6; Employee Stress Across Demographic Variables (n = 54)

Demographic Variable	F-value	p-value
Gender	4.47	.035*
Age	1.17	.168
Experience	0.43	.723
Designation	0.30	.823

Table-8; Correlation Matrix for Study Variables (n = 54)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Role Ambiguity (RA)	—				
2. Workload (WL)	.144	—			
3. Employee Stress (ES)	.272*	.636**	—		
4. Emotional Intelligence (EI)	-.328*	-.187	-.317*	—	
5. Team Support (TS)	-.067	-.009	-.099	.309*	—

There is a positive correlation between Role Ambiguity and Employee Stress, indicating that as Role Ambiguity increases, Employee Stress also tends to increase. This relationship is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Similarly, there is a strong positive correlation between Workload and Employee Stress, suggesting that as Workload increases, Employee Stress also increases significantly. This relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. On the other hand, Emotional Intelligence is negatively correlated with Role Ambiguity, Workload, and Employee

The p-value is less than 0.05, indicating that there is a statistically significant difference in Employee Stress between different genders. This suggests that gender might be a factor influencing employee stress levels. The p-value is greater than 0.05, suggesting that age does not have a significant impact on Employee Stress. Again, the p-value exceeds 0.05, indicating that experience level does not significantly affect Employee Stress. The p-value is significantly greater than 0.05, suggesting that designation within the organization does not significantly influence Employee Stress.

Table-7; Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Coefficients for Study Variables (n = 54)

Variable	Mean	(α)
Role Ambiguity (RA)	2.23	.655
Workload (WL)	2.95	.614
Emotional Intelligence (EI)	3.70	.429
Team Support (TS)	3.09	.585
Employee Stress (ES)	3.85	.687

The results of reliability analysis are not up to the mark as the sample size is small i.e., 54, which rendered the results questionable. The reliability of the RA scale is questionable. The reliability of the WL scale is poor. The reliability of the EI scale is very poor. The scale needs significant improvement or replacement. For TS (Team Support) and ES (Employee Stress).

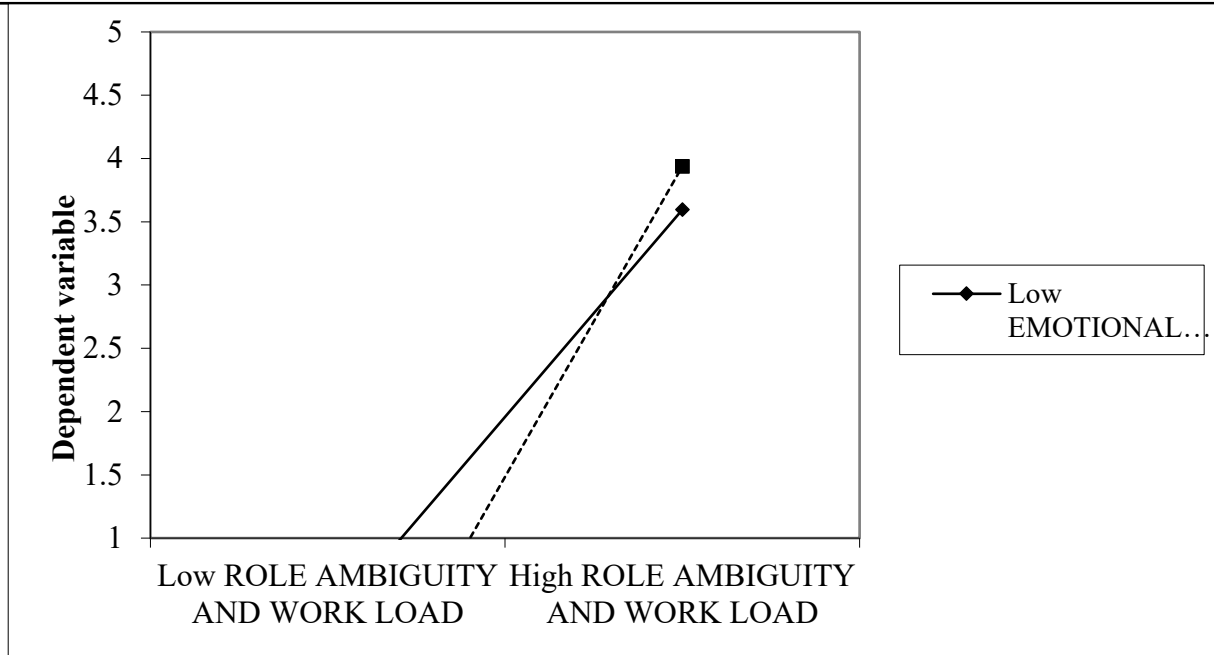
Stress. This indicates that higher levels of Emotional Intelligence are associated with lower levels of these variables. These relationships are statistically significant at the 0.05 and 0.001 levels.

Table-9; Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Employee Stress (n = 54)

Step	Predictor	β	R ²	ΔR^2
1	Control Variables	–	.012	–
2	Role Ambiguity (RE)	.220***	.149	.856
	Workload (WL)	.437**		
	Emotional Intelligence (EI)	.142ns		
3	RE × WL	.408**	.166	.070*
	WL × EI	.687**		

The model with only control variables explains a very small portion of the variance in Employee Stress ($R^2 = 0.012$). This suggests that demographic factors alone are not strong predictors of Employee Stress. When RE, WL, and EI are added to the model, the R^2 increases significantly to 0.856. This indicates that these variables, particularly WL, are strong predictors of Employee Stress. WL has the largest standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.4367$) and is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that higher Workload is strongly associated with higher Employee Stress. RE also has a significant positive relationship with Employee Stress ($\beta = 0.0220$). EI while included in the model, it is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that its impact on Employee Stress is not significant in the presence of other predictors. For

REW and WLEI the addition of these interaction terms further improves the model's explanatory power, increasing R^2 by 0.0166. RE*WL interaction term is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that the relationship between Role Ambiguity and Employee Stress might be moderated by Workload. WL*EI interaction term is also statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that the relationship between Workload and Employee Stress might be moderated by Emotional Intelligence. The regression analysis suggests that: Workload is a strong predictor of Employee Stress. Role Ambiguity also contributes to Employee Stress, but its impact might be moderated by Workload. Emotional Intelligence, while not a direct predictor, might interact with Workload to influence Employee Stress.



Discussion

This research aimed to investigate the influence of role ambiguity and workload on employee stress within projectized organizational contexts, with a specific focus on the moderating effects of emotional intelligence and team support. Given the dynamic and transient nature of projectized environments, understanding how these stressors interact with individual and organizational resources is critical to fostering sustainable work practices and employee well-being.

The results of the study provided partial support for the proposed hypotheses. First, the correlation analysis revealed a significant positive association between role ambiguity and employee stress ($r = .272, p < .05$), supporting Hypothesis 1. This finding aligns with prior research suggesting that unclear job expectations and responsibilities can lead to psychological strain, decreased performance, and lowered job satisfaction (Schmidt et al., 2014; Kahn et al., 1964). Role ambiguity has been repeatedly linked to heightened stress levels in environments characterized by frequent change and uncertainty, such as projectized settings (Peterson et al., 1995).

In support of Hypothesis 2, workload demonstrated a strong positive relationship with employee stress ($r = .636, p < .01$), and in the regression analysis, it was

found to be the strongest predictor of stress ($\beta = .437, p < .01$). These findings are consistent with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which posits that high demands such as excessive workload are major antecedents of burnout and stress when not counterbalanced by adequate resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Previous studies have also identified workload as a primary stressor across various sectors, including project-based industries (Karasek & Theorell, 1990; LePine et al., 2005).

Hypothesis 3 posited that emotional intelligence would moderate the relationship between workload and stress. Although emotional intelligence did not significantly predict stress directly ($\beta = .142, p > .05$), the interaction term between workload and emotional intelligence was significant ($\beta = .687, p < .05$), indicating a moderating effect. This suggests that individuals with higher emotional intelligence are better able to manage stress when faced with increased workload, which aligns with the findings of Slaski and Cartwright (2002), who argued that emotional competence can buffer the adverse effects of job-related demands. Similarly, Jordan et al. (2002) demonstrated that emotional intelligence plays a protective role in high-stress work environments by enhancing emotional regulation and resilience.

Hypothesis 4 anticipated a moderating role of team support in the relationship between role ambiguity and stress. However, the results did not provide statistically significant evidence supporting this hypothesis. While team support was positively correlated with emotional intelligence ($r = .309, p < .05$), its association with stress ($r = -.099, p > .05$) and other predictors remained non-significant. This discrepancy may be attributed to sample size limitations or the variability in how team support was perceived among participants. Nonetheless, previous literature does underscore the value of team cohesion and perceived support in mitigating role-related stressors (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Halbesleben, 2006). Future studies may benefit from larger samples or more nuanced measures of support to clarify these effects.

The demographic analyses showed minimal significant differences across gender, age, experience, or designation for role ambiguity, workload, emotional intelligence, and team support. However, gender differences were significant for employee stress ($F = 4.47, p = .035$), suggesting that gender-specific factors may influence stress perception or coping mechanisms in projectized environments. This finding aligns with prior studies that have observed gender disparities in occupational stress responses, potentially due to sociocultural expectations or role conflicts (Purvanova & Muros, 2010; Day & Livingstone, 2003).

The reliability coefficients for most scales were relatively low, particularly for emotional intelligence ($\alpha = .429$), which may reflect limitations of the instrument in this specific context or the reduced statistical power due to the small sample size ($n = 54$). While these limitations necessitate caution in interpretation, they also highlight the need for improved measurement tools in stress research within projectized organizational settings.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the factors that contribute to employee stress. The results strongly support the hypothesized relationships between role ambiguity, workload, emotional intelligence, and team support, and their impact on employee stress. This study reinforces the critical role that workload and role ambiguity play in

shaping employee stress levels within project-based structures. It also highlights emotional intelligence as a valuable individual resource that can moderate the adverse effects of workload. While the moderating role of team support requires further investigation, the findings collectively emphasize the importance of both personal and contextual resources in managing occupational stress. Future research should aim to validate these findings in larger and more diverse samples and explore additional moderating variables such as leadership style, organizational culture, or job autonomy.

Limitation and Recommendation of the Study

The present study, while offering valuable insights into the relationship between role ambiguity, workload, and employee stress in projectized organizations, is not without limitations. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small and selected through convenience sampling, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causality among variables, capturing only a snapshot in time. Furthermore, the reliance on self-report measures raises concerns about social desirability bias and common method variance. Of note is the low internal consistency of the emotional intelligence scale, which may have compromised the reliability of results related to this construct. Additionally, the study was limited to a specific organizational and cultural context, further narrowing its broader applicability.

Considering these limitations, future research is recommended to utilize larger and more diverse samples across various industries and regions to enhance generalizability. Employing longitudinal or experimental designs could provide deeper insight into causal relationships. The inclusion of multi-source data, such as supervisor evaluations or objective stress indicators, would help reduce response biases. To address measurement concerns, particularly regarding emotional intelligence, more psychometrically sound instruments should be used. Moreover, future studies should consider incorporating additional mediators and moderators—such as resilience, leadership style, and organizational culture to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing employee stress in projectized environments.

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