When Employees Engage In Workplace Incivility? The Effects of Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict

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***Abstract*-The current study aims to determine the relationships between role stressors and workplace incivility. Another aim of the study is to analyze the causal relationship between role stressors – role ambiguity and role conflict. Data were collected from 108 service sector employees. The analyses found that role conflict as a dimension of role stressors effect workplace incivility positively, and role ambiguity has no significant effect on workplace incivility. Results of the regression analyses it was found that role ambiguity has not any causal effect on role conflict.**

***Index terms* - Role Ambiguity, Role Conflict, Role Stressors, Workplace Incivility**

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years the undesirable behaviors, especially workplace incivility has been rise in the organizations (Remington and Darden, 2002; Cortina et al., 2001). This is a problem in social context, but a critical problem in managerial perspective because it is associated with employee turnover, absenteeism, lowered profitability and performance. So the organizations must define the underlying causes of uncivil behaviors to reduce its occurrence.

A research indicated that in the 21th century the stress in the organizations is the one of the chief problems in the workplace (Keichel, 1993). Role stressors are the situations that cause people to experience stress in an organization. Roles stressors generally are accepted in the literature by two types; role ambiguity and role conflict. Role ambiguity is lack of necessary information available to a given organizational position and role conflict is an incompatibility of requirements and expectations form the role, and that conflict directly affect the role performance (Rizzo et al., 1970).

The aim of the present study is to provide empirical evidence for the proposition that role stressors increases service sector employees' tendency to expose uncivil behaviors in workplace.In the study, a theoretical framework for workplace incivility and role stressors – role ambiguity and role conflict – was provided. Then the methodology and the findings of the survey were presented. At the end, the findings of the study were discussed. Along with these several suggestions to reduce workplace incivility will be produced.

II. THE ORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A.Workplace Incivility

In today's business world there are several mistreatments in organizations, and these have been described, modeled and analyzed in various conceptual forms, as counterproductive work behavior, violent behavior, antisocial work behavior, deviant behavior, mobbing and etc. The workplace incivility is the one of these mistreatments in the organizations. There are some difference between these behaviors according to the intensity and the intention. To clearly describe the concept of workplace incivility, it is important to focus on the intensity of the deviant behavior and the intention to harm the target. According to the Anderson and Pearson (1999: 457), workplace incivility is a low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm its target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. According to Roberts et al. (2011: 2) uncivil behaviors are considered mild, deviant, and ambiguous.

Uncivil behaviors in the organizations lead to a variety of undesirable organizational outcomes like decreased job satisfaction (Lim and Cortina, 2005); organizational commitment (Kim et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2012); citizenship behavior (Taylor et al., 2012; Porath and Erez, 2007) and increased burnout (Kim et al., 2013), turnover (Lim and Teo, 2009); deviance (Penney and Spector, 2005). So it is an important problem for organizations, and it is significant for researchers to identify the ways to solve this problem.

B. Role Stressors

Researchers do not have a consensus on whether role ambiguity and role conflict are separate constructs or a common concept within the context of work factors that lead to the role stress (Gregson and Wendeil, 1994: 108). While some researchers considered these concepts as two separate constructs (Rizzo, et al., 1970; Rebele and Michaels, 1990; Acker, 2004), some of others have treated them as one construct called role stress (Rasch and Harrell, 1990). In the study of McGee and his friends (1989) treating role ambiguity and role conflict as separate construct instead of combining them into stress resulted in better solutions. So in this study, role ambiguity and role conflict have been treated as two different types of role stress.

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C. Role Ambiguity

Role theory states that role ambiguity (Kahn et al., 1964) is the lack of necessary information available to a given organizational position (Rizzo et al., 1970: 151). Role ambiguity is defined as an uncertainty about what actions to take to fulfill a role (Peterson, et al., 1995: 430). According to the service sector employees Walker and his colleagues (1975: 33) defined role ambiguity that "occurs when the salesperson does not feel he has the necessary information to perform his role adequately, when he is uncertain about what the members of his role set expect of him."

According to Rizzo and his colleagues (1970) role ambiguity increase the probability that a person will be dissatisfied with his role, will experience anxiety, and will exhibit less performance.

D. Role Conflict

The concept of role conflict was first investigated by Kahn and his colleagues in 1964. They published a book about organizational stress and they focused on role conflict and role ambiguity as the results of organizational stress. Since 1964 the concept has become the main issue of hundreds of studies on the fields of management.

There are too many different definitions of the concept of role conflict. It is explained as the incompatibility between one or more roles within an employee's role set, such that fulfilling one role would make fulfilling the others more difficult (Weatherly and Tansik, 1993). Some researchers defined the role conflict as a situation in which an employee is expected to play incompatible roles (Lundberg et al., 1970: 185). According to Katz and Kahn (1977: 202) role conflict is an incompatibility between two or more roles held by the same person. As the definitions of role conflict, there are different types of role conflict as intra-sender conflict, inter-sender conflict, inter-role conflict, and person-role conflict (Siegall and Cummings, 1995: 69).

Walker and his colleagues (1975: 33) focused on service sector employees and defined role conflict that "exists when a salesperson believes that the expectations and demands of two or more role set members are incompatible."

According to the researches the consequences of role ambiguity and role conflict are usually similar. So role ambiguity and role conflict lead to a variety of negative outcomes including reduced job satisfaction (Sawyer, 1992; Sager, 1994: 75), self-efficacy (Jex and Gudanowski, 1992), adaptability (Scott and Bruce, 1994), organizational performance (Singh, 1993; Rizzo et al., 1970), organizational commitment (Rizzo et al., 1970; Acker, 2004; Sager, 1994: 75), and increased intention to leave (Sager, 1994: 75); burnout (Perrewe et al., 2002; TanovaveKaratepe, 2004). These negative outcomes of role stressors are more crucial for service sectors. Because contact employees on service sector act as "boundary spanners" between the firm and its customers. The contact employees who experience role ambiguity and role conflict are likely to exhibit decreased work performance and decreased service quality (Schneider, 1980).

E. Role Ambiguity Causes Role Conflict

The role ambiguity and role conflict as the role stressors has been subject to several studies. In literature there are lot of studies that examines the antecedents and the consequents of role stressors. Moreover limited studies focused on the causal relationship between role ambiguity and role conflict (Sager, 1994: 76; Johnston et al. 1990) According to the casual relationship between role stressors, when the employee perceive greater role ambiguity in the job, he will perceive more role conflict. In the light of this literature, the hypothesis below has been developed:

H1: Role ambiguity will be positively related to role conflict.

F. The Effects of Role Stressors on Workplace Incivility

There are many studies about the consequences of incivility (Cortina et al., 2001; Abid et al., 2015), but there is limited study about the antecedents of incivility (Roberts et al., 2011: 1). Although in sociology, psychology, social psychology, and management literatures there are several studies about role stressors – role ambiguity and role conflict. The studies which investigate the effects of role stressors on workplace incivility was limited. Moreover, there are no study based on this relationship on Turkish context.

Fox and Spector (2005) researched the relationship between job stress and counterproductive work behaviors (CWB). Bruk-Lee and Spector (2006) demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between social stressors and CWB. Bowling and Eschlemand (2010) reported that role stressors are the causes of CWB. Although there are variety of studies about role stressors and CWB, there is only few researches that analyze the effects of role stressors on workplace incivility (Roberts et al., 2011; Taylor and Kluemper, 2012).

So, on the basis of the theory and the researches discussed above, we anticipate that employees who experience high levels of role stressors will exhibit more uncivil behavior.

H2: Role ambiguity will be positively related to workplace incivility.

H3: Role conflict will be positively related to workplace incivility.

III. METHOD

A. Sample and Procedures

The study sample consisted of service sector employees in an urban area in Turkey. A questionnaire including the scales was administered to a sample of 145 service sector employees. Following the examination of questionnaires collected in terms of data losses and extreme

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values, 37 of them were excluded from the analysis. Thus, the study sample consisted of 108 employees. Participants' age range from 18 to 55 years with an average of 26 years. 85 of them (%79) were male, and 84 of them (%78) were single.

B. Measures

Original measures translated from English to Turkish. All the questionnaire items were on a 5-point Likert response scale ranging 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). We used role stressors scale developed by Rizzo et al. (1970). This scale measures role ambiguity by 6 items and role conflict by 8 items. Workplace incivility was assessed with 7-item scale developed by Cortina et al. (2001). The coefficient alpha reliability for scales are 0.70, 0.64 and 0.85, respectively. So, all measures displayed good reliabilities.

C. Results

Descriptive statistics for the variables, and inter-correlations among the variables are presented in Table 1.The role ambiguity and role conflict averages of participants were found to be 2.34 (sd=0.69) and 3.20 (sd=0.62), respectively. And the workplace incivility average of the participants was 2.07 (sd=0.84). the results indicates that majority of participant had the tendency to experience role conflict more than role ambiguity and workplace incivility.

According to the results generated from Table 1, workplace incivility was positively and significantly correlated with role conflict (r=0.309). Hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 were not supported based on these correlation coefficients, because there is no significant correlation between role ambiguity and role conflict, and between role ambiguity and workplace incivility.

Table 1.Descriptive Statistics and Inter-Correlation Matrix

	Mean	SD	1	2
1. Role Ambiguity	2.34	.69		
2. Role Conflict	3.20	.62	.101	
3. Workplace Incivility	2.07	.84	.145	.309**

**p<0.01, n=108

In variance analysis, there is a difference determined between male and female employees' workplace incivility. The results of t test were shown in Table 2. According to the independent sample t test result males expose more uncivil behaviors than females (t=-2.478; p<0.05).

Table 2. T-Test Results of Participants

Gender	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Female	1,7727	,50201	59,122	-2,478	,016
Male	2,1296	,88830			

To test the third hypothesis of the study, where role conflict was hypothesized to relate to the workplace incivility, regression analysis were conducted. By the regression analysis it was examined the predictability of role conflict on workplace incivility. The results of the analysis were significant (F=11.203, p<0.01). Role conflict accounted for approximately %10 of the total variance of workplace incivility, and role conflict effects the workplace incivility positively (β=0.309, p<0.01). According to the Tolerance and VIF values there is no multi-collinearity problem. Results of the regression analysis were showed in Table 3.

Table 3. Regression Analysis Results

	R	R^2	Adj. R^2	F	Sig.
Model	,309	,096	,087	11,203	,001
	β	t	Sig.		
Role Conflict	,309	3,347	,001		

IV. CONCLUSION

While number of studies demonstrated that role stressors is related to various negative organizational outcomes, there are limited study about its relationship with workplace incivility. The aim of this study was to define the relationship between role stressors and the workplace incivility. According to the literature workplace incivility is a low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm its target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. So the organizations must define the underlying causes of uncivil behaviors to reduce its occurrence.

In recent study the results of the analyses showed that there is not a causal relationship between role ambiguity and role conflict. Role ambiguity has no significant effect on workplace incivility, but role conflict effects workplace incivility positively. So when employees in service sector perceived that someone in the organization expected him to play incompatible roles, his tendency to expose uncivil behavior will increase.

On the other hand, it was statistically important that no significant difference was found between the variables except gender. According to variance analysis, there was a difference determined between male and female employees' workplace incivility, that males expose more uncivil behaviors than females.

The current study was designed as a pioneer study for more comprehensive studies. In further studies the result of this study can be extended by improving its results and adding different variables to the study. More contributions may be made by carrying out research on different sample groups or adding different variables, like personality, organizational commitment or perceived organizational justice.

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