

Role conflict and role ambiguity concerning Physical Education teachers in private health centers

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Abstract: In the last decade, there has been a development in the field of exercise and health. These health centers, which offer a variety of dance aerobic programs, need professional trainers whose engagement in these programs has become their main source of income. Role conflict is a situation in which a person experiences an inconsistency of the directions or demands that correspond in a role. Role ambiguity refers to the uncertainty of an employee in relation to his/her job responsibilities and the way he/she has to carry them out and it occurs when he/she does not have a clear picture concerning goals, responsibilities and ways of achievement, while at the same time he/she is aware of this uncertainty. The aim of this research was to examine the levels of role ambiguity and role conflict concerning P.E. teachers/trainers of group aerobics programs in private gyms and investigate whether there are any differences after the application of an intervention program on the clarification of certain terms. The sample of the research included 198 P.E. teachers (76 men & 122 women) with an average age $38, 76 \pm 6.54$ years and experience on guiding aerobic programs in a gym $6, 5 \pm 2.31$ years. The instruments used for the measurement of role conflict and role ambiguity were the role conflict and role ambiguity scales (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970), were adapted and calibrated for the Greek population by Koustelios and Kousteliou (1998). The intervention program concerning P.E. teachers/trainers of group aerobics programs lasted 12 consecutive weeks with 60 minute sessions, twice a week. For the statistical analysis of the data, the method used was the Reliability analysis, Correlation and Repeated Measures Anova analysis, to investigate any differences in relation to the role ambiguity and role conflict before and after the end of the intervention program. The results of the research showed the intervention program had a statistically significant influence in the two factors that were examined –“role ambiguity” and “role conflict”- as concerns the P.E. teachers/trainers of group aerobics programs on whom it was applied.

Keywords: role conflict, role ambiguity, physical education teachers, private health center

1. Introduction

In the last decade, there has been a development in the field of exercise and health. In 2019, there were almost 210,000 gyms/health centers which hosted about 184 million sportspeople and with an overall income of \$96.7 million (International Health Racquet and Sports club Association, 2020). These health centers, which offer a variety of dance aerobic programs, need professional trainers whose engagement in these programs has become their main source of income (Welch, 2003). All these P.E. teachers or trainers of group aerobic

programs offered in gyms are agents of specific actions which aim at a more intact function of these institutes and the achievement of certain goals. Their behavior is not casual or arbitrary but dictated by certain rules and anticipated by the specific post owned by each teacher or trainer. The content of their role is defined by mainly customary norms, binding for each employee.

The effectiveness of a gym greatly depends on the combination of roles enacted and developed by its employees, in accordance of its function. Any conflict of ambiguity in the roles played by any member of the staff puts in danger the smooth function of a gym as well as its effectiveness (Koustelios & Tsigilis, 2005; Zhang & Parker 2019). Conflict and ambiguity of roles are considered important factors which influence teachers and trainers' psychological, spiritual and physical health negatively, while trying to fulfill their duties.

Role conflict occurs when the actions of a person or group are inhibitory factors for the desired actions of another person or group, which leads to disagreement between them in relation to better achieving their goals (Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Kantas, 1995). An employee also experiences conflict of roles when his/her expected behavior contrasts his/her personal values or varied demands are given to the same person simultaneously. In addition, conflict of roles occurs when different persons or groups that interact with a specific employee (e.g. trainees, colleagues, staff, and director) have contradictory expectations from his/her behavior (Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Farrell, 2001; Koustelios & Kousteliou, 1998; Lichtenthaler & Fischbach, 2019). The above definitions make clear that conflict of roles is a situation in which a person experiences an inconsistency of the directions or demands that correspond in a role (Layn & Atarwaman, 2020).

Conflict within a role can be created by the multiple demands of a labor post e.g. when two different persons have different demands or expectations from an employee. Conflict outside a role can be caused when a person has to deal with different demands coming from his/her workplace and his/her social or family environment (e.g. cancellation of holidays due to word overload). Furthermore, role conflict can emerge when a person has contradictory expectations or demands from an employee (e.g. gives him/her assignments which are considered contradictory) or when an employee is faced with demands that are in conflict with his/her personal values. When the demands of a role are not adequately described, employees may be found in a negative affective state. This condition affects their well-being as well as their intention to act in ways that could avail the institute they work for even beyond their role expectations. Such an impact is even more obvious in group work, where employees experience role ambiguity as a general climate (Manas, Diaz-Funez, Pecino, Lopez-Liria, Padilla, & Aguilar-Parra, 2018).

A special form of role conflict is the one that occurs between the demands of a job and those of family life. This problem could emerge to any employee, especially one-parent families or families with children, when both husband and wife have their separate careers. Such a conflict is created when children are ill or when school activities demand parental participation. The fact is that the conflict between job and family affects mostly women, as women are mainly in charge of children upbringing (Yong Cheen Ee, Tech, & Yen, 2017).

Role ambiguity refers to the uncertainty of an employee in relation to his/her job responsibilities and the way he/she has to carry them out (Koustelios, Theodorakis, & Goulimaris, 2004) and it occurs when he/she does not have a clear picture concerning goals, responsibilities and ways of achievement, while at the same time he/she is aware of this uncertainty (Tun & Kutanis, 2009; Koustelios et al., 2004). Various researchers support that role ambiguity influences job satisfaction and professional fatigue while underlining that there should be an examination of any observable differentiations through the application of special educational programs that would inform employees on their responsibilities in their workplace (the gym) and would improve their self-effectiveness and performance (Chang & Hancock, 2003; Shen, 2005).

Role ambiguity and role conflict are frequent occurrences in gyms, where a certain disharmony or even aggressiveness is often observed not only among P.E. colleagues but also between teachers and executives or managers and sometimes among trainees. Organizational weaknesses, differences of mentality, differentiations in post specifications or educational level often create a confusion of responsibilities and lead to intense disagreements, confusion and/or inaction. In addition, it has been ascertained that role conflict and ambiguity influences both the performance of group aerobic program trainers and the reputation of a gym as a whole. Several scientific studies agree that role conflict and ambiguity (Burke & Greenglass, 1995a; Cravens, Grant, & Moncrief, 2001; Lichtenthaler & Fischbach, 2018; Low, Cravens, Grant, & Moncrief, 2001) are important organizational factors which lead to labor stress, reduced professional performance, job fatigue, diminution of self-achievement and ineffectiveness in gyms. A research by Theodorakis, Kouli and Koustelios (2003), with a sample of 97 Physical Education teachers and dance aerobics instructors in private gyms discovered that the participants experienced moderate levels of role conflict and high levels of role ambiguity and job security.

In a more recent research Robbins and Judge (2019), stated that "Role ambiguity means that the defined behaviors of the employees are not clear". According to Mishra (2015) "Role ambiguity is reported when roles are not clear and definite", while Chiocchio et al. (2015) stated that role ambiguity refers to lack of clarity concerning the expected behaviors in a specific job post.

The aim of this research was to examine the levels of role ambiguity and role conflict concerning P.E. teachers/trainers of group aerobics programs in private gyms and investigate whether there are any differences after the application of an intervention program on the clarification of certain terms.

2. Methods & Procedure

2.1 Sample

The subjects for the present study were teachers of physical education, who were specialised in dance aerobics programs. More specifically, the sample of the research included 198 P.E. teachers (76 men & 122 women) with an average age 38, 76 ± 6.54 years and experience on guiding programs in a gym 6, 5 ± 2.31 years.

2.2 Instruments

The instruments used for the measurement of role conflict and role ambiguity were the role conflict and role ambiguity scales (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970), were adapted and calibrated for the Greek population by Koustelios and Kousteliou (1998). The construction of the two scales was based on the theory of roles and the opinion of the classical organizational theory that every labor post in an organizational structure must have clear labor demands.

The scale that measures role ambiguity includes six sentences (e.g. I know exactly what the others expect of me) and examines the ambiguity of instructions, responsibilities and goals concerning a teacher in his/her workplace. The answers are given on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1=absolutely false to 7 absolutely true.

The role conflict scale consists of eight sentences (e.g. in my job, I am asked to do contradictory things) and examines the conflict of roles in a workplace. The grading takes place through a Likert type scale with seven gradations for each sentence ranging from 1=absolutely false to 7=absolutely true.

Concerning the role ambiguity scale, there was an estimation of the mean of the answers to the six sentences which was called *degree of role clarity* (from 1=absolute ambiguity to 7=absolute clarity), while role conflict scale there was an estimation of the mean of the answers to the eight sentences which was called *degree of role conflict* (from 1=absolute lack of role conflict to 7=absolute presence of role conflict).

2.3. Procedure

The intervention program concerning P.E. teachers/trainers of group aerobics programs lasted 12 consecutive weeks with 60 minute sessions, twice a week. In addition, the researcher gave lectures on the ambiguity and conflict of roles in a workplace, which were followed by discussions, updates and guidance through relative instructions and leaflets on the employees' obligations and duties as well as their responsibilities in their workplace.

The researcher communicated with the managers of the acknowledged gyms existing in the town of Thessaloniki and informed them on the aim of the research. Furthermore, she attended the programs of the gyms during the 1st week of the research, contacted the P.E. teachers/trainers who dealt with group aerobic programs and updated them on the aim of the intervention program. Also, during the 1st week of the program, the participants filled in questionnaires concerning organizational factors and the conflict and ambiguity of roles in their workplace.

The questionnaires were anonymous and participation was voluntary. It was stressed that the participants' answers were not connected with their professional development, that there were no correct or wrong answers and that the results were going to be used for purely scientific goals. In addition, it was stated that any demographic characteristics (gender, somatometric features, age, education, guidance programs, hours of work per day and per week, years of occupation in gyms) would be used exclusively for the purposed of the research. The anonymous questionnaires were filled in by the participants during the 1st week and after the completion of the intervention, in the 12th week.

2.4. Statistical analysis

For the statistical analysis of the data, the method used was the Reliability analysis, Correlation and Repeated Measures Anova analysis, to investigate any differences in relation to the role ambiguity and role conflict before and after the end of the intervention program. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

3. Results

The Reliability analysis showed that the internal cohesion indices of the factors of both scales ranged on satisfactory levels (Cronbach's α was from .72 to .77 in the initial measurements and from .81 to .84 in the final) (Table 1.). Similarly, a research by Koustelios and Kousteliou (1998) reported a .71 credibility index for role conflict and a .73 for role ambiguity (Cook, Hepworth, Wall, & Warr, 1981; Koustelios, 2001).

As concerns the differences in the factors of the two questionnaires after the end of the intervention program, the fluctuation analysis of the Repeated Measures Anova for the factor "role ambiguity" showed a statistically significant difference between the measurements [$F_{(1,196)} = 14,22$; $p < .001$], since the means was low ($M=1.98$) in the initial measurement and had a statistically significant increase in the final ($M=4.37$), in the seven-grade scale of the questionnaire concerning role ambiguity.

Respectively, concerning role conflict the fluctuation analysis of the Repeated Measures Anova showed a statistically significant difference between the measurements [$F_{(1,196)} = 8,37$; $p < .01$], since there was a statistically significant reduction in the means of the factor "role conflict" which was $M=5.26$ in the initial measurement and $M=3.07$ in the final one, after the end of the program. The results are shown analytically in Table 1.

Table 1: Means and Typical Deviations of the factors "role ambiguity and "role conflict" and statistically significant differences between the measurements, before and after the end of the intervention.

Factors	Initial Measurement		Final Measurement		α Cronbach's
	\bar{X}	T.D.	\bar{X}	D	
1. Role ambiguity	1.98	(.92)	4.37***	(.83)	.77/.81
2. Role Conflict	5.26	(1.58)	3.07**	(1.18)	.72/.84

Note: statistically significant differences *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

4. Discussion

The results of the research showed the intervention program had a statistically significant influence in the two factors that were examined –"role ambiguity" and "role conflict"- as concerns the P.E. teachers/trainers of group aerobics programs on whom it was applied. More specifically, in the initial measurement the participants had a low conception of role ambiguity in their job, which increased after the intervention program as shown by the means ($M=4,37$) of the seven-grade scale of the questionnaire, with seven being the absolute role clarity. Afshan, Nauheen and Madiha (2021), recorded that the lack of role ambiguity and role conflict is related positively to the employees' devotion and commitment to the institute they work for. A research by Theodorakis, Kouli and Kousteliou (2003), using a sample of aerobics trainers working in health and recreation centers, presented high levels of role ambiguity and moderate levels of role conflict. Role ambiguity could be due to ambiguous directions or ineffective communication and is related to the uncertainty caused by labor demands or the way others (colleagues, trainees, managers) expect one to behave at work (Argyris, Koustelios, Digelidis, & Chroni, 2005; Papastylianou & Polychronopoulos, 2007). Lloyd, King and Chenoweth (2002) supported that organizational factors or role conflict and role ambiguity contribute to the process of professional fatigue, which in turn is connected to low job satisfaction. Shen (2005), in two meta-analyses of his researches, recorded a negative relation between role ambiguity/role conflict and job satisfaction. Accordingly, a research by Chang and Hancock (2003) showed that job satisfaction is negatively connected to role ambiguity and professional stress. Koustelios, Theodorakis and Goulmaris (2004) report that several scientific researches manifest role ambiguity and conflict as sources of professional discontent while one of their researches, with a sample of P.E. teachers, shows that role conflict and role ambiguity are related to certain labor dimensions as well as to the nature of work itself, the supervision and the workplace as a whole.

A research by Argyraki and Kaloupsi (2011) verified that the degree of job satisfaction, in addition to its significant relation with various behaviors at work, has a significant influence on human health (mental and physical) as well as on the family life of the employees. Role conflict and role ambiguity are important prognostic factors of professional worry, professional stress and are negatively connected to job satisfaction. The results of a research by Zhou, Zeng, Hu, Xi and Tan (2014), recorded that professional anxiety had a statistically important relation to role ambiguity, role conflict and role overload. Role ambiguity had a significant positive influence on chronic worry and professional stress. A similar research by Yfanti, Getsios, Naka, Mastrapa, Tsigirika and Petropoulou (2012), investigated role ambiguity and conflict concerning health professionals. The results supported that the high levels of role ambiguity and conflict observed among the medical and nursing staff could lead to reduced effectiveness and decisiveness in health services. To reduce the degree of role ambiguity and conflict an administration should introduce cross-scientific programs in order to

provide quality care that focuses on the patient (Rovithis, Linardakis, Rikos, Merkouris, Patiraki, & Philalithis, 2017).

An organization would be more effective if its employees were more eager to perform beyond their prescribed obligations (extra-role performance). It is obvious that when there are high professional demands, employees should be willing to offer in more personal and affective ways than the generally expected goals (Rodríguez-Montalbán et al., 2014). According to Manas, Diaz-Funez, Pecino, Lopez-Liria, Padilla and Aguilar-Parra (2018), an institute or a gym which wishes to extract extra-role performance and devotion by its employees should focus on assigning them with tasks that are accompanied with more comprehensive information. As a result, the employees would have the time to prepare themselves adequately, organize structures and control changes, which in turn would improve role clarity and help by the administration.

5. Conclusion

The results of the present research reinforce the conviction that providing employees with printed guides or lectures that define their responsibilities in gyms as well as in any other organization, enterprise or institute will clarify their role and responsibilities and will help employers to acquire a more devoted staff.

In conclusion, it would be beneficial if health and sports center administrations minimized role ambiguity and role conflict and provided their employees with clearer instructions concerning their roles and responsibilities, in order to enhance their job satisfaction and commitment and reassure the better performance of the institute.

6. References

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