FACTORS CAUSING LINE AND STAFF CONFLICTS REGARDING HR ROLES: EVIDENCE FROM BANGLADESH

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Abstract- Organizational conflict is an issue of concern all over the world. This paper aims at identifying the factors that cause conflict between line and staff regarding HR roles in the enterprises of Bangladesh. A list of factors which are responsible for the conflict between these groups was identified from the literature review, which was discussed and proliferated by the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The FGD was again used to structure and validate an inventory titled "Causes of Line and Staff Conflict" which was administered over 150 respondents based on the incidental sample technique for data reduction. Finally, this study found that there are four components which are organizational structure and environment, individual differences, internal dynamics and external forces are responsible for line and staff conflict for HR roles. If there is proper distribution of power through an effective design of organization structure, regular orientation, informal meeting, HR seminar, HR counseling and consultancy hour provided and maintained by the enterprises, this study found it to be rational for an effective HRM practice as there will be minimum conflict between line and staff regarding HR roles.

Keywords-Conflict, conflict management, line and staff, line and staff conflict.

I. INTRODUCTION

The organization of any society inevitably influences on the economic system and growth. It determines the cost of various feasible actions as well as economic resource distribution. Although the theme goes back at least to Adam Smith, it has recently been the focus of historical, theoretical, social psychologist and the organizational behavioral researcher to handle and resolve conflict efficiently for the faster development of the organization and hence the economic growth of society. From the behavioral perspective, organization is defined as the collection of rights, privileges, obligations, and responsibilities that is delicately balanced over a period of time through conflict and conflict resolution [1]. As our organizations are structured by the conflict through grudges, rumors, grumbling, criticism, sarcasm, etc., it needs to be clearly pointed out the parties involved in the conflict and thereby the factors responsible for the conflict. Otherwise, the interactionist view of conflict will not actually work in the modern societal organization. Where this view believes that conflict is absolutely necessary for a group to perform effectively [2]. So, it is inevitable for the organization to find out the actors and factors for the conflict and conflict resolution. A strong theme in the literature on strategic HRM is that people management (HR) functions should be delegated to the line managers in organizations [3]. Meanwhile, there are also several studies found that line managers face difficulties playing people-management function [4]. From those studies there are several factors have been found which led this inefficiency. One of them is a conflict between line and staff. To point out the more specific reason, a longitudinal research conducted on the conflict between line and staff has found that there is a conflicting view of both managers about the HR roles, functions and responsibilities [5]. As a result, there appears to be a tension in the literature among the factors which are moderating the conflicts between these two groups in the organization. Moreover, a general consensus found in the literature that the conflict should be addressed as close as possible to the point of origin [6]. Furthermore, an exploratory research was conducted in Nepal [7] found that high developed organizations (HR responsibility delegated to the line managers) contribute positively in their performance than less developed organization (poorly designed HR responsibility to line managers). In this regard, a greater research is required to obtain the fuller understanding of the nature, characteristics and factors of conflict between line and staff regarding HR roles. Thus, this paper found it is to be rational to identify the factors which lead to the line and staff conflict for HR roles in the organization in Bangladesh.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Deriving line and staff positions

Line and staff are very significant issue in management. Though in some literatures they argue about the distinctions between line and staff definition and pointed out such differences are now insignificant because of decision making and authority differentials are disappeared [8]. But there are also considerable researches made on the distinction between line and staff position in the organization. The fact underlies that in the organization employees and managers are very confident about their concrete notion of line and staff [9]. Yet in some developed countries where decentralization is taken at the high place, works have been divisionalized at a very micro level, high level of

engagement of knowledge workers, independent work structure etc. made obsolete the distinction between line and staff. But in the developing countries where the industrialization is beginning to be structured, the mind-set of the employees and managers are inadequately metaphorized, and normal, but standard quality of literacy rate is far behind the expectation grew the importance of taking the differences in line and staff positions. In this study the definition is taken as a line function or position is one that directly advances an organization in its core work, which typically generates profits or revenue such as production, sales, marketing, etc. And a staff function or position supports the organization with specialized advisory and support functions such as human resources, accounting etc. [10].

B. Line and staff conflict

According to Oxford English Dictionary, conflict refers to a series of disagreement or argument, incompatibility between opinions, principles, etc. There are some frequently used words instead of conflict, such as- dispute, disagreement, incompatibility and differences in opinion to give a meaning of conflict. Line and staff conflict and can be defined as the disagreements, role differences, jealousy and incompatible opinions between line and staff position in an organization. Wright [5] suggested that line and staff managers are in conflict where they have differing views about what HR responsibilities are actually being developed. Organizations have long suffered from this conflict as the proliferation of staff-specialists in organizations, and ever greater separation of the responsibility for planning from the responsibility for performance. It has been implicitly assumed that the roots of such controversies lie in discrepancies between the perceptions or expectations held by staff role performers and relevant line role definers. So, if there are any discrepancies in the role definition, role expectation, disagreements, negative emotion, different opinions lies between line and staff can be called line and staff conflict.

C. Factors responsible for line and staff conflict

Line managers are performing a very effective role in formulating and managing human resources. In some context, it has been seen that line managers are the core of conducting HR related issues. Several studies have revealed this that managing human resources as a responsibility shared by line managers [11]. A research conducted by Brewster and Larsen [12] pointed out that there are five overlapping reasons for the assignment of HR issues to the line managers, i.e. the development of cost-centre or profit-centre based approaches; the need for a comprehensive approach to people management; the growing influence of service industries; increasing real time decision making; and changes in philosophy and organizational structure. These studies confirm that there is line management engagement in performing HR roles along with the staff position in the organization.

From many literatures, it is evident that the pivotal role of line managers' HR role in organizations is to identify the problem, problem solving and conflict resolution. Several studies have unearthed the HR role of line managers in conflict, fist, line managers can help prevent workplace conflict by performing a mentoring and coaching role [13], [6]. Line managers' coaching and mentoring to somewhat effective as they are closely looped with the operational employees and also as they have the primary information to handle grievances. Toner [14] described the key role that line managers played in managing people is mitigating employee grievances in non-union foreign owned multinationals. Conflict between line and staff in this regard has taken place where micro-management practice prevails, autocratic attitudes of managers and lack of delegation occurs. Whilst the positive thinkers accepted this type of conflict as natural as both positions do have differences in their roles' perception. The dissonance between their roles' perception and micro management intensifies when line managers take help from staff managers to resolve conflict because of the nature or the magnitude of complexity of the conflict. In fact, line managers should have the ability to differentiate the problems which they need to pass up the managerial hierarchy or to the staff for the formal conflict management mechanisms.

Second, a number of studies suggest that line managers may not fully implement organizational policies related to the management of people or HR roles. McGovern [15] identified that line managers are seen as being preoccupied with getting work tasks completed and therefore less concerned with the implementation of the HR related policies. Most of the cases line managers rest this action to be taken by HR center lead by staff managers. Moreover, line managers perform this process in an informal, ad hoc manner in the organization [16]. This process, which confront with the differences in policy making, implementation and standard practices because line managers are loosely coupled with formal restriction in performing HR roles.

Third is the problem of alignment, which disrupts the effective delivery of HR policies. The poor alignment between line managers and HR staff position held because of lack of HR training of line managers and the incentive structure [17]. Besides, there are many variables identified like- the degree of shared commitment between management and employees, decentralized teams and decision-making structures, individual reward system, job security, etc. On the other hand, HR specialist of HR managers believes that line managers are capable of both resolving conflicts directly and acting as conduits channeling

disputes to formal mechanisms [18]. Thus the perception about the ability of line managers to some extent is mismatched with the actual performance and hence a conflict between them.

Hodgetts [19] in his research found that when organization acquires higher complexity, line personnel alone become inadequate and thereby staff is required to perform. He also explains these two or more groups, thus, engage in conflict. Hence the Forth problem, the power distribution of groups may become another important notion for the conflict between line and staff. The group equilibrium theory attempts to explain how power can be distributed equitably among groups in any given social setting to avoid conflicts which could threaten the survival of the social setting. Each group pursues its own narrow self-interest and its interest may conflict with that of another. Although groups are not equal, but have some resources, which give them weight and lacerate in the scheme of things [20].

The power distribution, thus creates a conflict between line and staff. Moreover, the fifth problem found form several researches those have identified the conflict arise because line managers have little desire to perform HR roles.

The reasons they identified are 1) they do give little importance to the HRM than their functional activities, 2) they do not have sufficient capacity to perform HR roles, 3) they lack sufficient HR competencies, and 4) they need but do not always receive support from HR managers to perform their HR roles effectively. Because of these problems they do not upright their desire to perform the function of HRM in their respective department.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study is eventually required for the effective management of conflict between line and staff in any organization. This study is based on the predictive theory in general where there is an attempt to explain the connection between conflict escalation between line and staff regarding HR roles. From any view of conflict understandings, say as, the believer of the traditional view of conflict, they need to know the factors affecting the conflict between line and staff to avoid future conflict.

Those who believe in the modern view of conflict need to know the factors to manage and handle the conflict in the positive way and hence bring the success and prosperity of the relationship between line and staff and so to the organization. In short the objectives of the study are:

1) To identify the factors are responsible for the conflict between line and staff regarding HR roles.
2) To find out the correlation among the factors to establish some latent variables.
3) Generating some recommendations to mitigate the conflict between line and staff positions.

IV. METHODS

D. Research design

Primary data were collected by using focus group discussion (FGD) method consisting of experienced HR practitioners of different organizations in Bangladesh, typically employing more than 50 employees. They were used to design and validate the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 28 items designed in Likert 5 scales ranges from positive to negative outcomes. To find out the latent variables, data reduction technique was used and finally a model has been developed.

E. Procedures

From the literature review, a list of factors has been identified those are primarily responsible for line and staff conflict. Those factors are carefully discussed in a very structured and coherent way with the focus group. The focus group consists of 6 HR managers who are serving HR departments for more than 8 years on average. In a session of 1 hour 40 minute discussion the focus group adds some important factors to the conflict between line and staff. Based on those factors gained from the literature and focus group a questionnaire have been developed and again revised by the focus group individually. The final questionnaire is based on 28 variables and administered to find out their relevance to 150 samples. Later on, a simple factor analysis has been conducted to finally find latent variables.

F. Sample

A total of 150 respondents was taken from different organizations in Bangladesh following incidental sampling technique. Their age ranges from 26 to 51 years. A brief descriptions of the respondents are given in the following table.

Table I
Number of respondents according to experiences and gender

Experiences	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
Less than two years	19	7	26
Between two to five years	43	19	62
Between five to ten years	33	21	54
More than 10 years	6	2	8
Total	101	49	150

G. Measures

To conduct this research an inventory titled "Causes of line and staff conflict" was constructed following International Test Commission (ITC) guidelines based on the literature review and from the FGD. The inventory consists of 28 items and all of these and statements. For scaling purpose, the 5 point Likert Scale has been used ranges from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The reliability of the inventory was measured using Cronbanch Alpha which was found to be 0.809. Inter class correlation ranged form 0.763 to 0.851 which were significant with 0.05 significance level with 149 degrees of freedom. So, the inventory was found to be valid.

H. Hypothesis

From the literature review and FGD, a list of factors has been identified which lead conflict between line and staff positions in the organization. These factors are shown in the table II.

Table II
Factors leading to line and staff conflict

X1= Age	X2= Gender	X3= Experiences
X4= Personality	X5= Values	X6=Competency level
X7= Lack of optimized goal	X8= Organizational politics	X9= Lack of resources
X10= Lack of cooperation	X11= Poor perception of HR roles	X12= Fear of stereotyping
X13=Priorities of line and staff	X14= Organizational HR practices	X15= Incentive structure
X16= Reluctancy in performing HR roles	X17= Poor time management	X18= Local influence
X19= Up to date information	X20= Lack of commitment	X21= Autonomy
X22= Poor power practices	X23= Autocracy	X24= Lack of HR training to line managers
X25= Goal differences	X26= Emotional attachment	X27= Lack of delegation
X28= Point of responsibilities		

Based on the 28 factors relating to the line and staff conflict hypothesis has been developed.

H_0: There is no correlation among the set of identified variables that lead line and staff conflict.

H_1: The variables are highly correlated.

V. ANALYSIS

To test the hypothesis, this research has been opted for factor analysis. Factor analysis is conducted mainly for data reduction. In total of these 28 variables, most of which are correlated and which must be reduced to a manageable level. The model of factor analysis is

Fi=Wi1X1+Wi2X2+Wi3X3+…….+WinX n

Where,

Fi= Estimate of ith factor

Wi= Factor score coefficient

n= Number of variables

KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity is a measure of sampling adequacy that is recommended to check the case to variable ration for the analysis being conducted. In most academic and business studies, KMO and Bartlett's test play an important role in accepting the sample adequacy. So, to find out whether these variables are appropriate for considering for the test of factor analysis, and to find out the correlation among the factors, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy is administered which is 0.846 (>0.6) proves that the sample is appropriate for factor analysis. Moreover, the test result shows the approximate chi-square statistics is significant at the 0.05 level. The test result is shown in the following table III.

Table III
KMO and Bartlett's test result

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sample Adequacy		.846
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx.Chi-Square	3.486E3
	df	378
	Sig.	.000

Table IV
Eigenvalues

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	6.429	22.962	22.962
2	5.043	18.010	40.972
3	4.604	19.442	57.414
4	3.041	10.859	68.274
5	1.454	5.192	73.466
6	.846	3.022	76.488
7	.661	2.359	78.847
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28	.047	.169	100.00

To find out the major variables relating to the study, priori determination, approaches based on eigenvalues, scree plot and percentages of variance are also accounted. The commonality for each variable is 1.0 as unities are inserted in the diagonal of the correlation matrix. Extraction column indicates the proportion of each variable's variance that can be

explained by the retained factors. The eigenvalues for a factor indicated the total variance attributed to that factor. The eigenvalue greater than 1.0 (default option) results in five (5) factors being extracted. Factor 1 count for a variance of 6.429, which is (6.429/28) or 22.962% of the total variance. Likewise, next 4 factors account for 18.010%, 16.442%, 3.041% and 1.454% of the total variance respectively. Here first 5 factors account for 73.466% of the total variance. These are the same as under initial eigenvalues. Moreover, from the scree plot, a distinct break occurs after five factors (fig. 1). Thus, five factors appear to be reasonable in this situation. So the five factors are extracted for determining the factors are responsible for the conflict between line and staff regarding HR roles.

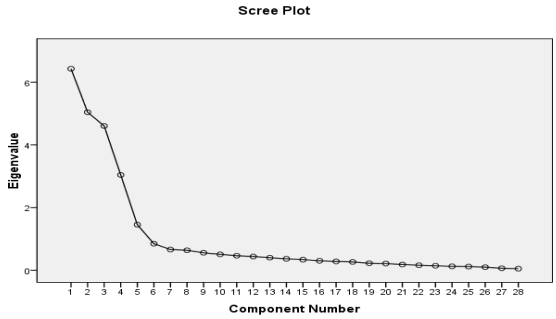


Figure 1 Scree Plot

Table V
Rotated Component Matrix

	Component				
Variables	1	2	3	4	5
X1	.406	**.710**	-.155	.050	.106
X2	.342	**.660**	-.175	.072	.097
X3	.360	**.741**	-.297	.067	-.023
X4	.464	**.715**	-.237	.062	.113
X5	.460	**.733**	-.208	.038	.116
X6	.415	**.752**	-.245	.079	.067
X7	-.556	.321	.473	.417	-.067
X8	.176	.213	**.634**	**-.628**	-.122
X9	-.437	.348	**.588**	.294	-.012
X10	.173	.266	**.598**	**-.601**	-.089
X11	.104	.206	**.578**	**-.595**	-.092
X12	.141	.238	**.595**	-.546	.037
X13	.072	.212	.444	**-.591**	-.111
X14	.504	.361	.454	.332	-.037
X15	.505	.353	.465	.318	-.020
X16	**.790**	-.250	.368	.249	.043
X17	-.528	.239	.496	.242	.147
X18	-.044	-.223	.044	-.171	**.803**
X19	-.044	-.202	.100	-.254	**.790**
X20	**.758**	-.228	.440	.282	.064
X21	**.754**	-.231	.415	.250	.060
X22	**.687**	-.164	.427	.259	-.041
X23	**.654**	-.220	.326	.297	.003
X24	**.688**	-.225	.359	.209	-.022
X25	**.588**	-.215	.380	.284	-.055
X26	.326	**.730**	-.172	.039	.031
X27	-.450	.358	.497	.327	.153
X28	-.484	.229	**.598**	.209	.147

The coefficients of the rotated factor (component) matrix are used to interpret the factors (table-V). In table V, lack of commitment, autonomy, poor power practice, autocracy, lack of HR training, goal differences are correlated highly with factor 1 after rotation. Likewise, age differences, gender differences, experience, personality differences, values differences, competencies are correlated highly with factor 2 after rotation. And organizational politics, lack of resources, lack of cooperation, perception about HR roles, fear of stereotyping and responsibilities are correlated with factor three. In factor 4, there is no such positive correlation have found among the variables. But in factor 5, local influences and up-to-date information has found highly correlated. So, from the component matrix, among the five factors, based on the factor loadings, four components are selected.

VI. FINDINGS

The interpretation of quantitative research results presented in the paper reveals some criterion that has been found to influence the factors leading conflict between line and staff position regarding the HR role in the organization of Bangladesh. From the correlation components, the latent factors are identified and based on the latent components a model is established.

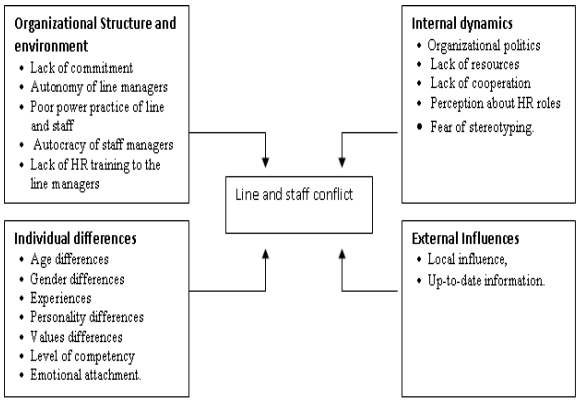


Figure 2 Factors Causing For Line And Staff Conflict

These four factors are the core of conflict between line and staff position in the organization in Bangladesh. From the FGD, it has been found that one of the important variables in the individual differences is lack of competence and professional knowledge to implement HR activities. In this study there is a high correlation (0.752) in the component matrix (table-5) was found between personal differences and lack of competence. Besides, in the personality difference, values difference, age differences and emotional attachment are also found highly correlated with individual differences.

In the factor organizational structure and environment the study found that there is a high correlation (0.754) between autonomy and organizational structure. Line positions (managers) may want the freedom to do things in their own way without considering the opinions. They also interpret company policies to meet their own needs. In the FGD, this has found that line managers may think the policies like, "leadership principle", "code of control", "speech out policy"are interrupting their job. Moreover, the lack of commitment also scores high the component matrix (0.758) in the organization structure factor. And also there is a lack of training found to the line managers regarding the HR role found in this study. This finding also satisfies the previous study where it found that the line managers are sometimes not provided with adequate organizational support or training to carry out assigned HR tasks [21]. Organizational politics, lack of resources, poor perception about the HR roles and fear of stereotyping account for the internal dynamic factor. Though competing priorities (0.444) is not highly correlated with internal dynamics, but in the FGD, it was the focus of discussion. They discussed there is a clear competing priorities between line and staff, where staff position are more porn to establish principles, maintaining standards, whereas line positions are trying to reach goals out of less even if means getting rid of people to cut down on the cost of production. A very high correlation also found in the component matrix between local influences (.803) and up-to-date (.790) to the external influences. The notion is that the line and staff conflict arises when there is limited access to the information or incomplete information. It has been found that information distribution should be up-to-date and properly distributed.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The motivation behind this study is to improve understanding of the factors that cause for the line and staff conflict in organization in Bangladesh. As the line and staff conflict is widely addressed problem in the literatures and organizations, this research helps to understand the causes and find out a way to reduce conflict. From the understanding, some recommendations are stated below:

1) The authority, roles and responsibilities should be clearly written and be well understood by the line and staff position in the organization. Gernerally line positions deal with operating decisions and staff positions deals with strategic decisions. But there should be a clear distinction between the responsibilities performed by line and staff positions and decision making authority. This will help them to build a congenial atmosphere to work with each other.

2) The staff positions must operate in a friendly way so that there should be no negative stereotyping from the line positions.

3) There should be an appointed (formal or informal) mentor, arbitrator, counselor or mediator who will mitigate conflict between line and staff positions by hearing the problems and prospects of the argument from both parties. There should be proper caucusing from the mediator to both parties.

4) Staff position must deal and recognize the contingency that any new idea are bound to be resisted in the initial stages. Sometimes, changes act as a threat to the line positions. So, to bring change, staff positions should systematically design and develop means to mitigate fear about changes.

5) There should be a proper orientation of each other. The orientation should be comprehensive and should be continuous basis. Moreover, there should be some informal mechanism which creates bonding between line and staff positions, like a tour, picnic, etc. These arrangements will reduce the individual differences such as age differences, sharing experiences, building emotional attachment, etc.

6) The management should persistently pursue line and staff position to the mission of the organization. The goal directed behavior of line and staff position help to reduce the goal differences as well as steer participation and cooperation.

7) The organization should structure its operation in such a way where line managers/positions can exchange their viewpoints regarding the HR role to the staff managers/positions. The involvement of line managers can help to fit business strategy development and HR development which are primary gateway to achieving competitive advantage [16].

8) Some strategies might help to reduce conflict between line and staff regarding HR roles. These strategies help line and staff positions increase their competency level as well as keep them up to date regarding HR rules, regulations and practice. These strategies might be an informal discussion, HR week arrangement, HR information sharing, HR counseling and consultation hour, HR idea competition, HR seminar, etc.

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