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Introduction

Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) can be a traumatic event in the lives of individuals, because the turmoil created often leads to increased anxiety and stress (Ashford, 1988; Schweiger, Ivancevich & Power, 1987). Based on role theory (Rizzo, House and Lirtzman, 1970) and Lau and Murnigham's (1998) concept of faultlines within teams, it is posited that mergers may negatively impact employees' work role experiences. When a merger occurs, typically positions are consolidated and work groups are restructured. These types of organizational restructuring may lead to higher workloads and changes in responsibilities and duties, likely leading to an increase in role ambiguity, role overload and role conflict. These stressor would be expected to influence work-life outcomes such as work-to-nonwork conflict, schedule flexibility and stress. It is also expected that the degree to which there is managerial support (both instrumental and emotional) would affect role overload and role ambiguity, which in turn will influence stress and work-life outcomes. It is surprising that given the detrimental outcomes that mergers have on stressors in the workplace, that there has been very limited research on the impact of a merger on work-life outcomes. This study attempts to fill such a gap.

M&A Influence on Role Ambiguity and Role Overload

Roles are the building blocks of social systems and the requirements an individual confronts as a member of such systems (Katz & Kahn, 1978). In organizations individuals carry out roles assigned to them in order to create an

efficient organizational system. Organizational roles are based on expectations about behavior for a position in a social structure, and these expectations define what behavioral requirements or limitations are ascribed to the role (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). Role theory can be used to help explain how roles can be a source of stress for employees in organizations.

According to role theory, when role expectations are conflicting, ambiguous, or overloading, which may arise from characteristics of the individual or the work environment, the individual experiences role stress (Jackson & Schuler, 1985;Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal,1964; Tetrick, Quick, Murphy, & Hurrell, 1992). Role ambiguity refers to a situation where there is a lack of necessary information for an organizational position, resulting in role dissatisfaction, anxiety, fear and hostility and lower performance (Kahn et al., 1964). Role conflict refers to the existence of behavioral expectations that are inconsistent. Finally role overload refers to work expectations that exceed ones' capacity (Caplan, 1971). Role conflict and ambiguity have been associated with decreased well-being, work dissatisfaction and decreased job performance (e.g., Jackson and Schuler, 1985; Tubre and Colins, 2000). Role overload has been associated with increased turnover (Isaksson and Johannson, 2003) as well as job stress, job dissatisfaction and anxiety (Perrewe et al., 2005). Thus, role strain may negatively affect work attitudes, well-being and performance when one is required to engage in multiple conflicting roles, when role expectations are unclear, or when there is too much work required by certain roles.

In M&A, position consolidations and layoffs often increase the workload of employees as layoff survivors typically end up absorbing extra responsibilities,

(Fong & Kleiner, 2004; Fairfield-Sonn, Ogilvie, & DelVecchio, 2002; McGinn et al., 2001). M & A's may be especially problematic for organizations that have team-based structure with interdependent team members. We borrow from Lau and Murnighan's (1998) concept of faultlines to help explain how the integration of team members from two different companies could impact role stressors and work-life outcomes. Faultlines refer to demographic attributes of a group that can subdivide a group along one or more characteristics. Faultlines are different from the diversity concept in that group members become divided based on one or more attributes because either the differences are aligned or there is strength in the attribute that divides them.

Lau and Murnighan give the example of two groups. In one group, there are two 20-year old Caucasian males and a 40-year old Hispanic woman. The second group consists of a 20-year old Caucasian female, a 20-year old Hispanic man, and a 40-year old Caucasian male. Although the diversity is similar, the first group has a strong possibility of a coalition consisting of the two Caucasian males (in their twenties) versus the female Hispanic woman (40 year old) because the two males are similar on many traits (gender, age and race). They argue that faultlines create subgroup dynamics such as conflict, disrupted internal communication and a general decreased group functioning due to inefficient infighting within the team (Lau and Murnighan, 1998).

Li and Hambrick (2005) argue that in a merger, when people form a team that consists of members drawn from two corporations, individuals are socially invested in their respective prior firms, causing an alignment of team members

based on their legacy corporation membership. They found that these factional

faultlines led to emotional conflict and task conflict. The emotional conflict, in turn,

led to increased behavioral disintegration (less communication, information

exchange, collaborative behavior and joint decision making). It could be argued that

in teams that have been merged, the factional faultline on the parent company

attribute would lead to conflict among team members resulting in an increased

workload due to lower team performance. In addition, the lack of communication

and collaborative behavior would also create an inefficient organization, leading to

an increased workload. Therefore, as a result of a merger, teams that have been

restructured may experience higher levels of conflict among team members, causing

a deterioration of performance, and higher levels of workload. Consequently, it is

likely that role overload would be more pronounced among restructured teams

compared to teams that have not been restructured. . Therefore it is expected that

H1: Teams that are restructured will experience higher levels of role

overload than teams that are not restructured.

Several organizational changes may lead to role ambiguity. Rapid growth

which is often due to reorganizations, changes in personnel which disturb existing

relationships, changes in the environment of the organization resulting in new work

demands, and managerial behavior that hinders information flow all may lead to

role ambiguity (Kahn et al., 1964). As former job responsibilities are altered

following a merger, there are often high levels of uncertainty for employees in terms

of what is expected of them (Fairfield-Sonn, Ogilvie & DelVecchio, 2002; Schweiger

& DiNisi, 1991). When teams experience some kind of restructuring, team members

may find themselves having to learn how to work with a manager from a different

legacy company or with team members from a different legacy company. The

faultlines that are created may result in mistrust among employees, leading to low

information flow and confusion about role requirements. Therefore, it is expected

that restructured teams will be marked by higher levels of ambiguity because of low

information sharing, confusion about new roles as well as uncertainty about how to

accomplish tasks under a new manager. Based on theory and past research it is

expected that:

Hypothesis 2: Team restructuring will be related to higher levels of role ambiguity

than teams that are not restructured.

Restructuring and Work-Life Outcomes

Restructuring of work teams due to two companies merging can be a very

stressful event. Lee (1988) examined "merger syndrome" which was defined as

executive's stressful reaction to a joint venture, which led to crisis management

behaviors and as a result, lower performance. The reasons for this syndrome

include increased workload due to absorbing the responsibilities of those who have left

the organization (Galinsky, et al., 2001; Kalimo, Taris, & Schaufeli, 2003), less time

available to complete work tasks due to higher workloads, and uncertainty and/or

insecurity about the future (Kalimo et al., 2003; Lee, Bobko, Ashford, Chen, & Ren,

2008).

Research indeed shows that organizational changes and the insecurity associated

with these changes are in turn associated with poor employee health. Cartwright and

Cooper (1993) found that post merger mental health of employees was compromised, even when mergers were friendly. More recently, Kalimo, et al. (2003) found that employees who experienced downsizing or anticipated downsizing in the future were found to have elevated levels of perceived inequity, which in turn were associated with elevated levels of psychological strain, cynicism, and absence. Past/anticipated future downsizing were also directly related to high levels of strain, cynicism, and absence, outcomes which were exacerbated it downsizings involved the elimination of jobs. Meta-analytic findings also provide evidence of a positive relationship between job insecurity and employee health (Cheng & Chan, 2008).

It is likely that in a post M&A environment, team members who have a new manager and/or new team members as a result of restructuring would be especially impacted by the stressful event due to the ambiguity and uncertainty of working with new colleagues and/or a new manager. In addition, the faultline created based on legacy company would likely lead to subgroup task and relationship based conflict (Li & Hambrick, 2005). Therefore, restructured teams would likely have higher levels of stress compared to team that have not been changed in any way.

The increased workload and work hours that results from job insecurity and additional role responsibilities may also lead to increased levels of work-to-nonwork conflict. Work-nonwork conflict occurs when the demands of the work role compete with nonwork roles during overlapping points in time (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). When employees feel overloaded at work as a result of a merger or other organizational change, they may feel short of resources (e.g., time) to fulfill work obligations (Steffy & Jones, 1990; Voydanoff, 1988, 2004). This work overload may

result in the demands of the work role interfering with the ability to satisfy nonwork role requirements (Hecht, 2001). Employees who are part of restructured teams may be taking on new or more responsibilities that could lead to feeling work-to-nonwork conflict. In addition, the faultline created by the merger, may lead to a lack of cooperation within the team and inefficient team functioning, increasing the workload of each team member as a result and thereby creating feelings of work-to-nonwork conflict

The positive benefits that managerial support may have for employees during organizational changes in terms of allowing for flexible schedules would decline in a restructured team where team members are working with a new manager. Managerial support is a facet of a supportive work-family culture, such that managers are expected to show sensitivity to employees' personal responsibilities and help them cope with their multiple demands (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). Managerial support has been related to positive work-life outcomes, such as more work-family balance and less role conflict (Clark, 2001; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). However, not all team members may reap the benefits of a supportive manager, as managers are known to show discretion in their support (Allen, 2001) and arrange idiosyncratic deals with subordinates concerning their schedule flexibility (Hornung, Rousseau, & Glaser, 2008). This is especially likely when two merged companies have different work-life cultures in terms of the level of support they provide to employees. Employees who are part of restructured teams with new managers from an unsupportive work-life culture may not have the schedule flexibility that was provided in the past. Furthermore, subordinates dealing with new managers may establish new schedule arrangements that may not match the flexibility they had in the past. There is support for the notion that employees are often reluctant to

use benefits even if they exist (Thompson et al., 1999). Due to insecurity about one's job post-merger, employees may be particularly reluctant to seek flexibility or use scheduling options that they took advantage of in the past. Therefore, it is expected that:

Hypothesis 3: Restructured teams will experience higher levels of job stress than teams that are not restructured.

Hypothesis 4: Restructured teams will experience increased work to family conflict than teams that are not restructured.

Hypothesis 5: Restructured teams will experience decreased perceived flexibility in schedules than teams that are not restructured.

Role stressors and employee outcomes

Aside from restructuring influencing work-outcomes, it is expected that role stressors (role ambiguity and role overload) will be directly related to perceived stress, flexibility in schedule and ability to balance work and life. As mentioned previously, role stressors can cause employee tension and have negative effects on work attitudes (Schaubroeck et al., 1993). Most studies that have examined the relationship between role ambiguity and work-family conflict have shown a non-significant relationship (Boyar, Maertz, Pearson, & Keough, 2003). However, role ambiguity has been acknowledged to be a significant stressor in the general stress literature, with the uncertainty about roles leading to a sense of anxiety (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). Therefore it is only expected that role ambiguity will be related to higher levels of perceived stress and not related to the work-life outcomes. It is therefore hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 6: Role ambiguity will lead to higher levels of perceived stress

Role overload occurs when an individual finds it difficult to complete an assigned task within a certain amount of time (Beehr, Walsh, and Tabler, 1976). It follows that role overload (having demands that exceed one's resources) would make it more difficult to balance the two roles that compete for one's time and energy. A heavy workload would make it more difficult to have a flexible schedule because one would feel obligated to spend more hours to fulfill work expectations, especially given the fear of job loss that often occurs in a post merger environment (Lee et al., 2008)

Research has found support for work overload being related to higher levels of work-family conflict (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000) and the negative spillover of emotions, behaviors, and energy from work to other areas of life (Grotto & Lyness, 2010; Voydanoff, 2004, 2005; Wallace, 1999) and lower levels of work-life balance (Boyar, Maertz, Pearson & Keough, 2003). In a survey of layoff survivors, when high workloads were experienced after a merger, the survivors had a lower work-life balance leading to reduced job and life satisfaction (Tetrick et al., 1992; Virick, Lily and Casper, 2007).

Role overload is also a significant stressor leading to strain in the stress literature due to the high demands placed on the individual (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). In a study of full-time employed women, role overload was found to be the strongest predictor of psychological health (Pearson, 2008). Therefore, based on past research and theory, it is expected that:

Hypothesis 7: Role overload will lead to higher levels of stress.

Hypothesis 8: Role overload will lead to increased levels of work to life conflict.

Hypothesis 9: Role overload will lead to lower levels of perceived schedule flexibility.

Role Ambiguity and Role Overload mediate the relationship between restructuring and Work-Life Outcomes

As indicated previously, teams that are restructured are likely to experience increased higher levels of stress, decreased perceptions that one's schedule is flexible enough to meet life demands and increased work to family conflict. It is likely that restructured teams experience these outcomes, in part, due to higher levels of role conflict and ambiguity that result from the restructured natured of the teams. Therefore it is expected that:

Hypothesis 10: Role ambiguity will partially mediate the relationship between re-structuring and perceived job stress.

Hypothesis 11: Role overload will partially mediate the relationship between restructuring and job stress.

Hypothesis 12: Role overload will partially mediate the relationship between restructuring and perceived schedule flexibility.

Hypothesis 13: Role overload will partially mediate the relationship between restructuring and work-life conflict.

Managerial support Influences on Role Stressors and Work-life Outcomes

Although social support has been viewed as an antecedent to stressors, a variable that mediates the relationship between stressors and strain, a moderator in the stressor –strain relationship and as an independent variable to strain, research has found the most support for social support acting as an antecedent to role stressors, with support reducing perceived role stressors (conflict, ambiguity and time demands), indirectly decreasing work-family conflict (Carlson & Perrewe, 1999). Managerial support, a type of social support, should be a crucial variable within a firm where turmoil and uncertainty creates high work demands and confusion for the individual. Managerial support, both instrumental and emotional, presumably should influence work overload, as it is the manager's job to buffer the employee from excessive work demands. This in turn should influence work-family outcomes. It is expected that managerial support (both instrumental and emotional) will influence role ambiguity, which will impact only stress, and not work-life balance. As mentioned previously, there is limited support for the relationship between role ambiguity and work-life outcomes. Specifically, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 14: Managerial support (both instrumental and emotional) will lead to increased *role ambiguity*, and therefore higher levels of stress.

Hypothesis 15: Managerial support (both instrumental and emotional) will lead to increased *role overload*, and therefore higher levels of stress (15a), work-to-nonwork conflict (15b) and schedule flexibility(15c).

Methodology

Participants

An employee opinion survey was conducted at a medium-sized, multinational biotechnology company approximately six months following a merger and acquisition. The acquiring company nearly doubled in size after acquiring another biotechnology company, resulting in 9,619 employees in the newly merged company, of which 8,652 voluntarily participated in the survey. Twenty-one percent of the participants were managers and 42% were female. The average participant age was 39-years-old and average tenure was 6.3 years. There was a total of 352 involuntary turnovers within six months of the merger, 87% for reasons related to the merger (restructuring, integration, etc) and 13% performance related. This data set provided a unique opportunity to control for organizational variables (e.g., industry, size) when looking at the effects of restructuring on employee outcomes.

Using survey data six months after the merger (Fall 2009), the study compared restructured teams versus non-restructured teams on work-life outcomes (schedule flexibility, and work-life balance) and overall stress. Based on each employee's direct manager, survey results were aggregated at the team level (n=815). Restructured teams were operationalized as those where at least one person's legacy company was different than the legacy company of the team manager. A dichotomous variable was created to indicate whether a team was restructured. If at least one team member's legacy company differed from the team manager's legacy company then a team was considered "restructured" (n=147; coded as 1) vs. "not restructured" (n=668; coded as 0).

Measures

A dichotomous variable was created to indicate whether a team was *restructured*. If at least one team member's legacy company differed from the team manager's legacy company then a team was considered "restructured" (n=147; coded as 1) vs. "not restructured" (n=668; coded as 0). All survey items had the same response scale (1 = *strongly agree*, 5 = *strongly disagree*). Scores were reversed when necessary so that higher values reflected more of each constructed item scores were averaged to form scales. Six survey items measured *role ambiguity* (e.g., I have a clear idea of the results expected of me; alpha = .86). *Role overload* was measured with four items (e.g., The amount of work expected of me is manageable; alpha = .82). *Flexibility* was measured with, "I have the flexibility in my schedule for the level of physical activity that is right for me." *Work-to-nonwork conflict* was measured with, "When I am away from work, I can focus on personal life." *Job stress* was measured with, "I do not experience unhealthy levels of stress."

Analyses

The t-test for Equality of Means was used to determine whether restructured teams differed significantly from teams that were not restructured on key employee attitudes (e.g., role overload, manager support, job stress). We used mediated regression and the Sobel Product of Coefficients Approach to test for mediation. Sobel estimates the total, direct, and indirect effects of an independent variable on an outcome variable through a proposed mediator variable. The significance of mediation was assessed based on the p value for the ratio of indirect to direct effect. After centering the variables, we tested the moderated relationships by entering the independent variables

and mediators in Step 1 and the products of these variables in Step 2. The significance was assessed based on the F-test for change in explained variance in Step 2.

Results

Consistent with our hypotheses, the t-test results (Table 1) showed some significant attitudinal differences between teams that have been restructured compared to teams that have not been restructured. Hypothesis 1 was not supported, such that restructured teams did not report higher levels of role ambiguity compared to teams that were not restructured. In support of Hypotheses 2 through 5 compared to teams that were not restructured, restructured teams scored significantly higher on role overload, job stress, and work-to-nonwork conflict ($t = -4.023$, $p < .001$, $t = -2.054$, $p < .05$, and $t = -5.940$, $p < .001$, respectively) and significantly lower on schedule flexibility ($t = 2.837$, $p < .01$). Simple correlations also confirmed the expected relationships. Role ambiguity and role overload were both positively related to job stress (hypotheses 6 and 7). Role overload was positively related to work-to-nonwork conflict (hypothesis 8) and negatively related to schedule flexibility (hypothesis 9).

According to the mediation results, no support was found for hypothesis 10. Although role ambiguity was positively related to job stress, it was not related to team restructuring and did not mediate the relationship between restructuring and job stress (Sobel = -.584, $p = .56$). In support of hypothesis 11, role overload mediated the relationship between restructuring and job stress (Sobel = 3.96, $p < .001$). Hypothesis 12 was supported as well, as role overload mediated the relationship between restructuring and flexibility (Sobel = -3.94, $p < .001$). We also found support for hypothesis 13; role

overload mediated the relationship between restructuring and work-to-nonwork conflict (Sobel = 3.91, $p < .001$).

Support was found for hypotheses 14 and 15. The relationships between managerial support (both instrumental and emotional) and job stress were mediated by role ambiguity (Hypothesis 14; Sobel = -4.01, $p < .001$ and Sobel = -4.88, $p < .001$, respectively) and by role overload (Hypothesis 15a; Sobel = -12.25, $p < .001$ and Sobel = -10.84, $p < .001$, respectively). The relationships between managerial support (both instrumental and emotional) and work-to-nonwork conflict were mediated by role overload (Hypothesis 15b; Sobel = 12.17, $p < .001$ and Sobel = 10.60, $p < .001$, respectively). Role overload also mediated the relationships between managerial support (both instrumental and emotional) and schedule flexibility (Hypothesis 15c; Sobel = 10.34, $p < .001$ and Sobel = 9.43, $p < .001$, respectively).

Discussion/Implications

Merger and Acquisition activity is expected to reach the $2 trillion mark in 2010 (www.forbes.com). With the relatively common nature of merger and acquisition activity, it is important to understand the impact that mergers have on individuals, including the ability to have scheduling flexibility, work-life balance and overall stress levels. The preliminary results of this study highlight the potential detrimental impact of the employee as a result of team restructuring. Restructuring impacts the degree to which

employees experience role overload, which in turn increases perceived stress and decreases one's flexibility in work scheduling as well as work-life balance.

These results also suggest the importance of managers monitoring the workload of the employees, to ensure that they have the proper tools and training to complete their job responsibilities. The study also sheds light on the important role that a manager's instrumental and emotional support can play in terms of directly alleviating role ambiguity and role overload in the workplace. In particular, managerial support directly decreases role overload, leading to lower levels of stress, increased work-life balance and increased scheduling flexibility. In addition, managerial support also decreases role ambiguity, lowering perceived stress levels in the organization. Implications for organizations are that organizations might consider coaching managers on how to help employees manage an increased workload and how to provide the emotional and instrumental support needed to reduce ambiguity in terms of what is expected in a post merger environment.

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Table 1

Results for t-tests Comparing Restructured Teams and Not Restructured Teams on Role Ambiguity, Role Overload, Job Stress, Work-to-Nonwork Conflict and Schedule Flexibility

Variable	Group Mean for Restructured Teams	Group Mean for Restructured Teams	Group Mean Score Difference
Role Ambiguity	2.10	2.11	.02
Role Overload	2.67	2.52	.15***
Job Stress	3.02	2.92	.10*
Work-to-Nonwork Conflict	2.76	2.47	.29***
Schedule Flexibility	3.31	3.45	-.14**

Note. Restructured Teams ($N = 147$). Not Restructured Teams ($N = 668$).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.