



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**ROLE CONFLICT AND ROLE AMBIGUITY AMONG
MALAYSIAN JOURNALISTS IN NEWSROOM
DECISION-MAKING**

FARIDAH IBRAHIM

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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITI PERTANIAN MALAYSIA**

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IN NEWSROOM DECISION-MAKING**

by

FARIDAH IBRAHIM

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xii
ABSTRACT.....	xiii
ABSTRAK.....	xvi
CHAPTER.....	1
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background of the Problem	1
The Context of the Study.....	1
Mass Media System in Malaysia: Issues and Challenges.....	8
Statement of the Problem.....	13
Objectives of the Study.....	15
Significance of the Study.....	16
Scope and Limitations of the Study.....	17
Definition of Terms.....	19
Organisation of the Study	23
II LITERATURE REVIEW.....	24
An Overview of Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity (Role Stress).....	25
Role Theory and Concepts.....	25
Role Expectation.....	28
Role Sending.....	28
Received Role.....	29
Role Behaviour.....	29
Role Conflict.....	30
Role Ambiguity.....	32
Role Stress.....	33



	Page
Role Stress Theory and General Stress Model.....	37
Role Episode Model.....	38
A Model of Stress.....	41
A Model of Causes, Types and Consequences of Stress.....	42
Antecedents of Stress.....	43
Newsroom and Decision-making.....	45
Concepts on Decision-making.....	45
Decision-making Process in the Newsroom.....	49
Decision-making in Malaysian Newsroom	54
Role Stress in the Newsroom.....	58
Factors Associated with Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity.....	66
Concepts of Leadership.....	66
Nature of Tasks and Job Characteristics.....	70
Participation in Decision-making.....	76
Communication and Interpersonal Relationship.....	78
Research on Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity.....	85
Organisational Factors.....	87
Personal Factors.....	93
Interpersonal Factors.....	96
III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	99
Conceptual Framework of the Study.....	99
Statement of Hypotheses.....	104
Population and Sample.....	107
Sampling Procedure.....	108
Description of Survey Instrument.....	112
Measurement of Variables.....	114
Role Measurement.....	114
Participation in Decision-making.....	116
Participation in Newsroom Task Decision.....	117
Leadership Behaviour.....	118
Deadline Pressure.....	119
Task Characteristics	120
Communication Relationship.....	121

	Page
Interpersonal Relationship	122
Years of Working Experience	123
Age.....	123
Years of Formal Education Completed.....	123
Salary.....	123
Pre-testing of the Questionnaire.....	123
Reliability Test of the Scales.....	124
Procedure for Data Collection.....	126
Data Analysis.....	128
Descriptive Statistics	129
Pearson Correlation	129
Multiple Regression	130
Discriminant Analysis	131
The Level of Significance	131
IV FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	132
Characteristics of the Respondents.....	132
Job Status, Gender, Marital Status and Age.....	133
Race, Educational Attainment, Years of Formal Education and Salary.....	134
Length of Work in Current Organisation, Working Experience and Years of Holding Current Position.....	137
Departmental or Job Transfer, Promotion and Propensity to Leave for Another Profession	139
Perception of Journalists regarding the Nature of their Organisation's Ownership	140
Factors Leading to Role Stress.....	142
Levels of Perceived Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity.....	145
Relationships with Research Variables.....	148
Hypothesis 1.....	148
Hypothesis 2	155
Hypothesis 3	162
Hypothesis 4	167
Hypothesis 5	171
Hypothesis 6	174

	Page
Significant Predictors of Role Conflict.....	177
Significant Predictors of Role Ambiguity.....	185
Discriminant Variables of Role Conflict Perceived among Journalists in Newsroom Decision-making.....	192
Discriminant Variables of Role Ambiguity Perceived among Journalists in Newsroom Decision-making.....	197
Summary of Results.....	201
V SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	205
Research Problem.....	205
Objectives.....	207
Statement of Hypotheses.....	208
Methodology.....	210
Findings.....	211
Respondents' Characteristics	211
Levels of Perceived Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity	213
Relationships with Research Variables	214
Discriminant Variables of Role Conflict Perceived by Journalists	217
Discriminant Variables of Role Ambiguity Perceived by Journalists	218
Conclusions.....	218
Implications and Recommendations.....	223
Implications.....	223
Recommendations for Practice.....	230
Recommendations for Further Research	233
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	237
APPENDICES.....	249
A Questionnaire in English.....	249
B Questionnaire in Bahasa Malaysia.....	263
C Correspondence.....	277
D Additional Table.....	288
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	289



LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1	Sample Size and Response Rates from Selected Organisations..... 111
2	Test of Reliability using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient..... 126
3	Distribution of Respondents by Job Status, Gender, Marital Status and Age..... 135
4	Distribution of Respondents by Race, Educational Attainment, Years of Formal Education and Salary..... 136
5	Distribution of Respondents by Length of Work in Current Organisation, Working Experience and Years of Holding Current Position..... 138
6	Distribution of Respondents by Number of Job Transfer, Promotion and Propensity to Leave for Another Profession..... 140
7	Distribution of Respondents by the Perceived Nature of Organisation's Ownership 141
8	Factors Leading to Role Stress as Perceived by Respondents..... 144
9	Levels of Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity in Newsroom Decision-making as Perceived by Journalists..... 145
10	Frequency Distribution of Levels of Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity..... 147
11	Correlation Coefficients between Role Conflict and some Selected Organisational Variables..... 149
12	Correlation Coefficients between Role Ambiguity and some Selected Organisational Variables..... 156



	Page
13	Correlation Coefficients between Role Conflict and some Selected Personal Variables..... 163
14	Correlation Coefficients between Role Ambiguity and some Selected Personal Variables..... 168
15	Correlation Coefficients between Role Conflict and some Selected Interpersonal Variables..... 173
16	Correlation Coefficients between Role Ambiguity and some Selected Interpersonal Variables..... 175
17	Multiple Regression between Role Conflict and Overall Independent Variables..... 179
18	Multiple Regression between Role Conflict and some Selected Organisational Variables..... 180
19	Multiple Regression between Role Conflict and some Selected Personal Variables..... 181
20	Multiple Regression between Role Conflict and some Selected Interpersonal Variables..... 182
21	Stepwise Multiple Regression between Role Conflict and some Selected Independent Variables..... 184
22	Multiple Regression between Role Ambiguity and Overall Independent Variables..... 186
23	Multiple Regression between Role Ambiguity and and some Selected Organisational Variables..... 188
24	Multiple Regression between Role Ambiguity and some Selected Personal Variables..... 189
25	Multiple Regression between Role Ambiguity and some Selected Interpersonal Variables..... 189



	Page
26 Stepwise Multiple Regression between Role Ambiguity and some Selected Independent Variables.....	192
27 Summary data for Discriminant Analysis in the Role Conflict Category.....	195
28 Discriminant Analysis: Classification Results of Cases according to Role Conflict.....	196
29 Summary data for Discriminant Analysis in the Role Ambiguity Category.....	200
30 Discriminant Analysis: Classification Results of Cases according to Role Ambiguity.....	201
31 Intercorrelations among Variables.....	288



LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	A Model of the Role Episode.....	27
2	A Model of Role Episode. A Theoretical Model of Factors Involved in the Taking of Organisational Roles.....	39
3	Conceptual Framework of Perceived Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity Experienced by Journalists in Newsroom Decision-making.....	102
4	A Modified Conceptual Framework of Perceived Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity Experienced by Journalists in Newsroom Decision-making	235



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FARIDAH IBRAHIM

April, 1995

Chairman : Professor Sulaiman Mohd. Yassin, Ph.D.

Faculty : Centre for Extension and Continuing Education

The main objective of the study was to determine the relationship between some selected independent variables with role conflict and role ambiguity perceived by Malaysian journalists in newsroom decision-making.

The study was carried out among 226 randomly selected journalists from eight Malaysian print media organisations and a national news agency. A survey research method was employed and self-administered and structured questionnaires were used to collect data. Descriptive and inferential statistics, namely, frequency and percentage, Pearson's correlation coefficients, multiple regression and discriminant analysis were used for data analysis.



Apart from revealing that the perceived levels of role conflict and role ambiguity among the Malaysian print and news agency journalists were at moderate levels, the results of the study also showed that the level of role stress was influenced by some organisational, personal and interpersonal factors. Findings from the study suggested that the level of role conflict and role ambiguity among journalists could be made less pronounced if media managers would give due consideration to some of the critical variables examined in the study. The study found that the perceived levels of both role conflict and role ambiguity among the journalists were negatively related to the level of participation in newsroom decision-making, the level of participation in task decision, nature of task characteristics, leadership supportive behaviour and positively related to structure-oriented leadership behaviour. Role conflict was also found to be positively related to the deadline pressure experienced by the journalists in their newsrooms.

The salary of the journalists as well as the years of working experience that journalists had in the related field were also found to be related to the levels of role conflict and role ambiguity. The level of interpersonal trust, respect and liking as well as the communication relationships between journalists and their superiors were also related to journalists' perceived role stress. The study revealed that the level of role conflict among journalists was found to be higher in those who had high deadline pressure, low work experience, low regard for their task characteristics and low participation in task decision; while the level of role ambiguity tended to be higher among

those who had weak interpersonal relationships with their superiors, low regard for their task characteristics, low participation in decision-making and task decision, were younger in age and those who perceived their leaders to be more structure-oriented and less supportive.



Abstrak disertasi yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Pertanian Malaysia sebagai **memenuhi sebahagian** daripada keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah.

**KONFLIK PERANAN DAN KEKABURAN PERANAN
DI KALANGAN WARTAWAN DI MALAYSIA
DALAM BUATPUTUSAN DI BILIK BERITA**

Oleh

FARIDAH IBRAHIM

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Pengerusi : Profesor Sulaiman Mohd. Yassin, Ph.D.

Fakulti : Pusat Pengembangan dan Pendidikan Lanjutan

Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk menentukan hubungan antara beberapa angkubah bebas terpilih dengan konflik peranan dan kekaburan peranan di kalangan wartawan di Malaysia dalam proses buatputusan di bilik berita.

Kajian tersebut telah dijalankan di kalangan 226 orang responden yang dipilih secara rambang dari lapan buah organisasi media cetak dan sebuah agensi berita nasional. Untuk mengumpul data, kajian tersebut menggunakan kaedah tinjauan dan borang soal selidik berstruktur yang dijawab sendiri oleh responden. Statistik deskriptif dan inferensi seperti kekerapan dan peratus, korelasi Pearson, kaedah regresi dan diskriminan digunakan untuk analisis data.



Di samping mendedahkan bahawa tahap persepsi konflik peranan dan keaburan peranan di kalangan wartawan media cetak dan agensi berita di Malaysia adalah di peringkat sederhana, hasil kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa tahap tekanan peranan ini dipengaruhi oleh beberapa faktor organisasi, peribadi dan antaraperibadi. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa tahap konflik peranan dan keaburan peranan boleh diusahakan supaya tidak begitu ketara sekiranya para pengurus media memberi pertimbangan sewajarnya kepada beberapa angkubah yang dikaji dalam kajian tersebut. Kajian mendapati tahap persepsi konflik peranan dan keaburan peranan di kalangan wartawan mempunyai hubungan negatif dengan tahap penyertaan dalam buatputusan di bilik berita, tahap penyertaan dalam proses buatputusan berkaitan dengan tugas, ciri-ciri tugas, dan tingkahlaku kepimpinan yang bercorak kerjasama, serta mempunyai hubungan positif dengan tingkahlaku kepimpinan berorientasikan struktur. Konflik peranan juga didapati mempunyai hubungan positif dengan batasan waktu yang dihadapi oleh wartawan di bilik berita.

Pendapatan serta pengalaman bekerja dalam bidang kewartawanan di kalangan wartawan juga mempunyai hubungkait dengan tahap persepsi konflik peranan dan keaburan peranan. Tahap perhubungan antaraperibadi seperti kepercayaan, kesukaan dan penghormatan serta perhubungan komunikasi antara wartawan dengan ketua, mempunyai hubungan dengan tahap konflik peranan dan keaburan peranan di kalangan wartawan. Kajian tersebut menunjukkan bahawa tahap konflik peranan didapati lebih tinggi di

kalangan wartawan yang menghadapi batasan waktu yang terlalu tinggi, mempunyai kurang pengalaman bekerja dalam bidangewartawanan, tanggapan rendah terhadap ciri-ciri tugas dan tahap penyertaan yang rendah dalam proses buatputusan yang berkaitan dengan tugas. Manakala tahap kekaburan peranan didapati lebih tinggi di kalangan wartawan yang mempunyai hubungan antaraperibadi yang rendah dengan ketua, tanggapan yang rendah terhadap ciri-ciri tugas, tahap penyertaan yang rendah dalam proses buatputusan di bilik berita dan buatputusan dalam hal-hal berkaitan tugas, lebih muda dari segi usia dan mereka yang menanggapi ketua-ketua lebih berorientasikan struktur dan kurang bersikap kerjasama.



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

The Context of the Study

Stress on the job is a real, growing problem. Not only is it detrimental to industry, it is also expensive in human terms. And for an industry such as the mass communication particularly the media organisations that already have a reputation as being stressful, it is a problem that needs attention (Endres and Wearden, 1991).

Given the fast-paced, constantly changing nature of the media, one might guess that the best structure for an information company would be one which is a stable and very organised, where work moves in a predictable, timely fashion conducive to the daily deadline demands. However, modern management thinking suggests that the best format to accomplish the goals of a progressive media organisation should not be quite so formal (Lavine and Wackman, 1988).

Media managers and leaders, according to Lavine and Wackman (1988), have to deal with a structure that must accomplish two somewhat



contradicting objectives: (1) producing media products in an orderly fashion to meet deadlines and (2) producing media products that are fresh, innovative, timely and informative as well as messages that are of high-quality. Whilst the first objective requires that media organisations follow a formal kind of organisational structure, the second objective requires that employees be given some freedom from a rigid work schedule.

This fundamental distinction between the media and other industries is the factor that gives information organisations and their managers and workers major challenges. According to Lavine and Wackman (1988: 20) besides the enormous deadline pressure that media managers and journalists have to encounter everyday, there are also these challenges that need daily attention:

1. Public policies as well as societal, legal, regulatory and ethical limits that are different, more visible, and often more restrictive than those facing managers in nonmedia industries;
2. The production of a product with content that is brand new each time it reaches the audience market or advertiser market;
3. Managing a workforce whose most important employees are often headstrong and creative, possessing their own ideas about quality - employees who often have more allegiance to their profession than to their employers; and
4. Making decisions in industries where traditional lines of demarcation are rapidly disappearing.

It is the very complexity of these constraints and responsibilities within the media organisations that place media managers and journalists under stressful conditions (Endres and Wearden, 1992; Cook and Banks, 1993). Such is the nature of the media organisations that a slight occurrence of unexpected important events can greatly enhance tension in the newsroom. Tension before deadlines is something that media managers and journalists have to deal with everyday.

There are various departments in the media organisations which are involved in various functions and decision-making. But one of the most important department, where crucial decisions are made daily, is the newsroom, which is considered the lifeline of a media organisation (Teel and Taylor, 1983).

According to Epstein (1973) the daily agenda of reports produced by the media organisations and labelled as "news" is by no means a product of chance events; it is actually the result of crucial decisions made in the newsrooms. The process of selecting news is also known as news decision-making process and it is also a task made in a hurry due to deadline pressure.

News decision-making in the newsroom comes in various forms which include news evaluation and selection by the news staff; the expenditure of time and resources for news gathering; the assigning of reporters to specific events; and the allocation of space for the presentation of news. These are among the numerous tasks that have to be undertaken by reporters and editors in their roles as journalists.

The numerous tasks and decisions that need to be handled within the enormous deadline pressure in the newsroom, are major reasons that place media managers and journalists under constant stress especially job-related stress and role stress.

In making news decisions, news organisations basically need to consider their own goals and requirements for surviving in a competitive environment. Decisions made will be based on key decision makers, namely, the editors and editorial managers, who will make decisions consistent with the organisation's overriding interests. These decisions will in turn shape its product - the news (Epstein, 1973).

Although the key decisions are in the hands of top editors, from the author's personal experience, it appears that many reporters are also involved in initial decision-making at specific stages such as gathering, writing and editing news. Thus, both editors and reporters have decision roles that give them some amount of autonomy within the realms of the journalistic profession.

Studies by scholars have shown that journalists have strong needs for greater participation in news decisions (Epstein, 1973; Johnstone *et al.*, 1976; Gans, 1980; Joseph, 1982; Adams and Fish, 1987; Gaziano and Coulson, 1988; Powers, 1991).

Various studies on participation also showed that lack of participation can be a major source of stress (French *et al.*, 1960; French and Caplan, 1972; Jackson, 1983; Pearson, 1991). These studies have shown that

lack of opportunities to participate in the decision process can create strain or stress in the person and even adversely affect satisfaction and productivity.

Media organisations in Malaysia especially the influential national dailies such as **The New Straits Times**, **Utusan Malaysia**, **Berita Harian** and **The Star**, the government news agency, BERNAMA, and the two television stations, Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) and TV3 are regarded by Malaysians as the media that play the most significant role in providing information for decision makers and the attentive public (Lent, 1974).

If journalists of these organisations share certain preferences in the interpretation of their roles in the newsroom decision process, and if their preferences do not represent what they actually practise in reality, we can conclude that there are some incongruencies in their role expectations which will result in role stress. Journalists under stress may feed erroneous information in the news, possibly causing inappropriate decisions and policies to be made by the Malaysian government and its people.

Furthermore, according to a renowned Malaysian journalist, A. Samad (1991) the definition of news itself is still rather vague and there lies a wide area of ambiguity. Since there is no hard and fast rule to help journalists make decisions in the newsroom, they invariably have to depend more on their good sense and judgement, with the interests of their organisational goals in mind.

According to the role theory, when the behaviours expected of an individual by others in the organisations are inconsistent or incongruent, he or she will be in a state of role conflict and will experience stress, becomes