A study of role conflict among department chairs at University of Tabriz

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Abstract
Department chairs' job position in higher education is a unique one as it is full of conflict. No business, academic or non-academic unit can avoid conflict between its employees. Conflict is inherently more likely to occur within an academic department than in any other type of business unit. Survey and questionnaire are employed as the research methodology and technique, respectively. The study population consists of two groups: professors and department chairs. The questionnaire was distributed among all 66 department chairs. Random sampling was used to select professors. 200 professors received the questionnaire. Statistical results of the data analysis show that there is a significant direct relationship between role overload and role conflict. Additionally, there is a significant relationship between department chairs' leadership styles, roles and some personal and professional characteristics (e.g. how they were selected as the department chair or head of an academic group) and role conflict. Department chairs who follow a liberal leadership style experience lower levels of role overload and conflict compared to those who follow authoritarian and mixed leadership styles. The findings also show that there is a difference between what professors expect from roles of department chairs and what department chairs expect from their own role. Furthermore, there is a significant difference between what professors think of leadership styles of department chairs and what department chairs think of their own leadership styles.

Key words: Department chairs, professors, role conflict, role overload, leadership styles

Introduction

Kahn (1965) believes that organization is a set of roles. When roles influence each other, we end up with some overlapping roles. So, more precisely, organization is a set of overlapping roles. According to Kahn, overlapping of roles leads to conflict and ambiguity (Kahn, 1965; Moshabaki, 2006: 202). Department chairs' job position in higher education is a unique one as it is full of conflict. In higher education unlike many other organizations whose structure require that decisions are made by managers and transferred to other employees for execution, teachers have major authority and the upper hand in decision-makings. Department chairs form a significant and essential link between teachers and university's central administrative office and are always confines by a set of conflicting values, responsibilities and roles (Young, 2001:1).

No business, academic or non-academic unit can avoid conflict between its employees. Conflict is inherently more likely to occur within an academic department than in any other type of business unit (Ramsden, 2001:296). Role theory examines human behaviors that are expected of individuals in certain situations. According to role theory, department chair's job might be considered as a social position that could be occupied by individuals. Certain behaviors are expected of those who take on this job. These expected behaviors are called roles (Young, 2007: 1). Eichelman suggests

that individuals interpret each other's roles based on their own thoughts and attitudes and therefore, each person might not expect the same role of an individual in a certain position. Roles expected of department chairs are internalized by different individuals such as teachers, students and other department chairs. This will lead to conflict rather than consensus (ibid). Many research studies have listed inherent conflict and tension as the characteristics of department chairs'' job. Tucker is one of the first researchers who have comprehensively studied the position of department chairs or heads of academic groups. He considers this job as a conflicting one (Tucker, 1981: 4).

The nature of this job has led some researchers including Gmelch and Miskin to consider it as job that results in burnout, fatigue and stress (Gmelch & Miskin, 2004; Young, 2007: 3). Department chairs might also experience role overload. Role overload is a condition in which holders of a certain job position are expected to accomplish many different tasks within an inadequate timeframe. Department chairs are trapped between faculty members and other executive managers. Many scholars have pointed to this job stress and its root causes (Gmelch & Berns, 1994; Gmelch & Gates, 1995; Hubbell & Homer, 1997; Moses & Roe, 1990; and Roach, 1967). Many researchers have also tried to identify challenges faced by department chairs through determining their roles (Young, 2007: 3).

Understanding leadership culture and skills is of utmost importance because resistance to change and how it is dealt with can reflect organizational culture and environment (Austin, 1994: 51). The traditional view considers department chairs as mediators between teachers and the central administrative office. This view compares department chairs to the two-faced Roman God since they are both a manager and a faculty member (teacher). Today, department chairs could be regarded as mediators and facilitators playing a central role in development of their departments, faculties and even university as a whole (Mac Arthur, 2002: 6).

Conflict is one of the major phenomena seen in an organization. Organizational conflict is an important subject for leaders and scholars who are eager to understand the nature of organizations and all behaviors found within them, hence, acquiring a comprehensive understanding of an organization is not possible without first understanding conflict (Afzalor Rahim, 2001: 7).

Conflict is an integral part of human life and absolutely natural. It has historically been associated with human life. A wide variety of individuals with different personality traits, needs, beliefs, values, expectations and perceptions inevitably leads to conflict in organizations (Dargahi et al., 2008: 63). Webster defines conflict as the dispute and disagreement between opposing forces and a contrast between instincts and moral and religious ideals and ethics (Webster, 1989; Fayazi, 2009: 93). According to Greenberg and Baron, conflict is a process wherein one party feels that the other party engages in activities that prevents him from reaching his goals and pursuing his interests (Greenberg & Baron, 1997: 385). Gray et al. believe that conflict is perception of incompatible and opposing activities (goals, values, beliefs, demands, feelings and etc.) that leads to interference, interdiction, damage and inconvenience (Gray et al., 2007: 1417). Pantham defines conflict as the interaction between individuals who, on one hand, are in contact with each other and on the other hand, have differences regarding their major and minor goals and values. Under such conditions, individuals see one another as a potential obstacle to achieving their goals (Ghafourian, 2005: 37).

Recently, researchers have gotten more interested in studying conflict within organizations. According to Bursalioglu (1974), Follett (1924) was the first person to consider conflict within an organizational context. He believes that conflict is not problematic by itself and it is our inability to deal with this phenomenon that presents problems (Bursalioglu, 1974; Bali, 2006: 6). In addition to management, conflict has been taken into consideration in many fields including sociology, psychology, Culture, economy, labor relations and negotiation. Research conducted by Machado (2001) confirms that managers and employees can use conflict to solve problems, improve efficiency, and strengthen relationships (Machado, 2001). Coleman (2003) has also identified 50 variables influencing conflict. These variables cover various environmental aspects of relationships. Conflict as a phenomenon has different dimensions including human, psychological, social, cultural, political, and economic (Coleman, 2003; Fayazi, 2009: 97).

Conflict is a phenomenon leaving both positive and negative effects on the performance of individuals and organizations. Proper and effective use of conflict enhances performance and promotes health within an organization. Ineffective use of such phenomenon undermines performance

and creates conflict and tension within an organization. Effective use of conflict requires a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of its nature and causes apart from acquiring the skills necessary for conflict management and control which, today, is considered as one of the most important management skills (Nekouei Moghaddam et al., 2010: 58).

Since use of mediation and negotiation to resolve conflict between faculty members in order to reach integration and coordination is one of the most important aspects of academic leadership, there is nothing unique about academic organizations that could allow them to consider conflict as more or less acceptable. Conflict between colleagues can be due to the different degrees of importance they assign to teaching, access to different resources, dissimilar opinions about education and evaluation, disciplinary interpretations, differing research methodologies, management perspectives, faculty democracy and so on. These conflicts can occur between departments, faculty members, staff members and students (Ramsden, 2001:296).

Theoretical Principles

According to knowledge structuration theory, universities have group structures and groups should be involved in management. Therefore, group structure is associated with professional features of academic society. In such structure, the department chair has a high degree of expertise and considerable experience. His leadership status and role is derived from his academic competence. He is accepted and respected by all teachers, experts and executives in the university. In this structure, the management network (at all levels) is freely selected by or from among faculty members. Management is responsible for coordination and evaluation of colleagues so that they can contribute to organization's goals and missions (Khodaverdi, 1996: 63).

Adizes believes that effective management of an organization requires its manager's dedication to take on four distinct roles as a producer, administrator, entrepreneur, and integrator. As a producer, the manager should produce results equal or better that the competitors. As an administrator, the manager should prepare schedules, provide coordination, exercise control and enforce discipline. As an entrepreneur, the manager acts within the framework of an information – decision-making subsystem. As an integrator, the manager transforms individual strategies to group strategies, individual risks to group risks, individual goals to group goals, and individual initiatives to group initiatives (Rezaeian: 1997: 20-21).

Path-goal theory pints out that leaders' fundamental duty is to clarify goals for the subordinates. Leaders help subordinates find the best path to the goals and remove any obstacles along the path. This theory makes it possible for the leaders to adjust to different situations. According to this model, the factors influencing leaders' success include: (1) subordinates' characteristics: needs, confidence, abilities and (2) nature of workplace: type and nature of tasks and relationships between colleagues (Asghari, 2007: 156). Fiedler's contingency model of leadership focuses on two basic concepts relationship-oriented leadership style and task-oriented leadership style. Relationship-oriented leaders emphasize on different aspects of their work relationships. They see every employee as someone important and accordingly, pay attention to them as well as their needs. Task-oriented leaders emphasize on work and duty and consider employees as means to achieve organizational goals (Shaban, 2008: 46).

Mintzberg concluded that managers are almost similar in what they do. He considers several roles for managers. Interpersonal roles include figurehead, leader and liaison and decisional roles include entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator (Robbins & DeCenzo, 2000: 23).

In this study, role theory is used as the main theoretical framework because it provides an appropriate context for describing and analyzing behaviors and expectations associated with the role of department chairs. In addition, from among the wide variety of role theories, organizational role theory was specifically used as it deals with the behavior and relationships within official organizations such as departments in universities. Role conflict is the main element of organizational role theory. It refers to situation in which individuals working close to each other in an organization have varying views about how other members of organization should behave (Kahn et al., 1964: 26). Therefore, by understanding the concept of role conflict, we can examine the level of role conflict

among department chairs at University of Tabriz and its associated factors. Historically, there have been different views on conflict a summary of which is provided below.

The traditional theory of conflict considered it indecent and had a negative viewed it negatively. Conflict was synonymous with terms such as desecration, destruction and irrationality. In general conflict was something harmful that should be avoided. According to this theory, all conflicts should be avoided (Gorji & Taheri, 2010: 33).

Behavioral theory argues that conflict is a natural phenomenon in all groups and organizations. Due to its inevitability, the behavioral school recommends us to accept it. In comparison to behavioral theory, which accepts conflict, interactionism theory encourages conflict because coordinated, quiet, peaceful and collaborating groups are potentially prone to transforming into static and indifferent groups (Malayeri & Mayani, 2009: 67).

Interactionism argues that a conflict-free organization will probably be static, immobile and insensitive to change. Conflict is advantageous if it leads to exploring and finding better ways of doing things and change the status quo. Advocates of interactionism believe that change does not occur automatically and by itself as it needs a stimulus which, in this case, is conflict.

March and Simon as the theorists of administrative behavior theory consider conflict a primarily and essentially personal and private issue although it involves two individuals. In this theory, conflict is accepted as a reality of organizational life. These theorists recognize the significance of external factors and pressures in provoking organizational conflict and indicate that conflict is caused by power structure, different contexts and situations and varying group replications in large organizations (Groos, 1964: 187).

Follett believes that no organization is conflict-free and life without conflict is boring. Violin produces music due to friction. Similarly, conflict is considered as a phenomenon that can produce energy. It is managers' task to manage and control conflict (Parkinson, 1991: 46).

Johari window theory can also be applied to interpersonal conflict. The theory's core infrastructure used in behavior analysis is individual's knowledge of self and others' knowledge of individual. According to this theory, the more individuals are placed into the open or arena (they get a better understanding of each other through exchange of beliefs, attitudes, opinions and, in general, any information about themselves) it is more likely that they reach an agreement and, therefore, experience less disagreement and conflict (Izadi Yazdanabadi, 2000: 149-152).

Related Studies

A research by Duze in 2012 indicated that role conflict between professional and academic administrators in Nigeria's universities was caused by competition over scares resources, poor communication, improper order of tasks, inequitable distribution of power, and poor managerial strategies. In addition, an effective strategy for avoiding and resolving role conflict and identifying and removing its root causes was introduced. In this method, any situation or conditions leading to role conflict will be removed before being experienced by administrators. So, it is recommended that university officials adopt this strategy to resolve role conflict (Duze, 2012).

In 2007, Margaret Young showed that there was no significant difference between department chairs and faculty heads in the ratings they assign to the importance of department chairs' tasks and duties. Additionally, no significant difference was found between department chairs and full-time faculty members in the ratings they assign to the importance of department chairs' tasks and duties. Rizzo et al. used role conflict scale to prove the presence of role conflict among department chairs. They also suggest that department chairs deal with another phenomenon called role overload. Their research results suggested that there was no significant relationship between role conflict and features including age, department size, methods used for selecting department chairs, and length of service of department chair (Young, 2007).

In a research conducted by both in 1982, it was concluded that organizational management growth and development can significantly alleviate role conflict. Furthermore, management training and education and awareness of management issues are among the basic needs of department chairs (Both, 1982).

Carroll and Gmelch (1992) identified four main roles for department chairs: leader, scholar, faculty developer and manager. Each of these roles consists of a number of roles. Gmelch and Carroll

argue that all these roles should be performed by department chairs. However, depending on their personality traits and other social circumstances, department chairs focus on only a group of these roles. More precisely, they essentially advocate one specific role. Such approach will clearly lead to role conflict (Carroll & Gmelch, 1992).

In 2002, Ferst identified five major roles for department chairs: scholar, faculty developer I, leader, manager and faculty developer II. He showed that recruitment and selection of faculty members and evaluating teachers' performance are of utmost importance for heads of faculties, whereas teachers assign the lowest level of importance to these tasks. Finding good ideas for improving department's status, do planning and organizing department meetings were of utmost importance for teachers. Ferst showed that teachers preferred department chairs to perform their leadership goals, whereas department chairs, themselves prefer their role as scholars. He also indicated that teachers, faculty heads and department chairs, each, have certain quite different expectations of department chairs which, in turn, will lead to role conflict (Ferst, 2002).

Research Model
Analytical model: 1 research on organizational role conflict
Analytical model: 2 research on mental role conflict

Research Hypotheses
1) There is a significant relationship between department chairs' leadership styles and their role conflict.
2) There is a significant relationship between department chairs' role overload and role conflict.
3) There is a significant relationship between the importance department chairs assign to their own role and their role conflict and overload.
4) There is a significant relationship between personal and career characteristics of department chairs and their role conflict and overload.
5) There is a significant difference between the importance department chairs assign to their own roles and the importance teachers assign to the same role.

Methodology
The present study is a survey. The research population consists of all department chairs and teachers at University of Tabriz. The questionnaire was distributed among all 66 department chairs. 51 of completed questionnaires were considered acceptable. The total number of teachers was 634. Random sampling method was used to determine this part of research sample. 200 of completed questionnaires were considered acceptable.

The researchers used questionnaires as their data collection tool. The questionnaire consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The Likert scale is used in the closed-ended questions. Four questionnaires were used to measure the research variables: (1) modified version of department chair duty questionnaire developed by Carroll and Gmelch (1992) and distributed among department chairs and teachers (it consists of 21 duties categorized under five roles (department leader, resource manager, faculty leader, instructional manager, and teacher and student advisor)), (2) role conflict seven-item scale (Rizzo et al., 1970) distributed among department chairs (3) role overload three-items scale (Netemeyer et al., 1995) and a one-item scale developed by Young (2007) distributed among department chairs, and (4) Salzman's 35-item leadership scale distributed among department chairs (to determine their leadership style) and teachers (to determine department chairs' leadership style).

Content validity or more specifically face validity was used to determine research's validity. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for importance assigned to duties questionnaire, leadership style questionnaire, role conflict questionnaire, and role overload questionnaire were 0.766, 0.723, 0.89, and 0.88, respectively. Since estimated Cronbach's alpha coefficients were greater than the standard value (0.7), it can be concluded that the questionnaires have good internal reliability

Findings

Descriptive Findings

The descriptive tables of demographic and main variables are shown as Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1
Description of Demographic Variables

	Frequency	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis	Minimum	Maximum
Age	51	46.10	6.926	47.970	-0.309	-0.415	34	60
Length of experience as a department chair	51	4.355	3.2570	10.608	0.878	-0.140	0.4	12
Length of experience as a faculty member	51	8.402	5.1010	26.020	1.106	0.952	1	22
Department Size	51	8.94	3.491	12.185	0.216	-1.061	3	15

Table 2
Description of Main Variables

	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis	Minimum	Maximum
Importance Assigned to duties	51	4.9356	0.43308	0.188	-0.755	-0.620	4.05	5.52
Student advisor role	51	4.5098	0.88029	0.775	1.159	-0.685	4	6
Resource manager Role	51	4.8392	0.76422	0.584	-0.470	-0.493	3.20	6
Department leader	51	5.1024	0.49583	0.246	-0.490	1.278	3.44	5.78
Instructional manager	51	5.0980	0.66096	0.437	-0.891	0.696	3	6
Faculty leader	51	4.7516	0.61768	0.382	0.572	-0.684	4	6
Role overload	51	3.7794	1.54568	2.389	-0.126	-1.278	1	6
Role conflict	51	3.3665	1.41397	1.999	-0.006	-1.085	1	5.71

Inferential Findings

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between department chairs' leadership styles and their role conflict.

One-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) was used to test this hypothesis. The test results show that the level of significance is 0.000 which is less than 0.05 meaning null hypothesis is rejected. As a result, there is significant relationship between department chairs' leadership styles and their role conflict. LSD post hoc test's results indicate that the level of role conflict is significantly lower in department chairs with a liberal leadership style than with department chairs with authoritarian and mixed leadership styles.

Table 3
ANOVA Results for Analysis of Relationship between Role conflict and Leadership Style

	Frequency	Mean	Standard deviation	F	Level of significance
Authoritarian leadership style	10	4.2690	1.46041	9.562	0.000
Mixed leadership style	17	3.9412	1.27981		
Liberal leadership style	24	2.5833	1.06491		

Table 4
LSD Post Hoc Test Results for Role Conflict

Leadership Style (I)	Leadership style (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Mean Difference Error	Level of Significance
Authoritarian leadership style	Mixed leadership style	0.32787	0.48634	0.503
	Liberal leadership style	1.68571	0.45932	0.001
Liberal leadership style	Liberal leadership style	1.35784	0.38685	0.001

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between department chairs' role overload and role conflict.

Pearson's correlation was used to test this hypothesis. Pearson's correlation coefficient and level of significance were 0.802 and 0.000, respectively. Since the calculated Pearson's correlation coefficient was less than 0.05, the hypothesis that considers these two variables as independent is rejected. In other words, there is a significant relationship between department chairs' role overload and role conflict.

Table 5
Pearson's Correlation Test Results for Analyzing the Relationship between Role Overload and Role Conflict

		Role Conflict
Role Overload	Correlation Coefficient	0.802
	Level of significance	0.000
	Frequency	51

Diagram 3 – The Relationship between Role Conflict and Role Overload

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant relationship between the importance department chairs assign to their own role and their role conflict and overload.

Pearson's correlation was used to test this hypothesis. As for resource manager role, Pearson's correlation coefficient and level of significance were 0.307 and 0.028, respectively. Since the calculated Pearson's correlation coefficient was less than 0.05, the hypothesis that considers these two variables as independent is rejected. In other words, there is a significant relationship between resource manager role and role conflict. There is no significant relationship between role conflict and overall importance assigned to the duties, student advisor role, department leadership role, instructional manager role, and faculty leader role (levels of significance were less than 0.05).

Table 6
Pearson's Correlation Test Results for Analyzing the Relationship between Importance Assigned to Roles and Role Conflict

		Importance assigned to duties	Student advisor	Resource manager	Department leader	Instructional manager	Faculty leader
Role Conflict	Correlation coefficient	0.199	0.096	0.307	0.121	-0.016	-0.094
	Level of significance	0.161	0.501	0.028	0.397	0.909	0.513
	Frequency	51	51	51	51	51	51

Hypothesis 4: There is a significant relationship between personal and career characteristics of department chairs and their role conflict and overload.

This hypothesis is examined in different parts. Relevant tests are used in each part.

Age: Pearson's correlation test was used to examine the relationship between age and role conflict and overload. As for role conflict, Pearson's correlation coefficient and level of significance were 0.065 and 0.651, respectively. As for role overload, Pearson's correlation coefficient and level of significance were 0.069 and 0.629, respectively. Since the calculated Pearson's correlation coefficients were greater than 0.05, the hypothesis that considers the two variables as independent is not rejected. In other words, there is no significant relationship between age of department chairs and their role conflict and overload.

Table 7
Pearson's Correlation Test Results for Analyzing the Relationship between Age and Role Conflict and Overload

		Role conflict	Role overload
Age	Correlation coefficient	0.065	0.069
	Level of significance	0.651	0.629
	Frequency	51	51

Length of experience as a department chair. Pearson's correlation test was used to examine the relationship between length of experience as a department chair and role conflict and overload. As for role conflict, Pearson's correlation coefficient and level of significance were - 0.185 and 0.194, respectively. As for role overload, Pearson's correlation coefficient and level of significance were - 0.127 and 0.374, respectively. Since the calculated Pearson's correlation coefficients were greater than 0.05, the hypotheses that consider the two variables as independent are not rejected. In other words, there is no significant relationship between length of experience as a department chair and their role conflict and overload.

Table 8
Pearson's Correlation Test Results for Analyzing the Relationship between Length of Experience as a Department Chair and Role Conflict and Overload

		Role conflict	Role overload
Length of experience as a department chair	Correlation coefficient	-0.185	-0.127
	Level of significance	0.194	0.374
	Frequency	51	51

Length of experience as a faculty member. Pearson's correlation test was used to examine the relationship between length of experience as a faculty member and role conflict and overload. As for role conflict, Pearson's correlation coefficient and level of significance were - 0.059 and 0.681,

respectively. As for role overload, Pearson's correlation coefficient and level of significance were - 0.142 and 0.32, respectively. Since the calculated Pearson's correlation coefficients were greater than 0.05, the hypotheses that consider the two variables as independent are not rejected. In other words, there is no significant relationship between length of experience as a faculty member and their role conflict and overload.

Table 9
Pearson's Correlation Test Results for Analyzing the Relationship between Length of Experience as a Faculty Member and Role Conflict and Overload

		Role conflict	Role overload
Length of experience as a faculty member	Correlation coefficient	-0.059	-0.142
	Level of significance	0.681	0.320
	Frequency	51	51

Department size. Pearson's correlation test was used to examine the relationship between department size and role conflict and overload. As for role conflict, Pearson's correlation coefficient and level of significance were - 0.116 and 0.418, respectively. As for role overload, Pearson's correlation coefficient and level of significance were - 0.123 and 0.389, respectively. Since the calculated Pearson's correlation coefficients were greater than 0.05, the hypotheses that consider the two variables as independent are not rejected. In other words, there is no significant relationship between department size and their role conflict and overload.

Table 10
Pearson's Correlation Test Results for Analyzing the Relationship between Department Size and Role Conflict and Overload

		Role conflict	Role overload
Department size	Correlation coefficient	-0.116	-0.123
	Level of significance	0.418	0.389
	Frequency	51	51

Gender. Independent t-test was used to examine the relationship between gender and role conflict and overload. The mean values of role conflict among male and female department chairs were 3.38 and 3.23, respectively and the level of significance was 0.821. In addition, the mean values of role overload among male and female department chairs were 3.85 and 3.15, respectively and the level of significance was 0.343. Since t-test's levels of significance are greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is not rejected. In other words, there is no significant difference between male and female department chairs' role conflict and overload.

Table 11
Independent T-Test Results for Analyzing the Relationship between Department Chairs' Gender and Role Conflict and Overload

Dependent Variable	Gender	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation	Levene's test		T-test		
					F	Level of significance	T	Degree of freedom	Level of Significance
Role Conflict	Male	46	3.3815	1.46832	2.711	0.106	0.227	49	0.821
	Female	5	3.2286	0.84274					
Role Overload	Male	46	3.8478	1.58507	1.995	0.164	0.958	49	0.343
	Female	5	3.1500	1.02470					

Academic rank. Independent t-test was used to examine the relationship between academic ranks and role conflict and overload. The mean values of role conflict among assistant professor and associate professor department chairs were 3.52 and 3.09, respectively and the level of significance was 0.314. In addition, the mean values of role overload among assistant professor and associate professor chairs were 3.72 and 3.89, respectively and the level of significance was 0.672. Since t-test's levels of significance are greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is not rejected. In other words, there is no significant difference between assistant professor and associate professor department chairs' role conflict and overload.

Table 12
Independent T-Test Results for Analyzing the Relationship between Department Chairs' academic Rank and Role Conflict and Overload

Dependent Variable	Academic rank	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation	Levene's test		T-test		
					F	Level of sig.	T	Degree of freedom	Level of Sig.
Role Conflict	Assistant professor	33	3.5152	1.49747	1.792	0.187	1.017	49	0.314
	Associate professor	18	3.0939	1.24005					
Role Overload	Assistant professor	33	3.7197	1.76639	13.528	0.001	-0.426	48.401	0.672
	Associate professor	18	3.8889	1.06489					

Department chair selection method. Independent t-test was used to examine the relationship between department chair selection method and role conflict and overload. The mean values of role conflict among department chairs selected by university and department chairs selected by faculty members were 3.80 and 2.70, respectively and the level of significance was 0.006. In addition, the mean values of role overload among department chairs selected by university and department chairs selected by faculty members were 4.14 and 3.22, respectively and the level of significance was 0.038. Since t-test's levels of significance are less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. In other words, the level of role conflict and overload is significantly higher in department chairs selected by university than department chairs selected by faculty members.

Table 13
Independent T-Test Results for Analyzing the Relationship between Department Chair Selection Method and Role Conflict and Overload

Dependent Variable	Selection method	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation	Levene's test		T-test		
					F	Level of sig.	T	Degree of freedom	Level of Sig.
Role Conflict	University	31	3.7972	1.31908	0.25	0.875	2.903	49	0.006
	Teachers	20	2.6988	1.31984					
Role Overload	University	31	4.1371	1.50116	0.047	0.830	2.129	49	0.038
	Teachers	20	3.2250	1.48213					

Disciplinary department. One-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) was used to examine the relationship between disciplinary department and role conflict and overload. As for role conflict, the level of significance was 0.22. As for role overload, the level of significance was 0.007. Since the levels of significance were less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. As a result, there is a significant difference in role conflict and overload among department chairs of different disciplinary departments. LSD post hoc test's results indicate that the level of role conflict and overload are

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significantly lower in department chairs of pure soft sciences than in department chairs of applied and pure hard sciences.

Table 14
ANOVA Results for Analysis of Relationship between Disciplinary Department and Role Conflict and Overload

	Disciplinary department	Frequency	Mean	Standard deviation	F	Level of significance
Role conflict	Applied soft sciences	4	3.5000	1.22613	3.528	0.022
	Pure soft sciences	9	2.1164	0.83677		
	Applied hard sciences	23	3.7930	1.41513		
	Pure hard sciences	15	3.4270	1.39955		
Role overload	Applied soft sciences	4	2.9375	0.96555	4.496	0.007
	Pure soft sciences	9	2.4722	1.14185		
	Applied hard sciences	23	4.3804	1.56101		
	Pure hard sciences	15	3.8667	1.36233		

Table 15
LSD Post Hoc Test Results

	Disciplinary department (I)	Disciplinary department (J)	Mean difference	Mean difference error	Level of significance
Role conflict	Applied soft sciences	Pure soft sciences	1.38360	0.79176	0.087
		Applied hard sciences	-0.29296	0.71377	0.683
		Pure soft sciences	0.07302	0.74144	0.922
	Pure soft sciences	Applied hard sciences	-1.67656	0.51804	0.002
		Pure hard sciences	-1.31085	0.55553	0.023
	Applied hard sciences	Pure hard sciences	0.36598	0.43728	0.407
Role overload	Applied soft sciences	Pure soft sciences	0.46528	0.84448	0.584
		Applied hard sciences	-1.44293	0.76130	0.064
		Pure hard sciences	-0.92917	0.79081	0.246
	Pure soft sciences	Applied hard sciences	-1.90821	0.55254	0.001
		Pure hard sciences	-1.39444	0.59253	0.023
	Applied hard sciences	Pure hard sciences	0.51377	0.46639	0.276

Hypothesis 5. There is a significant difference between the importance department chairs assign to their own roles and the importance teachers assign to the same role.

Independent t-test was used to test this hypothesis. The test results show that department chairs assign a significantly higher importance to their role in general and resource manager role, department leadership role, and instructional manager role in specific compared to teachers (mean value of department chairs' opinion is higher and the level of significance is less than 0.05). Teachers assign a significantly higher importance to student advisor role and faculty leadership role compared to department chairs (mean value of teachers' opinion is higher and the level of significance is less than 0.05).

Table 16
Independent T-Test Result for Comparing the Importance Faculty Chairs Assign to Their Own Role and the Importance Teachers Assign to the Same Role

Dependent Variable	Department	Frequency	Mean	Standard deviation	Levene's test		T-test		
					F	Level of sig.	T	Degree of freedom	Level of sig.
Importance assigned to duties	Chairs	51	4.9356	0.43308	51.670	0.000	7.576	56.878	0.000
	Teachers	200	4.4610	0.22227					
Student advisor role	Chairs	51	4.50985	0.88029	6.888	0.009	-3.653	69.636	0.000
	Teachers	200		0.75021					
Resource manager role	Chairs	51	4.8392	0.76422	19.923	0.000	3.280	60.427	0.002
	Teachers	200	4.4710	0.48033					
Department leader	Chairs	51	5.1024	0.49583	3.678	0.056	18.810	249	0.000
	Teachers	200	3.8339	0.41169					
Instructional manager	Chairs	51	5.0980	0.66096	7.020	0.009	2.228	64.193	0.029
	Teachers	200	4.8783	0.48215					
Faculty leader	Chairs	51	4.7516	0.61768	17.263	0.000	-7.287	61.768	0.000
	Teachers	200	5.4167	0.41165					

Discussion and Conclusion

In the present study, the authors tried to identify the factors associated with department chairs' role conflict at University of Tabriz. Considering the research subject, two types of theories were used: theories associated with roles of department chairs and role conflict theories. As for theories associated with roles of department chairs, each theorist (e.g. Mintzberg and Adizes) has identified a different set of roles. These roles are contradictory and disparate in some cases and can lead to role conflict. In this study, five general roles were considered for department chairs. Both department chairs and teachers assign a relatively high importance to all these five roles. The results also showed that department chairs assign a higher level of importance to resource manager role, department leader role, and instructional manager role, whereas teachers assign a higher level of importance to student advisor role and faculty leader role. Such conditions can lead to role conflict. Such difference can be explained according to organizational role theory. This theory suggests that individuals involved in a role network can have different expectations of a role leading to role conflict. The results are in accordance with Ferst's findings (2002). Each of role conflict theories points to a different set of factors that can influence role conflict. In this study, only those factors that can be associated with department chairs' roles are taken into consideration. The results of statistical tests indicated that there is a significant relationship between department chairs' leadership styles and their role conflict. In other words, department chairs who follow a liberal leadership style experience lower levels of role conflict and overload compared to the department chairs who follow authoritarian and mixed leadership styles. According to Fiedler's contingency model of leadership, a leader described as liberal and relationship-oriented emphasizes on different aspects of their work relationships and pay attention to every subordinate. Naturally, in a department where chairs follow such leadership style, faculty members have better feelings and since work relationships and working atmosphere are both positive, they consider themselves as an important member, feel more committed and engage in department activities. On the other hand, department chairs face less difficulty managing the department. The results of statistical tests also show that there is a significant relationship between some personal and professional characteristics of department chairs (e.g. department chair selection method) and their role conflict. In other words, department chairs selected by faculty members experience a lower level of role conflict compared to those selected by other methods. According to knowledge structuration theory, the department chair has a high degree of expertise and considerable experience and his leadership status and role is derived from his academic competence. Therefore, faculty members feel more committed toward department chairs they,

themselves, select and thus engage in department activities. In addition, according to Follett's law of situation, if faculty members will follow department chair's orders and instruction if they believe that his position and status is due to his academic competence. In such circumstances, the department chair will have less difficulty in motivating faculty members to maximize their efforts and will experience a lower level of role conflict. The research results indicated that there is a significant relationship between role overload and role conflict. In other words, an increase in role overload will result in an increase in role conflict among department chairs. It can be due to the fact that when department chairs assume a wider range of roles, it is more likely that others will have different expectations of them. This situation results in a higher level of role conflict since they cannot fulfill all their duties and tasks.

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