

Task Ambiguity: The Effects of Missing Standard Operating Procedures and Inter-Leadership Harmony in Organizations

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Abstract

This research explores the impact of task ambiguity on organizational progress, particularly in the context of mental health organizations experiencing uncertainty in task flow and lacking effective Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and leadership coordination. Utilizing a qualitative approach, data was gathered through interviews with organization members and analysis of internal documents from 20 randomly selected organizations. The findings indicate that task ambiguity in the ABC Organization significantly affects member productivity and satisfaction, with uncertainty caused by unclear and ineffective SOPs and inconsistent leadership coordination leading to decreased motivation, increased stress, and reduced work quality among members. To address these issues, it is recommended that the ABC Organization develop and implement comprehensive and clear SOPs and enhance coordination and communication among leaders. This would help reduce task ambiguity, improve work efficiency, and create a more stable and supportive work environment.

Keywords: Task ambiguity, Standard Operational Procedure (SOP), Inter-leadership.

INTRODUCTION

In an organization, the accuracy and consistency of task flow are very important for the running of the work system and achieving optimal performance (Harjunheimo & Peteri, 2024; F. Sun et al., 2024). However, when ambiguity and uncertainty arise in the flow of a task, it can severely hamper member productivity and satisfaction, especially in the absence of Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) and ambiguous leadership coordination among key figures such as founders, co-founders and general managers (Abson et al., 2024; Ly, 2024). This research focuses on the impact of ambiguity in the flow of task distribution and its impact on organizational progress (Mueller et al., 2024; Pramanick et al., 2022).

Ambiguity in task division occurs when members are unsure about the flow, priorities, or expectations of assigned tasks (Wieland et al., 2022). This occurs when there is no clear Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) providing clear guidelines for task implementation and coordination (Killcross, 2021; Moreno-Villanueva et al., 2015). In addition, the lack of effective communication and harmonious coordination among leaders exacerbates the confusion experienced by members (Y. Sun et al., 2022). When members don't understand how to prioritize their tasks, it can cause major problems for them and the entire organization. They

may feel more stressed, unhappy with their jobs, and less motivated. This can make them less productive, miss deadlines, and do low-quality work (Schulman, 2020).

Previous research by Keene (2021) stated the importance of Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) in outlining how tasks should be carried out and coordinated, which helps reduce uncertainty in the flow of task distribution and underscores the importance of SOPs in proper instructions for task completion and coordination which is very important in reducing the ambiguity of task distribution flows. Another study conducted by Rehman (2023) found that task ambiguity was considered a variable that influenced workers' intention to resign. Task ambiguity can occur when workers are not clear about what is expected of them or when tasks do not have clear boundaries, so the work cannot be done properly and efficiently. In this context, clear and specific SOPs can help reduce task ambiguity and ensure that work is done efficiently and effectively (Gupta et al., 2023; Lui et al., 2024).

Also, if leaders don't work well together, they may give different instructions, do the same job twice, or not work together on tasks properly (Giurge & Woolley, 2022; Van der Hauwaert et al., 2022). To address this issue, organizations must understand the importance of clear rules (SOPs) that explain how tasks should be ordered and how leaders should work together (Qin et al., 2022). When there are clear rules, it helps to make things less confusing, helps members know what to do better, and makes the whole organization work better (Parco et al., 2023). Also, leaders need to talk and cooperate well so that members get the same instructions and don't get confused (Brown et al., 2023; Lu et al., 2024). The uniqueness of this study lies in its investigation of the relationship between unity of leadership and coordination of tasks in organizations. By analyzing how productive collaboration among leaders affects task distribution and completion, the study brings attention to the value of integrated leadership in minimizing repetition, contradictory direction, and ineffective task distribution (Maharani & Saputra, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2023). In addition, it emphasizes the importance of transparent communication and cooperative decision-making among leaders in improving organizational efficiency and member understanding (Hollmann et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021)

This research aims to analyze the impact of the absence of clear SOPs and poor coordination among leaders on task distribution ambiguity within organizations. Furthermore, it seeks to identify strategies to reduce this ambiguity and enhance the productivity and job satisfaction of organizational members. The benefits of this research include providing practical insights for organizations on the importance of clear SOPs and effective leadership coordination. The implications of this research can help organizations design better SOPs and improve communication and collaboration among leaders. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to long-term operational efficiency and employee well-being.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the relationship between the accuracy of standard operating procedures (SOPs) and leadership coordination in the context of mental health organizations that experience uncertainty in the flow of task distribution and lack of effective SOPs and leadership coordination. The focus of the research is on the impact of such uncertainty on organizational progress. The research focuses on these organizations, examining how they deal with and manage uncertainty in task distribution flows as well as deficiencies in SOPs and leadership coordination. Data for the study were obtained through two main sources:

interviews with members of the organization and analysis of internal documents, including SOPs and reports. The study population consisted of mental health organizations that experienced uncertainty with respect to task distribution and leadership coordination flows, while the study sample consisted of 20 organizations randomly selected from that population.

Research techniques and tools used include surveys designed to collect data on organizational members' perceptions and experiences related to uncertainty in task distribution flows as well as lack of SOPs and leadership coordination. In addition, an analysis of organizational documents is performed to get a further picture of how the organization responds to and overcomes the challenges faced. The data analysis technique used is qualitative analysis, which involves coding data to identify themes and patterns that arise with respect to uncertainty in the flow of task distribution and lack of SOPs and leadership coordination. The data is then interpreted to understand how those uncertainties affect the progress of mental health organizations as a whole.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ambiguity in the Division of Tasks

The results of the interviews revealed that many members in the ABC Organization experienced ambiguity in the distribution of tasks. Unclear task flow, priorities, and expectations often occur due to the lack of clear and effective Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs). Members are often unsure about their specific tasks, leading to confusion and frustration in carrying out the work.

Table 1. Ambiguity in the division of task

Statement	Number of Respondents (from a total of 25 respondents)	Percentage (%)
Experiencing task flow vagueness	15	60
Experiencing unclear priorities	12	48
Experiencing vagueness of expectations	10	40
Not sure about specific tasks	13	52
Experiencing confusion in carrying out work	14	56
Experiencing frustration in carrying out work	11	44
Mention the lack of clear Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs)	16	64
Mention the missing of SOPs	14	56

This table illustrates the various aspects of ambiguity in the division of tasks experienced by members of the ABC Organization and shows the percentage of respondents who experienced each problem.

Lack of Leadership Coordination

Participatory observations show that coordination among leaders in the ABC Organization is not always harmonious. Instructions from founders and co-founders sometimes contradict each other, while general managers do not always manage to align directions from superiors. As a result, team members receive varying instructions, exacerbating ambiguity in their tasks. This results in confusion about the true priorities.

Table 2. Aspects of Lack of Leader Coordination

Statement	Number of Respondents (from a total of 25 respondents)	Percentage (%)
The instructions of the founder and co-founder contradict each other	14	56
General managers do not always manage to align directions from superiors	12	48
Team members receive different instructions	15	60
Experiencing confusion about actual priorities	13	52

This table illustrates the various aspects of the lack of leadership coordination observed in Organization ABC and shows the percentage of respondents who experienced each problem.

Discussion

Impact of Task Ambiguity on Member Productivity and Satisfaction

The study found that ambiguity in task distribution in the ABC Organization had a significant impact on member productivity and satisfaction. Uncertainty in tasks leads to decreased motivation, increased stress levels, and decreased quality of work. Members often feel frustrated and helpless at not knowing what is expected of them, which in turn hinders their ability to get work done efficiently and effectively (Shen et al., 2024). In addition, the ambiguity of tasks creates an unstable work environment, where team members feel confused and unsupported, which worsens their emotional state and increases feelings of insecurity at work.

The decrease in motivation caused by the ambiguity of this task is very detrimental to the organization because unmotivated team members tend to show suboptimal work performance (Kanat-Maymon et al., 2020). They will avoid initiative and responsibility and only do the minimum work necessary. Increased stress levels caused by the vagueness of tasks also contribute to broader mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression, which can ultimately result in absenteeism and decreased employee retention.

In addition, uncertainty in tasks can trigger conflicts between team members, as they may have different understandings of each other's responsibilities (Milner, 2024). This conflict not only disrupts teamwork, but also reduces team cohesion, which is important for the achievement of organizational goals. Vagueness in the division of tasks also hinders the skill

development of team members, as they do not get clear feedback on their performance and which areas need improvement.

This result is in line with Schulman's (2020) findings, which state that vagueness in tasks can reduce productivity and job satisfaction. Schulman found that when team members have a clear understanding of their responsibilities, they are more likely to feel satisfied with their work and show better performance. Thus, it is important for management to ensure that tasks and responsibilities are clearly defined and effective communication is carried out to reduce ambiguity and improve the productivity and well-being of team members.

The Importance of Clear and Specific SOPs

In accordance with the findings of Keene (2021) and Rehman (2023), this study emphasizes the importance of having clear and specific SOPs. Detailed SOPs can provide necessary guidelines for task execution and coordination, reduce ambiguity, and improve work efficiency. A good SOP not only describes the steps to be followed but also establishes clear responsibilities, clarifies the flow of communication, and provides a mechanism to solve problems that may arise during the execution of tasks.

In the ABC Organization, the lack of adequate SOPs is one of the main causes of task vagueness. Without clear guidance, members often don't know who is responsible for a particular task or how to get the job done in the most effective way. This not only lowers productivity but also creates confusion and frustration among team members.

Keene (2021) points out that clear SOPs can help members understand work expectations and standards, which in turn improves job performance and satisfaction. Meanwhile, Rehman (2023) emphasizes that detailed SOPs can strengthen coordination among teams and departments, ensuring that all members of the organization are working towards the same goals in a structured and efficient manner.

By implementing clear and specific SOPs, ABC Organization can reduce ambiguity in the distribution of tasks, improve work efficiency, and create a more stable and supportive work environment (Eskandarzadeh et al., 2023). In addition, a good SOP can also serve as a training tool for new members, helping them adjust quickly and understand their responsibilities from the start. Effective implementation of SOPs will be an important step in correcting operational issues and improving overall organizational performance (Mills et al., 2020).

Effective Leadership Coordination

The findings of this study suggest that effective leadership coordination is essential to reduce ambiguity in tasks. Good collaboration among leaders can ensure that the instructions given to members are consistent and clear so that each team member understands their priorities and responsibilities. Good coordination also allows leaders to align vision and strategy, reducing the risk of confusion caused by conflicting directives.

This study supports the findings of Hollmann et al. (2020), who emphasize the importance of transparent communication among leaders. Open and honest communication allows leaders to effectively share information, clarify expectations, and resolve conflicts before they negatively impact the team. Transparency in communication also helps build trust among team members, which in turn improves performance and job satisfaction.

In addition, Li et al. (2021) highlight the importance of cooperative decision-making among leaders. When decisions are taken collectively and take into account the perspectives of

all leaders, the results tend to be more comprehensive and can be implemented more effectively. Cooperative decision-making ensures that every leader has the same understanding of goals and methods to achieve them so that instructions given to team members are more consistent and purposeful.

In ABC Organization, ineffectiveness in leadership coordination has led to ambiguity in the division of tasks, which negatively impacts members' productivity and job satisfaction. By strengthening coordination and communication between leaders, organizations can create a more structured and efficient work environment. Leaders need to hold regular meetings to align direction, share important information, and ensure that all team members get clear and consistent instructions.

Effective implementation of leadership coordination strategies will help reduce ambiguity in tasks, improve work efficiency, and create a more harmonious work environment (Chortareas & Mavrodimitrakis, 2021; Roy & Houser, 2024). In addition, it will also improve the ability of the organization to achieve its strategic objectives more effectively and responsively to dynamic changes in the business environment.

Implications for the Organization ABC

To overcome the problem of ambiguity in the distribution of tasks, the ABC Organization needs to develop and implement comprehensive and clear SOPs. A detailed SOP should cover all aspects of the organization's operations, including procedures for each task, individual responsibilities, and workflows to be followed. With good SOPs in place, members will have clear guidance on what is expected of them, how to carry out their duties, and to whom they should report their work. This will reduce uncertainty and increase efficiency and consistency in task execution.

In addition, organizations should improve coordination and communication among leaders. Leaders at all levels of the organization should be involved in the SOP development process to ensure that all operational aspects are considered and agreed upon. Effective communication between leaders will ensure that the instructions given to members do not conflict with each other and that all leaders have the same understanding of the priorities and goals of the organization (De Clercq & Pereira, 2023).

Special training to improve communication skills and cooperation among leaders is also indispensable (Blomberg et al., 2024). These training programs should focus on developing effective communication skills, conflict-resolution techniques, and teamwork strategies. With this training, leaders can learn how to provide clear and consistent instruction, listen to and understand their peers' perspectives, and work together to achieve common goals. This will help reduce conflicting instructions and increase member satisfaction and productivity (Berger et al., 2022).

Further, organizations need to hold regular meetings to ensure ongoing coordination among leaders. These meetings can be used to discuss the latest developments, identify and address emerging issues, and align strategies and priorities. Thus, organizations can create a more structured and harmonious work environment where each team member feels supported and has a clear direction.

Comprehensive SOP implementation and improved leadership coordination will not only reduce ambiguity in task distribution but also improve overall operational efficiency. Thus, ABC Organization will be able to increase productivity, reduce members' stress levels, and

achieve better performance. It will also have a positive impact on job satisfaction and member loyalty, which will ultimately contribute to the long-term success of the organization.

CONCLUSION

The study effectively delves into the repercussions of task ambiguity within the ABC Organization, shedding light on its detrimental effects on productivity and member satisfaction. Through a meticulous blend of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, it is apparent that the absence of clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and consistent leadership coordination engenders uncertainty in task execution, resulting in diminished motivation, heightened stress levels, and compromised work quality among members. This pervasive lack of clarity leaves employees feeling disempowered and frustrated, ultimately impeding their capacity to perform optimally within the organization's framework.

To rectify these pressing issues, the ABC Organization must prioritize the development and implementation of comprehensive, unambiguous SOPs, alongside efforts to bolster coordination and communication among leadership. Concrete measures, such as regular leadership training sessions to augment communication and management skills, in tandem with ongoing evaluations of SOP adherence, are recommended. Nonetheless, it is imperative to acknowledge the study's limitations, notably its reliance on data from a singular organization, which may restrict the applicability of its findings. Future research endeavors should aim to explore the ramifications of task ambiguity across diverse organizational landscapes and cultural contexts, thereby yielding more comprehensive insights into this pertinent organizational challenge.

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