

Pathways from Role Identification Level to Attention Residue in Multiple Team Membership

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Bachelor of Science

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Purpose/Motivation: More than two third of knowledge workers are assigned to multiple teams simultaneously with the goal to leverage employees' knowledge more effectively and to respond with higher flexibility (Espinosa, Cummings, Wilson, & Pearce, 2003; O'Leary, Woolley, & Mortensen, 2012). We are just starting to understand the benefits and challenges that MTM entails for organizations, teams and employees. For example, the psychosocial experiences caused by continuous role switching across multiple teams with which individuals might feel differentially identified have received scarce scholar attention so far. This thesis proposes a theoretical model bolstered by semi-structured interviews linking identification level in MTM to attention residue through two pathways: engagement and interrole conflict.

Theories/Hypotheses, Approach/Methodology and Findings: The paper is the convergence of personal engagement theory (Kahn, 1990), role/boundary theory (Ashforth, 2001), self-regulation theory (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000), attention residue theory (Leroy, 2009) and interviews conducted with academics. The result is a theoretical model (see image below) proposing that a high role identification level in one role can lead to attention residue in another role via interrole conflict and role engagement. It further proposes role identification dispersion and interrole interruptions as moderators of the distinct pathways. The following hypotheses were derived from the extensive literature review and interviews:

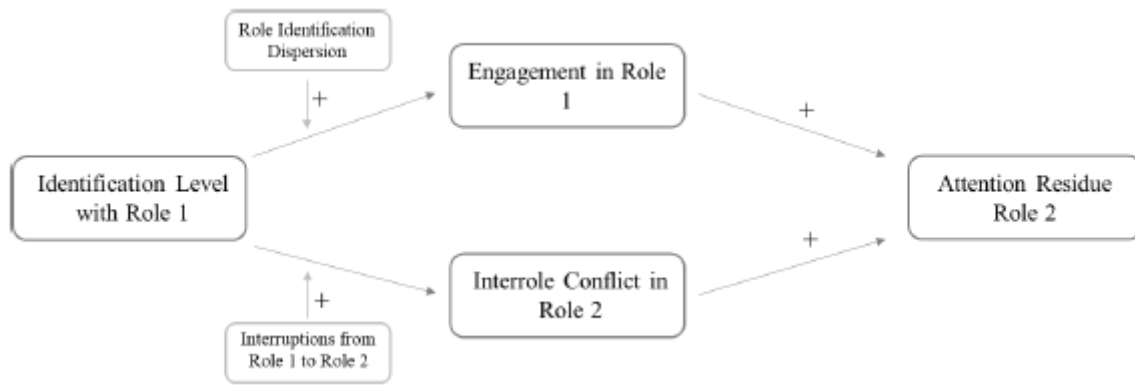
H1: Role Identification with Role 1 leads to attention residue in role 2.

H1a: Role identification with role 1 will lead to attention residue in role 2 via personal engagement with role 1.

H1aa: Personal engagement in the higher identified role will be strengthened if the individual experiences high role identification dispersion between the assigned teams.

H1b: Role identification with role 1 will lead to attention residue in role 2 via interrole conflict in role 2.

H1bb: Interruptions from the preferred role strengthen the interrole conflict in role 2.



This shows, that even if external conditions, like time fragmentation or the number and variety of teams are kept at an optimal level, individuals' internal processes still can influence the success of MTM in organizations.

Research Limitations: The conceptual model was simplified regarding the amount and time fragmentation of teams. Employees will not have the possibility to manage their complete working hours per week autonomously but will have already organized team events or meetings during their workday. Therefore, a few interruptions and transitions are prescribed. Additional interrole conflicts may emerge through deadlines in a team project which are not predictable. Moreover, there will be rare situations in which the time allocation to each team is clearly communicated, but often blurred and changing. Finally, MTM will often come together with multiteam systems (MTS), which means that there is further interdependence of team-level inputs like team members, and team processes and outcomes not accounted for in this research.

Research Implications: Due to a lack of empirical data about the actual impact of role identification on attention residue, a field study would provide greater insights. In this study, factors like the team member constellation, the project-stage and the quality of the project, as well as the personal importance of the project regarding career possibilities can be captured and their correlation and stand-alone impact researched. Besides academia as work field, a similar empirical field study would make sense in economic sectors like in consulting agencies. In this work field employees have less opportunity to self-select in projects and to define their role, wherefore the role identification may have more impact.

Practical Implications: Person-role match is more important than ever before. To sustain their competitive advantage, organizations should try to retain their qualified workers and one possibility to do this is through offering them a suitable role. This implies, that organizations should invest in person-job and person-organization fittings to select employees that have the right starting conditions, by default. Ideally, employees should have a voice in the decision process in which teams they are assigned. But even after taking care of a good matching

between the employee and the several roles, role switching and differences in the role identification can occur. Then, organizations should keep an eye on minimizing the role transitions. This can be achieved through encouraging employees to coordinate their time slots for certain role activities accordingly. Organizations could offer time and self-management trainings for employees to assess their work and attention behaviour and learn to manage it.

Contribution: This paper is one of the first about the role identification in MTM situations and the connection to negative outcomes on attentional level.

Paper type: conceptual

Further readings:

Ashforth, B., Kreiner, G. E., & Fugate, M. (2000). All in a day's work: Boundaries and micro role transitions. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(3), 472-491.

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O'Leary, M. B., Mortensen, M., & Woolley, A. W. (2011). Multiple team membership: A theoretical model of its effects on productivity and learning for individuals and teams.

Academy of Management Review, 36(3), 461-478. doi:10.5465/amr.2011.61031807

Sessions, H., Nahrgang, J. D., Vaultont, M., Williams, R., & Bartels, A. L. (2020). Do the hustle! Empowerment from side-hustles and its effects on full-time work performance.

Academy of management journal. doi:10.5465/amj.2018.0164