



Role Ambiguity and Leadership Styles among Women Leaders in Educational and Private Corporate Sector: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract : This study explores the role ambiguity and leadership styles among the women leaders in education and private corporate sector organisations, through semi-structured interview with 14 women participants with experience of 2+ years in leadership and managerial role, the research explores how unclear role expectations influence leadership behavior, decision-making, and professional identity. Study also identifies the leadership styles commonly adopted and the coping strategies used by women leaders for managing and overcoming the role ambiguity in their leadership roles. Thematic analysis revealed that role ambiguity may occur in conjunction with proximity to kindred responsibilities, gendered expectations, and the institutional culture. Notwithstanding the implications of ambiguity, participants articulated leading in an adaptive manner that could be described along a spectrum of transformational leading to participative leading, allowing them to respond with adaptability and tact. Finally, these results demonstrate a necessity for organizations to provide clarity, for there to be an infrastructure of supportive leadership programming, and for organizations to specifically address gendered policies and approaches that may empower them in the role of institutional leader. The presented study contributes to the larger conversation and attention around gender and leadership experience by providing nuanced perspectives on how women navigate multifaceted roles across numerous workplace sectors.

Keywords - Role Ambiguity, Leadership Styles, Women Leaders, Educational Sector, Corporate Sector, Gendered Expectations, Professional Identity, Transformational Leadership, Participative Leadership, Coping Strategies, Adaptive Leadership, Institutional Culture, Organizational Clarity, Supportive Leadership Programs, Gender and Leadership, Workplace Dynamics, Thematic Analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This study explores the dynamic presence of role ambiguity and leadership styles among women leaders in two distinct but important organizational contexts, private corporate and education sector. Women in leadership positions face a unique set of challenges not just as a result of the responsibilities of their positions, but it is also the ambiguity, shifting, or conflicting expectations as well. Role ambiguity is a challenge that is particularly pronounced in leadership contexts with convergence of gendered perceptions, organizational configurations and mental models, and cultural norms.

Leadership needs clarity of purpose, decisiveness and alignment with the organization. However, when women step into leadership roles, they often face muddled distinctions, shifting goalposts and less certainty about responsibilities and how their performance will be assessed, respectively. These ambiguities can stem from several factors, e.g., gaps in hierarchies, incomplete role descriptions, and/or ambiguous organizational norms, and influence how leadership is ultimately developed and expressed.

In all of these situations, women who lead use many and different leadership styles to exert influence, to build trust, and to influence results. We know that leadership styles shifts when required. Leadership styles are influenced by the organization performance, relationships with others, and action systems at the level of the socio-professional climate. Educational institutions have found leadership based largely on relational and collaborative models, while most corporations have a heavy emphasis on performance models. For all who lead, many (if not all) must examine and attend to multiple leadership frames to succeed.

By examining how women leaders make sense of their roles amidst ambiguity and how they strategically employ leadership styles in response, this research aims to uncover patterns of adaptation, resilience, and meaning-making in diverse organizational contexts.

1.1 Understanding the Organisations

Organisation offers a methodical structure whereby tasks are broken out into doable chunks, so guaranteeing effectiveness in reaching goals. Gutterman (2023) claims that companies are set systems that separate members depending on authority, status, and roles, so allowing coordinated action toward shared goals. Fundamentally, an organization is a system that lets people cooperate and coordinate in an organized manner. It requires a structured process to coordinate relationships, roles, decision-making, and

activities (Guterman, 2023). The importance of an organization goes beyond businesses and is apparent in governmental, social, and economic systems where coordinated structure is vital. As markets evolve, established firms must innovate or collaborate through strategic partnerships or mergers to remain competitive Galbraith (1977) further defines organizations as systems that integrate labor through planned processes and information-based decision-making, ensuring continuity over time.

The concept of an organization has been interpreted in multiple ways, with scholars defining it through different perspectives. There are a wide variety of definitions with the words and emphasis changing depending upon the academic school of thought. (Guterman 2023). One widely accepted view is that an organization is a process, representing a dynamic and continuous activity that involves the efficient planning and utilization of resources. This perspective aligns with Barnard's (1938) definition of an organization as "a system of cooperative activities of two or more persons," emphasizing that organizations must constantly evolve to remain relevant. Allen (1958), similarly, defines organization as "the method of recognizing and organizing the tasks to be completed, outlining and delegating accountability and power, and creating associations to allow individuals to work together most efficiently in achieving goals." In a fast-paced environment when businesses and institutions must adapt to social and technological changes, the always shifting nature of organizations is absolutely essential.

Still another important point of view is that an organization provides a framework for interactions. From this structural point of view, companies are seen as systems in which clearly defined roles, duties, and interpersonal interactions help to improve coordination and efficiency. Mooney and Reily (1931) highlight this viewpoint by characterizing organization as "the structure of every human group aimed at achieving a shared goal."

Similarly, Henry, Urwick, and Farland spotlight the significance of structure in ensuring that participants function in a properly-organized manner (Northcourt, 1962). This view shows that with out a established framework, agencies could warfare to function successfully, as ambiguity in roles and responsibilities can result in inefficiencies.

Organizations are also commonly viewed as groups of people working toward shared goals. This perspective focuses on the collective efforts of individuals who come together to achieve common objectives. Keith Davis (1967) defines an organization as "a group of individuals, large or small, that is cooperating under the direction of executive leadership in the accomplishment of certain common objectives." This social aspect of organizations highlights the importance of collaboration, leadership, and teamwork. The contributions of individual members are essential in achieving organizational success, reinforcing the idea that organizations are not merely structures but also social entities that rely on human interaction.

A fourth perspective sees organizations as a system, where various components like people, functions and resources - are interconnected. The systems perspective acknowledges that companies are made of various interconnected components, every affecting and being laid low with the others. This concept is strongly related to present day control theories, which highlight that organizations must function as open structures, continuously enticing with outdoor environments. Guterman (2023) supports this approach, stating that an organization must be flexible and favorable to external changes to be viable. The system perspective also accepts that organizations should integrate various tasks, such as production, marketing, finance and human resources, to work efficiently.

Organizations can be perceived from various viewpoints, such as a process, a network of connections, a collection of people, and a system. These varying interpretations emphasize the intricacy of organizational frameworks and their function in facilitating efficient cooperation. Regardless of being in business, government, or social institutions, organizations act as vital means for accomplishing shared objectives. Organizations are intricate, organized structures that develop due to both external and internal influences. Their survival relies on efficient coordination, flexibility, and the ability to respond to evolving human and societal requirements.

1.2 Role Ambiguity

The changing environment has shifted our understanding of the leadership practices that can accommodate rapid change, complicated structures, and a variety of stakeholder expectations, among other demands on leaders. In sectors such as business, public service, education, health, and technology leaders must balance evolving challenges while fostering efficiency and innovation. Role ambiguity is a persistent and significant nominal source of challenge and distraction for all leadership, regardless of sector. Role ambiguity is the uncertainty of an individual's duties, expectations, and limits of authority (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). Regardless of position or structure, leaders must navigate complicated organizational systems and manage uncertainty surrounding their role. Unlike their male counterparts, women leaders are often confronted with particular challenges afforded or imposed by customary gender norms and shifting organizational demands. Women leaders are redefining organizational contexts in every sector. However, their own leadership styles may be influenced by the own distinct challenges associated with experiences of role ambiguity. Role ambiguity is a significant factor, particularly, in the contemporary workplace characterized by fast-paced action and interconnections, where leaders are likely to face, support, and negotiate competing demands while working to provide clarity and direction to those in their charge. These competing demands can create multiple sources of potential role ambiguity that shape the engagement of specific leadership practices and effectiveness in leadership activities. As role ambiguity has been related to stress, decreased job satisfaction, and poorer decision making (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964), the effects role ambiguity may have on women leaders' leadership styles deserve attention.

Research in organizations has paid considerable attention to role ambiguity because of its consequences for leadership effectiveness as well as employee performance and work morale (Kahn et al., 1964). When individuals do not have clarity about the expectations for their jobs, leaders may experience difficulty making decisions, increased stress, and difficulty coordinating teams. In organizational settings, such as the service sector, non-profits, finance, manufacturing and government organizations where key stakeholders need leadership to guide decision-making through uncertainty, role ambiguity in leadership can diminish efficiency and lead to failure in achieving goals.

Over the years, both sectors, whether one is in education or private service, have been studied extensively, including women's experiences as leaders. An influential component of women's experience in these leadership contexts is role ambiguity. Role ambiguity affects both women's effectiveness as a leader and increases the likelihood of negative organizational consequences.

Role ambiguity presents a serious issue to organizations that affects job performance, job satisfaction, and the overall dynamics and efficiency of the workplace. Role ambiguity has been defined as the "absence of clarity of expectations, responsibility, or criteria for performance" (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964), and research on role ambiguity can be found

throughout the industrial and organizational psychology literature and the management literature. Kahn et al (1964) described role ambiguity as a situation where "the single or multiple roles that confront the role incumbent may not be clearly articulated (communicated) in terms of behaviors, tasks, or performance levels." It occurs when members of the organization have vacillating or unclear expectations regarding their role, resulting in confusion and ultimately stress which reduces productivity (Breaugh & Colihan, 1994). Role ambiguity is more important to study in contemporary organizations than in the past, as change of technology, job characteristics, and work expectations have contributed to uncertainty in stated and unstated job roles and responsibilities.

Role ambiguity can be broken down into several dimensions, such as ambiguity regarding work methods (understanding how to do the job), ambiguity regarding scheduling (how long is the time frame for completing the task), and ambiguity regarding criteria for performance (understanding criteria for success) (Naylor, Pritchard, & Ilgen, 1980). These dimensions illustrate that role ambiguity is a problem of multiple facets and changes from one job/industry to another (Bauer & Simmon, 2023).

Researchers have sought to clarify role ambiguity by conceptualizing it as a construct made up of several dimensions. Breaugh and Colihan (1994) more specifically framed the concept as job ambiguity. They identified "three specific dimensions: the methods of performing the work; the scheduling of the work; and the criteria used to evaluate the work." Likewise, researchers (e.g., Bedeian and Armenakis, 1981; Sawyer, 1992) have theorized that role ambiguity is also multidimensional, and that people may experience ambiguity differently depending on which dimension of the job they are considering (e.g., Sawyer, 1992). These dimensions can usually be categorized into four dimensions: goal ambiguity (what is expected), process ambiguity (how to do it), priority ambiguity (order/importance of tasks), or task ambiguity (what behaviors are expected in relation to your role) (e.g., Sawyer, 1992).

Many studies on role ambiguity and organizational outcomes have been conducted, and the literature generally indicates a negative impact of role ambiguity. Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970) stated that "role ambiguity is negatively correlated with job satisfaction and job performance variables," which has been corroborated by other researchers as well (Van Sell, Brief, & Schuler, 1981; Singh, 1998). Employees who report high role ambiguity generally exhibit high stress, anxiety, and burnout, and low motivation, that is associated with an increased tendency to turnover (Fisher & Gitelson, 1983). In addition to employee strain, ambiguity regarding performance and evaluation criteria often leads to frustration and job dissatisfaction, which can hinder productivity and organizational efficiency (Jackson & Schuler, 1985). However, more recent studies of role ambiguity are indicating it may not always be negative. Singh (1998) suggested a curvilinear relationship between role ambiguity and job outcomes, asserting that role ambiguity is needed in some cases, as moderate levels of role ambiguity can be useful. Moderate levels of role ambiguity can lead to creativity and solutions to problems as employees pursue clearly defined ambiguities through more proactive means. Singh continued to state that, "beyond a certain point, further decreases in role ambiguity through detailed procedural guidelines are likely to increase job tension and turnover intentions, especially if the task environment has low feedback and task variety." This curvilinear hypothesis posits that complete ambiguity is not necessarily always good and that some ambiguity can be conducive to a healthy balance, because ambiguity can promote flexibility, innovation, and autonomous problem solving.

Role ambiguity is particularly applicable to modern organizational structures that focus on change and adaptability. With changing technologies and workplace dynamics, many employees encounter role ambiguity as communication becomes vague, priorities shift, and virtual workplaces take hold (King & Sethi, 1998). Organizations with leaders with good communication skills and structured feedback are able to prevent role ambiguity longer (Carter & Harper, 2016). Leadership styles influence role clarity; especially transformational and participative leadership approaches. It was indicated that organizational leaders, employing transformational and participative leadership styles, decreased role ambiguity in workplaces by creating open communication and shared decision-making (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2018).

With the increasing complexity in modern workplaces, it is important to also focus on approaches that support the management and reduction of role ambiguity. Several intervention strategies have been recommended, including role clarity, role negotiation, and participative decision-making. Role clarity is a formalized process in which job expectations and responsibilities are explicitly articulated through structured employment onboarding and ongoing training in which managers and employees have ongoing inquiry to articulate job expectations clearly (Schaubroeck et al., 1993). Role negotiation encourages employees to be an active part in defining their job role through ongoing conversations with managers and colleagues (Naylor et al., 1980). This continuous inquiry process allows employees and managers to define roles together, and align them to organizational goals (Singh & Rhoads, 1991). Lastly, participative decision making has also been identified as a potential moderator of job satisfaction. Witt (1992) stated that "workers are who involved actively in decision-making processes experience less role ambiguity and greater job satisfaction."

Another new place of interest is technology's contribution to role ambiguity. As digital communication continues to flourish, the process of delivering and interpreting role expectations is evolving. Some assert that technology improves role clarity by readily providing information to employees about their jobs, while others argue technology can bolster ambiguity through information overload and role boundary ambiguity (Sawyer, 1992). The relationship between role ambiguity and the role of technology deserves a better understanding. In particular, organizations could better understand how digital tools could enhance role clarity rather than contribute to ambiguity.

Additionally, the influence of culture on role ambiguity must be a consideration given the growing diversity in workplace settings. Johnson (1994) states "the constantly shifting demographics of the workplace have had a significant impact on organizations," indicating that variation of culture and similarities in communication styles and expectations could be contributors to role ambiguity. Understanding cultural characteristics in a workforce can help organizations develop strategies specific to the workforces in need of role clarity. As role ambiguity has significant consequences for employees (well-being) and organizations (efficiency), it remains an important topic to study.

1.3 Leadership Styles

Role ambiguity has an impact on leaders which carry into any organizational context and, if anything, this impact will be greater for leaders in new leadership roles and for those operating within rapidly transforming environments. Organizations are increasingly looking for flexibility and innovation, and the relationship between leadership style and role ambiguity can help with workplace effectiveness and resiliency.

Leadership styles have important implications for mitigating the impact of role ambiguity. For instance, Transformational leaders place emphasis on vision and communication which can help clarify expectations and connect team members to organizational goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Laissez-faire leader provides minimal intervention creating an environment rich with ambiguity, leaving employees without guidance or direction (Vecchio, Justin, & Pearce, 2010). Participative and servant leadership are a great context for role ambiguity and provide employees with cooperative and collaborative means of decision-making, leading to transparent communication (Greenleaf, 2002; Yukl, 2013).

Leadership plays a huge role in organizational productivity, influencing the organizational direction, the organizational culture, and the engagement of the team or organization. Northouse (2018) describes leadership as the process involving influence and direction of individuals to accomplish shared goals. It is clear that there is a fast-growing research focus on leadership's role to develop density in organizations and motivating a workforce. Involvement and influence decision-making processes, strategies and developing teams, leaders in organization impact productivity and teams' member engagement.

Leadership style is the approach and way in which the leader interacts with their team, makes decisions, and implements an organization's vision (Bwalya, 2023). The leadership style chosen will substantially affect employee engagement, creativity, and the workplace culture. Leadership styles are originally created from the personality of the leader, the needs of the organization, and the surroundings. Researchers have categorized leadership styles into a variety of leadership styles; each will have characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Transformational leadership is arguably the most important leadership model in the areas of inspiration, motivation, and vision. Transformational leaders can articulate a vibrant future and inspire their followers to reach for all that they thought was beyond their own capabilities, and beyond the capabilities of the organization (Collins, 2014). Bass and Riggio (2006) identified four dimensions to transformational leadership: idealized influence; inspirational motivation; intellectual stimulation; and individualized consideration. Two classic examples of transformational leaders are Nelson Mandela and Barack Obama, who both utilized their leadership approach to make substantial change and foster innovation. While transformational leadership can have enormous impact in rapidly changing situations, it does require a high level of emotional intelligence and commitment and can lead to burnout (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Conversely, transactional leadership functions through a reward-and-punishment mechanism while emphasizing a significant amount of structure, due process, and compliance (Northouse, 2018). They define clear expectations and use contingent rewards to gain the desired performance. This leadership style is often used in stable, highly regulated industries that mimic an adherence to guidelines and performance measurements, such as production and manufacturing. Podsakoff et al. (2000) argue that transactional leadership can be effective in attaining short-term results, although the transactional style normally paralyzes creative and innovative solutions because of its rigidity. Leaders such as Bill Gates and Angela Merkel utilized transactional strategies to generate results and stability in their organizations.

Autocratic leadership is another common leadership style that has been researched, in which the leader centralized the power of decision-making with little input from followers (Pearce & Sims, 2002). Autocratic leadership is optimal in crisis situations because it generates decision-making quickly. The downside is that it may reduce employee motivation and involvement. Societies have experienced autocratic leaders, such as Adolf Hitler and Kim Jong-un, who had full rights for their governments and organizations. While effective in some instances, it typically generates employee turnover and resistance because of its nature (Sosik & Dinger, 2007).

In contrast to the other styles, laissez-faire leadership takes a more hands-off approach, providing significant authority of decision-making and task completion to employees and/or subordinates (Vecchio et al., 2010). Laissez-faire leadership promotes and strengthens creativity and innovation, because of which this functions best in research-based and technology-driven industries. Remarkable laissez-faire leaders includes Steve Jobs, and Mahatma Gandhi, who empowered their followers, promoted independent thinking, and made them feel valued. Laissez-faire leadership can create a sense of ambiguity and lack of direction when there are insufficient support and accountability aspects (Northouse, 2018).

Servant leadership, which focuses on the wellbeing and development of followers, is another powerful influence on followers (Greenleaf, 2002). Servant leaders help their team members grow and be successful while creating a collaborative and ethical climate. Yukl (2013) states that servant leadership can promote employee satisfaction and long term effectiveness of the organization in developing a culture of trust and respect. There are well-recognized leaders such as Jack Ma and Pope Francis who practice servant leadership with strong emphasis on social responsibility and emphasis on a people-over-profits emphasis. However, servant leadership is more time intensive and may be perceived as leading someone who is not making decisions while under pressure in a situation (Irving & Longbotham, 2007).

Pacesetter leadership is another modern leadership style in which the leader sets the bar for high-performance goals, then models the behavior they expect (Goleman et al., 2013). While pacesetter leadership promotes high output and a focus on excellence, it can produce an intolerably high-pressure workplace where team members become exhausted by the relentless demands being placed on them. Leaders like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos use a pacesetter approach with their employees to constantly push for new levels of innovation and productivity. This style of leadership can be successful in some industries where results must be delivered, but it can also produce egregiously horrible work-life balance and ultimately jeopardize the quality of life (Northouse, 2013).

Lastly, democratic leadership, or participative leadership, invites participation from team members in decision making (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Democratic leadership entails collaboration, creativity, and taking ownership for employees. Two examples of democratic leaders are Nelson Mandela and Jacinda Ardern, who used inclusive leadership to unite the global community in pursuit of social and organizational ends. Nevertheless, democratic leadership can take up a significant amount of time and delay decision-making during a time of crisis (Yukl, 2013).

The choice of leadership style depends on the organizational context, industry demands, and team makeup. Many leaders will adopt the same leadership style, while some will take advantage of multiple leadership styles, when necessary based on the situation. In 2013, Hersey et al. provided the situational leadership model stating that an effective leader would employ a different leadership style based on the followers' developmental level. Thus leadership provides the leader flexibility, and is responsive to the changing circumstances and development of followers.

To conclude, we can say that leadership is a multidimensional concept that has an impact on an organization's success. The various styles of leadership offer diverse advantages and disadvantages that in turn can affect team dynamics and performance. Hence, it is critical for leaders to recognize and modify their respective leadership styles to improve employee engagement, employee creativity, and the overall efficiency of an organization. Leadership research will undeniably expand and create more opportunities for exploration; there will invariably be enough inquiry to study the relationship of leadership styles and organizational culture. The aim of the dissertation will not be the study of leadership theory and style, rather, it will be an in-depth study of leadership styles and their influences on employee motivation, organizational performance, and workplace well-being.

1.4 Relationship between Role Ambiguity and Leadership styles

Leadership's role in dealing with role ambiguity is important, as there are differing affects by each leadership style on employees' role clarity and overall organizational effectiveness. Leadership styles impact information sharing, expectations, and allocation of responsibilities, which directly impact the degree of role ambiguity experienced by employees (Northouse, 2018).

Research has suggested transformational leaders, through inspiration, vision, and individual consideration can significantly lead to lower role ambiguity through open communication and encouraging proactive engagement (Bass & Riggio, 2006). They are known to clarify expectations and provide continuous feedback, helping employees understand their roles and responsibilities (Carter & Harper, 2016). Conversely, with transactional leaders, who emphasize structured contingent rewards and punishments, role ambiguity could decrease or increase, depending upon the clarity of performance criteria they set (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). Specifically, when expectations are clear and defined, transactional leaders contributed to lower role ambiguity; when expectations were unclear and ambiguous, this led to role ambiguity, confusion and employee stress (Bauer & Simmon, 2023).

Autocratic leadership involves making decisions without employee input so, while it decreases role ambiguity in a highly structured context, it reduces both employee innovation and flexibility (Pearce & Sims, 2002). Laissez-faire leadership, characterized by little supervision by or involvement of the leader is generally increases role ambiguity in terms of guidance and feedback (Vecchio, Justin, & Pearce, 2010). For employees in a laissez-faire leadership context, unclear expectations may create challenges for performance and satisfaction with their job (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970).

Servant and participative leadership styles generally result in lower role ambiguity due to their collaborative notions of working with employees indicating developments of employees and shared decision making (Greenleaf, 2002; Yukl, 2013). Leaders who allow employees to shape their own job expectations and job objectives bring role clarity and role commitment which minimizes efficiency and ambiguity (Witt, 1992). This style seems to be especially useful in today's swirling world of work that emphasizes agility and continuous learning (Singh, Verbeke, & Rhoads, 1996).

In summary, leadership significantly influences role clarity, and the type of leadership can help or hinder role ambiguity. Organizations with transformational, participative, or servant leadership styles are more likely to engage in clearer articulation of roles within a workplace. Additionally, these organizations are more likely to create a structured and supportive environment that alleviates uncertainty and positively improves employee well-being and productivity (Breaugh & Colihan, 1994).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of literature explores existing research on role ambiguity, leadership styles, and related studies done on these variables. It highlights theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and gaps in knowledge, providing a foundation for understanding how women leaders in different industry sectors cope with role ambiguity and how their leadership styles influence their work effectiveness.

The impact of role conflict and role ambiguity on emotional weariness among healthcare service workers in hospital settings was examined by Mwakyusa & Mcharo (2024). They employed a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire that was given to 181 Kairuki Memorial Hospital staff members; only 131 of the surveys were deemed suitable for data analysis. Using SPSS software, they performed regression and descriptive analyses to examine the data. According to the findings, role ambiguity and emotional weariness were positively and significantly correlated. On the other hand, there was a weak but negative correlation between role conflict and emotional tiredness.

Ahmad et al., (2023) conducted a related study to look into how role ambiguity and conflict affected workers' creativity. The precise relationship between job stress (role conflict and role ambiguity) and employee creativity was investigated empirically in this study. Standard questionnaires were distributed to the staff of three public universities in Peshawar, KPK, Pakistan, with a sample size of 100. According to the study's findings, employees' creativity is negatively impacted by job conflict and role ambiguity.

It has been determined that role conflicts and position ambiguity are significant risk factors for being exposed to bullying at work, especially when paired with poor leadership techniques. Prior research has mostly focused on role stressors as concurrent predictors of workplace bullying, despite the fact that role ambiguity might theoretically be thought of as a causal precursor to role disputes. This was investigated by Ågotnes, et al., (2023) in their study that provides a more nuanced analysis on effect role conflicts as a mediator in the relationship between role ambiguity and exposure to bullying behaviours. Adding to the understanding of the bullying process they also considered the possible moderating roles of laissez-faire and transformational leadership in the role stressor-bullying relationship. They collected data from a sample of 1,164 Norwegian workers, with three measurements across a 12-month period, the results showed an indirect effect of employees' role ambiguity on subsequent exposure to bullying behaviours through employees' experience of role conflicts. Furthermore, the indirect association between role ambiguity and susceptibility to bullying behaviors through role conflicts was lessened by transformational leadership, but it was enhanced by laissez-faire leadership. According to their findings, employees are more likely to be exposed to bullying at work when management of organizations fails to fulfill its innate duty to appropriately address their experiences with job ambiguity and role conflicts.

Another study by Martínez-Díaz, et al., (2021) examined the moderating effect of the department head's support in the detrimental influence of role ambiguity on employee engagement and extra-role performance behaviors. It is hypothesized that role ambiguity will be transformed into a demanding job requirement with favorable outcomes with the department head's cooperation. Participating in this study were 315 public employees who had administrative staff. The findings demonstrated that role ambiguity's

impacts are mitigated by the leader's backing. By adding this variable as a moderator, role ambiguity's detrimental impact on extra-role performance behaviors is lessened and its positive affect on employee engagement is transformed. These findings support the idea that in public administrations, leader support serves as a buffer against job pressures.

Charoensukmongkol & Puyod, (2021) examined the impact of transformational leadership on role ambiguity and work-life balance among university staff in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic. The moderating impact of employee involvement on the relationship between job ambiguity and transformative leadership is also examined in this study. 522 workers of three public institutions in the Philippines participated in an online poll. The findings support transformational leadership's impact on reducing job ambiguity and fostering work-life balance among Filipino workers amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Employee involvement, however, seems to exacerbate role ambiguity and lessen the impact of transformational leadership on role ambiguity, according to the moderating effect analysis. The findings suggest that transformative leadership combined with employee involvement practices seems to reduce the effectiveness of leaders in reducing role ambiguity among Filipino employees, who are a high-power distance culture. According to the study, executives that exhibit transformational leadership traits might also need to be mindful of some management techniques that don't fit with the cultural traits of their workforce.

Nannan Zhang & Xin Li. (2021) Conducted a study with a purpose to ascertain whether role stress and depressed symptoms are related, as well as whether job autonomy has a moderating effect on this link. Two standardized measures of role conflict and role ambiguity were used to measure role stress among Chinese participants. A measure derived from the Job Content Questionnaire was used to evaluate job autonomy. They discovered that work autonomy had a negative correlation with depressive symptoms, whereas role conflict and role ambiguity had a positive correlation. Furthermore, the negative impact of role ambiguity on depressed symptoms was found to be mitigated by job autonomy. The results of the study imply that actions aimed at enhancing job autonomy and reducing role stress are required to enhance the psychological health of social workers.

A study by Faiqa & Naeem (2018) examined the connection between work-family conflict (WFC), job ambiguity, and role conflict among college and university instructors. Their study sought to determine how gender and marital status affected study variables, as well as how role ambiguity and role conflict predicted WFC. Data was gathered from a sample of 200 teachers, equally divided between the sexes, using the Role Ambiguity Scale, Role Conflict Scale, and Work-Family Conflict Scale by Netemeyer, et al., 1996. The findings showed that the WFC and family-to-work conflict were positively correlated with work-family conflict. Additionally, there was a positive correlation between role ambiguity and work-family conflict, as well as a negative correlation between role conflict and work-family conflict. Furthermore, the WFC was adversely predicted by role conflict and positively predicted by role ambiguity. When it came to role ambiguity, married instructors outperformed unmarried teachers, and male teachers outperformed female teachers by a wide margin. The findings' implications for research and practice were finally examined.

One of the key elements of employee management that consistently influences an organization's success is employee performance. Another study of this kind was carried out by Abdullahi et al., (2018), who used role ambiguity as a moderating variable in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's (KSA) higher education system to examine the impact of training and leadership on workers' performance. 39154 workers who were split up into five groups according to their geographic locations (East, West, Middle, North, and South) were given a questionnaire. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to test the hypotheses that were put forth. According to the findings, staff performance is significantly improved by training and leadership. The study also demonstrated that, in the KSA higher education sector, job ambiguity considerably moderates the link between leadership styles and employee performance. This study unexpectedly discovered that role ambiguity had no discernible moderating effect on the association between employee performance and training. Role ambiguity has a detrimental effect on the relationship between employee performance and leadership.

Since the conceptual review indicates that leadership styles have an impact on role conflict and role ambiguity, which in return affect work performance and cooperation, Al-Malki & Juan (2018) examined how to attain better job performance and cooperation among employees. The data was analyzed using SPSS after a questionnaire survey was created and administered to a sample of Saudi Arabian company employees. The study's conclusions imply that role ambiguity and role conflict have a detrimental effect on improving job performance. The study also demonstrates that improving job performance has a favorable effect on job cooperation. The effect of laissez-faire leadership on role conflict and ambiguity is negligible. Their study's conclusions helped managers and leaders better identify role pressures and how to address them to boost worker productivity. They added to the body of study on leadership-performance and based their research paper on leadership theory.

Job conflicts and position ambiguity have been shown to be significant risk factors for experiencing bullying at work, especially when paired with poor leadership practices. Prior research has mostly focused on role stressors as concurrent predictors of professional bullying, even if role ambiguity might be seen of as a causal precursor to role conflicts. A study by Mañas MA et al.,(2018) examined how a climate of high role ambiguity can have the effect of lowering employee affective engagement within the context of the job demands-resources model. It has been linked over time to detrimental outcomes for the company because of a deficiency in extra-role performance. 706 employees from a global corporation, split up into 11 work teams, were included in the sample. Consistent with the hypotheses, the findings validate the detrimental impact of the role ambiguity climate on extra-role performance as well as the mediating function of affective involvement in the relationship between the two. These results suggest that employees' ability to function effectively or ineffectively in a work environment is correlated with the role ambiguity climate.

In the film industry, project-based organizations typically have a dual-leadership structure. This structure is based on the division of tasks between the producer and the director, with the producer handling the commercial aspects of the film and the director handling the artistic aspects. In terms of hierarchy, these organizations also play a function beneath and between the dual leaders, such as the first assistant director. The individual holding that specific function is likely to encounter role ambiguity and role conflict as a result of this organizational environment. Role conflict and role ambiguity have been shown to have detrimental effects in previous research, but Ebberts & Wijnberg, (2017) found that they can also have positive effects because they allow for a more expansive definition of the role, which can then be facilitated by the dual leaders establishing their own roles more precisely.

Using a sample of 280 respondents from the manufacturing, construction, services, and mining sectors, Lee, & Low (2016) investigated the role ambiguity intervening construct on the causal relationship between leadership and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) in a variety of industrial settings. A transformational leader has a positive relationship with OCB, while a transactional leader has a negative relationship with OCB, according to the findings of the Pearson correlation analysis. It was discovered that the causal association between OCB and a transformative leader was mediated by role ambiguity. Instead of being directly associated with OCB, role ambiguity acts as a mediator between OCB and transformational leadership style. According to this study, managers should prioritize transformational leadership in order to promote higher OCB. Both direct and indirect effects on OCB are caused by the mediating role ambiguity of subordinates. On OCB, role ambiguity serves to strengthen transformative leadership. These results demonstrate that subordinates' perceptions of their role ambiguity act as a mediating factor in the effectiveness of leadership approaches.

In order to ascertain the disparities in this perspective, Bako, (2014) carried out a study to examine role ambiguity and role conflict among the academic and administrative staff at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. He also looked at how role perception was affected by demographic factors like tenure, gender, age, and level of education. The Role Perception Questionnaire, created by Rizzo et al. (1970) to gauge role ambiguity and role conflict, was included in the questionnaire along with demographic items. Out of 200 questionnaires, a 53.5% response rate was obtained. The statistical analysis's findings showed that while there was no discernible difference in the groups' perceptions of role conflict, there was a statistically significant difference in how each group perceived role ambiguity. There was no discernible difference between the academic and administrative staff's perceptions of role conflict, but the academic staff felt far more role ambiguity. Academic staff members' perceptions of their roles were significantly influenced by their gender and level of education, but administrative staff members' perceptions of their roles were not significantly impacted. Age and tenure had no discernible effects on how the groups under investigation perceived their roles. With an insignificant correlation value ($r = .45$), the study verified a positive relationship between role ambiguity and role conflict.

According to Khattak, et al., (2013), any organization wants its workers to have good working circumstances so they may provide their best efforts and help the business expand and develop quickly. Junior staff members, on the other hand, face a challenge as they must work harder to impress their superiors while simultaneously advancing up the Maslow hierarchy of needs, which includes physiological needs, safety needs, needs for love and belonging, needs for esteem, and, finally, needs for self-actualization. Because of the challenging working conditions that the majority of employees endure—primarily due to the management's organizational culture and leadership style—achieving all of the aforementioned needs is not easy. In a company where the management has adopted a totalitarian leadership style, for example, junior employees have little opportunity to advance in their careers because they lack the authority to question the managers' decisions. However, in organizations that have adopted a democratic leadership style, the situation is different since it allows employees greater flexibility in decision-making, which provides them with an opportunity to progress in their careers.

Schulz (2013) concentrated on academics in research-intensive universities in the UK and examined their perceptions of organizational climate, role conflict, role ambiguity and work satisfaction. According to the data, there are several organizational climates at the universities. Reduced levels of role stress were linked to three organizational climate types: adhocracy, hierarchy, and clan. However, the Market atmosphere was connected with higher degrees of role conflict. High levels of job satisfaction were only directly correlated with a Clan-type climate. Despite the shifts in university management styles, it seems that academic staff satisfaction is still greatly influenced by the collegial/clan environment.

In their study, Nanik et al., (2011) investigated the role of ambiguity as factors in stress among managers in Pakistan's manufacturing industry. They used a simple random technique to collect data from 100 workers in the manufacturing industry, and they found that role conflict and role ambiguity were positively and significantly related to work stress among Pakistani managers, and that work stress was negatively and significantly related to job satisfaction. Two personality variables were selected as moderator variables, but only one, tolerance of ambiguity, demonstrated moderating effects. Locus of control was unable to moderate the relationships between stressor stress and stress response. All things considered, this study shows that a sample of Pakistani managers experience stress at work, and that the causes of this stress are related to their roles. Data from a cross-sectional survey were used in the paper.

In their analysis, Cicero, et al., (2010) found that role ambiguity is a situational influence that feeds into the desire to reduce uncertainty and serves as a mediator of the relationship between leader group prototypicality and signs of leadership effectiveness (perceived effectiveness, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions). The outcomes of a survey of 368 employees of four Italian companies supported the hypothesis that role ambiguity and leader group prototypicality interacted to predict perceived effectiveness, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions, with leader group prototypicality being more strongly associated with leadership effectiveness for employees with higher levels of role ambiguity.

In interdependent team sports, Beauchamp, et al., (2005) examined the connections between leadership actions and players' perceptions of role ambiguity. Athletes' later views of multi-dimensional role ambiguity were examined in connection to the extent to which coaches participated in training, instruction, and positive feedback behaviors from the early to midway stages of their separate seasons. Significant differences in offensive and defensive role consequences ambiguity and offensive role evaluation ambiguity were explained by coaches' training and coaching for nonstarters. To begin with, however, neither of the leadership dimensions evaluated in this study was able to account for a considerable amount of variation in any of the aspects of role ambiguity. The findings are examined in relation to the development of theories and future studies looking into potential causes of multidimensional role ambiguity.

Within schools and between schools and the district, the formation of teacher leadership teams gives teachers and principals new responsibilities and connections. Chrispeels, et al., (1999) carried out a qualitative study to examine four significant School Leadership Team (SLT) activities (role episodes) in order to investigate how the team worked to define its role. The study drew on video, interview, survey, and observational data. They emphasized the intricate relationships that arose as teachers and the principal carried out bottom-up reforms that go against conventional interaction patterns by using event mapping, open systems, and role theory. They look at how the superintendent, principal, and SLT's connections affected role ambiguity and conflict. The findings demonstrated the importance of systems thinking in the implementation of significant innovations like site-based management. Teachers cannot be empowered without corresponding district-wide changes because schools are intricate systems that must take

into account organizational, intergroup, and environmental elements. They also talked about how teachers' interpretations and implementation of the new responsibilities are not predetermined by the implementation of a policy that empowers them and involves them in decision-making. They came to the conclusion that in order to resolve discrepancies between ideas and practices that may affect students' learning, roles, responsibilities, and relationships must be clear and supported by chances for ongoing negotiation and improvement.

In the framework of supervision, the type and scope of role-difficulty experiences among counselor candidates were investigated by Olk, & Friedlander (1992). Role conflict occurs when trainees come across conflicting expectations for their behavior, whereas role ambiguity occurs when trainees are unclear about supervisory expectations for their performance or evaluation. In practicum, internship, and post-internship contexts, the Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity Inventory was created and validated with supervisors and trainees. The inventory's validity and reliability are demonstrated by the results. As predicted, role challenges were associated with higher levels of anxiety at work, overall job discontent, and discontent with supervision. Compared to more seasoned trainees, beginning trainees expressed higher degrees of role uncertainty. Only advanced trainees, for whose ambiguity is low, appear to have trouble with role conflict.

The relationship between role conflict and role ambiguity and teacher burnout was investigated in a study connected by Schwab & Iwanicki, (1982), on 469 classroom teachers. The study looked at three aspects of burnout: feelings of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization or negative attitudes towards students, and feelings of an absence of personal accomplishment. The findings indicated that role conflict and role ambiguity stated a statistically significant amount of variance in feelings of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and that the relationships between role conflict and role ambiguity varied among the three aspects of burnout.

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The reviewed literature clearly suggests that there has been much research on leadership theories but little has been done in this area of leadership and role ambiguity considering leadership approaches- especially for women. Role ambiguity, particularly for women in leadership positions, may be an overlooked area of study. The area of role ambiguity for women in leadership positions has not been critically explored, particularly in the Indian context. The layered and nuanced experiences of women leaders who have to navigate a mainly unknown and complex social and cultural and organizational ecosystem have been largely unexamined in scholarship. In India, women leaders deal with many factors in leadership: expected gender roles, the organizations hierarchies, patriarchal formality, and various context-specific issues that specifically shape a woman's leadership experience.

Amongst stakeholders, subordinates and institutional norms, women represent both educational and private corporate sectors in India where women are often juggling several conflicting expectations and layered expectations of role conflict lead to role ambiguity, which ultimately damages their effectiveness as a leader, sets them at internal odds, limits their professional opportunities and influences their mental health. Despite this ambivalence, it is perplexing that there is little qualitative research to allow women's own voice to these lived experiences.

The objective of this study is to fill this important void by qualitatively examining how role ambiguity is experienced by women leaders in the Indian educational and corporate contexts, as well as how various leadership styles may shape or influence how these leaders experience role ambiguity. The results of this study could inform gender sensitive leadership development initiatives, refine the definitions of roles and the policies developed by HR, and provide a cultural understanding based on context in terms of leadership and ambiguity. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to more inclusive and supportive organizational climates for women leaders in India.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Understanding the methodological technique taken in this study to comprehend the leadership styles and role ambiguity among women leaders in the education and private corporate sectors is the focus of this chapter. The purpose of the study and the chosen methodology will be presented in this chapter. In addition to presenting the chosen sample, it will outline the data gathering methodology and data analysis procedure. Lastly, it will go over any ethical concerns and restrictions related to this research.

The methodology section outline the plan and method that how the study is conducted. This includes Universe of the study, sample of the study, Data and Sources of Data, study's variables and analytical framework. The details are as follows;

3.1 Population and Sample

The data was collected from sample size of 14 individuals, 7 people from each the sectors i.e., educational and private corporate sector. The sample for this study's data collection is gathered using the purposive sampling approach. It is a sampling approach used to choose study participants based on the researcher's expertise and judgment on the population and research topic. The sample included only female employees from both educational and service sectors who have minimum 2 years of experience in working at managerial and leadership positions in either of the above mentioned sectors. Participants were taken from only the educational and private corporate sector. The exclusion criteria included male and also those females who doesn't have minimum 2 years of experience of working at managerial or leadership level positions in either of the selected industry sectors. The age of the participants also included in exclusion criteria.

3.2 Data and Sources of Data

For this study primary data has been collected. A qualitative approach was chosen as the research methodology for this investigation. An interpretive method for examining intricate human experiences, behaviors, and social events in their natural environments is qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Instead of testing preconceived notions, qualitative research uses an inductive approach that lets theories and themes surface from the data (Patton, 2015). To find patterns and insights, the study usually uses grounded theory, narrative analysis, or thematic coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Although qualitative research yields rich, in-depth insights, it also has drawbacks, including poor generalizability and researcher bias (Silverman, 2020). But when done well, qualitative research provides a potent way to investigate intricate social realities and produce significant knowledge contributions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.3 Theoretical framework

Variables of the study includes the Role Ambiguity and types of leadership styles among the women leaders in educational and private corporate sectors. The study focused on three research questions given below:

- To see the prevalence of Role Ambiguity among women leaders in the educational and private corporate sector.
- To identify the leadership styles commonly adopted by women leaders in educational and private corporate sectors.
- To explore the coping strategies used by women leaders for managing and overcoming the role ambiguity in their leadership roles.

3.4 Statistical tools

Semi-Structured Interview method was used for collecting data for this study. This method gave participants more freedom to elaborate, which increased the flexibility, range, and ability to elicit more information from them. Semi-structured interviews allow people to respond to questions more freely than standardised interviews do, but they still offer a good framework for comparison compared to focused interviews (May, 1997). Kumar (2005) believes that interviews are the best method for researching sensitive and complex topics because the interviewer can prepare a participant before posing delicate questions and directly explain complex ones to them. Here, the interviewer's experience, abilities, and dedication impact the caliber of the data produced (Kumar, 2005). The interview questions prepared for this study are constructed after in-depth research and after studying many literature reviews. The questions are attached in the appendix at the end.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This will draw upon the main themes and present the findings which arose out of the interview process and subsequent data analysis. First and foremost, a brief profile of each of the participants is presented in Table 4.1. The themes and subthemes created on the basis of verbatims from the interview transcripts are presented in the Table 4.2. Also the Table 4.3 shows the number of responses and there percentage value of each sub theme to validate and support the themes and subthemes created. The tables given below presents the key themes that emerged following data analysis and shows how all of the themes are interconnected.

Table 4.1 : Participant Description

S. No.	Job title	Experience in leadership position	Industry sector
1.	Head of Department(HOD) of History Dept. and Supervisor of Junior and secondary classes	7 years	Education sector (School)
2.	HOD of Mathematics Dept. and Supervisor of Senior Secondary classes	7.5 years	Education sector (School)
3.	Vice Principal	3.5 years	Education sector (School)
4.	Principal	5 years	Education sector (School)
5.	Primary School Principal	8 years	Education sector (School)
6.	Head of Institute (HOI) of Psychology Dept.	2.5 years	Education sector (College)
7.	Vice Principal	5 years	Education sector (School)
8.	HR Recruiter Team Leader	4.5 years	Private Corporate Sector
9.	Sales Manager	4 years	Private Corporate Sector
10.	Project Manager	2.5 years	Private Corporate Sector
11.	HR Generalist	7.5 years	Private Corporate Sector
12.	IT Software developer Head	2 years	Private Corporate Sector
13.	Finance and Accounts Head	6 years	Private Corporate Sector
14.	Founder and CEO	3 years	Private Corporate Sector

Table 4.2 : Table showing the themes and subthemes created on the basis of the verbatims from the interview transcripts.

Verbatims	Themes	Sub-Themes
• “It’s a juggling act between academics and administration, really.” • “But I also find myself stepping into different roles when needed sometimes” • “I’m a consultant, sometimes a problem-solver, and other times a mentor to my team.”	<u>Theme – 1</u> Prevalence of Role Ambiguity among Women Leaders	1. Multiple and overlapping responsibilities.
• “There are times when responsibilities overlap with department heads or even the Principal, especially during crisis situations or special projects.” • “There have been times when expectations from different groups—whether it’s the management, parents, or even staff—don’t always align” • “I’ve definitely experienced some moments of confusion. Sometimes responsibilities overlap with other teams, like marketing or product teams, which can make things a bit tricky”.		2. Unclear role expectations and task ownership.

“I think the policies are there, but they’re not always practical.” “Policies definitely provide a framework, but they’re not foolproof.” “Clear policies definitely help in streamlining HR processes and reducing confusion. However, in a growing and evolving business like ours, policies sometimes need to be adapted, and that can create moments of ambiguity.”		3. Institutional policies as both a guide and a limitations.
“I would say my leadership style is a mix of transformational and participative.” “I’d say I’m a mix of collaborative and transformational” “I’d say I’m a mix of transformational and participative leadership”	<u>Theme – 2</u> Leadership Styles adopted by Women Leaders	1. Transformational and participative leadership approaches.
“I’d describe my leadership style as collaborative and empathetic.” “I’d say I’m a mix of collaborative and transformational.” “My style is collaborative and empathetic.”		2. Collaborative and empathetic leadership styles.
“Flexibility is important. Each situation requires a slightly different approach, and I’ve learned to adjust accordingly.” “When I first started, I was more rigid, very task-focused. Over the years, I’ve learned that flexibility is key.” “So its important to assess the situation, its requirements and then react accordingly.”		3. Context-sensitive and adaptive leadership strategies.
“Men, on the other hand, often have more clearly defined roles, and their boundaries are respected more.” “I do think that women leaders often face more scrutiny when it comes to leadership style.” “Women leaders, in my experience, tend to face more scrutiny”	<u>Theme – 3</u> Gendered Challenges in Leadership and Role Clarity	1. Scrutiny and bias in leadership evaluation.
“There’s this unspoken expectation that we’ll handle not just academics but also emotional and pastoral support, more so than our male counterparts.” “Sometimes, the expectations placed on them are higher or more complex, which naturally creates more ambiguity.” “There can be an unspoken expectation to "prove" technical expertise more than our male counterparts.”		2. Additional expectations placed on women leaders.
“Sometimes, decisions we make are questioned more rigorously, as if we have to prove our authority a little more.” “I feel women leaders have to work harder to establish authority.” “Sometimes, authority isn’t as immediately recognized, and we have to assert our leadership a bit more.”		3. Authority challenges and recognition issues.
“It can slow down decision-making and lead to inefficiencies.” “It can slow down decision-making because it creates doubt or second-guessing.” “When roles and expectations aren’t clearly defined, it can slow down decision-making and lead to inefficiencies.”	<u>Theme – 4</u> Influence of Role Ambiguity on Decision Making and Performance	1. Indecisiveness and lack of efficiency in decision making.
“It can affect performance and lead to frustration.” “It’s also mentally draining at times.” “the mental load of managing tasks outside your core role can be exhausting.”		2. Psychological stress and job dissatisfaction.
“It can affect performance and lead to frustration.” “It can slow down the team’s efficiency because people aren’t sure about priorities.” “It can feel like a lot of back-and-forth, and it delays decisions that should be straightforward.”		3. Organizational effectiveness and team performance impact.
“One of the biggest strategies is maintaining regular communication with all levels.” “I also have transparent discussions with management to resolve any ambiguity.” “Communication is key. I always make it a point to clearly define goals, expectations, and processes for my team.”	<u>Theme – 5</u> Strategies used to	1. Establishing role clarity through communication.

“I believe in setting clear expectations from the start.” “I make sure expectations are spelled out, roles are defined, and responsibilities are delegated effectively.” “By being proactive about setting clear expectations from the start.”	overcome Role Ambiguity	2. Setting clear expectations and defining responsibilities.
“I meet with my team to outline roles, responsibilities, and goals.” “we stay aligned, and everyone knows what’s expected of them.” “I hold regular meetings to ensure everyone knows their responsibilities.”		3. Delegation as a tool for managing role ambiguity.
“Open communication with teachers and other staff.” “Transparent communication is vital” “I make sure we have regular team meetings to align everyone on priorities.”	<u>Theme – 6</u> The Role of Communication in Leadership Clarity	1. Open and transparent communication to mitigate uncertainty.
“Regular meetings and open discussions help a lot.” “I’ve created documented processes and checklists for my team to follow.” “Regular check-ins and feedback sessions help us address any misunderstandings early on.”		2. Role clarity through structured check-ins, discussions and documentations.
“I keep an open-door policy so that anyone can come to me if something isn’t clear.” “Communication ensures that everyone is on the same page and that ambiguity doesn’t linger.” “Communication prevents misunderstandings. I always encourage my team to share their concerns so that we can address them early.”		3. Communication as a tool for team alignment and growth

Table 4.3 : Showing the total number of responses and their percentage for each themes and subthemes.

Themes	Sub-themes	No. of Responses	Percentage of Responses
<u>Theme – 1</u> Prevalence of Role Ambiguity among Women Leaders	1. Multiple and overlapping responsibilities.	13	93%
	2. Unclear role expectations and task ownership.	13	93%
	3. Institutional policies as both a guide and a limitations.	13	93%
<u>Theme – 2</u> Leadership Styles adopted by Women Leaders	1. Transformational and participative leadership approaches.	11	78%
	2. Collaborative and empathetic leadership styles.	11	78%
	3. Context-sensitive and adaptive leadership strategies.	14	100%
<u>Theme – 3</u> Gendered Challenges in Leadership and Role Clarity	1. Scrutiny and bias in leadership evaluation.	11	78%
	2. Additional expectations placed on women leaders.	11	78%
	3. Authority challenges and recognition issues.	9	64%
<u>Theme – 4</u> Influence of Role Ambiguity on Decision Making and Performance	1. Indecisiveness and lack of efficiency in decision making.	12	86%
	2. Psychological stress and job dissatisfaction.	8	57%
	3. Organizational effectiveness and team performance	12	86%

	impact.		
<u>Theme – 5</u> Strategies used to overcome Role Ambiguity	1. Establishing role clarity through communication.	14	100%
	2. Setting clear expectations and defining responsibilities.	14	100%
	3. Delegation as a tool for managing role ambiguity.	12	86%
<u>Theme – 6</u> The Role of Communication in Leadership Clarity	1. Open and transparent communication to mitigate uncertainty.	14	100%
	2. Role clarity through structured check-ins, discussions and documentations.	14	100%
	3. Communication as a tool for team alignment and growth	14	100%

V. DISCUSSION

The aim of this study is to understand the presence of role ambiguity and types of leadership styles among the women leaders in educational and private corporate sectors. This study focuses on exploring the prevalence of Role Ambiguity among women leaders and to identify the leadership styles commonly adopted by them in educational and private corporate sectors. This study also explores the coping strategies used by women leaders for managing and overcoming the role ambiguity in their leadership roles. This chapter will provide an interpretation of the findings obtained; it will illustrate why the findings are relevant to the research and relate the findings to other research carried out. The findings of this study are based on the interpretation and analysis of data obtained through the process of semi-structured interviews of fourteen female participants who have experience of leadership in educational and private corporate sectors.

Role ambiguity is the uncertainty of an individual's duties, expectations, and limits of authority (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). Regardless of position or structure, leaders must navigate complicated organizational systems and manage uncertainty surrounding their role. Role ambiguity affects both women's effectiveness as a leader and increases the likelihood of negative organizational consequences.

Leadership is an integral component of organizational effectiveness, as it determines the path intended to determine how the organization and/or its teams operate and are cultured. Northouse (2018) claims leadership is a process of influencing and guiding others to fulfill a shared purpose. In addition, leadership style means the way that leaders relate to the team, make decisions, and achieve organizational goals (Bwalya, 2023). The leadership style chosen can influence employee morale, innovation, and workplace culture significantly. Leadership styles exist in the prism of leader's dispositions, organizational needs, and situational context.

Leadership is important in addressing role ambiguity because there are different effects to each leadership style in terms of employees' role clarity and organizational effectiveness overall. Different leadership styles impact information sharing, expectations and distribution of tasks for employees which in turns affects the amount of role ambiguity employees experience (Northouse, 2018).

Both telephonic and in-person interviews were used to gather data for the study. Four of the 14 participants were referred by well-known third parties, and ten were interviewer acquaintances. Participants were asked open-ended questions concerning their experiences with leadership styles and role ambiguity in a semi-structured interview format to maintain consistency. In order to promote transparency, some interviews were conducted in cozy settings like homes or cafes, although the majority were conducted over the phone. Every interview was taped, verbatim transcribed, and subjected to thematic coding for analysis. A pilot interview was conducted beforehand to refine the questions and structure. The pilot data was excluded from the final analysis. After transcription, data was coded with keywords and organized into themes and sub-themes. The final stage involved interpreting recurring patterns and constructing findings tables.

After the codes were prepared, total six main themes were constructed along with three sub-themes under each main theme, In the table 4.1, we can see the themes, sub-themes along with the number of responses given by the participants in favour of that subtheme. This discussion elaborates on six emergent themes from the qualitative data, grounded in both participant verbatims and existing theoretical frameworks.

Theme one examines the prevalence of role ambiguity among women leaders across both the sectors. The prominence of role ambiguity is high as expected. It is a defining concern, with more than 50% of participants reporting experiences of facing role ambiguity in their job roles. The sub theme under this main theme includes overlapping responsibilities and unclear expectations which is highly prominent with 93% of participants sharing their experiences for the same and describing their roles as fluid and undefined.. The data supports existing literature suggesting that ambiguity is more pronounced in leadership roles lacking clear boundaries (Kahn et al., 1964). Women's accounts reflect a consistent juggling of multiple responsibilities—academic, administrative, and interpersonal, often leading to a blurred sense of ownership. For instance, one leader stated, “It’s a juggling act between academics and administration.” This reflects the multifaceted nature of leadership roles that often expand beyond formal

job descriptions, especially for women. While institutional policies exist, their practical application appears limited, further contributing to ambiguity as noted by statements of 13 participants out of total 14 participants which is a high number. Although policies theoretically provide structure, they were sometimes seen as inflexible or out of touch with the dynamic realities of leadership. This aligns with research suggesting that even well-drafted policies may be insufficient in rapidly evolving organizational contexts (Rizzo et al., 1970).

The second theme focuses on exploring the types of leadership styles that are commonly used by the women leaders. The sub-themes explain that most commonly used leadership styles are transformational, collaborative and participative with 78% participants' statements. The majority of the participants discussed transformational, participatory, and adaptable leadership philosophies, which are characterized by a strong focus on inclusivity, teamwork, and motivation. According to Bass and Avolio's (1994) Full Range Leadership Model, transformational leaders inspire and motivate via engagement and empathy. An intentional shift away from authoritarian approaches is seen in one respondent's statement, "I would say my leadership style is a mix of transformational and collaborative." Furthermore, the focus on empathy and teamwork draws attention to a gendered complexity in leadership choices that is frequently observed in feminist leadership discourse (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Participants' complete agreement on context-sensitive leadership techniques implies that female leaders continuously adjust their style to suit the needs of the moment, maybe in reaction to the role ambiguity they encounter. This conduct points to a situational leadership style (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969), in which leaders modify their strategies according to the demands of their group and the assignment at hand.

The third theme delves into understanding gendered challenges in leadership and role clarity. Findings under this theme reveal persistent gender bias, scrutiny, and heightened expectations from women leaders with 78% response agreements. Participants reported facing authority challenges, with decisions often being second-guessed. One participant noted, "Sometimes, decisions we make are questioned more rigorously, as if we have to prove our authority a little more." These insights echo Ridgeway's (2001) theory on gender and status beliefs, where women in authority roles are subject to heightened scrutiny compared to men. This reflects the double bind that women often experience that, they must assert authority without being perceived as overly dominant, a dilemma which is rarely faced by their male counterparts. One leader stated, "There's this unspoken expectation that we'll handle not just academics but also emotional and pastoral support." The "invisible labor" of emotional support and mentorship, which women are expected to perform in addition to their formal responsibilities, reinforces gendered workplace norms and may intensify role ambiguity and burnout.

Fourth theme investigates the influence of role ambiguity on decision making and performance of the women leaders. The findings revealed that role ambiguity significantly impairs decision-making efficiency, contributing to stress and job dissatisfaction. Most participants (86%) reported that ambiguity slowed down decision-making processes. The emotional toll—described as "mentally draining"—can lead to burnout, decreased motivation, and withdrawal from leadership engagement. The correlation between unclear expectations and decreased performance aligns with role theory, which links ambiguity with cognitive overload and lower organizational effectiveness (Jackson & Schuler, 1985). Leaders expressed frustration, stating that unclear expectations led to "back-and-forth," delaying even basic decisions. This suggests that decision paralysis may be a consequence of constantly navigating competing demands. Furthermore, 12 out of 14 participants indicated that the lack of defined roles affects not only individual performance but also team alignment and overall morale, suggesting a cascading impact on the workplace ecosystem.

Fifth theme notes the strategies used to overcome role ambiguity. In response to role ambiguity, participants employed strategies such as clear communication, defined expectations, and effective delegation. Leaders highlighted regular meetings, transparent feedback loops, and proactive communication with stakeholders to define responsibilities clearly. These align with proactive role clarification techniques discussed by Katz & Kahn (1978), who emphasize the role of communication in reducing uncertainty. One respondent summarized this approach concisely, "Communication is key. I always make it a point to clearly define goals, expectations, and processes for my team." Notably, every respondent emphasized communication and expectation-setting, highlighting these as cornerstone practices in managing ambiguity. Delegation was also cited as a practical method to distribute workload and clarify responsibilities. It was widely cited as a method to manage workload and clarify team roles. By distributing tasks and responsibilities effectively, leaders reduce ambiguity not just for themselves, but for their teams. This reinforces distributed leadership models, where decision-making and ownership are shared to improve team alignment.

The last theme focuses on understanding the role of communication in leadership clarity. The finding showed that Communication emerged as the most vital theme across all responses. Regular meetings, structured check-ins, transparent discussions, and documentation were identified as tools to ensure clarity and alignment by all the participants. These practices reinforce findings from organizational communication literature that advocates open communication for team coherence and conflict resolution (Clampitt et al., 2000). Moreover, fostering a culture of open-door dialogue and continuous feedback appears to buffer the negative effects of ambiguity and enhance trust within teams.

The above discussion affirms that role ambiguity is a pervasive and gendered challenge for women in leadership, with significant personal and organizational consequences. Nonetheless, women leaders also demonstrate high levels of adaptability, empathy, and communication skill in navigating these complexities. However, the persistence of gendered expectations and authority challenges calls for institutional reforms and systematic interventions that go beyond surface-level policies such as gender-sensitive policy frameworks, clearer role definitions and Leadership development programs should incorporate modules on role clarity, emotional labor, and inclusive leadership to support women in navigating these layered complexities and to address these issues structurally.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

There were certain restrictions on this study as it was being carried out. Most importantly, caution was needed when extrapolating findings from the data due to the limited sample size. Any type of study benefits from conducting research on a larger and more detailed scale since it allows for a more in-depth review of the results. However, semi-structured interviews were an excellent method for getting participants to provide in-depth and perceptive information. Interviewing people is a time-consuming process, but it has been proven to be a very successful technique to persuade people to provide information honestly and openly. The researcher now has a far better understanding of the participants' unique experiences with role ambiguity, their leadership philosophies in those jobs, and their thoughts on these subjects. Another constraint that is further examined in this study is

researcher bias, which can be a danger in any type of research effort, especially when data collection is less systematic. This study's author tried to be aware of and vigilant about researcher bias. The researcher feels confident that the findings are trustworthy and generalizable to larger audiences, even when study bias cannot be totally eliminated. Furthermore, it might be argued that the types of data collected permit more interpretation than numerical statistics.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Research

There are few suggestions for future study directions that build on the current discoveries in order to fill in knowledge gaps. To improve the generalizability of findings and compare sector-specific subtleties in leadership experiences, future research could use mixed-methods or large-scale qualitative approaches involving diverse sectors like healthcare, technology, and government and leadership levels like mid-level managers, executives, and larger, more varied participant pools. Longitudinal studies could follow women leaders through significant organizational or career transitions to gain a better understanding of how role ambiguity and leadership techniques develop over time. This would provide information on resilience-building and adaptive leadership development. How other social identities—like caste, class, religion, or sexual orientation—interact with gender to influence leadership problems and role clarity should be the subject of future study. This may reveal unique support requirements and obstacles. Future studies that include male executives would provide insightful comparisons and aid in differentiating between gender-specific and universal leadership issues. Programs for developing leaders that are more equitable may benefit from this.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study demonstrated that women leaders often experience role ambiguity due to multiple responsibilities, uncertain expectations and gender-related challenges. In spite of the ambiguities of their role, they used adaptive leadership styles mostly transformational and participative and allowed communication and the ability to delegate to assist with ambiguity. These findings suggest that clearer organizational policies, gender responsive leadership development and emotional labors need to be recognised. Overall, the findings highlight the complexity of women's leadership experiences and the ability of women leaders to deal with these processes through a lens of resilience.

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