

THE IMPACT OF CONTINUOUS ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE ON EMPLOYEE BURNOUT: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF ROLE AMBIGUITY IN DIGITAL MARKETING FIRMS

Monica Desvi Lesta Putri^{1*}, Siti Zulaikha Wulandari²

¹²Department of Management, Jendral Soedirman University, Indonesia

*Email corresponding author: Monicade2196@gmail.com

Abstract

Continuous organizational change has become a common phenomenon in digital-based industries. However, repeated structural adjustments, shifting work systems, and evolving performance indicators may generate unintended psychological consequences for employees. This study examines the effect of continuous organizational change on employee burnout, with role ambiguity as a mediating variable. The research was conducted at PT Ethos Kreatif Indonesia, involving 180 employees across various departments. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that continuous organizational change significantly increases role ambiguity and employee burnout. Role ambiguity also significantly influences burnout. Furthermore, mediation analysis reveals that role ambiguity partially mediates the relationship between continuous organizational change and burnout. The findings suggest that burnout does not solely arise from the presence of change itself, but from the uncertainty and unclear expectations that accompany repeated organizational adjustments. This study contributes to organizational change literature by highlighting role ambiguity as a critical psychological mechanism linking continuous change and employee burnout in digital marketing firms. Practically, the results emphasize the importance of structured change communication and role clarification to mitigate burnout risks in dynamic organizational environments.

Keywords: continuous organizational change, role ambiguity, burnout, PLS-SEM, digital marketing industry

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving business environment, digital marketing firms operate under constant pressure to remain agile, adaptive, and competitive. Organizational change has therefore become not only inevitable but also strategic. Companies frequently adjust their structures, systems,

Workflows, and performance metrics to respond to market demands and technological advancements. While such adaptability is often associated with organizational success, excessive and continuous change may produce unintended psychological consequences for employees.

Continuous organizational change refers to repeated modifications in organizational structures, policies, work systems, and performance evaluation mechanisms within relatively short time intervals. In dynamic industries such as digital marketing, these changes may include restructuring teams, updating digital platforms, altering key performance indicators (KPIs), and even modifying work schedules. Although these adjustments are designed to enhance efficiency and competitiveness, when implemented frequently and over extended periods, they may generate uncertainty and instability in employees' work experiences.

At PT Ethos Kreatif Indonesia, a digital marketing company operating in Indonesia, organizational changes have occurred repeatedly over the past four years. These changes have included structural reorganizations, revisions of performance evaluation systems, shifts from

regular working hours to shift-based schedules, and continuous updates to operational systems. While such transformations aim to improve organizational responsiveness, sustained change over a prolonged period may influence employees' clarity regarding their roles and responsibilities.

According to Role Theory, role ambiguity arises when employees lack clear information about job expectations, responsibilities, performance standards, or reporting relationships. Frequent changes in organizational systems and structures can disrupt established work routines and blur previously defined responsibilities. As role clarity decreases, employees may struggle to understand what is expected of them, how their performance is assessed, and how to prioritize their tasks. Over time, such ambiguity may function as a psychological demand.

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model suggests that excessive job demands without sufficient resources can lead to emotional exhaustion and burnout. Role ambiguity, as a form of job demand, consumes cognitive and emotional energy because employees must continuously interpret shifting expectations. When sustained over time, this condition may increase stress levels and ultimately contribute to employee burnout.

Despite the growing attention to organizational change and employee well-being, limited empirical research has specifically examined how continuous, high-frequency organizational change affects burnout through the mechanism of role ambiguity, particularly within digital marketing firms in emerging markets. Most prior studies focus either on change management effectiveness or general job stress factors, leaving a gap in understanding the psychological processes linking sustained change and burnout.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the impact of continuous organizational change on employee burnout, with role ambiguity as a mediating variable, in the context of a digital marketing company. By identifying the indirect psychological pathway through which ongoing change influences burnout, this research contributes to both organizational change literature and employee well-being studies. Furthermore, the findings are expected to provide practical insights for management in designing change strategies that minimize adverse psychological consequences while maintaining organizational agility.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

1. Continuous Organizational Change and Role Ambiguity

Continuous organizational change refers to frequent and ongoing adjustments in organizational structures, processes, systems, and performance standards within relatively short periods. In dynamic industries such as digital marketing, organizations are required to continuously adapt to technological developments, market trends, and client demands. However, excessive and repeated changes may create uncertainty among employees regarding their roles and responsibilities.

According to Role Theory, role ambiguity occurs when employees lack clear information about job expectations, responsibilities, authority, and performance evaluation criteria. Continuous changes in organizational structures and work systems can disrupt established routines and blur previously defined roles. As a result, employees may experience confusion about what is expected of them, how to perform their tasks, and how their performance is assessed.

Previous studies suggest that frequent organizational changes significantly increase role ambiguity because employees must constantly reinterpret evolving expectations. This condition leads to uncertainty and reduces role clarity, especially when communication regarding changes is insufficient.

H1: Continuous organizational change has a positive and significant effect on role ambiguity.

2. Continuous Organizational Change and Employee Burnout

Employee burnout is a psychological condition characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model explains that burnout arises when job demands exceed the resources available to employees.

Continuous organizational change can be categorized as a job demand because it requires employees to continuously adapt to new systems, roles, and expectations. Frequent adjustments in performance indicators, workflows, and organizational structures may increase workload, stress, and cognitive burden. Over time, this persistent pressure can lead to emotional exhaustion and ultimately burnout.

Empirical research indicates that excessive organizational change, especially when occurring continuously, is associated with higher levels of employee stress and burnout. This is because employees experience instability and lack of control over their work environment.

H2: Continuous organizational change has a positive and significant effect on employee burnout.

3. Role Ambiguity and Employee Burnout

Role ambiguity is considered a significant job stressor within the JD-R framework. When employees do not clearly understand their roles, expectations, and performance standards, they must expend additional cognitive and emotional effort to interpret their tasks. This ongoing uncertainty can create psychological strain.

Employees experiencing role ambiguity often face difficulties in prioritizing tasks, making decisions, and meeting performance expectations. This condition leads to frustration, anxiety, and prolonged stress, which are key antecedents of burnout.

Previous studies consistently show that role ambiguity has a significant positive relationship with burnout, particularly in environments characterized by high uncertainty and dynamic changes.

H3: Role ambiguity has a positive and significant effect on employee burnout.

4. The Mediating Role of Role Ambiguity

While continuous organizational change directly influences employee burnout, its indirect effect through psychological mechanisms is equally important. One key mechanism is role ambiguity. Continuous change often disrupts clarity in job roles, which in turn increases role ambiguity. This ambiguity acts as a psychological burden that consumes employees' cognitive and emotional resources. As a result, burnout may not arise solely from the change itself, but from the uncertainty and confusion that accompany it.

The JD-R model supports this mediation relationship by explaining how job demands (continuous change) can lead to strain (burnout) through specific stressors (role ambiguity). Empirical evidence also supports the mediating role of role ambiguity in linking organizational change and burnout.

H4: Role ambiguity mediates the relationship between continuous organizational change and employee burnout.

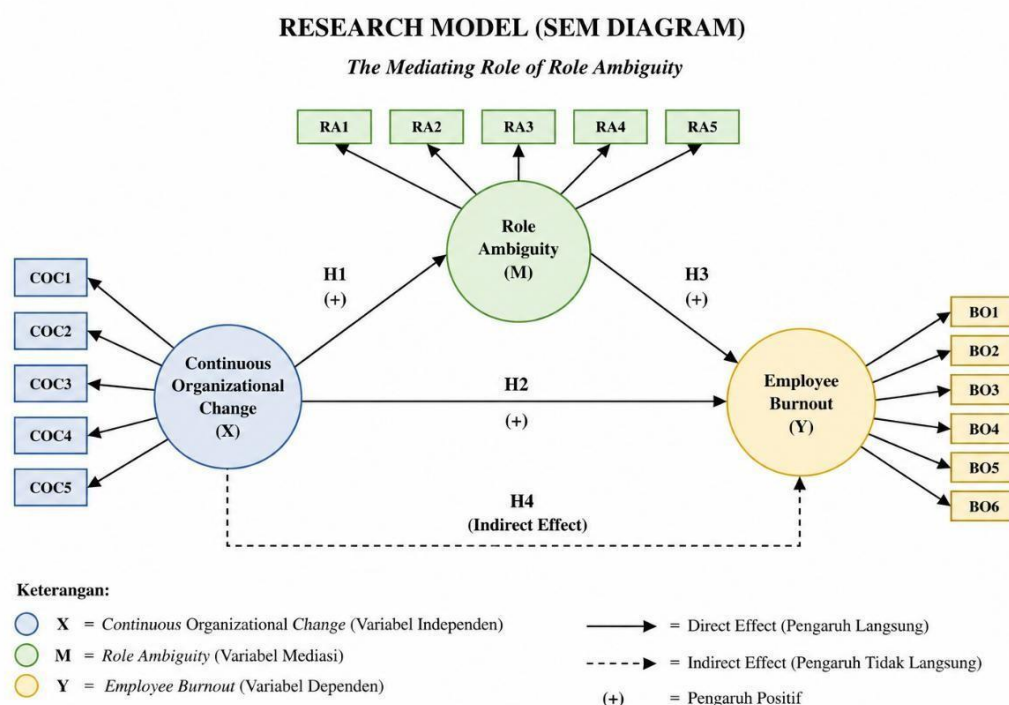


Figure 1. Research Model (SEM DIAGRAM)

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a quantitative research approach with an explanatory design to examine the causal relationships between continuous organizational change, role ambiguity, and employee burnout. The research aims to test both direct and indirect effects among variables using a structural model.

1. Research Design

The study uses a cross-sectional survey design, where data are collected at a single point in time. This design is appropriate for analyzing relationships between variables and testing hypotheses within the framework of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

2. Population and Sampel

The population of this study consists of all employees working at PT Ethos Kreatif Indonesia, a digital marketing company. The sample includes 180 employees from various departments, representing different functional roles within the organization.

A non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, was used. Respondents were selected based on the criteria that they have experienced organizational changes within the company for at least one year, ensuring that they have sufficient exposure to continuous organizational change.

3. Data Collection Technique

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed to respondents. The questionnaire was designed using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The distribution was conducted online to ensure efficiency and accessibility.

4. Meisurement of Variables

All variables in this study were measured using adapted indicators from previous empirical studies to ensure validity and reliability.

- a. Continuous Organizational Change (X)
Measured by indicators reflecting frequency of structural changes, system updates, work process changes, and performance evaluation adjustments.
- b. Role Ambiguity (M)
Measured by indicators related to clarity of job responsibilities, expectations, authority, and performance standards.
- c. Employee Burnout (Y)
Measured using dimensions such as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.

5. Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the assistance of SmartPLS. This method was chosen because it is suitable for predictive analysis and does not require strict assumptions of normal data distribution.

The analysis was conducted in two stages:

- a. Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

This stage assesses the validity and reliability of the constructs using:

- 1.1 Convergent validity (outer loadings > 0.7)
- 1.2 Average Variance Extracted (AVE > 0.5)
- 1.3 Composite Reliability (CR > 0.7)
- 1.4 Cronbach's Alpha (> 0.7)

- b. Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

This stage evaluates the relationships between variables using:

- 1.1 Path coefficients
- 1.2 Coefficient of determination (R^2)
- 1.3 Effect size (f^2)
- 1.4 Predictive relevance (Q^2)

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping method to determine the significance of path coefficients. A hypothesis is accepted if the t-statistic > 1.96 and p-value < 0.05 .

6. Mediation Analysis

To test the mediating role of role ambiguity, indirect effects were analyzed using the bootstrapping procedure. Mediation is confirmed if the indirect effect is significant. The type of mediation (partial or full) is determined by comparing direct and indirect effects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results indicate that continuous organizational change has a significant positive effect on role ambiguity. This finding supports Role Theory, which suggests that frequent changes disrupt role clarity and create uncertainty among employees.

Furthermore, continuous organizational change is proven to significantly increase employee burnout. This aligns with the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, where continuous change acts as a job demand that drains employees' psychological resources.

Role ambiguity also has a significant effect on burnout. Employees who lack clarity regarding their responsibilities and expectations tend to experience higher levels of stress, which eventually leads to burnout.

Importantly, the mediation analysis shows that role ambiguity partially mediates the relationship between continuous organizational change and burnout. This suggests that burnout is

not only caused directly by change but also indirectly through the uncertainty and confusion experienced by employees.

These findings highlight the importance of clear communication and role definition during organizational change processes, particularly in dynamic industries such as digital marketing.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that continuous organizational change significantly increases employee burnout, both directly and indirectly through role ambiguity. Role ambiguity plays a crucial mediating role, indicating that burnout is not only caused by change itself but also by the uncertainty in roles and expectations experienced by employees. These findings highlight the importance of clear communication and role clarity in managing continuous change to reduce the risk of employee burnout.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Felstead, A., Jewson, N., Phizacklea, A., & Walters, S. (2002). Opportunities to work at home in the context of work-life balance. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 12(1), 54–76.

Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2021). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Jackson, S. E., & Schuler, R. S. (1985). A meta-analysis and conceptual critique of research on role ambiguity and role conflict in work settings. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 36(1), 16–78.

Maslach, C., & Jackson, S. E. (1981). The measurement of experienced burnout. *Journal of Occupational Behavior*, 2(2), 99–113.

Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W. B., & Leiter, M. P. (2001). Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52(1), 397–422.

Oreg, S., Vakola, M., & Armenakis, A. (2011). Change recipients' reactions to organizational change: A 60-year review of quantitative studies. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 47(4), 461–524.

Rafferty, A. E., & Griffin, M. A. (2006). Perceptions of organizational change: A stress and coping perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(5), 1154–1162.

Rizzo, J. R., House, R. J., & Lirtzman, S. I. (1970). Role conflict and ambiguity in complex organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 15(2), 150–163.

Schaufeli, W. B., Leiter, M. P., & Maslach, C. (2009). Burnout: 35 years of research and practice. *Career Development International*, 14(3), 204–220.

Vakola, M. (2014). What's in there for me? Individual readiness to change and the perceived impact of organizational change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 27(4), 568–583.

De Clercq, D., & Pereira, R. (2023). When does role ambiguity escalate into diminished change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior? *Information Development*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/03063070231191878>

Irigoyen-Amparan, C. W., Gonzalez, K. D., Pennathur, A., Mancera, B., & Pennathur, P. R. (2025). Organizational challenges persist, and new research directions emerge in the study of burnout: A bibliometric analysis. *Global Business Review*.

Kurnia, D. I., Noermijati, & Juwita, H. A. J. (2026). How workload leads to burnout: The mediating roles of job stress and work-life balance. *Jurnal Manajemen*, 30(1), 52–73.

Ling, J., Chok, J. I., Zhang, W., & Lowery, C. M. (2025). The impacts of organizational changes on work engagement and quiet quitting. *American Journal of Management*, 25(1).

Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (2021). Understanding the burnout experience: Recent research and its implications. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 8, 397–422.

Schaufeli, W. B. (2021). Burnout: A review of 50 years of research and future directions. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 42(3), 1–15.

Zhang, H. L., Wu, C., Yan, J. R., Liu, J. H., Wang, P., Hu, M. Y., Liu, F., & Lang, H. J. (2023).

The relationship between role ambiguity, emotional exhaustion and work alienation. *BMC Psychiatry*, 23, 516. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-023-04923-5>