

PSYCHOSOCIAL RISK OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR: THE ROLE OF WORK STRESS IN EMPLOYEE OUTCOMES

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Article history:

Submitted:

April 15, 2026

Revised:

June 11, 2026

Accepted:

June 29, 2026

JEL Classification:

J28, J45, M12

Keywords:

*Change related uncertainty;
emotional exhaustion;
employee performance; job
stress*

Kata kunci:

*Kelelahan emosional;
ketidakpastian perubahan
organisasi; kinerja pegawai;
stres kerja*

How to cite:

Utami, Y.I.P., Sunaryo S. (2026). Psychosocial risk of organizational change in the public sector: the role of work stress in employee outcomes. JIMFE (Jurnal Ilmiah Manajemen Fakultas Ekonomi, 12(1), 55-74.



ABSTRACT

This study examine the psychosocial risks linked to organizational change measured through the variable of uncertainty regarding change on employee performance and emotional exhaustion, with job stress serving as a mediating variable. This study was conducted in the Indonesian public sector, grounded in the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. It employed a quantitative methodology using survey techniques. Data collection was conducted among civil servants (PNS) at a government agency in Indonesia. We utilized PLS-SEM analysis to test hypotheses and examine how the study variables are interrelated, both directly and indirectly. The results show that change-related uncertainty significantly increases job stress, which subsequently reduces employee performance and increases emotional exhaustion. In contrast, change-related uncertainty does not directly influence emotional exhaustion but exerts a significant indirect effect through job stress, indicating full mediation. These findings demonstrate that job stress is the primary psychological mechanism linking organizational change uncertainty to both employee performance and emotional exhaustion. Based on these findings, organizations should implement proactive stress management programs and keep communication channels open during times of change to protect employee performance and mental well-being.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji risiko psikososial yang muncul akibat perubahan organisasi dengan menelaah pengaruh ketidakpastian perubahan terhadap kinerja pegawai dan kelelahan emosional, serta menempatkan stres kerja sebagai variabel mediasi. Penelitian ini dilakukan pada sektor publik di Indonesia dengan berlandaskan pada teori *Conservation of Resources* (COR). Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah kuantitatif melalui metode survei. Pengumpulan data dilakukan terhadap Pegawai Negeri Sipil (PNS) pada salah satu instansi pemerintah di Indonesia. Pengujian hipotesis dilakukan menggunakan metode *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling* (PLS-SEM) untuk menganalisis hubungan langsung maupun tidak langsung antarvariabel penelitian. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketidakpastian perubahan berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap peningkatan stres kerja, yang selanjutnya menurunkan kinerja pegawai serta meningkatkan kelelahan emosional. Sebaliknya, ketidakpastian perubahan tidak berpengaruh secara langsung terhadap kelelahan emosional, tetapi memberikan pengaruh tidak langsung yang signifikan melalui stres kerja, yang menunjukkan adanya mediasi penuh. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa stres kerja merupakan mekanisme psikologis utama yang menjembatani pengaruh ketidakpastian perubahan organisasi terhadap kinerja pegawai maupun kelelahan emosional. Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, organisasi perlu menerapkan program pengelolaan stres secara proaktif serta menjaga komunikasi yang terbuka selama proses perubahan agar kinerja pegawai dan kesejahteraan psikologis mereka tetap terpelihara.

INTRODUCTION

Modern organizations must undergo organizational changes driven by both external and internal environmental factors, such as technological advancements, global market growth, and regulatory changes (Cameron & Green, 2024). Although numerous studies have already examined organizational change, this topic remains of interest because it is constantly evolving depending on social, economic, and political developments. Rafferty and Griffin (2006) also point out that few studies have thoroughly examined which aspects of organizational change have the greatest impact on employees and how those aspects influence their attitudes. The need for budget efficiency is one of the main reasons why organizations change. According to Christensen and Lægreid (2007), budget efficiency has led organizations to make reforms, including staff reductions and the strengthening of accountability mechanisms. Research in the public sector is of immense importance, as public organizations face challenges that differ from those in the private sector, particularly with regard to bureaucratic obstacles, limited structural flexibility, and political pressure (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Kuipers et al. (2014) note that characteristics such as bureaucratic inertia make the change process in the public sector more complex and slow down its implementation. Such changes often place an additional burden on employees, including increased workloads, job insecurity, and the need to adapt to new systems. This study explores how the uncertainty associated with change affects employees' emotional exhaustion and performance, with work stress considered as a mediating variable. The uncertainty resulting from organizational change can negatively affect employees' work experience, including their attitude, job satisfaction, and performance (Cullen et al., 2014). According to transactional stress theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), increasing environmental demands linked to organizational change can trigger a stress response, which in turn can lead to emotional exhaustion.

There have been several previous studies on this topic, but these studies were only partial, and none have yet combined the variables in this study into a single model. For example, Rafferty and Griffin (2006) examined how uncertainty regarding organizational change affects work-related stress. Cullen et al. (2014) examined how uncertainty related to change affects employee performance. Raza et al. (2023) also examined how work stress, emotional exhaustion, and organizational change are interrelated. Building on previous studies that have examined these relationships separately (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006; Cullen et al., 2014; Raza et al., 2023), the present study integrates change-related uncertainty, job stress, emotional exhaustion, and employee performance into a single analytical model within the public-sector context. By examining these variables simultaneously, this study provides empirical evidence that can inform organizational policies aimed at mitigating psychosocial risks associated with organizational change while maintaining employee performance and well-being.

Previous research has also reported inconsistent findings regarding how organizational change affects employee performance outcomes. Contreras and Gonzalez (2021) found that organizational change significantly affects employee performance as measured by cognitive load utilization. Conversely, Cullen et al. (2014) observed that while uncertainty related to change does not have a significant direct impact on employee performance, it exerts an indirect effect when mediated by perceived organizational support (POS). Liu et al. (2025) state that organizational change does not have a uniform or consistent impact across all conditions. Organizational change can drive innovative performance by strengthening work engagement, but it can also hinder it by increasing work pressure (Liu et al., 2025). These inconsistent findings suggest that research results vary greatly depending on how employees respond to change. Therefore, the influence of change-related uncertainty on employees' emotional exhaustion and performance is an intriguing research topic due to its varying impacts.

This research is becoming more important in Indonesia as budget efficiency policies go into effect in 2025. Presidential Instruction (Inpres) No. 1 of 2025 sets a national budget efficiency target of IDR

306.69 trillion for all expenditures by ministries and the central government, including fund transfers to local governments. The president implemented budget efficiency measures that directly affected a public sector organization in Indonesia. Informal interviews with employees in this organization revealed symptoms of job stress, emotional exhaustion, and inter-team conflict resulting from changes in systems and workloads. These observations are consistent with previous studies showing that organizational change may lead to adverse psychological and social consequences for employees, including increased stress, emotional exhaustion, and uncertainty (Bordia et al., 2004; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006; Oreg et al., 2018). Therefore, research on the psychosocial risks of organizational change is particularly relevant in Indonesia in light of the current budget-efficiency policies affecting the public sector.

This study enriches the existing literature on organizational change, particularly in the public sector, by making three significant contributions. First, this study presents empirical information on the psychosocial risks faced by employees as a result of organizational changes driven by budget efficiency, a topic that has not yet been extensively explored in public sector research. Second, this study shows that the uncertainty that comes with change leads to a process of resource depletion through stress, which has an effect on employee performance and emotional exhaustion. This widens the application of Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. Third, this study was conducted on public organizations in Indonesia that are currently undergoing budget efficiency reforms, with the aim of managing the impact of organizational change uncertainty. Cullen et al. (2014) argue that comprehending the effects of uncertainty related to change on employment outcomes, especially employee satisfaction and performance, is an essential initial step in mitigating resistance to change.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Theoretical Background

This study draws upon the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, originally proposed by Hobfoll (1989), as its theoretical foundation. According to COR theory, people feel psychological strain when their valuable resources are at risk of being lost or are actually lost, or when it takes too much effort to protect the resources they still have (Hobfoll, 2011). In an organizational context, this theoretical perspective is commonly used to explain how stressful and demanding work environments affect employees' psychological conditions, job satisfaction, performance, and the development of negative behaviors toward coworkers (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Consistent with the core premise of COR theory, Raza et al. (2023) applied COR theory to examine the relationship between organizational change and workplace incivility, proposing a mediating mechanism through job stress and a moderating mechanism through emotional exhaustion. In this context, the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory provides a useful framework for examining how employees react to stress and its impact in the workplace when facing the uncertainty of organizational change.

According to Jones (2013), organizational change is a planned transition process that helps an organization move from its current state to a desired state. Organizational change, according to Cameron and Green (2024), is the process by which an organization adjusts its procedures, strategies, structures, or cultures in reaction to both internal and external demands. Organizational transformations, while often essential, frequently engender employee apprehension, with individuals expressing concern regarding the implications for their job security, routine responsibilities, and positions within the organizational structure (Bordia et al., 2004). In addition, Bordia et al. (2004) explain that the uncertainty arising from change is a psychological condition characterized by the perception of an inability to accurately predict the processes and consequences associated with organizational change. Change-related uncertainty refers to employees' perceived inability to accurately predict the processes and outcomes associated with organizational change (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). In this study, the construct was measured using four

questionnaire items adapted from Rafferty and Griffin (2006). The items assess employees' uncertainty regarding how they should respond to organizational change, the perceived impact of change on their work, the extent to which changes affect their work unit, and the predictability of the work environment during periods of organizational change.

Change-Related Uncertainty and Job Stress

Job stress is a physical and mental reaction that occurs when there is a discrepancy between job demands and an employee's capabilities, resources, or personal requirements (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to the COR theory, stress is a psychological response that arises when a person feels that their essential resources are at risk of being depleted or lost (Hobfoll, 1989). Raza et al. (2023) define job stress as a response to unwanted demands encountered in the workplace. The construct was measured using thirteen questionnaire items adapted from Parker and DeCotiis (1983). These items capture various aspects of job stress, including feelings of anxiety, work overload, work-life imbalance, time pressure, frustration, psychological tension, difficulty disconnecting from work, and perceived exhaustion caused by excessive work demands.

Rafferty and Griffin (2006) explain that unclear directions of organizational change and the uncertainty they create are important factors contributing to employees' job stress. Consistent with this perspective, a study by Van Doninck et al. (2025), conducted among public sector employees, shows that change-related uncertainty has a significant effect on chronic stress. Similarly, Raza et al. (2023) report that organizational change significantly influences job stress.

H₁: Change-related uncertainty has a positive effect on job stress

Change-Related Uncertainty and Employee Performance

Researchers conceptualize employee performance as behaviors and actions that support the achievement of organizational goals (Campbell et al., 1990; Dorta-Afonso et al., 2025). According to Lo Presti et al. (2025) job performance is a multidimensional concept that is defined as the actions and behaviors carried out by employees to contribute to the success of their organization. In this study, employee performance was measured using five questionnaire items by Koopmans et al. (2014) assessing employees' ability to plan their work, remember and achieve work targets, prioritize tasks, complete work efficiently, and manage time effectively.

Rafferty and Griffin (2006) state that changes in the workplace can lead to a decline in employee performance and a decrease in their job satisfaction. A study by Contreras and Gonzalez (2021) shows that organizational changes impacted employee performance, as measured by cognitive load utilization. Consistent with the findings of previous studies, Liu et al. (2025) found that organizational changes have a significant impact on employees' innovative performance. These findings suggest that change-related uncertainty may have important implications for employee performance.

H₂: Change-related uncertainty has a negative effect on employee performance.

Change-Related Uncertainty and Emotional Exhaustion

An important aspect of burnout is emotional exhaustion. It means feeling drained and having less energy because of long-term job stress (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Emotional exhaustion refers to a condition in which individuals experience emotional depletion and fatigue due to their work obligations (Raza et al., 2023). Historically, the concept of emotional exhaustion can be traced back to Maslach and Jackson's (1981) seminal work, which conceptualized burnout as a multidimensional phenomenon consisting of three core components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion was measured using five questionnaire items by Penny et al.

(2023) reflecting employees' feelings of emotional exhaustion, physical fatigue, frustration with work, excessive work effort, and the negative emotional impact of workplace experiences on their personal lives.

Research by Day et al. (2017) shows that stressors associated with organizational change significantly influence employee burnout, in which emotional exhaustion constitutes a central dimension. Consistent with earlier studies, Hung and Liu (2022) show that when employees struggle to tolerate uncertainty and resist organizational change, they are more likely to experience emotional exhaustion. Their findings also indicate that intolerance of uncertainty plays an important mediating role in this relationship. Furthermore, Gao et al. (2025) find that employees who have difficulty tolerating uncertainty are more susceptible to higher levels of emotional exhaustion and change fatigue. Recent studies also suggest that the uncertainty experienced by employees during the COVID-19 pandemic functioned as an additional job demand, which in turn contributed to higher levels of emotional exhaustion (Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2021; Ersoy et al., 2023).

H₃: Change-related uncertainty has a positive effect on employees' emotional exhaustion.

Job Stress and Employee Performance

According to Beehr (2014), stress acts as a primary catalyst for the erosion of employee motivation and the subsequent decline in overall performance. Van Doninck et al. (2025) state that chronic stress can lead to a decline in employee performance and a reduction in individual well-being. Sackey and Sanda (2009) point out that stress at work not only makes people less productive, but it can also hurt their mental health and psychological well-being, which can lead to even more problems at work. Research by Contreras and Gonzalez (2021) shows that stress has a significant impact on how well employees perform their tasks. Parker and DeCotiis (1983) support these findings, stating that job stress has a negative impact on employee performance.

H₄: Job stress has a negative effect on employee performance.

Job Stress and Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion in the workplace is closely correlated with an individual's stress responses, including anxiety, work-related fatigue, work-related sadness, and psychosomatic symptoms (Demerouti et al., 2001). Golparvar et al. (2012) state that work stress and emotional exhaustion are conceptually different, with work stress being a temporary reaction to workplace conditions, whereas emotional exhaustion refers to a more chronic condition. Castro-Medina et al. (2025) demonstrate that stress is the primary cause of emotional exhaustion, both directly and indirectly. Zhang et al. (2025) support this view by identifying stress as the main factor contributing to burnout, particularly in influencing its core component, which is emotional exhaustion. Moreover, employees enduring extended stress are significantly susceptible to burnout, defined by emotional fatigue, a decrease in personal achievement, and depersonalization (Tang et al., 2025).

H₅: Job stress has a positive effect on emotional exhaustion.

Job Stress as a Mediator between Change-Related Uncertainty and Employee Performance

In the context of stress models in the organizational behavior literature, Robbins and Judge (2023) explain that uncertainty in the workplace can trigger stress in individuals, which has the potential to negatively impact their performance. Contreras and Gonzalez (2021) observe that employees undergoing organizational change tend to experience increased levels of job stress, which are linked to declines in employee performance as measured by cognitive load utilization. Raza et al. (2023) further note that the

implementation of organizational change can induce employee stress, and stress-related factors may ultimately have a negative impact on organizational performance.

H₆: Job stress negatively mediates the effect of change-related uncertainty on employee performance.

Job Stress as a Mediator between Change-Related Uncertainty and Emotional Exhaustion

Within stress models in the organizational behavior literature, Robbins and Judge (2023) explain that uncertainty in the work environment can cause individuals to experience stress, which may subsequently generate anxiety and undermine their emotional well-being. Raza et al. (2023) further demonstrate that stress functions as an intervening factor in the relationship between organizational change and workplace incivility, with the increased levels of emotional exhaustion strengthening the relationship. Although their study treats emotional exhaustion as a moderating variable, the authors recommend that future research explore emotional exhaustion as a mediating outcome that emerges following stress.

Prior studies have consistently shown that change-related uncertainty has a significant effect on job stress (Contreras & Gonzalez, 2021; Van Doninck et al., 2025) and that job stress, in turn, significantly influences emotional exhaustion (Castro-Medina et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). Based on that literature, it is therefore reasonable to propose that job stress serves as a potential mediator between change-related uncertainty and employees' emotional exhaustion.

H₇: Job stress positively mediates the effect of change-related uncertainty on employees' emotional exhaustion.

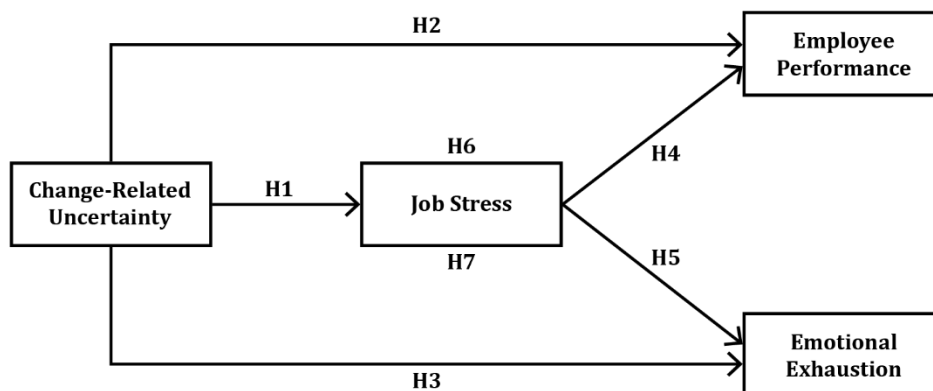


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHOD

By using a quantitative research framework, this research seeks to identify the associations between variables and determine the magnitude of their respective impacts. This study used a survey design to collect data from a small group of employees in a specific public organization that was meant to represent the larger population. This study used a cross-sectional approach, which meant that it looked at data from structured questionnaires filled out by individual employees at a certain point. By using a quantitative research framework, this research seeks to identify the associations between variables and determine the magnitude of their respective impacts. The research was conducted in a single government institution in Indonesia that was undergoing organizational changes following the implementation of the 2025 budget-efficiency policy. The target population consisted of all civil servants employed by the institution. A simple random sampling technique was used to ensure that each member of the population had an equal

probability of being selected. A total of 172 questionnaires were distributed, of which 157 were returned, resulting in a response rate of 91,28%. After data screening, 10 questionnaires were excluded because they contained incomplete responses or were identified as outliers. Consequently, the final sample comprised 147 valid respondents.

The study used descriptive analysis to provide an overview of the demographic characteristics of respondents, including age, educational background, tenure, and marital status. This study used Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the hypotheses. PLS-SEM is a variance-based SEM technique. Since PLS-SEM is a technique based on variance, it is recommended when the research objective is prediction, exploration, or structural theory development; when the structural model is complex (involving multiple constructs and indicators); when the sample size is relatively small (147 respondents); and when the data do not follow a normal distribution (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 1. Variable Operational Definitions

Variable	Definitions	Item	Source
Change-Related Uncertainty (CRU)	Psychological state characterized by a perceived inability to accurately predict the processes and outcomes associated with organizational change.	4 items	(Rafferty & Griffin, 2006)
Job Stress (JS)	Mental and physical responses to undesirable pressures experienced in the workplace	13 items	(Parker & DeCotiis, 1983)
Employee Performance (EP)	Actions and behaviors carried out by employees to contribute to the success of their organization	5 items	(Koopmans et al., 2014)
Emotional Exhaustion (EH)	A state in which individuals feel emotionally drained and worn out by their work demands	5 items	(Penny et al., 2023)

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Respondent Characteristics

Of the 147 respondents, the largest proportion were aged 20–29 years (44,898%), followed by those aged 30–39 years (23,810%), 40–49 years (22,449%), and the smallest proportion were aged 50 years and above (8,844%). In terms of education, most respondents have a bachelor's degree (72,789%), followed by postgraduate degrees (12,925%), diploma qualifications (11,565%), and senior high school education (2,721%). Based on job tenure, the majority sample had a length of service of 0–10 years (55,102%), followed by 11–20 years (26,531%), 21–30 years (12,925%), and more than 30 years (5,442%). Most respondents were married (63,946%), followed by those who were single (35,374%), with only a small number reporting being divorced or widowed (0,680%).

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics

Respondent Characteristic	Description	Percentage
Age	20-29	44,900
	30-39	23,810
	40-49	22,450
	50+	8,840
Educational Attainment	Postgraduate	12,930
	Bachelor	72,790
	Diploma	11,560
	High School	2,720
Job Tenure	0-10	55,100
	11-20	26,530
	21-30	12,930
	30+	5,440
Marital Status	Single	35,370
	Married	63,950
	Divorced or	0,680
	Widowed	

Source: Data Processed (2025)

Measurement Model Analysis

According to Hair et al. (2022), the outer loading value is used to check the reliability of an indicator, and values above 0,708 are generally regarded as adequate. If the omission of specific indicators results in improved convergent validity or internal consistency, those with loadings between 0,400 and 0,700 ought to be considered for deletion (Hair et al., 2022). In this study, all indicators measuring change-related uncertainty and emotional exhaustion exhibit outer loading values above 0,708, indicating satisfactory indicator reliability. For the employee performance variable, indicator EP2 shows an outer loading value of 0,629. In the job stress variable, three indicators have outer loading values below 0,708, namely JS1 (0,655), JS10 (0,532), and JS13 (0,592). As all indicators exceeded the minimum outer loading threshold of 0,400, none were excluded at this stage of the analysis. Indicators with outer loadings in the range of 0,400 – 0,700 were further evaluated based on internal consistency reliability and convergent validity. In general, a sufficiently high outer loading value indicates that the indicators in this study are a good representation of the constructs they measure.

To further evaluate the measurement model, internal consistency reliability was analyzed using Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha (α), as recommended by Hair et al. (2022). Hair et al. (2022) state that α and CR coefficients between 0.600 and 0.700 are sufficient for exploratory studies, but values between 0.700 and 0.900 are preferable for more rigorous research. In this study, both the α and CR values fell between 0.800 and 0.900, indicating that the internal consistency reliability was good.

To evaluate convergent validity, which reflects the positive correlation between a measure and other metrics of the same construct, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is widely employed as a primary indicator (Hair et al., 2022). AVE indicates the average variance explained by a construct and is obtained by averaging the squared loadings of its indicators. Similar to indicator reliability standards, the majority of the variance in the indicators is considered accounted for when the AVE reaches 0,500 or higher, indicating a robust construct representation (Hair et al., 2022). All constructs exhibit AVE values above 0,500, indicating sufficient explanatory power for their respective indicators.

Table 3. Measurement Model Analysis

Items	Loading Factor	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
CRU1	0,802	0,827	0,885	0,658
CRU2	0,889			
CRU3	0,728			
CRU4	0,819			
JS1	0,655	0,864	0,941	0,763
JS4	0,748			
JS8	0,684			
JS9	0,759			
JS10	0,532			
JS11	0,741			
JS12	0,790			
JS13	0,592			
EP1	0,827	0,862	0,901	0,647
EP2	0,629			
EP3	0,859			
EP4	0,849			
EP5	0,836			
EH1	0,909			
EH2	0,921			
EH3	0,871			
EH4	0,836			
EH5	0,826			

Source: Data Processed (2025)

Discriminant validity reflects how clearly a construct can be distinguished from other constructs based on empirical evidence (Hair et al., 2022). The verification of discriminant validity involves several statistical techniques, including the examination of cross-loadings, the Fornell–Larcker benchmark, and the HTMT ratio. However, Hair et al. (2022) point out that the Fornell–Larcker criterion and cross-loadings have some limitations, so using HTMT is generally considered a more reliable method. HTMT values under 0,90 suggest that the construct is clearly distinct from others, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). In this result analysis, most HTMT values fall within the recommended range; however, the HTMT value between job stress and emotional exhaustion is 0,940, which exceeds the suggested threshold. An HTMT value more than 0,900 may be due to similarities among indicators measuring job stress and emotional exhaustion, raising concerns about potential item redundancy. Hair et al. (2022) recommend that researchers take corrective actions whenever a criterion indicates a lack of discriminant validity. Such actions may include removing indicators that exhibit high correlations with indicators of other constructs. After the gradual removal of highly correlated indicators (JS2, JS3, JS5, JS6, and JS7), the HTMT value decreased to 0,896. These findings confirm the divergence of the constructs within the model, demonstrating that discriminant validity is sufficiently met as each variable remains empirically unique.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity

Fornell-Larcker criterion				
	Change-Related Uncertainty	Job Stress	Employee Performance	Emotional Exhaustion
Change-Related Uncertainty	0,811			
Job Stress	0,438	0,718		
Employee Performance	-0,333	-0,418	0,804	
Emotional Exhaustion	0,416	0,809	-0,349	0,873
HTMT				
	Change-Related Uncertainty	Job Stress	Employee Performance	Emotional Exhaustion
Change-Related Uncertainty				
Job Stress	0,490			
Employee Performance	0,381	0,450		
Emotional Exhaustion	0,464	0,896	0,378	

Note: Values on the diagonal (bold) are the square root AVE, and the off-diagonal are correlations
Source: Data processed (2025)

Structural Model Analysis

A preliminary assessment of the structural model involves checking for data multicollinearity. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is utilized as the primary diagnostic tool for checking collinearity in the inner model. VIF values below five, or more conservatively below three, suggest that collinearity does not significantly affect the estimates in the structural model (Hair et al., 2022). In this study, all independent variables have VIF values below 1.3, indicating that multicollinearity does not significantly impact the estimation of the structural model. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is used to check how well the structural model fits overall, as suggested by Henseler et al. (2015). The SRMR value obtained from the model is 0,074, which is below the recommended value of 0,080. This result shows that the proposed model fits well enough.

Following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2022), a bootstrapping technique with 5,000 resamples was used to find out how much empirical support there is for the proposed structural links. This study applies a 5% significance level. According to Hair et al. (2022), exploratory studies, or those with relatively small sample sizes, often employ a 5% significance level. Table 5 and Figure 2 present the results of our significance tests for both direct and indirect effects. The results demonstrate that change-related uncertainty exerts a substantial detrimental influence on employee performance while simultaneously having a marked upward impact on job stress and emotional exhaustion. The results reveal that change-related uncertainty not only undermines employee performance but also elevates job stress and emotional exhaustion. However, change-related uncertainty does not have a significant direct effect on emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, job stress is found to have a significant negative effect on employee performance and a significant positive effect on emotional exhaustion. These results support H1, H2, H5, and H6, but not for H3. Based on Cohen's (2009) guidelines, the effect of change-related uncertainty on job stress ($f^2 = 0,238$) can be categorized as medium. The effects of change-related uncertainty on employee performance ($f^2 = 0,035$) and emotional exhaustion ($f^2 = 0,014$) are considered small.

Meanwhile, the effect of job stress on emotional exhaustion ($f^2 = 1,422$) is large, indicating that job stress is the dominant predictor of emotional exhaustion.

Following Preacher and Hayes (2008), the bootstrapping method is also used to examine the significance of indirect effects. According to the data in Figure 2 and Table 5, job stress functions as a pivotal intervening mechanism through which change-related uncertainty influences both employee performance and emotional exhaustion. The results are confirmed as significant with all p-values falling below the 5% threshold, thereby supporting H4 and H7.

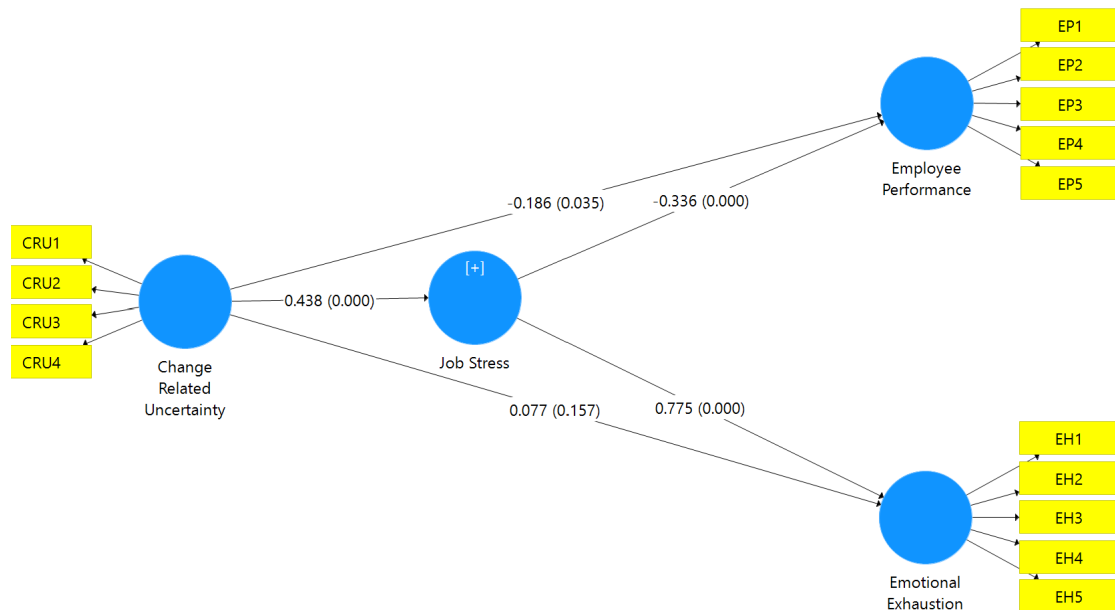


Figure 2. Structural Model Result

Note: Numbers on the arrows represent standardized path coefficients (β), and values in parentheses indicate the corresponding p-values obtained from the bootstrapping procedure.

After determining the significance of the paths, the model's ability to explain its variance is evaluated using the R^2 values of the endogenous variables, as per Hair et al. (2022). The model's explanatory power is classified as strong, moderate, or weak based on R^2 values of 0,750, 0,500, and 0,250, respectively. The results show that the model explains 65,900% of the variance in emotional exhaustion, 20,200% of the variance in employee performance, and 19,200% of the variance in job stress. Then, a blindfolding test with an omission distance of seven was done to get Stone–Geisser's Q^2 values (Hair et al., 2017). The Q^2 values for employee performance, emotional exhaustion, and job stress are 0,094, 0,157, and 0,175, respectively. Given that every Q^2 value is higher than zero, the model exhibits sufficient predictive relevance.

Additionally, we conducted a PLSpredict analysis using Q^2_{predict} , Mean Absolute Error (MAE), and Root Mean Square Error (RMSE), following the approach suggested by Shmueli et al. (2016). The Q^2_{predict} values for job stress, employee performance, and emotional exhaustion all exceed zero, indicating that the PLS-SEM model predicts these outcomes more accurately than using the mean as a benchmark. According to Hair et al. (2022), when Q^2_{predict} values exceed zero, the next step is to compare the RMSE or MAE values of the PLS model with those of a simple linear regression (LM) model. The benchmarking results show that the PLS model yields lower RMSE and MAE values for most indicators. These findings indicate that the model possesses a moderate level of predictive capability (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 5. Structural Model

Direct Effect	Original Sample	t- Statistics	p-values	Decision	f²
Change-Related Uncertainty → Job Stress	0,438	6,355	0,000	Supported	0,238
Change-Related Uncertainty → Employee Performance	-0,186	2,149	0,032	Supported	0,035
Change-Related Uncertainty → Emotional Exhaustion	0,077	1,418	0,156	Not Supported	0,014
Job Stress → Employee Performance	-0,336	4,245	0,000	Supported	0,115
Job Stress → Emotional Exhaustion	0,775	21,247	0,000	Supported	1,422
Indirect Effect	Original Sample	t- Statistics	p-values	Decision	f²
Change Related Uncertainty → Job Stress → Employee Performance	-0,148	3,958	0,000	Supported	
Change Related Uncertainty → Job Stress → Emotional Exhaustion	0,340	6,264	0,000	Supported	

Discussion

This study reveals that the uncertainty caused by organizational change has a significant negative impact on employee performance. The study demonstrates that conditions of uncertainty trigger anxiety, ambiguity, and a lack of clarity regarding tasks, thereby hindering employee performance. These findings are consistent with the views of Rafferty and Griffin (2006), who argue that organizational change can have a negative impact on employee performance and job satisfaction. These results are in line with research by Liu et al. (2025) and Contreras and Gonzalez (2021), which both show that organizational changes have a major impact on employee performance. Therefore, this study reinforces the argument that organizations need to ensure that change processes are accompanied by clear and transparent communication, as well as adequate information to maintain employee performance.

The research findings also indicate a strong positive relationship, in which uncertainty regarding change worsens job stress. Uncertain situations of transition trigger psychological responses characterized by mental strain, tension, and feelings of uncertainty regarding one's employment status. This study supports the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), which states that individuals experience stress when their psychological resources are threatened with depletion or loss. Previous research has reached similar conclusions, indicating that uncertainty associated with change can increase stress levels due to employees' inability to predict future consequences (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006; Raza et al., 2023; Van Doninck et al., 2025). Therefore, these findings show the importance for companies to effectively manage the stages of transition to reduce the psychological burden experienced by employees. Previous studies have reached similar conclusions, indicating that the uncertainty associated with change can increase stress levels due to employees' inability to predict future work conditions (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006; Raza et al., 2023; Van Doninck et al., 2025). Therefore, our findings emphasized the importance of organizations managing the stages of change appropriately to reduce the psychological burden faced by employees.

Additionally, the data shows that stress at work has a very negative effect on how well employees do their jobs. As stress levels increase, cognitive capacity, focus, and the ability to complete tasks decline, resulting in suboptimal work outcomes. Robbins and Judge (2023) explain that ongoing stress can disrupt employees' decision-making and negatively affect the quality of their work. Demerouti (2001) also shows

that long-term stress can cause mental exhaustion, which directly reduces performance. Thus, this study reinforces the idea that effective stress management plays a crucial role in maintaining employee productivity, particularly during periods of organizational change.

A further examination of the indirect pathways indicates that job stress serves as a key mediating variable in the relationship between change-related uncertainty and employee performance. Essentially, change-related uncertainty constrains employee performance through two mechanisms: it acts as a direct barrier while also exerting an indirect effect by elevating levels of job stress. As a direct barrier change-related uncertainty directly reduces performance by creating ambiguity regarding work procedures, role expectations, and organizational priorities. Employees may become hesitant in decision-making, allocate more cognitive resources to interpreting change-related information, and experience difficulties focusing on task completion. Change-related uncertainty also indirectly affects performance through increased job stress, which further depletes psychological resources and impairs work effectiveness. These findings align with recent COR-based research. Recent organizational research has continued to support COR theory Hobfoll's (2018). Based on COR theory, Raza et al. (2023) demonstrated that organizational change significantly impacts workplace incivility, with job stress mediating this relationship and emotional exhaustion moderating it. Previous study by Contreras and Gonzalez (2021) support this finding, employees undergoing organizational change tend to experience increased levels of job stress, which are linked to declines in employee performance as measured by cognitive load utilization. Therefore, the mediating role of job stress suggests that reducing ambiguity during organizational change may help prevent indirect declines in performance.

Nevertheless, H3 was not supported by the data, as change-related uncertainty did not show a statistically significant direct effect on employees' emotional exhaustion. From a theoretical perspective, this finding suggests that uncertainty primarily represents a cognitive appraisal of organizational change, whereas emotional exhaustion is a more enduring affective state that develops through the gradual depletion of psychological resources, consistent with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. Accordingly, uncertainty alone may not be sufficient to trigger emotional exhaustion unless it first generates sustained job stress or other psychological demands. This interpretation is supported by previous studies showing that the relationship between organizational change and emotional exhaustion is often indirect, operating through mechanisms such as job stress (Raza et al., 2023), learning demands, and qualitative job insecurity (Nikolova et al., 2019). From a methodological perspective, the absence of a direct effect may also reflect the characteristics of the present study, as the respondents were civil servants working in a relatively stable public-sector environment where job security, established organizational procedures, and adaptive resources such as social support, effective communication, and perceived control may buffer the immediate emotional consequences of change. In addition, the cross-sectional design captures employees' perceptions at a single point in time, whereas emotional exhaustion typically develops after prolonged exposure to stress. Therefore, the combination of the non-significant direct effect and the significant indirect effect through job stress indicates that change-related uncertainty influences emotional exhaustion primarily through a stress-mediated pathway rather than through an immediate direct relationship.

These findings indicate a strong and significant effect of job stress on employees' emotional exhaustion, thereby supporting H6. The results highlight that high work pressure, excessive workloads, and prolonged psychological demands can substantially drain employees' emotional energy and trigger symptoms of emotional exhaustion. This is consistent with the burnout model proposed by Maslach and Jackson (1981), which suggests that prolonged job stress evolves into emotional exhaustion as an early stage of burnout. In addition, Schaufeli et al. (2009) found that poorly managed job stress increases the risk of psychological detachment, reduced motivation, and feelings of cynicism toward work. Therefore,

this significant relationship underscores the need for organizations to implement effective strategies to manage job stress and protect employees from emotional exhaustion.

In addition, job stress significantly acts as a mediator between uncertainty related to change and emotional exhaustion, which is consistent with H7. When considered together with the non-significant direct effect of change-related uncertainty on emotional exhaustion (H3), this finding indicates a full mediation mechanism, suggesting that change-related uncertainty alone is insufficient to directly induce emotional exhaustion. Instead, its effect emerges only after uncertainty generates job stress, which subsequently depletes employees' psychological resources and leads to emotional exhaustion. This finding is consistent with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which posits that emotional exhaustion develops through the progressive loss of valuable psychological resources rather than as an immediate reaction to organizational change. It also aligns with previous studies highlighting that the effects of organizational change on emotional exhaustion are transmitted through intervening mechanisms such as job stress, learning demands, and qualitative job insecurity (Raza et al., 2023; Nikolova et al., 2019). Therefore, this study extends the application of COR theory by demonstrating that job stress serves as the critical psychological pathway through which change-related uncertainty is transformed into emotional exhaustion. From a practical perspective, these findings imply that organizations should prioritize interventions aimed at reducing job stress during periods of organizational change, as minimizing uncertainty alone may not be sufficient to protect employees from emotional exhaustion.

The relatively low R^2 and Q^2 values for employee performance indicate that additional factors beyond change-related uncertainty may play a more substantial role in determining employee performance in public organizations. This pattern is consistent with the presence of omitted variables that may exert a more dominant influence on employee performance, particularly within a public sector institutional context. Previous studies suggest that employee performance in government institutions is influenced by variables such as perceived organizational support (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Cullen et al., 2014; Kurtessis et al., 2017), public service motivation (Perry & Wise, 1990), and employee adaptability (Cullen et al., 2014; Sony and Mekoth, 2016). Leadership quality and supervisory support have been consistently identified as primary determinants of employee performance in bureaucratic settings, as the hierarchical and rule-bound nature of government institutions makes employees highly dependent on guidance from their superiors (Kuipers et al., 2014; Tummers & Knies, 2016).

The model demonstrates substantially greater explanatory power for emotional exhaustion ($R^2 = 65,900$) than for employee performance ($R^2 = 20,200\%$). This finding suggests that change-related uncertainty primarily operates as a psychological stressor that directly influences employees' emotional states. Consistent with Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), uncertainty threatens employees' psychological resources, leading first to stress and emotional depletion. In contrast, employee performance is a multidimensional outcome influenced not only by psychological conditions but also by organizational systems, competencies, leadership, work design, technology, and performance management mechanisms. Consequently, psychosocial variables explain emotional outcomes more effectively than actual performance outcomes in public organizations.

These findings are relevant in the context of the Indonesian bureaucracy, where public sector employees face structural rigidity, hierarchical decision-making processes, and limited organizational flexibility. Unlike organizations in the private sector, workers in the public sector face unique institutional pressures during fiscal efficiency reforms, which can escalate perceptions of uncertainty and stress. Therefore, the psychosocial consequences identified in this study are particularly important for bureaucratic reform initiatives in developing countries.

CONCLUSION

To summarize the main findings of this study, it was found that change-related uncertainty is a psychological factor with a significant impact on employee performance both direct and indirect pathways. Directly, uncertainty reduces employee performance by creating ambiguity regarding organizational priorities and work expectations. Indirectly, uncertainty increases job stress, which subsequently diminishes employee performance. In addition, change-related uncertainty contributes to emotional exhaustion only through the mediating role of job stress. Since change-related uncertainty does not directly predict emotional exhaustion, then emotional exhaustion can be considered the result of the accumulation of unmanaged psychological stress rather than a direct response to structural changes. Finally, these dynamic positions job stress as a key bridge that transforms change-related uncertainty into tangible behavioral and psychological effects. This study enriches the existing literature by providing a comprehensive perspective on bureaucratic transition, while demonstrating that change-related uncertainty, which deplete resources, adversely affects employee performance and triggers emotional exhaustion, particularly through the mediating role of job stress. Consistent with the transactional stress model and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the findings of this study explain that emotional exhaustion does not occur immediately following structural changes; rather, it develops gradually as psychological stress accumulates and remains unaddressed due to efficiency-oriented reforms. By identifying work stress as the primary link between organizational ambiguity and deteriorating behavioral and psychological outcomes, this empirical evidence directly provides significant implications. The research findings specifically indicate that organizations need to actively reduce job stress during periods of change by communicating clearly and consistently to minimize confusion. Because increased job stress has a major impact on employee performance and emotional exhaustion, organizational leaders are encouraged to implement various support measures, ranging from workload adjustments to targeted psychological care. Creating a strong sense of psychological safety will make employees more flexible and resilient, which will help maintain performance standards and overall human well-being as the organization changes over time.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the data were collected from a single government institution in Indonesia that was undergoing budget efficiency reforms mandated by Presidential Instruction No. 1 of 2025. While this focus enables a contextually rich and internally consistent analysis, it also raises the question of whether findings can be generalized to the broader Indonesian public sector or to public organizations in other national contexts. It is important to note, however, that the chosen institution possesses several characteristics that support its representativeness as a public sector case. As a ministry-level government body, it operates under the same regulatory framework, civil service statutes (*Undang-Undang Aparatur Sipil Negara*), and bureaucratic norms that govern all Indonesian central government institutions. The budget efficiency pressures it faces are not unique to this organization but are system-wide reforms applied uniformly across all ministries and government agencies under the same Presidential Instruction. Second, the cross-sectional design of this study limits the ability to draw causal inferences about the temporal sequence of the relationships examined. Longitudinal data would be more suitable for establishing whether changes in uncertainty precede changes in stress and, subsequently, performance and emotional exhaustion. Third, as discussed, the relatively low explanatory power for employee performance ($R^2 = 20,200\%$) suggests that important predictors were not captured in the present model, including leadership support, resource availability, job design, and individual competencies. Future research should integrate these variables to develop a more comprehensive model. Fourth, reliance on self-reported questionnaires introduces potential common method bias. Future studies may consider triangulating self-report data with objective performance records or supervisory assessments to increase validity.

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