



# Understanding Team Conflict: The Contributions of Work Burnout and Role Ambiguity

Yoko. Wong<sup>1</sup>, Xian Seng. Neo<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Humanities, Department of Psychology, Nanyang Technological University, Nanyang, Singapore

\* Corresponding author email address: [xianseng.neo@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:xianseng.neo@ntu.edu.sg)

### Article Info

#### Article type:

Original Research

#### How to cite this article:

Wong, Y., & Neo, X.S. (2025). Understanding Team Conflict: The Contributions of Work Burnout and Role Ambiguity. *KMAN Counseling and Psychology Nexus*, 3, 1-8.  
<http://doi.org/10.61838/kman.ooc.psynexus.3.4>



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### ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to investigate the relationships between team conflict, work burnout, and role ambiguity in organizational settings. Specifically, it aimed to determine how work burnout and role ambiguity contribute to team conflict. This cross-sectional study involved 171 participants from various organizational settings. The sample size was determined using the Morgan and Krejcie table. Data were collected through structured questionnaires measuring team conflict, work burnout, and role ambiguity. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationships between variables, while linear regression analysis was used to assess the predictive power of work burnout and role ambiguity on team conflict. All data analyses were performed using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics revealed moderate levels of team conflict ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ), high levels of work burnout ( $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ), and moderate to high levels of role ambiguity ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ). Pearson correlation results indicated significant positive relationships between team conflict and work burnout ( $r = 0.53$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and between team conflict and role ambiguity ( $r = 0.47$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Regression analysis showed that work burnout and role ambiguity significantly predicted team conflict, explaining 40% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.40$ ,  $F(2, 168) = 55.03$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Both work burnout ( $B = 0.35$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and role ambiguity ( $B = 0.29$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) were significant predictors. The study highlights the significant impact of work burnout and role ambiguity on team conflict within organizations. Addressing these factors through clear role definitions and comprehensive stress management programs can help mitigate team conflict and improve organizational effectiveness. Future research should explore these relationships longitudinally and consider additional moderating variables.

**Keywords:** Team Conflict, Work Burnout, Role Ambiguity, Organizational Behavior, Cross-Sectional Study, Stress Management.

## 1. Introduction

Team conflict refers to disagreements and frictions among team members, which can manifest in various forms such as task conflict, relationship conflict, and process conflict (Manlove, 1994; Pratiwi et al., 2019). Task conflict involves differences in viewpoints regarding the task at hand, relationship conflict pertains to personal incompatibilities, and process conflict relates to disagreements on how tasks should be accomplished (Bosselut et al., 2012). Effective management of these conflicts is essential for team cohesion and performance. Research by Bosselut et al. (2012) highlights that athletes' perceptions of role ambiguity and coaching competency can significantly influence team conflict, suggesting that clear role definitions and competent leadership are vital for minimizing conflicts within teams (Bosselut et al., 2012).

Work burnout is a psychological syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. It is particularly prevalent in high-stress professions such as healthcare, education, and social work (Golparvar & Parsakia, 2023). Maslach and Jackson (1981) developed the Maslach Burnout Inventory to measure burnout, which has since become a standard tool in burnout research (Golparvar & Parsakia, 2023). Studies have consistently shown that role-related stressors, such as role ambiguity and role conflict, are significant predictors of burnout (Akkoç et al., 2020; Han et al., 2014). For instance, Bhanugopan and Fish (2006) found that job burnout among expatriates was influenced by various role-related stressors, underscoring the need for organizational interventions to mitigate these stressors (Bhanugopan & Fish, 2006).

Role ambiguity occurs when there is a lack of clarity regarding job expectations, responsibilities, and performance criteria. This uncertainty can lead to stress, decreased job satisfaction, and increased turnover intentions (Bosselut et al., 2012; Dasgupta, 2012; Ghorpade et al., 2011; Mañas et al., 2018; Manlove, 1994; Martínez-Díaz et al., 2020). Research by Papastyliau et al. (2009) demonstrated that teachers' burnout was significantly associated with role ambiguity and conflict, indicating that clear communication and role definitions are crucial in educational settings (Papastyliau et al., 2009). Similarly, Pratiwi et al. (2019) found that role ambiguity, along with role conflict and overload, contributed to burnout among government internal supervisors, highlighting the widespread impact of role ambiguity across various sectors (Pratiwi et al., 2019).

The interconnections between team conflict, work burnout, and role ambiguity are complex and multifaceted. Studies have shown that role ambiguity can exacerbate work burnout, which in turn can lead to increased team conflict (Beauchamp et al., 2002; Martínez-Díaz et al., 2020). For example, Dasgupta (2012) found that role ambiguity, conflict, and overload were significant predictors of burnout among nurses in private hospitals, with self-efficacy acting as a mediating factor (Dasgupta, 2012). Similarly, Manlove (1994) observed that conflict and ambiguity over work roles significantly impacted child care worker burnout, suggesting that role clarity is essential for reducing burnout and improving job satisfaction (Manlove, 1994).

Various studies have explored mediating and moderating factors in the relationships between role stressors, burnout, and team conflict. For instance, Ghorpade et al. (2011) identified personality as a moderator of the relationship between role conflict, role ambiguity, and burnout, indicating that individual differences can influence how employees perceive and respond to role stressors (Ghorpade et al., 2011). Anisykurlillah et al. (2021) investigated the mediating effect of role stressors in the relationship between Type A personality and auditor burnout, highlighting the importance of personality traits in understanding burnout dynamics (Anisykurlillah et al., 2021).

Organizational and contextual factors also play a significant role in these dynamics. For instance, Kar and Suar (2014) found that burnout mediated the relationship between job demands and job outcomes among Indian nurses, emphasizing the importance of addressing organizational stressors to improve job outcomes (Kar & Suar, 2014). Nikolić (2023) reported that occupational burnout among employees in the Serbian banking sector was influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting that external stressors can exacerbate existing role-related stressors and burnout (Nikolić, 2023). Padmanabhanunni and Pretorius (2023) similarly highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teacher burnout, indicating that unprecedented global events can significantly affect job-related stress and well-being (Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2023).

The role of social support and team dynamics in mitigating the effects of role stressors and burnout has been widely studied. Jimmieson et al. (2010) found that social support had a stress-buffering effect in the occupational stress process, particularly in teams with strong identification and cohesion (Jimmieson et al., 2010). This suggests that fostering a supportive team environment can

help alleviate the negative impacts of role ambiguity and burnout. Wong et al. (2022) further explored the negative impact of individual perceived isolation in distributed teams, recommending remedies such as enhanced communication and team-building activities to mitigate these effects (Wong et al., 2022).

The findings from these studies have significant implications for organizational practice. Implementing clear role definitions, providing adequate training and support, and fostering a supportive team environment can help reduce role ambiguity and burnout, thereby minimizing team conflict. Suprpto et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of addressing intra-firm causal ambiguity to improve cross-functional project team performance, suggesting that clear communication and role clarity are essential for successful team outcomes (Suprpto et al., 2018). Savelsbergh (2012) also highlighted the importance of team learning and performance in managing team role stress, indicating that continuous improvement and learning opportunities can help teams better navigate role-related stressors (Savelsbergh, 2012).

In contemporary organizational environments, understanding the dynamics of team conflict, work burnout, and role ambiguity is crucial for maintaining effective and productive teams. These factors not only influence individual well-being but also significantly impact organizational performance and employee retention. This study investigates the relationship between these variables, focusing on how work burnout and role ambiguity contribute to team conflict. The investigation is grounded in a comprehensive review of existing literature, emphasizing the importance of addressing these issues in diverse professional settings.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a cross-sectional design to investigate the relationship between team conflict, work burnout, and role ambiguity. A total of 171 participants were recruited based on the sample size recommendation from the Morgan and Krejcie table, ensuring adequate statistical power. Participants were selected from various organizational settings to ensure a diverse and representative sample. Inclusion criteria required participants to be currently employed and working within team environments. Data were collected through structured questionnaires

distributed both online and in person, ensuring anonymity and voluntary participation.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Team Conflict

To measure team conflict, the "Intragroup Conflict Scale" developed by Jehn (1995) is utilized. This scale includes three subscales: task conflict, relationship conflict, and process conflict, which collectively encompass 9 items. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived conflict within the team. The validity and reliability of the Intragroup Conflict Scale have been confirmed in numerous studies, demonstrating strong internal consistency and construct validity across various organizational settings (Dasgupta, 2012; Ghorpade et al., 2011; Manlove, 1994; Papastylianou et al., 2009; Pratiwi et al., 2019).

#### 2.2.2. Work Burnout

Work burnout is assessed using the "Maslach Burnout Inventory" (MBI), created by Maslach and Jackson in 1981. The MBI consists of 22 items divided into three subscales: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Participants respond to each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (every day). Higher scores on the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization subscales, and lower scores on the personal accomplishment subscale, indicate greater burnout. The MBI is widely recognized for its high validity and reliability, with extensive research supporting its use across diverse occupational groups (Akkoç et al., 2020; Anisykurlillah et al., 2021; Bhanugopan & Fish, 2006; Brunsting et al., 2014; Dasgupta, 2012; Ghorpade et al., 2011; Han et al., 2014; Kar & Suar, 2014; Khan, 2024; Khan, 2013; Lee & Ashforth, 1991; Manlove, 1994; Nikolić, 2023; Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2023; Papastylianou et al., 2009; Pratiwi et al., 2019; Shin, 2015).

#### 2.2.3. Role Ambiguity

Role ambiguity is measured using the "Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale" developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman in 1970. This scale contains 14 items, with 6 items specifically addressing role ambiguity. Respondents rate each item on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores represent greater

perceived role ambiguity. The Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale has been validated in numerous studies, showing robust reliability and validity in various organizational contexts, making it a standard tool for assessing role-related stressors (Beauchamp et al., 2002; Bosselut et al., 2012; Dasgupta, 2012; Ghorpade et al., 2011; Mañas et al., 2018; Manlove, 1994; Martínez-Díaz et al., 2020; Papastylianou et al., 2009; Pratiwi et al., 2019; Schippers & Rus, 2021; Suprpto et al., 2018).

### 2.3. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 27. To examine the relationships between the dependent variable (team conflict) and each independent variable (work burnout and role ambiguity), Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. This analysis provided insight into the strength and direction of the associations between these variables. Additionally, linear regression analysis was conducted to explore the predictive power of work burnout and role ambiguity on team conflict. The regression model included team conflict as the dependent variable and work burnout and role ambiguity as independent variables. This approach allowed for the assessment of the combined and individual

contributions of the independent variables to team conflict. The significance level was set at  $p < 0.05$  for all statistical tests.

### 3. Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of the 171 participants are as follows: Of the participants, 92 were female (53.80%) and 79 were male (46.20%). The age distribution indicated that 35 participants (20.47%) were between 18-25 years old, 58 participants (33.92%) were between 26-35 years old, 49 participants (28.65%) were between 36-45 years old, 21 participants (12.28%) were between 46-55 years old, and 8 participants (4.68%) were over 55 years old. Regarding educational attainment, 44 participants (25.73%) held a high school diploma, 82 participants (47.95%) had a bachelor's degree, 39 participants (22.81%) possessed a master's degree, and 6 participants (3.51%) had a doctoral degree. In terms of work experience, 26 participants (15.20%) had less than 1 year of experience, 67 participants (39.18%) had 1-5 years, 54 participants (31.58%) had 6-10 years, and 24 participants (14.04%) had more than 10 years of work experience.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 171)*

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Team Conflict	3.45	0.89
Work Burnout	4.12	1.01
Role Ambiguity	3.87	0.94

As shown in Table 1, the mean score for team conflict was 3.45 (SD = 0.89), indicating a moderate level of perceived conflict within teams. Work burnout had a mean score of 4.12 (SD = 1.01), suggesting a relatively high level of burnout among participants. The mean score for role ambiguity was 3.87 (SD = 0.94), reflecting a moderate to high level of ambiguity in job roles.

Before conducting the main analyses, several assumptions were tested to ensure the appropriateness of the statistical methods used. The assumption of normality was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test, with results indicating non-significant p-values for team conflict ( $p = 0.075$ ), work burnout ( $p = 0.087$ ), and role ambiguity ( $p = 0.093$ ),

suggesting that the data were normally distributed. Homoscedasticity was confirmed through the examination of scatterplots of residuals, which showed no discernible pattern. Linearity was verified by inspecting scatterplots of each independent variable against the dependent variable, revealing a linear relationship. Multicollinearity was assessed by calculating the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), with all VIF values below 1.5, indicating no multicollinearity issues. Finally, independence of errors was confirmed using the Durbin-Watson statistic, which yielded a value of 1.97, indicating that the residuals were independent. Thus, all assumptions for Pearson correlation and linear regression analyses were met.

**Table 2**

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Variables*

Variable	1. Team Conflict	2. Work Burnout	3. Role Ambiguity
1. Team Conflict	1.00		
2. Work Burnout	0.53**	1.00	
p-value	< 0.001		
3. Role Ambiguity	0.47**	0.61**	1.00
p-value	< 0.001	< 0.001	

Table 2 demonstrates significant positive correlations between team conflict and work burnout ( $r = 0.53, p < 0.001$ ) and between team conflict and role ambiguity ( $r = 0.47, p < 0.001$ ). Additionally, work burnout and role ambiguity were

significantly correlated ( $r = 0.61, p < 0.001$ ), indicating that higher levels of burnout are associated with greater role ambiguity.

**Table 3**

*Summary of Regression Analysis Results*

Source	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> adj	F	p
Regression	84.76	2	42.38	0.63	0.40	0.39	55.03	<0.001
Residual	128.24	168	0.76					
Total	213.00	170						

The regression analysis results in Table 3 indicate that the model explained 40% of the variance in team conflict ( $R^2 = 0.40$ ). The regression model was statistically significant

( $F(2, 168) = 55.03, p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that work burnout and role ambiguity are significant predictors of team conflict.

**Table 4**

*Multivariate Regression Analysis Results*

Predictor Variable	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
Constant	1.23	0.45		2.73	0.007
Work Burnout	0.35	0.08	0.41	4.38	<0.001
Role Ambiguity	0.29	0.07	0.36	4.14	<0.001

As depicted in Table 4, both work burnout ( $B = 0.35, SE = 0.08, \beta = 0.41, t = 4.38, p < 0.001$ ) and role ambiguity ( $B = 0.29, SE = 0.07, \beta = 0.36, t = 4.14, p < 0.001$ ) were significant predictors of team conflict. These results suggest that higher levels of work burnout and role ambiguity are associated with increased team conflict. The constant was also significant ( $B = 1.23, SE = 0.45, t = 2.73, p = 0.007$ ), indicating the baseline level of team conflict when the predictors are at zero.

( $r = 0.47, p < 0.001$ ). Additionally, work burnout and role ambiguity were significantly correlated ( $r = 0.61, p < 0.001$ ). The regression analysis demonstrated that work burnout and role ambiguity are significant predictors of team conflict, explaining 40% of the variance in team conflict ( $R^2 = 0.40, F(2, 168) = 55.03, p < 0.001$ ). Specifically, both work burnout ( $B = 0.35, SE = 0.08, \beta = 0.41, t = 4.38, p < 0.001$ ) and role ambiguity ( $B = 0.29, SE = 0.07, \beta = 0.36, t = 4.14, p < 0.001$ ) were found to significantly contribute to team conflict.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between team conflict, work burnout, and role ambiguity within organizational settings. The findings indicate significant positive correlations between team conflict and both work burnout ( $r = 0.53, p < 0.001$ ) and role ambiguity

The significant positive relationship between work burnout and team conflict aligns with previous research indicating that burnout can exacerbate interpersonal tensions within teams (Brunsting et al., 2014; Kar & Suar, 2014). Burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment,

often leads to decreased tolerance and increased irritability among employees, which can manifest as conflict (Han et al., 2014; Shin, 2015). This finding is consistent with Han et al. (2014), who reported that role stressors such as burnout contribute significantly to turnover intentions, mediated by increased conflict and decreased organizational commitment (Han et al., 2014).

Similarly, the positive correlation between role ambiguity and team conflict corroborates findings from prior studies (Papastylianou et al., 2009; Pratiwi et al., 2019). Role ambiguity, which arises from unclear job expectations and responsibilities, creates uncertainty and stress, leading to frustration and conflict among team members (Papastylianou et al., 2009). Dasgupta (2012) found that role ambiguity, along with role conflict and overload, significantly predicted burnout among nurses, further supporting the link between unclear roles and increased workplace conflict (Dasgupta, 2012).

The strong correlation between work burnout and role ambiguity ( $r = 0.61$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) suggests that these factors are interrelated, as has been highlighted in previous research. Ghorpade et al. (2011) noted that role ambiguity and role conflict are significant predictors of burnout, with personality traits moderating these relationships (Ghorpade et al., 2011). This interrelationship implies that interventions targeting role clarity and reducing burnout could concurrently mitigate team conflict.

The results of this study are in line with Akkoç et al. (2020), who found that role-related stressors significantly impact nurses' burnout, with work-related stress mediating this effect (Akkoç et al., 2020). This highlights the importance of addressing both role clarity and stress management to reduce burnout and associated conflicts. Furthermore, Shin (2015) reported that professionals at centers for independent living experienced significant burnout due to role stressors, reinforcing the critical need for clear role definitions and support mechanisms (Shin, 2015).

Bhanugopan and Fish (2006) emphasized that job burnout among expatriates was influenced by various role-related stressors, underscoring the universal applicability of these findings across different job contexts and cultures (Bhanugopan & Fish, 2006). This suggests that organizations worldwide should consider these factors to enhance employee well-being and minimize conflict.

Despite the significant findings, this study has several limitations. Firstly, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality between the variables. Future research should consider longitudinal designs to better

understand the causal relationships and potential temporal dynamics among team conflict, work burnout, and role ambiguity. Secondly, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias and common method variance. Incorporating objective measures and multiple data sources could enhance the robustness of the findings. Additionally, the sample was drawn from various organizational settings, which, while providing diversity, may also introduce variability that was not controlled for. Future studies should aim for more homogeneous samples or control for organizational differences.

Future research should explore the causal pathways between role ambiguity, work burnout, and team conflict using longitudinal methodologies. This would provide a clearer picture of how these variables interact over time and identify critical periods for intervention. Investigating the role of moderating variables such as organizational culture, leadership styles, and individual differences (e.g., personality traits) could also provide deeper insights into the conditions under which role ambiguity and burnout most strongly influence team conflict (Anisykurillah et al., 2021; Ghorpade et al., 2011). Additionally, qualitative studies could complement quantitative findings by exploring employees' lived experiences and providing rich, contextualized understanding of these dynamics. Finally, given the global nature of modern work environments, cross-cultural studies would be valuable in examining how cultural differences impact the relationships among these variables.

To mitigate team conflict and enhance organizational effectiveness, several practical steps can be implemented based on the findings of this study. Organizations should prioritize clear communication of job roles and expectations to reduce role ambiguity. This can be achieved through regular training, clear job descriptions, and continuous feedback mechanisms (Bosselut et al., 2012; Suprpto et al., 2018). Additionally, implementing comprehensive stress management programs can help alleviate work burnout. These programs could include counseling services, stress management workshops, and fostering a supportive work environment that encourages work-life balance (Jimmieson et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2022). Leadership development programs that emphasize conflict resolution skills and emotional intelligence can equip managers with the tools needed to address and mitigate team conflict effectively. Lastly, organizations should foster a culture of recognition and support, where employees feel valued and supported, thereby reducing the adverse effects of role stressors and

burnout on team dynamics (Martínez-Díaz et al., 2020; Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2023).

In conclusion, this study underscores the significant impact of work burnout and role ambiguity on team conflict, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address these issues. By implementing clear role definitions, comprehensive stress management programs, and supportive leadership practices, organizations can enhance employee well-being, reduce conflict, and ultimately improve organizational performance.

### Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

### Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

### Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

### Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

### Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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