



E-ISSN: 3108-4192

APSSHS

Academic Publications of Social Sciences and Humanities Studies

2022, Volume 2, Issue 2, Page No: 27-35

Available online at: <https://apsshs.com/>

Journal of Applied Organizational Systems and Behavior

Agility as Control and the Production of Behavioral Exhaustion

Sofía Martínez^{1*}, Carlos Gómez¹, Lucia Navarro²

1. Department of Organizational Agility and Employee Well-Being, Faculty of Business, Polytechnic University of Madrid, Madrid, Spain.
2. Department of Behavioral Control and Work Stress, Faculty of Psychology, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain.

Abstract

Organizational agility promises responsiveness, learning, customer alignment, and decentralized action, yet its enactment may also intensify the behavioral demands placed on employees. Existing accounts often treat agile practices as either empowering resources or operational techniques, leaving insufficient explanation of how apparently autonomous work can become a mode of control. This original non-empirical process theory article proposes the Process Theory of Agility-Induced Exhaustion. The theory distinguishes agile practices from three proposed control translations: temporal compression, through which accelerated cycles constrain the time available for completion, interpretation, and recovery; responsibility expansion, through which obligations grow without equivalent authority, resources, or role clarification; and behavioral discipline, through which visible and repeated adaptation normalizes continuous self-correction. These mechanisms are proposed to increase self-regulatory work and, under unfavorable organizational conditions, produce behavioral exhaustion, defined as diminished capacity to sustain adaptation, coordination, self-monitoring, and role negotiation. The theory also identifies psychological safety, consequential participation, authority–responsibility alignment, organizational skills, usable resources, temporal slack, and recovery opportunities as potential moderators. Its propositions specify when agile practices may generate strain, when resource-generating pathways may prevail, and how reciprocal processes could reinforce or interrupt exhaustion. The model remains conceptually proposed rather than empirically validated. Testing requires longitudinal, multilevel, process-sensitive research that separates employee perceptions from organizational practices and distinguishes formal autonomy from substantive power. The contribution is a bounded explanation of how agility may operate simultaneously as organizational capability and behavioral control.

Keywords: Process theory of agility-induced exhaustion, Moderating resources and organizational conditions, Theoretical propositions, Implications for agile work design, Agility

How to cite this article: Martínez S, Gómez C, Navarro L. Agility as Control and the Production of Behavioral Exhaustion. J Appl Organ Syst Behav. 2022;2(2):27-35. <https://doi.org/10.51847/fqjah9ZXAL>

Received: 26 September 2022; **Revised:** 10 December 2022; **Accepted:** 14 December 2022

Corresponding author: Sofia Martínez

E-mail ✉ sofia.martinez@upm.es

Introduction

Agile work is commonly associated with responsiveness, iterative learning, distributed coordination, and reduced dependence on rigid hierarchy. Such features can improve employees' experience when they clarify roles, strengthen organizational capabilities, or enable teams to respond constructively to changing demands. Nevertheless, direct evidence does not support a uniformly beneficial or harmful interpretation. Recent findings associate agile work with generally favorable but heterogeneous outcomes whose direction and magnitude vary with role processes, occupation, organizational capability, national context, and crisis conditions [1–3]. The central problem is therefore not whether agility has consequences for employee well-being, but why similar practices may operate as resources in one setting and as intensified behavioral demands in another.



© 2022 The Author(s).

Copyright CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

Evidence of favorable pathways reinforces rather than resolves this paradox. Agile project management has been associated with lower emotional exhaustion through reduced work-related stress, particularly where organizational culture supports psychological empowerment [4]. This finding suggests that agility can create usable discretion and coordination resources. It does not, however, establish that formally self-organizing work necessarily provides substantive authority, sufficient capacity, or protection from excessive demands. Organizational labels describe intended arrangements; employees experience enacted deadlines, role expectations, evaluation practices, resource constraints, and opportunities—or failures—to influence decisions. A control-sensitive account becomes necessary because contemporary work intensification is multidimensional, involving accelerated pace, expanding workload, heightened learning requirements, and increased responsibility for planning and career management. Its reported consequences are predominantly adverse, although variation across dimensions and contexts cautions against deterministic conclusions [5]. This original process theory article therefore asks how agile practices may be translated into temporal, role-related, and behavioral control mechanisms. It proposes that agility can produce behavioral exhaustion when accelerated cadence, fluid responsibility, and continuous adaptation generate self-regulatory demands that exceed available resources and recovery. The resulting theory is an evidence-bounded synthesis, not a validated causal model or universal characterization of agile organizations.

Theoretical foundations of agile work and organizational control

A theory of agility-induced exhaustion requires three complementary foundations. Job demands–resources theory explains how work arrangements can simultaneously activate health-impairment and motivational processes. Work-design scholarship shows that employee outcomes depend on the configuration of task, knowledge, social, and contextual characteristics rather than broad labels such as flexibility or autonomy. Organizational-control research demonstrates that direction, evaluation, and discipline can persist through digitally visible and decentralized systems even when direct supervision declines. A control-sensitive account of agile work can therefore be organized jointly through demand–resource configurations, designed task and role properties, and digitally mediated control structures [6–8].

From this perspective, an agile practice is neither inherently a demand nor inherently a resource. Iterative communication may improve information access, while the same cadence may increase interruption. Distributed decision-making may support autonomy, while it may also transfer coordination burdens. Direct evidence indicates that agile methods can reduce exhaustion through favorable role perceptions and organizational skills [2]. Job demands–resources theory nevertheless implies that resources must be usable in relation to the demands employees actually encounter [6]. Formal permission to act is therefore distinct from substantive power to alter workload, deadlines, priorities, or standards of evaluation.

Control is defined here as the set of arrangements through which conduct is directed, rendered assessable, evaluated, and corrected. Digital systems can intensify these functions by making activity continuously visible and comparable [8]. Agile boards, stand-up meetings, sprint reviews, and iterative metrics are not automatically instruments of domination; they may support coordination, learning, and collective problem solving. Yet visibility should not be confused with performance, and self-organization should not be inferred from reduced managerial presence. Work-design theory requires analysis of who sets goals, who carries coordination costs, which decisions employees can genuinely change, and whether responsibilities are matched by time, information, authority, and social support [7].

Speed as a temporal control mechanism

Speed becomes a control mechanism when organizational cadence governs not only when work must be delivered but also how rapidly employees must interpret change, mobilize effort, switch attention, renegotiate priorities, and return to readiness. The proposed construct of temporal compression refers to a reduction in usable time for task completion, coordination, sensemaking, and recovery relative to the pace and volatility of demands. Speed alone is not necessarily harmful. Time pressure and learning demands can function as challenge stressors and coexist with workplace thriving under favorable appraisal and resource conditions [9]. Any process theory must therefore allow an alternative pathway in which demanding cadence stimulates vitality, learning, or focused effort.

The relevant question is not simply whether work is fast, but how performance-oriented practices are configured. Systems combining demanding objectives with information, skill development, participation, and support may differ substantially from isolated practices that increase expectations without enabling employees to meet them. Comparative evidence on high-performance work practices indicates that employee health implications vary according to whether practices operate separately or as integrated configurations [10]. Applied to agile work, this suggests that short cycles cannot be evaluated independently from staffing, task interdependence, decision authority, workflow stability, and the ability to revise commitments.

Temporal control becomes more plausible when involvement is coupled with intensified demands. High-involvement systems can coexist with increased work demands and emotional exhaustion, demonstrating that participation language does not eliminate strain-producing conditions [11]. The proposed mechanism is therefore not “speed causes exhaustion.” It is that

accelerated cadence may produce temporal compression when recurring deadlines, unfinished-task carryover, rapid reprioritization, and insufficient recovery require sustained self-regulation. Crisis demands, understaffing, poor planning, job insecurity, or weak leadership remain rival explanations and must be separated from effects attributable specifically to agile cadence.

Role fluidity as responsibility expansion

Agile work frequently redistributes tasks, coordination, and problem-solving responsibilities across team members. Such fluidity can enable learning and adaptive collaboration, but it can also obscure ownership and create incompatible expectations. Role ambiguity concerns uncertainty about duties, authority, or evaluation, whereas role conflict concerns incompatible expectations or demands. These constructs are empirically distinguishable and require separate measurement [12]. The proposed concept of responsibility expansion is broader: it describes growth or redistribution of task, coordination, monitoring, and problem-resolution obligations without a corresponding increase in authority, resources, role clarity, or removal of previous work.

Role fluidity must also be distinguished from employee-initiated job crafting. Workers may actively alter tasks, relationships, and resources through approach-oriented or avoidance-oriented forms of crafting [13]. Such changes may be purposeful and empowering, especially where employees possess discretion and usable resources. Responsibility expansion, by contrast, concerns an organizationally produced mismatch between obligations and the means to discharge them. The distinction depends on the origin and voluntariness of the change, whether prior duties are removed, whether employees can refuse or renegotiate new responsibilities, and whether accountability is accompanied by legitimate decision rights.

Job-crafting scholarship further demonstrates that active work changes form a hierarchical and heterogeneous set rather than one uniformly beneficial behavior [14]. Role fluidity should therefore not be treated as a single exposure or as evidence of empowerment by definition. In the proposed theory, fluidity becomes a control translation when employees must repeatedly absorb coordination failures, resolve unclear ownership, or remain accountable for outcomes they cannot substantively influence. This relationship remains conceptually proposed and requires measurement of responsibility, authority, workload, resources, voluntariness, and prior role demands. **Table 1** organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for definitions, constructs, and conceptual boundaries for agility as control and the production of behavioral exhaustion.

Table 1. Definitions, constructs, and conceptual boundaries for Agility as Control and the Production of Behavioral Exhaustion.

Construct or Component	Definition	Problem Addressed	Distinction from Adjacent Concepts	Proposed Role	Uncertainty	Boundary Statement
Agile Work or Agile Enactments	Iterative work arrangements involving short planning cycles, feedback, distributed coordination, changing priorities, and adaptive action.	Broad agile labels can conceal variation in actual employee experience.	Organizational agility is a capability-level concept; agile enactments are experienced practices at employee and team levels.	Evidence-informed input category for the proposed theory.	Measures and implementations differ across occupations and organizations.	Agile work is not assumed to be inherently empowering, controlling, beneficial, or harmful.
Organizational Control	Arrangements through which conduct is directed, made assessable, evaluated, and corrected.	Reduced direct supervision may be mistaken for an absence of control.	Coordination supports interdependent work; control additionally structures permissible conduct and correction. Visibility is not equivalent to performance.	Provides the theoretical lens through which agile practices may acquire control functions.	Agile tools vary considerably and should not be classified as control technologies solely because they make work visible.	Applying digital-control reasoning to agile settings is a bounded interpretation, not proof that every agile system is disciplinary.
Demand–Resource Configuration	The combined pattern of requirements that consume sustained effort and resources that support goals, reduce demands, or enable development.	Single-practice explanations overlook simultaneous health-impairment and motivational processes.	A work characteristic may operate differently from an employee’s appraisal or from the organizational resources available to manage it.	Organizes the conditions under which agile enactments may generate strain or motivation.	Resource availability does not establish resource usability.	The framework supports constituent reasoning but does not validate the integrated process theory.
Temporal Compression	Proposed construct: reduction in usable	“Speed” is too broad to explain	Differs from objective speed,	Proposed translation	Appropriate exposure duration,	Fast work is not necessarily

	time for completion, coordination, interpretation, and recovery relative to the pace and volatility of work demands.	when rapid work becomes depleting.	temporary urgency, and challenge appraisal.	through which cadence becomes a temporal control mechanism.	nonlinearities, and occupational differences remain unknown.	temporally compressive; the mismatch between cadence and usable time must be demonstrated.
Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict	Uncertainty about role expectations and incompatibility among expectations, respectively.	General references to unclear roles can collapse distinct stressors.	Neither construct is equivalent to broad role fluidity or responsibility expansion.	Possible proximal states within the proposed responsibility pathway.	Their occurrence cannot be inferred from an agile label.	Measurement evidence does not establish that agile practices cause either role stressor.
Job Crafting	Employee-initiated alteration of tasks, relationships, cognition, roles, or resources.	Fluid roles may be mistakenly interpreted as either wholly voluntary or wholly imposed.	Differs from organizationally imposed redistribution of responsibility.	Alternative resource-generating or protective pathway.	Voluntariness, available discretion, and consequences vary by crafting form.	Job crafting should not be used as evidence that responsibility transfer is empowering.
Responsibility Expansion	Proposed construct: accumulation or redistribution of task, coordination, monitoring, and problem-resolution obligations without proportionate authority, resources, clarity, or workload removal.	Formal self-organization may conceal an obligation–authority mismatch.	Differs from ordinary role breadth, voluntary job crafting, developmental stretch, and temporary helping.	Proposed translation through which role fluidity becomes organizational control.	Construct validity and discriminant validity remain untested.	Expansion must be demonstrated through changes in obligations relative to authority and resources, not inferred from flexible role descriptions.
Continuous Adaptation as Behavioral Discipline	Proposed construct: repeated self-correction under visible, iterative, and normatively enforced demands for responsiveness.	Adaptation is often treated as neutral learning rather than potentially compelled conduct.	Differs from learning, adaptive performance, discretionary proactivity, and ordinary organizational change.	Proposed third control translation in the wider theory.	Direct evidence for the complete agile pathway remains absent.	Visibility or iteration alone does not demonstrate discipline; restricted influence and enforced correction must be examined.
Behavioral Exhaustion	Proposed construct: diminished capacity to sustain adaptation, coordination, self-monitoring, and role negotiation.	Existing strain concepts do not isolate depletion of behavior required by permanently adaptive work.	Related to but not interchangeable with emotional exhaustion, burnout, fatigue, disengagement, or change fatigue.	Proposed outcome of accumulated control translations and self-regulatory work.	Its measurement, temporal development, and discriminant validity require testing.	The construct must not be treated as an established diagnosis, validated scale, or proven result of agile work.
Moderating Organizational Resources	Empowerment, organizational skills, usable discretion, support, authority, time, and coordination capacity that may alter employee exposure to demands.	Formal autonomy may be ineffective when employees cannot use it to change work conditions.	Resource availability differs from symbolic support or permission without decision influence.	Candidate buffers or pathway-reversing conditions.	Moderation by specific resources has not been established for the complete proposed theory.	Resource effects should be tested rather than presumed from organizational policy or rhetoric.

Note: Evidence-derived statements are cited. Constructs identified as **proposed** are original conceptual contributions of this article and are not presented as empirically validated.

Continuous adaptation as behavioral discipline

Agile work treats adaptation as an ordinary and recurring feature of organizing. Priorities, customer requirements, responsibilities, and delivery expectations may be revised before employees have fully stabilized the preceding arrangement. Organizational-change research indicates that successful change depends on diagnosis, participation, coordinated implementation, and evaluation rather than on change rhetoric alone [15]. Continuous adaptation should therefore not be

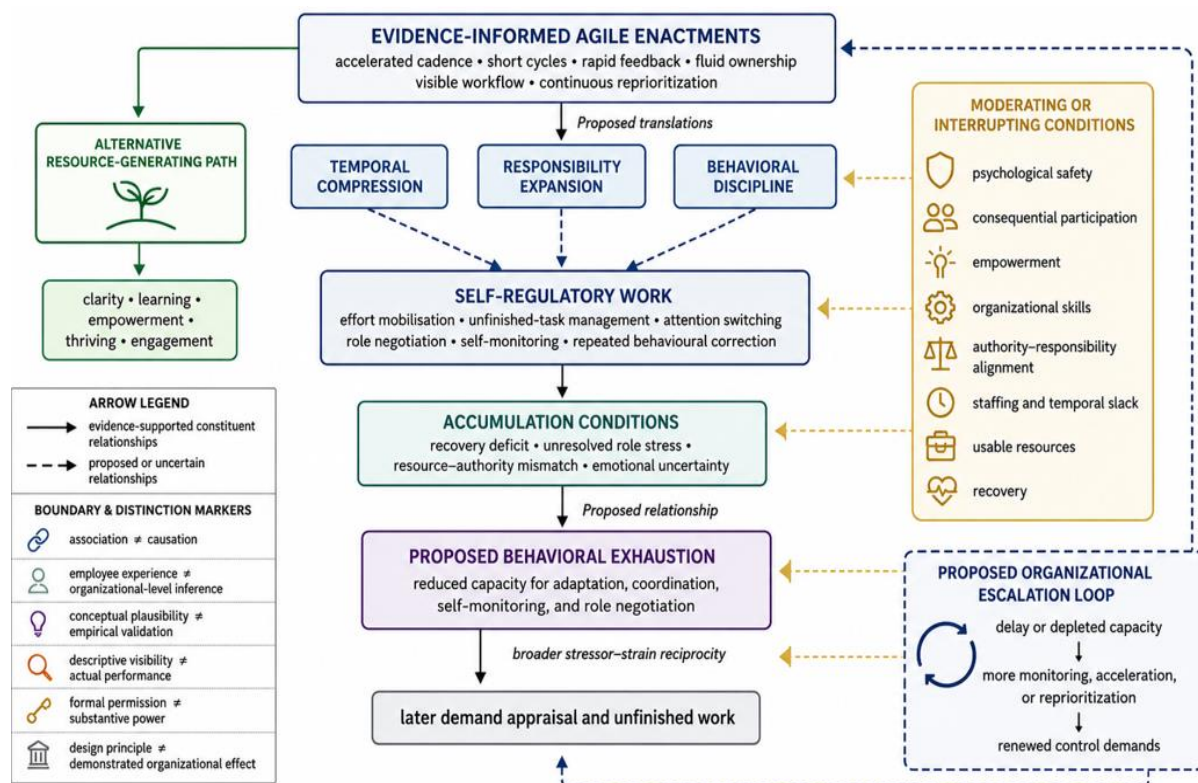
equated automatically with organizational learning. Its effects depend on how changes are introduced, whether initiatives are mutually coherent, and whether employees can influence the demands created by repeated revision.

Employees are not passive recipients of changing work. They interpret change events, assess their significance, experience affective reactions, and select behavioral responses [16]. Building on this process view, the proposed construct of behavioral discipline describes repeated self-correction under visible, iterative, and normatively enforced expectations of responsiveness. It may involve continually demonstrating adaptability, updating conduct before expectations stabilize, and suppressing objections that could be interpreted as inflexibility. Behavioral discipline is distinct from voluntary learning or adaptive performance because it concerns how responsiveness becomes an ongoing standard through which conduct is evaluated.

Repeated adaptation may become particularly demanding when several initiatives alter roles, priorities, or performance expectations simultaneously. Longitudinal process evidence indicates that interference among concurrent changes can create perceived inconsistencies and emotional uncertainty that undermine implementation [17]. In agile settings, similar interference may arise when sprint commitments, transformation programs, digital systems, and shifting strategic priorities impose incompatible adjustment demands. This connection remains proposed rather than established. Poor leadership, weak coordination, scarce resources, or initiative overload may explain the same outcomes and must be separated from discipline attributable specifically to agile practices.

Proposed process theory of agility-induced exhaustion

The proposed Process Theory of Agility-Induced Exhaustion links agile enactments to three possible control translations: temporal compression, responsibility expansion, and behavioral discipline. These mechanisms are expected to increase self-regulatory work through sustained effort, attention switching, unfinished-task management, role negotiation, self-monitoring, and repeated behavioral correction. When demands remain unresolved and recovery is inadequate, the process may culminate in behavioral exhaustion, defined as reduced capacity to sustain adaptive, coordinating, and role-regulating behavior. **Figure 1** presents the original conceptual synthesis for process theory of agility-induced exhaustion, showing how the article's principal constructs, mechanisms, uncertainties, and decision boundaries are connected.



The figure is an original conceptual synthesis developed for 'Agility as Control and the Production of Behavioral Exhaustion. Arrows and grouping indicate evidence-supported or proposed relationships rather than measured effect sizes. The figure does not represent a validated causal model, universal organizational prescription, regulatory determination, or deployment-ready system.

Figure 1. Process Theory of Agility-Induced Exhaustion

The theory treats exhaustion as an unfolding and potentially reciprocal process rather than a single reaction to workload. Longitudinal evidence indicates that job stressors and burnout can influence one another over time, that demand and resource pathways retain temporal significance, and that recovery can interrupt the accumulation of work-related strain [18–20]. These findings support the plausibility of accumulation and feedback but do not validate behavioral exhaustion as a distinct construct.

Emotional exhaustion and burnout remain adjacent outcomes, whereas behavioral exhaustion refers specifically to diminished capacity for continued adaptation, self-regulation, coordination, and role negotiation.

A further proposed feedback loop extends from employee depletion to organizational response. Behavioral exhaustion may contribute to unfinished work, slower adaptation, withdrawal from role negotiation, or altered appraisal of later demands. Broader longitudinal evidence supports reciprocal stressor–strain processes at the employee level [18]. Organizations may then interpret delays as insufficient commitment or adaptability and respond with additional monitoring, acceleration, or reprioritization. This organizational escalation pathway is original and untested. Alternative responses—including workload reduction, role clarification, protected recovery, or participatory redesign—could interrupt rather than reinforce the process.

Moderating resources and organizational conditions

The proposed pathways are conditional on resources that allow employees to question demands, obtain assistance, and renegotiate commitments. Psychological safety is associated with interpersonal risk taking, voice, learning, and related organizational processes [21]. It may therefore enable employees to disclose capacity limits or challenge unrealistic priorities. Yet psychological safety is not equivalent to substantive influence. Employees may feel able to speak while lacking authority to alter cadence, workload, evaluation rules, or role allocation. Its moderating role in agility-induced exhaustion consequently remains a proposition requiring direct testing.

Resources must also be assessed as usable configurations rather than symbolic assurances. Evidence from workplace-resource interventions suggests that resources can support well-being and performance, although effects vary according to intervention design, context, and implementation [22]. In agile work, potentially relevant resources include staffing, coordination competence, decision authority, technical support, temporal slack, escalation procedures, and protected recovery. A formal empowerment policy may provide little protection when employees cannot postpone work, revise commitments, secure additional capacity, or remove obsolete duties.

Participation offers another possible interruption mechanism, but its direction cannot be assumed. Longitudinal intervention evidence suggests that active involvement and well-being may influence each other reciprocally [23]. Employees with greater well-being may participate more effectively, while meaningful participation may improve the conditions shaping well-being. The important distinction is therefore between voice opportunity and consequential participation, proposed here as involvement capable of changing priorities, cadence, role boundaries, workload, or implementation. **Table 2** organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for proposed mechanisms, relationships, and organizational consequences in agility as control and the production of behavioral exhaustion.

Table 2. Proposed mechanisms, relationships, and organizational consequences in Agility as Control and the Production of Behavioral Exhaustion.

Mechanism or Relationship	Antecedent	Mediator or Process	Moderator	Expected Consequence	Rival Explanation	Validation Requirement
Cadence Acceleration → Temporal Compression	Short cycles, urgent feedback, volatile priorities	Sustained effort, switching, unfinished-task carryover, reduced recovery	Staffing, temporal slack, task interdependence, recovery opportunity	Proposed: greater behavioral exhaustion under sustained exposure	Crisis conditions, understaffing, poor planning, or job insecurity	Intensive longitudinal measurement of cadence, unfinished work, recovery, and exhaustion
Fluid Ownership → Responsibility Expansion	Distributed coordination and changing task ownership	Accumulation of accountability, role negotiation, ambiguity, conflict	Authority, role clarity, skills, workload removal	Proposed: depletion of role-regulation capacity	Voluntary job crafting, developmental stretch, or temporary helping	Measure obligations, authority, resources, voluntariness, and prior workload separately
Continuous Reprioritization → Behavioral Discipline	Visible iteration, changing standards, recurring evaluation	Self-monitoring, repeated correction, suppression of deviation	Psychological safety, consequential participation, escalation rights	Proposed: persistent adaptive effort and constrained voice	Legitimate coordination, learning, or customer responsiveness	Process tracing of priority setting, contestability, visibility, and consequences of dissent
Concurrent Change → Inconsistency And Uncertainty	Multiple interacting initiatives	Inconsistency judgments and emotional uncertainty	Initiative sequencing and coordination	Proposed: adaptation disruption and accumulated strain	General resource scarcity or ineffective leadership	Comparative longitudinal studies using independent records of change events

Resource– Authority Mismatch → Constrained Autonomy	Responsibility redistribution without equivalent control over work	Inability to modify demands despite formal discretion	Empowerment culture, organizational skills, team support	Proposed: strain despite nominal self-organization	Individual skill deficit or employee preference	Multilevel comparison of formal policy, enacted authority, resources, and employee experience
Resource Interruption Pathway	Safety, participation, support, slack, and recovery	Renegotiation, learning, workload adjustment, detachment	Implementation quality and managerial response	Proposed: weakened, interrupted, or reversed exhaustion pathway	Healthy-worker selection or generally positive climate	Controlled or phased redesign with process and implementation evaluation
Reciprocal Exhaustion Loop	Prior behavioral exhaustion	Reduced adaptive capacity, unfinished work, altered demand appraisal	Recovery and organizational response	Proposed: reinforcement or interruption over time	Stable negative affect, prior burnout, or common-method bias	Continuous-time, cross-lagged, and multilevel tests
Alternative Resource- Generating Pathway	Agile practices enacted with aligned authority and resources	Clarity, learning, empowerment, coordination	Skills, safety, support, and implementation maturity	Learning, thriving, engagement, or reduced stress	Selection into better-managed teams	Quasi-experimental comparisons with independent measures of practice enactment

Note: “Expected consequence” identifies theoretically proposed outcomes, not demonstrated effects. Supporting evidence concerns constituent relationships and does not validate the complete pathways.

Theoretical propositions

Adaptive performance should not be treated as an unlimited personal attribute. Its antecedents span individual capabilities, job characteristics, team conditions, and organizational support [24]. The first propositions therefore locate the transition from agile practice to control in the relation between demand and capacity. **Proposition 1:** Accelerated iterative cadence is more likely to produce temporal compression as priority volatility increases and usable time, staffing, or recovery opportunities fail to increase proportionately. **Proposition 2:** Temporal compression is more likely to contribute to behavioral exhaustion through sustained effort, unfinished-task carryover, attention switching, and reduced recovery than through speed alone.

Proactivity likewise has conditional value; beneficial outcomes depend on whether action is informed, situationally appropriate, socially supported, and feasible [25]. **Proposition 3:** Role fluidity is more likely to become responsibility expansion when accountability grows without corresponding authority, resources, clarification, or removal of prior obligations. **Proposition 4:** Continuous adaptation is more likely to become behavioral discipline when responsiveness is highly visible and repeatedly evaluated while employees possess limited influence over priorities, cadence, role boundaries, or evaluative standards. These propositions distinguish substantive autonomy from compelled responsiveness.

Active changes to work vary in form, direction, and consequence rather than constituting one homogeneous behavior [26].

Proposition 5: Temporal compression, responsibility expansion, and behavioral discipline will reinforce one another when changing priorities, unclear ownership, and visible evaluation occur within the same recurring cycles. **Proposition 6:** Psychological safety, consequential participation, authority–responsibility alignment, usable resources, temporal slack, and recovery will weaken or reverse these relationships. **Proposition 7:** Behavioral exhaustion will reduce later adaptive and role-negotiating capacity, producing a reinforcing loop when organizations respond with acceleration or monitoring and an interrupting loop when they respond with workload reduction, clarification, or recovery protection.

Implications for agile work design

The theory shifts agile work design away from asking whether an organization “uses agile” and toward examining what employees must repeatedly do, how quickly they must do it, and what authority and resources accompany those demands. Intervention evidence indicates that work-engagement initiatives produce modest average improvements and remain sensitive to context and implementation [27]. Organizations should therefore avoid treating training, resilience, or engagement programs as sufficient responses to structurally generated compression or responsibility mismatch. Such initiatives may add another adaptation demand if the underlying work configuration remains unchanged.

Work redesign should specify the mechanism being altered and the evidence needed to evaluate it. Reviews of job-design and employment-practice interventions indicate mixed results and recurring methodological limitations [28]. A bounded agile redesign would identify the focal demand, affected employees, expected resource, decision authority, implementation process, comparator, possible harm, and stopping or revision criteria. Cadence could be examined alongside completion quality and

recovery; role fluidity alongside authority and workload removal; participation alongside actual decision influence. These are proposed evaluation principles rather than validated prescriptions.

Digital technologies also require work-design scrutiny. Automation and algorithms may redistribute autonomy, responsibility, cognitive demands, social interaction, and control rather than merely improve efficiency [29]. The same principle applies to agile dashboards, issue trackers, workflow analytics, and automated performance signals. Descriptive visibility should not be treated as proof of productivity, and technical capacity to monitor should not establish legitimate authority to intensify evaluation. Agile tools should be evaluated according to how they reshape work, who bears coordination costs, who can contest interpretations, and whether employee consequences are monitored over time.

Conclusion

This original process theory article explains how organizational agility may function simultaneously as a responsiveness capability and a mode of behavioral control. Its principal contribution is the proposed integration of temporal compression, responsibility expansion, and behavioral discipline into a process through which agile enactments may increase self-regulatory work and accumulate as behavioral exhaustion. The theory also identifies resource-generating alternatives and organizational conditions capable of weakening, interrupting, or reversing the proposed pathways. The model does not establish that agility is inherently harmful, that all visible or iterative work is disciplinary, or that behavioral exhaustion has already been validated as a distinct outcome. Its relationships remain conditional, multilevel, and open to rival explanations. Longitudinal, multilevel, qualitative, intervention, and cross-context research is required to test temporal ordering, distinguish employee experience from organizational policy, establish construct validity, and identify null or reversed pathways. The resulting contribution is therefore a testable and bounded theoretical account rather than a universal prescription or implementation-ready framework.

Acknowledgments: None

Conflict of interest: None

Financial support: None

Ethics statement: None

References

1. Koch J, Drazic I, Schermuly CC. The affective, behavioural and cognitive outcomes of agile project management: A preliminary meta-analysis. *J Occup Organ Psychol.* 2023;96(3):678-706. doi:10.1111/joop.12429
2. Venkatesh V, Thong JYL, Chan FKY, Hoehle H, Spohrer K. How agile software development methods reduce work exhaustion: Insights on role perceptions and organizational skills. *Inf Syst J.* 2020;30(4):733-61. doi:10.1111/isj.12282
3. Koch J, Schermuly CC. Managing the crisis: How COVID-19 demands interact with agile project management in predicting employee exhaustion. *Br J Manag.* 2021;32(4):1265-83. doi:10.1111/1467-8551.12536
4. Augner T, Schermuly CC. Agile project management and emotional exhaustion: A moderated mediation process. *Proj Manag J.* 2023;54(5):491-507. doi:10.1177/87569728231151930
5. Mauno S, Herttalaampi M, Minkkinen J, Feldt T, Kubicek B. Is work intensification bad for employees? A review of outcomes for employees over the last two decades. *Work Stress.* 2023;37(1):100-25. doi:10.1080/02678373.2022.2080778
6. Bakker AB, Demerouti E. Job demands–resources theory: Taking stock and looking forward. *J Occup Health Psychol.* 2017;22(3):273-85. doi:10.1037/ocp0000056
7. Parker SK, Morgeson FP, Johns G. One hundred years of work design research: Looking back and looking forward. *J Appl Psychol.* 2017;102(3):403-20. doi:10.1037/apl0000106
8. Kellogg KC, Valentine MA, Christin A. Algorithms at work: The new contested terrain of control. *Acad Manag Ann.* 2020;14(1):366-410. doi:10.5465/annals.2018.0174
9. Prem R, Ohly S, Kubicek B, Korunka C. Thriving on challenge stressors? Exploring time pressure and learning demands as antecedents of thriving at work. *J Organ Behav.* 2017;38(1):108-23. doi:10.1002/job.2115
10. Ogbonnaya C, Daniels K, Connolly S, van Veldhoven M. Integrated and isolated impact of high-performance work practices on employee health and well-being: A comparative study. *J Occup Health Psychol.* 2017;22(1):98-114. doi:10.1037/ocp0000027

11. Oppenauer V, Van De Voorde K. Exploring the relationships between high involvement work system practices, work demands and emotional exhaustion: A multilevel study. *Int J Hum Resour Manag.* 2018;29(2):311-37. doi:10.1080/09585192.2016.1146321
12. Bowling NA, Khazon S, Alarcon GM, Blackmore CE, Bragg CB, Hoepf MR, et al. Building better measures of role ambiguity and role conflict: The validation of new role stressor scales. *Work Stress.* 2017;31(1):1-23. doi:10.1080/02678373.2017.1292563
13. Bruning PF, Campion MA. A role–resource approach–avoidance model of job crafting: A multimethod integration and extension of job crafting theory. *Acad Manag J.* 2018;61(2):499-522. doi:10.5465/amj.2015.0604
14. Zhang F, Parker SK. Reorienting job crafting research: A hierarchical structure of job crafting concepts and integrative review. *J Organ Behav.* 2019;40(2):126-46. doi:10.1002/job.2332
15. Stouten J, Rousseau DM, De Cremer D. Successful organizational change: Integrating the management practice and scholarly literatures. *Acad Manag Ann.* 2018;12(2):752-88. doi:10.5465/annals.2016.0095
16. Oreg S, Bartunek JM, Lee G, Do B. An affect-based model of recipients' responses to organizational change events. *Acad Manag Rev.* 2018;43(1):65-86. doi:10.5465/amr.2014.0335
17. Kanitz R, Huy QN, Backmann J, Hoegl M. No change is an island: How interferences between change initiatives evoke inconsistencies that undermine implementation. *Acad Manag J.* 2022;65(2):683-710. doi:10.5465/amj.2019.0413
18. Guthier C, Dormann C, Voelkle MC. Reciprocal effects between job stressors and burnout: A continuous time meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *Psychol Bull.* 2020;146(12):1146-73. doi:10.1037/bul0000304
19. Lesener T, Gusy B, Wolter C. The job demands–resources model: A meta-analytic review of longitudinal studies. *Work Stress.* 2019;33(1):76-103. doi:10.1080/02678373.2018.1529065
20. Sonnentag S, Cheng BH, Parker SL. Recovery from work: Advancing the field toward the future. *Annu Rev Organ Psychol Organ Behav.* 2022;9:33-60. doi:10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-012420-091355
21. Frazier ML, Fainshmidt S, Klinger RL, Pezeshkan A, Vracheva V. Psychological safety: A meta-analytic review and extension. *Pers Psychol.* 2017;70(1):113-65. doi:10.1111/peps.12183
22. Nielsen K, Nielsen MB, Ogbonnaya C, Käsälä M, Saari E, Isaksson K. Workplace resources to improve both employee well-being and performance: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Work Stress.* 2017;31(2):101-20. doi:10.1080/02678373.2017.1304463
23. Tafvelin S, von Thiele Schwarz U, Nielsen K, Hasson H. Employees' and line managers' active involvement in participatory organizational interventions: Examining direct, reversed, and reciprocal effects on well-being. *Stress Health.* 2019;35(1):69-80. doi:10.1002/smi.2841
24. Park S, Park S. Employee adaptive performance and its antecedents: Review and synthesis. *Hum Resour Dev Rev.* 2019;18(3):294-324. doi:10.1177/1534484319836315
25. Parker SK, Wang Y, Liao J. When is proactivity wise? A review of factors that influence the individual outcomes of proactive behavior. *Annu Rev Organ Psychol Organ Behav.* 2019;6:221-48. doi:10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-012218-015302
26. Bindl UK, Unsworth KL, Gibson CB, Stride CB. Job crafting revisited: Implications of an extended framework for active changes at work. *J Appl Psychol.* 2019;104(5):605-28. doi:10.1037/apl0000362
27. Knight C, Patterson M, Dawson J. Building work engagement: A systematic review and meta-analysis investigating the effectiveness of work engagement interventions. *J Organ Behav.* 2017;38(6):792-812. doi:10.1002/job.2167
28. Daniels K, Gedikli C, Watson D, Semkina A, Vaughn O. Job design, employment practices and well-being: A systematic review of intervention studies. *Ergonomics.* 2017;60(9):1177-96. doi:10.1080/00140139.2017.1303085
29. Parker SK, Grote G. Automation, algorithms, and beyond: Why work design matters more than ever in a digital world. *Appl Psychol.* 2022;71(4):1171-204. doi:10.1111/apps.12241