

The Impact of Work-Family Conflict on Burnout in China's Inland IT Hub

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Abstract

This study examines burnout among IT professionals in Sichuan, China, focusing on cultural friction between the “996” work regime and the local “Slow Life” ethos amid the inland shift of the tech industry. Using JD-R and Social Exchange Theory with PLS-SEM analysis of 380 respondents, the findings show that work–family conflict is a strong predictor of burnout, while physical work environment has no direct effect. Instead, perceived organizational support fully mediates this relationship, revealing a “resource mismatch paradox” in which material benefits fail without organizational care. The model explains 64.1% of burnout variance, highlighting the need to move from hardware-focused management to supportive, people-centered organizational practices.

Keywords: Job Burnout; Work-Family Conflict; Perceived Organizational Support; Resource Mismatch; Cultural Friction; Inland Digital Migrants

Introduction

The global digital economy has ushered in an era of unprecedented connectivity and productivity, yet this technological progress has precipitated a parallel crisis in occupational health: the epidemic of employee burnout. As digitalization permeates every facet of modern existence, IT professionals, who serve as the architects of this digital infrastructure, increasingly find themselves at the epicenter of this crisis. Burnout, conceptualized by the World Health Organization as a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed, has evolved from an individual ailment into a systemic threat to organizational sustainability in the post-pandemic era (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). This challenge is particularly acute in China, where the IT sector serves as the primary engine of national economic growth and technological advancement.

However, this growth is frequently sustained by the notorious "996" work culture, which refers to working from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days a week, and a pervasive state of boundarylessness, in which mobile technology obliterates the demarcation between professional duties and private life, leaving employees in a state of perpetual connectivity and resource depletion (Derks et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2020). In the inland digital hub of Sichuan specifically, data from the 2023 Sichuan Internet Industry Report indicate that more than 65% of IT employees regularly work beyond contracted hours due to mobile connectivity demands, and that reported rates of sleep disruption and family tension among this cohort exceed those documented in coastal technology centers—underscoring the acuity of boundary erosion as a precursor to burnout in this specific regional context. The psychological toll of such demanding work schedules has become increasingly apparent, with reports of mental health issues, decreased job satisfaction, and high turnover rates becoming commonplace in China's technology sector. This phenomenon has attracted significant attention from both academic researchers and policy makers seeking to understand and address its root causes.

Despite the recognition of this crisis, traditional organizational interventions often fall short of their intended goals. Conventional management approaches typically rely on enhancing physical work environments, such as upgrading digital infrastructure, providing ergonomic facilities, or implementing workplace safety policies, as primary buffers against job demands. This material-centric perspective, rooted in early applications of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, assumes that providing tangible resources is sufficient to counterbalance high workloads and prevent burnout. However, in an environment characterized by boundarylessness and extreme time pressure, the protective utility of physical resources is increasingly questioned by contemporary scholars and practitioners alike.

When work invades family domains and emotional exhaustion peaks, the mere provision of hardware or rules may fail to translate into psychological relief, creating a resource mismatch where organizational investments do not mitigate the actual sources of strain, such as Work-Family Conflict (WFC). This dilemma underscores the need to look beyond material resources and examine the psychological mechanisms of social exchange that truly buffer burnout. The question of how organizations can effectively support their employees' well-being while maintaining productivity has become increasingly urgent in the contemporary workplace, particularly in high-pressure industries such as information technology.

This resource dilemma is magnified in the context of China's strategic regional development initiatives. While prior research has predominantly focused on first-tier coastal metropolises like Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen, the "Go West" policy has rapidly shifted the digital frontier to inland hubs like Sichuan Province. Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan, is often hailed as the "Silicon Valley of Western China," but it presents a unique sociolinguistic context

distinct from coastal cities. Sichuan is culturally renowned for its “Slow Life” philosophy and strong leisure orientation, values that are deeply embedded in the local social fabric and have been cultivated over centuries of cultural development. This cultural foundation renders “Digital Migrants”—IT professionals who have relocated from coastal cities or who have adopted coastal work norms within inland communities—empirically distinct from their counterparts in Beijing or Shenzhen. Unlike coastal professionals for whom high-intensity work culture represents a normalized occupational identity, Digital Migrants in Sichuan navigate a constant tension between imported work norms and inherited local values, making the inland context a qualitatively different site of burnout risk that prior coastal-centric research has not adequately captured.

To address these gaps, this study integrates the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model with Social Exchange Theory (SET) to construct a comprehensive framework for understanding burnout among IT professionals in inland China.

Objective

1. Examine the impact of Work-Family Conflict as a primary demand on burnout among digital migrants in Sichuan
2. Test the direct efficacy of Work Environment as a physical resource in mitigating burnout
3. Investigate the mediating role of Perceived Organizational Support in transforming physical conditions into psychological safety.

Research Framework and Hypotheses

This study examines how Work Environment influences Job Burnout through the mediating role of Perceived Organizational Support (POS), amidst the critical stressor of Work-Family Conflict. The conceptual framework integrates Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory, Social Exchange Theory (SET), and Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) to provide a comprehensive understanding of the burnout phenomenon in inland China's IT sector. The framework proposes Work Environment (WE) and Work-Family Conflict (WFC) as key antecedents and boundary conditions for burnout, while positioning POS as the crucial mediating mechanism.

Drawing on the JD-R Theory, physical resources, which encompass digital infrastructure, ergonomic facilities, and workplace policies, theoretically reduce burnout by optimizing task execution and reducing unnecessary strain. However, COR Theory posits that WFC acts as a primary resource-depleting mechanism that threatens valued resources including time, energy, and psychological well-being. When professional boundaries blur through constant connectivity and work demands, employees experience a net loss of emotional energy that physical resources alone cannot replenish (Amstad et al., 2011).

Consequently, Perceived Organizational Support occupies a central mediating position in the proposed framework. Aligning with Social Exchange Theory, POS represents the psychological translation of physical investments into perceived care and support. The framework proposes that POS is not merely an outcome of good facilities but a vital transmission channel that explains how material resources create psychological safety, thereby mediating the impact of the environment on burnout. This hypothesis is grounded in the Job Demands-Resources Theory and related empirical findings.

The theory argues that job resources are fundamental forces that reduce the physiological and psychological costs of job demands. However, it is acknowledged that in contexts characterized by profound cultural friction—such as the inland tech sector in Sichuan—the buffering efficacy of physical resources may be substantially attenuated. When burnout stems primarily from a mismatch between work norms and cultural identity rather than from a shortage of material tools, physical improvements alone risk functioning as cosmetic interventions that do not address the root emotional demands on employees.

Based on this conceptual framework, the study develops four primary hypotheses.

H1: Work Environment has a significant negative influence on Job Burnout.

H2: Perceived Organizational Support has a significant negative influence on Job Burnout. This hypothesis is rooted in Social Exchange Theory, emphasizing that POS is a key driver of employee well-being.

H3: Perceived Organizational Support mediates the relationship between Work Environment and Job Burnout. This hypothesis serves as the integration point of JD-R and SET, suggesting that physical Work Environment acts as an enabler for psychological support signaling.

H4: Work-Family Conflict has a significant positive influence on Job Burnout. This hypothesis draws directly on Conservation of Resources Theory, emphasizing that individuals strive to retain resources, and stress occurs when resources are threatened or lost.

Literature Review

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model has long served as the predominant framework for understanding employee well-being, positing that job resources buffer the physiological and psychological costs of job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Early applications of this model often adopted a material-deterministic perspective, assuming that structural resources, such as ergonomic facilities, digital infrastructure, and safety policies, which are collectively defined as Work Environment, were sufficient to mitigate burnout. This traditional view has guided organizational interventions for decades, with companies investing heavily in physical workspace improvements, technological upgrades, and formal policy implementations to support employee well-being.

However, this traditional view faces increasing scrutiny in the era of digital work. Recent scholarship suggests that in hyper-connected environments characterized by boundarylessness,

the protective utility of physical resources exhibits diminishing marginal returns (Zhang et al., 2023). When professional demands invade private domains, a resource mismatch occurs: the organization provides instrumental support, such as better computers or more comfortable offices, to solve what is essentially an emotional and boundary-related crisis. This mismatch has become particularly pronounced in industries where remote work and constant connectivity have become the norm rather than the exception.

Consequently, this study challenges the assumption that physical Work Environment alone acts as an effective buffer against burnout, proposing instead that without psychological validation through perceived care and support, material resources function merely as passive hygiene factors rather than active motivators. This perspective aligns with Herzberg's two-factor theory, which distinguishes between factors that prevent dissatisfaction and those that promote satisfaction, suggesting that physical resources may be necessary but insufficient conditions for employee well-being in contemporary work environments.

To understand why material resources fail to protect employees from burnout, one must examine the specific nature of the dominant stressor: Work-Family Conflict (WFC). While traditional literature defines WFC as a generic inter-role conflict where the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), within the context of China's inland tech hubs, it acquires a distinct cultural friction dimension that has not been adequately addressed in previous research. In Sichuan, a region culturally codified by a leisure-oriented lifestyle that values relaxation, family time, and personal enjoyment, the intrusion of the imported "996" work culture creates severe cognitive dissonance.

Unlike coastal metropolises where high-intensity work is normalized and even celebrated as a path to success, inland digital migrants experience WFC not just as time pressure but as a violation of local cultural values that have been transmitted across generations. This cultural dimension of WFC represents a unique form of stress that goes beyond the typical time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based conflicts identified in traditional WFC research. This study posits that WFC in this context depletes specific emotional energies that physical resources cannot replenish, as the conflict is fundamentally about identity and values rather than merely time allocation.

Therefore, relying solely on the JD-R model's physical resource path ignores the specific contextual toxicity of WFC in the inland sector, necessitating a more nuanced explanatory mechanism that accounts for cultural factors. The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory provides additional insight into this phenomenon, suggesting that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect resources, and that stress occurs when resources are threatened, lost, or when individuals fail to gain resources after significant investment (Hobfoll, 1989). In the context of Cultural Friction, WFC represents a particularly potent threat to valued resources.

Bridging the gap between ineffective physical resources and high-intensity cultural conflict requires a theoretical lens that explains how resources are interpreted and given meaning by

employees. Social Exchange Theory (SET) offers this mechanism through the construct of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) (Blau, 1964; Eisenberger et al., 1986). POS refers to employees' global beliefs that the organization values their contributions, cares for their well-being, and is committed to their success. Unlike physical resources, POS represents a socio-emotional resource that directly addresses employees' psychological needs for esteem, affiliation, and emotional support.

Here, POS functions not merely as another resource but as a converter of physical conditions, transforming tangible investments into perceived care. According to SET, when employees perceive genuine care through POS, they interpret physical amenities as tangible evidence of organizational support, thereby activating the reciprocity norm to reduce burnout (Kurtessis et al., 2017). This reciprocity mechanism suggests that employees who feel supported by their organization are more likely to engage positively with their work, experience less stress, and maintain better psychological health. Conversely, in the absence of POS, high-end physical environments risk becoming a Golden Cage.

Conceptual Framework

This study examines burnout among IT professionals in Sichuan, China, focusing on cultural friction between the “996” work regime and the local “Slow Life” ethos amid the inland shift of the tech industry. Using JD-R and Social Exchange Theory with PLS-SEM analysis. Detail as follow:

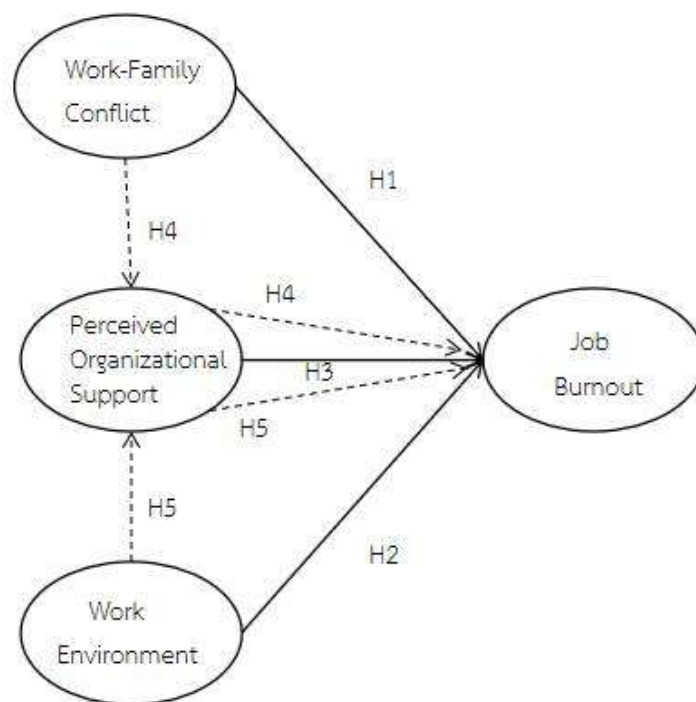


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework Research

Methodology

The population comprised IT industry employees in Sichuan Province, China, representing a diverse range of technology companies, positions, and experience levels. This population was selected because Sichuan represents a rapidly developing inland tech hub that exemplifies the Cultural Friction phenomenon under investigation. Using a stratified random sampling framework based on the 2023 Sichuan Internet Industry Report, the sample was stratified by city to ensure regional representativeness. The proportional distribution of IT enterprise density in each city was employed.

Demographically, the sample exhibits a balanced gender distribution with 54.7% male and 45.3% female participants, reflecting the growing diversity in China's IT workforce. The sample shows a predominantly young age structure, with 75% of respondents aged between 20 and 35 years. In terms of educational background, the sample demonstrated high literacy, with 67.9% holding a bachelor's degree, 21.0% a postgraduate degree or above, and 11.1% holding an associate degree.

Regarding work experience, the sample covered various career stages. While all participants met the minimum tenure requirement of one year, the largest segment consisted of junior professionals with 1-3 years of experience (51.3%), followed by mid-level staff with 4-6 years (30.3%). Senior experts with 7-10 years and over 10 years of experience accounted for 14.5% and 3.9%, respectively. This diversity ensures that the study captures the nuances of burnout across different phases of professional development.

Work-Family Conflict was measured using a 12-item scale adapted from Netemeyer et al. (1996), comprising three dimensions: Time-based Conflict (4 items) assessed the competition for time between work and family roles; Strain-based Conflict (4 items) measured the extent to which work-related stress spills over into family life; Behavior-based Conflict (4 items) evaluated the incompatibility between behavioral patterns required in work and family domains. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Work Environment was measured using a 15-item scale adapted from Bakker and Demerouti (2017), comprising three dimensions: Job Resources (5 items) evaluated the availability of autonomy and technical tools; Social Support (5 items) assessed interpersonal cohesion and help from colleagues; Workplace Policies (5 items) measured the clarity and supportiveness of organizational rules. It is important to note that within this operationalization, policy-based items (e.g., clarity of rules, flexibility of working hours) and technology-based items (e.g., adequacy of digital infrastructure, software quality) were treated as components of a single composite construct. In practice, however, these sub-dimensions may exert different psychological effects on employees: policy items directly shape perceptions of organizational fairness and support, while technology items primarily reduce task friction. Future research may benefit from separating these sub-dimensions to examine whether their individual paths to burnout reduction differ, particularly in contexts where cultural friction mediates the relationship between work norms and

employee well-being. Perceived Organizational Support was measured using a 12-item scale adapted from Caesens et al. (2021), comprising Supervisor Support, Fairness, and Organizational Rewards dimensions.

Job Burnout was measured using a 15-item scale adapted from the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS) (Maslach & Leiter, 2016), comprising three dimensions: Emotional Exhaustion (5 items) assessed the depletion of emotional resources; Cynicism (5 items) measured indifference and distant attitudes toward work; Reduced Professional Efficacy (5 items) evaluated the decline in feelings of competence. Additionally, respondent age, gender, and tenure were included as control variables.

Data collection employed a systematically orchestrated approach. The survey was deployed via the Sojump (Wenjuanxing) platform, selected for its cultural alignment with the Chinese professional landscape. A multi-channel outreach strategy was implemented, targeting institutional clusters in Chengdu Tianfu Software Park and extending to Mianyang, Yibin, and Deyang. Content validity evaluation by five experts yielded S-CVI of 0.95. From 425 initial questionnaires, systematic filtering resulted in 380 valid responses (89.4% effective response rate).

Data analysis proceeded in two stages using SPSS 29.0 and SmartPLS 4.0. Preliminary analyses included descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis. Harman's single-factor test assessed Common Method Bias. PLS-SEM with bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) was employed for hypothesis testing, following a two-step procedural framework assessing measurement model reliability and validity, followed by structural model evaluation.

Ethics Committee

This study received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Rattana Bundit University (Approval No. RBAC-EC-BUS-0-016/68)

Results

Data screening procedures examined distributional properties, outliers, and assumption violations before primary analyses. Missing data analysis indicated minimal missing values, with appropriate imputation methods applied. Common method variance (CMV) was assessed using Harman's single-factor test, with the first factor explaining 32.45% of the variance, well below the 50% threshold. Additionally, full collinearity tests showed all VIF values below 3.3, confirming CMV was not a critical concern (Kock, 2015).

Descriptive statistics revealed that all constructs showed means near the scale midpoint, ranging from 2.86 to 3.23. Work-Family Conflict ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.12$) showed the highest mean, suggesting moderate to high levels of work-family interference. Perceived Organizational Support ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.18$) showed the lowest mean. Correlation coefficients revealed significant relationships in expected directions; Work-Family Conflict was positively correlated with Job

Burnout ($r = .397$), while Perceived Organizational Support showed strong negative correlation with Job Burnout ($r = -.523$).

Table 1: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Items	α	CR	AVE
Work-Family Conflict (WFC)	12	0.898	0.902	0.755
Work Environment (WE)	15	0.908	0.915	0.782
Perceived Org. Support (POS)	12	0.885	0.891	0.732
Job Burnout (JB)	15	0.922	0.928	0.811

The measurement model was assessed for reliability and validity as shown in Table 1. All reliability indicators exceeded recommended thresholds, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.885 to 0.922, Composite Reliability (CR) values from 0.891 to 0.928, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values from 0.732 to 0.811. These results indicate excellent internal consistency and convergent validity. All factor loadings ranged from 0.852 to 0.905, exceeding the 0.70 threshold ($p < .001$).

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and HTMT ratio. The square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its correlation with all other constructs. All HTMT values were below the strict threshold of 0.85, and no 95% confidence interval included 1, confirming adequate discriminant validity.

Table 2: Structural Model Path Coefficients (Direct Effects)

Hypothesis	Path	β	t	p	Result
H1	WE $\rightarrow$ JB	-0.082	1.708	0.088	Not Supported
H2	POS $\rightarrow$ JB	-0.523	15.306	< 0.001	Supported
H4	WFC $\rightarrow$ JB	0.397	7.784	< 0.001	Supported
--	WE $\rightarrow$ POS	0.497	13.895	< 0.001	Supported

As shown in Table 2, Work-Family Conflict had a significant positive effect on Job Burnout ($\beta = .397$, $p < .001$), providing strong support for H4. Perceived Organizational Support exhibited a strong negative effect on Job Burnout ($\beta = -.523$, $p < .001$), supporting H2. However, the direct effect of Work Environment on Job Burnout was not statistically significant ($\beta = -.082$, $p = .088$), rejecting H1. This counter-intuitive finding suggests that physical work environment improvements alone are insufficient to reduce burnout.

The mediation hypothesis (H3) proposed that POS mediates the relationship between WE and JB. The indirect effect was significant ($\beta = -.260$, $p < .001$, 95% CI: -0.314, -0.208). Given the

non-significant direct effect, this confirms Full Mediation, providing strong support for H3. The model explained 64.1% of variance in Job Burnout ($R^2 = .641$) and 35.4% in POS ($R^2 = .354$). Effect sizes indicated POS ($f^2 = .384$) had large effect on JB, while WFC ($f^2 = .215$) had medium-to-large effect. Model fit was excellent with SRMR of 0.042 and NFI of 0.925.

Discussion

This study reveals that Work-Family Conflict serves as a core stressor with significant positive direct impact on Job Burnout, aligning with Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory. By blurring the boundaries between professional duties and private life, the boundaryless nature of mobile work accelerates resource depletion and addresses the explanatory gap regarding why burnout is particularly acute in the inland IT sector. This confirms that the intrusion of work into the family domain constitutes a primary mechanism of psychological exhaustion.

The strong relationship between WFC and burnout ($\beta = .397$) underscores the particular vulnerability of IT professionals working in Sichuan's inland tech hubs. Unlike their counterparts in coastal cities where long working hours have become normalized, these digital migrants experience WFC as a violation of deeply held cultural values emphasizing family harmony and work-life balance. This Cultural Friction amplifies the negative effects of WFC, making it a more potent predictor of burnout than might be expected in other contexts.

A nuanced finding shows Perceived Organizational Support plays a full mediating role, yet Work Environment exerts a non-significant direct effect on Job Burnout. This paradox is explained by critical deficiencies in the psychological translation of physical resources, manifested as Golden Cage facilities that offer physical comfort but lack psychological safety. This reflects hardware-centric management prioritizing physical amenities over socio-emotional support, providing critical amendment to JD-R Theory: resource effectiveness depends on psychological interpretation rather than mere provision of physical infrastructure.

Furthermore, Cultural Friction negatively impacts the Work Environment-Burnout mitigation process. Low alignment between the imported "996" work culture and the local "Slow Life" values constrains the buffering effectiveness of standard job resources. Organizations demonstrate weaknesses in cultural adaptation, deploying one-size-fits-all high-pressure policies that fail to address the heterogeneous psychological needs of Digital Migrants in Sichuan.

Body of Knowledge

This research makes several key theoretical contributions. First, it expands Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory by identifying the Golden Cage mechanism as a critical boundary condition for job resources. By theorizing the non-significant direct impact of the physical work environment, the study introduces the concept of Resource Mismatch, in which physical amenities function merely as passive conditions that are necessary but insufficient for reducing

burnout. This shifts the theoretical focus from a predominantly universal positive view of resources to a contingent perspective.

Second, the study validates and refines Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory within the context of regional talent migration. The empirical identification of Cultural Friction as an amplifier of resource depletion underscores that the impact of Work-Family Conflict is not merely a function of time pressure but is critically dependent on the geo-cultural dissonance between imported efficiency-driven norms and the local life-driven habitus. This enriches the theory's application in emerging economies. Third, given that 75% of the present sample comprised professionals aged 20–35, future research should employ Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) to examine whether the burnout pathways identified here differ meaningfully across demographic subgroups, including generational cohorts (junior versus senior staff), gender, and tenure levels. Junior professionals may experience Work-Family Conflict primarily through time pressure, while senior staff may be more sensitive to role incompatibility and reduced professional efficacy. Disaggregating these groups would sharpen the policy relevance of the findings and move the field beyond aggregate models that risk obscuring important within-industry heterogeneity.

Summary

This research examines the determinants of job burnout among IT professionals in Sichuan Province, China—an emerging inland technology hub shaped by the strategic relocation of the digital industry from coastal cities. The study focuses on the cultural friction between the intensive “996” work regime (9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days a week) and Sichuan’s locally embedded “Slow Life” ethos. This tension is conceptualized as a source of work–family conflict (WFC), which contributes to emotional exhaustion and burnout among digital migrants.

The study integrates the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, Social Exchange Theory (SET), and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to construct a comprehensive framework. Work–Family Conflict (WFC) is positioned as a primary resource-depleting demand, Work Environment (WE) as a physical job resource, and Perceived Organizational Support (POS) as a psychological mechanism that translates material resources into perceived care and support.

Data were collected from 380 IT employees using a structured questionnaire with five-point Likert scales. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that WFC has a significant positive effect on job burnout, confirming it as a core stressor. POS has a strong and significant negative effect on burnout and emerges as the most influential predictor in reducing it. In contrast, Work Environment does not have a significant direct effect on burnout. Instead, its effect operates fully through POS, demonstrating a full mediation relationship. The structural model explains 64.1% of the variance in job burnout.

A key contribution of the study is the identification of a “Resource Mismatch” or “Golden Cage” phenomenon. The findings suggest that investments in physical infrastructure and

workplace amenities alone are insufficient to alleviate burnout if employees do not interpret these investments as genuine organizational care. Without psychological validation through perceived support, material resources function merely as passive conditions rather than active protective factors. Moreover, cultural friction amplifies the negative impact of WFC, as inland IT professionals experience boundaryless work not only as time pressure but also as a violation of deeply rooted local values emphasizing family harmony and balanced living.

In conclusion, the study advocates a shift from hardware-centered management toward a people-centered approach. Organizations should prioritize strengthening Perceived Organizational Support—particularly through supportive leadership practices—so that physical work environments are meaningfully translated into psychological safety. Such a transformation is essential for mitigating burnout in China's rapidly expanding inland digital economy.

Recommendations

The findings offer actionable guidance for stakeholders, creating a hierarchical framework for intervention at multiple organizational levels. Service design should adopt Cultural Resonance principles by moving beyond generic office designs to create spaces that respect local habits and cultural values. Given the local affinity for Slow Life, workplace design should incorporate Recharge Zones, such as tea corners or meditation spaces, that legitimize short breaks and promote recovery from work demands. These spaces serve not just a physical function but also a symbolic one. It must be emphasized, however, that such physical interventions are insufficient as standalone solutions: the present findings confirm that material resources reduce burnout only when they are psychologically translated into perceived organizational care. Recharge Zones therefore carry meaning principally as visible signals of leadership intention rather than as burnout-prevention mechanisms in themselves. The primary locus of intervention must be organizational culture and leadership behavior rather than physical amenity provision.

Management practices need to evolve by positioning the supervisor as a Resource Agent. Since Perceived Organizational Support (POS) is the sole pathway to reducing burnout through Work Environment investments, middle managers must be trained to actively articulate the link between physical resources and employee care. Performance metrics for supervisors should include Supportive Behaviors rather than just task completion, ensuring that amenities are viewed as genuine support tools rather than golden handcuffs. Concretely, organizations should reform their Key Performance Indicator (KPI) frameworks to shift the basis of evaluation from hours worked—the defining feature of the “996” culture—toward outcome-based criteria that are compatible with the “Slow Life” ethos of inland Sichuan. Such a structural change would directly reduce the cultural friction identified as a core amplifier of burnout in this study. In parallel, organizations should invest in developing middle managers as emotionally intelligent Resource Agents who possess the interpersonal skills to perceive subordinate stress, communicate genuine care, and translate organizational investments into felt support. Training programs grounded in

emotional intelligence and culturally responsive leadership represent a higher-leverage investment than physical workspace renovation, as they directly strengthen the mediating mechanism—POS—through which work environment improvements ultimately reduce burnout.

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