The Mediating Roles Of Work-Life Conflict, Job Autonomy, And Psychological Detachment In The Relationship Between Telecommuting And Job Performance Among Lecturers In China

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic began in early 2020 and spread rapidly. Numerous businesses began implementing telecommuting policies, which significantly raised their profile and reignited interest in telecommuting. The literature on telecommuting, job performance, work-life conflict, job autonomy, psychological detachment, boundary theory, and job demands-resources theory is reviewed in this study, which focuses on lecturers in China. The goal is to investigate the relationship between telecommuting and job performance, as well as the mediating effects of job autonomy, work-life conflict and psychological detachment. Building a research framework concurrently. This study plans to employ statistical analysis using SPSS software after conducting an empirical survey on the anticipated integration framework in order to meet its research goals. Investigating the benefits of telecommuting is crucial because it can add to the body of knowledge on the subject and help researchers, human resource professionals, and higher education institutions create policies that will further promote sustainable work-life balance practices in educational settings. **Keywords:** Work-Life Conflict, Job Autonomy, Psychological Detachment, Telecommuting, Job Performance, Lecturers, China

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on many aspects around the world, one of which is the explosion of demand for telecommuting in various organizations (Liu et al., 2023). In recent years, with the development of network communication technology and tools, telecommuting has become a trend all over the world. Telecommuting, once proposed, is favored by employees because of its highly flexible schedule, reduced commuting, time saving and many other advantages (Nakrošien˙et al., 2019). As telecommuting gains popularity, concerns about its productivity have prompted researchers to examine the relationship between telecommuting and job performance. Some scholars have found that telecommuting has a positive impact on job performance (Ipsen et al.，2021；Tabasum et al.，2021). Some scholars have found that telecommuting has a negative impact on job performance (Hamouche & Parent-Lamarche，2023；Jaafar & Rahim，2022). These studies illustrate that telecommuting has both positive and negative effects on job performance (Kuruzovich et al., 2021). Therefore, boundary conditions and mediating mechanisms need to be explored in more detail to discover more diverse results.

Work-life conflict has received much attention in telecommuting research. On the one hand, telecommuting has led to increased work-life conflicts (Santa-Cruz-Espinoza et al., 2023). On the other hand, telecommuting

can alleviate work-life conflicts (Metselaar et al.，2023；Grant et al.，2019). It can be seen that there is still significant controversy regarding the research on telecommuting and work-life conflict. One of the reasons why telecommuting is highly valued by employees is that it increases their job autonomy, making their work unrestricted by time, location, and other factors (Metselaar et al.，2023；Khawand & Zargar，2022). Therefore, it is necessary to explore the mediating role of job autonomy between telecommuting and job performance and work-life conflict. With the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic, most industries have been severely affected, and many scholars have conducted research on telecommuting. Various studies have pointed out the huge impact of telecommuting on psychological, physical, economic and other aspects (Schubert et al., 2023; Silva et al., 2023). Recent research reveals how employee behavior affects psychological detachment (Luta et al., 2021). Combining the above analysis, this study recognizes the significant impact of telecommuting on employee job performance, as well as the mediating roles of job autonomy, psychological detachment, and work-life conflict.

2. Problem Statement

At the beginning of 2020, a sudden epidemic broke out on a large scale around the world. 215 countries and regions have been affected by the epidemic (Huo et al., 2020). A large number of companies have delayed the start of operations and are even on the verge of bankruptcy. Enterprises use telecommuting to enable employees to complete their work without leaving home. Media Research data shows that during the resumption of work in 2020, more than 18 million companies in China adopted the telecommuting model, and more than 300 million users used telecommuting applications. The COVID-19 pandemic is a catalyst for expanding the use of telecommuting, which objectively brings benefits to enterprises and society in various countries. Management presents new challenges. Especially in the education sector, how to effectively use this new way of working is the key to efficient work, and employee performance is affected by a series of different factors.

An evolving issue facing academics in higher education institutions (HEIs) is the challenge of how to achieve work-life balance (Kinman, & Jones, 2008). A review on work-life balance challenges in Asia published by Le et al. (2020) highlighted that surging demands and high workloads in academia and industry make it difficult for academics to balance work and life commitments. The economic transformation and commercialization of higher education have led to large-scale reforms of the higher education system, changing the landscape and making it more tense than before. Due to the heavy workload of academic work, university teachers have to attend classes, conduct scientific research, and perform administrative tasks, which consume a lot of time and energy, exacerbating the conflict between work and life (Sarwar et al., 2021). Especially during COVID-19, the teaching, research, and other work and life of university teachers were in the same space, and the relationship between the two was complex. Work continued to invade life, and life continued to interfere with work. Work-life conflicts continued to intensify (Khawand, & Zargar, 2022).

Therefore, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, from the beginning of 2020 to the present, most universities in China have implemented online teaching for a long time or temporarily. Therefore, these lecturers have experienced the working mode of telecommuting. Whether before or after the epidemic, most lecturers in China, especially teaching and research personnel, implement flexible management and do not have fixed working hours from 9 to 5. It seems that they have high work freedom and flexibility, but the boundaries between their work and life are blurred, so lecturers are faced with high work pressure and high work intensity. As more and more organizations and people telecommute, this way of working gradually exposes some problems.

In order to more fully reveal the impact of telecommuting and elaborate on the impact of telecommuting on job performance mechanism, this study examine the impact of telecommuting on job performance by using lecturers who have actually experienced telecommuting as the survey subjects. This will allow the study to offer more insightful recommendations and opinions for organizational practices and individual responses at the work-life interface. Therefore, this study is to investigate the job performance of telecommuters, reduce worklife conflict, improve job performance, and explore the mediating roles of work-life conflict, job autonomy, and psychological detachment.

3. Literature Review

Telecommuting

When the telecommuting model first emerged, a large amount of survey data showed that the main reason why employees chose to leave the office was to reduce commuting (Marz, & Şen, 2022; O'Brien, & Aliabadi, 2020). Gender is also a prerequisite for actively choosing telecommuting (Scarborough et al., 2023; Lyttelton et al., 2022). Additionally, having children at home may encourage employees to choose telecommuting (GiménezNadal et al.,2018; Zhang et al.,2020). From the organization level, if management believes that the benefits of telecommuting to the organization outweigh the costs, the likelihood of adopting this new working method will increase (Alfanza,2021; Abilash, & Siju, 2021). Some scholarly studies have shown that telecommuting reduces reliance on centralized office spaces (O'Brien, & Aliabadi, 2020). Increased use of

information and communication technologies and technological advances have facilitated the development of telecommuting (Metselaar et al., 2023；Abilash, & Siju, 2021).

Environmental factors are the basis for the emergence of telecommuting, which aims to reduce the pollution and carbon footprint caused by transportation (Marz, & Şen, 2022; Van Reenen, & Nkosi, 2020). Telecommuting due to security concerns arising from natural disasters, terrorist attacks, or health alerts. The expansion of Covid-19 has triggered a crisis on both a health level and an economic level, with most organizations requiring their employees to telecommute as telecommuters (Camacho, & Barrios, 2022; Brandão, & Ramos, 2023). One side adopts a "negative" viewpoint, contending that the new work arrangement known as telecommuting will drain employees' resources and harm both the workers and their families (SantaCruz-Espinoza et al., 2023; Sarbu, 2018). Telecommuting affects job performance (Hamouche & ParentLamarche, 2023; Tabasum et al., 2021). However, academics think that employee performance and productivity are enhanced by telecommuting (Khan et al., 2018; Suryani et al., 2023). Telecommuting helps alleviate work-life conflict (Metselaar et al., 2023; Suryani et al., 2023).

Job Performance

The contributing factors of job performance mainly include the following aspects. Some of the individual's differentiated traits (such as mindfulness, self-management, work adaptability, career growth) have a positive effect on job performance (Raišienė et al.,2020). The mediating effect of work flexibility ability and the moderating effect of work flexibility willingness are two ways that leadership style affects work-family balance, which in turn affects job performance (Chu et al., 2020; Zheng, 2021). The flexible working style provided by the organization for individuals can help improve individual work engagement, help generate proactive behaviors during the work process (Ipsen et al., 2021; Tabasum et al., 2021), and further improve job performance. The decrease of work-life conflict has a major effect on employees' workplace attitudes, behaviors, and performance, per research by Wiradendi Wolor et al. (2020).

Work-Life Conflict

Academic research on work-family conflict was the first to focus on the conflict between employees' job and non-work domains. According to Greenhaus and Beautell (1985), "work-family conflict" is the outcome of a degree of mismatch between an employee's responsibilities and duties in the work and family domains, which causes stress in both domains. Numerous academics have also used this term as the foundation for their later study on "work-family conflict". Work interference with family and family interference with work are the two dimensions into which work-family conflict can be subdivided (Frone et al., 1992). Building upon the work of Greenhaus and Beautell (1985), scholars now assert that conflicts encompass not only conflicts between personal work and life, but also conflicts between work and other domains of one's life as a whole. This study methodology has been embraced by numerous international experts. Palumbo (2020) research shows that in telecommuting, women show greater problems in dealing with the work-life interface, and education level is negatively related to work-life balance. Additionally, age and health were positively associated with respondents' ability to manage work and life interactions. Studies such as Matthews (2010) show that individuals aged 29-45 believe that work interferes with family, and family interference with work is significantly higher than individuals of other age groups.

Telecommuting increases workplace conflict, family conflict, and work-life conflict, leading to frequent repartitioning and redistribution of household chores between couples (Zhang et al., 2020). For parents with young children, working part-time may be a good way to reduce work-life conflict (Van Breeschoten, & Evertsson, 2019). Work-life conflict may be influenced by two aspects of job design—autonomy and job feedback—that put pressure on work-life boundaries (Martineau & Trottier, 2022). Gisler et al. (2018) conducted a related study and found that there are three categories of outcome variables associated with worklife conflict: stress-related outcomes, work-related outcomes, and non-work-related outcomes. The outcome variables related to stress mainly include physiological stress, psychological stress and behavioral stress (Westrupp et al., 2016; Shukri et al., 2018). Work-related outcome variables mainly include job burnout, job satisfaction, job performance, turnover intention, etc (Shakoor et al., 2021; Treuren, & Fein, 2021). Marital satisfaction, family contentment, and life satisfaction are the three key non-work-related outcome variables (Cho, & Tay, 2016; Gisler et al., 2018).

Job Autonomy

The contributing factors of job autonomy mainly include the following aspects. The first category is some basic variables of the employees themselves, including their gender, age, level of education, marital status, and type of employment (Grund and Rubin,2021; Aspøy,2020).The second category is some variables closely related to the employee's immediate superior, including leadership style and trust in subordinates (Tummers et al., 2018; Cho et al., 2021).The third category is variables closely related to employee organization, including industry and organization size (Metselaar et al., 2023; Abilash, & Siju, 2021). Numerous studies have demonstrated the beneficial effects of job autonomy on employee attitudes and behaviors, including work-life balance, performance, engagement, and satisfaction (Malinowska et al.,2018; Wheatley, 2017). A limited body of

empirical research indicates that employees may suffer negative effects from having too much job autonomy (Kubicek et al., 2017).

Psychological Detachment

Psychological detachment is affected by individual differences. Research by Sonnentag and Kruel (2020) shown that people who have recovery-related self-efficacy are more able to achieve psychological detachment. People with over-committed professional personalities, work involvement, work addiction and other individual traits also weaken their ability to detach from work (Sonnentag, & Kruel, 2020). Lyndon et al. (2023) research shows that it is impossible to psychologically detach from work during telecommuting. According to Kubicek et al. (2022), the daily obligations of collaborating with others at work raise cognitive load, which hinders proper psychological detachment when working from home. Some scholars also study psychological detachment from the perspective of work-life boundaries. Mascarenhas et al. (2023) research shows that boundary violation is an obstacle to psychological detachment among teachers working remotely during COVID-19, and both work-to-family violation and family-to-work violation are negatively related to psychological detachment.

Regarding the workplace, Cheng and Zhang's research findings from 2023, for instance, indicate that psychological disengagement from work substantially moderates the association between the extent of telecommuting and employee job performance, leading to a decline in employee job performance. According to Agolli and Holtz (2023), psychological distance is essential for employees to execute their jobs well. Psychological detachment can assist lessen the detrimental impacts of high job expectations and lessen harm to job performance, according to Lu and Chou (2020). Psychological detachment during non-work time improves all facets of employee well-being and job performance, as demonstrated by Olafsen and Bentzen (2020).For instance, Trzebiatowski (2024) discovered that psychological detachment can be more successful in lowering boundary violations within families. Work-family conflict is predicted by psychological detachment, according to study by Žiedelis et al. (2023), and employees who are better able to disconnect from work after work are less likely to experience pressure from blurred boundaries and incompatibilities between the work and family domains. The impact of psychological detachment on the work-family interface (work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict) is demonstrated by Trógolo et al.'s research (2022).

4. Underpinning Theories
Boundary Theory

The boundary theory was put forth by Clark (2000) and Ashforth et al. (2000), in that order. The most popular theoretical stance for explaining how telecommuting affects workers is boundary theory. Boundary matching, or the unification of preference and execution boundaries, is the primary goal of this approach (Žiedelis et al., 2021). Boundary theory states that people can better match their preference boundaries with execution bounds and so better realize the preference boundaries they wish to attain when their environment is more flexible and freer. The higher the boundary matching degree, the easier it is for people to gain psychological satisfaction, this positive effect can reduce employees' work-life conflicts (Ammons., 2013).

Work-life boundary theory explains the principles and reasons for the occurrence of work-life conflicts among boundary spanners, and the division, definition and management of work-life boundaries. Boundarycrossing behaviors can affect work-life boundaries and relationships between boundary intruders and others (Jia, & Su, 2020). According to work-life boundary theory, the impact of actual work-life boundaries on individuals will differ depending on their work-life boundary characteristics (Li, & Chan, 2022). Accordingly, work-life boundary characteristics may be important boundary conditions affecting telecommuting. Based on the above research, this study will focus on the impact and boundary conditions of telecommuting on employees' work-life conflict.

Job Demands-Resources Theory

The job demands-resources theory was initially put forth by Demerouti et al. (2001). This theory's central claim is that job needs, and job resources can be used to categorize all aspects of a job (Bakker, & Demerouti, 2007). Work demands include things like role conflict, job uncertainty, and pressure to perform well at work that drain personal energy. Job resources are favorable elements that foster advancement at work, such as family harmony, physical well-being, leadership support, and job autonomy. COVID-19 has had a significant negative impact on teachers' work-life balance because teaching is a demanding profession that depletes resources and can cause work-family tensions. For teachers who work from home, the amount of work during stressful times (like exams) requires more personal resources, which is seen as a major strain on their employment (Delanoeije et al., 2019; Rasoolet et al., 2021; Syrek et al., 2022). This is especially noticeable in how much time teaching assignments that call for focus outside of class take. The flexibility of space and time in remote working situations brings rich job resources to employees. Mazmanian et al. (2013) found that in a telecommuting situation, employees' perceived work autonomy and flexibility were significantly improved compared with nontelecommuters. According to the job demands-resources theory (JD-R), job resources can improve workers' psychological detachment and job autonomy, which in turn can impact work-life conflicts and output (Schaufeli, 2017).

5. Research Framework

This study aims to empirically examine the relationship between telecommuting and job performance, as well as the relationship between telecommuting and work-life conflict, job autonomy, and psychological detachment. The purpose of this study was to investigate if work-life conflict, job autonomy, and psychological detachment are mediating factors in the relationship between telecommuting and job performance. This study also looks at how job autonomy, psychological detachment, and work-life conflict affect workers' ability to do their jobs. The following explains in detail the arguments and logic of each hypothesis proposed in this study, representing the proposed research framework consisting of telecommuting, job performance, work-life conflict, job autonomy, and psychological detachment.
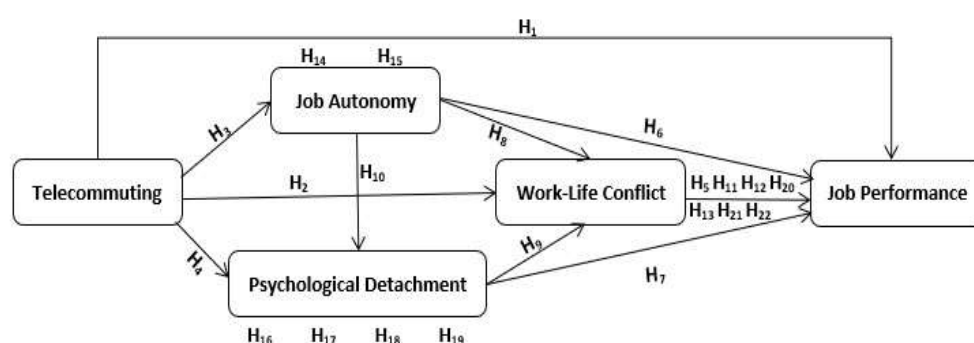

Figure 1 The Research Framework

6. Methodology

To achieve the research objectives, it is intended to conduct an empirical investigation of the intended integration framework through a survey using a sample of lectures in China. To determine the internal reliability of the scales utilized in this study, an exploratory factor analysis was employed to examine the data in the beginning. Cronbach's algorithm was then acquired. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, independent samples t-test, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were then used to further evaluate the data. Structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis was then employed to validate the proposed study framework. In order to test the research hypotheses, it was intended to collect primary data from universities in various provinces in China, approaching different universities from the teaching profession to avoid environmental constraints associated with focusing on only one university. All participants will be assured of confidentiality. According to statistics from the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, there were 1.3455 million full-time teachers in ordinary undergraduate schools in the basic situation of national education development in 2023. We will use structured questionnaires to collect information through network design.

7. Significance of the Study

This study aims to contribute to literature by examining the relationship between telecommuting, job performance, work-life conflict, job autonomy, and psychological detachment. The research conclusions can broaden and extend the research field of telecommuting to a certain extent and expand the research on regulating variables in related research mechanisms; at the same time, it can also provide reference and thinking for Chinese universities to respond to environmental changes and improve job performance; not just for individual careers, career design serves as a foundation for decision-making and guidance for government and corporate HRM strategies. Thorough research on the topic will enable more businesses to adopt telecommuting, take advantage of possibilities and overcome obstacles faster, and make proactive use of this effective tool to boost employee job performance.

8. Conclusion

This study reviewed literature on telecommuting, job performance, work-life conflict, job autonomy, and psychological detachment, and found that scholars have conducted extensive discussions on the relationship between telecommuting and job performance, but the conclusions drawn are not entirely the same. Existing research on the relationship between telecommuting and work-life conflicts has shown inconsistent results. Telecommuting has an impact on work-life conflict (Santa-Cruz-Espinoza et al., 2023; Suryani et al., 2023), and work-life conflict has an impact on job performance (Irfan et al., 2023; Weinert, & Weitzel, 2023). With the popularization and promotion of telecommuting, further research is needed on the mediating role of worklife conflict in the relationship between telecommuting and job performance. Similarly, the mediating role of job autonomy and psychological detachment also needs further research. The majority of Chinese lecturers,

as telecommuters, have a blurred boundary between work and life, and work-life conflicts have intensified. It is very necessary and meaningful to take this as the research object.

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