

How Young Employees Experience Job Stress in Chinese High-Tech Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: A Qualitative Exploration of Workplace Factors

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Abstract

This study investigates the experiences of work-related stress among young employees in high-tech small and medium-sized enterprises in China, a rapidly expanding yet highly competitive sector. Using semi-structured interviews, this research explores how organizational, interpersonal, and individual factors influence employees' psychological strain, emotional well-being, and turnover intentions. Drawing upon Social Exchange Theory, Conservation of Resources Theory, and the Theory of Organizational Mobility, the study identifies five primary sources of work-related stress: insufficient organizational support, excessive workload and resource demands, interpersonal conflicts and experiences of workplace ostracism, limited opportunities for career development and internal mobility, and challenges in maintaining work-life balance. The findings demonstrate that one-sided or asymmetric social exchanges, depletion of personal and structural resources, and employees' perceptions of external labor market opportunities play significant roles in shaping stress responses and decisions to remain with or leave the organization. Based on these insights, the study proposes actionable strategies to mitigate stress, including strengthening organizational support and recognition mechanisms, improving resource allocation and workload management, fostering inclusive and collaborative interpersonal environments, providing clear career development pathways, and implementing policies that promote work-life balance and employee autonomy. By integrating theoretical frameworks with empirical evidence from employees' lived experiences, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of workplace stress dynamics in fast-paced internet enterprises. Furthermore, it provides valuable guidance for managers and human resource practitioners seeking to

enhance employee well-being, improve retention, and sustain organizational performance in competitive, high-pressure work environments. The study also highlights the importance of considering both internal organizational practices and external labor market conditions when designing interventions to support young employees' psychological health and career development.

Keywords: Work-related Stress, Young Employees, High-Tech Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Social Exchange Theory, Conservation of Resources Theory, Organizational Mobility

Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial role in driving economic development and innovation in China. However, these organizations often face significant challenges in maintaining a stable workforce due to limited resources, intense market competition, and economic uncertainty (Hui, 2021). China has a labor force of approximately 770 million people, yet the average employee turnover rate has been estimated to reach about 18%, which is among the highest globally (Zhang & Chen, 2019). In particular, employees in China's rapidly expanding internet and technology sectors frequently experience high workloads, long working hours, and intense performance expectations. Such demanding work environments have increasingly raised concerns about employees' psychological well-being and job stress. As organizations continue to compete for talent in the digital economy, understanding how young employees experience workplace stress and what factors influence their perceptions has become an important issue for both researchers and practitioners.

Previous studies have explored workplace stress and employee well-being from multiple perspectives, including organizational support, workplace relationships, and job demands (Demerouti, 2025; Wang et al., 2023). Research has shown that insufficient organizational support and negative workplace interactions, such as workplace ostracism, may lead to emotional exhaustion and decreased well-being among employees (Wang et al., 2023). Moreover, prior studies have emphasized the importance of resources in maintaining employees' psychological health and work-life balance (Pensar & Rousi, 2023). Although these studies have contributed valuable insights, most existing research relies on quantitative survey methods and focuses primarily on Western organizational contexts. Consequently, there remains limited qualitative understanding of how young employees in Chinese high-tech small and medium-sized enterprises subjectively experience workplace stress and how different workplace factors interact to shape these experiences.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) provides an important theoretical perspective for understanding employees' attitudes and behaviors within organizations. According to SET, relationships between employees and organizations are based on reciprocal exchanges, where supportive treatment from the organization encourages employees to respond with positive attitudes and behaviors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). When employees perceive that their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being, they are more likely to develop trust, commitment, and positive work attitudes. Conversely, when employees perceive insufficient support or unfair treatment, they may experience psychological strain and dissatisfaction (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Therefore, SET offers a useful framework for understanding how perceived organizational support, leadership

behavior, and interpersonal interactions may influence young employees' experiences of workplace stress.

In addition to social exchange processes, employees' stress experiences can also be explained through the lens of the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and the Theory of Organizational Mobility (TOM). COR theory suggests that individuals strive to obtain, maintain, and protect valuable resources such as time, energy, and social support (Hobfoll, 1989). When these resources are threatened or depleted, individuals are more likely to experience stress and emotional exhaustion (Farkash et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the Theory of Organizational Mobility emphasizes that employees' workplace attitudes and turnover intentions are influenced not only by their satisfaction with the current organization but also by their perceptions of alternative job opportunities, often referred to as perceived ease of movement (March & Simon, 1958; Steel & Lounsbury, 2009). When employees believe that external job opportunities are accessible, dissatisfaction with the current workplace may more easily translate into turnover intentions (Rubenstein et al., 2018). Thus, considering employees' perceptions of career mobility can provide additional insights into how workplace experiences influence stress and career decisions.

Against this background, this study aims to explore how young employees in Chinese high-tech small and medium-sized enterprises experience workplace stress and what factors shape these experiences. Using qualitative interviews, this research investigates employees' perceptions of organizational support, interpersonal interactions, resource demands, and perceived career mobility. By integrating insights from Social Exchange Theory, Conservation of Resources theory, and the Theory of Organizational Mobility, this study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it provides a qualitative perspective on workplace stress among young employees in China's internet industry. Second, it offers an integrated theoretical understanding of how organizational, interpersonal, and career-related factors interact to influence employees' stress experiences. Finally, the findings may provide practical implications for managers seeking to improve employee well-being and retain talent in rapidly evolving organizational environments.

Literature Review

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) originated from sociology and organizational behavior research, aiming to explain interactions and reciprocal behaviors between individuals in social and organizational contexts (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The core idea of SET is that a reciprocal relationship exists between employees and organizations, where employees respond with positive attitudes and behaviors when the organization provides resources, support, or care (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Social exchange encompasses not only material rewards but also psychological and emotional reciprocity, such as trust, recognition, and emotional support. In organizational research, SET has been widely used to explain work attitudes, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), performance, and turnover intentions (Madison et al., 2025; Ahmad et al., 2023). In the context of job stress, young employees who perceive insufficient organizational support, including a lack of internal corporate social responsibility (ICSR), leadership care, or fair treatment, tend to experience psychological strain, negative emotions, and even intentions to leave the organization (Xuecheng et al., 2022; Xu, Wang, & Ma, 2022). Furthermore, although SET emphasizes the bidirectionality of

exchange relationships, in practice, these exchanges may be asymmetric or one-sided, which can leave employees feeling isolated or deprived of resources and may further increase work stress (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Extensive research has demonstrated that SET plays a significant role in explaining leader–follower relationships, employee organizational commitment, and turnover intentions (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Cropanzano et al., 2017). For instance, organizations that provide training and development opportunities, a supportive work environment, and fair treatment often elicit positive employee behaviors and retention intentions (Xuecheng et al., 2022). SET has also been applied to explain the formation of organizational citizenship behavior, where employees are more likely to proactively assist colleagues, serve customers, and enhance work performance when they perceive organizational support (Xu et al., 2022; Madison et al., 2025). However, most prior research relies on quantitative surveys and focuses primarily on Western organizational contexts, leaving limited understanding of the subjective experiences of job stress among young employees in high-pressure, rapidly changing Chinese high-tech small and medium-sized enterprises. Furthermore, micro-level interpersonal interactions, such as competition or jealousy among colleagues, and asymmetric psychological exchanges between leaders and employees remain underexplored within existing SET studies (Ahmad et al., 2023). Therefore, qualitative research is needed to investigate how employees perceive organizational support, interpersonal interactions, and the influence of these factors on work stress.

Conservation of Resources Theory

This study adopts the Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) as a theoretical framework to investigate workplace stress. COR was first proposed by Hobfoll (1989) as a branch of stress theory, defining resources as anything perceived by an individual to be valuable or a means to obtain what is valuable. Resources can be categorized into four types: material resources, such as cars, housing, and tools; condition resources, such as marriage, job qualifications, and social support; personal resources, including key skills and personal traits such as self-efficacy and self-esteem; and energy resources, such as knowledge, money, and time (Hobfoll, 1989). In daily work, employees are constantly required to expend effort in performing tasks, providing services, processing information, and managing responsibilities, which often leads to depletion of personal energy. COR emphasizes that individuals and groups strive to acquire, maintain, cultivate, and protect the resources they value. The theory highlights that resource loss is more painful than resource gain, prompting individuals to prioritize the prevention of resource depletion. Another key principle is that individuals must invest resources to offset losses, recover from setbacks, and accumulate additional resources, such as learning new skills to enhance employability, which can prevent future resource loss (Demerouti, 2025). The availability and structure of resources become especially crucial in stressful contexts, such as organizational changes or sudden events (Pensar & Rousi, 2023).

COR has been widely applied to explain how resource availability affects employee well-being, stress, and resilience. Research indicates that resource scarcity, job stress, social isolation, and anxiety are significant risk factors for psychological distress and post-traumatic stress disorder (Farkash et al., 2022). In organizational contexts, workplace ostracism has been shown to negatively impact employee well-being, with emotional exhaustion mediating this relationship. Team forgiveness climate can buffer the negative effects of ostracism,

demonstrating the importance of social and organizational resources (Wang et al., 2023). Furthermore, studies on work-life balance highlight that flexible work arrangements, autonomous work methods, and time-saving resources are critical for maintaining balance, with employee self-efficacy and trust in supervisors influencing their ability to utilize these resources effectively (Pensar & Rousi, 2023). In the context of this study, COR is particularly relevant because it provides a framework for understanding how young employees perceive the depletion or availability of personal, social, and structural resources, and how these perceptions influence their experience of work stress in high-pressure Chinese high-tech small and medium-sized enterprises. By applying COR, the study can explore how resource investment, preservation, and accumulation mechanisms affect employee well-being and coping strategies in dynamic work environments.

Theory of Organizational Mobility (TOM)

The Theory of Organizational Mobility (TOM) was originally proposed by March and Simon (1958) and has become a foundational framework in turnover research. TOM asserts that employees' turnover intentions are influenced not only by their satisfaction with their current organization but also by their perception of alternative job opportunities, commonly referred to as perceived ease of movement (Steel & Lounsbury, 2009; Hom et al., 2017). Employees who perceive the external labor market as abundant with attractive and attainable opportunities are more likely to develop intentions to leave, particularly if their current organization does not meet their career development or psychological needs (Mobley, 1977; Martini, 2023). Conversely, employees who perceive limited or inaccessible external options are less likely to act on turnover intentions, even when dissatisfied, resulting in retention despite suboptimal work experiences (De Cuyper et al., 2011). This perspective highlights perceived ease of movement as a critical moderator that can transform passive dissatisfaction into active turnover intention and potentially actual turnover behavior (Rubenstein et al., 2018; Steel & Lounsbury, 2009).

TOM has been applied to understand variations in employee responses to adverse workplace experiences, such as workplace bullying. Research shows that workplace mistreatment undermines employees' psychological well-being and reduces their emotional attachment to the organization, thereby increasing turnover intentions (Galanis et al., 2024). However, not all employees respond equally, as those who perceive greater external employment opportunities are more likely to act on these intentions, while those who perceive limited alternatives may feel constrained to stay (Martini, 2023; Rubenstein et al., 2018). Additionally, TOM provides insights into contemporary career mobility, reflecting changes in professional norms from traditional, organization-bound paths to modern, self-directed, multi-employer trajectories. Employees with strong preferences for organizational mobility are more likely to seek external knowledge, skills, and experience, and organizations that can provide these opportunities may achieve better person-organization fit and support long-term career development (Paluch & Shum, 2022). In this study, TOM is adopted to explore how perceived ease of movement influences young employees' responses to workplace stressors and negative experiences in Chinese high-tech small and medium-sized enterprises, offering a lens to understand the interplay between career mobility perceptions and turnover-related behaviors.

Although research has increasingly focused on job stress among young employees in Chinese high-tech small and medium-sized enterprises, significant gaps remain. Prior studies have mostly relied on quantitative surveys and Western contexts, limiting understanding of the subjective experiences of stress in rapidly evolving and high-pressure work environments. Moreover, the roles of interpersonal dynamics, perceived organizational support, and resource availability in shaping stress experiences are underexplored. To address these gaps, this study integrates three theoretical perspectives to guide semi-structured interviews. Social Exchange Theory (SET) provides a lens to explore how reciprocal or asymmetric relationships between employees, supervisors, and colleagues influence work stress and turnover intentions. Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) informs investigation of how the availability, loss, and investment of personal, social, and structural resources affect employees' ability to cope with stress and maintain well-being. The Theory of Organizational Mobility (TOM) highlights how employees' perceptions of external labor market opportunities moderate responses to workplace stressors and adverse experiences. Together, these theories form a conceptual framework that directly informs interview questions and data collection, allowing the study to capture the complex interplay between organizational support, resource management, interpersonal dynamics, and career mobility perceptions among young employees in Chinese high-tech small and medium-sized enterprises.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore how young employees in Chinese high-tech small and medium-sized enterprises experience job stress. A qualitative design is suitable because it allows an in-depth understanding of employees' subjective experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies, which cannot be fully captured through quantitative surveys. The research aims to uncover the mechanisms by which organizational support, interpersonal dynamics, resource availability, and perceived career mobility influence work stress.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which provide a flexible yet guided approach to gather rich, detailed insights from participants. Interview questions were developed based on the theoretical framework integrating Social Exchange Theory (SET), Conservation of Resources Theory (COR), and the Theory of Organizational Mobility (TOM). This approach enables the interviewer to explore core themes while allowing participants to freely elaborate on their experiences, emotions, and behaviors related to workplace stress.

The study focuses on young employees working in high-tech small and medium-sized enterprises in Shenzhen, a leading technology and innovation hub in China. Shenzhen was selected because it hosts a high concentration of SMEs in the internet and tech sectors, employs a large proportion of young professionals, and represents a high-pressure, rapidly changing work environment typical of the industry. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting employees aged 22–35 who have at least six months of experience in their current company. A total of 32 employees participated in the interviews, providing a diverse range of perspectives on organizational support, workplace interactions, resource management, and career mobility.

Table 1

Semi-Structured Interview Guide Based on Theoretical Framework

Theory	Sample Interview Questions	Respondents
Social Exchange Theory	Can you describe the support you receive from your supervisor and organization in your daily work?	Young employees (aged 22–35) in high-tech small and medium-sized enterprises in Shenzhen
	How do interactions with colleagues influence your work experience and stress?	
	Have you ever felt isolated or treated unfairly at work? How did it affect you? What personal, social, or organizational resources help you manage work demands?	
Conservation of Resources Theory	Can you describe situations where you felt your resources were insufficient or depleted?	Young employees with at least six months of experience in their current company
	How do you try to maintain or gain resources to cope with work stress?	
	How do you perceive external job opportunities in your industry?	
Theory of Organizational Mobility	Does the availability of external opportunities affect how you respond to workplace challenges or stress?	Young employees with high career mobility awareness or recent job experience in multiple organizations
	Have you ever considered leaving your current organization due to stress or career development reasons?	

Challenges*Insufficient Organizational Support*

Many participants reported feeling that their organizations did not provide sufficient guidance, recognition, or emotional support, which significantly intensified their work-related stress. Employees described situations in which supervisors offered minimal or inconsistent feedback, failed to acknowledge accomplishments, or seemed indifferent to employees' questions and concerns. This lack of attention created uncertainty about performance expectations and fostered feelings of frustration and disengagement. One participant stated, "I often feel that my efforts go unnoticed, and I have to figure out everything on my own," reflecting a perceived imbalance in the social exchange relationship. From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory (SET), such one-sided interactions can generate feelings of inequity, isolation, and diminished trust, which may lead to negative emotions and even turnover intentions. The lack of organizational support appeared particularly stressful for younger employees who are still developing professional skills and rely heavily on mentorship, structured guidance, and emotional reinforcement to navigate complex tasks and adapt to the fast-paced environment of internet SMEs.

High Resource Demands

Interviewees consistently emphasized that the workload and complexity of tasks in high-tech small and medium-sized enterprises often exceeded the resources available to them, creating continuous pressure. Employees reported frequent overtime, tight deadlines,

constant multitasking, and expectations to handle responsibilities beyond their formal roles, which drained both cognitive and physical resources. One respondent explained, “I sometimes feel exhausted because I have too many tasks and not enough support or tools to complete them efficiently,” highlighting the chronic tension between job demands and available resources. Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) posits that individuals are motivated to acquire, protect, and maintain valued resources, and that resource loss generates stress. Prolonged exposure to high demands without adequate support can lead to emotional exhaustion, reduced productivity, heightened anxiety, and decreased motivation. Moreover, employees reported that high resource demands interfered with opportunities for skill development and self-improvement, further compounding stress and feelings of helplessness.

Interpersonal Conflicts and Workplace Ostracism

Workplace relationships were another major source of stress among participants. Many reported experiencing interpersonal conflicts, social exclusion, or lack of peer support, which fostered feelings of isolation, self-doubt, and emotional strain. One employee noted, “Sometimes I am excluded from team discussions, and it makes me question my value in the team,” emphasizing the psychological toll of ostracism. From the COR perspective, social support is a critical resource, and its absence can intensify stress, reduce engagement, and undermine overall well-being. Additionally, asymmetric social exchanges with colleagues, such as favoritism or unequal task allocation, can amplify perceptions of unfairness and reduce trust within teams. Several participants highlighted that negative peer interactions also affected their willingness to seek help or share ideas, which in turn lowered collaboration and innovation, further increasing work pressure.

Uncertainty in Career Development

Many young employees expressed significant concerns regarding limited opportunities for promotion, internal mobility, and skill advancement. Participants reported feeling unclear about long-term career prospects within their organizations, which heightened anxiety, reduced job satisfaction, and sometimes led to contemplation of leaving the company. One interviewee remarked, “I want to grow, but I am not sure the company provides the opportunities I need,” reflecting the tension between personal career ambitions and organizational constraints. The Theory of Organizational Mobility (TOM) emphasizes that employees’ perceptions of external job opportunities, or perceived ease of movement, shape their reactions to dissatisfaction. When internal development pathways are unclear or insufficient, employees feel constrained and vulnerable, which can increase stress and turnover intentions. This challenge is particularly salient in SMEs, where career structures are often less formalized, mentorship opportunities limited, and skill development pathways less visible compared to larger corporations, leaving young employees uncertain about their professional future.

Balancing Work and Personal Life

Finally, employees reported persistent difficulties in managing long working hours while attending to personal life responsibilities, reflecting a significant work-life imbalance that contributes to chronic stress. Many cited the pressure to remain constantly available through digital platforms or respond to work-related requests outside office hours as a major source of emotional and physical strain. One participant stated, “I feel like I never truly have time for

myself because work follows me home,” highlighting the intrusion of work into personal time. From the COR perspective, personal time and energy are essential resources, and their depletion can have profound negative effects on well-being, mental health, and overall job satisfaction. The lack of organizational policies or supportive practices to promote work-life balance further exacerbates stress, particularly for younger employees who may be simultaneously managing personal development, family responsibilities, or educational pursuits. These pressures collectively reduce engagement, diminish productivity, and increase the risk of burnout, illustrating the urgent need for targeted interventions.

Suggestions

Enhance Organizational Support

To address the issue of insufficient organizational support, companies should establish more systematic and consistent support mechanisms that go beyond basic supervision. In particular, structured feedback systems, formal mentorship programs, and transparent recognition practices should be implemented to ensure that employees feel acknowledged and guided in their work. Regular one-on-one meetings between supervisors and employees can help clarify performance expectations, provide timely feedback, and create opportunities for employees to express concerns and seek support. In addition, organizations should encourage leaders to demonstrate empathy, active listening, and responsiveness to employees' needs, thereby strengthening emotional support in the workplace. From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, these practices can help restore balance in exchange relationships, fostering a sense of reciprocity and trust. When employees perceive that the organization values their contributions and well-being, they are more likely to respond with higher engagement, commitment, and reduced turnover intentions.

Resource Allocation and Training

Organizations should take proactive steps to ensure that employees have sufficient resources to meet job demands effectively. This includes not only providing adequate tools and technological support but also offering targeted training programs to enhance employees' skills and competencies. For example, companies can introduce onboarding programs for new employees, continuous learning opportunities, and role-specific training to reduce skill gaps and increase efficiency. In addition, flexible work arrangements and workload redistribution strategies can help employees better manage peak periods and prevent excessive resource depletion. According to Conservation of Resources Theory, investing in resource development allows individuals to replenish and accumulate valuable resources, thereby increasing resilience to stress. By aligning job demands with available resources, organizations can reduce employee burnout, improve performance outcomes, and create a more sustainable work environment that supports long-term productivity and well-being.

Promote Positive Interpersonal Relations

To mitigate the negative effects of interpersonal conflicts and workplace ostracism, organizations should actively cultivate a culture of inclusiveness, collaboration, and mutual respect. This can be achieved through initiatives such as team-building activities, communication workshops, and conflict resolution training, which aim to improve interpersonal understanding and reduce misunderstandings among employees. Establishing peer support systems and mentoring relationships can further strengthen social connections

and provide employees with reliable sources of emotional and professional support. Moreover, organizations should encourage open communication channels and create safe environments where employees feel comfortable expressing their opinions without fear of exclusion or retaliation. From a theoretical perspective, strengthening social resources aligns with Conservation of Resources Theory, while fostering fair and reciprocal interactions reflects the principles of Social Exchange Theory. Together, these efforts can enhance trust, reduce feelings of isolation, and improve overall team cohesion, thereby alleviating work-related stress.

Career Development Planning

Providing clear and structured career development pathways is essential for reducing uncertainty and enhancing employees' sense of security and motivation. Organizations should establish transparent promotion criteria, define clear role expectations, and offer opportunities for internal mobility and skill development. For instance, companies can implement career planning sessions, performance-based advancement systems, and training programs that align with employees' long-term career goals. Additionally, organizations should communicate development opportunities effectively to ensure that employees are aware of potential growth paths within the company. According to the Theory of Organizational Mobility, employees' perceptions of career opportunities, both internal and external, play a crucial role in shaping their attitudes and behaviors. By enhancing internal development opportunities, organizations can reduce employees' reliance on external mobility as a solution to dissatisfaction, thereby lowering turnover intentions. This approach is particularly important for young employees, who often prioritize career growth and skill acquisition when evaluating their employment choices.

Support Work-Life Balance

Finally, organizations should implement comprehensive policies and practices that support employees in balancing work and personal life demands. Flexible working hours, remote work options, and reasonable workload expectations can provide employees with greater autonomy in managing their time and responsibilities. In addition, companies can introduce wellness programs, mental health support services, and regular breaks to help employees recover from work-related stress and maintain overall well-being. Encouraging a culture that respects personal boundaries, such as limiting after-hours communication and avoiding excessive overtime, is also critical in preventing resource depletion. From the perspective of Conservation of Resources Theory, protecting employees' time and energy resources is essential for sustaining long-term performance and psychological health. By promoting work-life balance, organizations not only reduce stress and burnout but also enhance employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention, contributing to a more sustainable and productive work environment.

Conclusions

This study examined the experiences of work-related stress among young employees in high-tech small and medium-sized enterprises in Shenzhen through semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that insufficient organizational support, high workload demands, interpersonal conflicts, uncertainty in career development, and challenges in maintaining work-life balance are key contributors to employee stress. By applying Social Exchange Theory (SET), Conservation of Resources Theory (COR), and the Theory of

Organizational Mobility (TOM), this research provides a theoretical lens to understand the mechanisms underlying these stress experiences. Specifically, the study demonstrates how one-sided or asymmetric exchanges with supervisors and colleagues, the depletion of personal and organizational resources, and perceptions of limited internal mobility can collectively amplify psychological strain and turnover intentions. These insights emphasize the complex interplay between organizational practices, resource availability, and employees' perceptions of external opportunities in shaping stress outcomes.

Building on the identified challenges, this study offers practical implications for organizational management. Strengthening organizational support, optimizing resource allocation, fostering positive interpersonal relationships, providing clear career development pathways, and implementing policies that promote work-life balance are critical strategies to mitigate stress among young employees. By integrating theoretical understanding with empirical evidence from employees' lived experiences, this research not only contributes to the literature on workplace stress and turnover but also provides actionable recommendations for managers in dynamic, high-pressure internet environments. Future research can expand on these findings by exploring longitudinal effects of these interventions and examining how digital transformation and evolving employment models further influence the stress and retention of young employees in SMEs.

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