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Navigating Digital Careers: A Multi-Case Study of Women's Career Decisions in Indonesia's IT Sector

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Abstract. Indonesia's rapid digital transformation has intensified demand for IT talent, yet female attrition remains high. Aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals' emphasis on inclusivity, this study examines women's IT career decisions in Indonesia through the Individual Differences Theory of Gender and IT (IDTGIT). Using a qualitative multi-case design, 12 semi-structured interviews with female IT professionals reveal three career trajectories: stayers (women who remain in IT roles), movers (transitioning to non-IT sectors), and leavers (exiting the workforce completely). Findings show that career decisions are shaped by the interaction between internal drivers (self-actualization, personal characteristics, and career–person fit) and external contexts (organizational culture, relational support, and societal infrastructure). We found that work–family conflict and value reorientation emerge as pivotal mediators triggering transitions across career paths. This study advances IDTGIT by demonstrating its applicability in a developing, collectivist country and introducing a comparative framework across three career decisions. Practically, the findings suggest operationalizing flexible work arrangements through a Results-Only Work Environment (ROWE) and asynchronous tools, while strengthening inclusive policies via gender-responsive health support and accessible childcare to accommodate women's dual professional and caregiving roles.

Keywords: Career Decision, Digital Transformation, IDTGIT, Women in IT, Work-Family Conflict

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1. INTRODUCTION

Global digital transformation has intensified the demand for IT professionals [1]. Yet, gender imbalance persists, as women remain markedly underrepresented across the IT workforce. In Indonesia, despite a gender balanced population comprising 143.5 thousand men and 140.9 thousand women, women comprise 28% of the ICT labor force. This disparity is concerning, as gender-diverse teams are essential for innovation and the development of inclusive digital solutions [2]. Conversely, gender-homogeneous teams face diminished insight into diverse user needs and reduced capability to design inclusive and socially responsive digital solution [3].

A primary driver of this disparity is the "leaky pipeline" phenomenon [4], where women disproportionately exit technical career pathways despite having the qualifications to advance. This attrition is frequently attributed to the "greedy" nature of IT work characterized by long hours, rapid operational tempo, and high cognitive load conflicting with domestic roles [5]. However, women's responses are heterogeneous, exit from IT does not always imply withdrawal, many women transition to adjacent sectors or renegotiate their roles [6]. These varied pathways suggest that women's career decisions cannot be understood as uniform responses.

While the Individual Differences Theory of Gender and IT (IDTGIT) provide a framework to understand this diversity through personal and environmental interactions [7], existing research presents limitations. First, most studies applying IDTGIT primarily focus on factors influencing entry and persistence [8], [9], with limited studies concerned on comparing how similar factors produce different career decisions across digital work settings. Second, IDTGIT has largely been developed within Western, individualistic socio-cultural settings, where career decisions are framed as autonomous choices [8], [10]. This assumption is not fully aligned with collectivist contexts like Indonesia [11]. Here, women's career choices are frequently negotiated by expectations surrounding marriage, caregiving, and normative gender roles. Especially in Indonesia, a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, career decisions are often intertwined with moral and spiritual considerations regarding women's domestic responsibilities [12]. Therefore, treating career decisions as purely individualistic choices fails to explain why capable women leave her roles even when professional barriers are low.

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Therefore, this research intends to address these gaps by adopting a comparative approach to explore three distinct career outcomes: stayers, who continue to work in IT roles; movers, who transition to other sectors; and leavers, who exit the workforce or take career breaks. Using a qualitative multi-case study, we conducted 12 semi-structured interviews to answer the research question: "How do individual, social, and environmental factors differentially interact to shape the career trajectories of women, specifically stayers, movers, and leavers within Indonesia's digital workforce?".

Theoretically, this study extends IDTGIT by exploring its applicability in a developing, collectivist context and introducing a comparative framework that challenges the phenomenon of the "leaky pipeline." By contrasting stayers, movers, and leavers, we reveal how similar drivers generate distinct career pathways. Practically, the findings provide actionable guidance for organizations to strengthen retention through inclusive policies and support systems that specifically acknowledge women's dual professional and caregiving roles.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 outlines the research methodology, describing the qualitative multi-case study design, participant selection, and the analysis procedures. Following this, we present empirical findings and discussion, which culminate in a refined conceptual model. Finally, the paper concludes in Section 4.

2. METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative multi-case study design to investigate how women in Indonesia's IT workforce navigate career pathways. A multi-case approach is used for examining social phenomena embedded in real-life contexts and for comparing variations across distinct participant groups [13]. The research process followed a systematic flow, as illustrated in Figure 1.

A purposive sampling method was employed to identify information rich cases [17]. Participants were selected based on criteria: (1) women currently or previously employed in IT roles in Indonesia and (2) aged 27–40 years or possessing a minimum of five years of professional experience, capturing the mid-career stage, a critical juncture where work–family conflict typically intensifies. The sample consisted of 12 participants,

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determined by the principle of data saturation, where data collection no longer yields new information or themes [14]. Participants were categorized into three career trajectories to enable comparative analysis: stayers (remaining in IT), movers (shifting to non-IT roles), and leavers (exiting the workforce). Table 1 presents the participant profiles.

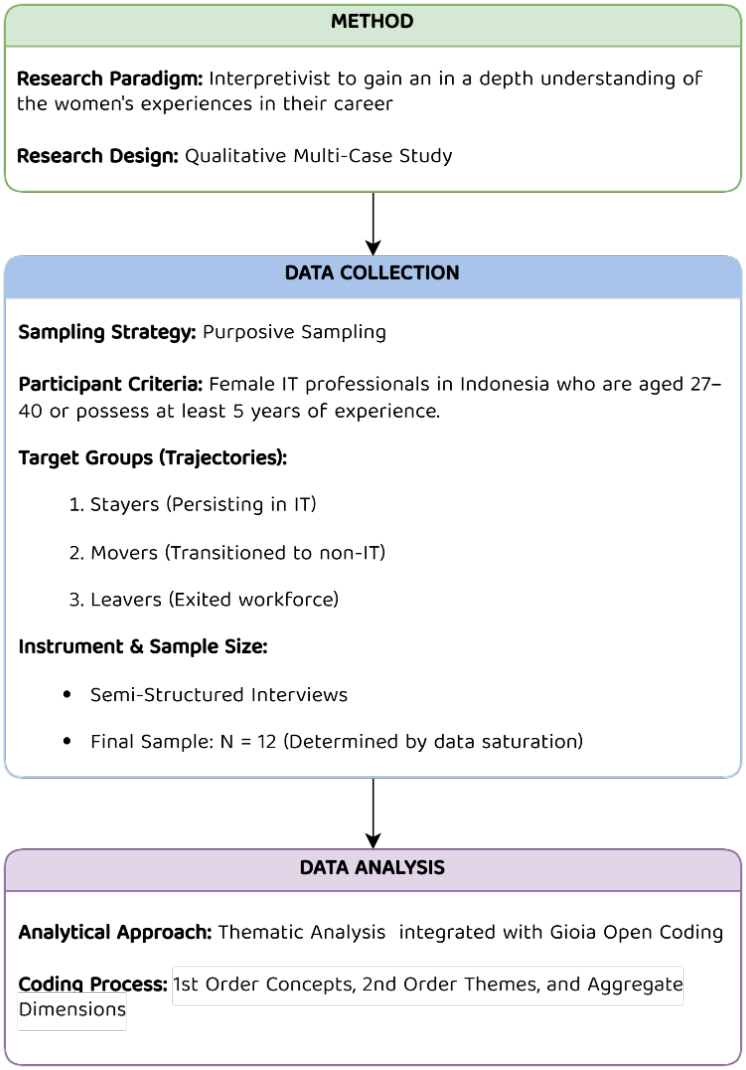

Figure 1. Research Methodology Process

Table 1. Participant Profiles

Participant Code	Age	Position	Decision
N1	29	Business Analyst	Stay
N2	35	Civil Servant (Data and IT)	Stay
N3	35	Head of IT Strategic Planning & Development	Stay
N4	35	System Analyst	Stay

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Participant Code	Age	Position	Decision
N5	28	Business Analyst	Stay
N6	28	Civil Servant (Computer)	Stay
N7	29	Virtual Assistant	Move
N8	32	Seller	Move
N9	27	Robotics Engineer	Move
N10	31	Housewife	Leave
N11	28	Housewife	Leave
N12	33	Housewife	Leave

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews conducted online, lasting 30–60 minutes each. The interview instrument was developed based on the IDTGIT [7]. An initial pilot interview phase was conducted with two IT professional prior to the main data collection for the refinement of the interview protocol and validate question clarity. The study adhered to ethical standards, obtaining informed consent regarding the research purpose, voluntary participation, and right to withdraw. Confidentiality was ensured by removing personal identifiers and assigning alphanumeric codes during analysis.

Data analysis began with data familiarization through repeated reading of the transcripts. Initial codes (first-order concepts) were generated and inductively organized following the Gioia et al. [16]. These first-order concepts were then clustered into second-order themes and further distilled into third-order concepts or aggregate dimensions, which were synthesized into an explanatory narrative supported by representative quotations. Overall, the analysis followed Braun and Clarke's [15] thematic analysis framework, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Thematic Analysis Framework

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An example of the coding process is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Example of the Coding Process

Code	Transcript	1st Order	2nd Order	3rd Order
N3	I didn't work to support the family financially. I worked to actualize myself.	Actualize myself	Self-actualization	Self-actualization
	Company provides lactation rooms, seminars, and maternity leave.	Supportive facilities	Inclusive Workplace	Organizational Culture and Policy
	My husband also supports my career. When I have to go on business trips, my husband usually takes leave and takes care of the children.	Spouse emotional support	Family Support	The Role of Social Support

Trustworthiness was ensured by examining behavioral consistencies and divergences across groups (external validity) and corroborating findings with existing literature. We conducted a cross-case synthesis to compare the three groups (stayers, movers, leavers). A matrix was used to map the presence and intensity of each aggregate dimension across groups, enabling us to identify distinct patterns. This allowed us to identify distinct patterns that appeared prominently in leavers but were managed differently by stayers and movers.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings integrated with theoretical discussion to explain the career decisions of women in Indonesia's IT workforce.

3.1 Women's Career Decisions in Indonesia's IT Sector

The analysis of women's career decisions within Indonesia's IT sector led to the development of a conceptual model that encapsulates the various factors influencing career dynamics. This model takes into account both individual and systemic influences that shape the professional paths of women in this field. The analysis culminated in a conceptual model in Figure 3.

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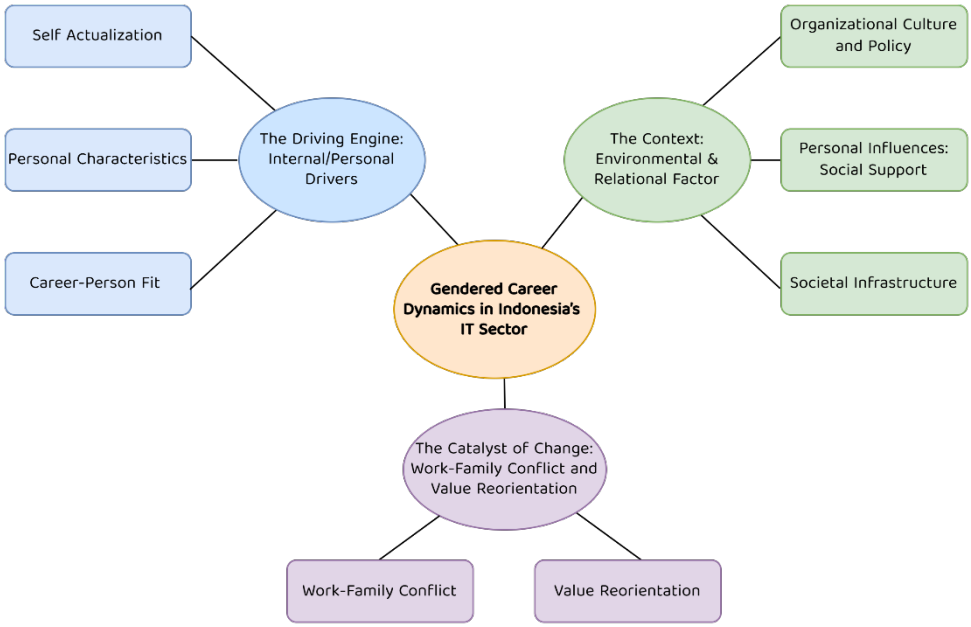

Figure 3. Conceptualization of Factors Shaping Career Dynamics

Each aspect of Conceptualization of Factors Shaping Career Dynamics will be addressed in more detail in the next subsections.

3.1.1 The Driving Engine: Internal/Personal Drivers

Internal drivers represent the core motivations shaping women's participation in the IT sector. In a rapidly evolving digital landscape that demands technical skills, adaptability, and continuous learning, these drivers act as the engine that sustains women's retention.

1) Self-Actualization

Self-actualization, defined in Maslow's hierarchy as the pursuit of one's full potential and personal fulfillment [17] For stayers, it appears as a desire for empowerment and proof of capability, as expressed by N6, *"Work is women's actualization, showing that women actually can do it, can give opinions and make decisions."* Similarly, movers seek to maintain competence, as N7 noted, *"What is needed when you're already a mother is to feel that we are still capable."* For leavers, self-actualization shifts from career achievement to intellectual drive within the family, as N11 explained, *"A career is not merely about earning money, but we have brains, it would be a waste not to use them"*. demonstrating that the pursuit of fulfillment persists even after workforce exit.

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2) Personal Characteristics

Personal traits significantly shape resilience. Stayers show a proactive learning mindset and resilience, as N5 emphasized, "*Dissatisfaction and curiosity must be high or else we'll be crushed by technology itself.*" Movers demonstrate high autonomy to redefine their paths, "*If you're really interested just go for it.*" In contrast, leavers experience perfectionism as a vulnerability. N10 described the internal conflict: "*I'm the perfectionist type. I want to give 120% at work, but my family also needs me. My focus gets split,*" leading to emotional exhaustion. Leavers often experience perfectionism as a vulnerability, where the pressure to excel in both professional and domestic roles becomes unsustainable.

3) Career-Person Fit on IT Work

The alignment between a woman's personal identity, passions, and her IT role was critical to career persistence. This aligns with the Person-Job (PJ) fit framework [18] which views fit not as a static state, but as a dynamic process Involving Demand-Ability (DA) fit (how well skills match job requirements) and Need-Supply (NS) fit (how well a job fulfills personal needs). Stayers report strong DA fit, fostering stability, as N3 noted, *"I'm already comfortable. I've mastered the tasks."* Movers, however, experience misalignment between role expectations and personal passion. For leavers, the misalignment is fundamental, the IT role no longer resonates with their evolving identity as mothers and wives.

4) Financial Stability

For stayers and movers, it validates professional worth and ensures family welfare; N4 stated, "*I want my children to have good facilities,*" while N5 viewed income as increasing professional value. For leavers, spousal support acts as a safety net. N12 revealed that her husband's increased income "*closed the gap*" removing the economic pressure to work and facilitating her exit.

3.1.2. The Context: Environmental & Relational Factors

These external influences operate at the organizational level, where culture, leadership, and flexibility determine inclusivity. Supportive environments characterized by equitable norms facilitate continuity, whereas rigid or gender-biased cultures accelerate exit [19].

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Relational factors also shape engagement, such as family support, mentorship, and peers provide essential coping resources [20].

1) Organizational Culture and Policy

Stayers thrive in supportive cultures that offer flexibility and inclusive policies [21]. N5 highlighted, "*What made me comfortable was the friends, and the work was flexible*," while N3 pointed to formal policies like "*lactation rooms and diversity KPIs*." Movers, conversely, face dissonance when flexibility is technically possible but managerially restricted, N7 resigned because "*WFH was no longer an excuse*." Uniquely, leavers often exit despite positive cultures, maintaining strong post-exit relationships (N11, N12), indicating their exit is driven by external structural conflicts rather than workplace toxicity.

2) Personal Influences: The Role of Social Support

Stayers benefit from a multi-layered support system involving spouses and parents. N2 shared, "*Because I still lived with my parents, they helped me.*" Movers receive bounded encouragement, such as N7's husband gave freedom but preferred roles "*that doesn't take me away from home*." For leavers, social support legitimizes withdrawal. N12 noted, "*I got the green light from my in-laws, parents, and husband. That's when I felt confident to resign*," indicating that family approval validates the decision to leave. Social support provides logistical help for stayers, sets boundaries for movers, and offers emotional legitimacy for leavers.

3) Societal Infrastructure

Reliable caregiving acts as a structural anchor. Its presence enables stayers to maintain dual roles. Its inconsistency forces movers into hybrid negotiations. N7 kept working from home because "the caregiver often skipped work. For leavers, the collapse of this infrastructure is a tipping point. N12 described the "*constant drama of changing babysitters*" as emotionally depleting, directly precipitating her resignation.

3.1.3. The Catalyst of Change: Work-Family Conflict and Value Reorientation

This section identifies how role pressures interact with internal value shifts to trigger transitions.

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1) Work-Family Conflict

Work-family conflict acts as the primary stressor testing resilience This conflict arises from the "always-on" culture of IT. N2 recalled fixing code while walking in a mall and working after midnight. Stayers manage this through internalizing guilt and maximizing quality time. Movers treat this conflict as a signal to realign. N7 adapts by taking "*short-term jobs depending on my child's condition*." For leavers, the tension becomes untenable. N10 confessed, "*I had to resign. The feeling of guilt was already starting to emerge*," marking the point where caregiving demands outweighed career sustainability. Stayers manage it through negotiation and compensation. Movers adjust their work arrangements. Leavers overwhelmed by the intensity of the conflict and associated guilt, resolve it by removing the professional stressor entirely.

2) Value Reorientation

Value reorientation represents a profound shift in how women align their decisions with spiritual and personal values. Participants described their choices in moral callings. N12 reflected, "*We don't want to just chase the world, there is still the hereafter*." while N11 cited Islamic guidelines on family roles. This reorientation reshapes the definition of success from professional achievement to spiritual and familial fulfillment. This is consistent with prior research finding that women tend to express stronger spiritual orientations than men [22]. When these religious values become internalized, women consciously choose to allocate more time to domestic activities and less to employment, marking a reconstruction of identity where moral priorities supersede professional ambition [23].

3.2. Discussion

Research on women's IT career persistence has been dominated by Western, individualistic contexts [24]. Although high demand for digital talent might suggest natural persistence, our findings indicate that women in Indonesia's IT sector still face a complex of barriers, ranging from the "always-on" culture of digital work to gender norms. These friction points have been examined in the literature regarding the "leaky pipeline" [25], empirical work showing how they lead to differentiated outcomes staying, moving, or leaving remains limited. Our findings demonstrate that women do not simply exit, they exercised agency adaptive negotiations between professional ambition and personal

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identity. Table 3 summarizes the similarities and differences in career trajectories among stayers, movers, and leavers across the identified themes.

Table 3. Comparison of Women's IT Career Paths

Theme	Stayers	Movers	Leavers
Self-Actualization	Work as empowerment and proof of capability	Work as a space for competence and social connection	Self-actualization is redefined through family and spiritual fulfillment
	Work is viewed as a form of self-expression and purpose beyond income		
Personal Characteristics	Discipline, curiosity, and accountability in managing IT demands	Adaptability, confidence, and self-efficacy in pursuing change	Exhibit perfectionism and emotional reflection
	All display persistence, self-awareness, and intrinsic motivation		
Career–Person Fit in IT Work	Strong alignment between education, role, and culture	Partial or unclear fit, prompting realignment	Misfit between career identity and personal life role.
	Evaluating fit between skills, identity, and IT role as key to satisfaction		
Financial Stability	Link income to family security and children's education	Pursuit of higher compensation and benefits	Financial needs met by spouse
	Influence career decision-making across all groups		
Personal Influence	Strong multi-layered support from spouse and parents	Conditional support shaped by household priorities	Spousal and familial approval validate decision to withdraw
	Family support acts as a significant career enabler		
Organizational Culture & Policy	Enjoy supportive, flexible, and inclusive workplaces	Confront inflexible policies despite digital affordances	Maintain positive relations post-exit
	Work environment and flexibility affect satisfaction and commitment		
Societal Infrastructure	Use caregivers to sustain career continuity	Cope with unreliable childcare by opting for remote work	Instability in caregiving leads to exhaustion and exit
	Dependence on caregiving systems shapes work–life sustainability		

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Theme	Stayers	Movers	Leavers
Work–Family Tension	Manage guilt through communication & emotional regulation	Adjust workloads & shift to flexible or temporary arrangements	Accumulated guilt and fatigue trigger career exit
	All experience emotional strain and maternal guilt balancing dual roles		
Value Reorientation	Balance career commitment with family and moral values	Implicitly seek equilibrium between personal priorities and flexible work	Reorient identity toward spiritual and family-centered fulfillment
	Values guide interpretations of success and career meaning		

Internal drivers such as self-actualization, personal characteristics, and career-person fit act as core motivators, but their influence is moderated by environmental conditions. Many participants noted that the “greedy” nature of IT work, with its high cognitive load and rapid pace, heightens conflict with domestic responsibilities in a culture where women are primary caregivers. For stayers, spousal and parental support acted as a buffer that mitigated maternal guilt and sustained participation. For leavers, weak or unstable support systems, particularly unreliable childcare, turned workplace rigidity into an untenable strain.

This study advances the Information Systems (IS) literature by extending boundary conditions of IDTGIT to a developing, collectivist context. We demonstrate that in Indonesia, environmental factors specifically family duty and religious values are significantly amplified. We reveal that individual identity is not static but evolves through life stages, where cultural expectations of domestic responsibility act as a potent filter. This explains why highly capable women exit technical roles even when professional barriers are low, driven by moral and spiritual goals rather than a lack of capability.

Second, we introduce "Value Reorientation" as a novel causal mechanism to explain workforce exit. Existing literature often frames women’s departure as a consequence of burnout [26]. This concept identifies a psychological shift where spiritual and familial fulfillment supersede professional ambition, explaining the failure of standard retention strategies. This contributes a deeper explanatory logic to the theory, clarifying why retention strategies focused solely on workplace satisfaction fail for this demographic.

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Finally, by contrasting stayers, movers, and leavers we show that similar drivers can generate distinct pathways. For movers, the lack of flexibility was the push factor, driving them to adjacent sectors where their skills were valued but structural rigidity was lower. This indicates that the "problem" of retention is often specific to the organizational design of technical roles rather than the IT field itself.

Retention extends beyond HR to team managers, who must normalize flexible work to accommodate caregiving. Organizationally, firms should dismantle the "always-on" culture by adopting asynchronous tools and transitioning to a Results-Only Work Environment (ROWE). By basing evaluation on delivered results rather than availability, ROWE reduces the friction between technical work and domestic duties. Furthermore, organizations must compensate for societal gaps through accessible childcare and gender-responsive health policies, specifically covering maternityneeds and menstrual pain. Finally, transparent evaluation processes are critical to ensuring women's contributions remain visible.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined women's career decisions in Indonesia's IT sector by extending the IDTGIT framework to a developing, collectivist context. Findings show that women's career trajectories emerge from the interplay of personal identity, relational support, and organizational structures. An insight from the comparative is that workforce exit is often triggered by work–family conflict and reflects a value reorientation where spiritual and familial fulfillment supersede professional ambition. This challenges the "leaky pipeline" narrative by showing that career outcomes are rational negotiations shaped by individual agency and the high-pressure dynamics of the "always-on" IT culture. Future work should employ longitudinal and cross-regional research to test and refine the model's cultural boundary conditions.

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