

# A Study of the Antecedents of Attitude towards Teleworking and the Moderating Effect of Self-identity

Youngkeun Choi\*

*Associate Professor, School of Management, Sangmyung University, Korea*

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## ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine the relationships between work-related support factors and attitude towards teleworking and explore the moderating effect of self-identity on that relationship. The present study collected data from 343 IT professionals in South Korea through a survey method and used hierarchical multiple regression analyses. In the results, first, the more supervisory or work-related supports participants perceive in teleworking platforms, the more favorable their attitudes towards teleworking. Second, the positive relationship between supervisory support and attitude towards teleworking is stronger for participants high rather than low in interdependent self-view. However, interdependent self-view was found to have no significance on the relationship between work colleague support and attitude towards teleworking. This study is the first to examine the integral model of work-related support factors of attitude towards teleworking and explore the moderating effect of self-identity in the teleworking process.

*Keywords:* Teleworking, Supervisory Support, Work Colleague Support, Self-Identity, Organizational Behavior, Human Resource Management

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## I . Introduction

Teleworking is defined as a work arrangement where organizational employees work at home instead of at their offices. This work can be done during or outside regular office hours. They maintain contact with their organizations through telephones, facsimile

machines, computer modems, and electronic and voice mail systems. Employees do not necessarily work at home every day but for one or more complete workdays a week instead of working in the office. They will spend the remaining days in the office. In short, teleworking combines computers and telecommunication technologies with flexible work loca-

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\*Corresponding Author. E-mail: [penking1@smu.ac.kr](mailto:penking1@smu.ac.kr)

tions to remove the geographical and organizational boundaries of the traditional, centralized workplace (Shockley and Allen, 2010). This definition is consistent with that adopted by other researchers (Allen et al., 2015).

However, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) that swept rapidly across the globe in early 2020 conferred a new meaning to telework. As this acute respiratory disease transmits through physical contact (World Health Organization, 2020), many organizations have since discouraged or forbidden non-essential employees from physically reporting to work to observe social distancing for halting the virus spread (Guyot and Sawhill, 2020). This pushed the incidence of telework to an unprecedented tipping point. In the United States, 65% of the workforce were teleworking full-time in early May 2020 (Gallup, 2020), a multifold increase from the 11% who had access to partial telework pre-COVID-19 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). All other regions, including Europe (Lomas, 2020) and Asia (Liang, 2020; Tay, 2020), also saw record telework rates. This study argues that this form of mandatory telework is fundamentally distinct from the aforementioned partial telework offered as a flexible work arrangement. Employees now have little or no volition to decide whether and when to telework. This work arrangement also severely restricts their ability to access physical infrastructure, tools, and resources in their workplaces.

Despite the strong increase in telework arrangements, previous literature reviews and meta-analyses concluded that telework is not always beneficial for employees to reduce their job stress or improve their well-being (Raghuram et al., 2019). More specifically, these reviews concluded that telework could be beneficial for some employees by reducing job stress by offering them increased autonomy and flexibility and

helping them to reduce their commute time (Delanoeije and Verbruggen, 2020). However, telework can also be destructive to an employee's well-being due to social isolation, Zoom fatigue, and the difficulty of maintaining a work-life balance (Heiden et al., 2021).

Similarly, several media reports also document the concerns about the consequences of telework on employees' well-being and productivity. For example, more than 85 percent of 5000 American survey respondents indicated that they need better support from their organization to telework (Thrive Global, 2020). Relatedly, the TELUS international survey (Forbes, 2020) reported that around 75% of teleworkers struggle with work stress during the pandemic. Around 80% of teleworkers would think about switching to another organization that offers better mental health support. Another report also noted that while telework helped employees reduce financial difficulties, it increased loneliness and mental distress. It is reflected in the opinion of many policy-making experts such as Nick Bloom (from Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research). He said that "forcing everybody home, often around kids, in shared rooms or bedrooms and no escape socially in non-work time will be generating major mental stress. This typically leads to loneliness and depression, which is mentally costly and often leads to physical health declines." (Financial Times, 2020). These media reports and the mixed findings of prior research suggest that more empirical research is needed to integrate moderators and to analyze when telework has beneficial versus dysfunctional effects on job stress (Beauregard et al., 2019; Raghuram et al., 2019).

For addressing this research gap, this study draws on telework research and cultural value theory. It analyzes the moderating role of an employee's cultural background (i.e., individualism and power distance)

and its influence on their telework effectiveness beliefs. Prior research analyzed the effects of telework in different occupations and industries (Raghuram et al., 2019). However, a recent literature review on telework (Beauregard et al., 2019) concluded that a fundamental matter had received very little attention, such as the effects of telework on attitude towards teleworking across employees with different cultural backgrounds. Much of the research into telework and job stress was conducted in a single-country context in Western countries, neglecting cultural differences regarding attitudes about telework and the effectiveness of telework (Muthukrishna et al., 2020). Accordingly, the main research questions were as follows:

Research Question 1: What were the key resources that positively impacted information technology sector employees' engagement in teleworking?

Research Question 2: Does an employee's cultural background moderate these key resources and impact information technology sector employees' engagement in teleworking?

Therefore, this study first examined Korean attitudes towards teleworking among information technology (IT) professionals based on the above research questions. IT personnel represent a dynamic workforce in a new and high-growth industry of the future. In fact, with the increasing use of IT by both developing and industrialized countries, IT personnel constitute an essential component of the workforce that can aid companies and governments in leveraging IT to improve efficiency and compete effectively in the global markets. One of the major problems which plagued

the IT industry is the high employee turnover rate among IT personnel. Employee turnover presents a wide range of problems for organizations. Frequent displacement of skilled IT personnel may lead to low morale among those who remained in the organization and escalating costs for organizations as new employees need to be recruited and trained. As more and more organizations continue to rely on IT to enhance their effectiveness and competitive advantage, the demand for skilled IT personnel will increase. Against this context of human resources shortage and high turnover rates. Therefore, this study seeks to examine various factors which may affect IT personnel's attitudes towards teleworking. Halbesleben et al. (2014) recommended that researchers adopt an episodic, experience sampling approach to examine resource trajectories within the limits of a timeframe when testing COR. We regard the episodic approach as highly suitable for this research because COVID-19 is an ongoing pandemic that unfolds bit by bit. Organizations revise their advisories and practices daily to deal with the frequent turns of events (Ellis, 2020; Lyons, 2020). Based on COR theory, empirical evidence in the social support literature suggests that support from supervisors and work colleagues (work-based support) is critical in influencing an employee's attitude towards teleworking. Therefore, this study can expect that employees who perceive that their supervisors and work colleagues are supportive of teleworking will be able to derive much more job satisfaction from teleworking.

Second, theories on the development of self-identity and the relationship between the self and other employees suggest that sharing a task will be associated with perceived social distances (Belk, 1988). Belk (1988)'s work on the Extended Self established that people expand their concept of who they are to include their possessions and tasks they perform. This study

applies ideas on the extended self to teleworking and proposes that by sharing a personal task, perceived social distances will be closer, vis-à-vis teleworking. And the subsequent section then outlines data and methods, followed by the results. The article concludes with a discussion on implications and avenues for future research.

## II. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

The conservation of resources (COR) theory offers a framework for understanding employee

stress from why and how employees lose resources, protect existing resources and gain new resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Resources in this context refer to anything the individual perceives to help attain their goals and can include energies and emotions (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Fluctuation of resources is one of the theory's key elements. Halbesleben et al. (2014) recommended that researchers adopt an episodic, experience sampling approach to examine resource trajectories within the limits of a timeframe when testing COR. We regard the episodic approach as highly suitable for this research because COVID-19 is an ongoing pandemic that unfolds bit by bit. Organizations revise their advisories and practices daily to deal with the frequent turns of events (Ellis, 2020; Lyons, 2020). Telework employees may receive new and sometimes contradictory work instructions on different days that disrupt how they initially perform their work duties (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). These task-related disruptions and complications brought specifically about by the pandemic are daily COVID-19 task setbacks. Halbesleben et al. (2014) also highlighted the importance of context in understanding with-

in-person resource fluctuations based on the COR theory. They explained that the context, such as job nature, organizational climate, and organizational support, acts as boundaries that potentially signal to an individual how resource-draining a trigger is or how valuable resources are.

Based on COR theory, empirical evidence in the social support literature suggests that support from supervisors and work colleagues (work-based support) is critical in influencing an employee's attitude towards teleworking. The relevant research found that employees who perceived their supervisors and work colleagues as supportive were more likely to favor teleworking (Urbaniec et al., 2022). Past studies revealed that management philosophies and supervisors' attitudes towards teleworking play a critical role in the success of a teleworking program (Adamovic, 2022). Employees who are not involved in teleworking are more likely to support teleworkers if they do not perceive the latter as being especially favored or privileged (Urbaniec et al., 2022).

Hartman et al. (1992) found that satisfaction with teleworking was significantly related to positive support and understanding from teleworkers' immediate supervisors. Teleworkers regarded their supervisors' understanding, concern, and acceptance of them teleworking as valuable and essential to their teleworking attitudes. Such results highlight the crucial role supervisory support plays in promoting and creating a favorable attitude towards teleworking.

Therefore, supervisors, in particular, must actively support alternative work arrangements to attract, recruit and retain valued employees. Supervisors must trust their subordinates to be disciplined enough to carry out their tasks dutifully while working at home. When employees perceive that the new work arrangement is important to their organization, they will be more motivated to adopt it. On the other hand, if

employees believe that their supervisors and work colleagues may react negatively towards teleworking, they may reject the work option. This is because employees feel that the organization is not interested in teleworking, and hence this new work arrangement is unlikely to be adopted even though the technology is available (DeSanctis, 1984).

Therefore, this study can expect that employees who perceive that their supervisors and work colleagues are supportive of teleworking will be able to derive much more job satisfaction from teleworking. Hence, they tend to have a more favorable attitude towards this work arrangement. In line with the above reasoning, it is hypothesized that:

*H1: Employees who perceive that their supervisors support teleworking will have a more favorable attitude towards teleworking.*

*H2: Employees who perceive that their work colleagues support teleworking will have a more favorable attitude towards teleworking.*

Previous work has used the terms independent and interdependent to describe how individuals derive their self-identity (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Interdependent individuals and groups tend to emphasize the needs of others, of fitting in with a harmonious group, whereas people from independent cultures tend to value expressing unique inner attributes (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). The more an individual depends on the group, the more they will attend to the group cues for developing their self-identity (Triandis, 1989). Independent and interdependent self-views have been found to be associated with abstract and concrete representations, respectively. Spassova and Lee (2013) saw that when asked to describe future events, those with independent self-views responded with more ab-

stract descriptions and a perception that even was even farther in the future than those who were interdependent. It suggests that those with higher levels of interdependent self-views are more sensitive to environmental cues and have a propensity to see things in more concrete ways. An in-group boundary is an extent to which an individual sees others as being part of their social group. The definitions of such boundaries keep adjusting along with situational factors, i.e., things such as common fates, common outside threats, and proximity (Triandis, 1989). Someone with an interdependent self-view does not subordinate themselves to the needs or goals of others (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). However, other people would represent a much more important role and be a focal point of one's actions. Inclusion may be a more discerning process given the more central nature of the in-group for an interdependent self. The personal boundary in-group may be narrower for the interdependent selves than for those with independent selves (Triandis, 1989). However, although individuals with strongly interdependent self-views may be much more selective about in-group membership, they are also more sensitive to social cues. Therefore, those with an interdependent self-view would be more sensitive to social cues for perceptions of social distances (such signals are expected to be more present in a teleworking context). Also, teleworking reflects more of an exchange-relationship as opposed to a communal relationship, so the exchange would lack the richly detailed information that collectivists might need to expand their in-group boundary. Yet, in the context of teleworking exchange, the relationships between the teleworkers need not exhibit interpersonal trust as would exchange defined as sharing.

Therefore, people with a high level of interdependent view can have a high level of trust in those participating in the teleworking platform. These peo-

ple can show enhanced participants' behavior during the teleworking process. In other words, the supervisor may not achieve supervisory support in the teleworking process alone, so it is necessary to trust that employees who participate in the teleworking platform will think the same way. Therefore, the higher the level of interdependent self-view, the more favorable attitude towards teleworking employees will have because they think their supervisors will participate in teleworking as they consider supervisory support important.

And, work colleague support in teleworking will not be achievable if other employees are involved in fraud, so trust in those involved in the teleworking platform will be needed. Therefore, the higher the level of interdependent self-view, the more favorable attitude towards teleworking employees will have because their work colleagues will participate in the teleworking process so that others will do the honest working. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that interdependent self-view is a major moderator for the relationship between two predictors and attitudes towards teleworking.

*H3: Interdependent self-view positively influences the relationship between supervisory support and employees' attitude towards teleworking.*

*H4: Interdependent self-view positively influences the relationship between work colleague and employees' attitude towards teleworking.*

### III. Methodology

#### 3.1. Sample and Data Collection

The sample comprised IT professionals from a large local IT organization in Korea. This organization has

formalized programs to continually track advances in IT and acquire new and promising technologies. This organization was selected for this study as the top management has indicated a strong interest in teleworking, and the company has the necessary IT infrastructure.

The study's objective was to identify the factors of psychological behaviors related to attitude towards teleworking based on empirical analysis. These factors can be identified by measuring the participants' perceptions of attitude towards teleworking. The survey research method is very useful in collecting data from a large number of individuals in a relatively short period and at a lower cost. Hence, the questionnaire survey was used for the current study for data collection. Data for this study were collected through the use of questionnaire surveys. The instrument was pretested with the top management of the IT organization to obtain feedback concerning the clarity of instructions and ensure that the questions were appropriate and applicable to the IT personnel's work context. Comments and suggestions received were then used to fine-tune the presentation of the final questionnaire.

The liaison person of the IT organization was seeking to help distribute the questionnaires to respondents. The final questionnaire package contained a cover letter, survey instrument, and a reply envelope. Respondents were requested to return the completed surveys in a sealed envelope to their respective registries. The liaison person then forwarded the completed surveys to the researchers. A total of 400 questionnaire packages were distributed to respondents in IT organizations.

Of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 351 were returned. Among the returned questionnaires, nine were not used due to incomplete responses. The remaining 343 questionnaires were used in the final data analysis, thereby yielding a response rate of about 86 percent, which is relatively higher than the norm

of 56 percent for studies utilizing a questionnaire survey (Baruch, 1999).

### 3.2. Variables

The questionnaire employed psychometric measurement (Nunnally, 1978). This study measured each construct that was all on a 5-point Likert scale. Work-based support variable was assessed with the work support scale adapted from House (1981). Specifically, four items were used to assess supervisory support and four items to assess work colleague support. The supervisory and work colleague support subscales yielded Cronbach's alphas of 0.83 and 0.88, respectively. Interdependent self-view was measured using twelve items from the Singelis Interdependent Self-view Construal Scale (Singelis, 1994). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.81. Attitude towards teleworking was assessed with two items. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.84. Control variables are sex, age, and educational level. Gender was coded as 1 for male and 0 for female. Age was measured as the age at the time of the survey. Education level was coded as 1 for graduate school and 0 for undergraduate.

### 3.3. Research Model

In the model based on the hypothesis of this study, supervisory support and work colleague support were set as independent variables, and Attitude towards teleworking was set as outcome variables. And attitude towards teleworking was set as a moderator variable between the independent and outcome variables. As control variables, gender, age, and education level, which are basically used in a survey methodology targeting an unspecified majority, were used. This study used a moderated hierarchical multiple regression model to analyze this research model.

## IV. Analysis result

### 4.1. Verification of Reliability and Validity

The validity of variables was verified through the principal components method and factor analysis with the varimax method. The criteria for determining the number of factors is defined as a 1.0 eigenvalue. I applied factors for analysis only if the factor loading was greater than 0.5 (factor loading represents the correlation scale between a factor and other variables). The reliability of variables was judged by internal consistency as assessed by Cronbach's alpha. I used surveys and regarded each as one measure only if their Cronbach's alpha values were 0.7 or higher.

### 4.2. Common Method Bias

As with all self-reported data, there is the potential for common method variance (CMV) (MacKenzie and Podsakoff, 2012; Podsakoff et al., 2003). To alleviate and assess the magnitude of common method bias, I adopted several procedural and statistical remedies that Podsakoff et al. (2003) suggest. First, during the survey, respondents were guaranteed of anonymity and confidentiality to reduce the evaluation apprehension. Further, we paid careful attention to the items' wording and developed our questionnaire carefully to reduce the item ambiguity. These procedures would make them less likely to edit their responses to be more socially desirable, acquiescent, and consistent with how they think the researcher wants them to respond when answering the questionnaire (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Tourangeau et al., 2000). Second, I conducted a Harman's one-factor test on all items. A principle components factor analysis revealed that the first factor only explained 34.1 percent of the variance. Thus, no single factor emerged,

nor did one-factor account for most of the variance.

Furthermore, the measurement model was reassessed with the addition of a latent common method variance factor (Podsakoff et al., 2003). All indicator variables in the measurement model were loaded on this factor. The addition of the common variance factor did not improve the fit over the measurement model without that factor, with all indicators still remaining significant. These results suggest that common method variance is not of great concern in this study.

Kock and Lynn (2012) proposed the full collinearity test as a comprehensive procedure for simultaneous vertical and lateral collinearity (Kock and Gaskins, 2014; Kock, 2015; Lee et al., 2021). This procedure, which is fully automated by the software WarpPLS, generates variance inflation factors (VIFs) for all latent variables in a model. The occurrence of a VIF greater than 3.3 is proposed as an indication of pathological collinearity, and also as an indication that a model may be contaminated by common method bias. Therefore, if all VIFs resulting from a full collinearity test are equal to or lower than 3.3, the model can be considered free of common method bias. In the full collinearity test, the model contaminated with common method bias includes a latent variable with a VIF greater than 3.3. The common method bias test proposed by Kock and Lynn (2012), based on the full collinearity test procedure, seems to succeed

in the identification of common method bias.

### 4.3. Relationship between Variables

<Table 1> summarizes the Pearson correlation test results between variables and reports the degree of multi-collinearity between independent variables. The minimum tolerance of 0.817 and the maximum variance inflation factor (VIF) of 1.224 show that the statistical significance of the data analysis was not compromised by multi-collinearity.

### 4.4. Hypothesis Testing

This study used moderated hierarchical multiple regression analyses with three steps to test the hypotheses. In the first step, demographic variables were controlled. Motivation factors were entered in the second step. In the final step, the multiplicative interaction terms between work-related support factors and interdependent self-view were entered to directly test the current hypothesis about the moderating effect. <Table 2> shows the results. First, sex and age among the control variables negatively correlate with attitude towards teleworking. This means that women are more likely to have a favorable attitude towards teleworking than men. Second, to analyze the relationship between work-related support factors

<Table 1> Variables' Correlation Coefficient

	Aver.(S.D)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Age	34.12(8.99)	1					
Educational level	0.65(0.87)	.062	1				
Supervisory support	3.47(0.91)	.014	.012	1			
Work colleague support	3.46(1.04)	-.036	.032	-.027	1		
Interdependent self-view	3.31(0.98)	.091	.042	.018	.101	1	
Attitude towards teleworking	3.90(0.82)	-.023*	.062	.043**	.022**	.012*	1

Note: \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, ns: insignificant at the 0.05 level.



&lt;Table 2&gt; Analysis Results

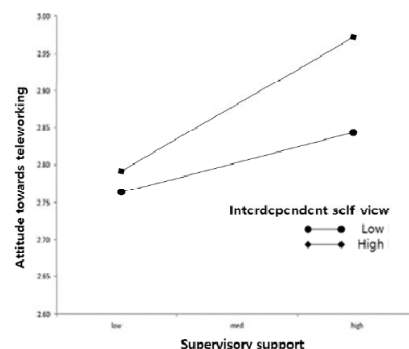
	Attitude Towards Teleworking		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Sex	-.021*	-.019*	-.015*
Age	-.016*	-.014*	-.010*
Educational level	.024	.023	.019
Supervisory support		.041**	.032**
Work colleague support		.051**	.040**
Interdependent self-view			.013**
Supervisory support * Interdependent self-view			.091*
Work colleague support * Interdependent self-view			.020
Adj. $R^2$	.119	.161	.181
$F$	4.861**	9.982**	12.421**

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , ns: insignificant at the 0.05 level.

and attitude towards teleworking, model 2 in <Table 2> shows that all work-related support factors have statistical significance with attitude towards teleworking. Supervisory support is positively related to attitude towards teleworking ( $\beta = .041$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and work colleague support has a positive relationship with attitude towards teleworking ( $\beta = .051$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Therefore, hypotheses 1 and 2 are supported.

Lastly, the model 3, consisting of moderators, shows the interactions work-related support factors and interdependent self-view on attitude towards teleworking. Interdependent self-view was found to positively affect the relationship between supervisory support and attitude towards teleworking ( $\beta = .013$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Interdependent self-view was found to have no significance on the relationship between work colleague support and attitude towards teleworking. Based on

these results, when participants in teleworking have a higher interdependent self-view, supervisory support has a stronger impact on their attitude towards teleworking, which is expected in H3 (see <Figure 1>).



&lt;Figure 1&gt; Interaction Effect

## V. Conclusion

### 5.1. Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the relationships between work-related support factors and attitude towards teleworking and explore the moderating effect of self-identity on that relationship. The results show that the more supervisory support or work colleague support participants perceive in teleworking, the more favorable their attitude towards teleworking. And in the results, the positive relationship between supervisory support and attitude towards teleworking is stronger for participants in teleworking platforms high rather than low in interdependent self-view. However, interdependent self-view was found to have no significance on the relationship between work colleague support and attitude towards teleworking. This study suggests that people with a high interdependent view can have high trust in those participating in the teleworking platform. Based on this suggestion, this study anticipates that these people can enhance participants' behavior during the teleworking process. Therefore, the results show that the higher the level of interdependent self-view, the more favorable attitude towards teleworking participants have because they think their supervisors will participate in teleworking as they consider supervisory support important.

This study interprets the analysis results as reflecting the characteristics of the information technology field. The job of workers in the field of information technology is characterized by being independently performed under the direction and control of their superiors in relation to their work. Thus, the more interdependent they are, the more they need the support of their superiors in a teleworking environment. On the other hand, given the nature of information

technology work in the teleworking environment, it is natural that they need the support of their colleagues, but do not show interdependence.

### 5.2. Research Contributions and Practical Implications

For research contribution, this study is the first to examine the integral model of work-related support factors of attitude towards teleworking in the perspective of COR theory. IT personnel represent a dynamic workforce in a new and high-growth industry of the future. We regard the episodic approach of COR as highly suitable for this research because COVID-19 is an ongoing pandemic that unfolds bit by bit. Organizations revise their advisories and practices daily to deal with the frequent turns of events. Based on COR theory, this study shows that people who participate in teleworking share the philosophy related to teleworking, unlike general off-line working.

Second, this study is the first one to investigate the moderating effect of self-identity in teleworking process. Especially, this study shows that those who participate in the teleworking process think that supervisory support is possible through trusting their supervisor. Therefore, this study extends the scope of the teleworking study by suggesting the factors of the moderating effect on the relationship between work-related support factors and attitude towards teleworking.

For practical implications, first, the results of this study show that work colleague support is important to enhance teleworking, but also supervisory support is important. Therefore, teleworking platform managers need to make the participants in teleworking perceive that they can perceive work not only colleague support but also supervisory support. For example, it would be a good idea to disclose in real-time about

the performance of the teleworking platform (increase in participants, increase in communication with supervisor and work colleague, expansion of function handled, etc.). Second, the results of this study show that the self-identity of the participants enhances the impact of supervisory support on teleworking participation but does not affect the impact of work colleague support on teleworking participation. Therefore, teleworking platform managers need to be aware of their propensity through working records of participants. For example, participants with higher interdependent self-view trust their supervisor, so requesting supervisory confirmation in the teleworking process will not be necessary.

### 5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

By this research results, the present study could have several insights into the work-related supports for participants in teleworking. However, it should

also acknowledge the following limitations in this research. First, the present study collected the responses from IT professionals in South Korea. There may exist some nation cultural issues in the research context. Future studies should re-test this in other countries to assure this results' reliability. Second, as the variables were all measured simultaneously, it cannot be sure that their relationships are constant. Although the survey questions occurred in reverse order of the analysis model to prevent additional issues, causal relationships between variables are possible. Therefore, future studies need to consider longitudinal studies. Finally, this study uses work-related support and explores self-identity as a moderator. However, considering the characteristics of teleworking, future studies may find other factors. For example, perceived advantages of disadvantages of teleworking may be considered for enjoyment. In addition, the social distance felt by the platform participants can be considered the control factor.

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◆ About the Authors ◆

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**Youngkeun Choi**

Youngkeun Choi is an associate professor in the School of Management at Sangmyung University, Seoul Korea. Before joining Sangmyung University, he was working at Samsung corporation as a business developer, Atinum Investment and Neoplux as a venture capitalist, and POSCO research institute as a business data scientist.

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