

Article

# Determinants of Occupational Loyalty among Guangdong University teachers: Moral Leadership, Work Autonomy, Psychological Contract, and Work Stress

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## Abstract

Within the framework of the "Double First-Class" initiative and ongoing reforms in higher education evaluation, the occupational loyalty of university faculty is closely linked to educational quality and the development of higher education. To investigate the mechanisms underlying this relationship, this study, grounded in the dual theories of Psychological Contract and stress interaction, employs a sample of 415 university instructors from Guangdong, China. It constructs an "antecedent-mediator-moderator-outcome" model and empirically examines the effects of Moral Leadership and work autonomy, the mediating role of Psychological Contracts, and the moderating effect of work-related stress. The results demonstrate that both Moral Leadership and work autonomy positively influence Psychological Contracts and occupational loyalty among university educators; the Psychological Contract partially mediates the relationships between these variables and occupational loyalty; and work-related stress negatively moderates the pathways from "Moral Leadership" to "Psychological Contract" and from "work autonomy" to "Psychological Contract," with more pronounced positive effects of Moral Leadership and work autonomy under conditions of low stress. This research enhances the theoretical understanding of occupational loyalty by integrating these two theoretical frameworks. It also provides practical guidance for higher education institutions to foster Moral Leadership, optimize the allocation of work autonomy, sustain Psychological Contracts, and implement targeted stress management strategies. The findings carry significant implications for advancing university faculty development.

Academic Editor: Aweewan Panyagometh

Received: April 9, 2026

Revised: May 27, 2026

Accepted: June 29, 2026

Published: July 1, 2026

**Keywords:** University Teachers;

Occupational Loyalty;

Moral Leadership;

Work Autonomy;

Psychological Contract;

Work Stress

## 1. Introduction

In the context of China's "Double First-Class" university initiative and ongoing reform of higher education evaluation, the occupational loyalty of university faculty members remains a vital pillar for maintaining staff stability and enhancing educational quality. Nonetheless, it encounters significant challenges, primarily due to widespread work-related stress and unfulfilled psychological contracts [1,2]. National policies, including China Education Modernization 2035, emphasize cultivating high-caliber, professional, and innovative teaching personnel while reducing non-teaching responsibilities. The achievement of these policy objectives heavily relies on effective organizational leadership and resource support within academic institutions. In this framework, moral leadership—defined by ethical exemplification, fairness, integrity, and concern for

subordinates—serves an essential function in higher education institutions. It fosters organizational trust, fulfills implicit expectations between universities and faculty members, and alleviates professional pressures [3,4]. However, existing research remains limited: most studies focus on isolated variables, lack comprehensive cross-theoretical frameworks, and rarely examine the synergistic effects of moral leadership and work autonomy on occupational loyalty through psychological contracts, particularly considering the moderating role of work stress [5,6]. To address this gap, the present study investigates university educators in Guangdong Province, a representative example of higher education reform in China characterized by diverse institutional types and typical teaching-research pressures. The study is grounded in psychological contract theory and stress interaction theory [7,8]. It emphasizes the pathway of "Moral Leadership, Work Autonomy → Psychological Contract → Occupational Loyalty of University Teachers." The objectives include examining the direct effects of moral leadership and work autonomy on teachers' occupational loyalty, clarifying the mediating role of psychological contracts, validating the negative moderating effect of work stress, and developing an integrated influence model to yield both theoretical insights and practical recommendations for optimizing university faculty management. Theoretically, this research integrates two classical theories to deepen the understanding of teachers' occupational loyalty and to broaden the application of moral leadership within higher education. Empirically, it provides targeted evidence from Guangdong's higher education landscape. Practically, it offers strategic operational guidance for university administrators to enhance moral leadership, ensure work autonomy, maintain psychological contracts, and reduce work-related stress. The study involves university teachers across various institutions in Guangdong with different teaching experiences and titles, analyzing the mechanisms among four core variables while not addressing cross-regional comparisons, external confounds, or non-professional dimensions. This approach balances academic innovation with practical relevance.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theory of Psychological Contract

The theory of the Psychological Contract was initially conceptualized and systematically developed by Schein in the 1970s, emphasizing implicit, reciprocal expectations between organizations and their members beyond formal employment agreements [7]. According to [9,10], the Psychological Contract embodies unwritten obligations of trust, fairness, and mutual commitment that significantly influence employees' attitudes and behaviors at work. In the context of higher education, the Psychological Contract between university faculty and institutions encompasses bilateral expectations: faculty anticipate career development, equitable evaluation, academic support, and job security, whereas institutions expect high-quality teaching, research productivity, and professional responsibility [11,12]. Empirical research has demonstrated that fulfillment of Psychological Contracts enhances organizational commitment and occupational loyalty, while breaches of such contracts may result in burnout, disengagement, and increased turnover intentions [2,5,13]. In this investigation, the Psychological Contract functions as a mediating variable: Moral Leadership and Work Autonomy facilitate the fulfillment of teachers' implicit expectations, thereby strengthening the Psychological Contract and further fostering Occupational Loyalty, thus providing a robust theoretical basis for the proposed mediating hypotheses.

## 2.2 Stress Interaction Theory

Stress Interaction Theory was established by Lazarus and Folkman in 1984, characterizing stress as a dynamic cognitive process involving the interaction between individuals and their environments, rather than as a static stimulus [8]. Central to this theory is cognitive appraisal: individuals evaluate external demands alongside their own coping resources, which subsequently influence the magnitude of stress responses [1]. Educators frequently face stressors such as substantial teaching and research workloads, performance pressures, and job insecurity [11]. Elevated stress levels can deplete cognitive resources and reduce responsiveness to organizational support [4,14]. Empirical evidence further suggests that work-related stress diminishes the positive effects of leadership and job autonomy [15,16]. Consequently, under high stress, the beneficial effects of Moral Leadership and Work Autonomy on Psychological Contracts tend to weaken, whereas these effects are more pronounced under low stress. This rationale supports the moderating hypotheses proposed in this study.

## 2.3 Review of Relevant Literature

In scholarly investigations of organizational behavior, the interrelationships among the Psychological Contract, Work Stress, and employee attitudes and behaviors have historically represented significant domains of inquiry. Of particular importance among organizational and job-related factors are Moral Leadership and Work Autonomy, as they can influence perceptions of the Psychological Contract and moderate the impact of Work Stress. Recognizing that occupational loyalty among university faculty is crucial for sustaining teaching quality and promoting talent development, it is imperative to elucidate how these variables collectively influence occupational loyalty.

Internationally, scholars have examined the individual effects of Moral Leadership, Work Autonomy, Psychological Contract, and Work Stress. For instance, [2] identified a detrimental cycle between Work Stress and Psychological Contract breach and underscored the buffering role of job resources. [17] found that Moral Leadership enhances organizational commitment by increasing job satisfaction and work engagement. [6] observed that Work Autonomy markedly strengthens teachers' professional commitment. Additionally, [18] identified Psychological Contract fulfillment as a significant predictor of employee loyalty.

In China, scholarly research has concentrated on localized mechanisms among university faculty. [15] demonstrated that Work Autonomy mitigates the adverse effects of Work Stress on burnout. [4] provided evidence that ethical (moral) leadership reduces pressure and enhances job satisfaction in high-stress environments. Further research in higher education suggests that Moral Leadership, equitable decision-making, and compassionate management fortify teachers' professional identity and organizational loyalty [5]. Additionally, Work Autonomy diminishes Work Stress and elevates job satisfaction, although excessive administrative oversight can frequently constrain its benefits. Empirical findings also indicate that Work Stress negatively influences Occupational Loyalty, whereas organizational support and fulfillment of Psychological Contracts can alleviate these adverse outcomes [13,16]. While some studies have explored the mediating role of the Psychological Contract or the moderating influence of Moral Leadership, an integrated multi-variable framework remains to be developed.

Consequently, three primary research gaps are identified. Firstly, the majority of studies concentrate on individual variables rather than on the interaction mechanisms between the Psychological Contract and Work Stress. Secondly, Moral Leadership and Work Autonomy are frequently examined independently, with their combined effects seldom explored. Thirdly, few investigations incorporate the dual theoretical framework of Psychological Contract and stress interaction to elucidate the development of loyalty among university faculty. To address these gaps, this study amalgamates Psychological

Contract theory and stress interaction theory to establish a comprehensive model that elucidates how Moral Leadership and Work Autonomy affect Occupational Loyalty.

#### 2.4 Definition of Core Variables

Occupational loyalty pertains to the persistent attitudes and behavioral tendencies demonstrated by university educators towards their teaching profession and employing institution [18]. It encompasses the emotional, behavioral, and normative dimensions of loyalty, reflecting a dual identification with both the professional domain and the organization [19,20] [3,21].

Moral leadership constitutes a leadership paradigm in which leaders influence others by exemplifying fairness, integrity, self-discipline, and adherence to ethical principles [3,21]. It encompasses two fundamental elements: functioning as an ethical role model and applying equitable, supportive management methods [4,20].

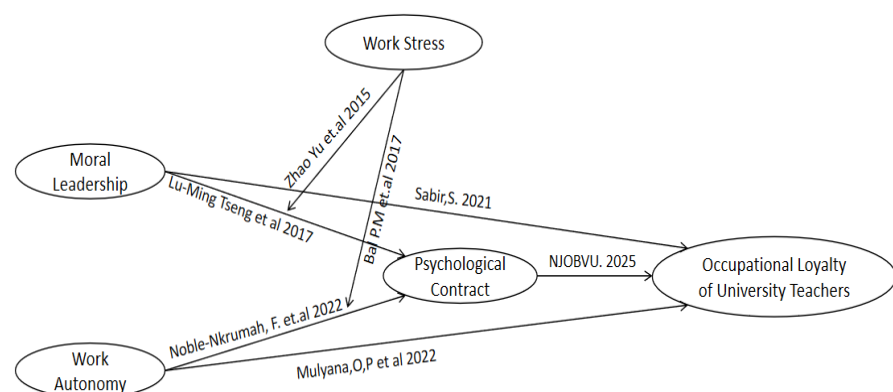
Work autonomy refers to the degree of decision-making autonomy granted to educators regarding teaching methods, research activities, instructional configurations, and work schedules [6,22]. It serves as a crucial occupational resource that underpins teachers' requirements for academic independence and professional development.

The Psychological Contract pertains to the implicit mutual expectations and perceptions held between educators and their respective universities, extending beyond explicit contractual agreements [9,10]. It includes both transactional and relational dimensions, with the former emphasizing material exchanges and the latter emphasizing ongoing emotional support [2,12].

Work-related stress pertains to the psychological strain and discomfort experienced by educators when job demands exceed their capacity to cope [1,8]. It primarily originates from substantial teaching and research commitments, insufficient resources, ambiguous evaluation criteria, and job insecurity [11,14].

#### 2.5 Theoretical Framework Diagram

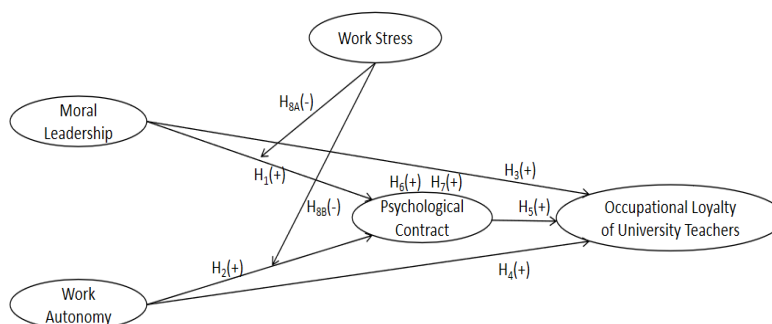
This research employs an integrated methodological approach to examine the relationship between Psychological Contract theory and Stress Interaction Theory. It investigates Moral Leadership and Work Autonomy as antecedents, university teachers' Occupational Loyalty as the outcome, the Psychological Contract as a mediating variable, and Work Stress as a moderating factor, thereby constructing a comprehensive model within the "antecedent-mediator-moderator-outcome" framework. The objective is to elucidate the logical processes and contextual limitations among these variables.



**Figure 1.** Theoretical Framework Diagram

## 2.6 Conceptual Framework Diagram

The conceptual framework further refines the hypothesized pathways in line with the theoretical model and delineates the dimensions for empirical validation. By synthesizing a literature review with theoretical deduction, this study constructs a conceptual framework that elucidates the intricate relationships and mechanisms among Moral Leadership, Work Autonomy, the Psychological Contract, Work Stress, and university teachers' Occupational Loyalty, thereby establishing a foundation for future research hypotheses.



**Figure 2.** Conceptual Framework Diagram

## 2.7 Research Hypotheses

Building on the theoretical analysis and literature review presented earlier, this study proposes the following research hypotheses to examine the relationships among moral leadership, work autonomy, psychological contracts, occupational loyalty, and work stress among university teachers. These hypotheses aim to assess both direct effects and mediating or moderating mechanisms, as summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Summary Table of Hypotheses

| Hypotheses      | Content of the research hypothesis                                                                                             |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| H <sub>1</sub>  | Moral leadership has a significant positive impact on the psychological contract.                                              |
| H <sub>2</sub>  | Work autonomy has a significant positive impact on the psychological contract.                                                 |
| H <sub>3</sub>  | Moral leadership has a significant positive impact on university teachers' occupational loyalty.                               |
| H <sub>4</sub>  | Work autonomy has a significant positive impact on university teachers' occupational loyalty.                                  |
| H <sub>5</sub>  | Psychological contract has a significant positive impact on university teachers' occupational loyalty.                         |
| H <sub>6</sub>  | The psychological contract mediates the relationship between moral leadership and university teachers' occupational loyalty.   |
| H <sub>7</sub>  | The psychological contract mediates the relationship between work autonomy and occupational loyalty among university teachers. |
| H <sub>8A</sub> | Work stress exerts an adverse moderating effect on the "moral leadership → psychological contract" path.                       |
| H <sub>8B</sub> | Work stress exerts an adverse moderating effect on the "work autonomy → psychological contract" path.                          |

### 3. Materials and Methods

This research employs a standardized quantitative approach, specifically "theoretical construction - empirical testing," to analyze how moral leadership and work autonomy influence university educators' occupational loyalty. It also seeks to clarify the mediating role of the psychological contract and the moderating effect of work stress.

#### 3.1 Research Object

This study uses a cross-sectional empirical design, focusing on full-time university educators in Guangdong Province, China. The research cohort includes educators from various types of higher education institutions, including both public and private undergraduate and vocational colleges. The sample was selected through snowball sampling to enhance representativeness. The final valid sample comprises 415 educators with diverse backgrounds, including variations in teaching experience, professional titles, university types, and educational backgrounds, thereby enabling the findings to accurately reflect the overall situation of university educators in Guangdong.

#### 3.2 Research Tools

A self-administered structured questionnaire was employed as the official measurement instrument. All items were adapted from established, internationally recognized scales to ensure both reliability and validity.

Moral Leadership was assessed with four items adapted from [20,21]. Work Autonomy was evaluated with five items adapted from [6,22]. The Psychological Contract was measured with four items from [10]. Work Stress was gauged with five items from [11] and [1]. Occupational Loyalty was measured with four items from [19] and [20].

All items were evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Prior to the formal survey, three experts assessed content validity, and a pilot study was conducted. The overall Cronbach's alpha was 0.835, and all sub-dimensions exhibited satisfactory reliability, each exceeding 0.80.

#### 3.3 Data Collection

Formal data collection was conducted online over three weeks using anonymous questionnaires. Snowball sampling was employed: initial respondents were encouraged to share the questionnaire with peers at other universities to reduce sample homogeneity. A total of 460 questionnaires were distributed, and 442 were returned. After excluding responses with inadequate response times, straight-lined answers, and incomplete data, 415 valid questionnaires remained, yielding an effective response rate of 93.9%.

#### 3.4 Data Analysis Methods

SPSS 26.0 and Process 3.3 are used to empirically evaluate research hypotheses and theoretical frameworks using a variety of methods, including reliability and validity assessments, correlation analyses, linear regression, bootstrapped mediation tests, and moderation analyses. This methodology guarantees the scientific rigor and validity of the research findings.

### 4. Results and Discussion

This study examines a sample of 415 active university educators in Guangdong Province to assess the determinants of key variables empirically. It incorporates research hypotheses within theoretical frameworks to systematically interpret the findings and offer support and insights for improving occupational loyalty among university faculty.

#### 4.1 Sample Basic Information and Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Out of the 415 valid samples collected in this survey, demographic data—such as gender, teaching experience, professional title, university type, and highest academic qualification—were recorded. The distribution appears appropriate, and the sample appears representative, as demonstrated in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Basic Information Survey Results

| Name                          | Options                                            | Frequency* | Percentage% |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Gender                        | Male                                               | 152        | 36.627      |
|                               | Female                                             | 263        | 63.373      |
| Teaching Experience           | 3 years or less                                    | 116        | 27.952      |
|                               | 4-10 years                                         | 163        | 39.277      |
|                               | 11-20 years                                        | 106        | 25.542      |
|                               | 20 years or more                                   | 30         | 7.229       |
|                               | None                                               | 64         | 15.422      |
| Professional Title            | Teaching Assistant                                 | 110        | 26.506      |
|                               | Lecturer                                           | 174        | 41.928      |
|                               | Associate Professor                                | 58         | 13.976      |
|                               | Professor                                          | 9          | 2.169       |
| Type of Affiliated University | Public undergraduate institutions                  | 125        | 30.12       |
|                               | Private undergraduate institutions                 | 64         | 15.422      |
|                               | Public higher vocational and specialized colleges  | 114        | 27.47       |
|                               | Private higher vocational and specialized colleges | 112        | 26.988      |
|                               | Junior college and below                           | 8          | 1.928       |
| Academic Degree               | Bachelor's degree                                  | 124        | 29.88       |
|                               | Master's degree                                    | 199        | 47.952      |
|                               | Doctoral degree                                    | 84         | 20.241      |

The descriptive statistics demonstrate that the means of all primary variables range from 2.70 to 3.52, with occupational loyalty and moral leadership registering the highest means (3.52 each). Conversely, work stress exhibits the lowest mean (2.70). All mean values exceed the midpoint of the scale (3 points). The standard deviations range from 0.896 to 0.967. Furthermore, the absolute values of skewness and kurtosis are below 1, indicating that the data are approximately normally distributed and therefore meet the prerequisites for subsequent statistical analysis. Detailed data are provided in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics Results

| Variable name          | Minimum | Maximum | Mean  | Standard Deviation | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|------------------------|---------|---------|-------|--------------------|----------|----------|
| Moral leadership       | 1.000   | 5.000   | 3.519 | 0.896              | -0.456   | -0.506   |
| Work autonomy          | 1.000   | 5.000   | 3.475 | 0.916              | -0.523   | -0.539   |
| Psychological contract | 1.000   | 5.000   | 3.377 | 0.952              | -0.324   | -0.694   |

| Variable name                            | Minimum | Maximum | Mean  | Standard Deviation | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|------------------------------------------|---------|---------|-------|--------------------|----------|----------|
| work stress                              | 1.000   | 5.000   | 2.700 | 0.939              | 0.228    | -0.917   |
| occupational loyalty of college teachers | 1.000   | 5.000   | 3.520 | 0.967              | -0.333   | -0.852   |

#### 4.2 Reliability and Validity Test Results

The results of the reliability testing demonstrate that the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients for all primary variables are at least 0.86, with a composite Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.835. The corrected item-total correlation (CITC) values for all items surpass 0.4, signifying excellent reliability and robust internal consistency. Comprehensive data are provided in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Reliability Test

| Dimension Name                | Name                                                                                                                                                                 | Corrected Item-Total Correlation (CITC) | Alpha Co-efficient with Item Deleted | Cronbach's Alpha Co-efficient | Overall Cronbach's Alpha Co-efficient |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Moral Leadership <sup>1</sup> | Leaders can become positive role models for their teams through self-control, self-discipline, and acts of integrity.                                                | 0.696                                   | 0.828                                | 0.861                         | 0.835                                 |
|                               | Leaders can understand the implications of educational policies and ensure that all teaching and administrative staff receive fair treatment in resource allocation. | 0.708                                   | 0.823                                |                               |                                       |
|                               | Leaders will clearly communicate the school's code of ethics and require all members (including leaders) to adhere strictly to it.                                   | 0.702                                   | 0.825                                |                               |                                       |
|                               | When making decisions, leaders consider both student and staff needs simultaneously and promote collaboration between the two groups.                                | 0.724                                   | 0.816                                |                               |                                       |
| Work Autonomy <sup>2</sup>    | I can independently select teaching styles appropriate to students' characteristics (e.g., lecture-based, cooperative group work).                                   | 0.753                                   | 0.850                                | 0.883                         |                                       |

<sup>1</sup> The items of moral leadership are developed based on the 'Eight Principles of Moral Leadership in Education' proposed by George Marshall (Lynch, 2015; cited in Sabir, 2021). These items have been validated by Sabir (2021) in educational research and possess solid theoretical support and scenario adaptability.

<sup>2</sup> The items of work autonomy are designed based on De Spiegelaere et al.'s (2014) theoretical framework of work autonomy, refined in the context of teaching and research scenarios of university teachers, and have been widely validated in related studies on professional autonomy.

| Dimension Name                      | Name                                                                                                                                                                      | Corrected<br>Item-Total<br>Correlation<br>(CITC) | Alpha Co-<br>efficient<br>with Item<br>Deleted | Cronbach's<br>Alpha Co-<br>efficient | Overall<br>Cronbach's<br>Alpha Co-<br>efficient |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Psychological Contract <sup>3</sup> | I can independently determine the specific processes and criteria for student evaluation (e.g., the proportion of regular performance grades and the assessment formats). | 0.729                                            | 0.856                                          | 0.862                                |                                                 |
|                                     | I can independently plan the sequence of teaching activities (e.g., explaining key points first, then conducting practical tasks).                                        | 0.755                                            | 0.850                                          |                                      |                                                 |
|                                     | I can independently adjust the scheduling of lesson preparation and homework grading (such as flexibly choosing to work from home or at school).                          | 0.706                                            | 0.861                                          |                                      |                                                 |
|                                     | I can independently select the venue for certain teaching activities (e.g., laboratories and campus practice areas).                                                      | 0.654                                            | 0.873                                          |                                      |                                                 |
|                                     | My organization has fulfilled its promised salary and benefits.                                                                                                           | 0.688                                            | 0.832                                          |                                      |                                                 |
|                                     | My organization has provided me with the training opportunities required for my professional development.                                                                 | 0.731                                            | 0.814                                          |                                      |                                                 |
|                                     | My organization takes my opinions and needs into account when making decisions.                                                                                           | 0.695                                            | 0.830                                          |                                      |                                                 |
|                                     | I believe the organization will ensure my long-term job stability.                                                                                                        | 0.721                                            | 0.819                                          |                                      |                                                 |
| Work stress <sup>4</sup>            | The school's insufficient research funding and equipment support have placed significant pressure on conducting academic research.                                        | 0.724                                            | 0.856                                          | 0.883                                |                                                 |

<sup>3</sup> The items of the psychological contract were derived from the core items of the Psychological Contract Fulfillment Scale developed by 10. Robinson, S.L.; Wolfe Morrison, E. The development of psychological contract breach and violation: a longitudinal study. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* **2000**, 21, 525-546, doi:https://doi.org/10.1002/1099-1379(200008)21:5<525::AID-JOB40>3.0.CO;2-T.. This scale has high reliability and validity in the field of organizational behavior, and its item content is adapted to the characteristics of the contractual relationship between university teachers and school organizations.

<sup>4</sup> The work stress items are based on sources including the Australian national study (National University Stress Study) and empirical research findings by 11. Gillespie, N.; Walsh, M.; Winefield, A.; Dua, J.; Stough, C. Occupational Stress in Universities: Staff Perceptions of the Causes, Consequences and Moderators of Stress. *Work & Stress* **2001**, 15, doi:10.1080/02678370117944. and 23. Winefield, A.H.; Jarrett, R. Occupational Stress in University Staff. *International Journal of Stress Management* **2001**, 8, 285-298, doi:10.1023/A:1017513615819., accurately covering typical work stress scenarios faced by university teachers.

| Dimension Name                                                   | Name                                                                                                                                                                   | Corrected<br>Item-Total<br>Correlation<br>(CITC) | Alpha Co-<br>efficient<br>with Item<br>Deleted | Cronbach's<br>Alpha Co-<br>efficient | Overall<br>Cronbach's<br>Alpha Co-<br>efficient |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Occupational Loyalty<br>of University Teach-<br>ers <sup>5</sup> | I need to undertake numerous teaching tasks, research outputs, and other duties simultaneously, resulting in excessive work-related stress.                            | 0.723                                            | 0.856                                          | 0.876                                |                                                 |
|                                                                  | Opaque decision-making processes and cumbersome operational procedures within the school management team create additional work stress for individual faculty members. | 0.749                                            | 0.850                                          |                                      |                                                 |
|                                                                  | My position lacks tenure security, and I am worried about not being able to renew the contract upon its expiration, which has caused persistent stress.                | 0.673                                            | 0.868                                          |                                      |                                                 |
|                                                                  | My academic contributions (teaching achievements and research outputs) have not been adequately recognized or fairly rewarded, resulting in increased work stress.     | 0.721                                            | 0.857                                          |                                      |                                                 |
|                                                                  | I will proactively enhance my professional knowledge and teaching skills.                                                                                              | 0.740                                            | 0.838                                          |                                      |                                                 |
|                                                                  | I take pride in my profession as a teacher.                                                                                                                            | 0.736                                            | 0.840                                          |                                      |                                                 |
|                                                                  | Even if there are other jobs with comparable salaries, I would still choose to continue teaching.                                                                      | 0.710                                            | 0.850                                          |                                      |                                                 |
|                                                                  | I believe the teaching profession is of significant value to society.                                                                                                  | 0.747                                            | 0.836                                          |                                      |                                                 |

The adequacy of the measurement model was deemed acceptable, evidenced by a KMO value of 0.900 and Bartlett's test p-value of less than 0.001, thereby confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis. Exploratory factor analysis employing principal component analysis identified five distinct factors, accounting for 70.583% of the total variance. All item factor loadings exceeded 0.7, indicating robust structural validity of the questionnaire. Relevant data are presented in Tables 4.4-4.6.

<sup>5</sup> The items of the questionnaire on the occupational loyalty of college teachers are derived from the 'commitment to profession' dimension of the Teacher Commitment Scale developed by 19. Thien, L.M.; Razak, N.A.; Ramayah, T. Validating Teacher Commitment Scale Using a Malaysian Sample. *Sage Journals* **2014**, 4, 1–9, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014536744>. This dimension was validated in educational research by 20.

Sabir, S. A study on Ethical leadership perceptions and its impact on teachers commitment in Pakistan. *International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management* **2021**, 9, 28-53, doi:10.17583/ijelm.2020.4525. and its connotation is highly consistent with 'occupational loyalty of college teachers'.

**Table 5.** KMO and Bartlett's Test

| KMO and Bartlett's Test    |                               |          |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------|
| Bartlett's Sphericity Test | KMO Sampling Adequacy Measure | 0.900    |
|                            | Approximate Chi-square        | 5004.658 |
|                            | Degrees of Freedom            | 231.000  |
|                            | Significance                  | 0.000    |

**Table 6.** Variance Explained Rate Table

| Factor Number | Characteristic root* |                                |                         | Variance explained rate before rotation |                                |                         | Variance explained rate after rotation |                                |                         |
|---------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
|               | Total                | Variance Explained Percentage% | Cumulative Percentage%* | Total                                   | Variance Explained Percentage% | Cumulative Percentage%* | Total                                  | Variance Explained Percentage% | Cumulative Percentage%* |
| 1             | 7.339                | 33.359                         | 33.359                  | 7.339                                   | 33.359                         | 33.359                  | 3.470                                  | 15.771                         | 15.771                  |
| 2             | 3.075                | 13.976                         | 47.335                  | 3.075                                   | 13.976                         | 47.335                  | 3.445                                  | 15.658                         | 31.429                  |
| 3             | 1.961                | 8.914                          | 56.249                  | 1.961                                   | 8.914                          | 56.249                  | 2.971                                  | 13.505                         | 44.935                  |
| 4             | 1.683                | 7.648                          | 63.897                  | 1.683                                   | 7.648                          | 63.897                  | 2.824                                  | 12.837                         | 57.772                  |
| 5             | 1.471                | 6.686                          | 70.583                  | 1.471                                   | 6.686                          | 70.583                  | 2.819                                  | 12.812                         | 70.583                  |
| 6             | 0.592                | 2.691                          | 73.274                  |                                         |                                |                         |                                        |                                |                         |
| 7             | 0.525                | 2.386                          | 75.661                  |                                         |                                |                         |                                        |                                |                         |
| 8             | 0.490                | 2.230                          | 77.890                  |                                         |                                |                         |                                        |                                |                         |
| 9             | 0.472                | 2.147                          | 80.037                  |                                         |                                |                         |                                        |                                |                         |
| 10            | 0.458                | 2.082                          | 82.120                  |                                         |                                |                         |                                        |                                |                         |
| 11            | 0.430                | 1.954                          | 84.073                  |                                         |                                |                         |                                        |                                |                         |
| 12            | 0.407                | 1.848                          | 85.921                  |                                         |                                |                         |                                        |                                |                         |
| 13            | 0.395                | 1.794                          | 87.715                  |                                         |                                |                         |                                        |                                |                         |
| 14            | 0.363                | 1.652                          | 89.367                  |                                         |                                |                         |                                        |                                |                         |
| 15            | 0.354                | 1.607                          | 90.974                  |                                         |                                |                         |                                        |                                |                         |
| 16            | 0.342                | 1.553                          | 92.527                  |                                         |                                |                         |                                        |                                |                         |
| 17            | 0.324                | 1.473                          | 94.000                  |                                         |                                |                         |                                        |                                |                         |
| 18            | 0.309                | 1.402                          | 95.403                  |                                         |                                |                         |                                        |                                |                         |
| 19            | 0.281                | 1.279                          | 96.682                  |                                         |                                |                         |                                        |                                |                         |
| 20            | 0.258                | 1.173                          | 97.855                  |                                         |                                |                         |                                        |                                |                         |
| 21            | 0.249                | 1.133                          | 98.987                  |                                         |                                |                         |                                        |                                |                         |
| 22            | 0.223                | 1.013                          | 100.000                 |                                         |                                |                         |                                        |                                |                         |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

**Table 7.** Rotated Factor Loading Coefficient Table

| Name | Factor Loading Coefficient |              |              |              |              | Communal-<br>ity (Common<br>Factor Vari-<br>ance) |
|------|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------------------------------------|
|      | Factor 1                   | Factor 2     | Factor 3     | Factor 4     | Factor 5     |                                                   |
| A1   |                            |              |              | <b>0.758</b> |              | 0.687                                             |
| A2   |                            |              |              | <b>0.792</b> |              | 0.715                                             |
| A3   |                            |              |              | <b>0.778</b> |              | 0.709                                             |
| A4   |                            |              |              | <b>0.800</b> |              | 0.736                                             |
| B1   |                            | <b>0.803</b> |              |              |              | 0.733                                             |
| B2   |                            | <b>0.805</b> |              |              |              | 0.704                                             |
| B3   |                            | <b>0.791</b> |              |              |              | 0.733                                             |
| B4   |                            | <b>0.769</b> |              |              |              | 0.663                                             |
| B5   |                            | <b>0.752</b> |              |              |              | 0.631                                             |
| C1   |                            |              |              |              | <b>0.772</b> | 0.686                                             |
| C2   |                            |              |              |              | <b>0.792</b> | 0.737                                             |
| C3   |                            |              |              |              | <b>0.770</b> | 0.696                                             |
| C4   |                            |              |              |              | <b>0.782</b> | 0.728                                             |
| D1   | <b>0.829</b>               |              |              |              |              | 0.695                                             |
| D2   | <b>0.831</b>               |              |              |              |              | 0.704                                             |
| D3   | <b>0.821</b>               |              |              |              |              | 0.726                                             |
| D4   | <b>0.782</b>               |              |              |              |              | 0.627                                             |
| D5   | <b>0.803</b>               |              |              |              |              | 0.686                                             |
| E1   |                            |              | <b>0.816</b> |              |              | 0.746                                             |
| E2   |                            |              | <b>0.809</b> |              |              | 0.729                                             |
| E3   |                            |              | <b>0.786</b> |              |              | 0.705                                             |
| E4   |                            |              | <b>0.829</b> |              |              | 0.754                                             |

Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation method: Kaiser Normalization Maximum Variance Method.

Note: The numbers in the table indicate that the absolute value of the load factor is greater than 0.4

#### 4.3 Results of Correlation Analysis

The Pearson correlation analysis indicates that moral leadership, work autonomy, psychological contract, and occupational loyalty are all positively and significantly correlated ( $p < 0.001$ ). Conversely, work stress exhibits a significant negative correlation with these four variables ( $p < 0.01$ ). The absolute values of the correlation coefficients among the variables do not exceed 0.8, suggesting the absence of severe multicollinearity and providing a robust foundation for subsequent regression analyses and related procedures. The detailed results are presented below (Table 8).

**Table 8.** Pearson Correlation Analysis

|                                             |                     | Moral Leadership | Work Autonomy | Psychological Contract | Work Stress | Occupational loyalty of university teachers |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------|------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Moral Leadership                            | Pearson Correlation | 1                |               |                        |             |                                             |
|                                             | Sig. (Two-tailed)   |                  |               |                        |             |                                             |
| Work Autonomy                               | Pearson Correlation | 0.462***         | 1             |                        |             |                                             |
|                                             | Sig. (Two-tailed)   | 0.000            |               |                        |             |                                             |
| Psychological Contract                      | Pearson Correlation | 0.471***         | 0.416***      | 1                      |             |                                             |
|                                             | Sig. (Two-tailed)   | 0.000            | 0.000         |                        |             |                                             |
| Work Stress                                 | Pearson Correlation | -0.203***        | -0.185***     | -0.286***              | 1           |                                             |
|                                             | Sig. (Two-tailed)   | 0.000            | 0.000         | 0.000                  |             |                                             |
| Occupational loyalty of university teachers | Pearson Correlation | 0.406***         | 0.394***      | 0.437***               | -0.158**    | 1                                           |
|                                             | Sig. (Two-tailed)   | 0.000            | 0.000         | 0.000                  | 0.001       |                                             |

\*\*\* significant correlation at the 0.001 level (two-tailed).

\*\* Significant correlation at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

\* Significant correlation at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

**Table 9.** Results of Linear Regression Analysis on the Impact of Moral Leadership and Work Autonomy on Psychological Contract

|                  | Unstandardized Coefficients |                | Standardized Coefficients | t     | p     | VIF   | R <sup>2</sup> | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> | F                       |
|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|-------|-------|-------|----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
|                  | B                           | Standard Error | Beta                      |       |       |       |                |                         |                         |
| Constant         | 1.144                       | 0.185          |                           | 6.181 | 0.000 |       |                |                         |                         |
| Moral Leadership | 0.376                       | 0.050          | 0.354                     | 7.476 | 0.000 | 1.271 | 0.272          | 0.268                   | F(2,415)=76.825,p=0.000 |
| Work Autonomy    | 0.262                       | 0.049          | 0.252                     | 5.315 | 0.000 | 1.271 |                |                         |                         |

a Dependent variable: Psychological contract

D-W: 1.947

**Table 10.** Results of Linear Regression Analysis on the Impact of Moral Leadership and Work Autonomy on Occupational Loyalty of University Teachers

|                  | Unstandardized Coefficients |                             | Standardized Coefficients | t <sup>a</sup> | p <sup>a</sup> | VIF <sup>a</sup> | R <sup>2a</sup> | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> | F <sup>a</sup>          |
|------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
|                  | B <sup>a</sup>              | Standard Error <sup>a</sup> | Beta <sup>a</sup>         |                |                |                  |                 |                         |                         |
| Constant         | 1.477                       | 0.195                       |                           | 7.583          | 0.000          |                  |                 |                         |                         |
| Moral Leadership | 0.307                       | 0.053                       | 0.285                     | 5.804          | 0.000          | 1.271            | 0.219           | 0.215                   | F(2,415)=57.784,p=0.000 |
| Work Autonomy    | 0.277                       | 0.052                       | 0.262                     | 5.344          | 0.000          | 1.271            |                 |                         |                         |

a Dependent variable: Occupational Loyalty of University Teachers

D-W: 1.806

**Table 11.** Results of Linear Regression Analysis on the Impact of Psychological Contract on Occupational Loyalty of University Teachers

|                        | Unstandardized Coefficients |                             | Standardized Coefficients | t <sup>a</sup> | p <sup>a</sup> | VIF <sup>a</sup> | R <sup>2a</sup> | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> | F <sup>a</sup>          |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
|                        | B <sup>a</sup>              | Standard Error <sup>a</sup> | Beta <sup>a</sup>         |                |                |                  |                 |                         |                         |
| Constant               | 2.021                       | 0.158                       |                           | 12.808         | 0.000          |                  |                 |                         |                         |
| Psychological Contract | 0.444                       | 0.045                       | 0.437                     | 9.867          | 0.000          | 1.000            | 0.191           | 0.189                   | F(1,415)=97.357,p=0.000 |

a Dependent variable: Occupational Loyalty of University Teachers

D-W: 1.623

#### 4.4 Results of Mediation Effect Test

Bootstrapping with 2000 resamples was utilized to assess mediation effects. The results indicated that the psychological contract partially mediates the relationship between moral leadership and university educators' occupational loyalty (total effect = 0.438, direct effect = 0.278, mediation effect = 0.160; with a 95% confidence interval excluding zero), thereby supporting Hypothesis H6. Conversely, the psychological contract partially mediates the relationship between work autonomy and faculty engagement in occupational loyalty among university instructors (total effect = 0.416, direct effect = 0.271, mediation effect = 0.145; 95% confidence interval excluding zero), thus corroborating Hypothesis H7. For comprehensive details, please refer to Tables 12-14. The mediating role of the psychological contract appears moderate, indicating that both moral leadership and work autonomy directly influence occupational loyalty in addition to their indirect effects mediated through the psychological contract.

**Table 12.** The Mediating Role of Psychological Contract between Moral Leadership and Occupational Loyalty of University Teachers

|                           | Model 1(X=>Y)                               |                         |        |       | Model 2(X=>M)          |                          |        |       | Model 3(X=>M=>Y)                            |                         |       |       |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------|-------|------------------------|--------------------------|--------|-------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------|-------|
|                           | Occupational Loyalty of University Teachers |                         |        |       | Psychological Contract |                          |        |       | Occupational Loyalty of University Teachers |                         |       |       |
|                           | B                                           | Stand-ard Er-ror        | t      | p     | B                      | Stand-ard Er-ror         | t      | p     | B                                           | Stand-ard Er-ror        | t     | p     |
| Con-stant                 | 1.979                                       | 0.176                   | 11.231 | 0.000 | 1.618                  | 0.167                    | 9.670  | 0.000 | 1.460                                       | 0.186                   | 7.846 | 0.000 |
| Moral Lead-ership         | 0.438                                       | 0.049                   | 9.032  | 0.000 | 0.500                  | 0.046                    | 10.846 | 0.000 | 0.278                                       | 0.052                   | 5.299 | 0.000 |
| Psy-cho-logical Con-tract |                                             |                         |        |       |                        |                          |        |       | 0.321                                       | 0.049                   | 6.491 | 0.000 |
| R <sup>2</sup>            |                                             |                         | 0.165  |       |                        |                          | 0.222  |       |                                             |                         | 0.242 |       |
| Ad-just R <sup>2</sup>    |                                             |                         | 0.163  |       |                        |                          | 0.220  |       |                                             |                         | 0.239 |       |
| F                         |                                             | F(1,415)=81.570,p=0.000 |        |       |                        | F(1,415)=117.637,p=0.000 |        |       |                                             | F(2,415)=65.910,p=0.000 |       |       |
| DW                        |                                             |                         | 1.726  |       |                        |                          | 1.919  |       |                                             |                         | 1.676 |       |

**Table 13.** The Mediating Role of Psychological Contract Between Work Autonomy and Occupational Loyalty of University Teachers

|                 | Model 1(X=>Y)                               |                  |        |       | Model 2(X=>M)          |                  |        |       | Model 3(X=>M=>Y)                            |                  |       |       |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------|--------|-------|------------------------|------------------|--------|-------|---------------------------------------------|------------------|-------|-------|
|                 | Occupational Loyalty of University Teachers |                  |        |       | Psychological Contract |                  |        |       | Occupational Loyalty of University Teachers |                  |       |       |
|                 | B                                           | Stand-ard Er-ror | t      | p     | B                      | Stand-ard Er-ror | t      | p     | B                                           | Stand-ard Er-ror | t     | p     |
| Con-stant       | 2.076                                       | 0.172            | 12.100 | 0.000 | 1.876                  | 0.167            | 11.238 | 0.000 | 1.446                                       | 0.185            | 7.796 | 0.000 |
| Work Au-ton-omy | 0.416                                       | 0.048            | 8.711  | 0.000 | 0.432                  | 0.046            | 9.290  | 0.000 | 0.271                                       | 0.050            | 5.456 | 0.000 |

|                            | Model 1(X=>Y)                               |                  |   |   | Model 2(X=>M)           |                  |   |   | Model 3(X=>M=>Y)                            |                  |       |       |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------|---|---|-------------------------|------------------|---|---|---------------------------------------------|------------------|-------|-------|
|                            | Occupational Loyalty of University Teachers |                  |   |   | Psychological Contract  |                  |   |   | Occupational Loyalty of University Teachers |                  |       |       |
|                            | B                                           | Stand-ard Er-ror | t | p | B                       | Stand-ard Er-ror | t | p | B                                           | Stand-ard Er-ror | t     | p     |
| Psy-cho-logi-cal Con-tract |                                             |                  |   |   |                         |                  |   |   | 0.335                                       | 0.048            | 7.013 | 0.000 |
| R <sup>2</sup>             |                                             | 0.155            |   |   |                         | 0.173            |   |   |                                             | 0.245            |       |       |
| Ad-just R <sup>2</sup>     |                                             | 0.153            |   |   |                         | 0.171            |   |   |                                             | 0.242            |       |       |
| F                          | F(1,415)=75.878,p=0.000                     |                  |   |   | F(1,415)=86.296,p=0.000 |                  |   |   | F(2,415)=66.955,p=0.000                     |                  |       |       |
| DW                         |                                             | 1.771            |   |   |                         | 1.896            |   |   |                                             | 1.712            |       |       |

**Table 14.** Summary of Mediation Effect Test Results

| Item                                                                                  | c            | a*b                    | c'            | Proportion of Mediation Effect | Proportion of direct effect | a*b       | a*b          | c'          | Test Conclusion       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|--------------|-------------|-----------------------|
|                                                                                       | Total Effect | Mediation Effect Value | Direct Effect |                                |                             | (Boot SE) | (95% BootCI) | (95% CI)    |                       |
| Moral Leadership=>Psychological Contract=>Occupational Loyalty of University Teachers | 0.438***     | 0.160***               | 0.278***      | 0.365                          | 0.635                       | 0.028     | 0.107~0.217  | 0.175~0.381 | Partial intermediates |
| Work Autonomy=>Psychological Contract=>Occupational Loyalty of University Teachers    | 0.416***     | 0.145***               | 0.271***      | 0.349                          | 0.651                       | 0.025     | 0.098~0.198  | 0.173~0.369 | Partial intermediates |

Note: c represents the total effect, a\*b represents the product of a and b, i.e., the mediating effect (indirect effect), and c' represents the direct effect.

(\*p<0.05 \*\*p<0.01 \*\*\*p<0.001)

#### 4.5 Moderating Effect Test Results

The results of the moderating effect test indicate that work stress significantly moderates the relationship between "ethical leadership → psychological contract" ( $\beta = -0.137$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Under low-pressure conditions, the positive influence of ethical leadership on the psychological contract is more pronounced, supporting Hypothesis H8a. Furthermore, work stress exerts a relatively strong negative moderating influence on the relationship between "work autonomy → psychological contract" ( $\beta = -0.170$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Under low-pressure conditions, the positive impact of work autonomy on the psychological contract becomes more evident, confirming Hypothesis H8b. Detailed data are provided in Tables 15-18 and Figures 3 and 4. The negative moderating effect of work stress is more pronounced on the path from work autonomy to the psychological contract, suggesting that university teachers' work autonomy is more strongly influenced by work-related pressure.

**Table 15.** Test Results of the Moderating Effect of Work Stress on the Relationship between Ethical Leadership and Psychological Contract

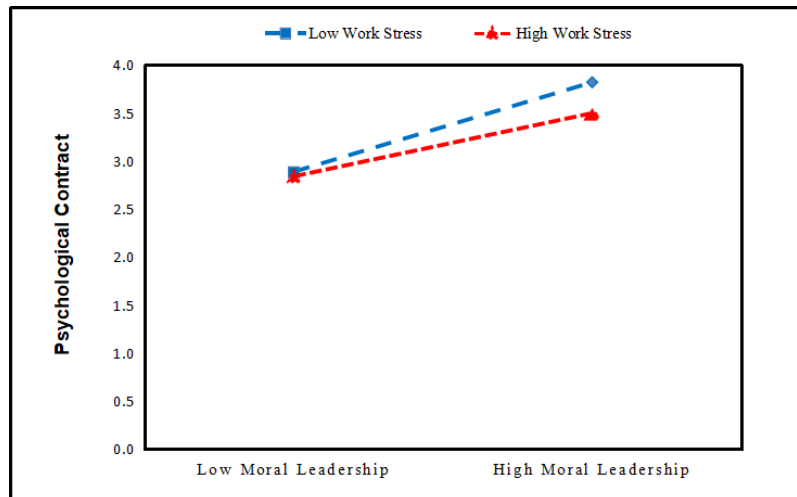
|                              | Psychological Contract |                |           |       |
|------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|-----------|-------|
|                              | Coefficient            | Standard Error | t         | p     |
| Constant                     | 3.353                  | 0.041          | 82.412    | 0.000 |
| Moral Leadership             | 0.466                  | 0.046          | 10.218    | 0.000 |
| Work Stress                  | -0.185                 | 0.044          | -4.223    | 0.000 |
| Work Stress*Moral Leadership | -0.137                 | 0.046          | -2.963    | 0.003 |
| R <sup>2</sup>               |                        |                | 0.275     |       |
| F                            |                        |                | 51.975*** |       |

Note: \*  $P < 0.05$  \*\* $P < 0.01$  \*\*\* $P < 0.001$

**Table 16.** Simple Slope Analysis of the Moderating Effect of Work Stress on the Relationship between Ethical Leadership and Psychological Contract

| Moderating Variable Level | Regression Coefficient | Standard Error | t      | p     | LLCI  | ULCI  |
|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| High Level(+1SD)          | 0.338                  | 0.061          | 5.557  | 0.000 | 0.218 | 0.457 |
| Average Level             | 0.466                  | 0.046          | 10.218 | 0.000 | 0.377 | 0.556 |
| Low Level(-1SD)           | 0.595                  | 0.065          | 9.134  | 0.000 | 0.467 | 0.723 |

Note: LLCI refers to the lower limit of the 95% confidence interval for the estimate, and ULCI refers to the upper limit of the 95% confidence interval for the forecast.



**Figure 3.** Moderating Effect Slope Diagram of Work Stress on the Relationship between Ethical Leadership and Psychological Contract

**Table 17.** Test Results of the Moderating Effect of Work Stress on the Relationship between Work Autonomy and Psychological Contract

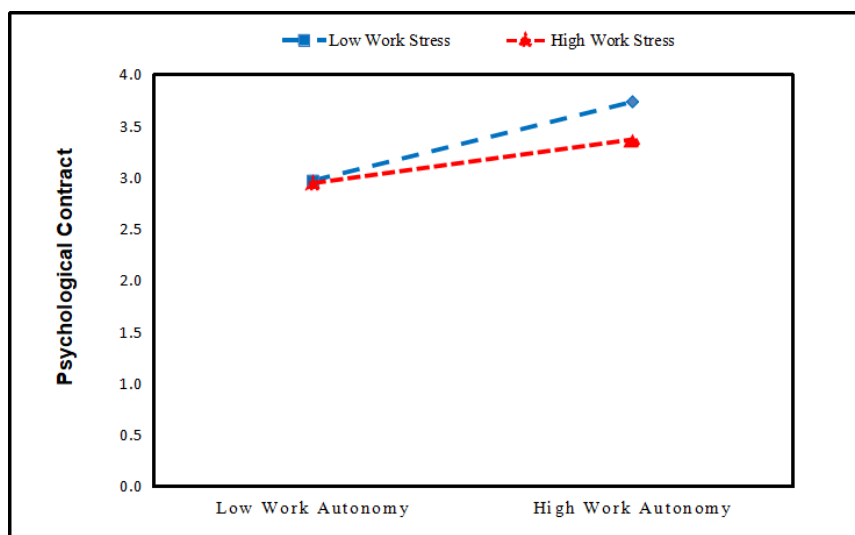
|                             | Psychological Contract |                |        |       |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|----------------|--------|-------|
|                             | Coefficient            | Standard Error | t      | p     |
| Constant                    | 3.349                  | 0.041          | 80.964 | 0.000 |
| Work Autonomy               | 0.382                  | 0.045          | 8.423  | 0.000 |
| Work Stress                 | -0.196                 | 0.045          | -4.396 | 0.000 |
| Work Stress * Work Autonomy | -0.170                 | 0.045          | -3.789 | 0.000 |
| R <sup>2</sup>              | 0.244                  |                |        |       |
| F                           | 44.332***              |                |        |       |

Note: \* P<0.05 \*\*P<0.01 \*\*\*P<0.001

**Table 18.** Simple Slope Analysis of the Moderating Effect of Work Stress on the Relationship between Work Autonomy and Psychological Contract

| Moderating Variable Level | Regression Coefficient | Standard Error | t     | p     | LLCI  | ULCI  |
|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| High Level(+1SD)          | 0.222                  | 0.063          | 3.513 | 0.000 | 0.098 | 0.347 |
| Average Level             | 0.382                  | 0.045          | 8.423 | 0.000 | 0.293 | 0.471 |
| Low Level(-1SD)           | 0.542                  | 0.060          | 8.960 | 0.000 | 0.423 | 0.660 |

Note: LLCI refers to the lower limit of the 95% confidence interval for the estimate, and ULCI refers to the upper limit of the 95% confidence interval for the forecast.



**Figure 4.** Slope Diagram of the Moderating Effect of Work Stress on the Relationship between Work Autonomy and Psychological Contract

#### 4.6 Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

As previously mentioned, the empirical analysis tested and validated all the hypotheses proposed in this study. The results are presented in Table 19.

**Table 19.** Hypothesis Test Results

| Hypotheses      | Content of the research hypothesis                                                                                             | Result    |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| H <sub>1</sub>  | Moral leadership has a significant positive impact on the psychological contract.                                              | Supported |
| H <sub>2</sub>  | Work autonomy has a significant positive impact on the psychological contract.                                                 | Supported |
| H <sub>3</sub>  | Moral leadership has a significant positive impact on university teachers' occupational loyalty.                               | Supported |
| H <sub>4</sub>  | Work autonomy has a significant positive impact on university teachers' occupational loyalty.                                  | Supported |
| H <sub>5</sub>  | Psychological contract has a significant positive impact on university teachers' occupational loyalty.                         | Supported |
| H <sub>6</sub>  | The psychological contract mediates the relationship between moral leadership and university teachers' occupational loyalty.   | Supported |
| H <sub>7</sub>  | The psychological contract mediates the relationship between work autonomy and occupational loyalty among university teachers. | Supported |
| H <sub>8A</sub> | Work stress exerts an adverse moderating effect on the "moral leadership → psychological contract" path.                       | Supported |
| H <sub>8B</sub> | Work stress exerts an adverse moderating effect on the "work autonomy → psychological contract" path.                          | Supported |

## 5. Conclusion

This study, which draws upon a sample of 415 current university faculty members in Guangdong Province, empirically examines the influence of Moral Leadership and Work Autonomy on Occupational Loyalty among academic staff. It elucidates the partial mediating role of the Psychological Contract in the relationships among these variables and Occupational Loyalty, and the negative moderating effect of Work Stress. This methodology effectively achieves the primary objectives of clarifying the relationships among variables,

identifying mediating and moderating effects, and developing an integrated mechanism model. All proposed research hypotheses have been substantiated.

Rooted in the dual perspectives of the Psychological Contract and stress interaction, this study not only broadens the application of relevant theories and underscores the influence of key variables but also offers practical guidance to universities for cultivating Moral Leadership, enhancing Work Autonomy, sustaining Psychological Contracts, and implementing targeted stress management strategies. Consequently, this research has substantial theoretical and practical significance.

Nevertheless, this study possesses certain limitations: the sample is confined to a specific region, namely university faculty in Guangdong Province, necessitating further investigation to evaluate the applicability of the findings to other contexts; the snowball sampling method may introduce bias; the research design is predominantly cross-sectional, which does not account for the dynamic interactions among variables; and the scope of variables considered is not exhaustive, as factors such as teachers' personal characteristics and organizational culture are not included.

Future research could expand the sample by including university educators from multiple provinces and diverse institutional types, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, I recommend refining the sampling methodology by implementing stratified random sampling to mitigate bias. Furthermore, employing longitudinal studies and other diverse research designs can facilitate the examination of the evolving relationships among variables. Further exploration of variables might involve analyzing specific aspects such as Moral Leadership and work-related stress. Conducting cross-group and cross-cultural studies within the context of digital transformation can strengthen the research framework, broaden perspectives, and advance scholarship in this domain. Ultimately, such efforts would provide more targeted support for the professional development of university teaching staff.

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