

Qualitative Article Critique

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Timothy D. Golden from the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and John F. Veiga and Zeki Simsek from the University of Connecticut examined the bidirectional nature of work-family conflict, WFC, and family-work conflict, FWC in their study: Telecommuting's Differential Impact on Work-Family Conflict: Is There no Place Like Home?

Existing literature is "scarce and inconsistent" and it focuses mainly on the unidirectional nature of work-family conflict (Golden et al., 2006, p. 1340). Previous research places emphasis on the overall work-life balance; thus, neglecting the distinction between the impact work has on family and family has on work for telecommuters. To address this limitation, Golden, Veiga, and Simsek focused on two concepts: the extent of telecommuting on the direction of conflict, work-family conflict and family-work conflict; and three contextual factors that potentially affect this impact: job autonomy, scheduling flexibility, and household size.

The researchers formulated five hypotheses. The first hypothesis assumes that the "extent of telecommuting will be negatively related to WFC" (Golden et al., 2006, p. 1341). Because many individuals naturally select family over work, telecommuters that work more often from home are more likely to dedicate their time and attention to family activities; thus, reducing the interference work has on family. The second hypothesis states that the "extent of telecommuting will be positively related to FWC" (Golden et al., 2006, p. 1342). Family matters are more salient; thus, perceptively more urgent. Therefore, individuals are more likely to let family matters interfere with their work responsibilities. Part one and two of hypothesis 3 are as follows: "The negative relationship between extent of telecommuting and WFC will be moderated by job autonomy such that WFC will decrease at a faster rate for telecommuters with greater autonomy"; and "the positive relationship between extent of telecommuting and FWC will be

moderated by job autonomy such that FWC will increase at a slower rate for telecommuters with greater autonomy” (Golden et al., 2006, p. 1342). Individuals working more often from home with greater autonomy will experience a decrease in work interfering with family at a faster rate because they have more control of which work tasks to complete and how to complete them; thus, devoting more attention to family. Individuals working more often from home with greater autonomy will experience an increase in family interfering with work at a slower rate because greater control of work responsibilities allows individuals to attend to family matters according to their own schedule. Part one and two of hypothesis 4 are as follows: “The negative relationship between extent of telecommuting and WFC will be moderated by scheduling flexibility such that WFC will decrease at a faster rate for telecommuters with greater flexibility”; and “the positive relationship between extent of telecommuting and FWC will be moderated by scheduling flexibility such that FWC will increase at a slower rate for telecommuters with greater flexibility” (Golden et al., 2006, p. 1343). Individuals working more often from home with greater scheduling flexibility will experience a decrease in work interfering with family at a faster rate because they have the ability to choose when their work gets done; thus, prioritizing family matters more often. Individuals working more often from home with greater scheduling flexibility will experience an increase in family interfering with work at a slower rate because they have the ability to attend to family and delay work matters until their family issues have been resolved. Part one and two of hypothesis 5 are as follows: “The negative relationship between extent of telecommuting and WFC will be moderated by household size such that WFC will decrease at a faster rate for telecommuters with larger households”; and “the positive relationship between extent of telecommuting and FWC will be moderated by household such that FWC will increase at a faster rate for telecommuters with

larger households” (Golden et al., 2006, p. 1343). Individuals working more often from home with larger households will experience a decrease in work interfering with family at a faster rate because individuals have more family members’ demands to address; thus, putting family matters above work matters. Individuals working more often from home with larger households will experience an increase in family interfering with work at a faster rate because the greater the demands of the family, the more likely they are to prevent individuals from successfully completing work duties.

The study was conducted on professional employees, specifically, college graduates, from one high-tech firm as a way to control for potential inconsistencies in telecommuting and work-family supportiveness. The company employs 34,000 people, of which 12,610 individuals were full-time professional employees. The company randomly chose 10% or 1,261 individuals to participate in the study. The senior executive contacted 1,261 employees via e-mail, and 454 provided responses that were used in the study. These responses were collected through an anonymous and confidential online survey under the first author’s server. The demographic of these 454 respondents is as follows: “65% were men, 35% were women; 54% were married; and their average age was 37 years” (Golden et al., 2006, p. 1343). Ranging from 1 to 10 years of telecommuting and ranging from 3 to 43 hours telecommuting from home, on average, the respondents have been telecommuting for 4 years and telecommuting from home 18.9 hours/week out of an average 45-hour workweek.

Golden and colleagues employed a list of instruments to measure their dependent and independent variables: WFC was assessed using a six-item instrument developed by Carlson et al. (2000); extent of telecommuting was measured through a brief interview; job autonomy was measured using a four-item instrument developed by Lanfred (2000); scheduling flexibility was

assessed using a five-item measure developed by Pierce and Newstrom (1983); and household size was measured using respondents' reports. The team operationalized and controlled for the following variables: age, gender, management level, and tenure. In order to confirm that these constructs, WFC and FWC, were conceptually unrelated, the team ran a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs). Additional CFAs were conducted to ensure the discriminant validity of all constructs on both a theoretical and empirical level. The CFAs verified that all measures from Table 1 were unrelated to each other. All hypotheses were tested using hierarchical stepwise regression.

The results were divided into two tables: descriptive statistics and correlations for each of the measures and hierarchical regression analyses for all moderators in relation to WFC and FWC relationships. Three figures are also illustrated in the results: the impact of job autonomy on the extent of telecommuting and WFC, the impact of scheduling flexibility on the extent of telecommuting and WFC, and the impact of household size on the extent of telecommuting and FWC. The researchers discovered the following results respective to each hypothesis: hypothesis 1 was supported; hypothesis 2 was supported; part one of hypothesis 3 was partially supported; part two of hypothesis 3 was not supported; part one of hypothesis 4 was supported; part two of hypothesis 4 was not supported; part one of hypothesis 5 was not supported; and part two of hypothesis 5 was supported. Essentially, the researchers found their results to be consistent with their hypotheses: "the more extensively individuals telecommute, the less work interferes with family—reducing WFC—and the more family interferes with work—increasing FWC" (Golden et al., 2006, p. 1346).

I believe the research design is comprehensive. The team stated that current studies have a limited scope on the extent of telecommuting and the impact it has on work and family

demands. This gap in literature motivated the team to examine the extent of telecommuting to the bidirectional relationship of work-family conflict as well as three factors that may influence this relationship: job autonomy, scheduling flexibility, and household size. The researchers chose a quantitative design which best fits the purpose of this study. The team is not interested in the individual experiences of extent of telecommuting on WFC and FWC, but rather, the objective data from a large sample from the population of interest. The team measured what they set out to measure using reliable and valid instruments from empirically-based studies for each of their constructs: work-family conflict, that is, work-family conflict, job autonomy, and scheduling flexibility. The team assessed the remaining variables, extent of telecommuting and household size, through respondents' reports. The use of self-reports can introduce biases; thus, confounding the results and impacting the team's interpretation. The researchers operationalized and organized their control variables, that is, age, gender, management level, and tenure, which avoids confusion and maintains objectivity and reliability. The study was also relatively efficient and cost-effective because it recruited participants through email and collected data through an online survey. The team recruited participants directly from a population of interest, that is telecommuters from a firm, and they did not engage in randomization or manipulation of variables; therefore, the study is relatively high in external validity and low in internal validity (Heppner et al., 2016, p. 122). The team thoroughly tested the constructs for their discriminate validity to ensure that each one is definitely unrelated; thus, ensuring that the relationship between the constructs was what informed their conclusions (Farrell, 2010). The researchers related their findings back to their hypotheses, explaining how each moderator differentially impacted WFC and FWC on the extent of telecommuting.

Edwards and Rothbard's (2000) depletion argument overlooks the professional-level telecommuter population and the generalizability to both genders, not just to females (Golden et al., 2006, pp. 1346-1347). Golden and colleagues extend the depletion argument to novel populations, providing greater insight into how professional-level telecommuters and both men and women are vulnerable to time, attention, and emotional energy depletion when they are under demands from multiple domains of life such as work and family. Reconciling this gap in literature enables practitioners to employ the same or similar instruments and interventions to a wider demographic. This research topic is also applicable for the current times because many workers were mandated to telecommute during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the consequences are still being dealt with today. Utilizing the design from this paper, additional research can be conducted; it would be interesting to see if there are any within-group differences from the time of the study, 2006, and now, 2022. The results may indicate even higher levels of conflict today which could be used by practitioners to generate or modify treatment for individuals struggling to balance work and family stress during the pandemic. If another study is to be conducted with the same population today, these results can be compared to the results from another firm using the same research design to test for between-group differences. Doing so may increase external validity if similar results can be obtained. The researchers further inform evidence-based practice through their emphasis on the impact of job autonomy, schedule flexibility, and household size on extent of telecommuting on WFC and FWC. An in-depth focus on these three additional constructs that have been overlooked in past studies, but Golden and colleagues shed light on if these additional factors affect the conflict between work and family. An emphasis on these three domains allows practitioners and clients to develop a more precise understanding of the conflicts.

In turn, a more specific treatment plan can be established targeting the domain of interest which could be more feasible and effective.

The researchers acknowledge some limitations such as issues with generalizability, internal validity, and the self-report method. In terms of generalizability, the study may only be generalized to individuals working as full-time professional employees that frequently telecommute. The study did not manipulate any variables; thus, inferences regarding causation cannot be made, only correlational relationships. And the team addressed issues that arise with self-reports, but in order to account for any confounds, they conducted CFAs to reduce the potential threat to the results. However, they still acknowledge that they cannot be unequivocally confident in their interpretations of the results.

References

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