

Telecommuting's Differential Impact on Work – Family Conflict Article Critique

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The article to be critiqued, Telecommuting's Differential Impact on Work-Family Conflict: Is There No Place Like Home, discusses different aspects of conflict that emerge from working from home in work-to-family conflict (WFC) versus family-to-work conflict (FWC). The research to be analyzed was done by Timothy D. Golden from the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute as well as John F. Veiga and Zeki Simsek from the University of Connecticut.

Multiple Factors

Several points were made in this article regarding work-to-home and family-to-work impact. Time and strain were considered as far as the amount of time that telecommuters invested from working from their homes and being so easily accessible to family. The researchers proposed several hypotheses regarding WFC and the benefits of WFC because of the level of job autonomy and scheduling flexibility afforded to them. The researchers reported that “by working at home telecommuters have the opportunity to alter the work patterns and associated strains of the workplace such that family needs might be better accommodated...” (Golden et al., 2006, p. 1341). In fact, they assert that the greater the autonomy of the telecommuter, the greater the decrease of WFC. On the contrary, because of the level of accessibility to family, conflict would arise because of the demand on family activities more so than work responsibilities. Additionally, the household size was a deciding component in this study. To demonstrate, if household size is large, there will be an increase as to whether telecommuters will give in to the time and strain associated with family demands while not being able to tend to work responsibilities.

Research Methodology and Statistical Method

This study was conducted on 454 professional workers at a firm in which 12,610 of its employees telecommute from the 34,000 of those employed at this firm with specific focus on job autonomy, scheduling flexibility, and household size. Out of the 1,261 individuals, 454 responded to the private survey given via email. 65% were men and 35% were women. The researchers averaged the age of 37 and of the participants, 54% were married. The measurement aspect of their method was specific in measuring the length of telecommuting, job autonomy, flexibility, household size and control variables while incorporating a six-item measure on time and strain. Participants were called upon to enter responses pertaining to WFC such as, “My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like”) as well as FWC such as, “I am constantly stressed because I am involved more with my family while my work suffers” (Golden et al., 2006, p. 1343). They were asked to do so by responding to answers ranging between 1 – 5 with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. Overall, six measures were used specifically focusing on time and strain while addressing WFC and FWC in these measures.

Respondents were asked a series of questions regarding length of telecommuting while carefully considering how many household members live in the same home as the telecommuter in deciding the family demands factor on the respondent. For example, as far as length of telecommuting, respondents were asked, “As a company telecommuter, in a typical week how many hours do you spend working from home?” (Golden, et al., 2006, p. 1343). The researchers were careful in selecting several control variables that would solidify validity of their study such as age, gender, job rank (managerial, senior manager, etc.) and the length of time respondents were employed at the firm. The purpose of these variables was to clarify the stages of career

perspectives the respondents had as well as the differences of experiences of WFC between the men and women.

Results

The results of the study were conducted through a four-factor model, confirmatory factor analysis and a stepwise regression that partially supported said hypotheses while entirely supporting several other of the hypotheses shared by the researchers. The researchers chose these statistical methods of their study to further validate the distinctiveness and reliability of their results while showing the relationship between constructs. Through the statistical data, hypothesis one was fully supported in that the more frequently an individual telecommutes, the less impact it would have on WFC. In hypothesis two, it was fully supported that the level of frequency of telecommuting would highly impact FWC. Statistical data also showed partial support of hypothesis three that proposed that because of job autonomy this would not negatively impact the extent of telecommuting on WFC. In fact, what they found was that telecommuters who had increased job autonomy, WFC, would *not* slow down at a faster rate of speed. If telecommuters had a low job autonomy level, then it had a significant negative impact on the extent of telecommuting with WFC. Hypothesis four through five stated that scheduling flexibility and household size would reduce the length of telecommuting with WFC. For the scheduling flexibility variable, it was found to have significant negative impact with WFC. While household size and the reduction of the negative relationship between the extent of telecommuting and WFC was not supported *large* household size was found to increase FWC at a greater speed as predicted earlier.

Discussion

The study in the article had differing perspectives regarding WFC and FWC. One can view WFC and FWC as moving in either direction. As an example, the researchers proposed viewing the impact of these two endeavors as a benefit to the telecommuter in that WFC is enhanced because of the ability to balance work with tending to family obligations; in fact, the family role is enhanced. However, regarding FWC, the study also provided a look into the fact that the work of the telecommuter suffers because of the expectation of choosing to tend to family *over* work responsibilities; therefore, work demands suffer. Because of the differing perspectives that one can view telecommuting and family, the researchers chose to conduct their research through an all-around representation regarding the impact of WFC as well as FWC. The hypotheses that were introduced were solidified in that frequent telecommuting decreases WFC and that family interrupting work will cause FWC to grow.

Interestingly, the current study compared well with the previous study by Edwards and Rothbard regarding loss between work and family. Golden and Simsak's findings took the ambiguity out of the study by viewing the different ways that family intercepts with work. This was a good place to start to provide specificity and reliability as their data showed. The findings were consistent as compared with the previous study in that the telecommuter will either pay more attention to one area (work) while suffering loss (family) and vice versa. Between the strain and extra time given to family pressures, work does not conflict as much as family conflicts with work. However, Rothbard's findings of depletion for telecommuters was one-directional. For example, women were the only gender found to give in to the family pressures while work suffered and vice versa, whereas the researcher's data proved that both genders fell under the marker of placing energies and extra time either for work or family suffering loss in either direction. The studies' findings prove to be bi-directional regarding both genders and are

consistent in their data showing evidence-based practices. Then again, the findings could not show that both WFC and FWC can combine effectively to create a balance and a good pay off. It showed that although telecommuters could decrease WFC by telecommuting more frequently, FWC showed a significant increase as they extensively telecommuted, showing that successful integration was not possible. Further research can be conducted with these questions in mind regarding how to successfully combine family with work and work with family to facilitate successful balance where neither is compromised. The researchers proposed that future research study the components of time and strain.

Regarding job autonomy, scheduling flexibility and the size of the home, the findings were important in this regard. Surprisingly, the researchers found having job autonomy had no bearing on WFC even when telecommuters frequently telecommuted; in fact, those who had less autonomy were able to successfully reduce WFC specifically when coupled with frequent telecommuting. As expected, the reduction of WFC was proven to be accurate due to the telecommuter's ability to schedule activities from work on their own when combined with frequency of telecommuting. Additionally, for those with large households, the extent of telecommuting and FWC increases due to the larger household size; however, for telecommuters who have a smaller household there was no change. The researchers suggest further study into the three components of job autonomy, scheduling flexibility and household size in the context of how these benefit or counterbalance the correlating factors of WFC and FWC. Overall, the researchers proposed that the center of their study was to inform on "...differentiated impact of extent of telecommuting on work-family conflict and family-to-work conflict within a population of professional-level telecommuters" (Golden, et al., 2006. page 1348). They also recognized

that their study had its limitations and that further study can be accomplished regarding the benefits that can supersede the perspectives of time and strain.

Although this study was well proportioned regarding validity and reliability, it was specifically focused on the relationship between WFC and FWC meaning that it was mainly correlational, and one could not find causality of the study. One could suggest further study into causality as well as the circumstances that surround the conflicts of WFC and FWC. In the opinion of the reader, the research design was strong, in that the researchers confirmed and backed their findings through nested CFA's and hierarchical stepwise regression. In addition, participants selected were both men and women, and the researchers attended to multiple variables, such as age, gender, tenure, job position, work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict, extent of telecommuting, job autonomy, scheduling flexibility and household size. Furthermore, the researchers compared their current findings with other studies showing specific statistical data as well a specific four factor model and the variables studied. The researchers made efforts in transparency and showed no ambiguity as they explained their design for the study giving way to evidence-based practice.

Reference

Golden, T.D., Veiga, J.F., & Simsek, Z, (2006). Telecommuting's Differential Impact on Work-Family Conflict: Is there No Place Like Home? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 1340-1350.