

Article Critique Paper

Telecommuting's Differential Impact on Work–Family Conflict: Is There No Place Like Home?

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Article Critique Paper 2

The article selected, *Telecommuting's Differential Impact on Work-Family Conflict: Is There No Place Like home?* discusses the 2006 research conducted by Timothy D. Golden, John F. Veiga, and Zeki Simsek on how telecommuting affects work-family. The findings are controversial, claiming that it can either improve work-life balance and lower conflict or that it raises conflict since more time and emotional energy are devoted to the family. The research overall shares the advantages and disadvantages of working from home. The purpose of this research was to create and test a model that simultaneously evaluates the distinct influence of the amount of telecommuting on work-to-family conflict (WFC) and family-to-work conflict (FWC) within a sample of professional-level telecommuters in order to address some of the limitations and from previous studies on this subject matter and resolve discrepancies as well as advance knowledge of the impact of this work mode on the work-family interaction. The study also expanded this model by examining three crucial contextual variables and their impact: career autonomy, scheduling flexibility, and household size.

The study's methodology (or sample/procedure) was carried out by using telecommuters from a firm with a large, active telecommuting program. The high-tech firm that volunteered to take part in this study contains almost 34,000 individuals. 12,610 of these individuals are said to be full-time professional telecommuter employees. Out of the 12,610 telecommuters, only 10% were chosen as a random sample for this research study. These telecommuters were contacted through email who were already regularly telecommuting from home and were told about participating in this study. The researchers used an anonymous and confidential Web-based survey that was hosted on the server of Timothy D (first author). Golden. A total of 454 respondents, or 36% of the total, provided useable responses. All of the respondents had college degrees, 65% of them males and 35% women, 54% were married, and average was 37 (Golden,

Article Critique Paper 3

et al., 2006, pg. 4). The researchers also noted that the respondents had been telecommuting for an average of 4 years and spent an average of 18.9 hours per week working from home during a typical 45-hour workweek.

There were 8 hypotheses used and several variables such as job autonomy, scheduling flexibility, and household size to investigate the extent to which working from home or working in an office can cause work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict. The researchers concentrated primarily on the direction of conflict, despite the fact that they recognized that the majority of work-family conflict situations are likely to result, to some extent, both time and psychological stress and tension. Hypothesis 1 suggested that the extent of telecommuting will be negatively related to work-to-family conflict. Working from home can put telecommuters under increased pressure to take on more family responsibilities, some of which are self-imposed and may conflict with their professional obligations. Telecommuters may progressively infringe on work time by accommodating family events or may find themselves preoccupied or distracted from work due to the related tension. There could be unpredictable and immediate needs from the family that can present themselves while telecommuters are working from home. Hypothesis 2 suggested that the extent of telecommuting will be positively related to family-to-work conflict.

The remaining 6 hypotheses factored in 3 variables in the moderating role of work-family context. The first variable is job autonomy which refers to the degree of control or authority an individual has over the tasks to be completed or the techniques/approaches/strategies that are used when executing their work. Essentially, people are less inclined to depend on others to do their work when they have more liberty/freedom. When individuals have less autonomy, however, their tasks are more restricted, prescribed, and scheduled and frequently require more

organization and reliance on others to be completed. In other words, when telecommuters operate in a setting that allows them to fully exercise the freedom granted by job autonomy, they're able to change the aspects of their jobs from home, away from the disruptions and stress of their workplace environment. The hypothesis in relation to job autonomy suggests that 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 (Golden, et al., 2006, pg. 3). The second hypothesis suggests that 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, pg. 3).

The second variable takes into account scheduling flexibility when it comes to a telecommuter's specific work-family context. According to Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, and Neuman (1999), scheduling flexibility is the degree of time flexibility required by a telecommuter to alter when work is completed in order to accommodate family obligations. Working from home would allow telecommuters to work in an environment where they can more easily leverage and benefit from scheduling flexibility away from the office environment. In other words, telecommuting increases the likelihood that people with somewhat better scheduling flexibility will be able to complete their tasks when it is most convenient for them. The first hypothesis in relation to scheduling flexibility suggests that 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 (Golden, et al., 2006, pg. 4). The second hypothesis suggests that 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, pg. 4).

The last variable takes household size into consideration when examining a telecommuter's specific work-family context. According to earlier studies, people with larger families typically devote additional time, attention, emotional energy, and effort to their families and less time to their work. Moreover, studies have shown that those who live with family members have more work-family conflict. As result, because of their accessibility and closeness to household members, people with larger households who telecommute frequently are more likely to experience a greater number of demands, expectations, and pressures (Golden, et al., 2006, pg. 4). The first hypothesis in relation to household size suggests that the negative relationship between extent of telecommuting and WFC will be moderated by household size, such that WFC will decrease at a slower rate for telecommuters with larger households' pressures (Golden, et al., 2006, pg. 4). The second hypothesis suggests that the positive relationship between extent of telecommuting and FWC will be moderated by household size, such that FWC will increase at a faster rate for telecommuters with larger households (Golden, et al., 2006, pg. 4).

For the measurements and statistical analysis, a 5-point scale was used on the participants (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) to measure WFC/FWC and fully capture the nuances of time and psychological strain that are likely to be intertwined in work-family conflict. When measuring the extent of telecommuting the participants were asked how many hours they spend working from home in a typical week and the responses ranged from 3 to 43hr/week. Participants were also asked how much of their average workweek was spent telecommuting. In the end, for the sake of clarity the researchers reported hours per week because there were no significant differences between the two measures. Job autonomy was measured by the participants evaluating the amount of discretion and control they have in the implementation of assigned

Article Critique Paper 6

work tasks on a 5-point scale (1 = very little, 5 = very much). After the researchers re-ran their regression analysis testing the hypotheses using the four-item measure, they found no significant difference. Their measure was found to be reliable and consistent with prior research. Scheduling flexibility was measured using a 5-point scale (1 = very little, 5 = very much) by asking the participants how much flexibility they had in determining when they work and the extent to which their work schedule is independent of others; the measure was found to be reliable. In the context of telecommuting, household size measures took into account all members of a household. Therefore, based on the participants' reports, the researchers calculated the total number of family members in the household. Due to previous studies, the researchers decided on having controlled variables. The variables included were age, gender (1 = male, 2 = female), management level (1 = nonsupervisory, 2 = first-line manager, 3 = middle manager, 4 = upper/senior management), and tenure (in years) so as to lessen the chance of false outcomes.

Results for this research study concluded that hypothesis 1 was supported suggesting that the more extensively individuals telecommute, the lower their WFC. Moreover, hypothesis 2 was also supported suggesting that the more individuals telecommute, the higher their FWC. Hypothesis 3a was partially supported because the findings suggested that, although lower levels of autonomy enhance the effects of extent of telecommuting on WFC, higher levels do not. Furthermore, no evidence was found to support Hypothesis 3b, which proposed that job autonomy would attenuate the favorable association between telecommuting and FWC. Hypothesis 4a was supported because the extent of telecommuting did indeed have a significant negative relationship with WFC when it comes to telecommuters with high flexibility and for those with low flexibility, a similar relationship was also found. In addition, when scheduling flexibility is high, WFC decreases at a faster rate, as expected. Hypothesis 4b and 5a were not

Article Critique Paper 7

supported. Hypothesis 5b was supported in that when household size is large, FWC increases at a faster rate, as expected. The overall findings for hypothesis 5b suggested that, although larger households worsen the effects of telecommuting on FWC, smaller households do not. The researchers noted that with smaller households the FWC does not necessarily decrease significantly.

The approach and design were overall appropriate in that it focused on developing a more complete model of telecommuting's impact on work-family conflict by examining its differential impact on WFC and FWC rather than viewing work and family conflict from a bidirectional lens. The research question asked, "is there no place like home?" and the survey specific questions and variables helped the participants anonymously share their personal experiences in an honest way using a 5-point scale. The research study's findings were consistent and fairly robust with the hypotheses presented, concluding that 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, pg. 7). The study's findings also suggested that differences in the telecommuter's specific work-family context, as reflected in job autonomy, scheduling flexibility, and household size, play a significant role. Throughout the discussion, there was an emphasis on needing more research to understand how different work schedules and family expectations actually mitigate the effects of the level of telecommuting on work-family conflict. In addition, it could be beneficial for future studies to pay more attention to the underlying time and strain processes to understand how they actually influence the conflict experienced. More study on time and strain is required to properly understand these links and to more accurately measure the scope and size of each, even though this study in particular mostly focused on the direction of conflict as opposed to elucidating underlying processes. One of the

Article Critique Paper 8

potential drawbacks about this research study mentioned in the article was the design because of its reliance on the self-report method/approach used to collect data, although there could be exceptions to the rule depending on the type of research study being done.

There are many ways that this particular study could inform evidence-based practice especially in this present day and age post Covid-19 pandemic where telecommuting and hybrid jobs became normalized and common across the U.S. The study laid out the advantages and disadvantages of telecommuting based on the findings and this information can help inform evidence-practice practice when it comes for example figuring out what a healthy and sustainable work-family balance looks like. Another way these findings can inform evidence practice is by applying it to mental health and see how telecommuting can either negatively or positively impacted impact mental health in relation to a work-family life. Lastly these findings can help inform how certain jobs in the cooperate world or companies can maximize productivity with their employees and increase work satisfaction and their employees' overall well-being.

Reference

Golden, T.D., Veiga, J.F., & Simsek, Z. (2006). Telecommuting's Differential Impact on Work-Family Conflict: Is There No Place Like Home? *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91 (6), 1340-1350.