Benefits of working from home depends on family demands

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If you work from home part of the week as a teleworker, does it help reduce work exhaustion caused by juggling work and family commitments? The answer may depend on the level of conflict you have between work and home and your ability to recharge your batteries adequately, according to Professor Timothy Golden, from the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, NY. His study of the influence of telework -- the use of computer technology to work from home -- on how people experience exhaustion shows that individuals who juggle conflicting demands between their work and home lives experience more work exhaustion. However, the amount of exhaustion experienced depends upon the type of telework that they practice and the severity of their conflict between work and home. His work is published online in Springer's *Journal of Business and Psychology*.

Telework is on the increase in most industrialized countries and this trend may be spurred, in part, by the view that mixing work and home helps relieve work exhaustion and conflict between work and family commitments. It is estimated that more than 80 percent of employees struggle to meet work and family demands on a daily basis. Work exhaustion has been linked to lower performance, burnout, increased staff turnover, and poorer health.

Golden's work seeks to understand when work-family conflicts impact work exhaustion. In this study of 316 adults working for a large computer company, Golden looks specifically at the impact of both traditional telework and non-traditional telework on work exhaustion

caused by work-family conflicts. Traditional telework is conducted during traditional work hours and non-traditional telework is conducted during non-traditional work hours, for example evenings or weekends.

The participants were asked to answer questions about the levels of work-to-family conflict they experienced, including whether work kept them from family activities more than they would have liked, and whether they were too stressed to do the things they enjoy at home due to pressures at work. Golden also looked at levels of family-to-work conflict e.g. time spent on family responsibilities interfering with work responsibilities, and difficulties concentrating on work because of stress from family responsibilities. Levels of work exhaustion and the extent and timing of telework were also assessed.

Golden found that the more work and family demands conflicted, the more people suffered from exhaustion. Those with already high levels of work-family conflicts suffered higher exhaustion when they spent extensive time working from home, irrespective of whether they worked during traditional or non-traditional work hours. However those who had lower levels of work-family conflicts suffered less exhaustion, which was further reduced by teleworking during either traditional or non-traditional work hours.

Golden comments: "Whereas individuals may adopt telework as a means to enhance their quality of life and reduce exhaustion, those with low levels of conflict between work and family seem able to benefit more from telework than are those individuals who have high levels of conflict between their work and home. These results occurred for individuals who teleworked during either regular work hours or during the evenings and weekends."

More information: Golden TD (2011). Altering the effects of work and family conflict on exhaustion: telework during traditional and non-

traditional work hours. *Journal of Business and Psychology*. DOI 10.1007/s10869-011-9247-0

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