Supervisory approaches and paradoxes in managing telecommuting implementation

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ABSTRACT
Voluntary telecommuting is an increasingly prevalent flexible work practice, typically offered to assist employees with managing work–family demands. Most organizations with telecommuting policies rely on supervisor discretion regarding policy access and implementation in their department. Although supervisors' approaches have implications for telecommuters and their non-telecommuting co-workers, few studies integrate these stakeholder perspectives. Drawing on surveys and interviews with 90 dyads of supervisors and subordinates, some of whom were telecommuters and some of whom were not, we examine effective managerial approaches regarding telecommuting implementation. First, supervisors should stay in close contact with telecommuters, but this contact should emphasize sharing information rather than close monitoring of work schedules. Telecommuters supervised with an information-sharing approach were more likely to report lower work–family conflict, increased performance, and were more likely to help co-workers. Second, supervisors should encourage telecommuting employees to separate work and family boundaries, which is related to lower work–family conflict. However, supervisors face a paradox as a separation approach can negatively affect workgroup relations: telecommuters who are encouraged to create boundaries between work and family were less likely to extend themselves in crunch times or after hours to help their colleagues. Non-telecommuters' workload and work–family conflict may increase as a result.