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Work Hour Congruence: The Effect on Job Satisfaction and Absenteeism

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of *work hour congruence* on employee job satisfaction and absenteeism using a large, longitudinal sample from the Canadian Workplace and Employee Survey (WES). An employee is said to have work hour congruence when they actually work the number of hours that they desire. Results indicate a difference between employees who desire more hours and those who desire fewer hours: employee desire for and receipt of more hours was related to positive changes in job satisfaction while employee desire for and receipt of fewer hours was related to reduced absenteeism. In addition, the results suggest that employees respond to employers who at least try to meet their needs; those who desired more hours and received some, but not all of these additional hours showed a positive increase in job satisfaction. This study contributes to the literature by using of a precise measure of work hour preference and change, differentiating employees who desire fewer hours from those who desire more and examining both full and partial work hour congruence.

Introduction

Individuals spend the majority of their waking time working; thus, job satisfaction has a significant impact on overall happiness and quality of life (Frey and Stutzer, 2010). Numerous individual, job and organizational level variables have been related to job satisfaction; however, there is growing attention on the impact of time at work and specifically the match between the hours employees wish to work and the hours they actually work. Some individuals might be willing and able to prioritize non-work time to devote to themselves, their families, or their communities (Golden, 2006). Others might prefer or be required to work longer hours to obtain a larger paycheck or other intrinsic and extrinsic rewards (Wilkins, 2007; McKee-Ryan and Harvey, 2011). However, these individual preferences are not often considered in managerial decisions about the optimal allocation of human resources. Some employees who wish for more hours are given fewer and some who wish for fewer hours must work more.

As will be discussed below, there is growing international evidence documenting the prevalence of work hour mismatch (Tilly, 1996; Kalleberg, 2008), its antecedents and its negative consequences (i.e., Holtom, Lee and Tidd, 2002; Sousa-Poza and Henneberger, 2002, 2003; Otterbach, 2010; Loughlin and Murray, 2013). Clark (2005) reported that 40% of people across seven OECD countries are not working the hours they want to or need to work, while Reynolds and Aletraris (2010) found that work hour mismatch persists for long periods of time. This literature suggests that a 'one size fits all' approach to hours allocation is detrimental to employees, their families and organizations, and it supports the strategic human resource management approach which emphasizes the need to design distinct

management practices for different employee groups (Becker, Huselid and Beatty, 2009; Mossholder, Reichardson, and Setton, 2011). However, there is a paucity of research that actually tests whether an employer's accommodation of employees' work hour preferences will alleviate the negative outcomes associated with work hour mismatch.

To our knowledge our study is among the first to examine whether achieving *work hour congruence* actually does improve work-related attitudes and behaviour. Due to the variety of definitions in the literature (see below), we define the concept of *work hour (in)congruence* as a (mis)match between the number of hours that an employee wants to work and the number of hours the person actually works. This could occur either in the direction of desiring more hours or desiring fewer hours.

Using this definition and leveraging a longitudinal dataset, our study is also the first to distinguish full work hour congruence (i.e., an employee has received his/her exact number of preferred hours) from partial work hour congruence (i.e., an employee who has received a change in the number of hours in the preferred direction, but ultimately continues to prefer additional/fewer work hours). This distinction is important because the magnitude of the incongruence or mismatch can be crucial in the determination of job satisfaction (Klein et al. 2009). Although both full work hour congruence and partial work hour congruence indicate employers' willingness to accommodate employees' preferences, there is no known research on whether partially meeting employees' preference in work hours is enough, or whether a firm needs to fully accommodate employee preferences in order to improve work related attitudes and behaviours.

Additionally, the previous research on workplace differentiation in human resource management has primarily focused on demographic variables, tenure, occupation, and geography (Tsui, Pearce, Porter, and Tripoli, 1997; Becker et al., 2009). Few studies have differentiated employees according to their work hour preferences (Wooden, Warren, and Drago, 2009). However, the underlying social and structural rationale for seeking different work hours is essential to understanding employees' attitudes and behaviours. For instance, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) and Frone, Russell, and Cooper (1992) found that employees experience work-family conflicts when they do not have time to spend with their families. This conflict subsequently has a negative impact on their life satisfaction, but not job satisfaction (Wooden et al., 2009). Yet, others have found that when employees could not work sufficient hours to achieve financial stability, they experienced reduced job satisfaction (McKee-Ryan and Harvey, 2011). These examples highlight the importance of differentiating employees according to whether they would like to work more or fewer hours.

In sum, this study tests three research questions: 1) Does employer accommodation of employee work hour preferences impact job attitudes and behaviours such as job satisfaction and absenteeism? 2) Does the effect of accommodation on job satisfaction and absenteeism differ according to whether the employee achieves full congruence or partial congruence in hours? 3) Does the effect of accommodation on job satisfaction and absenteeism differ according to whether more or fewer hours were desired? In answering these questions this study attempts to provide empirical evidence for a personalized

management approach as advocated in the strategic human resource management literature and/or greater involvement of employees in workplace decision-making (Livingstone, 2009; Osterman, 2010).

In what follows, we first present discrepancy theory and social exchange theory as applicable theoretical perspectives. We use these theories to demonstrate the mechanism through which work hour congruence may relate to job attitudes and behaviours. We next provide an explanation of our longitudinal data and methods before presenting the results and a discussion of our findings and conclusions, including their limitations and areas for future research.

Theories and Hypotheses

Work hour congruence and employee outcomes: The concept of mismatch between hours desired and hours worked has many names. This represents disciplinary norms as well as unique operationalization of the variables. For instance, in management literature the mismatch is part of work status incongruence (Morrow, McElroy and Elliott, 1994; Holtom et al., 2002; Loughlin and Murray, 2013). The economics literature refers to work hour constraints and considers demand side and supply side factors that could dictate work hour preferences and realities (Kahn and Lang, 1995; Sousa-Poza and Henneberger, 2002). Sociological literature employs the terms under and overemployment to discuss a range of job-related mismatches of which temporal or time-based mismatch is one (Kalleberg, 2008; Livingstone, 2009). Underemployment is working fewer hours than desired and

overemployment is working more hours than desired (Weststar, 2011). Related terms such as work hour match (Reynolds, 2003; Drago, Tseng and Wooden, 2005) and work hour preferences (Böheim and Taylor, 2004; Campbell and van Wanrooy, 2013) have also been used.

To avoid confusion and to highlight our unique contribution in using a precise count of the number of hours desired and worked (as opposed to job/employment status), we defined *work hour (in)congruence* as a (mis)match between the hours desired and the hours actually worked. Regarding incongruence, we differentiate between those who would prefer to work more hours (underemployment) and those who would prefer to work fewer hours (overemployment).

The literature has shown that work hour mismatch is related to negative employee attitudes and behaviours. For instance, Krausz, Sagie, and Bidermann (2000) found that work schedule and hours mismatch impacted job satisfaction, organizational commitment, burnout, and the intention to quit. Galinsky, Kim, and Bond (2001) found that employees who worked more hours than they desired felt angry toward their employers and co-workers and were more likely to look for other jobs. Other studies have linked hours incongruence to decreased citizenship behaviour, lower job and life satisfaction, unhealthy family relationships (Golden and Wiens-Tuers, 2006; Wooden et al., 2009), and increased turnover and labour market exit (Böheim and Taylor, 2004). Work hours match has been linked to positive job satisfaction, employee retention, in-role and extra-role performance,

organizational commitment, and higher levels of psychological well-being (Holtom et al., 2002; Burke, 2004; Carr, Gregory and Harris, 2010).

Despite these findings, few studies have used an overarching theory to explain or predict the consequences of work hour (in)congruence. Most focus on describing the nature and cause of incongruence or measuring its empirical effect. Following Holtom et al. (2002), this paper employs both discrepancy theory and social exchange theory as explanatory mechanisms for the observed consequences of work hour incongruence and as predictors for the consequences of moving from an incongruent to a congruent state.

Discrepancy theory: Discrepancy theory indicates that positive work outcomes result from fewer discrepancies between the desires of an employee and the job requirements expected of that employee (Locke 1969; Lawler 1973). Researchers have found that discrepancy in various job facets such as pay, communication, and work status (including work hours) are related to job dissatisfaction (Rice, Phillips, and McFarlin, 1990; Burke and Greenglass, 2000). In addition, studies have found that a discrepancy between what employees expect and what they experience impacts employee commitment, turnover and intention to leave (Abraham, 1999; Jiang and Klein, 2002). Rice et al. (1990) found that employees were most satisfied with the job facet where they experienced the smallest discrepancies between what they desired and what they obtained.

In the context of work hours, the discrepancy occurs between the number of hours that employees wish to work and the number of hours they are required to work. There has

been limited application of discrepancy theory to the consequence of work hour discrepancy (Holtom et al., 2002). However, following the application to other work attitudes and behaviours, discrepancy theory would predict a relationship between positive work outcomes and achieved congruence between desired and required work hours. Employees whose employers offer exactly the number of hours that employees desire to work (full work hour congruence) should demonstrate the highest level of positive work outcomes compared with other employees, *ceteris paribus*.

Based on this theoretical analysis and the above mentioned empirical evidence, we predict that:

Hypothesis 1a: Employees who achieve full work hour congruence will report a higher level of job satisfaction than employees who achieve no work hour congruence or only partial work hour congruence.

Hypothesis 1b: Employees who achieve full work hour congruence will report a lower level of absenteeism than employees who achieve no work hour congruence or only partial work hour congruence.

While discrepancy theory predicts that full work hour congruence will have a positive effect on employee outcomes, the predictions for partial work hour congruence are less clear. Therefore, we introduce social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) to propose that partially meeting employees' preference can also have a positive impact on employees' attitudes and behaviours.

Social exchange theory: Under social exchange theory people view their social interactions

as economic exchanges in which they seek fairness between what they give to others (or the firm) and what they receive in return (Blau, 1964). An employee exchanges effort in the workplace in return for something of value from his/her employer. This value item could be monetary compensation (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa, 1986), but also includes intrinsic rewards such as feeling recognized and cared for. Empirical evidence shows that human resources practices can produce value and initiate a positive social exchange between employers and employees. These practices include attractive compensation (Kehoe and Wright, 2013), investment in training (Koster, de Grip and Fouarge, 2011), family-friendly practices (Muse, Harris, Giles and Field, 2008; Wood and de Menezes, 2011), and high performance work systems (Chang and Chen, 2011).

Social exchange theory further suggests that these practices are likely to cause employees to perceive that their exchange relationship with the organization is characterized by a supportive environment because they signal employers' willingness to invest in employee skills, their effort towards achieving work-life balance, and to provide fair and attractive rewards for performance. In return, employees are likely to feel an obligation to the employer and exhibit affective attitudes and behaviours to help the organization to achieve its business goals. These attitudes and behaviours include job satisfaction, affective commitment, reduced absenteeism, employee retention, as well as in-role and extra-role performance (Sahibzada, Hammer, Neal and Kuang, 2005; Kehoe and Wright, 2013).

Among the numerous practices that may signal an employer's support and care, Shore and Shore (1995) found that improving job conditions is the most crucial.

Specifically, they found that the environmental demands of a job, including time demands, led to a decrease in perceived organizational support. Thus, we argue that employer accommodations with regard to work hours will improve job conditions for individual employees and help develop employee perceptions of employer supportiveness. Employees will reciprocate through the development of an affective attitude towards the organization - which may be expressed through an increase in job satisfaction and presence at the workplace (Witt, 1991; Wayne, Shore and Liden, 1997).

We propose that this social exchange will hold even when employers do not completely satisfy the optimal preferences of the employees, but do accommodate some in the desired direction. This is because the partial accommodation will still be perceived by employees as a signal of employer support and will spark reciprocation. In other words, full work hour congruence may not be a necessary condition to increase work attitudes and behaviours; instead, partial work hour congruence may be sufficient. This is important because it is often difficult for employers to offer full work hour congruence given the operational constraints faced by any organization.

While discrepancy theory and social exchange theory provide a broad supporting theoretical framework with regard to work hour congruence, we make an additional theoretical contribution by differentiating between individuals who desire more hours and those who desire fewer hours. There are differences in the reasons for seeking more hours and the reasons for seeking less. For instance, a primary reason for working additional hours is to increase income or improve work status (Wilkins, 2007), while a primary reason to

work fewer hours is burnout or work-life conflict (Golden, 2006; Weststar, 2011). Due to these differing goals, motivations, and expectations, it follows that people who wish to work more hours may exhibit different workplace attitudes and behaviours as a result of their mismatch than people who wish to work fewer hours.

We therefore predict that achieving partial work hour congruence may positively impact attitudes and behaviours for employees who want extra hours, but not for employees who want fewer hours. We make this prediction because, at least to some extent, any increase in hours immediately achieves an increase in salary, which is often a primary motivation for working more hours. As well, a longitudinal study by Reynolds and Aletraris (2010) found that a reduced gap in the desired hours for part-timers seeking to work additional hours was related to fewer turnovers and more committed behaviour.

The immediacy of this effect is not as clear with partial congruence for people who wish to work fewer hours. Employees, particularly women, often work fewer hours when they are burdened by work-life conflicts and competing demands (Barrett and Doiron, 2001; Blair-Loy, 2003; Gash, 2008). Achieving full work hour congruence means that employees' work hours are now manageable in the face of competing demands. However, if only partial work hour congruence is achieved, work-life conflicts may persist because the employee's hours are still excessive relative to their needs. As well, people who work slightly reduced or temporarily reduced hours often experience similar workloads as people with longer hours (Lee and McCann, 2006). If the employee's hours are not sufficiently reduced, the risk of job creep is larger. Therefore, although the employee may experience the need to

reciprocate the employers' care for them, because the underlying problem was not sufficiently resolved, partial work hour congruence may not achieve positive work attitudes or behaviours in these employees.

Based on the reasoning above, the following additional hypotheses are offered:

Hypothesis 2a: Employees who desire to work more hours and achieve partial work hour congruence will report a higher level of job satisfaction than employees in the same sub-group who achieve no work hour congruence.

Hypothesis 2b: Employees who desire to work more hours and achieve partial work hour congruence will report a lower level of paid absenteeism than employees in the same sub-group who achieve no work hour congruence.

Hypothesis 3a: Employees who desire to work fewer hours and achieve partial work hour congruence will report similar levels of job satisfaction as employees in the same sub-group who achieve no work hour congruence.

Hypothesis 3b: Employees who desire fewer hours and achieve partial work hour congruence will report similar levels of paid absenteeism as employees in the same sub-group who achieve no work hour congruence.

Method

Data

The impact of full and partial work hour congruence on job satisfaction and absenteeism is examined using an employee sample of the 1999-2005 Workplace and Employee Survey (WES) dataset. WES is a unique Canadian dataset that is highly suited to our study because it contains precise measures of desired and actual work hours, is

longitudinal, and is large with high external validity. As such, we respond to calls for improved representations of work hour congruence (Campbell and van Wanrooy, 2013). The WES was collected by Statistics Canada through an initial face-to-face interview and subsequent telephone and paper interviews. A representative sample of firms to be included in the survey was initially chosen from the Business Register (a census of all firms operating in Canada). The chief executive officer (or similar top management official) of each firm was asked firm-specific questions on a yearly basis. For each sampled firm in the WES, as many as 24 employees were interviewed to provide sufficient intra-firm variance. Employees were asked employee-specific questions related to their jobs and the practices within the firm. The same employees were surveyed for two consecutive years and then new employees within the same firm were selected to continue with similar survey questions. Hence, by using the employee portion of this survey, we obtain access to a longitudinal sample of two years with beginning dates of 1999, 2001, and 2003. Because of careful sampling (Statistics Canada, 2002), this dataset is highly representative of the Canadian population and can be generalized to similar liberal market democracies such as the US, the UK, and Australia.

The sample size of the WES varies from year to year, ranging from 16,804 to 23,540 observations per year. We restricted the sample size in several ways. First, to take advantage of the two-year longitudinal nature of the dataset, we dropped those observations that did not have a valid response to the survey for both years. These incidents of missing data were mainly linked to non-response or a departure from the company; no pattern of

non-response was observed. Second, we dropped the observations of employees who were interviewed for the first time in 2005 because there was no longitudinal component for these individuals. Third, we dropped all observations that had missing or non-valid responses for our key measures in either year one or year two. This situation occurred for less than one percent of the sample. Lastly, we excluded individuals who were happy with their hours of work in Time 1. That is, we only included individuals who indicated work hour incongruence in Time 1 in that they wanted to work more or fewer hours than they were scheduled to work. This approach resulted in a final sample size of 12,421 individuals; 8,406 sought to work additional hours and the remaining 4,015 sought to work fewer hours.

Measures

The key independent variable in this study is work hour congruence. The dependent variables are job satisfaction and paid absenteeism.

Independent variable: Work Hour Congruence. We operationalized work hour congruence as a 3x2 matrix that reflects the level of congruence and also whether additional or fewer hours are desired. First, we used the survey question at Time 1 that asked, “*Given your rate of pay, would you rather work the same number of hours, fewer hours or more hours?*” This response determined the employee’s preference at Time 1 for working the same, fewer or more hours. As indicated above, individuals who reported work hour congruence at Time 1 were dropped from the sample. This left the following two groups: those who desired more

hours and those who desired fewer hours. For each of these groups we turned to the survey questions that asked individuals to report the actual number of hours that they desired to work and that asked employees the number of hours they actually work. These data points were captured at Time 1. Taking advantage of the longitudinal nature of the survey, we then examined the actual number of hours worked (including overtime) by the individual one year later in Time 2. We compared these measures and defined the six groups outlined in Table 1. The result is two sets of three-level categorical variables. These variables were coded as 1-0 dummies with 1 signifying that the criterion of inclusion had been met.

 Insert Table 1 about here

Dependent variables and longitudinal approach. The first dependent variable of interest is a single-item measure of job satisfaction: “*Considering all aspects of this job, how satisfied are you with the job?*” on a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). Limitations of the survey prevented us from collecting a multi-item measure. However, research has indicated that single-item measures of job satisfaction can capture the construct as well as scalar measures (Wanous, Reichers and Hudy, 1997). We subtract the job satisfaction score at Time 1 from the score at Time 2. Negative scores (-4 to -1) denote a decrease in job satisfaction, positive scores (1 to 4) denote an increase in job satisfaction, and a score of zero denotes no change.

The second dependent variable of interest is paid absenteeism. In this constructed

measure, the responses of two “leave” questions were added to arrive at a total count of the number of paid absences taken by an employee in the given year. The questions include the following: “*In the past 12 months/since you started this job, how many days of paid vacation leave have you taken?*” and “*In the past 12 months/since you have started this job, how many days of paid sick leave have you taken?*” This count of paid absences was constructed at both Time 1 and Time 2. As with the job satisfaction variable, we then calculated the change in paid absences by subtracting the score for Time 1 from that of Time 2. Therefore, a negative score denotes a decrease in paid absences, a positive score denotes an increase in paid absences, and a zero score denotes no change in the number of paid absences taken from one year to the next.

In both of these cases, we apply the momentum approach (Chen, Ployhart, Thomas, Anderson and Bliese, 2011), which examines the change in the dependent variables. This approach better ensures that the results generated in our regression analysis accurately account for an effect because of full or partial work hour congruence and not because of a difference in individual preference. This method of constructing the dependent variables with longitudinal data accounts for unobserved heterogeneity and effects that might otherwise influence our results and also provides a more precise estimate of the true impact of work hour congruence on job satisfaction and absenteeism.

Control variables: Individual characteristics. Due to limitations in the dataset, the control variables we use are far from exhaustive; however, the use of the momentum approach

discussed above reduces the likelihood of significant effects regarding control variables. For example, Bockerman and Ilmakunnas (2009) demonstrate a negative correlation between job satisfaction and working conditions such as harm and hazard, which we are unable to control for using this dataset. However, in using the momentum variable which controls for the dependent variable in the first period, any other control variables that we are unable to measure can be accounted for to the extent that these variables are correlated with the dependent variable in the first period and have remained constant over the two periods. Despite this consideration, we include several individual characteristics that are used to control for the heterogeneity that exists in this sample: age, sex, marital status (coded as a dummy variable where 1 = people who are married, including common law marriage), dependent children (coded as a dummy where 1 = the existence of dependent children) and immigrant status. We include the human capital variables of job tenure (in years) and work experience (*“Considering all jobs you have held, how many years of full-time working experience do you have?”*). We include the firm-specific variables of union status, change in hourly wage from Time 1 to Time 2, and six dummies defined by the WES for the occupational group (1=manager; 2=professional; 3=trades; 4=market sales; 5=administration; 6=production). All of these variables are likely to influence an individual’s job satisfaction and the number of paid absences taken (Steers and Rhodes, 1978; Price, 1995), although it is not completely intuitive or apparent that they would influence the change in job satisfaction or absenteeism over time. Regarding sex specifically, we observe no differences in the dataset for preferences to work more or less

hours; men and women each make up about half of each sub-group (see Tables 2 and 3).

Estimation strategy

As indicated above, we divided our sample into two groups according to their preference for work hours in Time 1. One group wished to work more hours than they were working in Time 1 and the other group wished to work fewer hours than they were working in Time 1. Therefore, our estimation strategy involved running an OLS regression for each of our dependent variables for each of the work hour preference groups (see Table 4). Regressions 1 and 2 estimate the relationship between the change in job satisfaction and work hour congruence for the ‘prefer more hours’ group and the ‘prefer fewer hours’ group, respectively. Regressions 3 and 4 repeat this approach using the change in paid absences as the dependent variable. All regressions use ‘no work hour congruence’ as the omitted reference category and include the full range of control variables.

The particular nature of the WES data requires additional steps in the estimation procedure. First, because the WES data were collected using a stratified sampling design, it is important to incorporate sampling weights and strata parameters in the data analyses (Särndal, Swensson and Wretman, 1992). Specific survey weights based on the robust sampling methodology were provided by Statistics Canada and are applied in each regression to ensure the quality of the estimates and accurate, unbiased conclusions from the results. Second, the nature of the linked survey (employees embedded within firms) indicates that employees studied in this research might be interrelated at the firm level. That

is, employees in the same company may be similar to each other because they may be influenced by the same company practices and culture. To account for the bias associated with any dependence among observations that occurs in cluster data, we use clustered standard errors in all regressions.

Results

The institutional features of Canada documented in our data from 1999 to 2005 mirror the work hour trends over the past three decades. The incidence of part-time (11.1%) and full-time (49.4%) employment in 1999 have increased to 11.5% and 50.0% respectively¹. For individuals employed in Canada during this period, the average number of hours worked (37.7 hours) in 1999 had decreased to 37.2 hours in 2005². In this context, we examine the descriptive statistics in Table 2 for employees who seek to work additional hours and in Table 3 for employees who seek to work fewer hours. The majority of the sample (68%) had a desire to work more hours at Time 1 as opposed to fewer hours. However, the respondents' firms provided a limited response to this desire. Of this group only 14 percent achieved full congruence at Time 2. Approximately one-quarter achieved partial congruence, whereas 59 percent achieved no congruence and worked the same hours

¹ Statistics Canada. *Table 282-0002 - Labour force survey estimates (LFS), by sex and detailed age group, annual (persons unless otherwise noted)*, CANSIM (database).

² Statistics Canada. *Table 282-0028 - Labour force survey estimates (LFS), by total and average usual and actual hours worked, main or all jobs, type of work, sex and age group, annual (hours)*, CANSIM (database).

in Time 1 as Time 2. The pattern of organizational response with regard to employees who wanted to work fewer hours at Time 1 is slightly worse. Less than ten percent achieved full congruence at Time 2, while approximately 22 percent achieved partial congruence, and 68 percent experienced no congruence. The means for the control variables in the sample are representative of a typical middle-age employee within a firm. Three-quarters are married or live with their common-law partner and 54 percent have at least one dependent child at home.

Insert Table 2, Table 3 about here

The regression results for the impact of work hour congruence on both change in job satisfaction and change in paid absenteeism are in Table 4. The first two columns show the results for work hour congruence and change in job satisfaction. The results show a positive and statistically significant relationship between full congruence and change in job satisfaction for those individuals who want to work additional hours ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.013$). This indicates that employees who want to work additional hours and who obtain this in the following year are more likely to report a favourable change in job satisfaction (either less negative or more positive) than employees who seek additional hours but receive no change in hours. There is a similar positive and statistically significant effect between partial congruence and change in job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.12, p < 0.049$). The change in job satisfaction reported by employees who seek additional hours and receive at least some

increase is likely to be more favorable (less negative or more positive) than that reported by employees who seek additional hours but receive no change. These effects are not statistically significant for employees who want to work fewer hours. As expected, the positive effect is stronger for full work hour congruence than for partial work hour congruence.

Insert Table 4 about here

The last two columns of Table 4 show the impact of work hour congruence on the change in paid absenteeism. The last column indicates a negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -3.54$, $p < 0.072$) relationship between full congruence and the change in paid absenteeism for employees who seek to work fewer hours. This result suggests that employees who prefer to work fewer hours in year one and receive fewer hours in year two report a more favorable change in absenteeism (either a lesser increase or a greater decrease) than employees who did not achieve congruence. In fact, this result corresponds to approximately 3.54 fewer paid days taken by employees with work hour congruence than by employees who did not achieve congruence. The remaining results regarding the relationships between work hour congruence and the change in paid absenteeism are not statistically significant. The above results support Hypotheses 2a, 3a and 3b, partially support Hypotheses 1a and 1b, and do not support Hypothesis 2b.

Discussion and Conclusion

Previous literature has documented both the incidence of work hour mismatch and its association to negative employee and organizational outcomes. The conclusions of this literature have assumed that improving the match would improve the outcomes, but this final step had yet to be empirically tested. Our study provides initial empirical evidence on the effect of achieved work hour congruence on employees' job satisfaction and absenteeism.

In terms of the significant results, the predictions under discrepancy theory hold for the relationship between full congruence and paid absenteeism for the overemployed sample and between full congruence and job satisfaction for the underemployed sample. These workers show positive work outcomes when their hours-based preference is fully met. The predictions under social exchange theory hold for the relationship between partial congruence and job satisfaction for the underemployed sample and for the lack of relationship between partial congruence and either outcome for the overemployed sample.

Somewhat surprisingly, addressing the hour mismatch for those who wanted more hours had no effect on job satisfaction. This could indicate that other factors related to part-time or reduced hours could perpetuate feelings of job dissatisfaction despite the employee having ostensibly asked for those hours. As noted above, this could be related to the job creep that often occurs with part-time work as well as other documented challenges such as lack of belonging, assumed lack of commitment, being overlooked for choice work assignments, and reduced rewards and recognition (Tilly; 1996; Lee and McCann, 2006;

Weststar, 2011). Essentially as one discrepancy is closed, others may open.

Following our predictions through social exchange theory, it appears that simply reducing the number of hours for employees with competing demands is not sufficient to signal employee reciprocity through positive changes to job attitudes and behaviours if other features of the job continue to signal a lack of organizational support. Our data did not allow for more detailed examination of these additional features and more research is needed to explore the motivations for seeking fewer work hours and the implications of achieving them (Campbell and van Wanrooy, 2013). Though we found few significant effects in our control variables, additional heterogeneity even within the group requiring fewer hours could also be an aspect that requires additional examination. As well, it has been reported that many people experience ambivalence about their preferences for work hours and demonstrate a certain plasticity of preferences (Campbell and van Wanrooy 2013). This suggests that employees could be mistaken or overly optimistic about what a change in hours will mean if they are not able to accurately “imagine such a change” (Campbell and van Wanrooy, 2013, p. 1137).

Though our results only provide partial support for our hypotheses, two core findings remain. The first is that employer attempts to accommodate employee preferences in work hours do positively impact particular employee attitudes and behaviours. The second is that the impact of achieving work hour congruence varies by employee sub-group and also by type of employee outcome; perhaps in even more idiosyncratic ways than we have been able to capture. Taken together, these findings support the growing body of

literature examining individualized employment solutions and distinct management practices for individuals and sub-groups (Tsui et al., 1997; Lepak and Snell, 1999; Becker et al., 2009; Hornung, Rousseau, Glaser, Angerer and Weigel, 2010; Mossholder et al. 2011).

Theoretical contribution

Our findings contribute to the literature in three ways. First, this study extends discrepancy theory and social exchange theory to work hours and shows that meeting employees' preference of work hours leads to positive employee attitudes and behaviour. The majority of the literature on work hour mismatches has focused on describing and predicting the static incidence and consequence of work hour mismatches (Sousa-Poza and Henneberger, 2002; Jacobs, and Gerson. 2004; Reynolds and Aletraris, 2007; Drago, Wooden and Black, 2009). Relatively few have used hours mismatch as an independent variable (Galinsky et al., 2001; Wooden et al., 2009; Loughlin and Murray, 2013) and even fewer have studied the impact of achieved congruence. Our study shows that discrepancy theory and social exchange theory can be applied to the domain of work hours and it further explains why accommodating employees' preferences for work hours will have a positive impact on job satisfaction and paid absenteeism.

Second, this study enhances our understanding of work hour mismatch and reconciles conflicting results of its impact by separating employees into those who want to work more hours and those who want to work fewer hours. Allen (1981) and Vistnes (1997) found that individuals who work longer hours are less likely to be absent, while Dionne and

Dostie (2007) found that absences increase with work hours. Our results show that the conflicting results may be due to the fact that these studies did not take into account employees' work hour preferences. We also show that the impact on job satisfaction and absenteeism are different for employees who want to work more hours compared to employees who want to work fewer hours.

Third, this study provides an innovation from previous studies by gathering information on the precise number of desired work hours and contrasting this to a precise number of hours worked. This is an improvement over the full-time/part-time categories of employment status because of lack of specificity inherent in those higher level categorizations. Also, by using a quantifiable measure of work hours, we are able to measure the congruence distance – how close or far the employer comes to meeting the work hour preferences of the employee (full or partial congruence) – and its resulting impact on work outcomes.

Managerial implication

Regarding managerial practice, our results show that it is worthwhile for employers to strategically consider the work allocation within their firms on the basis of individual preferences. Thus, employers should be cognizant of the fact that employees may prefer to work a different number of hours than the number offered by the organization. Subject to operational requirements, this study shows that employee job attitudes and behavior can improve if a firm can provide full work hour congruence for its employees. Additionally, in

some cases, even a signal of accommodation through partial work hour congruence can be sufficient to improve employees' job attitudes. However, acting on individual differences would first necessitate that employee preferences become known. Rather than leaving it to employees to come forward with their challenges, managers could be more proactive in regularly and repeatedly soliciting opinions and desires about work scheduling. As investigated by Hornung and colleagues (2010), this information could then result in individualized deals with specific employees to solve specific known challenges. However, broader implications could involve greater organizational adjustment to align work to people (Loughlin and Murray, 2013) as opposed to aligning people to work. For instance, employees could be directly involved in the planning and allocation of work; what Berg (2010) refers to as an increased role for employees in crafting their work, or Livingstone (1999) advocates in the democratization of paid work. Broad policy implications also include mechanisms to more equitably redistribute work hours across the labour force (Bielenski, Bosch and Wagner 2002) and overcome barriers to worker's choice in employment status and work hours (Lee and McCann, 2006).

Including employees and their complex and contingent preferences in this planning process may also allow for greater sensitivity to the changing motivations and needs of workers across the life cycle (Campbell and van Wanrooy, 2013). Given the operational dictates of any organization, it may be unrealistic to propose that the work be completely tailored to employee needs or wants; however, increased flexibility and awareness on both

sides could alleviate pressure for employers and employees. This fits with our finding that even partial congruence can achieve some positive employee outcomes in some cases.

Limitations and future studies

Several limitations to this study affect the generalizability and interpretation of the results. First, although this is one of the only studies to explore exact work hour congruence, the data are the result of a self-report survey. ~~There is no verification regarding the veracity of the hours worked through employer records or surveys.~~ As a result, the number of hours worked could be incorrectly reported by the employee. That said, the report is still an employee perception of actual hours worked and should be valid to the extent that the employee would achieve *perceived* work hour congruence. Second, and similarly, the absenteeism data is self-reported and could suffer from recall bias. Some have suggested that nonreactive measures of employee absenteeism be used to supplement information from questionnaires and interviews (Frese and Zapf, 1988; Ganster and Schaubroeck, 1991). We agree that objective sources are a more valid measure of absenteeism; however, our dataset precluded this approach. We strongly recommend future research collect absenteeism data from other sources in order to further test this relationship.

Thirdly, the results of our empirical analysis only explain a small variance as evidenced by our r-squared statistic (from 0.014 to 0.028). ~~which~~ This is a typical concern of a study with a large sample size due to the higher amount of unobserved heterogeneity. Another common concern when dealing with using a large sample size is that the

~~statistical significance of the results are an artefact of the large sample size itself is probably related to very big samples instead of a real impact of independent variables. The facts that most of the explaining variables (e.g. union status, occupation, age, gender) in our regressions (e.g. union status, occupation, age, gender) are not statistically significant may indicate this is not a concern in our study. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the general meaning of research main findings and, therefore, their corresponding contribution and relevance, of a research are in doubt when if the sample size is large and the effect size is small regardless of achieved although they are statistically significant (Combs, 2010). This is not a concern in this case as the effect size in our study is not small (e.g. 3.54-); this indicates, which indicates that the results are meaningful to practitioners. In sum, although the large sample size enables us to obtain higher external validity and better estimates of the 'real world', the small variance explained is a limitation of our study. We suggest future studies conduct experiments or qualitative research to further examine the impact of work hour congruence on employee attitudes and behaviours.~~

~~the employee outcomes examined in this study are limited to a single item measure of job satisfaction and paid absenteeism and do not capture additional employee job attitudes or workplace behaviours. Using additional performance measures is one area of potential future research.~~

Finally, although this study used a broad-based survey with high external validity due to the span of employees across different industries and occupations, there were additional relationships that could not be explored. For example, it would be interesting to

measure whether individuals who prefer additional hours had a higher workload and felt a high level of workplace stress after receiving additional hours. In addition, an interesting comparison could be made regarding the workload and stress levels of employees who received full work hour congruence and the levels of employees who received only partial work hour congruence. It would also be valuable to examine whether work-life conflicts are only alleviated for individuals who prefer fewer hours when exact work hour congruence is achieved compared to employees who experience only a narrowing of the gap. These detailed measures do not exist in the dataset used in this study, but present opportunities for future research.

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