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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### UNDERSTANDING, MEASURING AND CONTROLLING EMPLOYEE ABSENTEEISM

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#### ABSTRACT

Employee absenteeism is a very critical problem in today's world. It has become of increasing interest for organizations to measure, understand and control absenteeism as much as possible. This study aims to explore the relationship between the employee motivation and absenteeism. Primary research was done in order to investigate this relationship. Questionnaires were used for data collection. The sample consisted of 10 employees of West Consultant. The results were that employee absenteeism and motivation had a negative relationship. We recommend that the employees be given extrinsic as well as intrinsic motivation in order for the organization to reduce employee absenteeism. Employees are valuable assets of an organization. Their work directly affects how productive the organization will be (Hawkins, 2007) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is of utmost concern to the companies that their employees are properly trained, are working effectively and efficiently and are satisfied with their jobs. Owing to the increasing competition that organizations have to face today, absenteeism of employees has become a problem that employers need to grapple with successfully in order to succeed in the market. In USA alone, absenteeism costs \$3600 per hourly employee and \$2650 per salaried employee annually.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Problem Statement

Employee Absenteeism is one of the most serious problems facing organizations today. It is essential that this problem is managed properly. Absenteeism not only leads to lost labor time but also costs a huge amount of money to organizations. Action is needed so that absenteeism can be controlled.

### Literature Review

#### Understanding Absenteeism

It is important to understand what absenteeism is and how it has been defined. Absence occurs when a person is motivated to allocate time to an activity that competes with the scheduled work to satisfy him (Frenchman, 2005). Absence refers to not having an individual's presence at a particular time and place when the person is expected to be there (Martocchio and Harrison, 2005). Absenteeism can be categorized into three types (Circadian, 2005). The first type is scheduled absence which includes holiday or individual time. This is not problematic as long as the employee reports that he would be going for a leave.

This ensures that the company covers up the work through other employees. If the employee takes extra time than what the person is expected to, that can also lead to losses to the company. Unscheduled absences include occasions when the employee is sick, or is injured. Employee absenteeism due to sickness can be reduced if organizations take care of the health of the workers. However, having zero absences is not possible. Partial shift absences are also a type of absenteeism. This is when the employee takes longer breaks than the time allowed or arrives late or leaves early. This kind of absence means that customers are not serviced when the person is absent, hence also compromising the productivity of the organization.

UK's labor relations agency states how the causes of an employee's absence can be due to one of the following three reasons: The employee is sick. Illness can be short term like fever and cold or long term which requires an operation or treatment. In any case, there is a certificate or a form that needs to be issued when the worker is ill.

1. They might have to care for someone in their family or they might simply not want to come for work. They might be demotivated or depressed and therefore not want to come for work.
2. They may be on an authorized leave for say, a training course or maternity/paternity leave. It also involves absence due to public duty for example jury service.

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The most common reason for absence is usually the first one, where the employee is on a sick leave. In fact, in the UK, 80% of the absences are due to short term sickness only.

One study on employee absenteeism, multiple factors that could lead to the absence (Gupta, 2013) one of the reasons could be bullying and harassment at the office. Employees might be using the sick leave to avoid the harassment. Other than that, the high level of stress and workload can also lead employees to have low motivation to work and might call in sick to relax at home. Often, people are absent because they have an elder/child to care in case of sickness or emergency (Gupta, 2013) even depression can be a cause of absenteeism. Depression can lead people turn to drugs which also might lead to more absenteeism. Religious and local festivals can also lead to absence from the work place. Illness, injuries and disengagement are also common causes of illness. The person may also call in sick while they go for an interview at another place, or are simply working on their resumes (Gupta, 2013). When understanding absenteeism, it is also essential to look into what it costs to a company. Firstly, it is very costly to hire a new person as a replacement while the person is on leave. Temporarily hiring a replacement staff not only means that they will have to be given a salary but also that their initial work won't be as effective because they would be in the process of understanding the work. Giving ads for the vacancy is also costly. If the person who is absent is responsible for dealing with customers, it can lead to lower customer satisfaction. This in turn might compromise the organization's reputation. Lastly, the employees who would have to do the extra work they are not normally responsible for increases their workload and frustration. All these problems caused by absenteeism suggest that it is very important to measure it.

### Measuring Absenteeism

Measuring employee absenteeism is extremely important for an organization because it helps give a score or a number to the concept or it helps quantify the phenomenon. This in turn helps the organization make decisions to manage or control it. One of the ways very commonly used by organizations to measure absenteeism is through the use of Bradford factor. It is a method which helps quantify the absenteeism of each employee. It gives a score to each employee. The score reflects the disturbance caused by those absences to the respective organization. Once the boss has the Bradford score for each worker, the employees whose absence rate is high can be identified. The Bradford score is calculated through the following formula:

$S * S * D =$  Bradford points score.

S = the number of occasions employee was absent in the last 52 weeks.

D = the total number of days of absence in the last 52 weeks.

Research shows that when employees are frequently shown their Bradford scores, the absenteeism can be reduced to up to 20%. In the UK, when the score reaches a certain point, the employee is warned. When the score goes beyond that point, the employee is dismissed.

There are other formulae as well which are used by organizations in order to calculate absenteeism rate of the employees.

1. Total paid and unpaid sick days (all employees) / # of employees in the 12 month period. The formula above helps calculate the average number of sick days taken per employee.
2. Total paid/unpaid days for leave for other reasons (all employees)/ # of employees in the 12 month period. The formula above calculates the average number of days that were taken for leave reasons per employee other than sick leave. This would include reasons such as maternity/paternity leave, bereavement, medical and emergency. This does not include the paid vacation.
3. (Total # of employees that took (5-20 days) sick leave/ # of employees in the 12-month period) \*100 this formula calculates the percentage of sick leave usage.

### Controlling absenteeism

A study on employee absenteeism was conducted in India. The objective of the said study was to determine what factors lead to absenteeism and how it is dealt with in Private Textile industries. The population of the study was employees of ten textile industries of Tamil Nadu, India. Convenient sampling was used for the study. Both, primary and secondary data was collected. Primary data was collected through the use of structured questionnaires whereas secondary was collected through magazines and booklets. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended that in order to reduce employee absenteeism, the employees should be given regular motivational training. There should be job rotation and repetitive tasks should be avoided as it reduces the self efficacy of the employees. They should be provided with good working conditions, and psychologists should be available for counseling at the office. Their work load should not be excessive as it leads to frustration among the employees. Preferably, medical and recreational facilities should also be provided by the organizations. Working hours should be such that employees get enough time for other activities as well. They conclude that it is vital that absenteeism be reduced because they lead to loss of productivity.

Another study conducted in India studied employee absenteeism and what measures could be used to control it. This study was conducted on Titan Industry Limited at Bangalore. It was a purely descriptive research. It used both primary and secondary data. A sample of 50 employees was taken for the study. The findings revealed that absenteeism rates at the company have been decreasing. The researchers have recommended multiple measures in order to reduce the absenteeism rates. The employees should be provided with welfare services and benefits. The employees should be given high wages. There should be effective upward communication and the employees should be provided safety and health services at the work. The organization should grant a particular number of leaves in case of sickness. They should be provided with guidance and counseling. Moreover, regular training sessions are important when trying to reduce absence of employees.

Labor Relations Agency has also talked about ways to manage absenteeism. It emphasizes that when the employee returns to the organization after a leave, positive language should be used. The employee should be welcomed back and the value of the employee to the organization should be emphasized. Their health and wellbeing should be valued. The organization should work in order to improve the health of the worker so that future absences can be avoided. Communication with the employees should be effective and regular in order to stay in touch with their lives. If necessary, a rehabilitation program should be established to help the employees with their problems. The organization should also try to reduce stress and to improve the working environment. When it comes to family commitments, the employers should be accepting and flexible. Also, labor relations agency proposes that when an employee is absent and does not call, it is beneficial that the organization calls the employee. The staff can be involved as a team in order to discuss how to finish the work.

The European Foundation proposes four interventions that can be used in order to manage absenteeism. The first intervention is a procedural measure where the organization monitors and controls absenteeism directly. Preventive work-oriented measures can also be implemented where the workload is reduced in order to decrease the imbalance between the capacity of the worker and the workload on the person. In other words, the security, fitness and wellbeing of the employees is given utmost importance. Preventive person-oriented measures would include increasing capacity of the individual by taking care of the quality of life and providing the employees with counseling and psychological help when necessary. The last type of measure is the reintegration measure where the return of the employee to the work is accelerated.

An organization in the UK called Accenture talks about how absence management in the public sector can be made effective. They emphasize on the fact that the team responsible for management of absenteeism should be committed. They should realize the importance of what they aim to do and should be willing to put their full efforts into it. Another very essential point they state is that the policies should be very clearly defined. They should be presented in an easy to understand way so that all level of workers can understand the part they have to play.

### Objective of the study

The objective of the study is to explore whether the level of motivation of employees affects the employee absenteeism.

### Hypothesis

In this study, the following hypothesis will be tested:

Hypothesis: If motivation and employee absenteeism are related, low motivation leads to higher absenteeism.

### Methodology

The target population of the study was the employees of the West Consultant company. To collect data for the study a

printed questionnaire was designed. The questionnaires were distributed among employees of West Consultant Company. Due to limited time span, it was decided that the sample size should be only ten. Non-probability sampling approach was used. However, due to such a limited sample size, the findings should be treated with caution.

The questionnaire consisted of 22 items. The variable of absenteeism was measured through the use of a scale. Motivation was measured through Motivation at Work Scale (MAWS). This scale has 12 items and measures the motivational level of the employees. This scale has been found to be valid and reliable.

Data was analyzed through linear regression.

## RESULTS

Targeting the West Consultant company we have the following results

### Model Summary<sup>b</sup>

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.984 <sup>a</sup>	.969	.965	1.652	2.517

a. Predictors: (Constant), motivation score

b. Dependent Variable: absenteeism

### ANOVA<sup>b</sup>

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	674.273	1	674.273	247.136	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	21.827	8	2.728		
	Total	696.100	9			

a. Predictors: (Constant), motivation score

b. Dependent Variable: absenteeism

### Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	8.260	1.676		4.928	.001
	motivation score	-.360	.023	-.984	15.721	.000

a. Dependent Variable: absenteeism

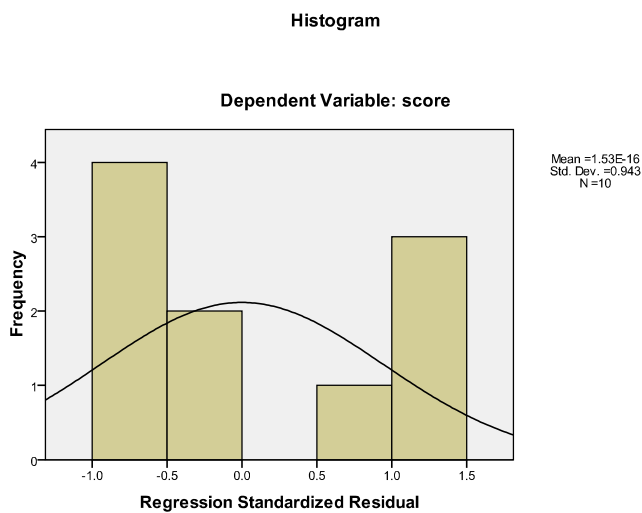
### Residuals Statistics<sup>a</sup>

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	14.75	38.52	33.30	8.656	10
Residual	-1.524	1.836	.000	1.557	10
Std. Predicted Value	-2.144	.604	.000	1.000	10
Std. Residual	-.923	1.112	.000	.943	10

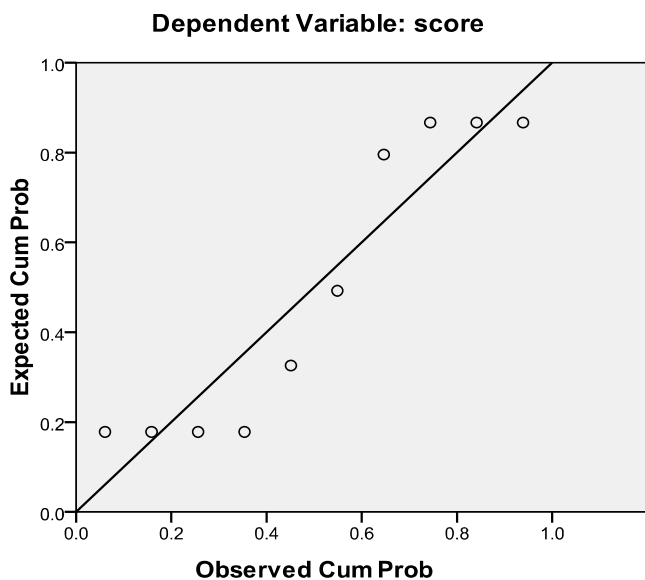
a. Dependent Variable: absenteeism

To test the relationship between employee absenteeism and the job motivation, linear regression was used. Results suggest that motivation did significantly predict employee absenteeism. Motivation did explain significant variance in employee

motivation,  $R^2 = 0.965$ ,  $F(1,247) = 2.728$ ,  $P > 0.05$ . Thus we can conclude our hypothesis has been accepted.



**Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual**



## Conclusion

The findings suggest that among the multiple causes of employee absenteeism, low motivation is also a very important cause of absence among employees. The employees should be provided with both, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation so that they look forward to coming to work rather than want to find excuses to be absent.

## Limitations

This study only had 10 employees as its sample due to limited time available. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the entire organization of West Consultant. There was only one variable that was tested which is also a limitation of the study. More than one organization could have been included in the study to make the study more valid. Moreover, using the

questionnaire in itself has multiple drawbacks. In-depth data could not be gathered about the relationship between the two variables. Extraneous variables like weather of the day, stress level on the day study was conducted, the workload, time of the day when questionnaire was given could all affect the results.

## Recommendations

For future research, it is recommended that more than one organization is given questionnaires so that the sample is larger. A sample of 50 employees should be used so that the study can be generalized. The study can also be conducted in more than one city across Pakistan in order to extend the scope of the research. Moreover, gender differences in employee absenteeism can also be investigated. Multiple variables such as gender, age, education, management, attitude of employees, work environment can be related to employee absenteeism in future research. The affect of the variables on absenteeism can be compared in order to understand which variable is most important to be managed. Moreover, mixed research method can also be used in order to make the data gathered more in depth and detailed. Employees can be not only given questionnaires but also interviewed or focus groups be conducted so that detailed analysis can be done.

It is recommended that the organizations try to increase employee motivation through the following measures:

1. There should be job rotation. People should be given a variety of tasks rather than the same task repeatedly. This would in turn increase their self efficacy and their perception of their skills and capabilities.
2. The employees are given motivational training regularly.
3. The employee should be given feedback about their work and should be appreciated or given bonus when they perform well.
4. The work environment should be friendly, safe and some level of recreation should also be provided.

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