

A Study On The Chronic Absenteeism

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Abstract

Absenteeism refers to employee's absence from their regular task when they are normally schedule to work. Chronic absenteeism is the practice or habit of being an absentee and an absentee is one who habitually stays away from work which results in terms of loss productivity to both the company and the economy. This is an important symptom of mal-adjustment and a sign of protest that is usually confronted by each and every industry. Frequently absenteeism in Industrial units has constituted a great drain on the productivity resources of India and thereby affecting the quality of Industrial performance.

The cost of chronic absenteeism to business usually expressed in terms of lost productivity. While the organizations are aware of negative consequences of Absenteeism, no attempt is often made to calculate the impact [1]. This study is therefore; design to examine different forms of absenteeism and the likely causes. The paper recommends the ways to reduce it in work place, this study is therefore designed to examine and counter the effects of absenteeism in organization. In a broad sense the objective of the study are as follows:

- To find out the causes of absenteeism.
- To find out the impact of absenteeism on the organization.
- To suggest some remedies of absenteeism.

Keyword - Workplace, chronic, absenteeism, mal adjustment.

1. Introduction

Absence affects more than just the person who is absent [2]. The study of absenteeism is very important for any industry. The word absenteeism means the absence of an employee from work when he is scheduled to be present at work place. Absenteeism has been defined as a root cause of losses in productivity. Absenteeism refers to unauthorized absence of the worker from his job. Absenteeism can also be defined as failure of employees to report for work when they are scheduled to work. Employees who are away from work on recognized holidays, vacations, approved leaves of absence, or leaves of absence allowed for under the collective agreement provisions would not be included under absenteeism.

1.1 Types of Absenteeism

Absences that will require some type of employer intervention are split into two distinct categories; Non-Culpable and Culpable. It is essential that industries could differentiate between these two types of absence, record them separately and resolve them differently. For instance, disciplinary measures may only be used to address absences that a determined to be culpable. Counseling measures are used to address non-culpable absences and are designed to be constructive and assist employees reduce their level of absenteeism. Absenteeism can also be classified as:

1.1.1 On the basis of Time

(a) **Long Absenteeism** Long absenteeism is said when the person is absenting for more than 8 days (depending upon the industry and nature of work).

(b) **Chronic Absenteeism** Chronic absenteeism is when employee remains absent for more than three days in a month. Chronic absentees incur more loss to the company as super visors do have an intimation of long absenting employees and do the arrangement as per the situation. But in case of chronic cases extra expense of over time is incurred. Which is loss to company.

1.1.2 On the basis of Nature

(a) **Innocent Absenteeism** Innocent absenteeism refers to employees who are absent for reasons beyond their control; like sickness and injury. **Situations where an employee is away from work too frequently and yet has genuine and documented reasons for the absences are presumed to be innocent.** Innocent absenteeism is not culpable which means that it is blameless. In a labor relations context this means that it cannot be remedied or treated by disciplinary measures. For Example: - Family and Health Problem

(b) Culpable Absenteeism Culpable absenteeism refers to employees who are absent without authorization for reasons which are within their control. These are unauthorized absences which are within the employee's control and may warrant a disciplinary response. The following are situations of culpable absence:

- excessive lateness;
- false explanation for an absence;
- no reason is provided for the absence;
- unsubstantiated absence, where evidence of the reason is required;
- reason for the absence is not legitimate.
- working environment, company policy.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that nearly 2.8 million workdays are lost each year due to employee absences (Truman, 2003) [3]. When the employee takes time off, on a scheduled working day with permission, it is authorized absence. When he remains absent without permission or informing, its willful absence without leave [4]. In these days, when the needs of the country require greater emphasis upon increase of productivity and the economic and rational utilization of time and materials at our disposal, it is necessary to minimize absenteeism to the maximum possible extent.

Industries expect their employees to miss some work each year due to vacation, illness and personal issues/responsibilities, but missing work becomes a problem for the company when the employee is absent repeatedly and/or unexpectedly, especially if that employee must be paid while absent. While disability leave, performance of jury duty and the observance of religious holidays are all legally protected reasons for an employee to miss work, some employees abuse these laws to take time off that they shouldn't, which incurs unfair costs to the employer.

1.2 Trends in absenteeism:

1. The higher the rate of pay and the greater the length of service of the employee, the fewer the absences.
2. As an organization grows, there is a tendency towards higher rates of absenteeism.
3. Women are absent more frequently than men.
4. Single employees are absent more frequently than married employees.
5. Younger employees are absent more frequently than older employees but the latter are absent for longer periods of time.
6. Unionized organizations have higher absenteeism rates than non-union organizations.

The rate of absenteeism can be calculated by considering the number of persons scheduled to work and the number actually present. Thus, the rate of absenteeism can be estimated in the following way:

Rate of Absenteeism = (No. of Total Man shifts Lost/ No. of Total Man shifts scheduled to work) X 100 [4]

1.3 Causes of Absenteeism

Some of the causes of chronic absenteeism in the industries are-

- Sickness
- Domestic problem
- Inadequate transport facility
- Housing problem
- Large family
- Small income
- Personal maladjustments
- Absence of satisfaction in the job
- Inaction on the part of managerial staff to take timely action with a view to minimize its future occurrences
- Inadequate wage structure
- Long working hour
- Inadequate leave facilities
- Job satisfaction
- Inadequate welfare facility
- Lack of training
- Company environment
- Absence of non-monetary incentives

In fact there can be many causes of absence .A worker may remain absent because another person offered him temporary work on attractive remuneration where the advantages outweighed the disadvantage .He may even remain absent due to illness of some family member. Workers mostly prefer to spend money on the consumption of liquor and enjoyment after getting the wage. Therefore, the rate of absenteeism is more during the first week of every month [5].

Some employers maintain distance between themselves and the worker. Such attitude of maintaining distance often creates more problem than that can be imagined .It also leads to lack of understanding of worker's abilities competence and their expectations which are often ignored by the employer .The unfair treatment of worker, favoritism and indiscreet use of their own power can

immensely impair the industrial relations besides creating frustration in them and such attitude on the part of an employer results in absenteeism of the worker

Among these causes, in the existing Indian conditions, wage level in industries, has a direct bearing on absenteeism [4]. Social and religious causes can be accounted as the second important contributing factor for absenteeism. Absenteeism in industry varies from place to place, depending on the festival, marriage, harvest season and other factors.

2. Effects of Absenteeism on Industrial Progress

It is quite evident that absenteeism is a common feature of industrial labor in India. It hinders industrial growth. Absenteeism is one of the root causes of labor unrest. It affects the worker's earnings as well as the company in the following manner:

2.1 Loss to Workers

Firstly due to the habit of being absenting frequently worker's income is reduced to a large extent. It is because there is a general principle of "no work – no pay". Thus the time lost in terms of absenteeism is a loss of income to workers.

2.2 Loss to Employers

On other hand, the employer has to suffer a greater loss due to absentees. It disturbs the efficiency and discipline of industries consequently, industrial production is reduced. In order to meet the emergency and strikes, an additional labor force is also maintained by the industries. On certain occasions, those workers are employed who present themselves at factory gates. During strikes they are adjusted in place of absent workers. Their adjustment brings serious complications because such workers do not generally prove themselves up to work. Higher absenteeism is an evil both for workers and the employers and ultimately it adversely affects the production of industries.

2.3 Others

- Job turnover of employee.
- Neither fulfills needs of their family nor their objective.
- Worker who is habitually absent may be removed from services causing a great hardship to themselves and their family.
- Inexperience in new technology and industrial accident increases.
- Workers lose wages for unauthorized absence from duty.
- Repair and maintenance cost increases due to frequent breakdown of machinery by inexperienced work.
- Work pressure on employees who are present, increases.
- Effect on status and safety.
- Productivity decreases.
- Order cannot be executed in time as production scheduled is upset or delayed.
- Quality of work suffers

3. The Economic Impact of Absenteeism

- Loss of revenues from not meeting project schedules.
- Administrative cost to recruit process and train new employees.
- Lost efficiency in work crews with new or inexperienced members.
- Underutilization of capital investments (tools, equipment).
- Interruption of work flows and task accomplishment.
- Misallocation of skills and talents of employees.
- Increased demand for administrative time and resources for planning and rescheduling.
- Increased overtime and employee fatigue.
- Lower morale.

The cost impact of many of these items will vary, depending on circumstances and management's ability to recognize the problems and to deal with them effectively. What is not as clear is how to take affirmative action to control absenteeism in such a way as not to create mistrust, costly administration and systems avoidance.

Traditional methods of absenteeism control based only on disciplinary procedures have proven to be ineffective. It is almost impossible to create a fair disciplinary procedure because even well run disciplinary systems, which treat similar actions in consistently similar ways, are usually seen as unfair. The reason for this is discipline alone usually does not identify or address the root causes of absenteeism. Every employee who takes time off in defiance of company regulations has reasons, right or wrong, which justify to themselves the legitimacy of their actions.

4. Remedies to Reduce Absenteeism

A variety of steps have been found to be effective in decreasing absenteeism in workplace. Those, which are most appropriate, will vary with the circumstances of each job— its size, duration, remoteness, type of work, labor demand etc.

4.1 Action taken by recruiting authority and Management

- Screen applicants. Examine work histories. Reject those who are not appropriately qualified or who have a history of job-hopping.
- Recruiting authority can control absenteeism by designing an absenteeism program. As stated earlier by Tylczak, there is no perfect absenteeism program [6]. An organization should develop its own absenteeism program by learning from the past to build on the future. Past records and tendencies of employee absenteeism indicate tendencies to be absent in the future.
- Punctual and regular attendance is an essential function of each employee's job at the Organization [7]. The most common absence management tool is recording absences, performed by approximately 87% of organizations [3]. Keep attendance records for all employees. Monitor to identify trouble spots. Establish a clear policy of firing chronic absentees, and communicate this to all employees when they are hired.
- Allowing employees to carry over unused sick days for future use [8].
- Maintain good communications with workers. Sense worker moods, understand their concerns, provide feedback from management, and prompt action where appropriate; to show that worker concerns are heard. Bulletin boards, newsletters, toolbox meetings, and suggestion boxes are all helpful, but face-to-face communication on the job by the immediate supervision is indispensable.
- Use the latest behavioral-science techniques for organizational effectiveness, including:
 - Create small work groups with as much autonomy as possible.
 - Communicate goals for the organization and for each work unit (including attendance goals).
 - Train supervisors in motivation and interpersonal skills.

4.2 Action taken by Unions:

- Recognize active involvement in discouraging absenteeism.
- Modify referral procedures to discourage absenteeism and turnover. Example: For a pre-determined period (say, 30 days) prohibit referral to another job of any worker who has quit a job without good cause or who was fired for excessive absenteeism. The study suggests that most workers would support such action so long as it is administered fairly and equitably.

One of the best ways of reducing staff absenteeism is by changing the environment in which the company operates. This can be done at a very basic level in terms of improving the conditions within offices and buildings. Modern equipment, climate controlled buildings and good work facilities are all beneficial as nobody likes to come to work to be sat or standing in a ramshackle office or factory. It goes far deeper than that though.

To sum up, we can say that causes of absenteeism vary greatly from employee to employee; organizations looking to tackle absenteeism would be well-advised to adopt a wide range of approaches. These could include:

- Establishing a clear policy on absence monitoring
- Adopting policies that offer employees a stronger work-life balance, such as job-sharing, home-working and flexi-time [9].
- Introducing mentoring, counseling and fitness programmes
- Enhancing employee motivation through training and development opportunities
- Conducting return-to-work interviews after illness.

5. Conclusion

Since every company is different, it will require various levels of analyses to identify the factors that impact absenteeism for a specific employer. If absenteeism is identified as a significant problem, the company will need to take a hard look at the cause of the problem and begin to consider strategies to recapture lost revenues [3]. The more aware a company is of issues related to employee absenteeism, the more successful they will be in implementing strategies to reduce the related cost and increase productivity.

Thus, it can be observed that absenteeism can be controlled and reduced to a great extent if the workers are committed and are supported by all levels of management. An effective attendance record-keeping system, consultation and open communication by the management can create a healthy productive work environment in the company [4]. This would reduce grievances and give greater employee satisfaction.

In cases of chronic absenteeism there is some problem from employer side or in ability to motivate employees. In this situation supervisor just not only pays attention to productivity but also to their subordinates so that they may not feel neglected. Chronic absenteeism has reduced deliberately through counseling and increasing understanding between the employer and employees. To reduce absenteeism basic formats of HR tools could be applied.

Only when the positive approach is unsuccessful, the company need to use the remedial approach to deal with habitual abusers or with excessive absentee cases. In all cases the company's actions must be fair and reasonable and consistently applied.

While tackling workplace absenteeism by direct action may alleviate the problem in the short-term, addressing the cause of the problem will provide long-term benefits.

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