AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM IN 'COMPANY X'

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Declaration

I hereby confirm that this material which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of B.Sc. (Hons.) Human Resource Management is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for assessment for any academic purpose other than in partial fulfillment for that stated above.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Acknowledgement

I wish to thank my family and friends for their kind support and patience over the past 4 years. I promise I will return to the social scene again with gusto and will reconnect my mobile! Personally, I am very proud of myself for committing to the challenge of part-time study as a mature student and putting my life temporarily on hold. It has been a long journey and rewarding experience on many levels.

Table of Contents

iii

iv

An Investigation into the Causes of Absenteeism in Company X

Introduction

Absenteeism is increasingly becoming an area of concern for Employers. In these economically challenging times when Employers are focusing on cost cutting across their businesses, absenteeism is an area that is being highlighted as an issue in need of addressing. Because of competitive pressures, Companies can no longer afford to carry absenteeism that they may have tolerated in the past (www.ibec.ie). In 2010, the Irish Business and Employer's Confederation (IBEC) calculated the cost per employee to be €818 per annum resulting in a loss to the Irish exchequer of €1.5 billion (IBEC Absence Survey, 2010).

What is Absenteeism? Huczynski and Fitzpatrick defined Absence as "the non-attendance of employees for scheduled work when they are expected to attend" (1989, p.4). Harrison and Prices (2003) defined Absence as "the lack of physical presence at a behaviour setting when and where one is

expected to be" (Harrison and Prices (2003) as cited by Shapira-Lishchinksy and Rosenblatt, 2003, p.204).

Absence Management is the term used to reduce levels of absenteeism through the introduction of policies and procedures.   The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) found in their Absence Management Survey 2010 that Public Sector employees' average absenteeism levels are 9.7 days per employee per year in comparison to the Private Sector's at 6.6 days. This rate may come under increased scrutiny because of reform in the Irish Public Sector.   "High absence levels obviously reduce productivity but also have knock-on effects as other employees may be placed under increased pressure and stress" (CIPD, Absence Management Survey, 2010, p.10).

The subject of Absenteeism has been researched under many different headings over the years. Examples of such Studies being: "contrasted paid with unpaid absences, organisationally excused with organisationally unexcused absence, genuine with false reasons for absence, voluntary with involuntary" (Huczynski and Fitzpatrick, 1989, p.4). The "science" of Absence Management is a vast topic and

encompasses areas of Management Theory such as motivation, organisational behaviour, job satisfaction, employee engagement and communication, costs, measurements and recording processes.

Due to the broad nature of the subject and the limitations of the thesis itself, the Author has decided to focus on the causes of absenteeism and will evaluate Company X in terms of what factors impact on absence within the organisation. This will be done through the gathering and dissemination of thoughts and opinions of Senior Management and Employees through a combination of interviews and a questionnaires supplemented by secondary data gathered from academic journals and various employer organisations such as IBEC and CIPD.

The Author will highlight the importance of calculating the cost of absence together with providing information on the measurements available. Absence has been researched by sociologists and psychologists for many years. It draws on motivational and behavioural theories. The Author has researched many of the most common reasons and discussed them.

The chapter on research methodology provides an insight into how the Author conducted the research. The Author is using an organisation she is familiar with as a case study. The organisation will be referred to as Company X. This is to ensure confidentiality regarding the findings and information provided.

Following the Author's own research into Company X, she has made recommendations which the Company could adopt to provide a more comprehensive absence management policy.

In conclusion, the Author will summarise her findings based on her own research and that of current academic thinking on the subject.

Background to Company X

Company X was established over 120 years ago and has come to be an integral part of the Irish Higher Education system. It has continued to expand and adapt to an ever changing Irish society meeting the needs and expectations of a society keen to learn and grow in knowledge and innovation. Central to its core values is an emphasis on student-centred learning, relevant knowledge and an energy and creativity supporting entrepreneurship and diversity.

Currently Company X has 20,000 registered students supported by 2,500 staff. Company X's aim is to provide the best educational experience for each and every one of its students.

Like every large organisation, Company X has to deal with the issue of absenteeism among its employees. In order to fulfil its promise to provide a student-centric environment, it has a duty of care to provide a high level of education to its 20,000 students. Part of providing this service means dealing with human resource issues through the effective management of the Organisation's policies and procedures.

2010 saw the introduction of a comprehensive Absence Management Policy which was approved by the governing body of the Organisation. Ownership of the Policy lies with the Human Resource Function, however, its implementation, management and control rests with Line Management. The Policy places an onus on management to monitor and record absence within their departments. The Human Resources Department polices the Policy.

Outlined within the Policy is a detailed instruction on how the Policy operates including statutory entitlements and disciplinary procedures to be followed in cases of abuse.

Absence is recorded through the medium of an electronic system called Core Time. Core Time requires employees to 'clock-in' and 'out' daily. The system records employee's attendance rates and it is managed by line managers. The system was rolled out to administration, maintenance, technical and library staff over the past four years. However, academic staff are currently excluded from 'clocking' due in part to the nature of their work but also to the strength of their union representatives who are against the system. While the system is effective in monitoring and recording absence, there

are limitations to its effectiveness, namely it has been, and continues to be, abused by a small number of employees. Efforts are made on the part of the Human Resources Department to deal with the abuse when noticed. However, Management are reluctant to deal with the issues at local level and often ignore the behaviour.

While Company X has an automated attendance recording mechanism in place, it does not currently monitor or place a value on the cost of absence to the Organisation. As part of the Government's cost-cutting plans, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) has imposed a new funding model with a reduced funding grant upon Company X together with a moratorium on staff recruitment. This has led to an enormous organisational challenge to reduce costs where visible. One area the Author proposes highlighting is the issue of the cost of absence. Currently the Organisation offers a very generous certified sick pay scheme whereby an employee is entitled to 100% payment of their salary over a 4 year period. In addition, the Organisation allows for up to 7 days uncertified paid sick leave days per annum.

According to IBEC, there is no legal obligation on employers to provide sick pay schemes for employees. The above stated entitlements have been agreed at National level and, while difficult to renegotiate, it is not impossible given these extraordinary economic times.

Currently Senior Management is provided with absence figures on a monthly basis. The visual presentation of these figures provides little meaning to management (Appendix A). The Author proposes providing a more detailed report which will include the names of individuals who have been identified as having reached a 'trigger' point, the name of their department and a cost of their absence to the department and the Organisation. This will highlight both the genuine and suspected false illnesses.

CHAPTER 1

1. Literature Review

1.1. Introduction

Managing Absence is a challenge for Organisations as it affects productivity, customer-service standards, morale and profits. It places pressure on colleagues who are required to manage additional workloads. Absence levels vary depending on the culture of the organisation. Increasingly, employers are becoming aware of their 'duty of care' to their employees resulting in significant costs arising from sick pay and occupational health schemes.

There is an overwhelming business case that absence management should be seen as a key business driver. "Prioritising absence should force the employer to include absence management as a major strategic goal" (Platt, 2001, cited by Kuzmits, 2009, p.280). Under the Croke Park agreement and in line with the past 20 years of Partnership agreements, there has been a drive within the Irish public sector to achieve greater efficiency and savings. The

importance of recording, measuring and providing a comprehensive management training programme is seen as the key drivers to effectively deal with absence issues. Today, managers are under enormous pressures to be all things to all people. Dealing with 'administrative' duties associated with managing absence is not a priority, a fact bourn out by research carried out by IBEC and CIPD which shows that less than 24% and 45% respectively record absence costs. Management find the issue time-consuming and, coupled with a lack of training, often let the issue become a low priority. In order for managers to take action to reduce absenteeism, they "must first examine the reasons for employee absenteeism with the goal of improving employers' strategies for strengthening employee attendance" (Kuzmits et al, 2009, p.281). Managers' attention to the measurement of absenteeism will be prioritised if they are measured on it. If you do not measure someone on a task it will not be priority compared to things that are actively measured. Difficulties have arisen in organisations where management is inconsistent in its approach to managing absence. However, organisations are now beginning to realise the direct and indirect costs associated with absence.

The literature review will report on the costs, measurement tools, models and causes of absence. Why employees are absent from work has been researched by academics for many years.

The aims of the Literature Review is:

1.   To bring clarity and focus to the research problem.   It helps understanding the subject better and conceptualising the research problem clearly

2.   Backs up research

3.   Broadens the knowledge base of the research.

1.2. Costs of Absenteeism

Absent employees not only affect business performance but also impact negatively on profits. Last year, Absenteeism cost the Irish economy €1.5 billion. Swart (2010, p.45) believes "timely attendance at work with the right number of employees in place to meet business demands is crucial to keep business activities moving and on schedule". CIPD findings highlight less than half of employers actually monitor the cost of absence (45%) (CIPD Absence Management Survey, 2010). Based on IBEC's 2010 figure of €818 per person, with a workforce of 2,500 Absenteeism costs Company X €2,045,000 per annum. Costs of Absenteeism are higher in the Public Sector than in the private sector due to the fact that the Public Sector is a large body and offers generous sick pay schemes. (CIPD Absence Management Report, 2010)

Absenteeism costs can be broken into direct and indirect costs. Direct costs cover sick pay schemes, salaries of absent employees, salaries of the replacement staff, pension contributions, bonus payments, contracted overtme and recruitment costs. Indirect costs are less obvious and can

include damage to the image and reputation of an organisation, its brand and result in lower levels of productivity and have a negative impact on the services being offered. They also include line management time, human resource department time, training and health promotion (Davis, 2002).

Nicholson (1977) believes that the negative connotations surrounding absence as organisational behaviour carry over to the wider social sphere and are reflected in higher costs to the consumer and taxation to pay for state sickness benefits and support services.

The following sample form of calculation cited by Evans et al (1999) and devised by Hugo Fair (1992) provides a mechanism for calculating the cost of absence to an organisation and the potential cost savings.

Cost of Absence €

Enter number of Employees	……..(a)
	……..(b)
Enter average weekly wage	……. I
	…….. = total pay bill
Multiply (a) x (b)	……..(d)
Multiply I x 52	……..(e)
Enter total absence days p.a.	……..(f) = absence rate
	……..(g) = absence cost p.a.
Enter total number of working days p.a.	
Divide [(d) x 100] by (e)	……...(h)
Multiply [(b) /5 x (d)]	……...(i)
<u>Potential cost saving</u>	
Enter target reduction in total days absent p.a.	
Divide (b) by (d)	
Multiply (i) by (g)	€…….... = total savings p.a.

Figure 1. Source: Personnel and Profit: London, IPM. (cited by Evans, 1999)

Absence data is necessary to understand if an organisation has an Absenteeism problem and whether they have the

appropriate policies in place to deal with the issue. The most commonly used methods of measuring absence are:

'Time-lost' resource is based on calculating the number of days lost as a proportion of the potential total number of days worked. While this measurement tool is used to calculate absence in a particular organisation, its reliability can be called into question when benchmarking or comparing to another organisation. The reason being the calculation of the formula being used. For example, one organisation may calculate the working year as 228 days (365 – weekends, 20 days annual leave – 12 bank holidays) where another may base their calculation on a different annual leave figure. Comparing like with like may cause anomalies in benchmarking.

Frequency of Absence can be broken into:

Frequency Rate – this measurement is based on the average number of absences of an employee. Determining whether time lost is due to a large number of short absences or a few periods of long absence can be measured using this tool.

Number of Absences over a period x 100

_____

Number of employees

Individual frequency rate – This shows the number of employees absent during a period (e.g. over one calendar year)

Number of employees absent during a period x 100

_____

Number of employees

Bradford Scale - Bradford University in the U.K. devised the Bradford Factor as a method of calculating employee absence.

This formula is based on the frequency of an individual's absence by weighting the spells of absence.

Evans (1999, p. 3) believe "that while the Bradford factor is best used for the implementation of policies relating to Absence, the reality is that most organisations use the Time-lost measurement".

Calculation: (S x S) x D

S = Spells of absence over a period (e.g. 12 months)

D = Total days off during the period

Company X offers a very generous sick pay scheme whereby 100% of an employee's salary is paid where illness does not exceed 365 days over a period of 4 years. The CIPD survey reported that 14% of employers in the UK across all sectors have recently changed or were planning to change their occupational sick pay arrangements with the majority (56%) planning to reduce their contributions (CIPD, Absence Management Survey, 2010).

Increasingly organisations are out-sourcing their absence management duties. This can be a very costly method of measurement. However, the experience of First Group and Sandwell Homes in the UK was their absence rates fell by 30% and 20% respectively by using the services of Active Health Partners (AHP). Following the introduction of the absence-management service by Sandwell Homes, absence information became available in real time rather than 6 weeks behind. Information was available to managers on a daily basis and this system afforded managers the ability "to introduce a more rigorous management culture of taking

responsibility for levels of sickness and has led to much greater consistency and compliance with how the company's absence policy is applied" (Sandwell Homes, 2009, p.12).

Many organisations are concerned about the health & well-being of their employees and this is reflected in company policies and procedures. It is common for organisations to offer the services of occupational health professionals and employee assistance programmes to aid employees with personal issues. Organisations understand that personal issues spill into the work place.

By costing Absence in the organisation, it is highlighting the issue as an area for cost savings. This can be done through an effective absence management policy. By introducing an effective absence management policy, there is the potential to reduce costs, prevent misuse of human resources and to deliver benefits to employees. IBEC found that only 26% of Irish employers count the cost of absence.

1.3. Theorists on Absence Management

According to Harrison and Martocchio (1998) over 500 books and papers have been written about absenteeism. However, they found results from studies to be inconsistent as most researchers focused on how personality (Steers and Rhodes, 1973), demographics (Lee, 1989) and job attitudes (Steers and Rhodes, 1978) influence absence behaviour. Burton et al (2002) believe the reasons for these inconsistencies is due to the fact that the studies were based on non-theory and overall absenteeism was examined rather than specific categories.

Over the years, a number of models of absenteeism have emerged. The most well known are the Steers and Rhodes (1978 and 1990) 'Process Model' and Nicholson's 'Attachment' theory. The Author has outlined the core concepts of each below.

1.3.1. Steers and Rhodes "Process Model" Theory

Steers and Rhodes (1978) developed a model of employee absenteeism which has been very influential and often-cited in

absenteeism literature (Harrison and Martocchio, 1998). Two primary factors influencing attendance were developed: "attendance motivation (voluntary absenteeism) and ability to attend (involuntary absenteeism)" (Kuzmits, 2009, p.281). Gunnigle (2006) believes Voluntary attendance is influenced by factors such as motivation, job satisfaction, one's personal work ethic and culture, beliefs and values – how the employee feels about the organisation and whether the employee feels a pressure to attend work. "Involuntary absence is influenced by health issues such as sickness, accidents and injuries" (Kuzmits, 2009, p. 281).

Economic conditions, incentives, work ethics and work group norms are said to create presence to attend (Gunnigle, 2006). The theory also explores the fact that when employees are not happy with their job or company, absent rates are high; but when these dissatisfied employees find alternative work, absence rates drop while labour turnover rates increase. (Gunnigle, 2007).

Since the initial work carried out by Steers and Rhodes in 1979 into the causes of absenteeism, there has been many investigations into the policies and strategies employed by

organisations into controlling and fundamentally reducing absence. However, the Steers and Rhodes process model is often used in programs adopted to reduce absence as they tackle the issues of motivation to work and ability to attend work. Please see Appendix B.

Further research by Steers and Rhodes in 1990 led to the adoption of a "Diagnostic model of Employee Attendance" which concentrated on 3 main characteristics:

1. Organisations need to set out clear procedures in relation to recruitment and selection which informs organisations of a new employee's history in relation to absence, for example, references with a particular focus on attendance.

2. Clear communication of absence policies to all staff

3. Employees' attitudes, values and goals are examined in line with the organisation's culture and procedures to ensure compliance.

One criticism of the Steers and Rhodes model is that it focuses on overall absenteeism. Burton et al (2002) consider that absenteeism has multidimensional rather than uni-dimensional constructs. If absenteeism is broken down into components a more rounded body of evidence supporting

their thinking will be found. Burton et al (2002) cites Kohler and Mathiew (1993) and Blau (1985) who argue that research into absenteeism may be missing significant findings by relying on a uni-dimensional framework of absenteeism. He reaffirms this belief by citing Kohler and Mathiew experience when researching a group of transit workers where they found that separating absenteeism into several components (illness, personal, family, transportation) enabled them to find results that would have been hidden by examining overall absenteeism.

1.3.2. Nicholson's "Attachment" Theory

Nigel Nicholson devised a model for analysing and predicting employee absence (Appendix C). The inception of this model was brought about by what he described as "fragmented insights" found in other theories. Nicholson believes that 'absence inducing' events are unavoidable, however, events leading to absence vary from person to person and "that this variation is due to the mediating influence of attendance motivation" (Nicholson, 1977, p. 231). In assessing the significance of absence behaviour Nicholson believes it is

important to commence with an analysis of what functions absence behaviour fulfils for the person, rather than "being blinded by an awareness of its more obviously deleterious effects on the organisation" (Nicholson, 1977, p. 238).

He believes that by focusing on the personal connotations of absence, the dynamic nature of the process becomes apparent. Some influences are neglected which need to be accounted for: notably mood status and transient emotions, moral beliefs and personal norms, personality characteristics and habitual routines and behaviours. To view the meaning of absence to the individual, the effects and consequences, beliefs and values and the policies and procedures in the workplace must all be examined.

Nicholson devised what he calls the A-B Continuum of Absence Types which is based on the assumption that attendance is 'normal' behaviour in most forms of employment, even those where absence levels are high. Most people are on 'automatic pilot' to attend work regularly and "the search for the causes of absence is a search for those factors that disturb the regularity of attendance" (Nicholson, 1977, p. 242). The first step in the A-B Continuum is to look

at absence inception in terms of how to avoid it, be that in terms of constraints on and barriers to attendance. It's about whether the employee *could* have made a decision re attending or not attending. 'A' types of absences generally are unavoidable and 'B' types are avoidable. The range from 'A' to 'B' can extend between "those who to which an exercise of individual choice would be irrelevant and those at the 'B' end those that are entirely under the potential control of individual choice" (Nicholson, 1977, p. 242). Using the A-B Continuum method, Nicholson believes a profile of each employee may be constructed which would highlight "how much of the variance in his absence behaviour is attributable to controllable or avoidable forces" (Nicholson, 1977, p. 242). The practicalities of administering this in a large organisation is questionable. The benefits of the exercise would need to justify the time and cost of setting up the profiles.

The research paper states that findings by researchers have shown that attendance in the workplace is the norm and that non-attendance is the behaviour of a few. Nicholson believes that the term 'attachment' determines why employees are motivated to attend work. He defines attachment as "the

degree to which the employee is dependent upon the regularities of organisational life" (Nicholson, 1977, p. 246).

Nicholson's (1977) paper also suggests 4 major influences which constitute 'attachment':

1.   *Personality traits* – Nicholson implies that with age there is a greater deal of stability and maturity thus impacting favourably on attendance motivation. He cites research which found that males place a greater attachment on work compared to females.

2.   *Work orientation* – "Industrial sociologists have devoted much attention to the ways in which the expectations and needs the employee takes to work determine the quality of his work experience" (Nicholson, 1977, P. 247). Research also shows that where there is a disconnect between workers expectations and needs, dissatisfaction, stress and absence arise.

3.   *Job involvement* – Nicholson describes this as the manner in which an employee connects with the characteristics of the job and how the employee copes with the demands. Ensuring the right fit of person for the job

through the recruitment and selection process has implications here.

4. *Employment relationship* – Nicholson cites 'high attachment' as a 'consequence' to a lucrative reward package or promotion system which may also include attendance initiatives.

The models give us an understanding of what motivates an employee to attend work. Variables such as job satisfaction, personal motivation, commitment and a feeling of being valued are motivational factors and lead to an employee feeling an attachment to an organisation.

1.4. Causes of Absenteeism

Researchers have found that the causes of absence are complex. Managers have their own views on the reasons for absence within their organisations but few actually have researched them sufficiently to address the problem. Huczynski & Fitzpatrick believe that most managers "neither understand, nor have investigated the causes of their absence problem" (1989, p.32). Furthermore, they believe "personal hunches, prejudices and rules of thumb represent the basis on which corrective action is decided" (1989, p.32). Managers often therefore base their assumptions on their own personal thoughts and experiences rather than research findings. McHugh (2002) suggests research into absence should seek to identify the underlying causes, with a view to developing more effective solutions to managing it. The author hopes to apply this to Company X. Current thinking according to Evans et al (1999) and Huczynski & Fitzpatrick (1989) sees causes in terms of multiple factors. However, broadly speaking, they believe the causes of absence can be broken into 3 main categories:

1. The influence of employees' personal characteristics

2. The influence of an organisation's policies

3. Factors External to the organisation

1.4.1. The influence of employees' personal characteristics

Rhodes and Steers 1990 model of Employee Attendance identified personal characteristics such as age, gender, personality, length of service, employee attitudes, values and expectations together with previous absence behaviour trends as factors which have a bearing on predicting future absence behaviours in employees.   Nicholson's (1977) views on 'attachment' in particular 'personality traits' coincide with the views held by Rhodes and Steers.

Age

Research by Nicholson (1977) found that in general younger employees have greater absence spells than older employees. However, older employees tend to have longer spells of absence, particularly those over 50 years of age.   Gibson (1966) found that while job satisfaction and work identification increases with age, so too do health problems. Huczynski & Fitzpatrick (1989) found that some of the

explanations offered to the above ideas "were lower levels of responsibility amongst young people, differences in their status, and the higher incidence of serious illness amongst older employees." (1989, p. 56) Scott Azwell writing in the National Underwriter Life and Health Magazine (2005) found older workers suffer from fewer incidents of acute illness and sporadic sick days and far fewer days spent caring for sick children. He also found lower turnover rates for long-term workers translate into lower recruiting, hiring and training expenses.

Gender

Research has shown that females tend to have higher Absence rates compared to males. This is due to the roles females play in wider society (i.e. care providers) rather than based on gender difference. Evans et al (1999) cite research which indicates that female absence patterns vary with length of service and occupational structure. The higher they climb on the organisational chart the lower the level of absence. Their ability to afford domestic help with higher paid salaries may have a bearing on their absence rates.

Length of service

Huczynski & Fitzpatrick (1989) found inconsistencies in the relationship between length of service and absenteeism. Some researchers believe that with age an individual's identification with their work increases and allegiance to their employer. A correlation between age and length of service remains, i.e. the older an employee the longer their absences are. However, Huczynski & Fitzpatrick (1989) found that there is no evidence linking absence and the duration of employment.

Personality

A relatively small number of employees account for the total absence frequency. Absence research has focused on those who are 'absence prone'. The conclusion as cited by Huczynski & Fitzpatrick (1989) and Evans et al (1999) is that those who demonstrate personality characteristics of anxiety and emotional instability are more likely to be absent than those who are more introverted and emotionally stable. If unmanaged and allowed to develop 'absent proneness',

employees will develop an absence pattern and once established, this cycle is hard to break.

Employee attitudes, values and expectations

Sociologists and psychologists have spent much time researching this topic and it is an issue with Evans (1999) believes is "of considerable debate" (1999, p. 22). Evans (1999) believe that outside influences such as family, education, community, class and upbringing will have a bearing on an employee's attitudes, values and expectations. In line with Rhodes and Steers (1990) views, outside influences will have a bearing on the motivation to attend work. How management view employees together with levels of employee commitment, culture, etc. will also influence an employees attendance.

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction research began in the 1950's. Initially, monetary gain was believed to be the greatest motivating factor. However, research into job satisfaction and its motivating influences identified two types of human nature

views.   Bassett-Jones and Lloyd (2005, p.930) defined the type of nature of one person as "basically lazy and work shy, and held that motivating them is a matter of external stimulation. The other view.... suggested that people are motivated to work well for its own sake, as well as for the social and monetary benefits they received, and that their motivation is internally stimulated". McGregor's Theory X and Y further develop this thought as Theory X is based on the assumptions that employees dislike work and are only interested in security and material reward. Theory Y is based upon the idea employees like responsibility, are interested in work and their careers and wish to undertake challenging tasks and responsibilities.

In 1959, Herzberg developed the motivation-hygiene theory which is concerned with the impact of work on job-design and motivation. He tested his theory through critical incident analysis. He described hygiene or extrinsic factors as those external to the job which affect job satisfaction. They include pay and working conditions. Motivational or intrinsic factors are within the employees' make-up, for example, the need for recognition, achievement, responsibility, work itself and promotional prospects. Herzberg believed that identifying

factors which motivated individuals would lead to job satisfaction or dissatisfaction, thereby aiding job-design.

Fitcher (2010, p.258) describes Herzberg's hygiene variables to reflect job dissatisfaction compared to motivational variables which are responsible for job satisfaction. He further explains that external factors "can lead to job dissatisfaction if negative levels exist. However, hygiene factors cannot cause job satisfaction, even if positive levels exist. Motivational internal factors can lead to job satisfaction if positive levels exist, but cannot cause dissatisfaction even if negative levels exist" (2010, p.258).

Intrinsic motivation as cited by Logan-Chullen (2010) refers to deriving pleasure and satisfaction from performing an activity rather than from the external outcomes of that activity (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Deci and Ryan, 2000). Intrinsic motivation has long been recognised as a major predictor of work-related behaviour, such as elevated levels of persistence, performance and productivity (Guay, Vallerand and Blanchard, 2000). Managers can foster these behaviours through policies and offering career development opportunities together with increased employee participation.

Steers and Rhodes (1976) reiterate this view. Adopting less hierarchical management structures rather than the old-style command and control styles encourage improved performance, commitment, employee engagement, job satisfaction and improved absenteeism levels.

Freed (2003) found a consistent theme in his research into "The causes and predictors of job satisfaction based on how people view their work". He found "the independent variables that predict job satisfaction are consistent with three distinct theoretical lines of thought" (2003, p. 23). Job satisfaction is dependent on the environmental situation that surrounds the job, for example, job characteristics and economic conditions (Stumpfer, Danana, Gouws and Viviers, 1998; Steel and Rentsch, 1997). Hackman, Oldham, Janson and Purdy (1975) reveal that well designed jobs lead to high motivation, high quality work performance, high satisfaction and low absenteeism and turnover. This is called *situationist*. Freed identified the second theoretical variable as *dispositionist*, that is, "job satisfaction is a function of the individual's personal traits or characteristics and other non-job characteristics" (2003, p.23) (Orgen and Lingl, 1995; Judge and Martocchio, 1996; Stumpfer et al, 1998;

Omundson, Schroeder and Stevens, 1996; Wong, Hui and Law, 1998; Clark, Oswald and Watt, 1998). The third theory is based on a combination of dispositional and situational (nature-nurture).

From a managerial point of view, managers have the ability to control the variables through job design, training programmes, policies and procedures. An effective recruitment and selection system will ensure that through job design the variables can be controlled and individuals with the right disposition are recruited.

1.4.2. The influence of an organisation's policies

Evans (1999) highlights 4 main perspectives in the influence of organisational context as a cause of absence. They are:

1. Work design
2. Other job related factors
3. Work group norms and cultures
4. Organisational policies and practices in relation to absence.

Work design

Twentieth century workplaces have been greatly influenced by the workings of Taylor and the introduction of the 'Scientific Management' approach to job design.

F.W. Taylor (1911) was a pioneer of the 'Scientific Management' approach to job design which dominated the 20th century. Scientific Management is based on the principles of a high degree of division of labour and specialisation (Evans, 1999, p. 24). The school of scientific management led to increased efficiency and specialisation and it was primarily associated with production line work. The thinking was brought into other forms of employment where jobs were broken down into tasks. While efficiency improved it also led to boredom, apathy and consequently absenteeism. Low levels of autonomy and participation led to increased levels of absence. Huczynski & Fitzpatrick (1989) found the higher the level of employee responsibility, the greater their feeling of achievement and the less likely employees will be absent. They cite research by Oberman (1963), Morgan (1976) and Dalton (1981) which found high levels of responsibility lead to low satisfaction & high absenteeism.

Conversely, one can assume that jobs redesigned to reduce routine, repetitiveness and encourage decision-making and initiative will lead to reduced absence levels.

Rhodes & Steers research into the effects of Scientific Management on job design found "negative outcomes include lower job satisfaction, lower motivation and higher absenteeism" (1989, p. 54). Further studies by Rhodes & Steers found that "the relationship between job satisfaction dimensions and absenteeism have uniformly found that the strongest relationship exists between work satisfaction and (low) absence frequency" (Evans et al, 1999, p. 25). Researchers Huczynski and Fitzpatrick (1989) found that high levels of repetitiveness with low levels of job satisfaction resulted in increased absence rates.

Other job-related factors

Stress

Employers have a responsibility and duty of care to provide a safe and stress free environment for their employees in which to work to. Armstrong (2009, p 978) highlights 4 main

reasons why an organisation should take account of stress and do something about it:

1. Social responsibility to provide a good quality of working life.
2. Excessive stress causes illness.
3. It can result in inability to cope with the demands of the job which causes further stress.
4. Excessive stress can reduce employee effectiveness and therefore organisational performance.

CIPD's 2010 Absence Management Survey cited stress as the main cause of long term sick leave. According to the report, stress related absence results from management style/relationships at work, organisational change, pressure to meet targets and workload.

Ben Wilmott, author of the CIPD Absence Management Survey 2004 report believes that advocating good people managing policies will go a long way towards managing stress. He says "it is about providing employees with well defined job roles, challenging but realistic targets and support, training and recognition to help them achieve their targets".

The CIPD suggest tackling the problem by improving work-life balance, introducing stress-audits and risk assessments, invest in training, carrying out staff satisfaction surveys, introducing employee assistance programmes and the involvement of occupational health professionals.

Taking sick days puts immense strain on other employees as their workload is doubled. Dr. Garrett Hayes, General Practitioner and Occupationalist Physician writing in the Health & Well-Being Magazine (2010) said "this can lead to increased stress for other workers. In some workplaces, things have to be done no matter how many people are there to do them and all the extra work falls on the rest of the colleagues. The expectations are they will carry the workload. This can lead to other people going out sick because they feel overly pressurised" (www.vhi.ie).

Leadership – The Role of Management

Huzynski and Fitzpatrick (1989, p. 48) cite findings by Taylor (1974, 1982) who links the role of management to absence behaviour. Behaviour has a strong correlation with brief spells of absence. Employees who have a good relationship

with their supervisors and who can openly discuss issues have lower frequencies of absence. In a US study by the Bureau of Business Practice, 39 companies employing 250,000 people were surveyed on the link between the role of management and absence. The study identified the quality of first line supervision as a major factor contributing to absence. Bennet (2002) found that organisational management may also contribute to employee absence where no physical illness or injury actually exists.

The role of management in engaging and communicating with staff is essential. Pavitt (1999) believes "when leaders effectively communicate their vision, they win the confidence of followers, which in turn aids in communication satisfaction between the leader and follower". Holladay and Coombs (1993) believe "leadership is a behaviour enacted through communication". Castaneda and Nahavandi (1991) suggested "that subordinates who perceive their supervisors' behaviours to exhibit both relationship orientation and task orientation report being the most satisfied". Madlock (2008) found when leaders communicate effectively, their followers experience greater levels of satisfaction.

Management is responsible for ensuring their employees well-being is looked after. Feeling valued increases a person's self-esteem and increases their level of commitment to the organisation.

Aspects of organisational and managerial practice such as how tasks or work is organised, the structure of the organisation, the nature of management hierarchy, low levels of responsibility, job satisfaction and organisational commitment are factors leading to employee absenteeism (Bennett, 2002, p.431).

Satisfied employees have also been shown to exhibit lower levels of absenteeism and higher levels of motivation (Sledge, 2008).

Mullins et al (2002) cite findings by Pfeffar (1998) who emphasise the importance of people to organisational success. He stresses the importance of people-centred strategies which enhance the internal work environment. Managers who adopt more flexible working policies which facilitate the role of spouses for example, encourage retention and reduces levels

of absenteeism. If leadership is poor, people feel disengaged and the psychological contract is broken.

Motivation

Understanding the concept of human motivation is recognised as an essential for effective management in today's organisational environment.

Measuring motivation according to Furnham (1997, p. 293) is very difficult "both because some people find it very difficult to report their motives accurately as they do not have sufficient insight into themselves, as well as the fact that there are pressures put on people to give socially desirable, rather that truthful answers." Findings by Westwood (1992) found that "individuals differ in terms of their motivational state and the factors that affect the motivational state of an individual is variable across time and situation" (Gunnigle, 2006, p. 132).

Over the years many theories in the area of motivation have been developed with the aim of analysing employee's performance in relation to satisfying employee's needs through reward and observing how people work. Gunnigle

concludes (2006, p. 133) "that if these needs are satisfied employees will be motivated to work at high-performance levels but, if not, their performance will be less than satisfactory".

One of the most influential theorists on the subject of motivation has been Abraham Maslow who developed the 'Hierarchy of Needs' theory which is based on the premise that we all have various needs to satisfy. The theory is based on "the principle of the existence of a series of needs that range from basic instinctive needs for sustenance and security to higher-order needs, such as self-esteem and the need for self-actualisation" (Robbins, 2001, p.158). The theory is based on 5 stages.
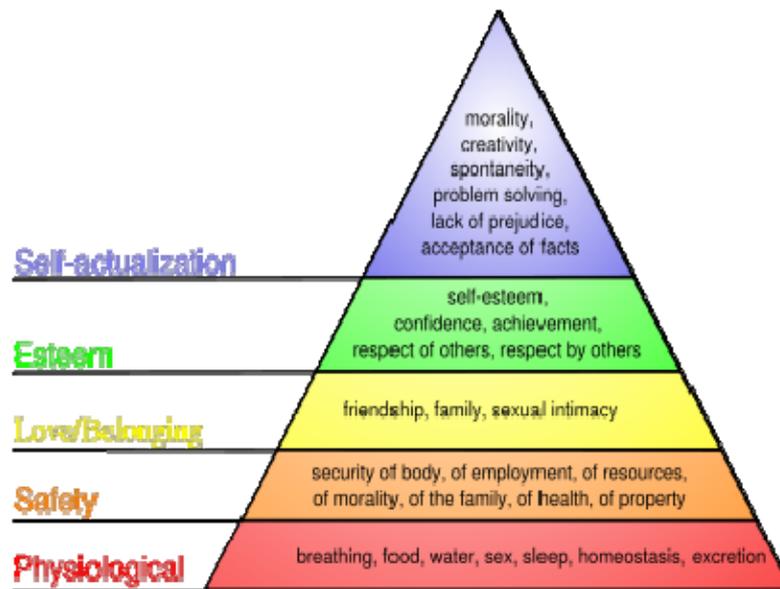
Figure 2. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Only when the lower level of need is satisfied does the higher need become a motivator. Where a need is unsatisfied, an employee will search it out. Consequently, if the need remains unsatisfied, it will lead to de-motivation.

Alderfer's Existence, Relatedness and Growth (ERG) theory contradicts Maslow's theory in so far as he believes that a person may have different levels of needs at the same time. Robbins (2001, p. 161) believes that the "ERG theory is more consistent with our knowledge of individual differences between people." The ERG model also finds that an

50

individual who is unable to satisfy a higher need will regress
and concentrate on a lower level need.

Herzberg (1959) developed the Dual-Factor theory in 1968
which is concerned with the impact of work and job-design on
motivation. He felt that identifying factors which led to job
satisfaction or dissatisfaction would enable managers design
jobs which either motivated or de-motivated employees.
Herzberg believed that a combination of intrinsic (facilitate
responsibility, career advancement, recognition) and extrinsic
(pay and working conditions) factors had a major impact on
employees motivation and consequently job satisfaction.
Central to Herzberg's theory "is that only by varying
motivator factors can management improve performance and
motivation" (Fichter et al, 2010, p.258). Once an employee is
motivated performance increases and employees are
motivated further.

Taylor's (1970) work on the classical theory also revealed
differing factors behind job satisfaction which included
communication satisfaction and supervisors' communication
style.

Locke and Latham devised the goal-setting theory. The basic premise behind their theory according to Greenberg and Baron (2000) "is that a goal serves as a motivator because it causes people to compare their present capacity to perform with that required to succeed at the goal" (2000, p. 139).

They maintain that if an individual believes they are capable of achieving the goal they will work hard to achieve it thus increasing their job satisfaction level. The theory also claims that individuals will accept set goals as their own personal goals extending a person's commitment to achieving the goal which is known as goal commitment (2000, p.139). The more committed a person is to achieving their goal, the more motivated they will be. Conversely unattainable goals or goals perceived to be unattainable will serve as de-motivating forces.

Greenberg and Baron (2000) believe that if employees believe they are unfairly treated, they may withhold a few minutes or days off their working day or week as a method of retaliation for perceived lack of equity and fairness. Nicholson (1977) similarly believes that absence is viewed as an instrument by employees to restore the balance of effort-reward rations.

This relates to Adam's equity theory which is based on the premise that individuals are motivated by fairness. The variables of outcomes and inputs are weighed up and a judgement made. If an employee feels his outcomes are less than his perceived inputs, the employee will create a feeling of equitable payment (i.e. absence from work) to balance the perceived fairness of his inputs and outputs.

Greenberg and Baron (2000) describe the expectancy theory whereby "people are motivated to work when they expect they will achieve the things that they want from their jobs" (2000, p. 149). The expectancy theory not only focuses on what people believe but also on aspects of the organisational environment which influences job performance. According to Greenberg and Baron, theorists believe that most result from 3 different types of beliefs:

- *Expectancy* – whereby a person's efforts will result in performance
- *Instrumentability* – where a person believes their performance will be rewarded
- *Valence* – is based on the perceived value of the rewards to the employees

A manager's role is to clarify an employee's role by defining their expectations along with supporting them to achieve their goals. Identifying what 'reward' means to an employee, for example, increased annual leave, family-friendly policies helps a manager realise what motivates their workers.

Work group norms and cultures

Within the workplace both formal and informal work group norms grow. Formal is based on management's enforcement of policies and practices which result on the governing, monitoring and recording of policies. Informal socialisation can be described as the 'way things are done'. In terms of what practices are allowed and what are let go they are learnt through observation. The power of the group influences behavioural norms. Norms arise (Evans et al, 1999), "out of the formal rules established by management and the rigour with which management enforces them on the one hand, and the informal rules established by work groups on the other – the latter being strongly influenced by the former." (Evans et al, 1999, p. 29)

Custom and practice can influence both formal and informal behavioural norms and outline what practices are and are not tolerated. Custom and practice according to Evans et al "sets precedents and establishes powerful expectations about what behaviours are acceptable and what disciplinary sanctions will be applied when acceptable norms of behaviour are transgressed." (1999, p.49). The norms are based on a history of how issues are dealt with by managers. Where absence is managed by Managers in accordance to the policies and procedures employees know what is expected of them. When a manager ignores the rules, employees know through experience what they can get away with. The culture of the organisation will also have a significant impact on custom and practice within a company.

Communication

Communication plays a pivotal role of management in organisations today. An effective communication process has many benefits to organisations including increased productivity, higher levels of creativity, reduced absenteeism and staff turnover, reduced industrial unrest and greater job satisfaction (Hargie et al, 2004, p. 5).

Communication has been found to impact on our physical, identity, social and practical needs. We are surrounded by our family, friends, colleagues and strangers. Our ability to speak, listen, read and write impacts on our daily lives. Research has shown that communication is necessary for our physical health. Studies have found that people who lack relationships in their lives are two to three times more likely to die early regardless of whether they drink or smoke. Studies indicated that "social isolation is a major risk factor contributing to coronary diseases, comparable to physiological factors" (Adler et al, 1997, p. 8). Our sense of identity comes from the way we interact with other human beings. Some theorists argue that communication is so necessary in our lives that it "is the primary goal of human existence" (Adler, 1997, p. 10).

Employees "who are informed and feel valued are more likely to be committed to the organisation and to perform better in their work" (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2010, p.225). "In a closed communication climate, information is withheld when it is to the advantage of the sender, and recrimination, secrecy and distrust can make working life unpleasant" (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2010, p.227).

"An open communication climate promotes collaborative working; people develop self-worth, feel that they can contribute freely without reprisal, know that their suggestions will be welcomed, that mistakes will be seen as learning opportunities and they feel trusted, secure and confident in their job" (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2010, p.227).

Pettit et al (1997) cited how communication plays a major role in one's job satisfaction. How an employee perceives a supervisor's communication style, credibility, and content as well as the organisation's communication system will to some extent influence the amount of satisfaction (morale) he or she receives from the job.

Pincus (1986) found that the relationship between communication and satisfaction was stronger, particularly where supervisors fostered an open communication climate and provided personal feedback. He found "the vital importance of employee-immediate supervisor communication on employee job satisfaction" (Pincus, 1986, p. 413). Wheeless, Wheeless & Howard (1983) in their research concluded the same.

Downs and Clampitt (1993) found 'personal feedback' from the supervisor to bear the highest impact. Conversely, they found that satisfaction with feedback did not necessarily lead to improved performance. Research carried out by Brayfield and Crockett (1955), Herzberg, Mausner, Peterson and Capwell (1979), Vroom (1964) and others felt that the relationship between performance and satisfaction is highly variable.

Accordingly Burke (1969) summarised his findings as follows "Communication is essential to the functioning of an organisation. It is viewed widely as one of the most important processes of management" (1969, p. 326).

Shaw (2005) believes that competent managers must share and respond to information in a timely manner, actively listen to other points of view, communicate clearly and succinctly to all levels of the organisation, and utilise differing communication channels (Madlock, 2008, p.61).

The relationship between ineffective communication and job satisfaction resulting in high staff turnover rates has been attributed to "a deterioration of relationships in organisational

settings resulting from reduced interpersonal communication between workers and supervisors negatively influences job satisfaction and sometimes leads to employees leaving" (Korte & Wynne, 1996).

Organisational Commitment

Porter et al defined commitment as "the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization" (1974, p.604). Mowday *et al* (1979) suggests organizational commitment is comprised "of a) strong belief in the acceptance of the organization's goals and values, b) a willingness to expend considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and c) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization" (Mowday et al (1979) as cited by Clark, 2011, p. 9).

Organisational commitment originally focused on an individual's emotional attachment to an organization (Mowday et al, 1979). This view according to Meyer and Allen (1991, 1997) has expanded to encompass three components:

1.   Affective commitment which relates to an employees' emotional attachment to an organization.

2.   Continuance commitment explains and employee's "awareness that there are associated costs with withdrawing temporarily or permanently from an organization" (Burton et al, 2002, p. 1833).

3.   Normative commitment relates to an employee's feelings of obligation to participate in an organization.

In a study examining the relationship between absenteeism and employee commitment Meyer (1997) found affective commitment had the highest link between absence behaviours when compared to continuance and normative.   However, Burton et al (2002, p.184) in their research found that "although organizational commitment and its various dimensions have been shown to be directly related to absenteeism, their effect is weak, accounting for less than 10% of the variance explained in absenteeism".

In the Steers and Rhodes model, each of these three variables in organizational commitment relate favorably to motivation to attend.   Affective and continuous commitment display emotional attachments to the organization.   Burton *et al*

(2002, p.185) feel that "the various dimensions of organizational commitment will indirectly influence the level of absenteeism through a person's motivation to attend".

Clark's (2011) findings in his paper 'The organization commitment of workers in OECD countries' found that "Public sector workers are very significantly less likely to say that they are willing to work harder than they have to in order to help their firm or organization to succeed." On the other hand, public sector employees were more likely to say they were proud to work in the sector and would turn down another job offering more money. Delfgaauw and Dur (2008) note that this may be due to less competitive pressure on workers in the public sector. Another possibility is generous employee benefits and opportunities for a greater work-life balance.

Bennet (2002, p.432) in his paper 'Employee commitment: the key to absence management in local government?' referred to organizational commitment as "the ways in which tasks or the work context are organised, the structure of the organization and the management hierarchy, together with low levels of employee responsibility, morale, motivation and

job satisfaction, have all been shown to be associated with employee absence (Dalton and Mesch, 1990; Rentsch and Steel, 1998). This relates to the importance of job design.

In addition to the 3 components of organizational commitment cited by Meyer and Allen, O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) identified psychological attachment as a central approach to all the various types of commitment. According to them "psychological attachment reflects the degree to which the individual adopts characteristics or perspectives of the organization" (1986, p.493). Psychological attachment can be divided into 3 categories. They are:

1.   Compliance, or instrumental involvement for specific, extrinsic rewards,

2.   Identification, or involvement based on a desire for affiliation, and

3. Internalisation, or involvement predicted on congruence between individual and organizational values (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986, p. 493).

The arguments highlight the multi-dimensional nature of organizational commitment. During times of change, organizational commitment may lesson. Greenberg and Baron (2000) cite high unemployment as a factor which limits alternative job options thus "leading people to stay with their present jobs despite their dissatisfaction" (2000, p. 178). The Croke Park agreement is leading to unprecedented change within the Irish Public Sector and it would be interesting to note the changes in resulting employee commitment.

Su (2009, p.2495) cited the following benefits from a high level of employee organizational commitment: "Employee organizational commitment can benefit society because of the decrease in job movement and the increase in national productivity and/or work quality". She also believes "Employee organizational commitment remains important for organizations because of its potential impact on employees' job performance (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Mackenzie, Podsakoff and Ahearne 1998; Ketchand and Strawser, 2001; Riketta, 2002), employee turnover and acceptance of organizational change by employees" (Lau and Woodman, 1995; Nikolaou and Vakola, 2005).

Organisational Culture

Buchanan & Huczynski (2010) describe culture as the "personality of an organisation". (2010, p.100) Culture impacts on how employees work and how they relate to each other, customers and managers. Organisational culture "effects not only task issues – how well or badly an organisation performs, but also emotional issues – how workers feel about their work and their organisation" (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2010, p100).

Culture can give an organisation an identity, for example, a philosophy, personality, climate or ideology. Deal and Kennedy (1982) as cited by Buchanan & Huczynski (2010, p. 100) depict culture as "the way we do things around here".

Research by authors on the subject of organisational culture portray culture as "a powerful lever for guiding workforce behaviour" (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2010, p.100). Publications on the subject have shown how positive values and beliefs impacted on the rise of Japan's successful industrial era of the 1980's and 1990's. However, culture can also negatively impact on an organisation's success and it is

the responsibility of management to ensure that the culture of the organisation manifests itself in a proper manner.

Where a culture of absence abuse is tolerated it will become the norm and establish itself as a custom and practice. To deal with the situation once it has been established is very difficult. Manager's have the ability to change culture to achieve greater organisational effectiveness. If they fail to implement policies and procedures, they are seen to condone absence abuse and "may serve to create a culture in which employees perceive that absence will be tolerated." (Evans & Walters, 2002, p.64)

Senior Management when recruiting new employees have a responsibility to induct them into the organisation's ways of thinking and behaving. Giving them a sense of how things operate within the organisation and expectations and standards reinforces the values and organisational beliefs. Edgar Schein's (2004) model of culture believes culture exists on three levels: the surface manifestation of culture which can be described as 'observable culture'; organisational values and beliefs which are bourn through employee's behaviour, i.e. respect and hard work and basic assumptions which relate

to the organisation's relationship with its environment. How management deal with absenteeism is influenced by organisational socialisation. Organisational socialisation influences "an employee's pattern of behaviour, values, attitudes and motives". (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2010, p.107). The difference between rules and regulations compared to custom and practice are defined under organisational socialisation.

According to Tina Nielsen in her article titled 'The morale high ground' (2006, p.51), "High levels of absenteeism and presenteeism (where people come to work but perform badly) are symptoms, they say of an ailing management culture. If leadership, teamwork and communication are poor, people feel disengaged; the psychological contract breaks down." Looking beyond the physical and mental health of individuals in the organisation to analyse "the corporate behaviour, culture and values". Communicating the organisations vision & mission together with aligning them to the organisation's goals will improve performance levels together with commitment to the organisation.

Organisational practices and policies

Organisation's practices and policies in relation to the subject of Absenteeism tend to refer to how an organisation deals with the issue of absence in a remedial way. O'Reilly (2010) considers findings by Nicholson who believes having an absence policy focuses on the issue of absence rather than on improving performance and attendance. He believes if the policy was to focus on productivity and employee performance in terms of a 'performance policy', the issue of absence could be portrayed in a positive light.

Existing policies need to be revised and reviewed where necessary to encourage job enlargement and enrichment, talent and career management, promote flexible working patterns, amend existing job designs, encourage family-friendly policies, etc. Management should ensure the existing policies are amended to avoid staff feeling bored and de-motivated, dissatisfied and stressed with their employment.

The organisation may need to enhance support functions such as occupational health and employee assistant programmes to

promote health and well-being all of which have been proved to aid attendance levels.

1.4.3.The influence of external factors on absence

External influences impede an employees ability to attend work and this line of thinking is based on Steers & Rhodes 'ability to attend' model.

Economic and Market conditions

During recessionary times absence levels tend to fall. An article published in the European Working Conditions Observatory (EWCO) found that in 2007, 1,745,300 days were lost due to accidents or illnesses (http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/studies/tn0911039s/ie 0911039q.htm). The level for 2010 will be published later this Autumn by IBEC which relates to their Absence Management Survey in 2010.. The 2007 figure was taken at the end of the Celtic Tiger years when jobs and the economy had not reached rock bottom. Many employees were still able to find new employment whereas now with 470,284 on the live register,

(http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/documents/labour_ma rket/2011/lreg_july2011.pdf) the possibility of finding alternative employment is materially more challenging.

Genuine illness and accidents

Genuine illness represents the main cause of absence. Huczynski and Fitzpatrick (1989) cite research by Hedges (1975) which found "the direct effects of health status on absenteeism has tended to be ignored by researchers, even though illness is widely recognised as a most important cause of absenteeism." (1989, p. 77). However, illness is a fact of life and support systems for example, paid sick leave and occupational health benefits and employee assistant programmes can support employees who are genuinely ill. IBEC in their 2011 survey found that the issue of Mental Health is becoming less of a taboo subject in the workplace as employees, through the introduction of employee assistant programmes and occupational health professionals are speaking more openly about the issue. Health and Safety legislation has been responsible for workplace safety and employers who fail to provide a duty-of-care to their employees can be prosecuted by law.

Travel and Transport problems

Journey times can be a de-motivating factor for some employees in affecting their decision to attend work. Rhodes and steers highlight a persons ability to attend work. The motivation may be there but if the ability is not available then the motivation is irrelevant. Evans et al (1999) cite research findings which show the longer the journey the greater the likelihood that people will be absent from work. Huczynski & Fitzpatrick believe "that absence rates are positively related to the nature of travel to work and to the duration of travelling time" (1989, p.79). The proposed traffic congestion charges being put forward for approval to Dublin City Council will add to the cost of travel to work and may ultimately have an adverse affect on absence rates.

Conclusion

The literature review supports the findings by the Theorists Rhodes & Steers and Nicholson which identifies motivation to attend as having the greatest influence on an employee's attendance levels. An employee's feelings towards job satisfaction and commitment levels to the organisation are

subject to the role Management plays in communicating effectively and valuing their employees. Younger employee's absenteeism levels impacts greater on an organisation through short and frequent periods of absenteeism. However, older employees have less absence but are out for longer periods. Ensuring effective policies and procedures are in place in relation to Absenteeism impacts positively on Absenteeism levels. An employee's ability to attend whether they have the motivation or not will also impact on Absenteeism levels. Managers have a role in policing the policies and ensuring that employees are inducted to the organisation's standards when recruited in order for a culture of honesty to prevail.

CHAPTER 2

Research Methodology

2.1. Introduction

The researcher has chosen to investigate the causes of absence within Company X. The reasons the Researcher chose this topic are:

1. personal interest in the subject

2. to gain an understanding of the concept of Absenteeism

3. to understand the role of absence management and its effects on the workplace

4. to make recommendations to Company X arising from the author's research on the subject.

5. to identify how theory and models of absence can aid the reduction of costs by identifying employee behaviours associated or resulting in high levels of Absenteeism.

This thesis includes details how the Researcher plans to investigate and analyse the subject in terms of gathering data,

both primary and secondary, along with the latest literature on the subject. For the purpose of this thesis, the company will be referred to as Company X.

2.2. Philosophy adopted when approaching the Research Methodology

2.2.1. Positivism

The author considered adopting a positivist approach to research methodology. Bryman & Bell defined a positive approach as "an epistemological position that advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond" (2003, p. 16). Fisher believes the intention of positivism is "to produce general laws that can be used to predict behaviour, in terms of probability at least, if not with absolute certainty. These general laws would form an open and orthodox body of knowledge and the positivist method would be the standard approach for all scientific endeavours" (Fisher, 2004, p.15).

A positivism approach does not suit the form of research the author wishes to take as positivism is only interested in the

norm and part of the Researchers research involves understanding particularities. The Researcher wishes to develop concrete answers to the questions and part of the results will require analysis.

2.2.2. Realism

Therefore, the Researcher will be using a Realist approach as this "retains many of the ambitions of positivism but recognises and comes to terms with the subjective nature of research and the inevitable role of values in it" (Fisher, 2004, p. 15). Adopting a realistic approach allows the researcher analyse variables which cannot be measured as black and white facts. This method allows for discussion of findings and subjectivity. It also allows for general explanations.

2.3. Research Model

The author has decided that a mixed-model research rationale is best suited towards the type of research being carried out. "The mixed-model approach mixes qualitative and quantitative across the entire research process and includes

other elements such as the research questions, validity issues and data interpretation" (Klenke, 2008, p.159).

The author wishes to present the most accurate account possible of the causes of Absenteeism and thus feels that the multi-model best suits this goal. Saunders, (2007, p. 139) calls this model "a triangulated approach". The term triangulation refers to the use of differing data collection techniques to ensure the most accurate results to ones research. Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 291) define triangulation as "the development of measures of concepts, whereby more than one method would be employed in the development of measures, resulting in greater confidence in findings". Tashakkori and Teddlie argue "mixed methods research provides stronger inferences resulting from quantitatively derived experiences through standardised questionnaires and qualitative capture experiences derived from open ended questions". (2003 as cited by Klenke, 2008, p. 158) According to Karami (2007, p. 89), "it has been emphasised that qualitative and quantitative research could be combined to reinforce each other in the same research project".

2.4. Research Approach

The Researcher will analyse primary data from her own research through the media of interviews and questionnaires. She will also analyse these findings against secondary research data which has been developed by theorists and other researchers on the subject, e.g. IBEC and CIPD. The objective is to satisfy the aims of the thesis.

2.4.1. Qualitative Data

One method of data collection being used is qualitative data. This can be defined as "all non-numeric data or data that have not been quantified.... ranges from a short list of responses to open ended questions in an on-line questionnaire" (Saunders, 2009, p. 480).

The Researcher intends to investigate the research questions by means of interviews. The Researcher will interview the Head of Human Resources Department of Company X and two Senior Managers with the aim of identifying their views on how absence is managed, the causes of absence and those which particularly affect Company X. The interviews are an

opportunity to explore the nature of the problem and to find out Management's opinions. These findings will be analysed and compared to the findings of the staff questionnaire to get a complete picture of the causes of absenteeism within the organisation.

The interviews will be semi-structured as this approach encourages discussion and opinions of the interviewee. Qualitative data allows the researcher to probe answers further to seek points of clarification. A very structured approach may lead to less informative and exploratory information gathering. Questions will be open ended to encourage opinions and viewpoints. The Researcher will explain the reasoning for the interviews and gain permission from the relevant authority before embarking on her research. The Author will explain the reasoning behind the interviews and to reiterate the confidentiality of the information gathered.

The benefits of qualitative data include exploring new areas of research, clarification can be sought on areas of interest and more complex types of questions may be asked compared to the quantitative method.

One of the drawbacks is ensuring the same questions are asked to all interviewees. The structure of the interview must be standard. An obligation is on the Researcher to focus and to note the answers ver batum.

2.4.2. Quantitative Data

The second method of gathering data is the quantitative method, i.e. a questionnaire.   Waters (2008) cites the following benefits of quantitative data collection:

1.   "Quantitative methods allow us to look logically and objectively at a problem.

2.   Quantitative methods allow us to compare performance across different operations, companies and time". (Waters, 2008, p. 2)

Other benefits include:

- Results are easy to summarise and analyse

- Researching a small group can give a reliable indication of the views of a larger population.

Secondary research as defined by Bryman & Bell is "the information that was collected by other researchers for a different purpose. They include journal articles, on-line data sources such as webpages of firms, governments, semi-

government organisaztions and catalogues". (2003, p.91)
IBEC has carried out an indepth survey on absence within
Ireland in 2010. The CIPD produced their own findings from
2009 in which they onducted a survey of 573 organisations
across the UK employing more than 1.5 million employees in
2009. Both of these sources of data and their findings will be
used to reinforce the author's research.

2.4.3. Population & Sample

The questionnaire will be administered to 125 employees
across the varying categories of staff. This will cover
Academic, Administrative, Management, Maintenance,
Library and Technical staff. A population as a group of
individuals, items or data from which a sample is taken. Prior
to conducting the survey, the author will contact the sample
by means of email to inform them of the objective of the
questionnaire (Appendices D & E).

The Researcher will adopt the Likert model of questionnaire
which is an established and recognised questionnaire format.
The Author also decided to adopt a 4 point rating scale in
preference to a 5 point scale because according to Saunders

(2009) *"an even number of points can be used to force the respondent to express their feelings about an implicitly positive or negative statement"*. By choosing a 5 point scale, the tendency is to pick the mid-point thus avoiding making a decision and taking the easy route.

2.4.4. Constraints

Due to the nature of Company X, most Academic staff are on leave from June to September. Also, many library staff are seasonal and work during the academic year. Therefore, the results from both of these staff categories is limited. Other categories of staff will also be availing of annual leave during the Summer months.

A voluntary approach to the questionnaire will be used so as no member of staff will be forced into answering it. Also, the participants will be fully informed about the reasons for the research and confidentiality is guaranteed. The information provided is to be used solely for the study and will not be made available to anyone else. Anonymity is guaranteed through the on-line survey tool.

2.4.5. Validity and Reliability

Saunders (2003) identified pitfalls in designing and administering surveys. The following precautions will be taken by the Researcher:

1. Permission will be sought from the Human Resources Manager to carry out the survey and interviews.

2. The survey will be sent by email using www.freeonlinesurvey.com. This on-line survey tool offers total confidentiality and that is why the Author has chosen this particular tool. The confidentiality element ensurs the honesty of the answers and the data received. By using a recognized survey, the researcher avoids the pitfalls of having to run a pilot questionnaire and unnecessary and irrelevant questions.

2.4.6. Ethical considerations

A number of ethical considerations were made before initiating the questionnaire:

1. The author will seek the permission of each employee before automatically forwarding the survey for completion.

2. The author will also re-iterated that confidentiality is

guaranteed through the on-line survey tool and that the information would not be seen by anyone other than the author.

3.   The author will comply with obligations relating to the Freedom of Information Acts and Data Protection Acts.

CHAPTER 3

Research Findings

3.1. Introduction

The Researcher devised an employee survey focusing on the causes of absenteeism which were based on findings in her literature review. Questions concentrated on personality traits, issues regarding the absenteeism policy and questions probing the effectiveness of communication and motivation.

The Author also interviewed three senior managers within Company X, one being the Human Resources Manager and the other two were the Marketing Manager and Administration Manager.

IBEC's Researcher of the 2010 Absent Management questionnaire to Irish Employers, Ms. Geraldine Anderson kindly agreed to answer questions from the Author in relation to her survey. Their survey results had not been published at time of this thesis submission date (22nd August 2011).

3.2 Results from questionnaire

A total of 44 responses were collected from 125 questionnaires which were emailed to employees within Company X. The response rate was 35.2%. The low response rate was partly due to the time of year in which the survey was administered and partly due to the fact that two categories of staff are absent during the summer months, namely academics and library. During the Summer months the majority of employees take their annual leave which also impacted on the low response rate. 36 of the respondents were female and 8 male. The Researcher feels that a larger sample of males is required to provide credibility to these findings (Appendix E).

Questions 1 to 5 focused on profiling the age group, gender, length of service together with the category of employment and type of employment contract. Both Nicholson and Steers & Rhodes models recognise the influence of personal characteristics on motivation and job satisfaction. 36 out of the 44 respondents are female with 47.7% falling into the 26 – 35 age bracket. 72.7% are permanent employees. Using SPSS software, the Author was able to cross reference 'length of service' with 'gender'. 84.7% of females had up to 7 years

service compared to 15.3% males. 77.7% of females had more than 7 years service and 22.2% males.

As stated earlier, the response rate was low from library and academic staff thus the responses were primarily made up of 81.8% administrative staff.

Questions 6 to 14 concentrated on what absence means to the individual and how they perceive it to be monitored. Over 72% are aware that Company X has an absence management policy and 35% became aware of it through the company's Human Resources website. 68% believed that absence was dealt with effectively.

In order to assess the difference between male and female participants, an ANOVA (Appendix H) was run on the key variables. A significance value of below 0.05 indicates that there is a significant difference between the groups (in this case gender) on the variable

Gender	Female	Male
Uncertified Days	2.56	0.38
Certified Days	5.90	2.75

Figure 3.

of interest. In terms of the results in Figure 3, a significant difference was found in the number of uncertified sick leave

85

days taken, whereas there was no significant difference in the number of certified sick leave days taken (Appendix I).

Minor illness made up the majority of days lost at 37.1%, however, 8.1% cited major illness as a factor which caused them to be absent and this presumably related to the variation between 0 and 36 days taken in 2010 relating to certified sick leave. This correlates with CIPD findings which cite minor illness, such as colds, flu, stomach upsets, headaches and migraines as the main causes of short-term sick leave.

Interestingly, nearly 60% of respondents felt that absence should be part of their performance discussion. Findings by IBEC differed in opinion to Company X's response in so far as they do not support absence management as a variable to be used in performance management.

Referring to the impact of absence on the job, there was very little variation between low staff morale (18.5%), reduced customer service (16.4%), low levels of productivity (17.1%), reduced efficiency (17.1%) and stress (19.9) among those left to cover duties.

Stress rated slightly higher with 29 respondents citing it as the most important factor. Based on outcomes from the literature

review Stress is becoming an increasingly important factor in absence from work. These findings also correspond to research by CIPD in their 2009 Absence Management Survey. They found that stress was a particularly common cause of long-term absence in the public sector. Employers are reporting that stress related absence is increasing every year. The causes are linked to workloads, external relationships, organisational change/restructuring and management styles. On a positive note, 8 out of 10 employers within the public service are taking steps to reduce stress. Increasingly, organisations are providing occupational health series to employees as a stress combating mechanism (CIPD Absence Management Survey, 2010).

Questions 15 to 24 related to perceptions of employees to their role and management's behaviour. Question 15 refers to the accuracy of the job description to the role and while 54.6% of respondents feel their job description did reflect their role, 45.5% disagreed and of that figure, 15.9% did not receive a job description at all.

A very positive 77.2% found their role varied between manageable and very challenging. Also positive was 65.9% agreed and strongly agreed being valued by their managers.

Question 18 probed into the effectiveness of management's attitude towards communication. This resulted in a varied response with 38.6% believing it is effective, 25% believing it to be ineffective and 36.4% believing it is sometimes effective. Of the 38.6% who believe their manager to be an effective communicator, 33% of communication was done through the medium of informal chats, 22% through one-to-one communications and 15.4% through team meetings. Only 11% was through PMDS.

Linked to questions 18 and 19 is question 20 which relates to feedback on performance. 29% receive feedback. 29% receive feedback on a weekly basis and worryingly over 20% never receive feedback. Out of the 27.1% who ticked the 'other' box, comments such as "rarely", "at PMDS meetings"," only when there is a need" and "only when there is a problem" were made.

Despite the view of employees on their manager's communication styles, a positive 77.4% believe they have a good to excellent rapport with their managers.

Question 22 is linked to how motivated employees feel about their positions and a very positive 65.9% feel motivated with 31.8% not.

Question 23 probes into the reasons employees are motivated. By performing a cross tabulation between the variables and gender, the responses showed little variance between males and female. In relation to 'recognition of job well done', the variance was negligible at 77.8% for females and 75% for males. All the factors found similar responses (Appendix J).

Question 24 asks whether employees believe absence is abused within their departments and 34.1% believe it is while 47.7% believe it is not. However, a further 13.6% are unsure and this variable can work either for or against the perception.

3.3 IBEC'S Absenteeism survey findings 2011

Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) carried out an Absence Survey in 2010 to ascertain absence levels within Irish industry. Their findings have not been published at time of this thesis being submitted (22nd August 2011).

However, the author spoke to the Researcher of the survey, Ms. Geraldine Anderson who was very helpful and provided the following information.

IBEC surveyed 635 companies and received responses from 502 (response rate 79%). They used the following definition of Absence, "unscheduled disruption of the work process due to days lost as a result of sickness or any other cause not excused through statutory entitlements or company approval".

They noted the following are not included as absence:

Statutory leave e.g. annual leave and public holidays, maternity leave, parental leave, force majeure, carer's leave; days lost due to strike and lay-offs; and excused leave such as bereavement leave, exam/study leave, marriage and paternity leave.

The following are the responses provided by Ms. Anderson to the author's questions:

Question 1   *How many companies were surveyed?*
Answer   635 companies

Question 2 *How many companies completed the survey?*

Answer 502

Question 3 *What is the absence rate (based on the calculation below) within the Public sector?*

Answer Insufficient information provided by public sector respondents to calculate a rate

The following formula was used to calculated absence rates:

Number of days of absence in period under review x 100

Total number of employees x total number of work days available

Question 4 *What were the absence rates of those companies who provide sick pay schemes v's those who do not?*

Answer 2.73% absence rates = companies with sick pay schemes, 2.13% absence rates = companies with no sick pay schemes

Question 5 *Which industries had the highest rates of absence?*

Answer

1. Contact centres = 3.67%
2. Food & tobacco = 3.29%
3. Manufacturing = 3.27%
4. Administration = 2.17%
5. Financial services = 1.5%
6. Other services = 2.4%

Question 6 *Were 'trigger mechanisms' used by organisations to control absence?*

Answer The area was explored but insufficient information was provided to warrant 'findings'.

Question 7 *Was 'cost' measured by many organisations?*

Answer 24% of those surveyed calculate cost.

Question 8 *Do many organisations formally record absence?*

Answer 64% of those surveyed record absence

Question 9   *What is the cost of absence in 2011 to Ireland?*

Answer   IBEC have calculated the cost to be €1.5 billion which works out at €818 per employee

Question 10   *What implications have the recession had on absence?*

Answer   IBEC found the perceived lack of job security and financial implications as the main reasons employee absenteeism is reduced. However, IBEC feel that this is an area   in need of further research.

Question 11   *Should absence be incorporated into performance appraisals?*

Answer   This question was not asked in detail in the survey.   However, Ms. Anderson believes that it would be too difficult to manage and there is no information to support such a system.

Question 12   *Is absence linked to Reward?*

Answer   This area has not been looked at as most
              episodes of absence relate to genuine
              illnesses. There is no evidence to support
              this.

Question 13   *Are many employers setting targets to*
              reduce absenteeism for 2012?

Answer   While employers realise there is scope for
              improvement, no figure is available.

Ms. Anderson did provide the following two 'interesting observations':

1.   Areas such as mental health and stress are increasingly being cited as reasons for absence. She found that employees are more willing to disclose these reasons now than before and this is due to organisations becoming more open and caring as employers.

2.   Biometric systems of recording are increasing in popularity. At the moment, 1% of employers are using this technology and they are predominantly the IT sector. She believes that this will gain support and will be used more

frequently in the future. There are issues pertaining to data protection, however, these have been upheld in legal test cases and it will be the way to go!

3.4. Results from interviews

The Human Resources, Marketing and Administrative Managers all agreed to be interviewed (Appendices F & G).

Findings from interview with Human Resources Manager

The Human Resources Manager believes that the implementation of the absence management policy in 2010 has been "extremely successful" and has managed to reduce absenteeism by 25%. According to her, the aim of the policy was to identify departments in which absence was a problem and reduce the absenteeism rates by implementing new rules and procedures. She believes the aims have been achieved to some degree but hopes that in future further reductions in absenteeism will be seen when employees become more familiar with the policy. After been in operation for one year, the Human Resources Manager feels the policy should be a little "stricter" and she would like to see 'return-to-work'

interviews as standard. This would have the effect of ascertaining the reasons for absenteeism and verifying the veracity of them.

Within Company X, the Manager believes that the main causes of absence are short-term illness and occasionally employees take days off due to stress caused by job dissatisfaction and feeling overwhelmed. These opinions are based on 15 years H.R. Managerial experience. Again based on personal opinion, she feels that a person's motivation to attend is primarily due to their willingness to attend, satisfaction with the workload, overall happiness which is linked to job satisfaction, reward and the possibility of promotion.

When asked if she intends carrying out an attitude survey to ascertain employee's views, she replied that this function is currently carried out through the performance management development system (PMDS). However, she may consider it in the future.

The final question related to stress and she believes that stress is predominantly due to incorrect expectations about the role.

She believes that job design and manager's communication skills need to be addressed to reduce stress levels.

Findings from interview with Marketing and Administration Managers.

Two senior managers were interviewed in relation to absenteeism within their department.

When asked how the new absence management policy has impacted on their roles, one felt that the guidelines help deal with those who abuse the system whereas the second manager felt it had no impact on her role. Neither Manager received training. When asked "do you feel confident in implementing the policy?", the lack of training became an issue as neither felt particularly confident in dealing with the policy. They felt that the Human Resources Department does not provide support and they have very little confidence in their knowledge or capabilities.

On a positive note, neither currently have absenteeism problems within their departments. Both have had an occasion where absenteeism was abused and while one

incident led to the employee's contract being terminated, the other found the Human Resources Department lacked support and she had to draw on previous managerial experiences to deal with the issue.

Genuine illness (90%) was cited as the main cause of absenteeism but one manager felt that the 7 days uncertified paid sick leave is seen as an additional entitlement to be taken. Both felt that absenteeism impacts negatively on the employees left to pick up the pieces. It leads to a pressurised and tense environment especially where deadlines have to be met. Reduced service levels, low-morale and time spent on administration relating to the absence were other factors mentioned.

3.5. Discussion

The findings from the primary research through the medium of an employee questionnaire, the interviews with both IBEC and Company X's Human Resource Manager and two Senior Managers support the findings in the literature review. The research highlighted the following issues for Company X

1. Young employees have a higher absenteeism rate compared to older employees. Company X has an issue in particular with young females compared to young males. However, the research is based on a small sample and further investigation is warranted.

2. The role of Human Resources in respect of training Line Managers in the implementation of the newly launched absenteeism policy needs to be addressed. Findings also alluded to a lack of confidence by Senior Managers in the information being provided by Human Resources staff.

3. 'Return-to-work' interviews needs to be incorporated into the absence management policy.

4. Further research by the Human Resources Manager needs to be undertaken into the issue of Stress and its management.

5. The Human Resources Department should investigate the causes of absenteeism within Company X rather than making judgements based on hunches and personal experiences.

Recommendations

The author has highlighted the following three areas for improvement and follow-up within Company X:

1. Following the author's findings in relation to communications, an employee attitude survey with a focus on the role of communication and motivation should be carried out company wide. It would provide an opportunity to further explore employee's levels of satisfaction with their roles, etc.

2. The actual cost of absence is not currently measured or analysed in Company X. A major cost reduction exercise is being carried out throughout the organisation and this is an area which can be costed relatively easy. IBEC have calculated the cost to the Irish economy as €1.5 billion for 2011 which equates to €818 per person. Company X has 2,500 employees which equates to over €2 million.

3. As part of management's training, the organisation needs to focus on the area of absence management training. Research has found that organisations that spend time on

training significantly reduce their absenteeism levels. It can be seen as an unsavoury aspect of people management, however, if properly carried out, the benefits are worth the effort.

Conclusion

Company X introduced a revised Absence Management policy in 2010 in order to address the issues of Absenteeism within the organisation. Theorists Rhodes and Steers and Nicholson advocate the implementation of policies and procedures to set out guidelines for employees to adhere to.

A robust Absence Management policy driven by the Human Resources Department and managed by Line Management is proven as one of the most successful methods of reducing Absenteeism. In order for the policy to succeed, Management training and support from Human Resources professionals is essential.

The role of Management in implementing, measuring and recording policies is key to its success. Indoctrinating employees with the values, vision and mission of the organisation fosters a positive culture. Custom and practice can undermine the role of Management if they allow it to do so. Effective communication skills aid Management in creating a positive work experience thus increasing

motivation and job satisfaction which in turn leads to greater employee commitment.

Minor illness is still the most common cause of employee absences, however, Stress is increasingly becoming a significant contributor. IBEC found that there is an increased willingness by employees to communicate more openly about stress and mental health issues. Their Researcher believes that this is due to an increasing trend by employers to provide employee assistant and occupational health services to employees. European Union legislation places a duty on employers to provide safeguards for their employees. Improved working conditions and legislation have increased employees expectations of their employers resulting in Absenteeism becoming a serious issue for employers.

Benchmarking against similar sized industry is recommended. Nonetheless, it is necessary to ensure the same measurement tools are used. Otherwise, the validity of the benchmarking is diluted.

Interest into the causes of Absenteeism has resulted in over 500 papers being written about the subject. What motivates

an employee is a question asked since the beginning of the 20th century by behavioural psychologists and is still a subject of interest today. Theorists Steers & Rhodes and Nicholson believe Absenteeism is influenced by a person motivation, attachment and ability to attend. Three main areas have been highlighted: the influence of personal characteristics, policies within the workplace and external influences. Their models are most commonly used by employers in identifying the causes of Absenteeism.

Absenteeism costs in 2010 have been estimated by IBEC to be €1.5 million which is a staggering figure. Costs go beyond the direct and indirect costs one could assume. According to Nicholson (1977), the costs also impact on the costs of goods and services together with the costs of benefits the Government has to provide. It certainly is an area that businesses now have to take seriously and start to manage.

The Researcher hopes to have demonstrated certainly some of the causes of Absenteeism within her organisation. Areas have been highlighted for attention. The costs need to be addressed and the Absence Management policy is in need of a few adjustments. The Researcher recommends the Human

Resource Department look into carrying out an employee
attitude survey to identify areas of concern for employees and
areas Management can improve on.

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APPENDIX A

Days Lost Mar 2011

Department	
Academic Affairs & Registrar	
Student Services	
Arts & Tourism	
Engineering & Built Environment	
Business	
Science & Health	
Finance	
Human Resources	
President's Office	
Research&Enterprise	
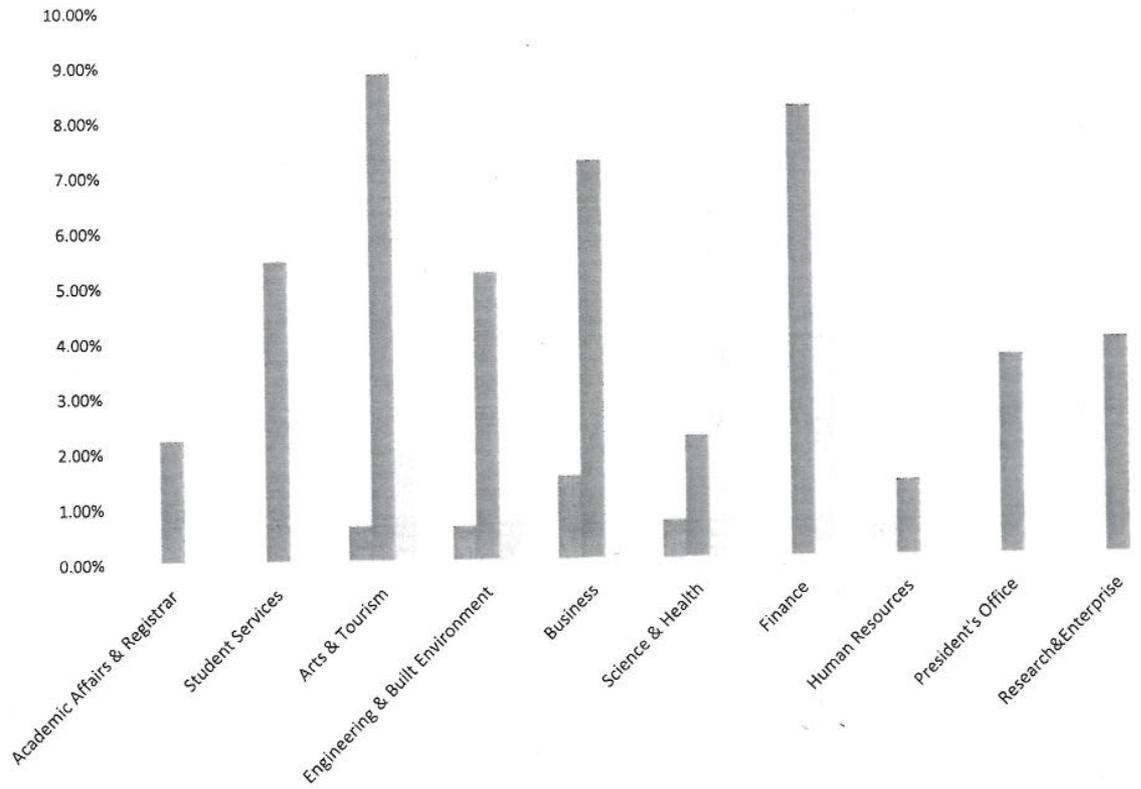
Monthly Absence Report 2011

Month Ending: March 2011

1: ACADEMIC AFFAIRS & REGISTRAR

Category	ACADEMIC				NON ACADEMIC				TECHNICAL			
Headcount	2				104				1			
Absence Type	USL	CSL	UA	% Days lost month	USL	CSL	UA	% Days lost month	USL	CSL	UA	% Days lost month
Days	0	0	0	0.0%	22.5	28.5	2	2.2%	0	0	0	0.0%

2: STUDENT SERVICES

Category	ACADEMIC				NON ACADEMIC				TECHNICAL			
Headcount	2				82				0			
Absence Type	USL	CSL	UA	% Days lost month	USL	CSL	UA	% Days lost month	USL	CSL	UA	% Days lost month
Days	0	0	0	0.0%	10.5	33	59	5.4%	0	0	0	0.0%

3: ARTS & TOURISM

Category	ACADEMIC				NON ACADEMIC				TECHNICAL			
Headcount	334				104				20			
Absence Type	USL	CSL	UA	% Days lost month	USL	CSL	UA	% Days lost month	USL	CSL	UA	% Days lost month
Days	6	43	0	0.6%	39.5	155.5	16	8.8%	1	8	0	2.0%

4: ENGINEERING & BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Category	ACADEMIC				NON ACADEMIC				TECHNICAL			
Headcount	374				78				50			
Absence Type	USL	CSL	UA	% Days lost month	USL	CSL	UA	% Days lost month	USL	CSL	UA	% Days lost month
Days	10	43.5	0	0.6%	20.5	66	7	5.2%	2.5	6	0	0.7%

5: BUSINESS

Category	ACADEMIC				NON ACADEMIC				TECHNICAL			
Headcount	155				35				3			
Absence Type	USL	CSL	UA	% Days lost month	USL	CSL	UA	% Days lost month	USL	CSL	UA	% Days lost month
Days	11	43	0	1.5%	16	41	1	7.2%	0	0	0	0.0%

Comments: Please note - absences shown are based over a five day working week - absences taken at weekends are not counted.

Key:
USL - Uncertified Sick Leave
CSl - Certified Sick Leave
UA - Unapproved Absence

38

APPENDIX B

Figure 2

RHODES AND STEERS' MODEL OF EMPLOYEE ATTENDANCE
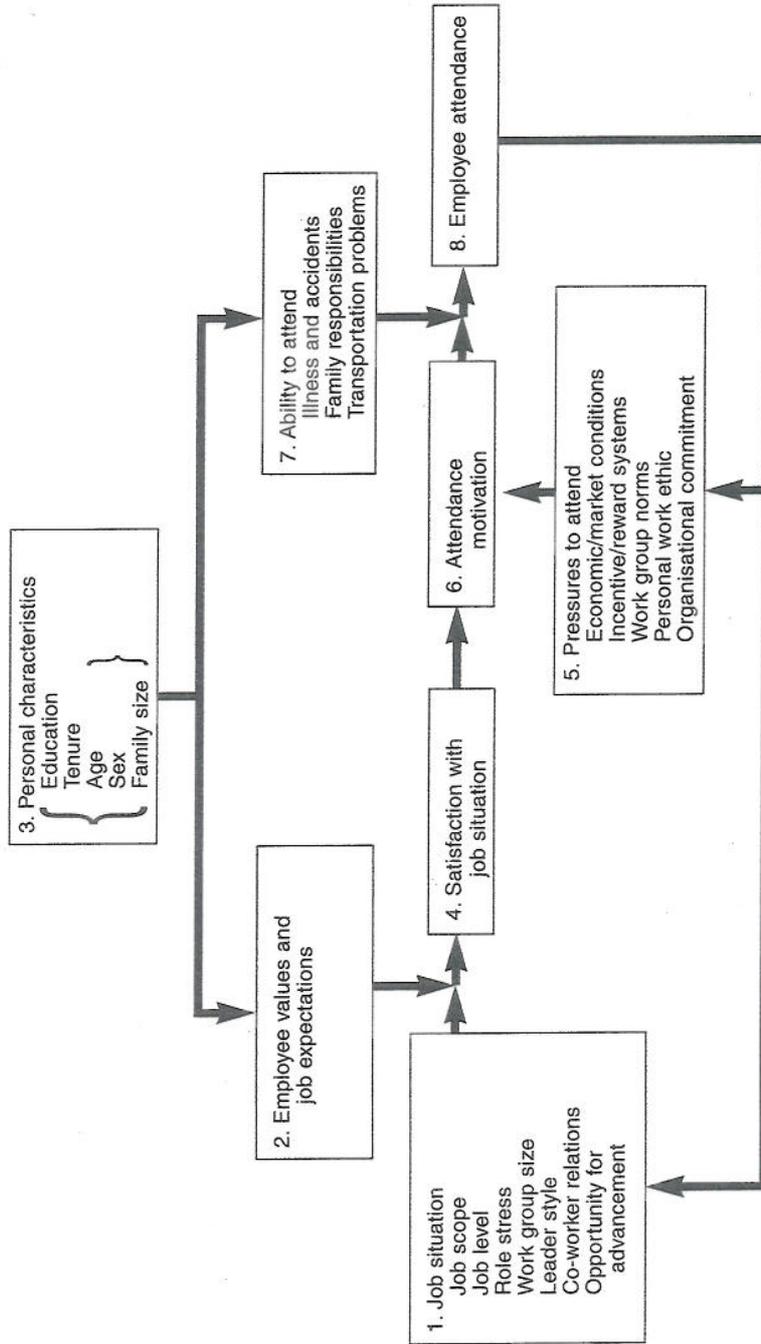
Source: Rhodes and Steers, 1990, p.46.

1. Job situation
Job scope
Job level
Role stress
Work group size
Leader style
Co-worker relations
Opportunity for advancement

2. Employee values and job expectations

3. Personal characteristics
Education
Tenure
Age
Sex
Family size

4. Satisfaction with job situation

5. Pressures to attend
Economic/market conditions
Incentive/reward systems
Work group norms
Personal work ethic
Organisational commitment

6. Attendance motivation

7. Ability to attend
Illness and accidents
Family responsibilities
Transportation problems

8. Employee attendance

APPENDIX C

Figure 1

NICHOLSON'S MODEL OF ATTENDANCE MOTIVATION

Contextual factors

| Personal characteristics | Biographical and extra-mural factors | Job characteristics | Organisational controls |

Attachment and attendance motivation

| Personal traits | Work orientation | Job involvement | Employment relationship |

Attendance motivation

Transient, unpredicted and random influences

The A–B continuum

A ← — Events capable of inducing absence — → B

Attendance and absence behaviour

Frequency of absence

Frequency of attendance

Source: Nigel Nicholson (1977), 'Absence Behavior and Attendance Motivation: A Conceptual Synthesis', *Journal of Management Studies, 14*(13), p.251. Copyright © Basil Blackwell Ltd.

APPENDIX D

Dear Colleagues,

I am currently completing a BSc. (Hons.) in Human Resource Management at the National College of Ireland. As part of my studies, I am carrying out a thesis on the causes of Absenteeism within the Institute. I will be referring to the Institute as 'Company X' so confidentiality will be guaranteed.

This is where I need your help! I would be grateful if you could complete the questionnaire – see link below – which should take no longer than 5 minutes. Please note no personal details, including email addresses, will be visible to me. Your honesty in completing the questionnaire would be appreciated. The questionnaire will close on Wednesday, 20th July.

http://FreeOnlineSurveys.com/rendersurvey.asp?sid=tc69bpn gb9j8p37940523

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at geraldinemegan@yahoo.com or extn. 7039.

Many thanks,

Geraldine.

APPENDIX E
Results for: Absenteeism within Company X

1) What gender are you?

	Percentage	Responses
Female	81.8	36
Male	18.2	8
Total responses:		44
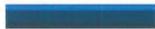
2) Please indicate your age bracket?

	Percentage	Responses
18 - 25	0.0	0
26 - 35	47.7	21
36 - 45	34.1	15
46 - 55	15.9	7
56 - 67	2.3	1
Total responses:		44

3) Please indicate the nature of your employment

	Percentage	Responses
Permanent Wholetime	72.7	32
Permanent Part-time	2.3	1
Temporary Wholetime	20.5	9
Temporary Part-time	0.0	0
Other	4.5	2
Total responses:		44

4) How long have you been employed by 'Company X'?

	Percentage	Responses
0 - 3 years	11.4	5
4 - 7 years	47.7	21
8 - 15 years	31.8	14
16 + years	9.1	4
Total responses:		44

5) What category of staff are you?

	Percentage	Responses
Academic	4.5	2
Administration	81.8	36

		Percentage	Responses
Library		0.0	0
Maintenance		0.0	0
Management		11.4	5
Technician		2.3	1
	Total responses:		**44**

6) Are you aware of 'Company X's' Absence Management policy?

		Percentage	Responses
Yes		72.7	32
No		27.3	12
	Total responses:		**44**

7) If yes, where did you hear about it?

		Percentage	Responses
Induction Training		16.1	5
Contract of employment		19.4	6
Team meetings		22.6	7
PMDS		6.5	2
Other		35.5	11
	Total responses:		**31**

8) Do you feel Absence is dealt with effectively within your Department in terms of monitoring and reporting?

		Percentage	Responses
Strongly agree		18.2	8
Agree		50.0	22
Disagree		25.0	11
Strongly disagree		6.8	3
	Total responses:		**44**

9) How many **uncertified** sick leave days did you take in 2010?

Average: 2.16

Range: 0<=>6.50

Median: 2

Total Responses: 44

10) Do you view your uncertified sick leave days as an

additional entitlement to your annual leave?

		Percentage	Responses
Yes		2.3%	1
No		97.7%	43
		Total responses:	**44**

11) How many **certified** sick leave days did you take in 2010?

Average: 5.33

Range: 0<=>36

Median: 2.50

Total Responses: 44

12) Below are some of the most common causes of absence. Please indicate which of these has caused you to be absent from work.

		Percentage	Responses
Minor illness		37.1	23
Major illness		8.1	5
Back pain		3.2	2
Work related injuries/accidents		1.6	1
Stress		1.6	1
Pregnancy		6.5	4
Recurring medical conditions		12.9	8
Non-work related injuries/accidents		3.2	2
Family commitments		8.1	5
Mental health		1.6	1
Drink/drug related illness		0.0	0
Commuting distances		0.0	0
Ill partner or child		3.2	2
Other		12.9	8

13) Do you think your absence record should be discussed at your performance review meeting?

		Percentage	Responses
Yes		59.1%	26
No		40.9%	18
		Total responses:	**44**

14) Do you believe absence has an effect on the following?

		Percentage	Responses
Low staff morale		18.5	27
Loss of business		4.1	6
Reduced customer service		16.4	24
Industrial relation conflicts		4.1	6
Low levels of productivity		17.1	25
Reduced efficiency		17.1	25
Stress among those left to cover duties		19.9	29
Other		2.7	4

15) Would you agree your job description accurately describes your role within Company X?

		Percentage	Responses
Strongly agree		2.3	1
Agree		52.3	23
Disagree		11.4	5
Strongly disagree		18.2	8
Did not receive a job description		15.9	7
	Total responses:		44

16) How would you describe your role?

		Percentage	Responses
Too challenging		2.3	1
Very challenging		22.7	10
Manageable		54.5	24
Easy		4.5	2
Mundane		9.1	4
Other		6.8	3
	Total responses:		44
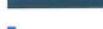
17) Do you feel valued by your Manager?

		Percentage	Responses
Strongly agree		15.9	7
Agree		50.0	22
Disagree		18.2	8
Strongly disagree		4.5	2
unsure		11.4	5
	Total responses:		44
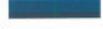
18) Do you feel your Manager communicates effectively with you?

		Percentage	Responses
Yes		38.6	17
No		25.0	11
Sometimes		36.4	16
	Total responses:		**44**

19) If you answered Yes or Sometimes to question 18, what medium of communication is used? Please tick all applicable channels.

		Percentage	Responses
Informal chat		33.0	30
Team meetings		15.4	14
One-to-one		22.0	20
PMDS		11.0	10
Memo		4.4	4
Other		14.3	13

20) How often do you receive feedback from your Manager (both formal and informal)?

		Percentage	Responses
Daily		8.3	4
Weekly		29.2	14
Monthly		8.3	4
Every 2 months		6.3	3
Never		20.8	10
Other		27.1	13

21) How would you describe your rapport with your manager?

		Percentage	Responses
Excellent		20.5	9
Very good		36.4	16
Good		20.5	9
Satisfactory		18.2	8
Unsatisfactory		4.5	2
	Total responses:		**44**

22) Would you say you are motivated by your job?

		Percentage	Responses
Strongly agree		18.2	8
Agree		47.7	21
Disagree		31.8	14
Strongly disagree		2.3	1
	Total responses:		44

23) What motivates you?

		Percentage	Responses
Recognition of job well done		23.4	34
Praise from Manager		9.7	14
Pay		7.6	11
Annual leave		5.5	8
Challenging work		20.0	29
Feeling valued		19.3	28
Promotion		11.0	16
Other		3.4	5

24) Within your Department, do you believe absence is abused?

		Percentage	Responses
Yes		34.1	15
No		47.7	21
Unsure		13.6	6
Other		4.5	2
	Total responses:		44

APPENDIX F

Questions to HR Manager

Company X introduced a revised and comprehensive Absence Management policy in 2010.

1. *How successful has the new policy been since implemented last year?*

   Extremely successful, it has cut down on absenteeism by 25%

2. *What were the aims of the new policy?*

   To identify areas in which absence was a problem and to cut back on absence by implementing new rules.

3. *Do you think they have been achieved? If yes, how? If no, why not?*

   Yes to some degree but I hope to see further decreases in absence as employees become more familiar with the policy.

4. *Are there any amendments to the policy you feel should be made after being in place for one year.*

   I feel the policy should be revised to become a little stricter. I would like to see the implementation of return to work interviews to ascertain the reasons for absence and to verify the veracity of them.

5. *Research findings show that most organisations tend not to research the causes of absence. What do you believe are the main reasons for absence within Company X?*

   Short-term illness and occasionally employees take days off due to stress and feeling dissatisfied and overwhelmed by their roles.

6. *Is this opinion based on research or personal opinions? If research, what type?*

   Personal opinions driven by 15 years experience as a HR professional.

7. *Absence has been linked to employee motivation and ability to attend. What do you believe are the main factors affecting a person's motivation to attend?*

Willingness to attend, satisfaction with workload, morale in workplace, overall happiness l   inked to job satisfaction, reward and the possibility of promotion.

8. *Does Company X intend carrying out an attitude survey?*

I feel this is covered in the review process (performance management) but I may do so in the future.

9. *The CIPD found that workplace stress is an increasing contributor to absenteeism. Do you believe this to be an issue in the organisation? If yes, why? If no, why?*

Yes, a minor problem due to incorrect expectations from the role. Some employees expect to do less work and managers expect more from them. Job roles need to be more clearly defined. Line Managers should clearly outline their expectations when a new employees commences.

APPENDIX G

Questions to Functional Managers – Administration Manager

Company X introduced a revised and comprehensive absence management policy in 2010.

1. *How has the new policy impacted on your role as Manager?*

   None

2. *What type of training did you receive?*

   None

3. *Do you feel confident in implementing the policy?*

   Wasn't aware a new policy was rolled out.

4. *Do you feel supported by the Human Resource Department? If yes, how? If no, why not?*

   No, they are difficult to contact. It is difficult to get a response from them. For non-standard queries, they are unable to provide support or answer queries.

5. *Is absence a problem within your department?*

   Not currently

6. *Have you ever had to deal with a situation where absence was abused? How did you deal with the situation?*

   Yes, the Human Resources Department was reviewing its absence management policy so they could not provide a huge amount of guidance so I had to follow the process as much as they were and add in my own additional safeguards based on common knowledge and previous managerial experience. Human Resources were unable to offer me any support.

7. *What do you believe are the main causes of absence within your department?*

Currently there isn't a problem but previously they were caused by mental illness.

8. *What has been the impact of absence impacted on your department?*

Firstly, work was not done and service levels not maintained.

Secondly, morale

Thirdly, huge amount of time was spent dealing with the absence management process and documenting the absence.

Questions to Functional Managers – Marketing Manager

Company X introduced a revised and comprehensive absence management policy in 2010.

1. *How has the new policy impacted on your role as Manager?*

   The guidelines make it easier to reprimand someone who is abusing the system

2. *What type of training did you receive?*

   None

3. *Do you feel confident in implementing the policy?*

   Confident in myself but not in the procedure due to lack of training

4. *Do you feel supported by the Human Resource Department? If yes, how? If no, why not?*

   No, they don't seem to follow through on situations. Have very little confidence in them.

5. *Is absence a problem within your department?*

   No, not a problem

6. *Have you ever had to deal with a situation where absence was abused? How did you deal with the situation?*

   Yes, she was on her probation period of one year of a three year contract. She received the relevant warnings but continued to abuse the system so her contract was terminated.

7. *What do you believe are the main causes of absence within your department?*

   Illness (90%). Sick leave is seen as an entitlement, as an extra 7 days leave.

8. *What has been the impact of absence impacted on your department?*

Other employee's work load increases which leads to a highly pressurised and tense environment.

APPENDIX H

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Uncerti fied Days	Between Groups	31.122	1	31.122	10.691	.002
	Within Groups	122.264	42	2.911		
	Total	153.386	43			
Certifie d Days	Between Groups	65.062	1	65.062	1.182	.283
	Within Groups	2311.410	42	55.034		
	Total	2376.472	43			

Comparison between Uncertified Sick Leave frequencies and Certified Sick Leave Frequencies by Gender.

APPENDIX I

Length of Service * Gender Crosstabulation

Count

		Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
Length of Service	Up to 7 years	22	4	26
	More than 7 years	14	4	18
Total		36	8	44

Age * Gender Crosstabulation

Count

		Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
Age	26-35	19	2	21
	36-45	14	1	15
	46-55	3	4	7
	56-67	0	1	1
Total		36	8	44

APPENDIX J

Frequencies – QUESTION 23

Gender = Female

Frequency Table

Q23a – What motivates you? Answer – Recognition of job well done

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	28	77.8	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	8	22.2		
Total		36	100.0		

a. Gender = Female

Q23b – What motivates you? – Praise from Manager

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	13	36.1	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	23	63.9		
Total		36	100.0		

a. Gender = Female

Q23c – What motivates you? - Pay

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	10	27.8	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	26	72.2		
Total		36	100.0		

a. Gender = Female

Q23d – What motivates you? – Annual leave

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	8	22.2	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	28	77.8		
Total		36	100.0		

Q23d – What motivates you? – Annual leave

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	8	22.2	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	28	77.8		
Total		36	100.0		

a. Gender = Female

Q23e – What motivates you? - Challenging work

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	25	69.4	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	11	30.6		
Total		36	100.0		

a. Gender = Female

Q23f – What motivates you? – Feeling valued

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	24	66.7	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	12	33.3		
Total		36	100.0		

a. Gender = Female

Q23g – What motivates you? - Promotion

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	14	38.9	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	22	61.1		
Total		36	100.0		

a. Gender = Female

Gender = Male

Frequency Table

Q23a – What motivates you? Answer – Recognition of job well done

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	6	75.0	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	2	25.0		
Total		8	100.0		

a. Gender = Male

Q23b – What motivates you? – Praise from Manager

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	12.5	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	7	87.5		
Total		8	100.0		

a. Gender = Male

Q23c – What motivates you? - Pay

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	12.5	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	7	87.5		
Total		8	100.0		

a. Gender = Male

Q23d – What motivates you? – Annual leave

		Frequency	Percent
Missing	System	8	100.0

a. Gender = Male

Q23e – What motivates you? - Challenging work

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	4	50.0	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	4	50.0		
Total		8	100.0		

a. Gender = Male

Q23f – What motivates you? – Feeling valued

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	4	50.0	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	4	50.0		
Total		8	100.0		

a. Gender = Male

Q23g – What motivates you? - Promotion

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2	25.0	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	6	75.0		
Total		8	100.0		

a. Gender = Male