



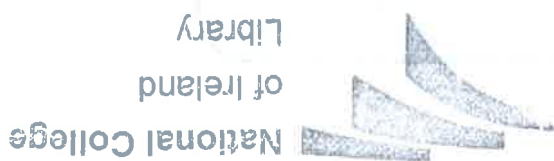
**Exploring the effectiveness of common absence management
strategies in the context of any possible increase in absenteeism
or presenteeism they may create: A Delphi study of Irish private
sector companies**

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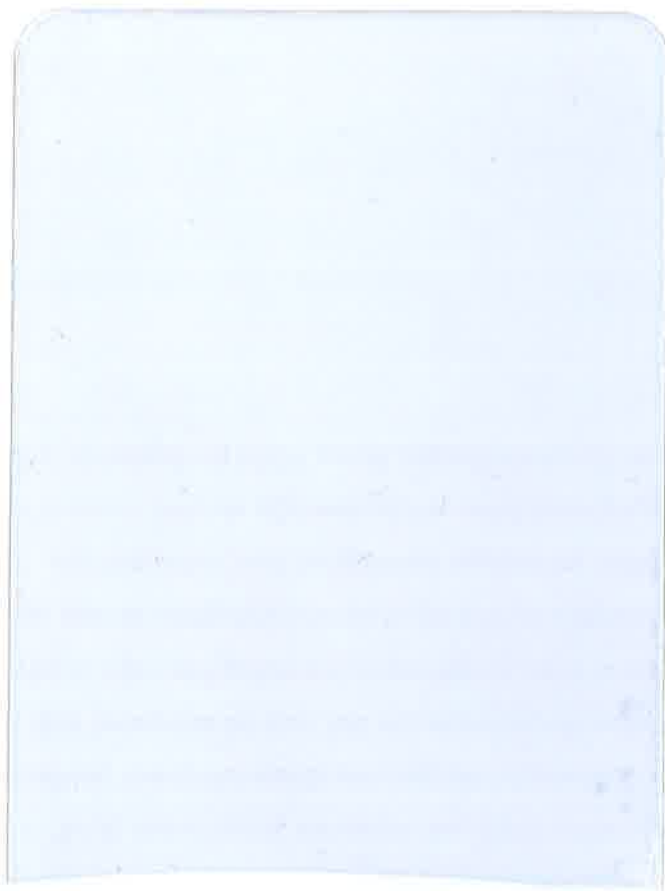
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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the opinions of Human Resource Management (HRM) professionals on the effectiveness of some common absence management strategies in the context of any possible increase in absenteeism or presenteeism they may create. The key question this research explores is whether the advantage to a company brought about by the overall reduction in absenteeism that such strategies may bring outweigh any possible disadvantages of potential increases to absenteeism and/or the presenteeism that may be associated with them. This research also explores future challenges HRM professionals may face in terms of managing absenteeism and presenteeism and how these challenges may be met. The literature highlights the importance of managing absenteeism and presenteeism, the relationship between these concepts and how this is an under researched area of HRM. A panel of nine HRM professionals working in Irish private sector organisations were presented with a series of questionnaires upon which they offered their opinions. The researcher used a modified, mixed-method Delphi Study to carry out the research. The study shows that the benefits to employers of providing flexible working conditions, wellness programmes, employee assistance programmes (EAP's) and return to work interviews outweighs any possible disadvantages of potential increases to absenteeism and/or the presenteeism that may be associated with them. With regards to return to work programmes, rewarding low rates of pay and limiting salaries for employees on sick leave the research group neither agreed nor disagreed that their advantages outweighed their disadvantages. The research identified an aging workforce and increasingly atypical forms of employment as being the biggest future challenges facing HRM professionals in this area.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland
Research Students Declaration Form
(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

Name: Damien Donnelly

Student Number: 12102130

Degree for which thesis is submitted: MA Human Resource Management

Material submitted for award

- (a) I declare that the work has been composed by myself.
- (b) I declare that all verbatim extracts contained in the thesis have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged.
- (c) My thesis will be included in electronic format in the College Institutional Repository TRAP (thesis reports and projects)
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Chapter 1 – Introduction

It is imperative that workplaces learn how to respond effectively to absenteeism and presenteeism as they cost employers billions of dollars each year in lost productivity (Prater and Smith, 2011). The purpose of this study is to explore the opinions of Human Resource Management (HRM) professionals on the effectiveness of some common absence management strategies that companies utilise, in the context of any possible increase in absenteeism or presenteeism they may create. The key question this research will explore is whether the advantage to a company brought about by the overall reduction in absenteeism that such strategies may bring outweigh any possible disadvantages of potential increases to absenteeism and/or the presenteeism that may be associated with them. This research will also explore future challenges HRM professionals may face in terms of managing absenteeism and presenteeism and how these challenges can be met.

It is hoped that this research can assist employers in evaluating the impact of their absence reducing initiatives, which according to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's (CIPD) 2014 study is crucial to their success. Athey (2009) advises employers to review their strategies aimed at combating absenteeism to ensure that the presenteeism they may create does not make them counterproductive, as presenteeism can often be an undesired outcome of some absenteeism reducing strategies. Grinyer and Singleton (2000) state that while strategies introduced by management may have been designed specifically to reduce sickness absence they can have the unintended negative consequences for both employers and employees of in fact ultimately increasing it. They emphasise the importance for organisations of striking a balance between managing absence and ensuring employees perform to the best of their capabilities. In this context they state that employers must focus on presenteeism and not just on reducing absenteeism. It is hoped that this research can also be used by employers to assist them in attempting to strike this balance.

As of 2005, the number of published research articles concerning presenteeism was a mere 0.01% of those regarding absenteeism (Niven and Ciforowska, 2013). "Until recently, the concept of presenteeism was largely ignored in the assessment of human efficiency in companies" (Gosselin, Lemyre and Corneil, 2013, p. 75). They suggest that one of the reasons for the lack of research into presenteeism is that it is difficult to measure. While absenteeism can be measured objectively through company registers, presenteeism is much more subjective, often involving an employee's perception of their own health and performance and thus it is harder to measure. It is also more insidious in nature. It is an almost invisible but significant drain on productivity which by some estimates costs companies more than absenteeism does, "you know when someone doesn't show up for work, but you often can't tell when, or how much, poor health hurts on-the-job performance" (Hemp, 2004, p. 49).

It is also hoped in a wider sense that this research can be of benefit to academics in the study of presenteeism, as, despite the increasing concern with presenteeism and its costs and effects on a company, in comparison to absenteeism, it is an area of HRM that is under-researched. According to Demerouti, Le Blanc, Bakker, Schaufeli, and Hox (2009), only a handful of studies have examined the causes of presenteeism. Finally it is hoped that by examining the presenteeism that can be caused by absence management strategies this study can be added to the small body of research that exists in this area.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review commenced with a comprehensive search of information sources including electronic resources, databases and journals, and a manual search of books (see Bibliography).

This chapter will examine what is meant by absenteeism and presenteeism, why it is important for an employer to manage absenteeism and why employers need to be cognisant of creating presenteeism with their absence management strategies. It will also examine the most common strategies employers use in order to combat absenteeism and the future challenges that HR professionals may face in terms of managing absenteeism and presenteeism.

2.2 Definition of Absenteeism and Presenteeism

The literature indicates general agreement on the definition of absenteeism as “a lack of physical presence at a behaviour setting when and where one is expected to be” (Gosselin et al., 2013; Prater and Smith, 2011). Presenteeism can be defined in a number of ways. For example Oxforddictionaries.com define it as “the practice of being present at one’s place of work for more hours than is required, especially as a manifestation of insecurity about one’s job”. For the purpose of this study, however, the definition of presenteeism used is “the practice of coming to work [or working from home] despite illness, injury or anxiety, often resulting in reduced productivity”. This definition is similar to the one used by other studies in this area, that is, “the phenomenon of people who, despite complaints and ill health that should prompt rest and absence from work, are still turning up at their jobs” (Aronsson, Gustafsson and Dallner, 2000, p. 503), or in simpler terms “the phenomenon of employees staying at work when they should be off sick” (Demerouti et al. 2009, p. 50).

In 2011 the British Government called for a major review of the sickness absence system in Great Britain in order to help combat the staggering £100 billion GBP that working age ill health costs the British economy every year. Commenting on the review, David Frost, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce stated that "Sickness absence undoubtedly has a huge impact on businesses" (Department for Work and Pensions, 2011). Employment Relations Minister Edward Davey commented that "Managing sickness absence more effectively

absence at close to £1 billion. employees, paying overtime, loss of productivity and time spent managing estimated the additional direct costs such as hiring temporary replacement 4,052,222 days lost by employees of such firms in that year. The report Ireland with sick pay schemes at being over €490 million per annum, with Firms Association calculated the direct cost of absenteeism to small firms in of payroll (Navarro and Bass, 2006). In its 2014 Absenteeism Report, the Small have shown that the direct and indirect costs of absenteeism can amount to 15% remains a problem for the majority of organisations. Several industry studies Despite being one of the most widely researched fields in HRM, absenteeism still

2.3 The Importance of Managing Absenteeism

The relationship between absenteeism and presenteeism is a complex one. "It represents a little understood state of work between full engagement and absenteeism" (Johns, 2011, p. 497). Athey (2009) describes the relationship between absenteeism and presenteeism as a perfect Catch-22 situation. On one hand absenteeism is costly for employers and affects productivity but on the other hand studies suggest that presenteeism is equally, if not more costly to employers (Athey, 2009; Cser, 2010; Prater and Smith, 2011). Gosselin et al. (2013) call for a joint conceptualisation of absenteeism and presenteeism to capture their dynamic interplay as well as their common repercussions. They state that if they were simply opposite concepts this would not explain the positive effects for both employee and employer of early rehabilitation strategies or the negative effect for both employee and employer that is caused by the presenteeism that some absence management strategies can generate.

Ospina, Dennett, Wayne, Jacobs, and Thompson (2015) see presenteeism as a quality of life issue that can result in employee burnout. This burnout can lead to

Demerouti et al. 2009 assert that whereas traditional estimates of health-related costs in the workplace have focussed on the cost of absenteeism, such estimates must now take account of the direct and indirect costs of presenteeism.

2.4 The Importance of Managing Presenteeism

“...considering that a 1% reduction in an 8% absence rate for an employer with 20,000 hourly workers and an average annual salary of \$40,000 USD per worker can equate to \$6.5 million USD in savings per year, organisations can quickly realise a strong return on investment with the implementation of a comprehensive absence management solution” (Navarro and Bass, 2006, p. 28).

astonishing, therefore cannot hope to gain control of employee absenteeism. This is absenteeism are unable to track its' associated direct and indirect costs and don't have a grasp on employee absences and don't proactively manage are missing an opportunity to save millions of euros each year. Companies that large costs of employee absence, organisations that don't proactively manage it associated with properly managing absence is frequently overlooked. Given the costs have long remained hidden among benefit and labour costs, the opportunity associated with absence (CIPD, 2014; Hewitt Associates, 2004). As absence annual employee absence rate, fewer than 40% of companies calculate the costs While studies show that more than three-quarters of organisations record their these costs” (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a, p.3).

economic times, neither the Government nor employers can continue to bear associated costs at around £9 billion GBP and stated that “in these harsh published in 2013, estimated the annual cost to employers for sick pay and crucially, the economy” (Department for Work and Pensions, 2011). The review, will be a win-win situation for all - businesses, individuals, the taxpayer and

a vicious cycle where job demands accumulate which the employee has less energy to cope with. The proverb "a stitch in time saves nine" is a phrase that can be associated with presenteeism. It can have a "snowball effect" where by not taking a short period of absence to resolve a minor illness an employee may develop a longer term illness which requires a long period of absence. Employees attending the workplace while sick can also lead to them infecting healthy employees which can create further problems for employers.

CIPD's 2013 survey of more than 1,000 workers found that presenteeism had reached epidemic proportions with 93% of workers coming in to work despite being ill. In addition, 81% of those surveyed reported that they had previously contracted an illness from a colleague who had attended work while ill. According to Aviva's 2013 research of 463 Irish employees and 350 Irish business managers or owners, business owners identified staff coming to work when they are not well enough to work as the main health issue for business owners. The survey showed that Irish employers view presenteeism as a bigger concern to their business than absenteeism.

2.5 Common Absence Management Strategies

The 2013 Employee Benefits survey of 376 HR and benefits professionals found that 70% of respondent's organisations had strategies in place to reduce sickness absence. Some of the most common strategies were:

- The return to work interview.
- Flexible-working strategies.
- Return to work programmes/rehabilitation of long term sick.
- Employee assistance programmes (EAP's).
- Wellness programmes.
- Limiting the number of sick days on full pay.
- Rewarding employees with low rates of absenteeism.

These seven strategies formed a core element of this researchers study. The researcher examined what each strategy entails and how effective they are at managing absenteeism according to existing literature in this area.

2.5.1 Flexible Working Conditions

The Employee Benefits (2013) survey showed that of the respondents whose organisations had an absence strategy 67% used flexible-working strategies as part of this strategy.

Studies indicate that sickness absence is directly affected by an employee's ability to adjust their working situation. These studies show that an employee was less likely to take sickness absence if the employee had scope to exercise control and flexibility over their working patterns and in particular with regard to flexible working time, time off in lieu, working from home, adjusting tasks to take account of an employee's illness (Johansson, Lundberg and Lundberg, 2006; Irvine, 2011).

2.5.2 Return to Work Programmes/Rehabilitation of Employees on Long Term Sick Leave

The Employee Benefits 2013 survey showed that of the respondents whose organisations had an absence strategy, 63% used return to work programmes as part of this strategy.

The purpose of return to work programmes is to enable employees who are on sick leave to return to work. Flexible working conditions can form part of an employer's return to work programme however they are just one of the many elements that an employer can offer as part of their return to work programme. Other elements can include adjusting work hours, occupational/physical therapy, retraining, redefinition of job duties, counselling, transfer to other work, work space modification (Cunningham and James, 2000).

The Employee Benefits (2013) survey showed that of the respondents whose organisations had absence strategies in place 46% utilised wellness programmes.

2.5.3 *Wellness Programmes*

Williams (2013) opines that in the context of return to work programmes, the absenteeism that is created can be positive for both the employee and employer. Baker-McClem, Greasley, Dale & Griffith (2010) state that while an employee phased return to work following a period of absence involves a degree of absenteeism, it can reduce the instances of that employee's absenteeism.

The Meager et al. (1998) study (cited in James et al., 2002, p. 86) found that more than a quarter of disabled workers (those with a long-term disability or health problems) who had left their jobs due to their disability felt that they would not have left their employment had workplace adaptations been made for them. Furthermore, Krause, Dasinger and Neuhauser (1998) reviewed 13 studies which examined "modified work programmes" aimed at assisting employees with temporary or permanent disabling injuries to return to work and concluded that workers offered such schemes were 50% more likely to return to employment than those who were not and that the programmes significantly reduced rates of absenteeism.

The Cuelenaere et al. (1999) study (cited in James, Cunningham and Dibben, 2002) showed that employees who were absent from work in the medium and long term were more likely to return to work if they received adaptations to their working hours, changes to work duties and therapeutic interventions like counselling and physiotherapy. James et al. (2002) examined data from the 1990 Survey of Ontario Workers with Permanent Impairments, which surveyed 1,850 employees who had returned to work on either a temporary or permanent basis following an absence caused by a permanent partial impairment. They stated that those who had received accommodations were significantly more likely to return to work on a permanent basis and were significantly less likely to take further periods of absence stemming from their impairment. James et al. (2002) state that evidence from further studies support this finding.

An effective wellness strategy supports employees who are physically and mentally healthy, as well as those who have health-risk factors or diseases. Wellness programmes and interventions are generally aimed at the increasing positive presenteeism through the prevention of future absenteeism for employees who are not presently absent from the workplace.

Baicker, Cutler and Song (2010) conducted a critical meta-analysis of the literature on costs and savings associated with the provision of wellness programmes. Their analysis of the case studies showed that the most frequently used method of delivery was the health risk assessment which can be used by employers to target programmes to suit the employee's needs and monitor appropriate health interventions. The second most common wellness intervention mechanism was the provision of self-help education materials, flu shot programmes, individual counselling or on-site group activities led by trained personnel. These tended to focus on obesity, smoking, weight loss, fitness, stress management, back care, nutrition, alcohol consumption, blood pressure, and preventive care.

The British Department for Work and Pensions (2013c) suggested that the development of a wellness culture is essential to reduce absence and improve performance in the workplace. Baicker et al's (2010) meta-analysis concluded that there are substantive return for employers who adopt such programmes. Out of 22 case studies they analysed all but one of the studies showed some reduction in absentee days of between 1.7 and 1.9 days per employee per year. This equated to a reduction in absentee day costs by about \$2.73 USD for every dollar spent. This figure does not include the other benefits to the employer which include improved employee health, reduced turnover, lower replacement costs for absent workers and an advantage in attracting workers to the firm. Cser's (2010) study found that participation in a workplace wellness programme decreased absenteeism and increased positive presenteeism. Commenting on such programmes Baker-McCleam et al. (2010) state that some aspects of "presenteeism" which such programmes can create may be beneficial, a concept which few researchers have picked up on.

2.5.4 · Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs)

The Employee Benefits (2013) survey showed that of the respondents whose organisations had absence strategies in place 40% utilised EAP's.

EAP's not only aim to increase the employee's well-being, but also to increase productivity and performance, and decrease absenteeism and negative presenteeism among employees. The Department for Work and Pensions (2013a) review of sickness absence recommended a retention of tax relief on EAP's, highlighting importance with which the UK government place on such programmes. Studies into the benefits of employers investing in the health of their employees through health screening or enhanced-care programmes such as an EAP show that such initiatives can significantly improve both clinical and work outcomes. Typically studies show that when implemented with mutual consent, support and understanding, such initiatives result in:

- Higher job and skill retention, decreased sickness, lower work-absence and increased work productivity (Wang, Gregory, Avorn, Azocar, Ludman, McCulloch, Petukhova and Kessler, 2007);
- Increased staff morale, reduced costs of sick-pay, improved quality and consistency of services and the reputation of the company as a 'good employer' (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013b); and
- Increased employee commitment and feelings of well-being, reduced propensity for employees to become disengaged from the workplace, possible prevention of an employee from dropping out of the work market, enabling employees to retain their self-confidence, skills and social network that their workplace provides, while the organisation holds on to the established experience and expertise of that individual (Baker-McCleam et al., 2010).

Despite these positive findings employers have been reluctant to invest in such intervention programmes. Wang et al. (2007) suggest that this is partly due to

their uncertainty of the return on investment of such programmes. Despite the increasing need for EAP providers and HR departments to demonstrate outcomes resulting from the availability and use of EAP services, few empirical studies have examined the relationship between EAP utilisation and objective organisational outcome measures (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013b; Spetch, Howland and Lowman, 2011).

2.5.5 *Return to Work Interviews*

The Employee Benefits (2013) survey showed that of the respondents whose organisations had an absence strategy 81% used return to work interviews as part of this strategy.

Return to work interviews provide employers an early opportunity to uncover any underlying issues which may be responsible for the absence and to act to address these issues before they escalate into a bigger issue. They also provide the employer an opportunity to assess what support the employee needs, what accommodations need to be made and what return to work initiatives need to be utilised.

The Labour Relations Agency (2013) state that early intervention and good communication are essential in any absence reduction strategy. Crail (2007) highlights that two thirds of employers believe that return-to-work interviews have a positive effect in cutting absence rates.

2.5.6 *Rewarding Attendance*

The Employee Benefits (2013) survey showed that of the respondents whose organisations had an absence strategy 12% used attendance related bonuses.

Gangai (2014) states that the most effective approach for reducing absenteeism is for an employer to use a combination of incentives and penalties. He advises emphasis to be placed on reward incentives for maximum effect. Camp and Lambert's (2006) analysis of the yearly data on sick leave for employees showed

that employees who were rewarded for unused sick leave had lower rates of absenteeism than those who were not rewarded. This study looked at employees who were hired prior to 1987 who were allowed to add unused sick leave to length of service for purposes of retirement. It compared this group of workers to those hired post 1987 who did not enjoy such a benefit and found that those hired prior to 1987 had lower rates of absenteeism.

Hassink and Koning's (2009) study showed similar results. They studied a Dutch manufacturing firm that held a monthly lottery for employees who had not taken sick leave in the previous three months. The winners were drawn at random and received a cash prize of €75. Employees who had previously won the lottery were ineligible for participation in the remaining monthly draws. Hassink and Koning (2009) found that absenteeism rates were higher amongst the group of employees who had already won the lottery (the group who were excluded from winning further lotteries), than for the group who had not won a lottery yet (who could still potentially win a prize). They concluded that their study showed that rewards can help reduce absenteeism.

While it has been shown that incentives can reduce absenteeism many observers, (Camp and Lambert, 2006; Hassink and Koning, 2009) state that while it might initially appear that such reduction in absenteeism associated with such incentives is positive, there would need to be a full cost-analysis conducted in each case to determine whether the presenteeism created by such incentives makes the counterproductive. For example it is in a company's best interest that an employee with a contagious illness stay away from the workplace and not risk infecting fellow employees. Also by taking a short absence when they start to feel burned out, overworked or stressed an employee may be able to avoid such problems increasing thus avoiding a longer period of absence at some future stage. Hassink and Koning (2009) further point out that once the incentive is terminated by the employer it can lead to absenteeism rates increasing to levels higher than they were prior to the incentive being introduced as the incentive can have the effect of displacing the employees intrinsic motivation for not reporting sick that existed prior to the introduction of the incentive.

2.5.7 Limiting the Number of Sick Days on Full Pay

The Employee Benefits (2013) survey showed that of the respondents whose organisations had an absence strategy 34% limited the number of sick days employees were entitled to on full pay as part of this strategy.

Scoppa (2010) advocates a "stick and carrot" approach to absenteeism management which hinges on the institutional framework and contractual arrangements. Many studies that have been conducted in this area show that there is considerable evidence that the generosity and duration of sickness benefits play a key role in both the perceived viability and consequences of taking time off sick and also the motivations involved in returning to work from sickness absence (Irvine, 2011; Hassink and Koning, 2009; Scoppa, 2010; Engstrom and Holmunda, 2007; Ichino and Riphahn, 2005; Henrekson and Persson, 2004). Indeed the Employee Benefits (2013) survey found that that paid absences being seen as an entitlement accounted for 10% of the causes of sickness absences in the respondent's organisations.

Irvine (2011) interviewed employees who considered themselves to have experience of a mental health condition. Almost half of the study participants had spent a period of one month or more off sick while with their current employer. However, only two had remained absent from work beyond the point at which their entitlement to full salary occupational sick pay ended. Nice and Thornton's 2004 research summary of the Department for Work and Pensions "Job Retention and Rehabilitation Pilot: employers' management of long-term sickness absence", found a clear pattern of people returning to work either shortly before or after a drop in income, particularly at six months when occupational sick pay schemes were commonly reduced by half. In a recent survey exploring the views of occupational health professionals about employee absence, generous sick pay/private health insurance entitlements emerged in the top five most common 'obstacles to recovery' (Ballard, 2009, cited in Irvine, 2011, p. 762). Brown and Sessions (2004) state that it is surprising that so many companies offer sick pay in excess of the statutory minimum, especially if ones takes the traditional attitude to absenteeism that employees coincide actual and

desired hours by rationally shirking and working less hours than contractually required to do so. Scoppa (2010) advises that a "significant fraction of the cost of absence should be borne by the worker... rather than instinctively by other employees, employers or taxpayers" (Scoppa 2010, p. 514).

The Economist (2014) emphasise that caution should be taken with this approach. They state that while limiting the number of sick days on full pay can reduce absenteeism, any benefits gained must be weighed against the negative effect of employees going into the workplace while ill. This includes losses of productivity, the risk of infecting co-workers and the increased likelihood of being injured in the workplace. Baker-McCleam et al. (2010) state that any strategies which make employees feel insecure about their financial stability is likely to create negative presenteeism as they can cause stress, low-morale, tension and ill feeling towards the organisation which not only affects the employee themselves and their productivity but also affects the wider organisation.

2.6 Future Trends

In her 2013 webinar Dumont states that by 2025 four generations will occupy the workforce. This is due to economic and demographic trends caused by the global economic downturn which led to erosion of retirement savings, devaluation of the property market, periods of unemployment, as well as an aging population and increases in retirement ages. This will pose a challenge to organisations as each generation will have different expectations and requirements from their employer.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter examined what is meant by absenteeism and presenteeism, why it is important for an employer to manage absenteeism and why employers need to be cognisant of creating presenteeism with their absence management strategies. It also examined the most common strategies employers use in order to combat absenteeism and the future challenges that HR professionals may face in terms of managing absenteeism and presenteeism.

It is clear from the literature that there is a lack of consensus regarding the effectiveness of many of these common policies. Particularly considering the possible increase in absenteeism and/or presenteeism they may create. In the next chapter the researcher identified the aims and objectives of the study.

Chapter 3 – Research Question

3.1 Research Title

Exploring the effectiveness of common absence management strategies in the context of any possible increase in absenteeism and/or presenteeism they may create: A Delphi study of Irish private sector companies

3.2 Aims and Objectives

3.2.1 Aims

The aim of this study is to explore the opinions of HRM professionals on the effectiveness of some common absence management strategies and whether the advantage to a company brought about by the overall reduction in absenteeism that they may bring outweighs any possible disadvantages of potential increases to absenteeism and/or the presenteeism that may be associated with them. The study also seeks to explore the perceived future challenges that HRM professionals may face in terms of managing absenteeism and presenteeism and how these challenges may be met.

3.2.2 Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

- Gain insight into how common each of the absence management strategies are in Irish private sector companies.
- Explore the opinions of HRM professionals on the absenteeism and presenteeism that each of these strategies may create and whether in the opinion of HRM professionals this makes them counterproductive.
- Evaluate the strength of these opinions.
- Generate discussion on possible future challenges that HRM professional may face in managing absenteeism and presenteeism.

- Explore how these challenges may be met.

It is hoped that the findings of the study will:

- Assist employers in evaluating the impact of their absence reducing strategies.
- Help employers strike a balance between managing absence and ensuring employees perform to the best of their abilities.
- Be of benefit to academics in the study of presenteeism and in particular its causes as they are an area of HRM that is under researched.

Chapter 4 – Methodology and Methods

4.1 Introduction

This chapter identifies why the mixed-method Delphi technique was chosen for conducting this research and how the study was carried out including selection of research participants, data collection, data analysis and other considerations such as the rigour, reliability and validity of the study and ethical considerations.

4.2 Research Design

The research was conducted through the use of a mixed-method Delphi study. This technique incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods of gathering data through multiple rounds of questionnaires. Kinn and Curzio (2005) state that the outcomes from research conducted using a mixed method approach are generally more convincing than those obtained through use of either qualitative or quantitative methods alone. Creswell (2009) concurs with this opinion, "it is more than simply collecting and analyzing both kinds of data; it also involves the use of both approaches in tandem so that the overall strength of a study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research" (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). The researcher believed that a mixed methods approach, though challenging, would result in the generation of "fruitful research by combining various approaches from both...in a way that works in the context of the study" (Tapio, Paloniemi and Vinnari, 2011, p. 1617).

4.3 Selection of the Delphi Study

The researcher considered the Delphi method to be a suitable research method for this particular research for the following reasons:

- Group judgment and opinions were required. The Delphi method facilitates the group problem-solving of issues by collecting and distilling the "anonymous judgments of experts using a series of data collection

taken into consideration.

The following advantages and disadvantages of the Delphi method were also

4.3.1 *Advantages and Disadvantages of the Delphi Method*

using this method.

- a Delphi study showed that there was scope for a study to be conducted

2010). In this researcher's opinion, the lack of data gathered by means of

2007) or quantitative interviews (Irvine, 2011; Baker-McCleam et al.,

qualitative questionnaires (Gosselin et al. 2013; Jensen and McIntosh,

• Much of the literature on absenteeism and presenteeism is based on

light on what might be in the future" (Steinhart, 2009, p. 293).

"generating most useful new information and insights that shed some

forecasts (Skulmoski et al., 2007). It is an explorative research tool for

to improve understanding of opportunities, solutions, or to develop

presenteeism management were required. The Delphi method can be used

• Predictions regarding the future direction of absenteeism and

relatively under researched area of HRM.

studies. They are therefore suitable for the study of presenteeism as it is a

• Delphi studies are well suited to new research areas and exploratory

subjective expert opinion on issues that cannot be specifically measured.

measurement. The Delphi method is ideally suited for capturing

effective to study it subjectively rather than aiming for an objective

perception of their own health and performance and thus it is more

• The measurement of presenteeism often involves an employee's

and Pawlowski, 2004; Rowe and Wright, 1999).

successful method in the pursuit of human expertise and opinions (Okoli

Hartman and Krahn, 2007, p. 1). It is regarded as the preferred, most

and analysis techniques interspersed with feedback" (Skulmoski,

Advantages:

- The research participants were not required to meet. This proved cost and time effective.
- It did not require a large number of research participants. The Delphi method is suitable for accommodating low numbers.
- The Delphi is flexible in terms of the methodological design and openness to follow up.
- Respondents are anonymous to each other but not the researcher. This allows the researcher to follow up with participants for clarification if required. It also allows the validity of the data to be supported by gaining a deeper understanding of the issues being researched.
- Delphi studies provide richer data because of their multiple rounds of questions and the ability of the participants to revise their responses due to feedback.

Disadvantages:

- As Delphi studies involve multiple rounds of questionnaires they require considerable time commitment from research participants.
- There is a greater risk of research participants dropping out than with other research methods.
- They require more time and effort from the researcher than other research methods as the researcher has to allocate sufficient time to collect and analyse the results of the first round questionnaire before sending out the second round questionnaire.
- Research participants also had to be afforded sufficient time to complete each round which also prolongs the research.
- There is a danger of the researcher misinterpreting feedback or displaying bias when selecting the feedback to carry through to the subsequent round of questionnaires.
- Due to the flexibility that the method offers rigour can be hard to achieve.

4.4 The Classic and Modified Delphi

The Classic Delphi

Rowe and Wright (1999) characterise the classical Delphi method by the following key features:

- Anonymity of Delphi participants: this encourages open and honest answers and free expression of opinions. Answers and opinions are evaluated on their merit, rather than who has proposed the idea.
- Iteration: allows the participants, upon consideration of other responses, to refine or change their views in light of the progress of the group's work from round to round, without the fear of being judged by other respondents, until the research question is satisfied. At least two rounds are used to strive towards reaching consensus on considering the views of other experts.
- Controlled feedback: informs the participants of the other participants' perspectives, and provides the opportunity for Delphi participants to clarify or change their views.

While these are characteristics of a classic Delphi method, it is important to note that it is a flexible research technique. The flexibility of the method is demonstrated by the fact that it can allow for quantitative, qualitative or mixed-method studies. There are no fixed rules concerning how a Delphi study must be conducted, the number of participants involved or the number of rounds of questionnaires required.

The Modified Delphi

The researcher followed the classic Delphi as characterised above. However, in line with the flexibility offered by the Delphi method the researcher modified the method to suit the aims and objectives of this study. "There is no "typical" Delphi; rather that the method is modified to suit the circumstances and research

- Masters level educated in HR or a related field.
- Working in a HR capacity.
- Working in private sector companies.
- Based in Ireland.

In addition to these criterion candidates selected for this study were:

- Expert knowledge and experience with the issues under investigation.
- Capacity and willingness to participate.
- Sufficient time to participate in the study.
- Effective communication skills; and
- Flexibility and a willingness to revise their initial or previous judgments.

The Delphi participants should have:

The most important step in the Delphi study process is choosing the appropriate research participants as it directly relates to the quality of the results generated (Hsu and Sandford, 2007). There is no steadfast criteria for selecting suitable candidates, however the literature (Skulmoski et al., 2007; Hsu and Sandford, 2007) suggests the below criteria, which the researcher followed for this research.

4.5 Selection of Research Participants

For example, account was taken of any additional comments and opinions expressed by result participants which did not form part of their answers to any of the specific questions asked in the first round questionnaire. Also, the aim of this study was not to try and reach consensus of expert opinion. Rather it was explorative in nature and sought to offer a snapshot of the opinions of HRM experts and to explore the strength of these opinions. It was determined by the researcher at the outset that two rounds of questionnaires would be sufficient to fulfil this purpose.

The Delphi questionnaires were administered via email. As Delphi studies involve multiple rounds of questionnaires they can be quite time consuming however the use of email to administer the questionnaire greatly helped reduce the time required to complete the research. Use of email also made it easier to follow up with research participants to remind them to return their completed

4.6.3 *Administration of Questionnaires*

The researcher conducted an initial pilot study. This allowed for the questions to be tested, refined and adjusted and any procedural problems worked out prior to sending the questionnaire to the research subjects. The second round questionnaire was also pre-tested. Skulmoski et al. (2007) recommend this approach for inexperienced researchers. It is also a prudent step given the limited time available in which to conduct the study as it is "the closest you will get to the real thing without wasting time and energy asking the wrong questions" (Pickard, 2007, p. 168). The candidate selected for this pilot study and subsequent pre-testing matched the criteria required for participation in the survey, as listed above.

4.6.2 *Pilot Study*

The research instrument utilised in this research was the questionnaire which followed a mixed-method Delphi approach asking both quantitative and qualitative questions.

4.6.1 *Research Instrument*

4.6 **Data Collection**

There are also no steadfast rules concerning how many participants are necessary for the study. As the researcher was concentrating on HR experts in Ireland this would constitute a homogenous group and therefore the researcher deemed the number of HR experts who participated in the study to be sufficient.

questionnaires as the researcher could not send out the next round of questionnaires or analyse the data until the previous round results had been returned.

4.6.4 Rounds

As the aim of this study was not to try and reach consensus of expert opinion. Rather it was explorative in nature and sought to offer a snapshot of the opinions of HRM experts and to explore the strength of these opinions. It was determined by the researcher at the outset that two rounds of questionnaires would be sufficient to fulfil this purpose.

In the first round questionnaire, research participants were asked both closed (quantitative) and open-ended (qualitative) questions (seeking the research participant's opinion on certain matters – see Appendix IV). In addition, research participants were invited at the end of the first round to give additional comments or observations. The ideas generated in this round were analysed using a "content analysis" approach. Content analysis is a research method that enables the researcher to more deeply understand and describe the content of the research participants comments and to find 'typical' answers in their responses and to classify these. (Adams, Khan, Raeside and White, 2007). These ideas informed the questions asked in the second round.

The second round questionnaire was quantitative in nature. It contained a variety of statements derived from the answers the research participants gave to the first round questionnaires. It required the research participants to rank these statements on a Likert-type scale, from 5-1 (from strongly agree to strongly disagree – see Appendix V).

For further information on the method that the researcher used please see the below process flow (Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1: Modified Delphi Method - Process Flow

4.7 Rigour, Validity and Reliability

“Rigour refers to a researcher’s responsibility to ensure that procedures have been adhered to and confounding factors eliminated [where possible] to produce dependable results” (Hasson and Keeney, 2011, p. 1685). Given the flexibility offered by the Delphi technique and the modifications that can be made to it by the researcher it can be difficult to demonstrate methodological rigour “any process to establish rigour in Delphi studies can be criticised... based on the “greyiness” of the technique” (Hasson and Keeney, 2011, p. 1701). In order to ensure the rigour of this research the researcher adhered to the guidelines regarding the application of the method, selection of research participants and data collection as outlined above.

The researcher also considered the reliability and validity of the study. “Reliability is the extent to which a procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions” (Hasson, Keeney and McKenna, 2000, p. 1012). Validity is the degree to which the research tool measures what it claims to measure.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the study the researcher followed these guidelines as outlined by Perez (2013) to ensure that the questions were valid and reliable:

- Researcher must be clear about the data required – by conducting an extensive literature review prior to constructing the first round questionnaire the researcher ensured this.

- Research participant decodes the question in the way the researcher intended – pilot studies were conducted prior to each round of questionnaire to ensure clarity and precision of the questions and directions. Each participant was also sent a letter of invitation and participant information form. These explained the aims and objectives of the study. The questionnaires also gave clear instructions and contained clarifying information to define terms used in order to avoid ambiguity.

The researcher read and understood the National College of Ireland's (NCI) Ethical Guidelines for Research with Human Participants and the research was carried out in accordance with these guidelines. The researcher submitted a Human Participants Ethical Review Application Form to the School of Business at the NCI. It was important that research subjects understood the nature of the study and that their consent was informed and freely given. To ensure ethical compliance and informed consent, research subjects were sent a participant information sheet explaining the aims and objectives of the study (Appendix II), letter of invitation (Appendix I) and Consent Form (Appendix III). They were also be invited to address with the researcher, any ethical questions or concerns they may have had.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

- Group Opinion – the use of group opinion is arguably more valid than an individual's decision.
 - Rounds – Iteration allowed the participants, upon consideration of other responses, to refine or change their views from round to round.
 - Minimising bias – the researcher endeavoured to be as objective as possible. Iteration facilitated this. Calculating the mean score of the answers also ensured that the opinion of the group were accurately portrayed.
- The reliability and validity were also ensured in the following ways:
- Researcher decodes the answer in the way the respondent intended – The first round questionnaire contained a section for additional comments where research participants could further explain and clarify their answers. The Delphi allows for the researcher to contact research participants individually if further clarification is required.

4.9 Dissemination of results of research

On completion of the study, the researcher furnished each research participant with a copy of the final report. It is hoped that the results of the research may be of interest to the research participants and that they will serve as an appropriate compensation for the time they have put in to answering the questionnaires.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter identified the aims and objectives of the study, why the mixed-method Delphi technique was chosen and how the study was conducted including selection of research participants, data collection, data analysis and other considerations such as the rigour, reliability and validity of the study and ethical considerations. The next chapter will present the findings of the research.

Chapter 5 – Analysis and Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the findings of the research. Initially it will discuss the research participant panel profile and how the findings were collected and analysed. The findings will be also be presented as statistical data using bar charts and pie charts. Chapter 6 will then go on to discuss these findings in more details.

5.2 Panel Profile

The invitation to participate was sent to candidates who matched the criteria for participation outlined in chapter 4. In total, 15 potential candidates replied expressing their interest in participating. The first round questionnaires were sent out to these individuals and 9 completed them. The second round questionnaires were sent to these 9 individuals and 7 of them completed this round of the questionnaire.

5.3 Data Collection and Analysis

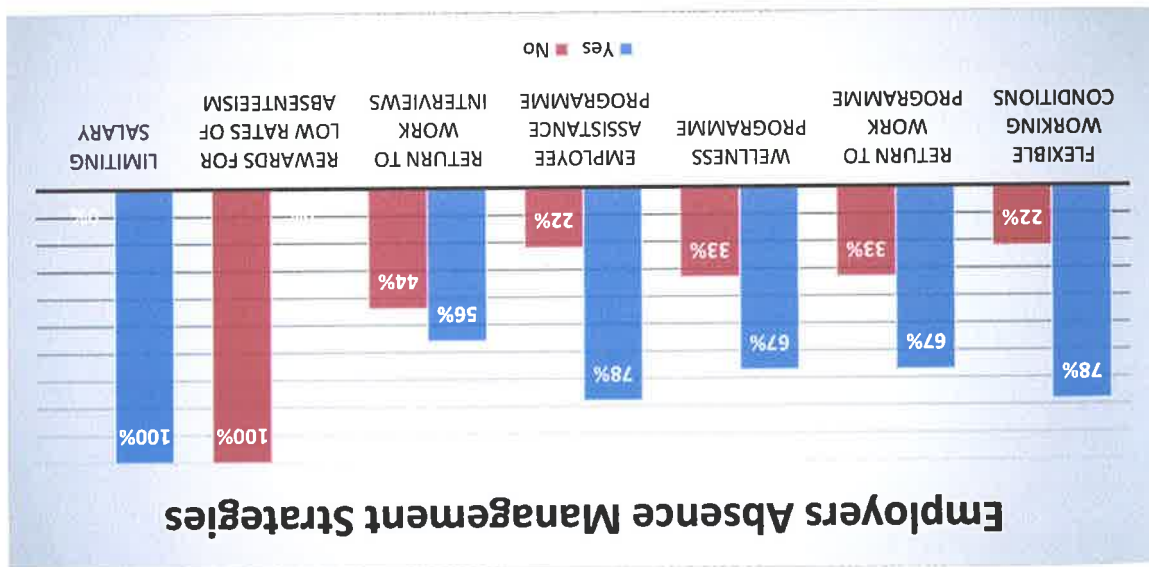
5.3.1 First Round Questionnaire

Section A of the first round questionnaire was quantitative in nature. Research participants were asked if their organisation/company provided any of the common absence management strategies as identified by the 2013 Employee Benefits survey. The purpose of capturing this data was to give an overview of how common each method is in Ireland. It also enabled a more in-depth discussion of the data collected in Sections B and C of the questionnaire (discussed in Chapter 6). The data collected in this section was factual data with only two options – “yes” or “no” and the results were not carried forward to round two of the Delphi study as there was no need to expand or probe the answers further.

Section C of the first round questionnaire asked research participants two qualitative questions. First it asked them to give their opinions on the future challenges that HR managers will face in terms of managing absenteeism and

them. management strategies outweighed the absenteeism that may be associated with whether they thought that the benefits associated with the various absence strategies affected absenteeism and presenteeism rates. They were then asked questions. It sought their opinions on how each of the absence management Section B of the first round questionnaire asked research participants qualitative

Figure 5.1 – Employers Absence Management Strategies



The results (see Figure 5.1 below) showed that limiting salaries for employees who have been on sick leave for a certain period of time was the most common strategy with 100% of research participants' employers utilising this strategy. Following this came flexible working conditions and the provision of EAP's each at 78%. Return to work programmes and wellness programmes were the next most common both at 67%. These were followed by return to work interviews at 56%. None of the research participant's employers offered rewards for low rates of absenteeism.

presenteeism. Secondly it asked them for their opinions on how these challenges can be met.

Data collected in Sections B and C was read and reread multiple times. It was then grouped together by question number in order to identify consistencies and differences. There was no need to further categorise the data as it was already organised into broad categories from the questions asked in the first round questionnaire. Themes and patterns were identified and descriptive labels assigned to the text. Infrequently occurring responses/themes were omitted in order to keep better control on the amount of questions to be carried forward into the second round questionnaire.

The information derived from Sections B and C of the questionnaire was analysed using a "content analysis" approach as described in the previous chapter (chapter 4).

5.3.2 Second Round Questionnaire

The second round questionnaire was quantitative in nature. It contained a variety of statements derived from the answers the research participants gave to the first round questionnaire. It required the research participants to indicate their level of agreement by ranking these statements on a Likert-type scale, from 5-1. The spread of the scale is shown in Table 5.1 below.

Strongly Agree	5
Agree	4
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	1

Table 5.1: Likert Type Scale

The completed second round questionnaires were analysed and from the Likert-type scale rankings the mean number was calculated for each statement to show the average group opinion. This was calculated by adding the rating number research participants gave for each statement and dividing this total by the number of research participants and rounding the resulting number up to the

Table 5.2: Research Participants Group Opinion (Mean Values)

Employers Absence Management	Research Groups Opinion
Strategy	
Flexible Working Conditions	Agree
Return to Work Programme	Neither Agree nor Disagree
Wellness Programme	Agree
Employee Assistance Programme	Agree
Return to Work Interviews	Agree
Rewards for Low Rates of Absenteeism	Neither Agree nor Disagree
Limiting Salary	Neither Agree nor Disagree

The key question that this round of the research sought to explore was whether the advantage to a company brought about by the overall reduction in absenteeism that various absence management strategies may bring outweighed any possible disadvantages of potential increases to absenteeism and/or the presenteeism that may be associated with them. The research group agreed that the advantages did outweigh the disadvantages in relation to flexible working conditions, wellness programmes, EAP's and return to work interviews. However in relation to return to work programmes, rewarding low rates of absenteeism and limiting salaries of employees who have been on sick leave for a certain period of time, the research group had a neutral stance on these (i.e. neither agreed nor disagreed). These results are displayed in Table 5.2 below.

The opinion of the group as a whole. Throughout this study where reference is made to the opinions of the "research group" it is this mean number that represents the group opinion that is being referred to.

The breakdown of the research participant's responses are displayed in Figures 5.2 – 5.8 below. To enhance the visual aesthetic of the charts the researcher removed any 0% scores and has also renamed the "Neither Agree nor Disagree" option as "Neutral".

Flexible Working Conditions

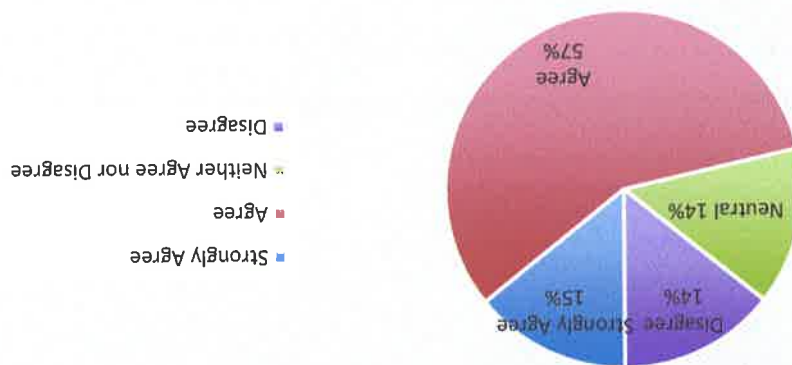


Figure 5.2: Flexible Working Conditions

Figure 5.2 shows that 15% of the research participants strongly agreed, 57% agreed, 14% disagreed and 14% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Return to Work Programme

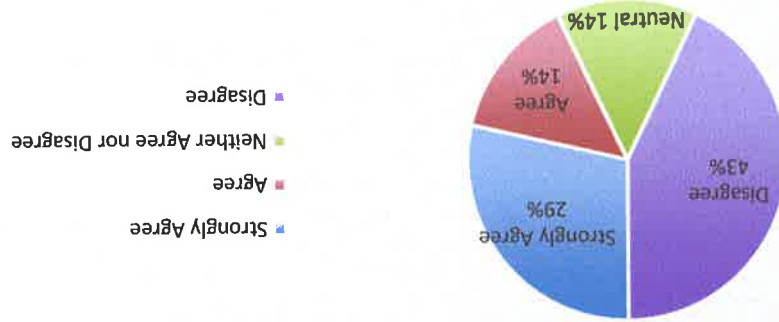


Figure 5.3: Return to Work Programme

Figure 5.3 shows that 29% of the research participants strongly agreed, 14% agreed, 43% disagreed and 14% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 5.4 shows that 43% of the research participants strongly agreed, 28% agreed, none of them disagreed and 29% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 5.5: Employee Assistance Programme

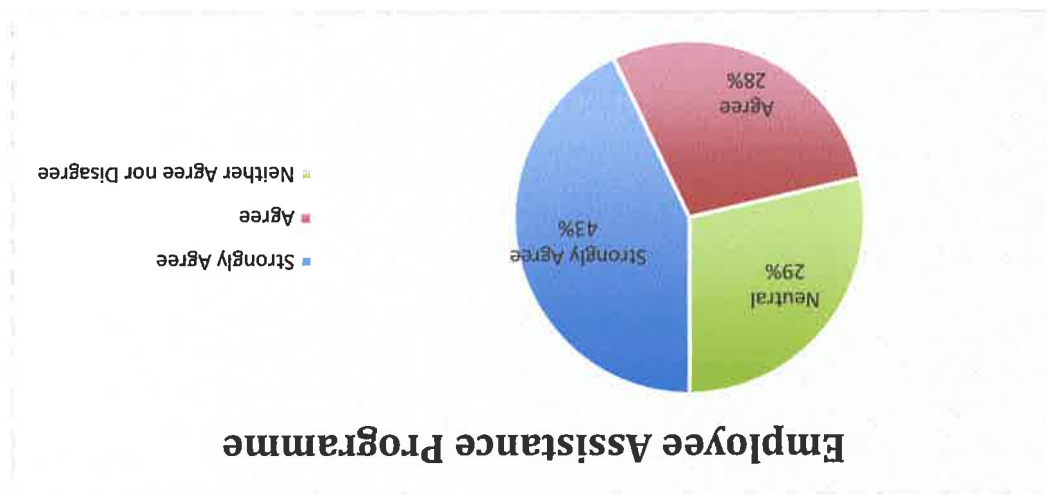
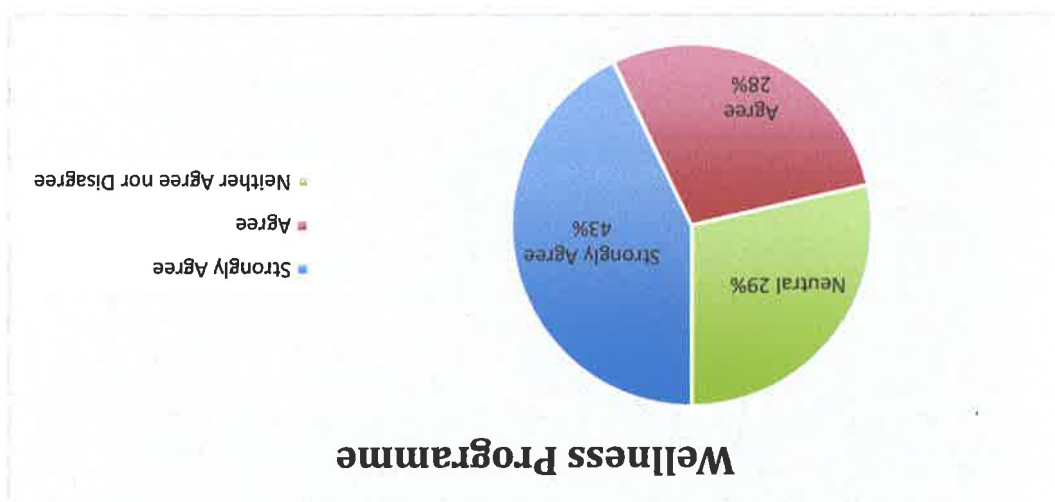


Figure 5.4 shows that 43% of the research participants strongly agreed, 28% agreed, none of them disagreed and 29% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 5.4: Wellness Programme



Return to Work Interviews

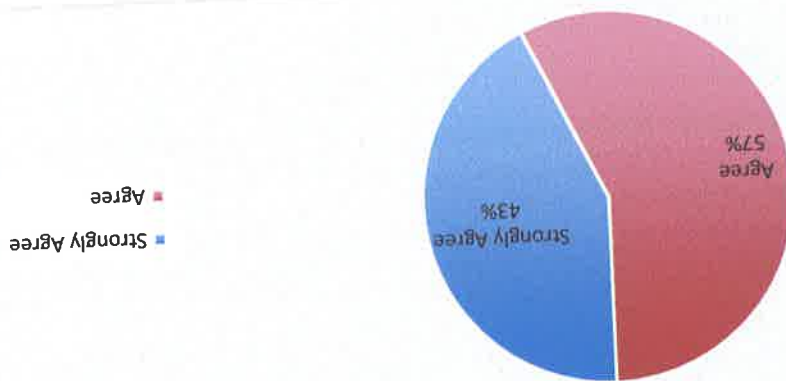


Figure 5.6: Return to Work Interviews

Figure 5.6 shows that 43% of the research participants strongly agreed, 57% agreed and none of them disagreed

Rewards for Low Rates of Absenteeism

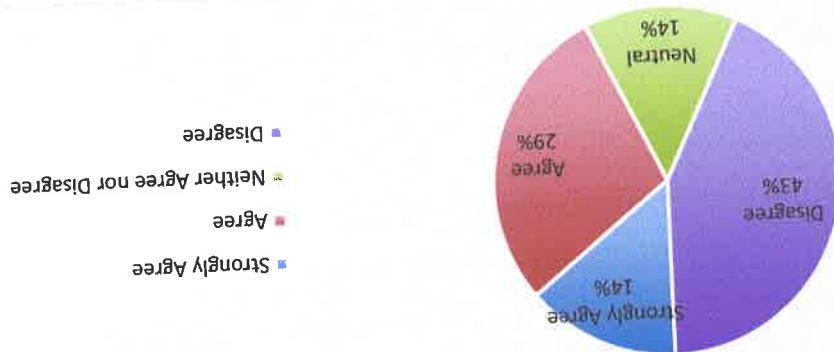


Figure 5.7: Rewards for Low Rates of Absenteeism

Figure 5.7 shows that 14% of the research participants strongly agreed, 29% agreed, 43% disagreed and 14% neither agreed nor disagreed

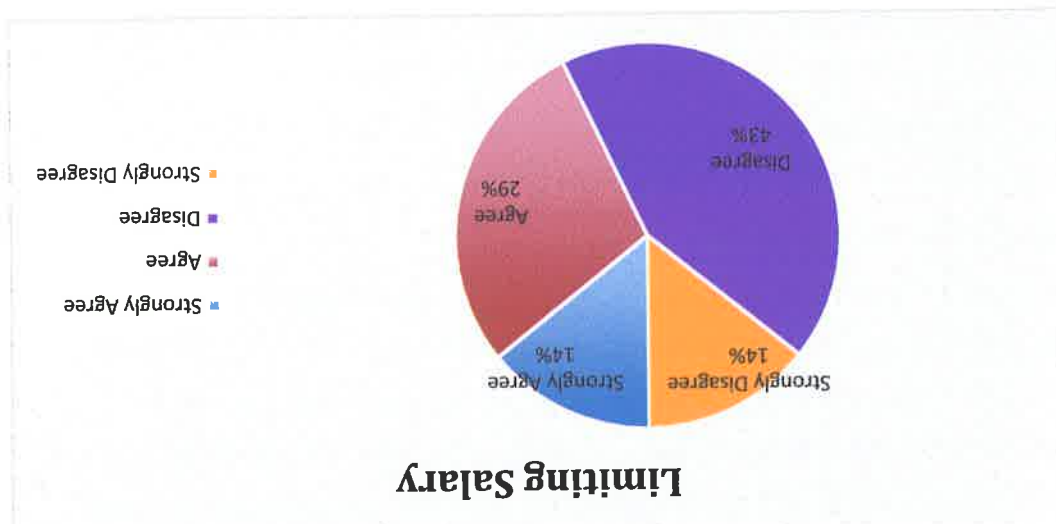
- There will be an increased number of employees above the current age of retirement in the workforce. These employees will have specific needs and requirements which are specific to an older age group that will need to be considered.
- Increasingly atypical forms of employments (such as 0-hours, temporary workers and part-time workers, high diversity) will affect motivation and engagement.
- There will be an increased variety of the workforce in the future (4 generations and different backgrounds/qualifications) and this means that HRM professionals will have to take into consideration the differing needs of each of the generations.
- There will be an increased number of employees above the current age of retirement in the workforce. These employees will have specific needs and requirements which are specific to an older age group that will need to be considered.
- Increasingly atypical forms of employments (such as 0-hours, temporary workers and part-time workers, high diversity) will affect motivation and engagement.

The research participants identified what they perceived to be future challenges HRM professionals may face in terms of managing absenteeism and presenteeism. The research group agreed or strongly agreed that the following challenges would be significant:

5.4 Future Challenges

Figure 5.8 shows that 14% of the research participants strongly agreed, 29% agreed, 14% strongly disagreed and 43% disagreed

Figure 5.8: Limiting Salary



5.5 Conclusion

The research group were of the opinion that the above challenges could be met through employers adopting holistic approaches by matching employees and employer's needs including strategic use of flexible working practices and flexible benefits. They also recommended placing greater responsibility on line managers and ensuring that they are fully supported and appropriately trained to handle this responsibility.

This chapter highlighted how the findings from the Delphi study were collected and analysed and the results of the Delphi questionnaires. It identified how common each absence management strategy is in Irish companies. It also highlighted the opinions of the research participants and research group on whether the advantage to a company brought about by the overall reduction in absenteeism that they may bring outweighs any possible disadvantages of potential increases to absenteeism and/or the presenteeism that may be associated with them. Finally it outlined the opinions of the research group on the future challenges that HRM professionals may face in terms of managing absenteeism and presenteeism and how these challenges may be met. These results will be discussed in further detail in the next Chapter.

Chapter 6 – Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will present a discussion in relation to the findings of this study which were outlined in Chapter 5. It will compare these findings to existing research in this area. It will also examine the opinions that research participants expressed in the first round questionnaire and the extent to which the research group expressed agreement or disagreement with these opinions in the second round questionnaire.

6.2 Comparing the Prevalence of Common Absence Management Strategies

100% of research participants surveyed for this study stated that their employers had a strategy in place to reduce sickness absence compared to just 70% of respondent's organisations surveyed for the Employee Benefits (2013) survey and 87% of those surveyed for CIPD's 2013 survey.

Figure 6.1 below shows a comparison between the extents to which the absence management strategies are utilised by the research participant's employers compared to the employers of the HR and benefits professionals surveyed for the Employee Benefits (2013) survey.

The research group did not identify many drawbacks regarding flexible working conditions however they agreed on one concern and this was that they can lead employees to feel under pressure to work from home when they are ill. This was an issue that had not been uncovered by the literature review so is an area worthy of further study.

studies in this area highlighted in the literature review.

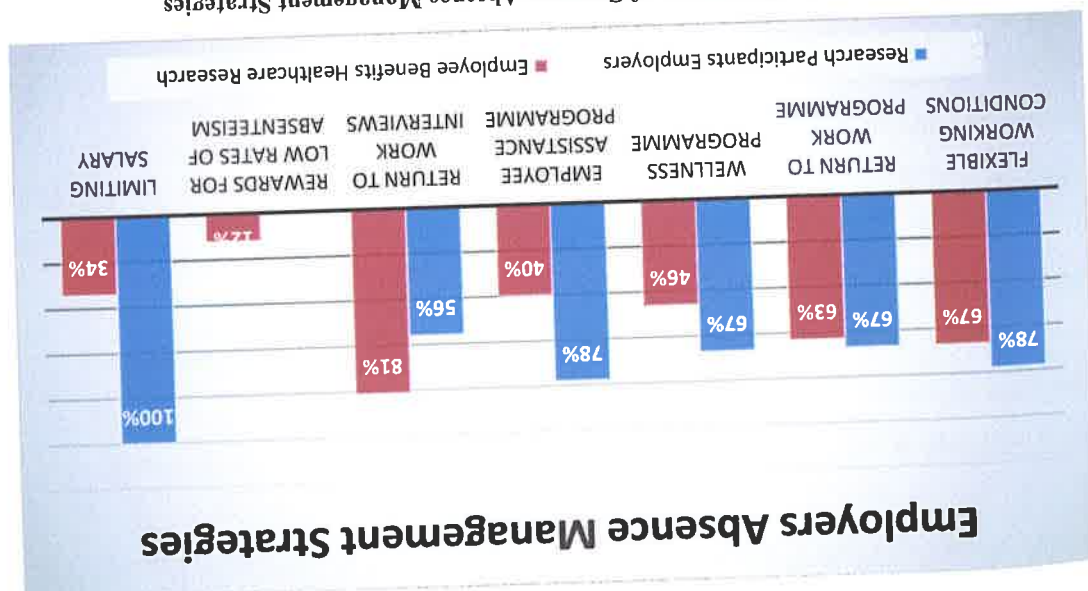
The research group strongly agreed that they can enable employees to manage their time more effectively and adjust their working patterns to accommodate their illness and/or other commitments. In this respect these strategies had a positive effect on absenteeism and presenteeism. This opinion is consistent with

78% of research participant's employers provided flexible working conditions as part of their absence management strategy. This is in comparison to 67% of employers of the HR and benefits professionals surveyed for the 2013 Employee Benefits survey.

6.3.1 Flexible Working Conditions

6.3 Further Discussion of Findings

Figure 6.1: Comparing the Prevalence of Common Absence Management Strategies



67% of research participant's employers provided return to work programmes as part of their absence management strategies. This is in comparison to 63% of employers of the HR and benefits professionals surveyed for the 2013 Employee Benefits survey.

The research group strongly agreed that they ensure that an employer is aware of the employee's situation which enables the employer to support them accordingly. They also agreed that they enable the employer to match the company's needs with the employee's new needs.

The research group's opinion was evenly split between those who thought the advantages outweighed the disadvantages and those who thought they were counterproductive. This lack of agreement adds further weight to the contention of Cunningham and James (2000) that the effectiveness of different types of and approaches to return to work activities, towards reducing absenteeism is an area worthy of further and more detailed study. The lack of agreement leads this researcher to suggest that return to work programmes are perhaps best studied on a case by case basis. It is clear that in certain circumstances and for certain employees they can be a great benefit but that it is difficult to conclude that they would be appropriate for all circumstances and for all employee populations.

The research highlighted in the literature review shows that it is beneficial for both the employer and employee that employees return to work albeit in a limited capacity. "As a society, we have moved away from old-fashioned preconceptions about who can and cannot work, and from the view that being away from the workplace is always in the best interest of someone with a health condition" (Department for Work and Pensions 2013a, p. 1). The research participants were not as convinced about this issue and they expressed concern about employees feeling pressured to come back to work when they were not fit to return. Another reason why the research participants were split on this issue was their concerns over the application of such a programme. The research group agreed that such programmes need to be introduced in consultation with the employee. If changes

Research suggests that in order to combat negative presenteeism an employer has to broaden their wellness programme, measure their wellness programme's effect on presenteeism and push their organisation's EAP (The HR Specialist, 2013). This view was shared by the research group.

can have the effect of increasing negative presenteeism. simply to reduce absence statistics while they may reduce absenteeism they also McClearn et al. (2010) who states that if the motivation of a particular strategy is mental health physically at the workplace. This opinion is supported by Baker-achieving this as they enable employees to better look after their physical and They strongly agreed that wellness programmes were an important step in decreasing absenteeism but should also include increasing positive presenteeism. order to achieve this the focus of such programmes should not just be on are at the workplace emotionally as well as physically. They also agreed that in group agreed that it was important for employers to make sure that employees benefits at Checkpoint HR (cited in Kuehner-Hebert, 2011, p. 31)). The research but emotionally as well" (Patrick Carragher, vice president and director of (positive) presenteeism—making sure people are not just on the job physically, "Today, the focus isn't just on decreasing absenteeism, it's about increasing

Benefits survey. employers of the HR and benefits professionals surveyed for the 2013 Employee of their absence management strategy. This is in comparison to 46% of 67% of research participant's employers provided wellness programmes as part

6.3.3 *Wellness Programmes*

creating negative presenteeism. et al., 2010, p. 326) have a positive effect of reducing absenteeism without implemented with mutual consent, support and understanding" (Baker-McClearn strategies that are mutually beneficial to both the employee and employer "when supported by Baker-McClearn et al. (2010) who state that absence management which would limit the success of the return to work programme. This view is are unilaterally imposed it could lead to a lack of "buy-in" from the employee

78% of research participant's employers provided EAP's as part of their absence management strategy. This is in comparison to 40% of employers of the HR and benefits professionals surveyed for the 2013 Employee Benefits survey.

The research group stated that the take up level for EAP counselling was lower than they would like and that for the full benefit of providing such a programme to be felt employers need to promote the service better. The main criticism of EAP's with which the research group agreed was that they can tend to focus on the employees' illness as the sole cause of absenteeism or presenteeism

tendencies. They can imply that if an employee is not coping well that the responsibility is on the employee themselves to learn strategies to enable them to be more resilient and cope better rather than on the employer to address

organisational factors, such as excessive workloads. The British Occupational Health Research Foundation (2010) state that organisational factors can often be the main cause of presenteeism and absenteeism patterns and the largest barrier to returning to work (British Occupational Health Research Foundation, 2010). Indeed, recent research among employees who had experienced long-term sickness absence found that the medical condition itself was rarely a barrier to returning to work. (Department for Work and Pensions 2013b; Spetch et al., 2011).

6.3.5 Return to Work Interviews

56% of research participant's employers provided return to work interviews as part of their absence management strategy. This is in comparison to 81% of employers of the HR and benefits professionals surveyed for the 2013 Employee Benefits survey.

Craig (2007) commenting on a survey of 182 organisations which together employ 705,000 people stated that 66% of employers believe that return-to-work interviews have a positive effect in cutting absence rates. According to the survey only 7% of HR practitioners believed that they could increase absentee

Many of the research participants felt that rewarding low attendance would only reduce absenteeism in the short term (immediate future) but would not address it in the long term (for example over the course of a year). They also stated that it would increase presenteeism as people with health issues might go to work in order to earn the reward instead of staying at home and looking after themselves. This in turn would increase absenteeism as while it may reduce absenteeism in a particular employee it could increase absenteeism overall as an employee who is ill could come into work in order to gain the reward and infect other employees. Many research participants were opposed to the very principle of rewarding attendance, claiming that rewards should be attached to work performance and exceeding targets rather than just "showing up for work".

None of research participant's employers rewarded low rates of absenteeism as part of their absence management strategy. This is in comparison to 12% of employers of the HR and benefits professionals surveyed for the 2013 Employee Benefits survey.

6.3.6 Rewarding Low Rates of Absenteeism

The research group unanimously agreed that they had a positive effect in cutting absence rates. The research group strongly agreed that they address persistent (frequent and uncertified) absenteeism by making the employee aware that their absences aren't going unnoticed. They also strongly agreed that they can provide an opportunity for an employer to identify any medical or work related issues which could affect the employee's ability to work and that they could thus enable the employer to identify ways in which they can support the employee. The group agreed that they can protect the wider employee population from contracting an illness from fellow employees returning to work when they are not fit or well enough to be present in the workplace as the employer conducting the interview can encourage the employee to take further time off if necessary.

6.3.7 Limiting Salary

100% of research participant's employers limited salaries for employees on sick leave after a certain period of time as part of their absence management strategy. This is in comparison to 34% of employers of the HR and benefits professionals surveyed for the 2013 Employee Benefits survey.

The research group strongly agreed that it can influence an employee's decision to return to work. They also agreed that it can impact negatively on the perception of the company and the value it places on human capital.

The research group neither agreed nor disagreed that the benefits limiting salary brings outweighed the possible disadvantages. The lack of consensus is also found in the literature on this topic as demonstrated in Chapter 2. While some academics were strongly in favour of it, the Economist (2014) advises against limiting salaries without first undertaking a full cost benefit analysis. They state that any benefits gained must be weighed against the negative effect of employees going into the workplace while ill. This is clearly an area that merits a further study.

6.3.8 Future Challenges

The research group's concerns regarding future challenges HRM professionals may face in terms of managing absenteeism and presenteeism are supported by the literature in this area. These concerns are listed in chapter 5 of this study. Their initial concern regarding the variety of employees of different ages is supported by Dumont (2013) who states that by 2025 four generations will occupy the workforce and that this will pose a challenge to organisations as each generation will have different expectations and requirements from their employer. Their second concern regarding employees being above current retirement age also finds support, "we recognise the workforce is ageing and that this will have a dramatic effect on workplaces. We need therefore to consider the needs of older workers and the support required to ensure people are able to work to a later age" (The Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a, p.6). Their

- concerns around atypical forms of employment such as zero hour contracts is also an area which is quite topical at present and has received much coverage in the media with Dunnes Stores staff striking in protest of such contracts earlier this year
- The research participants were asked for their opinions on how future challenges to absenteeism and presenteeism management can be met and the replies that they agreed or strongly agreed with were:
- Addressing the issue of absenteeism and presenteeism at an early stage will be key.* The research group agreed that this can involve assessing all instances of absenteeism early before they can escalate and should extend to the recruitment stage before a potential employee joins the company. A tight recruitment process can help ensure that an employee is the right fit for the role and the organisational culture.

• *Placing more responsibility on line managers.* The research group were of the opinion that the line manager is more aware of what is going on from day to day and is in a better position to identify and prevent potential issues early. They stated that in order to facilitate this HR would need to ensure that line managers are fully supported and appropriately trained to conduct difficult or sensitive conversations about illnesses, health and the various supports that the employer offers. This concept of increased responsibility and additional training for line managers finds support in the literature. The Economist (2014) state that businesses should ensure that managers are capable of identifying workplace triggers of ill health and recognising symptoms among employees.

• *Strategic use of flexible working practices* to adapt to the changing needs of employees will be key. This will be of particular importance given the increasingly globalised nature of many work environments where the traditional view of working nine to five, five days a week is decreasing.

• *Flexible benefits* may reduce the impacts of absenteeism in an ageing work force for example employer's contribution towards health insurance cover or health initiatives for employees.

- *HR managers should adopt holistic approaches to managing absenteeism and presenteeism by matching employees' and employers' needs.* Gosselin et al. (2013) agree with this view and state that health ailments should not be considered as the only cause of attendance dynamic problems. Rather, any strategy that an employer adopts to reduce the occurrence of negative presenteeism and absenteeism should be broadened to take into consideration the complex decision-making that underlies sickness absence and negative presenteeism
- *Management could better educate employees about the consequences of persistent absenteeism, its potential impact on career progression and future job prospects.*

The purpose of this study was to explore the opinions of HRM professionals on the effectiveness of common absence management strategies in the context of any possible increase in absenteeism or presenteeism they may create. The key question which this research explored was whether the advantage to a company brought about by the overall reduction in absenteeism that they may bring outweighs any possible disadvantages of potential increases to absenteeism and/or the presenteeism that may be associated with them. This research explored future challenges HR managers will face in terms of managing absenteeism and presenteeism and how these challenges can be met.

It is the opinion of this researcher that the aims and objectives of the study have been met. It is clear from the study that the advantages of providing flexible working conditions, wellness programmes, EAP's and return to work interviews outweighs any possible disadvantages of potential increases to absenteeism and/or the presenteeism that may be associated with them. With regards to return to work programmes, rewarding low rates of pay and limiting salaries for employees on sick leave, the research group neither agreed nor disagreed that their advantages outweighed their disadvantages. The aspects of an employers absence management strategy therefore are worthy of further study.

7.1 Limitations

The researcher faced some limitations during the study. 15 HRM professionals had originally agreed to participate in the study and were sent the first round questionnaire. Out of this group nine completed the questionnaire. Only seven out of these nine research participants completed the second round questionnaire. This is to be expected with Delphi studies as they require considerable commitment over a prolonged period of time from research participants. Lack of interest and dropout rates are higher with these studies than traditional quantitative or qualitative research methods. Thankfully the Delphi method does not require a large number of research participants and is for accommodating low numbers. If more numbers had dropped out it may have damaged the rigour of

The research showed that with regards to return to work programmes, rewarding low rates of pay and limiting salaries for employees on sick leave the research group neither agreed nor disagreed that their benefits outweighed their

7.2 Recommendations for Future Research

The aim of a "classic" Delphi study is to achieve a consensus of expert opinion through multiple rounds of questionnaires. As the researcher was time limited it was decided that Delphi would be modified so that the aim of this study was not to try and reach consensus of expert opinion. Rather it was explorative in nature and sought to offer a snapshot of the opinions of HRM professionals and to explore the strength of these opinions.

The Delphi is also a time consuming research method. It involves sending multiple rounds of questionnaires. The researcher had to allocate sufficient time to collect and analyse the results of the first round questionnaire before sending out the second round questionnaire. Research participants also had to be afforded sufficient time to complete each round. As the research was conducted during the summer months when many participants had holidays booked the time afforded to participants to complete the questionnaires was longer than the researcher would have ordinarily preferred. This led to the researcher receiving the second round data closer to the research submission date than would be preferable.

the research. Hasson et al., (2000) suggests that a response rate of 70% for each round is necessary to maintain the rigour of the study. The participation rate for the second round questionnaire was not below this percentage therefore in this questionnaire that the two research participants who did not complete the second round questionnaire had completed was still used to inform the statements for the second round questionnaire. Their input into the research therefore was still helpful despite the fact that they did not see the research through to completion.

disadvantages. These aspects of an employers absence management strategy therefore are worthy of further study.

The research also showed that return to work interviews were viewed as the most effective absence management strategy as 100% of the research participants either agreed or strongly agreed that their benefits outweighed their disadvantages. It is worthy of note that despite this unanimous approval of return to work interviews only 56% of the research participants employers utilised them as part of their absence management strategy. Further study is warranted to explore why more employers are not conducting return to work interviews given that the research group were unanimously in support of them. Also 100% of the research participants stated that their employers limited salary for employees on sick leave after a period of time yet 57% of them felt that limiting salary was an ineffective strategy as their disadvantages outweighed the advantages. Further study could also be undertaken in this area to investigate why so many employers are using this strategy when there is such a lack of consensus as to its effectiveness.

The factors that contribute to absenteeism and presenteeism are multiple and complex. This study looked exclusively at presenteeism and absenteeism that can be created by absence management strategies. Research shows, however, that there are certain demographic and organisational factors as well which can contribute to presenteeism such as gender, age, job satisfaction, stress, family status, employment security work schedules, workload, managerial support, work monitoring, group cohesion, corporate culture, leadership style, the type of employment, low organisational commitment and lack of organisational support (Gosselin et al., 2013; Harrison and Martocchio, 1998; Punnett, Greenidge, and Ramsey, 2007; Zheng, Molinueux, Mirshakary and Scarpato, 2015). This study also examined the advantages and disadvantages each of the absence management strategies had from the employer's perspective. It cannot be assumed that the same results would be found if the investigation were to be

conducted from the employee's perspective. This is an aspect that in this researchers opinion is worthy of further study.

With regard to the future direction of absenteeism and presenteeism management strategies this research highlights several areas worthy of future study. The research group were of the opinion that increasingly atypical contracts of employment such as zero hour contracts, increasing age of employees and more generations of employees in the workforce will be significant challenges to absenteeism and presenteeism management strategies that HRM professionals will face. The future challenges HRM professionals may face in terms of managing absenteeism and presenteeism and how these can be met is certainly an area worthy of more in-depth study.

The study was also limited to the absence management strategies highlighted in the 2013 Employee Benefits survey. There are other absence management strategies which would be worthy of studying in terms of the absenteeism and presenteeism they may create. For example the CIPD (2014) study findings suggest that having an absence-related KPI as being a powerful tool to focus attention on promoting attendance. In a similar vein using attendance as a selection criteria for redundancy could also be an absence management strategy worthy of further study.

Finally, much of the literature on absenteeism and presenteeism is based on qualitative questionnaires (Gosselin et al. 2013; Jensen and McIntosh, 2007) or quantitative interviews (Irvine, 2011; Baker-McCleam et al., 2010). In this researcher's opinion, the lack of data gathered by means of a Delphi study shows that there is scope for further research using this method.

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Appendices

Appendix I - Letter of Invitation

Private & Confidential

Name

Address

By Email

20 June 2015

To whom it concerns,

I am currently undertaking a Masters in Human Resource Management in the National College of Ireland (NCI). I am presently undertaking a thesis to explore the opinions of HRM professional on the effectiveness of some common absence management strategies and whether the advantage to a company brought about by the overall reduction in absenteeism that they may bring outweighs any possible disadvantages of potential increases to absenteeism and/or the presentism that may be associated with them. The study also seeks to explore the perceived future challenges that HRM professionals may face in terms of managing absenteeism and presentism and how these challenges may be met.

I propose to conduct this research by means of a Delphi Study, which will comprise two or three rounds of questionnaires. The first round will comprise of open ended (qualitative) questions. I will compile the answers given in round one into ranking (quantitative) questions and this will form round two of the questionnaire. Your details and those of your organisation will be kept anonymous throughout the study.

Further information is available in the Participant Information Sheet (enclosed). Should you wish to engage as a participant in this study, you will be asked to complete and return a signed copy of the enclosed Consent Form. Please note that should you decide to participate, you will be free to withdraw from the study at any time and without notice.

It is the intention of this study to comply with the NCI guidelines (a copy of which is available upon request), however, if you have any questions or concerns of an ethical nature please inform me so I can take appropriate action.

Should you wish to participate in this research study or if have any questions or concerns concerning the research project or your participation therein or if you wish to obtain further information, please contact Damien Donnelly (the Researcher) at damien.donnelly@yahoo.com or tel: 085 7702186.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Damien Donnelly

Appendix II - Participant Information Sheet

Project Title Exploring the effectiveness of common absence management strategies in the context of any possible increase in absenteeism or presenteeism they may create: a Delphi study of Irish private sector companies	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 30%;">Name of Researcher</td> <td>Damien Donnelly</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Contact email/number</td> <td>Damien.donnelly@yahoo.com</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>085-7702186</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Name of Participant</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> Project Aims: The aim of this study is to explore the opinions of HRM professional on the effectiveness of some common absence management strategies and whether the advantage to a company brought about by the overall reduction in absenteeism that they may bring outweighs any possible disadvantages of potential increases to absenteeism and/or the presenteeism that may be associated with them. The study also seeks to explore the perceived future challenges that HRM professionals may face in terms of managing absenteeism and presenteeism and how these challenges may be met.	Name of Researcher	Damien Donnelly	Contact email/number	Damien.donnelly@yahoo.com		085-7702186	Name of Participant	
Name of Researcher	Damien Donnelly								
Contact email/number	Damien.donnelly@yahoo.com								
	085-7702186								
Name of Participant									
Project Objectives: This study will be carried out by way of a Delphi study which comprises 2 rounds of questionnaires circulated to research participants. Round 1 will comprise of open ended (qualitative) questions. I will compile the answers given in round 1 into ranking (quantitative) questions and this will form round 2 of the questionnaire. The objectives of this study are to: • Gain insight into how common each of the absence management strategies are in Irish private sector companies.									

• Explore the opinions of HRM professionals on the absenteeism and presenteeism that each of these strategies may create and whether in the opinion of HRM professionals this makes them counterproductive. • Evaluate the strength of these opinions. • Generate discussion on possible future challenges that HRM professionals may face in managing absenteeism and presenteeism. • Explore how these challenges may be met.	Personal Information and Data Your personal information and all data and any correspondence concerning you or your company is protected under the Data Protection (Amendment) Act 2003. You can withdraw your permission at any time. You can ask to access the data gathered from you at any time by contacting the researcher (contact details supplied above).	How the information will be stored and published: Anonymity and confidentiality will be protected at all times. Your details and those of your company will be kept anonymous throughout the research. The data will be disposed of upon completion of the study and according to the Data Retention policy of the National College of Ireland.
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Appendix III – Consent Form

Project Title		Exploring the effectiveness of common absence management strategies in the context of any possible increase in absenteeism or presenteeism they may create: a Delphi study of Irish private sector companies	
Name of Researcher		Damien Donnelly	
Contact Email	Damien.donnelly@yahoo.com		
Contact	Phone	085-7702186	
Number			
Name of Participant			
☐ I consent to take part in this study.			
☐ I have received an Information Sheet and Letter of Invitation and have read and understood the purpose of the study.			
☐ I understand I can withdraw my consent at any time, without giving reason and without prejudice.			
☐ I am aware that my details and those of my company will be kept confidential at every stage the study including the final report.			
☐ I acknowledge that all correspondence, data and any personal information will be kept secure and confidential. They will be kept by the researcher until the end of the project. They will then be disposed of in line with National University of Ireland's Data Retention Policy.			
☐ I acknowledge that anonymised summaries (if required) will be produced from the data to be used in the project report and in other publications. None of the participants will be identified in the project report or in other publications based on this project. Copies of any reports or publications will be available on request to participants.			
☐ Participant: By signing I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above statements			
Signed:			
Date:			

Appendix IV - Round One Questionnaire

Exploring the effectiveness of common absence management strategies in the context of any possible increase in absenteeism or presenteeism they may create: a Delphi study of Irish private sector companies

Specific Instructions: Please answer the 3 sections in this questionnaire (Section A, B and C). You can type in your answers and return the document to me by email: dannien.donnelly@yahoo.com. I would be grateful if you could revert by 20 July. If you have any queries at any time, please let me know:

Important Note:

The definition of "absenteeism" for the purpose of this study will be "a lack of physical presence at a behaviour setting when and where one is expected to be"

The definition of "presenteeism" for the purpose of this study will be "the practice of coming to work despite illness, injury, anxiety, etc., often resulting in reduced productivity"

References to the "benefits" refers to benefits to the company rather than the benefits to the employee

Section A: Initial Questions: Please answer "Yes" or "No":

1. Does your company provide flexible working conditions (e.g. flexi-time, compressed working weeks, working from home, job-sharing)?
2. Does your company have a return to work programme in place for employees who have been out on sickness absence (e.g. modified work programmes, phased return to work, adapted work stations, changes to work duties)?
3. Does your company have a wellness programme in place (e.g. health risk assessments, the provision of self-help education materials, flu shot programmes, on-site group activities or trainings led by trained personnel)?
4. Does your company use an Employee Assistance Programme (an external provider of counselling for employees)?
5. Does your company conduct return to work interviews when employees return from sickness absence?
6. Does your company provide rewards for employees who have low rates of absenteeism?
7. Does your company have a strategy for provision of salary to employees who are on sick leave (i.e. do they reduce salary after a certain amount of time)?

Section B: Open Ended Questions. Please answer regardless of your answers to section A.

- 1. Flexible Working Conditions:**
 - i. In your opinion how does providing flexible working conditions affect absenteeism and presenteeism rates?
 - ii. Do you think that the benefits associated with providing flexible working conditions outweigh the presenteeism that may be associated with them? **Please elaborate/explain why.**

- 2. Return to Work Programmes:**
 - i. In your opinion how does providing return to work programmes affect absenteeism and presenteeism rates?
 - ii. Do you think that the benefits associated with providing return to work programmes outweigh the presenteeism that may be associated with them? **Please elaborate/explain why.**

- 3. Wellness Programmes:**
 - i. In your opinion how does providing wellness programmes affect absenteeism and presenteeism rates?
 - ii. Do you think that the benefits associated with providing wellness programmes outweigh the presenteeism that may be associated with them? **Please elaborate/explain why.**

- 4. Employee Assistance Programmes:**
 - i. In your opinion how does providing an Employee Assistance Programme affect absenteeism and presenteeism rates?
 - ii. Do you think that the benefits associated with providing an Employee Assistance Programme outweigh the presenteeism that may be associated with them? **Please elaborate/explain why.**

- 5. Return to Work Interviews:**
 - i. In your opinion how does conducting return to work interviews affect absenteeism and presenteeism rates?
 - ii. Do you think that the benefits associated with conducting return to work interviews outweigh the presenteeism that may be associated with them? **Please elaborate/explain why.**

- 6. Rewarding Low Rates of Absenteeism:**
- i. In your opinion how does providing rewards for employees with low rates of absenteeism affect absenteeism and presenteeism rates?
 - ii. Do you think that the benefits associated with providing rewards for employees with low rates of absenteeism outweigh the presenteeism that may be associated with them? Please elaborate/explain why.

7. Limiting Salary:

- i. In your opinion how does limiting salary for employees on sick leave affect absenteeism and presenteeism rates?
- ii. Do you think that the benefits associated with limiting salaries for employees on sick leave outweigh the presenteeism that may be associated with them? Please elaborate/explain why.

Section C: Future Direction of Absence and Presentee management strategies:

Studies suggest that by 2025 there will be 4 generations of employees in the workplace. This will pose a challenge to organisations as each generation will have different expectations and requirements from their employer.

1. What future challenges do you think HR managers will face in terms of managing absenteeism and presenteeism?
2. How do you think these challenges can be met?

Any additional comments or observations you feel may be relevant to this study?

Thank you very much!

Appendix V - Round Two Questionnaire

Important Note:

The purpose of this questionnaire is to explore opinions of Human Resource Management professionals on the effectiveness of various absence management strategies. Does any increase in absenteeism and presenteeism they may cause make them counterproductive?

The definition of "absenteeism" for the purpose of this study will be "a lack of physical presence at a behaviour setting when and where one is expected to be, due to illness".

The definition of "presenteeism" for the purpose of this study will be "the practice of coming to work [or working from home] despite illness, injury, anxiety, etc., often resulting in reduced productivity".

(Presenteeism is often an undesired outcome of absenteeism reducing methods that companies employ, although in some limited circumstances it can be a positive outcome).

Specific Instructions:

In this questionnaire I have collated the responses from Round 1 and am presenting them below.

Please review the statements in each section **A-H below** and assign a rank of numerical value demonstrating your level of agreement or disagreement with the statements, where '5' will indicate 'strongly agree' and '1' will indicate 'strongly disagree'.

Questionnaire:

Please assign a rank of numerical value (5-1) demonstrating your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

Strongly Agree	5
Agree	4
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	1

(A) Flexible Working Conditions	
(The Effects of Flexible Working Conditions on Absenteeism & Presenteeism)	
Rank 5-1 Agree - (Strongly Agree - Strongly Disagree)	
Absenteeism:	(i) They enable employees to manage their time more effectively between work and other commitments.
Presenteeism:	(ii) Employees can feel under pressure to work from home when they are ill.

	(iii) They can give the employee scope to adjust their working patterns to accommodate their illness/ other commitments that may otherwise have prevented them from working.
	(iv) Presenteeism is a natural outcome of not allowing some degree of freedom regarding flexible hours and working patterns.
	Key Question: (v) NB: The advantage to a company brought about by the overall reduction in absenteeism that flexible working conditions may bring outweighs any possible disadvantages of potential increases to absenteeism and/or the presenteeism that may be associated with them.

Please assign a rank of numerical value (5-1) demonstrating your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

Strongly Agree	5
Agree	4
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	1

Rank 5-1 (Strongly Agree – Strongly Disagree)	(B) Return to Work Programmes (The Effects of Return to Work Programmes on Absenteeism & Presenteeism)	
	Absenteeism:	
	(i)	They serve as a tool for employees who may need extra support in their return to work/ transition back to the workplace.
	(ii)	They ensure that the employer is aware of the employee's situation which enables the employer to support them accordingly.
	(iii)	They can enable the employer to match the company's needs with the employee's new needs.
	Presenteeism:	
	(iv)	They can encourage the employee to return to work, albeit in a limited capacity, when they are not fully fit to work.
	(v)	Employees may decide to return before they are fully fit to avoid being required to engage in a return to work programme.
	Key Question: (vi) NB: The advantage to a company brought about by the overall reduction in absenteeism that return to work programmes may bring outweighs any possible disadvantages of potential increases to absenteeism and/or the presenteeism that may be associated with them.	
	Observations/Comments (please also answer):	
	(vii)	They need to be introduced in consultation with the employee. If changes are unilaterally imposed it can lead to a lack of "buy-in" from the employee which will limit the success of the return to work programme.

Rank 5-1 (Strongly Agree - Strongly Disagree)		(C) Wellness Programmes (The Effects of Wellness Programmes on Absenteeism & Presenteeism)									
		Absenteeism:									
		(i) They enable employees to better look after their physical and mental health.									
		(ii) Direct health initiatives like the flu shot reduce absenteeism.									
		(iii) They help create a healthier organisational culture.									
		(iv) They promote healthier work practices and enhance employee satisfaction levels.									
		Presenteeism:									
		(v) They help create a healthier organisational culture.									
		(vi) They enable employees to better look after their physical and mental health.									
		(vii) They promote healthier work practices and enhance employee satisfaction levels.									
		Key Question:									
		(viii) NB: The advantage to a company brought about by the overall reduction in absenteeism that providing wellness programmes may bring outweighs any possible disadvantages of potential increases to absenteeism and/or the presenteeism that may be associated with them.									
		Observations/Comments (please also answer):									
		(ix) It is the responsibility of the employee rather than the employer to look after their own wellbeing.									
		(x) The focus should not be on decreasing absenteeism alone but should also include increasing (positive) presenteeism; making sure people are not just on the job physically, but emotionally as well.									
Please assign a rank of numerical value (5-1) demonstrating your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements:											
Strongly Disagree	1	Strongly Agree	5	Agree	4	Neither Agree nor Disagree	3	Disagree	2	Strongly Disagree	1
Rank 5-1 (Strongly Agree - Strongly Disagree)		(D) Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) (The Effects of Employee Assistance Programmes on Absenteeism & Presenteeism)									
		Absenteeism:									
		(i) They assist employees in dealing with issues that might be causing them difficulties such as stress or anxiety.									
		(ii) They provide the employer with statistical data which they can use to address workplace issues which they may have not have previously been aware of.									
		Presenteeism:									

Rank 5-1 (Strongly Agree – Strongly Disagree)	(E) Return to Work Interviews (The Effects of Return to Work Interviews on Absenteeism & Presenteeism)		
	Absenteeism:		
	(i)	They address persistent (frequent and uncanceled) absenteeism by making the employee aware that their absences aren't going unnoticed.	
	(ii)	They can provide an opportunity to identify any medical or work related issues which could affect the employee's ability to work	
	(iii)	The employer conducting the interview can encourage the employee to take further time off if they are not fit to be in the workplace.	

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

Please assign a rank of numerical value (5-1) demonstrating your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

Key Question:	(v)	NB: The advantage to a company brought about by the overall reduction in absenteeism that providing employee assistance programmes may bring outweighs any possible disadvantages of potential increases to absenteeism and/or the presenteeism that may be associated with them.	
	Observations/Comments (please also answer):		
	(vi)	EAPs can only focus on the individual's issue and therefore have limited scope in addressing organisational factors such as excessive workloads – which can often be the main cause of presenteeism and absenteeism patterns and the largest barrier to returning to work.	
	(vii)	The uptake by employees of EAP services is generally too low to really affect absenteeism and presenteeism rates.	
	(viii)	Companies need to promote the service better to increase the number of employees benefiting from the service.	
	(ix)	EAP counselling is frequently offered through times where a grievance or disciplinary may be taking place. In such circumstances it can be seen as a cynical cosmetic attempt by employers to make it look like they are supporting the employee. They can also be cynically viewed as a "corporate branding activity".	

(iv) They provide the employer with statistical data which they can use to address workplace issues which they may have not have previously been aware of.

(iii) They assist employees in dealing with issues that might be causing them difficulties such as stress or anxiety.

Rank 5-1 (Strongly Agree – Strongly Disagree)	(F) Rewarding Low Rates of Absenteeism (The Effects of Rewarding Low Rates of Absenteeism on Absenteeism & Presenteeism)	
	Absenteeism:	
	(i) Rewards could influence absenteeism in the short term (immediate future) but would not address it in the long term (for example over the course of a year).	(ii) It can have the effect of reducing absenteeism in a particular employee but can increase absenteeism overall as an employee who is ill could come into work in order to gain the reward and infect other employees.
	Presenteeism:	
	(iii) People with health issues might go to work in order to earn the reward instead of staying at home and looking after themselves.	

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

Please assign a rank of numerical value (5-1) demonstrating your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

Key Question:	(ix) NB: The advantage to a company brought about by the overall reduction in absenteeism that providing return to work interviews may bring outweighs any possible disadvantages of potential increases to absenteeism and/or the presenteeism that may be associated with them.	Observations/Comments (please also answer):
	(viii) If employees believe they are conducted in a punitive rather than supportive manner, an employee may be less inclined to take absence in the first place.	
	(vii) The employer conducting the interview can encourage the employee to take further time off if they are not fit to be in the workplace.	
	(vi) They can identify ways in which the employer can support the employee.	
Presenteeism:	(v) They can provide an opportunity to identify any medical or work related issues which could affect the employee's work	
	(iv) If employees believe they are conducted in a punitive rather than supportive manner, an employee may be less inclined to take absence in the first place.	

5	Strongly Agree
4	Agree
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree
2	Disagree
1	Strongly Disagree

Please assign a rank of numerical value (5-1) demonstrating your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

Key Question:		(iv) NB: The advantage to a company brought about by the overall reduction in absenteeism that rewarding low rates of absenteeism may bring outweighs any possible disadvantages of potential increases to absenteeism and/or the presenteeism that may be associated with them.	
Observations/Comments (please also answer):		(vi) It may impact negatively on the perception of the company and the value it places on human capital.	
(G) Limiting Salary			
(The Effects of Limiting Salary on Absenteeism & Presenteeism)			
Rank 5-1 (Strongly Agree – Strongly Disagree)	Absenteeism:		
	(i) It can strongly influence an employee's decision to return to work.		
	Presenteeism		
	(ii) The money saved by the company (when limiting the salary of the absent employee) can be used to bring in cover thus reducing the burden on the other employee(s) who would otherwise be required to cover the absent employee's work.		
	(iii) It can strongly influence an employee's decision to return to work.		
	(iv) The chance of creating negative presenteeism can be reduced if salary limitation is combined with the requirement to provide a doctors certificate stating fitness for work and a return to work meeting.		
Key Question:		(v) NB: The advantage to a company brought about by the overall reduction in absenteeism that rewarding low rates of absenteeism may bring outweighs any possible disadvantages of potential increases to absenteeism and/or the presenteeism that may be associated with them.	
Observations/Comments (please also answer):		(v) Rewards should be attached to work performance and exceeding targets rather than just 'showing up for work'.	

Rank 5-1 (Strongly Agree – Strongly Disagree)	(H) Future Direction of Absence and Presentee Management Strategies		What future challenges do you think HR managers will face in terms of managing absenteeism and presenteeism?		How do you think these challenges can be met?			
	(i)	The variety of the workforce (4 generations and different backgrounds/qualifications) will have an impact on absenteeism and presenteeism rates.			(i)	A tight recruitment process needs to be in place where an employee is the right fit for the role and the organisational culture.		
	(ii)	Increasingly atypical forms of employment (such as 0-hours, temporary workers and part-time workers, high diversity) will affect motivation and engagement which will have an effect of absenteeism and presenteeism rates.			(ii)	Strategic use of flexible working practices to adapt to the changing needs of employees will be key. (In many industries, especially with the globalised nature of many work environments, the traditional view of working 9-5pm, 5 days a week is decreasing).		
	(iii)	HR Managers will probably have to deal with more people in the work place who are above the current retirement age. It is possible that they will have more health problems due to age and HR Managers will be challenged to handle this fairly alongside other employees who don't have such problems.			(iii)	HR managers should adopt holistic approaches to managing absenteeism and presenteeism by matching employees' and employers' needs.		
	(iv)	The high unemployment rate since the recession means that there will be a large section of employees who have reached a certain age without having worked. Their work ethic and attitudes to work in general will consequently have been affected and this will affect absenteeism and presenteeism rates.			(iv)	Flexible benefits may reduce the impacts of absenteeism in an ageing work force (for example employer's contribution towards health insurance cover or health initiatives for employees).		
	(v)	Placing more responsibility on line managers rather than relying on HR as much. The line manager is more aware of what is going on from day to day and is in a better position to identify and prevent potential issues early before they would even come onto HR's radar.			(v)	Placing more responsibility on line managers rather than relying on HR as much. The line manager is more aware of what is going on from day to day and is in a better position to identify and prevent potential issues early before they would even come onto HR's radar.		
	(vi)	Ensuring that line managers are fully supported and appropriately trained to conduct difficult or sensitive conversations about illnesses, health and the various supports that the employer offers.			(vi)	Ensuring that line managers are fully supported and appropriately trained to conduct difficult or sensitive conversations about illnesses, health and the various supports that the employer offers.		

	(vii) Assessing every instance of absenteeism and addressing any issues early before they can escalate.
	(viii) Management could better educate employees about the consequences of persistent absenteeism – its potential impact on career progression and also on future job prospects in terms of how future employers will view their absence record.

Appendix VI - Submission of Thesis to Norma Smurfit Library, National

College of Ireland

Submission of Thesis to Norma Smurfit Library, National College of Ireland

Student name: Darnien Donnelly

Student number: 12102130

School: NCI School of Business

Course: MA Human Resource Management

Degree to be awarded: MA Human Resource Management

Title of Thesis: Exploring the effectiveness of common absence management strategies in the context of any possible increase in absenteeism or presenteeism they may create: A Delphi study of Irish private sector companies

One hard bound copy of your thesis will be lodged in the Norma Smurfit Library and will be available for consultation. The electronic copy will be accessible in TRAP (<http://trap.ncirl.ie/>), the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository. In accordance with normal academic library practice all theses lodged in the National College of Ireland Institutional Repository (TRAP) are made available on open access.

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Signature of Candidate:



For completion by the School:

The aforementioned thesis was received by _____

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