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EMPLOYEE ABSENTEEISM IN HEALTH CARE INDUSTRY: A CONCERN FOR THE ORGANIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Employee's presence at work place during the scheduled time is highly essential for the smooth running of the production process in particular and the organization in general. Despite the significance of their presence, employees sometime fail to report at the work place during the scheduled time, which is known as 'absenteeism'. Labour bureau, Simla, defined the term 'absenteeism' as "the failure of a worker to report for work when he is scheduled to work". It also states that "absenteeism is the total man-shifts lost because of absence as a percentage of the total number of man-shifts scheduled to work". According to Webster's Dictionary, "absenteeism is the practice or habit of being an 'absence' and an absentee is one who habitually stays away". This paper provides a theoretical framework for "Employee Absenteeism".

KEYWORDS

Absence; Failure of work; Absenteeism Cost; Absenteeism Rate; Frequency Rate; Severity Rate.

INTRODUCTION

In any human resource costing application, it is important first to define exactly what is being measured. From a business standpoint, absenteeism is any failure of an employee to report for or to remain at work as scheduled, regardless of reason. The term "as scheduled" is very significant, for it automatically excludes vacations, holidays, jury duty, and the like. It also eliminates the problem of determining whether an absence is "excusable" or not. Medically verified illness is a good example. From a business perspective, the employee is absent and is simply not available to perform his or her job; that absence will cost money.

TYPES OF ABSENTEEISM

Absenteeism is of four types. They are,

(i) Authorized Absenteeism

If an employee absents himself from work by taking permission from his superior and applying for leave, such absenteeism is called authorized absenteeism.

(ii) Unauthorized Absenteeism

If an employee absents himself from work without informing or taking permission and without applying for leave, such absenteeism is called unauthorized absenteeism.

(iii) Willful Absenteeism

If an employee absents himself from duty willfully, such absenteeism is said to be willful absenteeism.

(iv) Absenteeism caused by circumstances beyond one's control

It is absenteeism where an employee absents himself from duty owing to the circumstances beyond his control like involvement in accidents or sudden sickness.

FEATURES OF ABSENTEEISM

Research studies undertaken by different authors reveal the following.

- (i) The rate of absenteeism is the lowest on pay day; it increases considerably on the days following the payment of wages and bonus.
- (ii) Absenteeism is generally high among the workers below 25 years of age and those above 40 years of age.
- (iii) The rate of absenteeism varies from department to department within an organization. Generally, it is high in the production department.
- (iv) Absenteeism in traditional industries is seasonal in character.

CALCULATION OF ABSENTEEISM RATE

Absenteeism can be calculated with the help of the following formula.

$$\text{Absenteeism Rate} = \frac{\text{Number of Man days lost}}{\text{Number of Man days scheduled to work}} * 100$$

Absenteeism rate can be calculated for different employees and for different time periods like month and year.

The frequency rate reflects the incidence of absence and is usually expressed as the number of separate absence in a given period, irrespective of length of absences. The frequency rate represents the average number of absences per worker in a given period.

$$\text{Frequency Rate} = \frac{\text{Total number of times in which the leave was availed}}{\text{Total number of Man days scheduled to work}} * 100$$

Severity Rate is the average length of time lost per absence and is calculated by using the following formula.

$$\text{Severity Rate} = \frac{\text{Total number of days absent during a period}}{\text{Total number of times absent during that period}} * 100$$

A high severity rate indicates that the employee is absent for longer durations each time. High frequency and severity rates indicate that the employee is absent more frequently and for longer durations each time resulting in high absenteeism even in absolute terms.

CATEGORIES OF ABSENTEEISM

K.N. Vaid classifies chronic absentees in to five categories.

A. ENTREPRENEURS

These absentees consider that their jobs are very small for their total interest and personal goals. They engage themselves in other social and economic activities to fulfill their goals.

B. THE STATUS SEEKERS

They enjoy or perceive a higher ascribed social status and are keen on maintaining it.

C. THE EPICUREANS

These classes of absentees do not like to take up the jobs which demand initiative, responsibility, discipline and discomfort. They wish to have money, power, and status but are unwilling to work for their achievement.

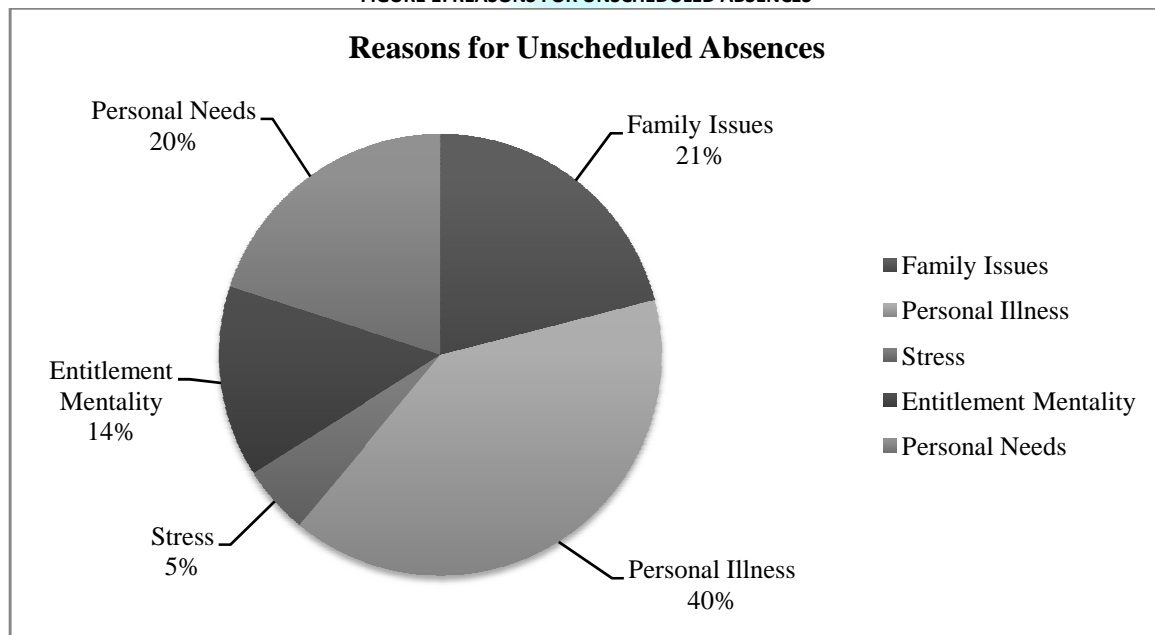
D. FAMILY-ORIENTED

They are often identified with the family activities.

E. THE SICK AND OLD

These categories of absentees are mostly unhealthy, with a weak constitution or old people.

FIGURE 1: REASONS FOR UNSCHEDULED ABSENCES



INTERPRETATION

The above figure explains that personal illness contributes for 40%, family issues to 21%, personal needs to 20%, Entitlement mentality 14% and stress for about 5% of the causes for unscheduled absences.

CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM

There are contrasting views on the causes of absenteeism. According to one school of thought, absenteeism is due to lack of commitment on the part of workers. Various research studies on absenteeism have revealed different causes of absenteeism. The causes can be grouped into three categories. Organizational factors, environmental factors and personal factors.

I. ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS

The following organizational factors have found to be responsible for absenteeism.

- Monotonous work.
- Leniency towards absenteeism causes high rate of absenteeism.
- Appointment of temporary/ casual workers leads to high absenteeism.
- Militant attitude of trade union also cause high absenteeism as workers become frustrated because of these attitudes.

II. ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

The environmental factors can further be classified to Socio-economic factors and Religious-cultural factors.

a. Socio-Economic Factors

- Due to migratory nature of labour force in India, workers do not develop emotional belongingness with their workplaces, hence their high absence.
- Workers generally live in unhygienic and poor economic conditions. Because of these conditions, they lack commitment to their work which causes absence.
- Workers generally have more number of dependent children. Coupled with unhygienic living conditions, they face the problem of sickness quite frequently which results in to absenteeism.

b. Religious and cultural factors

Indian population consists of multi-religious and cultural groups with each group having its own religious festivals, customs and traditions. Often, these festivals take considerable time to celebrate. It has been observed that during these festivals, absenteeism rate is quite high.

III. PERSONAL FACTORS

Personal causes for absenteeism are as follows.

- Unskilled and young workers have higher rate of absence because of their own personal problems.
- Woman workers are more prone to absenteeism because of their personal and family problems.
- Workers who are alcoholic and drug addict show higher tendency of absenteeism.
- Indebtedness of workers causes absenteeism.
- Some workers tend to be chronically absentees because of their personality factors or because of their other problems.

MEASURES TO CONTROL ABSENTEEISM

Absenteeism is a serious problem which affects both organizations and employees. While organizations have to bear extra costs, employees have to suffer in the form of lower earnings because of absenteeism. From the national point of view, absenteeism is a negative factor because it affects national output adversely. Therefore, measures should be adopted to control absenteeism so as to bring it to the lowest possible level.

(I) ADOPTION OF SUITABLE RECRUITMENT PROCEDURE

The magnitude of absenteeism can be reduced to some extent by adopting a suitable recruitment and selection procedure which can eliminate those candidates who are likely to show the tendency of being chronic absentees. For this purpose, more emphasis should be given on aptitude and personality factors rather than merely on knowledge and ability factors.

(II) CONGENIAL WORK ENVIRONMENT

Lack of congenial work environment, both physical and emotional, is one of the major factors for absenteeism. Poor working conditions lead to tardiness, disinterest, and work alienation. In order to overcome these, employees try to seek satisfaction elsewhere. Therefore, absenteeism can be controlled by providing good physical conditions at the workplace. Besides, the employees should be provided emotional support through good leadership and supervision, interpersonal relations, and development of healthy work groups.

(III) TRAINING AND COUNSELING

Employee should be provided training for developing their competence and modifying their attitudes towards work. Similarly, those employees who show higher level of absenteeism should be provided counseling to overcome their personal and family problems since these problems cause absenteeism.

(IV) EMPLOYEE WELFARE MEASURES

Absenteeism can be controlled by providing various welfare measures such as housing around the workplace, educational facilities, and facilities to their children, etc. Similarly, other welfare measures to overcome employee's occasional problems such as illness, marriages in their families, and any other hardships. Similarly, social security measures such as provident fund, superannuation fund, gratuity, etc., should be provided to develop belongingness to the organization. Special awards and incentives may be provided to employees showing higher level of attendance.

(V) TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION AND PROMPT REDRESSAL OF GRIEVANCES

There should be emphasis on two-way communication – upward and downward – so that employees get opportunity to air their views and feelings. This encourages them to develop positive attitudes towards the organization. Similarly, if employees have grievances, there should be prompt redressal of these which provides them satisfaction. If possible, grievances should be redressed at the initial stage itself.

(VI) OTHER MEASURES

Besides the above measures, organizations can adopt the following measures to control absenteeism.

- a. Organizations can seek the cooperation of trade unions to control excessive absenteeism.
- b. Disciplinary actions and other penal provisions should be made in consultation with trade unions to control the chronic absentees.
- c. Leave provisions should be made in such a way that these fulfill the genuine requirements of the employees.
- d. Proper records of absence along with causes of absence should be maintained and analyzed to develop measures for controlling absenteeism.

CONCLUSION

Absenteeism affects the organization from multiple angles. It severely affects the production process and the business process. The effect of unauthorized absenteeism is more compared to other types of absenteeism. However, it would be difficult to completely avoid absenteeism. The management can minimize absenteeism by employing measures to control it. However, the loss so generated as a result of absenteeism remains a vital concern for the management.

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