

**GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING AN ABSENTEEISM MANAGEMENT
PROGRAMME WITHIN AN INSTITUTION FOR HIGHER LEARNING**

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby solemnly declare that this document is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete references.

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THABANG HAPPINESS MOGOBE



DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to someone special who stood by me when it mattered the most.

“Still I rise....” Maya Angelou

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to convey my deepest gratitude and appreciation to the following people and institutions who contributed to the success of my research studies and Masters programme in particular:

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- My mother, for raising me to be the woman that I am today
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- My best friend Zanele, for the constant reminder of God's faithfulness
- The Ethics Review Committee at UNISA for granting me permission to conduct my study
- The participants and colleagues for opening up and sharing their views with me

ABSTRACT

The goal of the proposed study was to explore with line managers some guidelines for an absenteeism management programme in the environment of higher learning. The aim was to gain insight from line managers into the variables to be taken into consideration in the development of an absenteeism management programme.

The researcher used a qualitative research approach to gain deeper understanding of the line managers' need to deal with absenteeism within the environment of higher education. The study used a non-probability sampling technique with purposive sampling for selecting the sample.

Semi-structured interviews conducted using an interview schedule in conjunction with a recording device were conducted to gather data from ten participants. A qualitative analysis was carried out to grasp the richness of themes derived from the participants' narratives. The analysis involved both transcribing and interpreting the data.

The empirical findings revealed that participants were confronted with employees' absenteeism in the course of their daily operations. The majority of participants reported a lack of proper policies and procedures within the institution to guide them in managing absenteeism. The study also revealed that participants felt they would benefit from a programme that specifically addressed absenteeism behaviour in the workplace. The participants recommended items that would be essential in such a programme. These included, inter alia, a return to work policy, proper monitoring mechanisms and a link between absenteeism and the performance management system.



LIST OF KEY CONCEPTS

- Absenteeism
- Higher learning
- Programme



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Kutzmits and Adams (2009:280), employee absenteeism ranks among the nation's most widespread and costly human resource problems. Given this, it is surprising how many organisations are still grappling with the true cost of employee absence (Navarro & Bass, 2006:32). Pillay (2009:1) maintains that absenteeism occurs when employees are absent from work when they are scheduled to be there. Such occasions can be classified as voluntary and involuntary absence. Involuntary absence is considered to be beyond the individual's control, such as when someone is ill or has an emergency to deal with (Pillay, 2009:1). Voluntary absence, on the other hand, is under the employee's direct control and can be traced back to factors like a poor working environment, job dissatisfaction and difficulties with line management (Pillay, 2009:1).

For Sheika and Younis (2006:65), absence from work is one of the everyday managerial realities that have a far-reaching impact on organisational operations. They describe absenteeism as one of the most pervasive, persistent and challenging problems confronting organisations. Absenteeism is a real irritant for managers, forcing them to make alternative arrangements to cover for employees who do not come to work.

When considering the implications of absenteeism for the company, Sheika and Younis (2006:65) indicate that from the economic perspective absenteeism is perceived as a factor that increases the overhead costs of production. The economic impact of

employee absenteeism derives mainly from the costs of decreased productivity because of absence from work, less experienced replacement staff and the additional expense of hiring substitute labour.

Various experts consulted at the University of South Africa (UNISA) consider absenteeism to be a thorny issue as far as management is concerned. In 2009, for instance, 30 996 days were lost because of unscheduled leave (absenteeism), the total loss of which was estimated to be around R36 million (UNISA sick leave report, 2009). Van Niekerk (2010) is of the opinion that absenteeism is not well managed because employees abuse sick leave. Since line managers are in the best position to manage absenteeism, it is essential for them to be well-equipped for doing so. This highlights the need for training programmes to empower managers for dealing with the problem. Paton (2006:1) concurs, arguing that the commitment and responsibility of line managers is the key to managing workplace absenteeism through well-structured interventions.

According to Grobler (2010), line managers lack training for dealing with absenteeism. He went on further to suggest that, in dealing with absenteeism, one needs to consider the soft side, which includes focusing on issues such as policies, rules and programmes. Secondly, one should not forget to look at issues of work engagement. In her research on the impact of absenteeism, Pierce (2009) noted that poor management style and poor working conditions were among the causes of absenteeism.

It has been stated by 'Absenteeism trends in South African companies' (2009:1) that the absenteeism rate should be no higher than 1.5%, which means that for every 250 working days per year, the average employee should take 3.75 days of sick leave. Unfortunately, most South African companies are over the acceptable limit, as they

currently record 3.5-6%, with a total of R19 144 billion lost annually ('Absenteeism trends in South African companies', 2009:1). Training workshops for line managers and heads of departments on absentee management in the workplace (The Soma initiative, 2002) facilitated at the institution currently under study indicated that the absenteeism rate was 6%, and direct salary costs ranged from R180 000 to R510 000 per month. The figure has increased tremendously, as indicated in the sick leave report for 2009. Although this is not quantified, it may be assumed that the current rate of absenteeism was above 1.5%. However, it should be remembered that factors other than unscheduled leave can aggravate absenteeism. These include scheduled leave, such as for study and maternity purposes. Such leave periods are planned for, and the individual concerned still earns a salary while absent from work.

McIntosh and Jansen (2007:135) and Beira (2008:29) concur on the usefulness and impact of absenteeism management programmes. The authors agree that absenteeism management programmes are beneficial in that they reward good attendance through initiatives like promotion and incentives, which in turn discourages non-attendance at work. Furthermore, the effective management of absenteeism provides insight into genuine medical needs that can be supported through well-structured employee wellness programmes (Beira, 2008:29). Hargrave, Hiatt, Alexander and Shaffer (2008:283) recommend an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to save costs when dealing with absenteeism. This relates mostly to the number of days saved per employee through consistent attendance at work.

The rationale for the study was to engage line managers in sharing their needs for an absenteeism management programme at an institution of higher learning (UNISA). Eventually, recommendations will be made to management concerning the nature of such a programme. It was anticipated that the institution as a whole would be able to

move towards approving a recommended programme, which would address the specific needs of line managers, who have to deal with absenteeism in their line of duty.

It would be a useful contribution to the field if guidelines were adopted by human resource personnel (with management approval) for a programme to assist line managers in the fight against absenteeism. It was hoped that absenteeism management through programme development might reduce the rate of absenteeism, which in turn would increase both productivity and the overall performance of the institution.

1.2 PROBLEM FORMULATION

Fouché and De Vos (2005a:99) indicate that identification of the problem could be viewed as the first effort by the researcher in moulding the problem into a formulated form. According to Bless and Higson-Smith (2001:19), problems are special kinds of questions that arise for which knowledge is needed. Welman and Kruger (1999:67) state that the first step in any research project is to choose a research area, and this process requires the delineation of a problem area and the description of one or more research problems.

It has been shown that 80% of lost productivity costs can be attributed to absenteeism (Hargrave *et al.*, 2008:283). As indicated earlier, a total of 30 996 days were lost in 2009 alone at UNISA. Haswell (2003:16) stated that absence statistics in the United Kingdom averaged 7.8 days per employee per month. Approximately 70% of all sick leave in South Africa falls within the category of absence that costs an employer R1.3 million per 500 employees (Beira, 2008:29). This shows the extent of the problem of absenteeism,

not only in terms of days lost but also in its financial impact on organisations. Absenteeism remains a problem for the human resources divisions of most organisations because it is disruptive, sometimes causing tensions in teams because of increased workloads falling on those who are at work.

Coetzee and Rothman (2005:47) report that, historically speaking, working in a higher education institution has been considered to be relatively stress free. However, the South African landscape of higher education has changed both to cope with globalisation and to remain internationally competitive. Higher education institutions in South Africa have, in the past, been subjected to a series of mergers, as noted by Mostert, Rothmann, Mostert and Nell (2008:103). The authors argue further that people often overtly and covertly resist changes brought about by restructuring, as indicated below.

These changes brought with them occupational stressors (Siu, 2002:528), which affected employees' wellbeing on both the emotional and physical levels. The stressors began to manifest themselves in conditions such as absenteeism, tardiness and job dissatisfaction (Winefield, Gillespie, Stough, Dua, Hapuararchchi & Boyd, 2003). Research has shown that higher education institutions can suffer financially because of increased absenteeism and sickness resulting from lowered employee wellbeing (Tytherleigh, Webb, Cooper & Ricketts, 2005: 57).

In the researcher's opinion, research on absenteeism was necessary because there were no programmes geared specifically for managing this costly problem within the institution under study. It was hoped that the research would produce guidelines for developing a programme to address absenteeism.

The ideal focus of the research was thus to find out what line managers needed in a programme that addressed absenteeism. These guidelines would be used in making recommendations to senior management on what should ideally form part of such a programme from the perspective of those who have to deal with the situation (line managers). The researcher observed a limitation in studies focusing specifically on absenteeism in institutions of higher education. It was therefore hoped that the results of this particular research would serve as a knowledge base on a small scale for those working in similar organisations.

1.3 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

- **The goal of the study**

The goal of the study was to explore guidelines for developing an absenteeism management programme within an institution for higher learning.

- **Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the study were:

- to conduct an in-depth literature review on the manifestation of absenteeism as a problem and challenge in the workplace;
- to explore line managers' perceptions of absenteeism through an empirical study;
- to determine the needs of line managers regarding the management of absenteeism;
- to make recommendations to management on the development of a structured programme on absenteeism in the workplace.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

According to Mouton (2001:48), a research question is a clear and unambiguous statement of the object of a study. It asks what the researcher needs to find out about the sub-area of the intended study (Kumar, 2005:46). Absenteeism was the subject area of this study; sub-areas included its extent, reasons for it, perceptions by line managers and the guidelines that would be necessary in developing a programme. The research question should be related to the goal and objectives of the study.

Fouché and De Vos (2005b:103) refer to the “what” of the study as the unit of analysis; that is to say, what phenomenon (absenteeism) or entity (line managers at an institution of higher learning) is targeted by the study.

The researcher chose the research question because she wanted to explore what should be included in a programme that sought to address the problem of absenteeism. The nature of the research question related to “how” or “what” (Creswell, 1998:16). The research question for the study was:

What variables should be taken into consideration in developing an absenteeism management programme?

1.5 RESEARCH APPROACH

The researcher followed a qualitative research approach to gather data from the participants. The rationale for choosing the qualitative approach was to gain first-hand insight into what line managers would like in a programme that could be used to manage absenteeism at UNISA.

1.6 TYPE OF RESEARCH

Neuman (2000) identifies two types of research: applied and basic research. In this study, the researcher used applied research. This type of research “is focused on solving problems or troublesome situations in practice and helping practitioners to accomplish tasks” (Fouché & De Vos, 2005b:105). The proposed research study focused on the perceptions by line managers of what should ideally guide a programme for the management of absenteeism.

Applied research offers practical solutions to a concrete problem (Neuman, 2000:25) and has the potential for knowledge development (Fouché & De Vos, 2005b:105). Inputs from line managers were used as a guideline for an absenteeism management programme in an attempt to solve the identified problem.

1.7 FEASIBILITY OF THE STUDY

The researcher obtained permission to conduct the research study from the management of the institution of higher learning (Strydom, 2005a:208) (See Appendix. A). Once written permission had been granted, the researcher went ahead and scheduled interviews with identified line managers after they had given their informed consent. This was done by sending an e-mail requesting an interview, and ascertaining times that suited both the researcher and the line managers. The arrangements were confirmed a day before the interview to remind participants of the commitment they had made.

Gaining access to participants was not problematic, as the interviews were conducted during working hours. The costs were minimal: they consisted of making copies of the interview guide to be used and telephone calls to schedule and confirm appointments with the line managers.

1.8 ETHICAL ASPECTS

The goal of ethical sensitivity should be for the researcher to complete the dissertation in good standing with the participants and for the advancement of knowledge through findings. Ethics, as defined by Strydom (2005b:57), are a set of moral principles that offer behavioural expectations regarding conduct towards respondents. Essentially this means that the researcher is guided by a particular kind of ethical conduct when doing research. Ethics articulates a common set of values upon which professional and scientific work is built (Neuman, 2000:481). Ethical issues applicable to the proposed research study will be discussed below.

- **Informed consent**

Informed consent implies that participants must be given adequate information to enable them to make a voluntary and clear decision about their possible participation in the study (Strydom, 2005b:59). Neuman (2000:488) stresses that this consent should not be just a verbal undertaking: it should be written, and the researcher must keep a copy of such consent on file. In asking for informed consent, the researcher indicated to participants how they were selected and what the overall benefits of their participation would be.

All this information was given on a written consent form, and signed by all concerned to confirm their participation in the study. Other details included were procedures to be followed during the study (such as the use of a recording tape) and the researcher's credibility (Strydom, 2005b:59). The researcher also indicated her own responsibilities during the research, for example, setting time aside to conduct interviews for the study. It was also indicated that participants had the right to withdraw at any stage (see Appendix B).

- **Violation of privacy/confidentiality/anonymity**

Strydom (2005b:61) considers that researchers should be reminded of the importance of safeguarding the privacy and identity of respondents. This is necessary in order to ensure the integrity of the research, protect sensitive information obtained and encourage open communication by research participants (Neuman, 2000:486).

To avoid the violation of privacy during the proposed study, the researcher stated beforehand (as part of asking for informed consent) that a recording device would be used for verifying the accuracy of the collected data. To maintain confidentiality (Strydom, 2005b:61), line managers' names were not be recorded anywhere when the data was being analysed. This made it difficult to match responses to any particular department within the institution. Although anonymity could not be guaranteed in the sense that the researcher knew the participants by virtue of biographical details filled in on a consent form, confidentiality was maintained in that no-one else would be able to identify individuals (Strydom, 2005b:61).

- **Actions and competence of the researcher**

According to Strydom (2005b:63), researchers have an ethical obligation to ensure that they are competent and sufficiently skilled to undertake the proposed investigation. The research module undertaken by the researcher provided the groundwork for the process of empirical research. Neuman (2000:482) also stresses the importance of researchers undertaking only those tasks for which they are educationally qualified.

The proposed study also took place under the guidance of a supervisor with extensive knowledge both of supervision and of direct EAP services, of which absenteeism management forms part. The researcher concurs with the notion put forward by Strydom (2005b:63) that research should be conducted with the correct attitude: if this happens, the research will yield the right kind of information from the right people.

- **Release of findings**

Strydom (2005b:65) is of the opinion that findings should be presented in clear, unambiguous and unbiased ways which acknowledge all who took part in the study. This includes giving due credit to all the sources consulted in order to understand the phenomenon. The researcher will release the findings to the University of Pretoria, the management of the institution and the participants. The researcher will also publish the results in a scientific journal.

1.9 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

- **Absenteeism**

Watkins (2005:7) defines absenteeism as when an employee is simply not physically at work. According to Anderson (2009:13), absenteeism consists in the failure of an employee to report for work as scheduled. In light of the definitions above, absence can be seen as an employee's failure to present himself/herself for work on a scheduled day in accordance with the employer's expectation.

- **Higher learning**

Higher learning is defined as all learning programmes leading to qualifications above grade 12 (Schedule regarding consequential changes to higher education act [sa]). In the UK, education at university level [sa] is the highest level of education, with courses varying from certificates through first degrees to post-graduate degrees and doctorates achieved by a very high standard of research in any academic field. A common feature of the two definitions is that the education provided in institutions of higher learning is post-matriculation and is recognised as being at the highest level of education. Higher learning is a level of education provided in universities and colleges.

- **Programme**

A programme is a series of planned activities aimed at achieving certain set objectives (Principles of programme planning [sa]). It is also a specially-arranged selection of things to be done (Programme definition [sa]). These definitions indicate that a programme includes a list of activities planned to achieve set aims.

1.10 CONTENTS OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

Chapter 1: Introduction and general orientation

This consists of an introduction and background information on the research topic.

Chapter 2: Absenteeism management in the workplace

The focus includes a conceptualisation of absenteeism, factors contributing to absenteeism according to line managers' perception, perceptions about the need for a programme and what is required in such a programme.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

This section provides an overall view of how the research process was to be structured.

Chapter 4: Data analysis, findings and interpretation

Findings were discussed by processing, analysing and interpreting data. The researcher explained the use of qualitative research design, the use of interviews to collect data, and the method of analysis.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations

This section of the report presented a summary of the investigation, the purpose of which was to indicate how line managers could be helped to deal with the identified problem of absenteeism (Strydom, 2005c:253). The researcher intended, in this section, to summarise the findings and to make recommendations that could be used in developing an absentee management programme.

1.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One of the difficulties the researcher encountered in undertaking the semi-structured interviews was that line managers were not always available to attend the scheduled appointments. This meant the researcher had to assume a certain level of flexibility in order to accommodate all the respondents sampled to take part in the study.

The researcher is of the opinion that the findings could not be generalised on a large scale to other institutions of higher learning because of the sample size defined by the type of research approach.

1.12 SUMMARY

This chapter points to the general orientation of the study, which includes the context of the study, the problem formulation, the research approach and the research methodology used in this study. Ethical aspects, the definition of key concepts and the limitations of the study were also included in this chapter.

In Chapter Two, the researcher will provide an in-depth literature review on absenteeism as a phenomenon in order to create a better understanding of this concept in the workplace. Amongst other variables, this chapter will look at the different meanings that various scholars attach to the concept of absenteeism.

CHAPTER TWO

ABSENTEEISM MANAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Absenteeism is one of the thorniest issues in the workplace. Organisations often find themselves battling with a large number of employees who do not report to work as expected. This type of absence is not anticipated, because employees absent themselves for duty without having been giving the necessary permission to do so beforehand. Absenteeism is determined by conditions pertaining to personality, attitude and sometimes gender. Reasons for absenteeism can vary and include, inter alia, financial, social, economic, health and personal factors. Absenteeism disrupts operations and is often costly to the organisation (Beira, 2008:29).

Within the context of the study, workplace absenteeism will be identified as a problem with sub-areas (Kumar, 2005:45). This chapter comprises a discussion on absenteeism from the theoretical perspective, referring to relevant literature. First, absenteeism will be defined, followed by a discussion of its different types and the legislative considerations for dealing with the problem. An integrative model of absenteeism, together with its different causes and effects, will be explored. The chapter will conclude by looking at the different guidelines to be considered in the management of absenteeism and a summary in terms of the literature reviewed. The literature review of the study will provide an opportunity for further exploration of these fundamental aspects when dealing with absenteeism in the workplace.

2.2 DEFINITION OF ABSENTEEISM

Absenteeism is regarded as one of the greatest strategic risks for companies. Organisations are faced with the challenge of controlling and managing employee absenteeism mainly because it is costly. In South Africa, the overall cost of absenteeism is estimated to be about R1.3 million (Beira, 2008:28) in comparison with R17.3 billion dollars to United Kingdom economy (Employers rate occupational health..., 5).

Broadly defined, absenteeism is the outcome of a particular behaviour which happens when someone engages in activities that compete with scheduled work (Martocchio & Jameson, 2003:229). These authors view absence according to its physical sense, as an individual is deemed to be absent when there is a social expectation for him or her to be present at a given location and time. Anderson (2009:13) defines absenteeism as the employee's failure to report for work, regardless of the reason. In the light of the two definitions discussed above and for the purpose of this research, absenteeism can be defined as the inability or failure of an employee to physically report for duty at a specified location and time when expected to do so by the employer.

2.3 TYPES OF ABSENTEEISM

Absentee behaviour falls broadly into two main categories, as noted in The Soma Initiative (2002:2). These are scheduled and unscheduled absence.

- **Scheduled absence**

This refers to instances when the employer has budgeted beforehand for this type of absence because it was expected to happen (Soma Initiative, 2002:2). This includes absence from work for maternity, study, vacation or retirement purposes. Owing to the fact that a clearly identified process is followed, this means that work and resources can be allocated in time to others in the team, ensuring proper management of the workflow (Beira, 2008:28). Scheduled leave appears to be the preferred type of absenteeism for employers because it does not lead to any disruption in operations, seeing that it is usually planned in advance. This type of absence is also authorised by the employer prior to commencement (Anderson, 2009:14).

- **Unscheduled absence**

This type of leave usually leads to operational disruptions because the employer has neither planned nor budgeted for it. Included in this type of absence, as noted by Beira (2008:29), is a medically-certified sick leave, when a registered health care practitioner provides a medical certificate that complies with the guidelines outlined by the Health Professions Council of SA. This is also termed sick absence, since the employee claims ill health as the reason for absence (Anderson, 2009:13). Beira (2008:28) highlights the fact that approximately 70% of leave in South Africa falls into this category. Not only is it disruptive, but it is also costly because of the cost of managing sick individuals, replacement or overtime, as well as potential lost opportunity costs from the loss of productivity (Beira, 2008:29).

Unscheduled leave is sometimes referred to as voluntary or culpable absenteeism because the employee is absent from work owing to reasons that are within his or her control (The Soma Initiative, 2002:3). When this happens, the desire to stay at home far exceeds the motivation to report for duty. The employee may opt to be absent from

work because they have planned to be 'sick' in order to deal with other nonwork-related activities. This can be viewed as voluntary absence, because the reason for it is within the control of the employee in this instance.

It is worth noting that an individual can be absent from work without prior approval owing to reasons beyond their control. This is termed involuntary or innocent absenteeism precisely because the reasons are beyond the employee's control (The Soma Initiative, 2002:3). Examples of such cases would include death in the family, medical emergencies, genuine sickness, house robberies or accidents. It can be assumed that the employee intended to be at work on a particular day, but owing to unforeseen circumstances, the plan did not materialise. This research report will focus on unscheduled sick leave. Absentee behaviour in the workplace is mostly governed by the two main laws- the Labour Relations Act and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act.

2.4 LEGISLATIVE CONSIDERATIONS

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) No. 75 of 1997, section 22.2, states that every employer is obliged to ensure that all employees receive certain basic standards of employment, including a minimum number of days' sick leave. An employee can take up to six weeks' paid sick leave during a thirty-six month cycle. During the first six months a worker can take one day's paid sick leave for every twenty-six days worked. The law recognizes the possibility of innocent absence (involuntary absenteeism) in instances when employees miss work for reasons beyond their control, as already stated above. The problem arises when the system is abused by those who are frequently away from work for reasons that could be controlled (voluntary/culpable absenteeism).

As it is, many employers struggle to cope with situations in which employees are not genuinely ill but are frequently absent, and these absences are somehow always supported by a valid medical certificate or are within the provisions of BCEA (Absenteeism: negative impact..., 2006:162). This makes it imperative for organisations to establish sound systems that can be used as guidelines for addressing and managing both absenteeism and those who are abusing their unscheduled leave.

Even though employees are protected by the provisions of the BCEA insofar as sick leave is concerned, Pierce (2009) is of the opinion that absenteeism is also a breach of contract between employee and employer. The contract of employment is one of the basic standards of employment to be made accessible to the employee by the employer (Absenteeism: Guidelines managing..., 2007:2). The provisions of the contract for the employee are as noted below:

- an agreement to offer service to the employer
- to be remunerated for service provided
- subordination (The Soma initiative, 2002:4).

In the case of constant absenteeism, an employee can be seen not to be meeting his common law duty to remain in the service of the employer, as entered into per the contract stipulations. That is to say, he is in breach of common law duty (Parsee, 2008:522) by not meeting the obligations of his contract. Under these circumstances, the employee would not be offering a service as agreed, and yet might still expect remuneration.

Various authors have come up with different theories on absenteeism, which will be discussed in detail below.

2.5 AN INTEGRATIVE MODEL OF ABSENTEEISM

Models of absenteeism are as varied as its different explanations. For the purpose of this study, discussions will be limited to only to the one highlighted by Løkke Nielsen (2008). This is by no means exhaustive but it does focus on the model reviewed in recent years. It is also relevant to the current study.

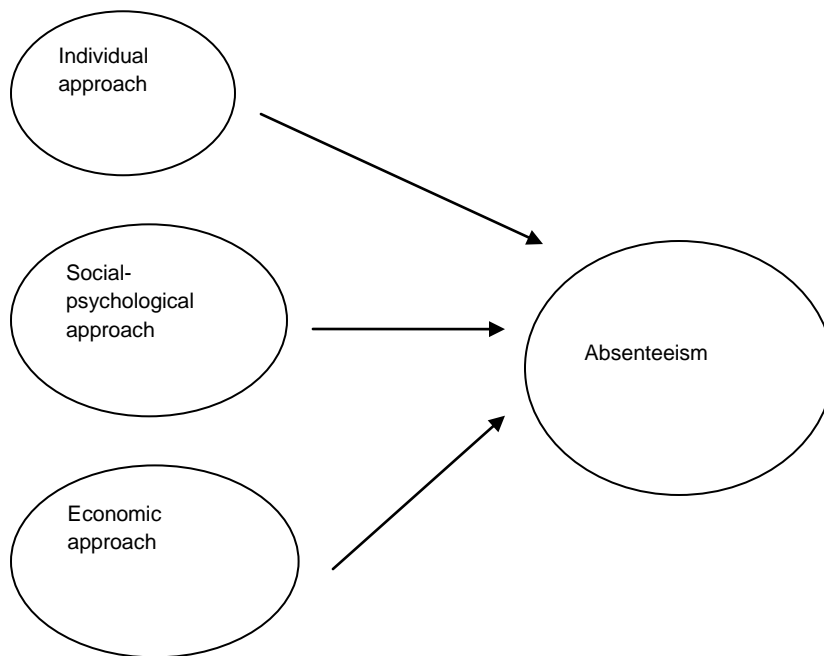


Figure 1: An integrative model of absenteeism (Løkke Nielsen, 2008)

Løkke Nielsen's model (2008) appears to be integrative because it takes into account the different factors that play a role in what determines the decision to stay away from work. This model recognizes that the motivation to be absent from work is determined by factors internal to the individual, and is influenced mainly by individual responses to stimuli in the work or non-work environment (Løkke Nielsen, 2008:1331). This would explain why some individuals are often absent from work while others continue to be present, despite working under the same conditions in the same organisation.

Furthermore, factors in the social environment that contribute to absenteeism are recognised (Løkke Nielsen, 2008:1332).

Absence is regarded as a social phenomenon. The absence culture is described as “the set of shared understandings about absence legitimacy in a given organisation and established custom and practice of employee absence behaviour and its control” (Løkke Nielsen, 2008:1332). The decision to be absent is therefore influenced by the individual’s observation of the conduct of colleagues and managers relating to their attendance behaviour. Individuals learn what is acceptable, and use this knowledge in adjusting their own absence behaviour (Løkke Nielsen, 2008:1332).

This theory would explain to some extent why, in the same organisation, some departments have higher rates of absenteeism than others. This makes it important to have homogeneity in terms of clarity in applying absence norms and policies. In conclusion, absence behaviour is influenced by determinants internal to the individual, social context, varying costs of absence across functions and occupations.

2.6 CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM

The actual reasons why people are absent from work are complex and are based on a number of factors. It has been observed that the main reasons for absenteeism are based on conditions relating to the individual and the organisational and social contexts. The figure below gives an indication of the extent to which personal circumstances account for most of the reasons for absenteeism (Pillay, 2009:1).

- **Personal factors**

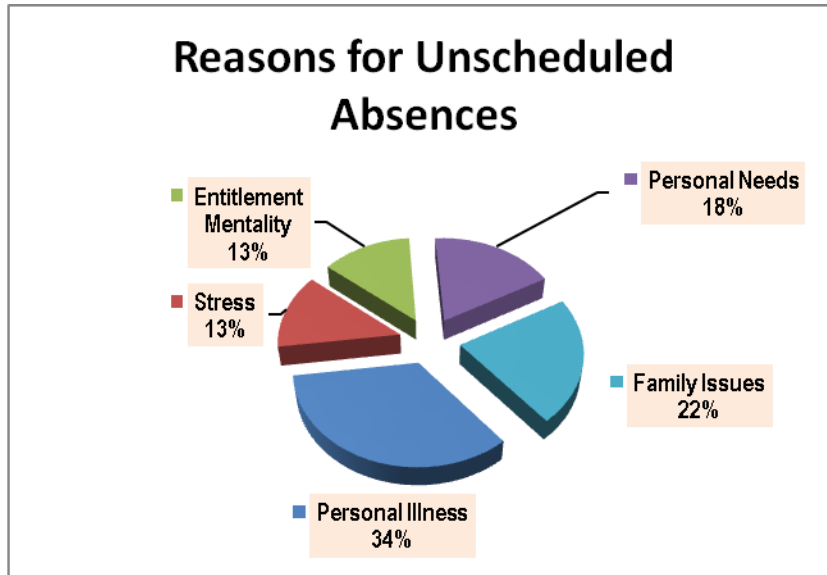


Figure 2: Reasons for absenteeism (Pillay, 2009)

According to Pillay (2009:1), personal factors like health, family responsibilities and stress account for most absenteeism in the workplace. For example, feeling stressed can lead the body to release high levels of adrenaline and the stress hormone cortisol, resulting in increased blood pressure leading to absenteeism. A Government Employees Medical Scheme (GEMS) report compiled by Pierce (2009) confirms that personal factors, especially those relating to ill health, appeared to be the leading cause of absenteeism. Illnesses worth noting in the same report were flu, HIV/ AIDS and back problems.

These three conditions accounted for most of the absences in the public sector, with a total of 150 000 employees recorded as being absent between March and November in 2009 (Pierce, 2009). Eleven and a half percent are flu-related and backaches take about 7.14% of occurrences respectively (Absenteeism trends, 2009:1).

Beira (2008) and McIntosh and Jansen (2007) assert that individual demographics can also determine an individual's absenteeism in the workplace. For example, older women were found to be less prone to absence from work as opposed to young women, because of less exposure to problems associated with young children (McIntosh & Jansen, 2007:134). This further confirms that family responsibilities are likely to keep employees away from work, since this is the second highest (22%) reason for absenteeism on the list, as indicated by Pillay (2009:1).

Martocchio and Jameson (2003:228) argue that personality determines who will be absent when faced with a stressful situation. The two authors assert that people with a conscientious personality are experienced as being dutiful, purposeful, punctual and reliable, with less probability as employees of engaging in counter-productive behaviours like frequent absence, because it will hinder effectiveness at work (Martocchio & Jameson, 2003:231, 234). It can therefore be assumed that the opposite can be expected from their less conscientious colleagues, who may be prone to arriving late, often showing signs of absenteeism as troubled employees. In addition, Martocchio and Jameson's (2003) personality theory can be used in trying to understand why some employees would not present with absenteeism, in spite of being exposed to the same psycho-social conditions.

- **Organisational factors**

This relates to conditions in the work environment, such as job satisfaction, low morale, sick leave entitlement, inadequate remuneration and poor working conditions (Pillay, 2009:2). These are likely to contribute to employees' absence from work in order to avoid the strain arising from unfavourable work conditions. Pillay (2009), Kuzmits and Adams (2009) and McIntosh and Jansen (2007) concur that small companies are likely to have lower rates of absenteeism in comparison with those where the total staff complement is high.

The reason could be that, in small organisations, absenteeism is easily recognised or discerned, whereas it could be easy to hide behind the greater numbers in larger organisations. Levy (2003:3.4) also points out that the bigger the organisation, the greater the possibility that employees may be treated as numbers and not as people. When someone feels that they are not a vital part of the team, the level of commitment will also be affected. Levy (2003:3.6) concedes that some organisational policies and procedures unwittingly encourage absence by making it easier for the employee to stay away without any expectation of negative consequences for him/herself. Thus the employer should take care that working conditions are such that the physical and mental health of employees is assured to avoid excessive absenteeism (Chauke, 2007:27).

- **Social factors**

Crime, poverty and erratic transport systems can have an adverse impact on absenteeism. A large part of the South African workforce is dependent on public transport to commute daily to work. Hence, when there is strike action by, for example, taxi, bus or train operators, companies also feel the effects because of absent employees. HIV/AIDS is one of the most prevalent social issues influencing absenteeism. In 2005, predictions by the South African Actuarial society put the average workforce HIV infection at 18.8%, costing industry close to R2 billion (Pillay, 2009:3).

In conclusion, absenteeism has different meanings for different people at different times (Kuzmits & Adams, 2009; McIntosh & Jansen, 2007; Martocchio & Jameson, 2003). This makes absentee episodes phenomenologically unique to each individual. Owing to employees' individuality, absentee behaviour can be influenced by personality, and social and organisational factors.

2.7 EFFECTS OF ABSENTEEISM

Absenteeism can lead to the following negative consequences, as noted by Pillay (2009:5):

- **Decreased productivity:** When an employee is absent from work, but is integral to daily work functions, others take on the added responsibility. When employees who are at work have to carry the extra workload, this has the potential to impact on their overall productivity and outputs (Chauke, 2007:24).
- **Demotivated employees:** Morale, engagement and retention are affected, especially when there is no recognition or acknowledgement for taking on extra responsibility as a result of absent team members. Staff morale tends to suffer as a result of extra demands on staff time owing to work overload and overtime (Chauke, 2007:24).
- **Decreased customer loyalty and satisfaction:** Employees are the backbone of any organisation and low morale could lead to dissatisfaction amongst customers. Chauke (2007:24) agrees that employee service delivery may suffer on account of absenteeism.
- **Decreased costs:** These are as a result of lost productivity, overtime, temporary staff and increased overall company overheads initially not budgeted for. These additional financial costs are most likely to be felt in the wage costs associated with any staff replacements (Chauke, 2007:24).
- **Job dissatisfaction:** Employees monitor each other's behaviour, and if absenteeism on the part of some colleagues is not addressed by management, they lose credibility among the staff, leading to staff turnover as a result of dissatisfaction. In short, anything that impacts on worker satisfaction (happiness) with the job can influence an employee's motivation

and indirectly affect whether they would practise absenteeism merely to stay away from an unhappy work situation (Chauke, 2007:25).

The researcher is of the opinion that it is important to note that even if only a few employees present with absence behaviour, the impact is felt across the entire organisation. Most employees work according to certain deadlines to which their respective departments must adhere, according to service level agreements. Therefore, when one person opts to take an absence not scheduled beforehand, this often hampers productivity, because the team is one pair of extra hands short. This means that colleagues have to automatically take on the extra responsibility so that the work gets done. Resentment is often high, especially in instances when management takes for granted the extra mile to which people go in ensuring that productivity is not affected. This negative experience is expressed in different ways by those affected.

For example, some employees in the organisation might opt to express their resentment by engaging in unscheduled absence which could be deemed voluntary or avoidable, because they are resting following “hard work.” On the other hand, others make clients take the brunt by giving them negative customer service. In environments like the Unisa contact centre or the switchboard, customer complaints escalate when there are staff shortages because of absenteeism. This is when those in attendance simply cannot cope with the unplanned increase in workload. Often the unintended costs of unscheduled absenteeism are owing to overtime. For example, in the production department, employees are often asked to work double shifts when fellow employees are not at work when they are scheduled to be there. Once again, this is done at an enormous sacrifice and inconvenience, as others have to re-arrange things like picking up their children from school. It is worth noting that while extra financial rewards are often welcomed, this does not prevent those employees from losing respect for management if they are perceived as not addressing the problem.

2.8 GUIDELINES TO ABSENTEEISM MANAGEMENT

According to Navarro and Bass (2006:32), proper absenteeism management involves developing programmes with guidelines that are clear and consistent, incorporating legal requirements so they can be established across the entire organisation. Paton (2006:9) points out that the message to be communicated has to be responsibility, intervention and rehabilitation when it comes to managing and reducing absenteeism in the workplace. The researcher concurs, because it means that the employer must be accountable when managing absenteeism by consulting with relevant stakeholders in the workplace. This is in order to come up with actions to remedy the situation among those found to be abusing their sick leave.

Paton (2006:9) further asserts that good absentee management is about cutting down on absenteeism while offering support to those who are genuinely ill. Essentially, this means that a programme should not be seen as insensitive at the expense of those who are genuinely sick. In truth, employers believe that only 10% of cases are not related to real illness (Paton, 2006:9). Among other conditions leading to absenteeism, HIV-related incapacity is one situation in which employers can exercise increased empathy so as to reduce prolonged exposure to harsh office conditions that could potentially exacerbate the symptoms leading to absenteeism (Pillay, 2009:7).

A programme for managing absenteeism could be comprised of the following components:

- **Proper recording keeping of absences**

Record-keeping can be done by noting the duration of absence, trends in terms of the most popular days for people taking sick leave and the type of illness. This can be done by the line manager checking attendance registers and sick leave absenteeism records

(Essential tips to manage absenteeism [sa]). With proper record-keeping, the number of absences that will be accommodated within a given period can be determined and even brought to the attention of the employee (Absenteeism: negative impact on bottom line..., 2006/2007). For example, most companies in South Africa operate on the principle that an employee is entitled to 36 sick leave days over a three-year leave cycle, as per provisions of the legislation (BCEA).

There are numerous benefits to proper record-keeping in terms of absence behaviour. First, this includes giving a rough estimate of the cost of sick leave absences by noting their duration. Secondly, it offers employers an opportunity to identify the size and cost of the absenteeism problem in a particular environment (Essential tips to manage absenteeism [sa]). Thirdly, this careful monitoring can lead to benchmarking of an employee's sick absenteeism against the company and national trends, which can serve as an indicator of whether sickness is genuine or is just an abuse of the system (Absenteeism trends in South Africa ... [sa]). Lastly, according to Chauke (2007:38), records of absences will help identify whether there is a trend developing amongst absent employees. In conclusion, both Pierce (2009) and Pillay (2009:6) emphasise the importance of also having an attendance or absenteeism policy whereby to monitor the extent of the problem in the organisation.

- **Return to work interviews**

Another important feature of a programme is to conduct an interview following an absentee incident by an employee (Essential tips to manage absenteeism [sa]; Absenteeism: negative impact on bottom line..., 2006/2007:162; Absenteeism trends in South Africa, [sa]; Pierce, 2009). Levy (2003: 9.5) cautions managers that it is safer to behave as if the employee is acting genuinely when it comes to reasons for his/her

absenteeism. This would, in turn, help the manager to act fairly, consistently and with an open mind.

A line manager could be tasked with the responsibility of completing an interview each time an employee returned from sick leave. In the first place, this would be to show genuine concern, secondly to check whether any further sick leave was anticipated and lastly to check for the remaining available sick leave days in the current leave cycle (Absenteeism: negative impact on bottom line..., 2006/2007:162). This would not only be a visible aspect of managing the problem of absenteeism (Essential tips to manage absenteeism [sa]) but would also act as a probable deterrent to those abusing the system, as they would have to face the manager every time they were absent from work (Absenteeism trends in South Africa: 2). This means the employee would be alerted to the fact that his/her absence was being noted.

The following are guidelines recommended by Levy (2003:9.5-9.6) when conducting the return to work interview:

- It must be done in private;
- The manager must go straight to the point and not beat about the bush;
- Neutrality and objectivity must be maintained.

- **Rules and standards**

A programme should have rules and standards to which employees must adhere when they are absent from work. It is important to note that there should be some level of fairness and consistency in the application of these rules by management (Chauke, 2007:37). According to Falcone (2009:99), it is beneficial in the long run to avoid

inconsistencies in the application of rules to avoid accusations of wrongful termination, discrimination or retaliation from a terminated worker. For example, one such rule that could be introduced could be that medical certificates must comply with standards before the employer accepts them. The employer could even ask for a second opinion from an alternative medical practitioner should the medical certificate appear not to be authentic (Absenteeism: negative impact on bottom line..., 2006/2007:162). Another strategy could be to 'put the ball back in the employee's court' should the manager doubt the authenticity of a medical certificate. Levy (2003:6.6) suggests that the employee could be asked to go back and get written answers from the doctor to questions on, for example, the employee's current condition, the extent to which it may change and whether it is necessary for him/her to seek alternative employment in the meantime.

Scrutinising medical certificates in respect of unscheduled sick leave absenteeism could assist in the early identification of occupational and social risks that could be supported and minimized before becoming problematic. This could also lead to timely access to appropriate health care and further reduce the risk of a medical condition deteriorating into absenteeism owing to incapacity or disability (Beira, 2008:29).

- **Early action against employees who contravene set rules**

This includes introducing a rule that requires employees to contact their immediate line manager to report their absence from work, or to provide a satisfactory explanation should they fail to do that (Levy, 2003:5.6). Even if an employee were to produce a medical certificate to justify his absence, failure to report is a disciplinary transgression and progressive sanctions such as a verbal, written and final warning and then finally dismissal could be implemented (Essential tips to manage absenteeism, [sa]). Falcone (2009:99) maintains that, if employees are given advance notice of the organisation's expectations, they should be held accountable should they not meet the set standard

going forward. Chauke (2007:40) concurs that once a supervisor identifies an individual with higher than average patterns of unauthorised absences, then this should be brought to that employee's attention, thus providing an opportunity to rectify the behaviour before disciplinary measures are instituted or sanctions imposed. It is therefore important for transgressors to be identified early and dealt with properly, whether supportively or correctively.

- **Organisational Wellness and EAP initiatives**

Research has shown that treatment offered through EAPs has confirmed cost savings as assessed by such indicators as reduced expenses associated with absenteeism (Hargrave *et al.*, 2008). It is important to proceed with formal counselling processes once the set standard has been exceeded and performance-counselling procedure can be followed (Absenteeism: negative impact on bottom line..., 2006/2007). Proactive mechanisms can be employed by addressing the problem as soon as there are indicators of a pattern of absenteeism rather than waiting until all sick leave credits have been exhausted. According to Pillay (2007:7) examples of effective wellness initiatives include access to flu injections to reduce the amount of sick leave on account of this condition whilst investing indirectly in productivity.

- **Rewarding good attendance record**

Pillay (2009:6) emphasises that maintaining a consistent attendance record is one of the good behaviours that should be rewarded scrupulously. Incentives could be offered (Pierce, 2009) in the form of an attendance bonus (Paton, 2006:9) and additional annual leave (Absenteeism: negative impact on bottom line..., 2006/2007). This indicates that the rewards need not always be monetary; employees with a good attendance record are looking for some form of acknowledgement to motivate them to keep up their good

behaviour. Attendance bonuses may also be seen as giving positive recognition to employees making an extra effort by rewarding them (Levy, 2003:5.7).

- **Introducing specific deterrents**

These may include providing information on a regular basis to all staff about the absenteeism trend in the organisation and its impact on the organisation as a whole (Absenteeism: negative impact on bottom line...2006/2007). This action may discourage those who intended to be absent following observation of their colleagues and even habitual voluntary unscheduled absentees.

- **Maintaining a healthy work environment**

According to Yende (2005:29), organisation of the work context, organisational structure, the management hierarchy and organisational commitment may contribute to employee absenteeism, either through inducing illness or contributing to the low levels of employee motivation. It has been further noted that commitment to the organisation has been found to be positively related to such organisational outcomes as motivation and attendance (Yende, 2005:30).

- **Application of good human resource management and labour relations practices**

According to Pierce (2009), this would include good human capital management resulting from the integration of employee benefit, EAP and health care management. In addition, good labour practice involves following occupational health and safety procedures and investing ergonomically-correct office equipment (Pillay, 2009:7). It is Falcone's (2009:98) opinion that any written policy should be reviewed with the help of legal counsel for the sake of consistency. The South African employment landscape is

promulgated by the provisions of the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 which affirms the importance of mutual respect in the relationship between employer and employee, with the focus on employment justice. It therefore means that, should an employee be fairly dismissed on account of absenteeism, the employer would have to show either that this absenteeism was affecting the employee's capacity to do the job he was hired for (capacity) or his absence was unauthorised, and was thus a form of misconduct (Levy, 2003:4, 12). From the above, it is the researcher's assertion that, when it comes to employment practice, employees have rights enforceable within legal frameworks.

The researcher has noted with interest that a common feature contained in the guidelines to managing absenteeism in the workplace is made up of the following key features: return to work interviews, rewarding good attendance, maintaining a positive work environment and using other internal resources such as EAP. Furthermore, a strategic approach to managing and reducing absenteeism should include targeting the organisation's human resource department, line managers and employees (The Soma Initiative, 2002). This gives a broader perspective on the attempt to address the problem, as its causes are diverse and the role players experience absenteeism in different ways.

It would be advisable for institutions to manage absenteeism by:

- developing programmes that include keeping proper records of attendance at work;
- maintaining a policy on returning to work;
- upholding clear rules and standards;
- identifying early signs of absentee behaviour;

- creating a healthy and congenial work environment by using proper EAP and wellness initiatives
- rewarding a good attendance record or behaviour and
- promoting sound human resource management and labour relations practices.

This would create a climate encouraging for people who wanted to come to work and be productive because they were valued as assets to the organisation.

2.9 BENEFITS TO MANAGING ABSENTEEISM

Beira (2008:28-29) noted some of the many benefits associated with managing absenteeism in organisations, as listed below:

- Provides insight into genuine medical needs that could be supported with well-structured employee health, lifestyle and wellness programmes;
- Provides support for employees who genuinely need assistance;
- Saves existing paid sick leave costs by preventing abuse of the system;
- Reduces the risk of human capital loss through burnout, exhaustion and fatigue;
- Good attendance record signals reliability and suitability for promotion (Beira, 2008:28-29);
- Net benefits of not attending work are outweighed by those of working (McIntosh & Jansen, 2007:135).

From the above list, the researcher is convinced of the importance of having a programme geared specifically towards addressing absenteeism. If organisations could introduce a programme based on convictions similar to those of Beira (2008) and McIntosh and Jansen (2007), it could potentially be a win-win situation for all. Without argument, an institution could reap many rewards from a sound programme for managing absenteeism, demonstrating genuine care for seriously-ill employees, preventing the abuse of sick leave and promoting and maintaining good attendance records.

First, employees who are genuinely ill would have the opportunity to receive support from the employer by means of various health and wellness initiatives. Further, the employer would not be seen to be encouraging productivity at the expense of those with real health concerns. Secondly, misuse of the system could be prevented, as all actions pertaining to attendance records and absence behaviour would be openly monitored. Thirdly, taking note of trends and patterns would also ensure that those with a good record of attendance were noted. Often, line managers put all their energy and resources into culprits at the expense of good employees.

When employees become aware that management rewards good attendance, more would want to be in line to reap the rewards. Human beings thrive on receiving positive reinforcement and being acknowledged for good behaviour. Lastly, measures could be put in place to proactively address stress before it escalated into burnout, because everyone would be involved in managing absenteeism in some way.

2.10 BARRIERS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ABSENTEEISM MANAGEMENT PROGRAMMES

The following have been identified by Beira (2008) and Anderson (2005) as being impediments to the implementation of absenteeism management programmes:

- lack of tracking mechanisms (Beira, 2008:29);
- lack of support from management (Anderson, 2005:65);
- unfair absence management policies (Anderson, 2005:65) and
- inconsistency in tracking absence (Anderson, 2005:65).

From the above, the researcher deduced that most programmes developed to manage absenteeism fail not because of resistance by those whom they are intended (employees) but mainly as a result of matters related to weaknesses within the structures or systems of those who should benefit (employer) from such a programme. These issues could be related to favouritism in the application of rules and policies, as well as the lack of systems to keep a record of attendance/absence. Should the programme lack the support of management, it would undoubtedly not succeed, because they would have to be its custodians.

2.11 SUMMARY

Absence can be either planned (which includes study leave) or unplanned (as in the case of sick leave). The law (BCEA) makes provision for employees to take a certain number of day's sick leave per leave cycle, even though unscheduled leave disrupts

operational requirements. Absenteeism was shown in this chapter to be a behavioural episode caused by interpersonal, intrapersonal and macro factors. As a result, the effects of absenteeism are felt on both the micro and the macro levels, with disruptive and costly consequences. If institutions want to address the scourge of absenteeism, it is imperative that they have a programme for this, because the benefits will be felt by everyone concerned.

In the next chapter, the researcher will provide a detailed account of the research methodology implemented.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the researcher will present a detailed account of the method used to carry out the research study. Specifically, attention will be paid to the approach, the design, the sampling method and the actual sample used. The chapter also includes an account of how information was collected from the research participants and how the analysis took place, along with the writing of the final report.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The most appropriate approach to this study was qualitative research. According to Holliday (2008:5), qualitative research looks deeply into behaviour within specific social settings rather than at broader populations. For the purpose of the proposed study, the researcher set out to scrutinise the phenomenon of absenteeism from the perspective of line managers in an institution of higher learning. This type of research relies on qualitative data that is measured not in numerical form but in words (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007:143), by using descriptive data in a mostly holistic manner (Fouché & Delport, 2005:74).

The researcher concurred with the view above, since the purpose of the study was not to measure absenteeism rates in the institution but rather to use line managers' own words as a guideline for the development of a programme relating to absenteeism.

When seeking people's input on a subject, it is important to interact with them and establish their needs in their own words. This made the qualitative research approach the most appropriate in the present instance.

Conducting qualitative research enabled the researcher to gain an understanding of how absenteeism is viewed and experienced by line managers. It was also possible to explore guidelines to the contents of an absenteeism management programme with them. Blaikie's statement (2001:243) on the openness and flexibility of this approach confirmed the researcher's decision to use it, because the anticipated level of interaction with line managers afforded them a chance to be open and genuine in sharing their experiences of dealing with absenteeism and their views on what they needed in a programme.

Qualitative research also explores experiences, feelings and perceptions in order to identify and describe themes from the responses of subjects (Kumar, 2005:18). The intended study explores the experiences of line managers regarding absenteeism and describes from their perspective, what they thought should be included in a programme to address absenteeism in the workplace.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

3.3.1 Research design

According to Kumar (2005:84), a research design is a plan, structure or strategy of investigation conceived in such a way that it provides answers to research questions. The most suitable research design for this study was a qualitative design with a

collective case study (Fouché, 2005:272). A collective case study furthers the researcher's understanding of a social issue or population studied within a specific setting and time frame (Fouché, 2005:272). The researcher intended to further her understanding of how to manage workplace absenteeism by using inputs from line managers regarding the necessary guidelines for such a programme.

The social issue under study was absenteeism, and the researcher investigated how line managers dealt with it. A collective case study was the most suitable design, because it offered in-depth insights and an opportunity to establish rapport with research subjects (Mouton, 2001:150). The researcher worked towards gaining the confidence of line managers to ascertain guidelines for an absenteeism management programme. The sole criterion for the selection of cases should be the provision of an opportunity to learn (Fouché, 2005:273). This was indeed the criterion for the selection of line managers, as they were the ones whose inputs were the most relevant, as they had to manage employee absence as one of their duties.

3.3.2 Research population, sample and sampling method

According to Strydom (2005d:193), population refers to individuals who possess specific characteristics that represent all the measurements of interest to the researcher. In the research study, the population was comprised of line managers in a certain institution of higher learning in the Gauteng province, who were experiencing absenteeism in their departments, according to human resources records. Information was gathered from line managers because they dealt with absenteeism and it was they who would benefit the most from an absenteeism management programme.

A sample is defined as elements of the population considered for inclusion in the actual study so as to understand the population as a whole (Strydom, 2005d:194). The sample consisted of ten line managers. The researcher believed that the intention of the study was not to generalise to the entire population of line managers in institutions of higher learning. It was intended, in fact, to gain input on an absenteeism management programme so that the information shared could be used by other managers in the same institution.

The researcher used non-probability sampling following a purposive method. Strydom and Delport (2005:328) state that, in purposive sampling, a particular case is chosen because it illustrates some features of interest for a particular study. Using purposive sampling, the researcher selected the participants on the basis of her own judgment (Babbie, 2005:486), her knowledge of the population and the purpose of the study (Babbie, 2001:179).

In the study, the boundary of the sample was as follows:

- Those managers who referred employees with an identified pattern of absenteeism to the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010. The specific employees were those flagged by their respective line managers as being problematic when it came to absenteeism.
- There had to be evidence that the line manager had attempted to address the problem prior to the referral for employee assistance. This served as confirmation that the participants had already been confronted with the evidence of their absenteeism in the workplace. There should also be evidence of the demands of managing such a phenomenon.
- There was no exclusion on the basis of age or language.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

According to Fouché (2005:272), the exploration of a case is done by means of in-depth, detailed data-collection methods. These include the use of semi-structured interviews (Mouton, 2001:150). A collective case study was the chosen research design for this study, and semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from the line managers. Qualitative interviews are an attempt to understand the world from the participants' point of view (Greeff, 2005:292). Given this, the researcher attempted to get the views of the line managers on what should ideally guide a programme for managing the problem of absenteeism.

During semi-structured interviews, an interview guide is used as a protocol for interviewers in order to ask questions and record answers consistently across the whole range of respondents (Lewis-Beck, Bryman & Liao, 2004:518). Although the researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule (see appendix C), there was room for flexibility of administration to suit the needs of the line managers who took part in the study. This flexibility in collecting data allowed for the phenomenon of absenteeism to unfold from the line managers' point of view by allowing them to express themselves and share their own ideas rather than those of the researcher (Greeff, 2005:295).

Semi-structured interviews have been perceived as intense and time-consuming (Greeff, 2005:297). It was the researcher's responsibility to ensure that participants felt comfortable and secure in sharing their views. This posed a challenge when it came to establishing rapport (Greeff, 2005:287). The researcher dealt with it by explaining the purpose of the study and the fact that their input as line managers was valuable, because if a programme was to be developed, it must be informed by the needs of those who would be using it.

To maintain privacy, interviews were conducted in the line managers' offices. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to an hour, which allowed a margin for those participants who needed a bit of time to respond. A total of 10 participants were interviewed, although there was a possibility of increasing the sample size until a saturation point was reached. The interviews were conducted in English.

The interview schedule was pilot-tested on two line managers who were not part of the main study but represented the same population as the one in the study (Kumar, 2005:22). The researcher conducted the pilot test under the same conditions as those of the main study. Pre-testing the interview schedule ensured that errors were identified before the tool was used in the main study (Babbie, 2005:210). For example, when the tool was initially pilot-tested, the researcher felt that it omitted to ask for participants' inputs on what information they would like to see incorporated in a programme that managed absenteeism. When the interview schedule was adjusted with this information and pilot-tested for the second time, the researcher found that the interview flowed and she was able to gather all the relevant data for the study.

Permission to conduct the study was requested from the ethics committee of the institute of higher learning (see appendix A), which regulates all research-related activities within the institution. Following the receipt of approval to continue with the study, the researcher distributed informed consent forms (see appendix B) to all participants who had been randomly selected. After the signed consent forms had been received from the participants, the researcher went ahead to schedule appointments to conduct the actual interviews, using the electronic diaries of all the line managers who were going to take part. Data was gathered by means of a semi-structured interview based on an interview schedule (see appendix C).

Prior to the interview, the researcher went through the consent form again with the participants to make sure that they understood all the procedures. All the interviews were recorded on a recording device to maintain accuracy and consistency when analysing and interpreting the purposive sampling of participants' data.

All the data collected will be safely stored in the Department of Social Work and Criminology for 15 years according to the policy of the University of Pretoria.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

According to De Vos (2005:333), data analysis is the “process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data.” This ordering process will enable the researcher to identify common themes in people's descriptions of their own experiences (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:140) and it is done mainly, according to Greeff (2005:299), to grasp the richness of the themes. From the points made above on the generation of themes, it can be deduced that, in the qualitative analysis of data, the quality of insights matters more than the number of insights generated. The researcher's attention was focused on what an absenteeism management programme should consist of according to line managers in an institution of higher learning.

De Vos (2005:334) indicates that the following nine steps of Creswell's (1998) analytic spiral of data analysis cannot be followed rigidly, but may overlap or even move in circles. These steps can be described as follows.

- **Planning for the recording of data**

The first step in data analysis will be planning for the recording of information (De Vos, 2005:334). As stated earlier, a schedule was used as a guide during the planned interviews, to gain an understanding of the world of line managers dealing with absenteeism. The participants were asked for permission to use a tape recorder to ensure the accuracy of information. This was in line with a suggestion by Trochim and Donnelly (2007:146) on using recording devices when conducting interviews. The researcher also wrote notes to remind herself of what was said during the interviews.

Marshall and Rossman (in De Vos, 2005:335) consider that the researcher should plan a system of easy information retrieval by colour coding, which would assist in tracing information such as dates, names and descriptions of settings. The researcher used files to record all completed interviews and verbatim transcripts. This is to ensure easy reference and the accessibility of collected material.

- **Data collection and preliminary analyses**

De Vos (2005:335) stated that the interaction between data collection and analysis is a distinguishing feature of qualitative research. At this stage, the researcher is guided by initial concepts and developing understandings, but shifts and modifies them as the information is collected and analysed (De Vos, 2005:335). The researcher collected data from line managers while provisionally formulating meanings in terms of what was needed in a programme for managing absenteeism. This provided an opportunity for the researcher to seek further clarity, when the need arose, by interviewing participants again to enrich descriptions of their understanding of absenteeism and what they needed by way of a programme.

- **Managing data**

According to De Vos (2005:336), researchers organise their data into file folders, index cards or computer files. Patton, as cited in De Vos (2005:336), offers some practical advice on how to organise data. Once it has been collected, there has to be an inventory of what is available, and data must be labeled properly to make it retrievable and manageable, and to ensure that transcripts are readily accessible. As mentioned earlier, the researcher put all the collected data into files. Raw data from the tapes was transcribed to reflect sentences that make sense for analysis at a later stage.

- **Reading and writing memos**

Writing memos in the margins of transcripts helps in classifying and interpreting the data collected (De Vos, 2005:337). Such memos should be short phrases, ideas or key concepts that occur to the reader. The researcher re-read the data several times to gauge what line managers were really saying during interviews and to write notes in the margins to be used in identifying patterns. This also assisted in ascertaining the common factors in managers' needs for incorporation into a programme for dealing with absenteeism.

- **Generating categories, themes and patterns**

After completing the process of reading and writing memos, the researcher generated categories, themes and patterns. This process entailed "identifying salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief" (De Vos, 2005:338), which in turn entailed grouping segments into categories that reflected the various meanings of the phenomenon as it was experienced (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:140). Common themes were carefully identified, along with trends. The researcher furthermore noted common

expressions used by line managers in identifying what they needed in a programme and whether they shared common interests in tackling the problem of absenteeism.

- **Coding the data**

Coding is the name given to the process of applying some coding scheme to the identified themes and categories. It may take the form of key words or numbers (De Vos, 2005:338). The researcher used abbreviations of key words to code the data in ways that would be understandable to her.

- **Testing emergent understandings**

During this phase the researcher evaluates data for usefulness and centrality (De Vos, 2005:339). This researcher considered the extent to which the available data answered the question about what was required in a programme for the management of absenteeism and whether this data reflected common understandings from the perspectives of the different line managers.

- **Searching for alternative explanations**

The last step in the information analysis will be the search for alternative explanations (De Vos, 2005:339). The researcher considered the various ways in which line managers experienced the phenomenon of absenteeism. The final result was a general description of line managers' wishes in a programme that managed absenteeism in the workplace. From then onwards, the focus was on common themes that should be included in a programme that addressed this social phenomenon.

- **Writing the report**

The researcher presented the report so that it could be understood by the general public. It was important to ensure that technical terms and phrases were avoided at all times.

3.6 SUMMARY

This chapter was a description of the process undertaken in conducting the research study. The researcher opted for the use of a qualitative research approach which relied more on language to derive meaning from the needs of line managers in a programme for managing absenteeism. A collective case study provided an opportunity for the study to focus on a specific population within a specified time frame. Ten line managers made up the sample from a population of all the managers in a certain institution of higher learning in the Gauteng province.

Data was collected during semi-structured interviews lasting from 45 minutes to an hour. Permission for the study to proceed was first sought from UNISA's research governing body followed by consent given specifically by those who participated in the study. Themes and sub-themes were used to generate meaning from the collected data.

In the next chapter, the researcher will analyse the responses recorded. The interpretations emerging will be used to generate themes and sub-themes, and will be linked with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two of the report.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher will deal with empirical findings derived from the collective case study of ten participants interviewed in an institution of higher learning. All the participants interviewed were line managers in their respective departments. The research findings gathered were analysed, interpreted and presented according to the themes and sub-themes extracted from the participants' responses.

4.2 PRESENTATION OF DATA

The background information on the participants is presented in the next page in the form of tables followed by a discussion and analysis of the information presented.

4.3 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Table 1: Work experience at the institution

Work experience	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1 year	1	10.0	10.0	10.0
2 years	2	20.0	20.0	30.0
6 years	2	20.0	20.0	50.0
8 years	1	10.0	10.0	60.0
15 years	2	20.0	20.0	80.0
20 years	1	10.0	10.0	90.0
33 years	1	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	100.0	

From the above table, the following conclusions were drawn regarding the participants' work experience at UNISA. Of the ten participants interviewed, three had been working at UNISA for two years or less, another three had between six to eight years' experience and only four had more than ten years' experience at this institution of higher learning.

Table 2: Years of experience as a manager

Years experience	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1 year	1	10.0	10.0	10.0
2 years	2	20.0	20.0	30.0
3 years	2	20.0	20.0	50.0
8 years	1	10.0	10.0	60.0
9 years	1	10.0	10.0	70.0
10 years	1	10.0	10.0	80.0
13 years	1	10.0	10.0	90.0
18 years	1	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	100.0	

The managerial years of experience of the participants ranged from one year to 18 years. Fifty percent of the respondents had more than eight years experience as a manager. It can thus be concluded that this group of managers had enough experience to share their experiences on absenteeism and to express their needs in addressing this problem.

Table 3: Employees under supervision

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 3	1	10.0	10.0	10.0
12	1	10.0	10.0	20.0
18	1	10.0	10.0	30.0
20	1	10.0	10.0	40.0
24	1	10.0	10.0	50.0
25	1	10.0	10.0	60.0
27	1	10.0	10.0	70.0
59	1	10.0	10.0	80.0
65	1	10.0	10.0	90.0
104	1	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	100.0	

The number of employees who reported to the managers ranged from three to 104. Three of the respondents had fewer than 20 people working under them; four of the respondents have at least 20 but not more than 40 people working under them, while another three respondents had more than 50 people working under them.

All respondents interviewed had a substantial number of employees reporting to them; so the results of the study will be helpful in making recommendations to management on the development of a structured programme on absenteeism in the workplace.

4.4 CENTRAL THEMES

De Vos (2005:338) indicates that “identifying salient themes, recurring ideas or language and patterns of belief that link people and settings is the most intellectually challenging phase of data analysis.” Information gathered from the main study was

categorised into themes and sub-themes. The researcher identified the themes and sub-themes presented in the table below.

Table 4: Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Sub-themes
Knowledge of absenteeism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unscheduled absenteeism • Scheduled absenteeism
The role of a manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early identification • Discussion with employee • Referral agent
Impact of absenteeism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased productivity • Low staff morale • Increased production costs • Emulation of behavior • Work overload
Guidelines for an absenteeism management programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proper policies and systems • Uniform policies and procedures • Rewards and incentive programmes • Management training • Raise awareness amongst employees • Rules and standards
Benefits of an absenteeism management programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive management of absenteeism • Transparency and consistency • Insights into employee performance and wellness

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce financial costs • Empowerment of managers
Barriers of an absenteeism management programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tedious disciplinary process • Lack of buy-in from unions • Resistance from employees • Lack of awareness • Lack of proper procedures and processes • Lack of management empowerment

THEME 1: KNOWLEDGE OF ABSENTEEISM

The first theme identified was the participants' knowledge of absenteeism. Pillay (2009:1) maintains that absenteeism occurs when employees are absent from work when they are scheduled to be there. The respondents' understanding of absenteeism was divided into two sub-themes respectively, unscheduled and unscheduled absence.

Sub-theme 1: Unscheduled absenteeism

Respondents indicated that someone may be absent from work when expected or scheduled to be there. The following statements are an indication of the participants' responses.

- "Absenteeism is not reporting for duty irrespective of the reason."
- "At times employees in my section choose not to report for duty during peak periods when we are busy preparing for examinations."
- "Absenteeism is when an employee is not physically present at work."

- “A person may be absent from work due to reasons under the employee’s direct control.”
- “To stay away from work without the necessary or formal permission which could be family, work or financial related and it varies from person to person.”
- “Absconding by an employee and not reporting to authority reasons for not being at work when expected to be.”
- “Not reporting for duty irrespective of the reason and not being on duty as expected at a given time and day.”
- “Absence from work, physically not being at work when expected to as stipulated in one’s contract of employment.”
- “Not being available at work to do one’s duties as expected without prior arrangements.”

Participants’ understanding of the phenomenon seems to be in support of Watkins’ (2005:7) definition of absenteeism as when an employee is simply not physically at work. Furthermore, what is also worth noting is the significant emphasis placed on people staying away from work without getting prior approval from management. This is in line with what Pillay (2009:1) said that absenteeism occurs when employees are absent from work while they are scheduled to be there

Sub-theme 2: Scheduled absenteeism

A few (20%) respondents attributed absenteeism to employees not being at work even when prior arrangements had been made for this.

The following statements are an indication of the respondents' responses.

Respondent 1

Gives cognizance to both authorized (vacation) and unauthorized (sick) leave

Respondent 2

“Absenteeism is not reporting for duty irrespective of the reason.”

It was interesting to note that only two line managers associated the employees' scheduled leave with absenteeism. This is in accordance with Watkins' (2005:7) definition of absenteeism when an employee is simply not physically at work. Furthermore, Anderson (2009:14) asserts that this type of absence is also authorised or scheduled by the employer prior to commencement by an employee.

THEME 2: THE ROLE OF A MANAGER

The second theme identified in the data collected was the role of the manager. The researcher divided early identification, discussion with an employee and referral agent as sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1: Early identification

Line managers feel it is their responsibility to identify early those employees showing a tendency to frequently be absent from work for various reasons. The following statements are an indication of the participants' responses.

- “Analyse the patterns and trends of absenteeism.”
- “When there is a pattern you try to understand the reasons and offer the necessary support.”
- “Take the necessary steps to prevent it from recurring in the future.”

- “Establish whether there is a pattern and caution the employee regarding the identified pattern of absenteeism.”
- “Talk to the employee to get to the reason behind their absenteeism.”
- “When there is a pattern, you try to understand the reasons to offer support if necessary.”
- “Raise awareness of the problem with the employee.”
- “Issue a written warning should there be no improvements upon being cautioned.”
- “Record and keep track of absenteeism record.”

The above excerpts show that participants appear to agree that line managers have a vital role to play in identifying early potential cases of absenteeism. This concurs with Levy (2003: 9.2), who indicates that the line manager is responsible for keeping records of absenteeism, investigating and discussing absenteeism with an employee, agreeing with an employee on action to be taken and taking disciplinary action when necessary.

These responses also indicate that a pattern of absenteeism should be noticed before action can be taken. This accords with the view that a noticeable increase or changes in the pattern of absences must be investigated and action taken prior to it becoming a major problem (Reducing and managing workplace absenteeism...[sa]:2). According to Chauke (2007:38), this essentially means nipping absenteeism in the bud by acting on the first day an employee is absent. In addition, one of the benefits of this early identification of such employees is that they can return to work as soon as possible (How to deal with employee absenteeism...[sa]). This includes improving the state of health of the workforce, thereby reducing absenteeism (Chauke, 2007:40).

Sub-theme 2: Discussion with employee

There is a noticeable trend in discussions with the absent employee on his/her return to work. The following are the statements of participants.

- “Speak to the employee to find out the reason for absence so as to guide them properly.”
- “Counsel the employee on a one on one basis.”
- “Return to work interview following an employee’s absenteeism.”
- “Talk to the employee to get to the reason behind absenteeism, enlist the cooperation of the employee to address the problem.”
- “Make the employee aware that you notice their absence.”
- “Address the matter in consultation with the employee.”
- “Address the absenteeism problem with the employee raising awareness of the behavior with the employee and its impact on the entire institution.”
- “Speak to employee highlighting the importance of attending work and reporting when not coming to work and that not coming to work without reporting is not permissible.”
- “Involve the person in trying to understand their reason for absenteeism.”

These quotations suggest that communication is a vital tool in addressing absenteeism. Line managers share similar sentiments that, as part of their role, it is important to talk with the employee following their time away from work without approval or permission. It is important for line managers to meet with employees when they come back to work following their period of absence. Falcone (2009:105) noted with interest how a simple talk could go a long way towards sensitising the employee to the fact that someone is aware of their absence.

It is management's responsibility to alert the employee to the fact that their absence behaviour is being noted and taken in a serious light because of its impact on operations. As noted in Essential tips to manage absenteeism ([sa]), this is thought of as being a visible form of managing the problem of absenteeism and can also serve as a deterrent to those abusing the system, as they have to face the manager every time they are absent from work (Absenteeism trends in South Africa:2).

Sub-theme 3: Referral agent

Another trend that the researcher identified concerns the referral role of the manager in the EAP. Extracts from the participants' responses in support of referral to EAP for further assistance follow:

- "Refer to EAP for further assistance."
- "Should there be no improvement then other relevant functionaries are engaged such as employee relations and EAP."
- "Not merely punitive but also rehabilitative prior to it being a disciplinary matter."

The management of absenteeism cannot be left to the line managers alone. At some point, they will have to refer a troubled employee to ensure that they receive the necessary psychological assistance before the matter goes for corrective discipline. As Chauke (2007:38) says, absence management should be a team effort and not the responsibility of only one person. She maintains that involving relevant parties in the solution will spread the burden of dealing with the issue.

The extracts above also confirm that participants often use EAP as a last resort in trying to reach out to employees identified as demonstrating excessive absenteeism as set out in the standards of the institution. The point has been made that when a manager

confronts an employee about their frequent absenteeism and they indicate it as due to personal problems, then a referral to EAP should be considered (Beira, 2008).

THEME 3: IMPACT OF ABSENTEEISM

The third theme identified in the empirical data was participants' perspectives on the impact of absenteeism. The following sub-themes were identified; decreased productivity, low staff morale, increased production costs, behaviour emulation and work overload.

Sub-theme 1: Decreased productivity

Every time an employee is on unscheduled leave, it means that production is affected because the team is a member short. As this was not anticipated, there are no prior plans to accommodate this shortage. The following statements are an indication of the participants' responses.

- “A manager needs to manage leave to ensure that there are always enough staff members to deliver the service to clients.”
- “Drop in production levels due to working in a highly mechanized environment affects the overall workflow because of the production line being one person less, disruptive at the most.”
- “Affects service delivery negatively due to decline in service level agreements.”
- “Causes delay in service delivery as daily strategies are relooked.”
- “Affects operations negatively.”

These statements by the participants emphasise that absenteeism can hamper service delivery through decreased productivity and a decreased response rate.

Chauke (2007:32) concurs with the classical explanation that the drain on productivity is absenteeism. Pillay (2009:5) agrees that absenteeism can lead to decreased productivity and the fact that “unscheduled absences hurt” (Absenteeism... [sa]) as a result of losses in productivity. This accounts for 20% of the costs associated with low productivity (Hargrave *et al.*, 2008).

Sub-theme 2: Low staff morale

Employees who are constantly present at work often experience decreased morale because they have to carry the workload of those who are absent. The following statements are an indication of the participants’ responses.

- “Affects team morale negatively.”
- “Affects the morale of other team members.”
- “Staff morale is affected negatively.”
- “Negatively affects other team members.”

The above statements can be interpreted as meaning that when absenteeism rates are high, there seems to be some negative energy in the environment affecting morale. This could be mainly due to the feelings of resentment from those who are constantly present at work. This position was further supported in Absenteeism: negative impact on bottom line (2006/2007:162) that chronic absenteeism can lead to low morale among the employees who have to shoulder the workload. This ultimately puts pressure on managers to deal with problems of morale and job stress (Absenteeism [sa]).

Sub-theme 3: Increased production costs

Absenteeism results in loss of production, overtime costs, temporary replacement staff and increased overall company overheads initially not budgeted for. The following statements are an indication of the participants' responses:

- “Affects operations negatively due to overtime costs as a result of not being able to meet production targets due to staff shortage as a result of absenteeism.”
- “Unplanned overtime costs due to replacement costs of staff.”
- “It causes unplanned overtime costs.”

From the above excerpts, the participants' responses can be interpreted as saying that they take note that absenteeism not only affects productivity negatively but can also take its financial toll on the company, as pointed out in an article entitled 'Find out how to reduce employee absenteeism' ([sa]). This concurs with Sheika and Younis's (2006:65) view that, from an economic perspective, absenteeism is seen to be a factor that increases the overhead costs of production. Beira (2008:29) takes it further, indicating that absenteeism is costly because of the resource expenses of managing sick individuals and overtime costs, and that ultimately a company has not only an absentee problem, but also one of profit ('Absenteeism...' [sa]).

Sub-theme 4: Behaviour emulation by colleagues

The following statements are an indication of the participants' responses:

- “Has a snow ball effect because other employees would like to emulate the behaviour of the absent employee as they think nothing is being done to address absenteeism.”
- “Management is being accused of favoritism as a result of being perceived not to do anything.”

- “Fellow team members observe the behaviour of absenteeism and emulate it because of perceptions that nothing is being done.”
- “People think that nothing is being done, “I can get away with it”, and eventually everyone wants to take one day sick leave per month.”
- “Emulate the behaviour of their colleague as they feel that nothing is being done to address the matter.”
- “Staff gets a perception that nothing is being done.”
- “Members look to see how management responds to those that are absent.”

In the above quotes, participants strongly acknowledge the effects of absenteeism on their colleagues. As Beira (2009:5) points out, employees monitor each other’s behaviour, and if absenteeism is not addressed by management, the latter lose credibility among the staff, which leads to staff turnover and dissatisfaction. Løkke Nielsen (2008:1332) stated that the decision to be absent is influenced by the individual’s observation of the conduct of colleagues and managers concerning their attendance behaviour. The individual then uses this knowledge to adjust their own absence behaviour. This seems to further confirm a point made by both Falcone (2009:105) and Chauke (2007:36) that employees talk among themselves and that one would be surprised to find out the kind of news that spreads along the corridors.

Sub-theme 5: Work overload

An unintended effect of absenteeism is the excessive burden it places on those employees who unfailingly come to work and have to carry the workload of their absent colleagues. Unfortunately, businesses do not stop operating when there are staff shortages. Below is an indication of participants’ statements on the increased workload caused by absenteeism. The participants’ responses follow:

- “Remaining staff members take the workload of those not at work.”

- “Forces other staff members to do the work of the absent team member.”
- “Creates work overload for the remaining staff members.”

From the above extracts, it is clear that participants share this opinion that, when others are absent, it means that those at work are forced to carry their workload. Pillay (2009:5) maintains that absenteeism can lead to demotivated employees with low morale, which affects their taking on extra responsibility. It is correct to ask “when those who abuse the system begin calling in sick on too many Monday and Friday mornings, who picks up the slack and handles the extra work?” (Absenteeism [sa]).

THEME 4: GUIDELINES FOR AN ABSENTEEISM MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

The fourth theme identified in the data collected revealed the guidelines that would be imperative to effectively guiding the management of absenteeism. Attendance improvement programmes could work, as shown by some companies who have been able to reduce their absenteeism rates by half through the introduction of such a programme (Chauke, 2007:38). What the employees require is commitment and support from all levels of management, an effective attendance record-keeping system, consultation and open communication on the reasons for the attendance programme (Guidelines for absenteeism control...[sa]).

Within this theme, the following sub-themes were identified; proper policies and systems, uniformity in policies and procedures, rewards and incentive programmes, management training, raised awareness among employees and rules and standards.

Sub-theme 1: Proper policies and systems

The quotations make it apparent that participants place importance on the existence of guiding policies and systems to help them manage absenteeism. The following statements are an indication of the participants' responses:

- “Appropriate supportive policies are required to deal with absenteeism.”
- “There is a need for policies and procedures that as managers we can refer to in dealing with absenteeism.”
- “We need internal procedures and policies to use as a reference point.”
- “There is a need for internal processes to deal with absenteeism.”
- “It is important to have relevant procedures and policies.”
- “We need information systems that flags problematic behaviour.”
- “There is a need for policies and procedures that addresses absenteeism.”

In order to effectively reduce absenteeism, it would appear that line managers should have clearly-identified rules, policies and procedures to use as a point of reference when dealing with this phenomenon. It is important for every company to have an attendance policy (How to deal with employee absenteeism [sa]). This policy should be clear and easily understood by all (Chauke, 2007:38).

A point noted in the SOHO guidebook as quoted in Absenteeism [sa] appear to affirm that “it is important to develop a formal, detailed policy that addresses absences, failure to call in and leaving early.” Furthermore, this absenteeism policy should outline work attendance rules and regulate ways in which infringements are handled (Find out how to reduce employee absenteeism in 2 easy steps [sa]).

Sub-theme 2: Uniformity in policies and procedures

The following statements are an indication of the responses from the participants.

- “There should be uniform guidelines of what is absenteeism to maintain consistency across different departments when managers address the problem.”
- “The institutions should show or give clear guidelines of acceptable v/s unacceptable absenteeism.”
- “Clear description of what constitutes absenteeism to maintain consistency.”

It seems that uniformity creates consistency and gives line managers a point of reference when it comes to the management of absenteeism. The above excerpts give an indication that participants would appreciate the existence of guiding rules and processes that they could all adhere to when confronted with absenteeism. This would help to create consistency and uniformity in the application of rules. This point supports a view noted by Falcone (2009:98), which is that inconsistencies must be accounted for to avoid legal recourse. Policies are required because they “serve to prevent misconceptions about acceptable behaviour, inconsistent discipline, complaints of favoritism and charges of illegal discrimination” (Absenteeism [sa]).

Sub-theme 3: Rewards and incentive programmes

The statements below from participants are a confirmation of what was said by Chauke (2007:36), that people want recognition and praise for a job well done to reinforce good attendance behaviour. The following statements are an indication of the participants’ responses:

- “It is necessary to have a payment structure that takes into account the number of days that an employee actually reported for duty and compensate them extra accordingly.”
- “Good attendance record should be linked to good performance management.”

- “It should have a direct link to payment. For example, payment should be according to the total number of hours worked.”

In the above responses, participants indicate that a good attendance record should be acknowledged and rewarded accordingly, if possibly, monetarily. It is, of course, possible for individual behaviour to be motivated by what will be gained in return. If, therefore, employees with a consistent attendance record are positively reinforced by their respective line management by means of different incentives, they are likely to feel motivated to keep on displaying this positive behaviour in order to continue getting recognition. It has been shown that an incentive programme provides an employee with a boost to their motivation to avoid unnecessary absenteeism (How to deal with employee absenteeism [sa]). Pillay (2009:6) agrees that consistent attendance records should be rewarded without fail and (Paton, 2006:9) indicates that a recognised employee is less likely to be absent from work. Levy (2003:5.7) concurs with the effectiveness of attendance bonuses, which can be seen in their ability to improve attendance levels in some instances.

Sub-theme 4: Management training

Since line managers are at the forefront of managing absenteeism they should ideally be thoroughly trained in dealing with it as and when it occurs. The following statements show of the participants' responses.

- “Train managers with steps to manage absenteeism.”
- “Empower managers to be able to make recommendations after identifying a pattern of absenteeism.”
- “Proper control measures to empower managers.”
- “Line managers need to be empowered to be able to implement corrective measures.”

The above extracts from participants affirm that training initiatives promote a certain level of awareness when addressing absenteeism. This engenders a sense of empowerment, because managers, with prior guidance, gain confidence in their ability to address the problem. Paton (2006:9) makes the point that line managers have the ultimate primary responsibility for managing absenteeism in the workplace. It is therefore imperative for them to receive the necessary training to deal with the issue. Furthermore, by training managers, a company would be taking a positive step not only towards reducing absenteeism but reducing turnover and job burnout (How to deal with employee absenteeism [sa]).

Sub-theme 5: Raise awareness amongst employees

Line managers must take on the responsibility of raising awareness in the employee ranks and for sensitising them as to the overall implications of absenteeism. The following statements are an indication of the participants' responses.

- “Managers need to raise awareness amongst employees on the impact of absenteeism on operations and consequences of such continued behaviour.”
- “Highlight to the employee identified trends and patterns in their absenteeism behaviour.”
- “The programme must raise awareness amongst staff to keep their part of the contract to attend work and that continuous absenteeism is not keeping their part of the contract.”

The above statements indicate the participants' awareness that if the employees are to respond to the proposed programme on absenteeism they must be made aware of the impact of absenteeism on operational requirements. These requirements could include the effects on both financial and human resources, which are felt every time someone

stays away from work without the necessary permission. This supports the notion that organisations should provide all staff members with information about absenteeism trends in the organisation on a regular basis, at the same time pointing out the impact on the organisation as a whole (Absenteeism: negative impact on bottom line...2006/2007:162). Keeping employees well-informed may assist them in knowing the kind of support structures that are available, as well as how to further access them (Chauke, 2007:38).

Sub-theme 6: Rules and standards

In managing absenteeism, it is important to have a clear set of documented rules that apply to all employees. These rules should be exercised by management. The participants' responses follow:

- “We need to have the necessary plans in place to control absenteeism.”
- “Manage the situation through ensuring accessibility of the institution’s rules and policies by employees.”
- “Put corrective measures in place.”

The above quotations show that the participants think that rules and standards are necessary to correct absenteeism in the institution. This supports what was said in the *Labour Law for Managers Practical Handbook*, in terms of an employer giving all the employees clear written rules on expected conduct relating to absenteeism. These rules should contain the normal anticipated standard that should be adhered to and the repercussions of not following it through (Find out how to reduce employee absenteeism in 2 easy steps [sa]).

Most employing organisations in South Africa adhere to the stipulations as contained in the BCEA in trying to regulate the number of days to which employees are entitled in terms of vacation and paid sick leave. Most departments within the institution under consideration here go further and develop specific rules that govern the attendance record. For example, when an employee intends not reporting for duty as expected, s/he must telephonically inform the line manager before a certain time of that working day. Once this time has lapsed, without any form of notification, even from family members, the employee is deemed to have absconded or deserted their work without the necessary permission.

THEME 5: BENEFITS OF AN ABSENTEEISM MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

Managing absenteeism is an indication of an organisation keeping track of its own affairs. As already shown, absenteeism is not only about an employee not coming to work but also includes other factors such as money, increased workload, disruption of operations and a general feeling of hostility amongst other staff members. According to Guidelines for absenteeism control [sa], attendance improvement programs could work and some of the benefits include: reduced absenteeism, team spirit and greater employee satisfaction.

The fifth theme identified from the data collected was the respondents' views on the benefits of an absenteeism management programme. Within this theme the following sub-themes were identified; proactive management of absenteeism, transparency and consistency, insights into employee performance and wellness, reduction of financial costs and the empowerment of managers.

Sub-theme 1: Pro-active management of absenteeism

Below are statements from participants which give an indication of the importance of taking a proactive approach to addressing absenteeism.

- “Gives an impression that the institution takes interest in the management of absenteeism.”
- “Addressing the problem speedily.”
- “Escalation of serious ill-health and private problems to the relevant programme prior to them being absenteeism cases.”
- “Proactively manage staff through understanding the diversities inherent in it.”
- “Joint responsibility taking for attending work and not seeing it as a witch-hunt by management.”
- “Effective management of staff through proactive address of absenteeism.”
- “Alleviate the huge problem faced by the institution.”

The above responses confirm participants’ concurrence that a programme has the potential to communicate the notion that absenteeism is taken seriously in the workplace and that transgressors will not easily be tolerated, as there would be systems to flag them to line management earlier for appropriate intervention.

The results support the view expressed by Paton (2006:9) that good absence management is about cutting down on absenteeism prior to its becoming a problem by communicating a message of responsibility, intervention and rehabilitation.

Sub-theme 2: Transparency and consistency

The following statements made by participants indicate how they could further benefit from the existence of an absenteeism management programme through creating consistency:

- “Create consistency in the implementation of policies.”
- “No chances of favoritism because of consistent and transparent absenteeism management programme.”
- “Create consistency as a result of uniformity.”

The above empirical evidence given by the participants confirms that having a specific, tailor-made programme to deal with widespread absenteeism would promote transparency because the guidelines would be available for all to access. In return, this would encourage a certain level of consistency in the application of applicable policies and procedures. These results are similar to those presented in an article with the title ‘Essential tips to manage absenteeism’ ([sa]), citing the benefits of a programme that includes standards for maintaining consistency and fairness when addressing absenteeism.

Sub-theme 3: Provide insights into employee performance and wellness

The following statements affirm participants’ views that a programme would be likely to give an indication to management of the health status of the workforce.

- “Ability to make statistical comparison to identify trends and patterns of absenteeism.”
- “Improvement in the employee’s attendance record.”
- “Accountability to correct absenteeism behavior.”
- “Reduction in the rate of absenteeism.”
- “Promotes responsibility taking because an employee will be aware of their attendance.”
- “Better output management and target projection (improved service delivery).”

From the above responses, it can be deduced that participants are of the view that once an employer becomes aware of how the organization is performing in terms of

attendance records, this will give a clear picture of trends in absenteeism and how employees are performing in their work. It is important to link good attendance records to performance management because it could be argued that it would be difficult to prove that one was a highly performing employee if one was regularly not at work. This is in support of a comment made that a good programme offers employers an opportunity to identify the size and cost of the absenteeism problem in a particular environment ('Essential tips to manage absenteeism' [sa]).

Furthermore, the results support the findings by Beira (2008:29) that effective programme management provides insight into genuine medical needs that could be supported by means of well-structured employee health and wellness initiatives. Hargrave *et al.* (2008:283) further affirm that treatment offered through EAPs carries authentic cost savings assessed by such indicators as reduced expenses associated with absenteeism.

Sub-theme 4: Reduction in financial costs

It is widely known that one of the greatest effects of absenteeism is the financial effect felt by employers. The following statements are an indication of the participants' responses:

- "A programme will give an indication to the financial costs of absenteeism and I am sure once that is constantly flagged to the eyes of management, they will be bound to respond."
- "It will minimise the cost of overtime."
- "Alleviate burden and cost to the entire institution–financial costs."
- "There will be reduction in financial costs."

The excerpts in the previous page confirm that participants realise the financial benefits for the institution of having a programme, because in the year 2009 alone the loss was projected to be around R3 billion owing to employees being on unplanned leave (UNISA sick leave report, 2009). This finding concurs Beira's (2008:28-29) statement that a programme could potentially save up to 40% of existing paid sick leave costs, seeing that approximately 70% of all paid sick leave in SA fall into this category of absence.

Sub-theme 5: Empowerment of managers

The statements below are an assertion of how a programme on absenteeism management would empower the participants, seeing that the key to improving attendance lies in what managers would do (Levy, 2003:5.3).

- “Managers would be empowered by supportive systems to enforce policies and procedures relating to absenteeism. This will help dispel perception of managers just being tokens when it comes to the management of absenteeism.”
- “Empower managers to take action to address absenteeism.”
- “It will make line manager accountable to properly manage absenteeism.”
- “It will help me to effectively manage staff.”

It is apparent that participants feel that if there were a programme that could be used as a point of reference, this would engender a sense of confidence that their decisions regarding absenteeism were well-informed and that they knew what they were doing. Other than applying the applicable legislation, it is currently sometimes difficult for line managers to be certain about the corrective measures that they apply, as the institution does not have a programme to act as a sounding board to confirm their actions. Paton (2006:1) concurs, stating that the commitment and responsibility of line managers is the key to managing workplace absenteeism by applying well-structured interventions.

THEME 6: BARRIERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN ABSENTEEISM MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

The last theme identified in the data collection was the respondents' views on the impediments to the implementation of an absenteeism management programme. The researcher divided the tedious disciplinary process, lack of buy-in from unions, resistance from employees, lack of awareness, lack of proper procedures and processes and lack of management empowerment as sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1: Tedious disciplinary process

Employees cannot always be dismissed automatically without due processes being followed. These could hamper progress in terms of problem resolution. The following statements indicate the participants' responses.

- “Tedious disciplinary process makes it to take longer to finalise absenteeism matters.”
- “Lengthy disciplinary procedures as prescribed by law (Labour Relations Act).”
- “Tedious and long processes.”

It can be inferred that participants think that that the provisions of the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 make it necessary to exhaust all avenues before disciplinary procedures on the basis of absenteeism can be instituted against an employee. This often leads to disciplinary processes being perceived as being lengthy because, by the time corrective action is taken, the employee has been transgressing for a long time. There is thus a considerable overlap between problem identification and implementation. The provisions of the BCEA No. 75 of 1997, section 22.2, provide a framework for basic conditions of employment, such as access to sick leave.

To further support the above finding, the Labour Relations Act No. 66 of 1995 provides mechanisms for the prevention of arbitrary termination of employment relationship unless a case of misconduct or incapacity can be proven. This is a further confirmation of Falcone's (2009:102) point that labour standards and leave policies make employers liable for punitive damages, so it is not surprising that most of them avoid confronting excessive absenteeism for fear of facing a lawsuit somewhere down the line.

Sub-theme 2: Lack of buy-in by organized labour/unions

The following statements from participants stress the importance of communicating the existence of a programme as a form of establishing buy-in from all stakeholders, especially the workers' representatives.

- "Labour can reject it if it infringes on the existing policies and rights of employees as per Labor Relations Act."
- "Lack of buy-in from unions could be a blockage."
- "Unions/labour may try to be protective of their members irrespective of their absent behavior."
- "Unions challenging the implementation."
- "Organised labour may be a blockage."
- "Not getting a buy-in initially from labour."
- "Unions taking sides of the employees overlooking facts."
- "Lack of knowledge by the unions/lack of buy-in."

Levy (2003:2.4) asserts that responsible unions do try to cooperate with management in their effort to improve attendance. Furthermore, to avoid resistance, unions should be consulted in advance, they should be told what is happening and be given reasons for such a programme in order to enlist their cooperation (Levy, 2003:5.10). UNISA is a highly unionized work environment, which could explain why the empirical results revealed a perception of their being seen as a potential obstacle. The researcher is of

the opinion that not involving them from the onset of the programme could fuel this element of resistance.

Sub-theme 3: Resistance by employees

The following statements indicate the participants' opinions on the reasons why employees might block successful implementation of the programme.

- “If it disempowers the employees, then they will reject it.”
- “Negative perception by absconders.”
- “Employees may receive the programme negatively because they do not see themselves as having a problem of absenteeism.”
- “Culture of employees rejecting any control measures and wanting to do as they please.”

The above excerpts show the participants' idea that employees might potentially reject the programme and refuse to cooperate if it is perceived negatively as reducing their power. This finding corroborates the earlier comment suggesting that, when an attendance improvement programme is communicated and implemented well, the majority of employees would probably agree with it and cooperate (Guidelines for absenteeism control [sa]).

Sub-theme 4: Lack of awareness

The following statements are an indication of the participants' responses pertaining to employees being unaware of the programme, thereby blocking its implementation.

- “Lack of awareness amongst employees regarding usefulness of the programme.”
- “Lack of consultation with staff / raising awareness.”

- “This has been a legacy issue entrenched in the organisational culture – leave seen as an entitlement as opposed to it being a benefit.”
- “Lack of awareness of the objectives of the programme.”

These responses seem to suggest that employees could resist the programme should they simply not be aware of what it entailed and how it is meant to benefit them. This result ties in with the statement in ‘Guidelines for absenteeism control’ ([sa]) that attendance improvement programmes could work if employees were properly consulted and the reasons for instituting the programme were openly communicated.

Sub-theme 5: Lack of proper procedures and processes

The following statements are the participants’ responses on the lack of procedures and processes blocking implementation of the programme.

- “Lack of proper benchmarking of such a programme.”
- “Tedious processes between identification and implementation (huge gap).”

The inference here is that the participants think that the lack of appropriate procedures and processes for following the programme could be detrimental to its success. This concurs with the opinion of Navarro and Bass (2006:34) that an attendance programme should encompass clear and consistent guidelines incorporating legal requirements. This is consistent with Falcone’s (2009:99) statement that the frequency of worker absenteeism should be relative to industrial and geographical standards. This explains why a lack of proper benchmarking in the higher education sector could impede the implementation of the programme.

Sub-theme 6: Lack of management empowerment

The following statements indicate the participants' responses.

- “Use of the programme by managers to absolve themselves of their responsibility to still manage absenteeism internally.”
- “Line managers not being empowered.”

This concurs with Levy's (2003:5.9) assertion that supervisors and managers are often too busy to take action to prevent absenteeism and see such a control as the responsibility of another department, such as human resources.

4.5 SUMMARY

All ten participants had sufficient managerial experience and were responsible for a substantial number of people, so could give inputs on the management of absenteeism. Unscheduled leave emerged as a thorny issue because it disrupts operational requirements and productivity, as well as negatively affecting team morale.

The results show that the participants embraced their responsibilities as partners in the management of absenteeism. However, empirical findings showed that if they were to do this, it was evident that a specific programme was needed to empower participants in their role. The programme should be founded on, inter alia, consistent policies and procedures and should take into account the acknowledgement of good attendance behaviour.

According to the evidence, the benefits of such a programme would be felt in reduced costs and in the fact that management was taking absenteeism seriously. It was apparent that, unless all the relevant stakeholders were buying into the programme, it could prove detrimental to its successful implementation.

Conclusions on the themes and sub-themes identified during the study will be provided in the next chapter and recommendations will be made to management.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The goal of the study was to explore guidelines for developing an absenteeism management programme in an institution for higher learning. An empirical study of a qualitative nature was undertaken and the rationale was to engage line managers in sharing their needs for an absenteeism management programme at an institution of higher learning. Relevant literature reviewed in Chapter Two confirmed that absenteeism was a widespread phenomenon and that targeted interventions were needed to curb and eradicate its impact on both the micro and macro levels. Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews with ten participants performing a managerial role within an environment of higher learning.

This chapter will serve as the final evaluation of the research process. In order to enable the researcher to provide an effective research report, certain conclusions and recommendations will be made.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of the empirical study:

- Line managers have a clear understanding of the concept absenteeism (pages 52-53).

- Line managers will willingly assume responsibility for timeously identifying employees who tend to stay away from work without permission (page 54-55).
- Return to work interviews are necessary to raise awareness among employees of their unbecoming conduct, enlist their cooperation in addressing the identified problem of absenteeism and referring them for further (EAP counselling) assistance should it be deemed necessary by the line manager in his/her consultation with the employee concerned (page 56-57).
- Absenteeism has a negative impact on the overall functioning of the institution (page 58-61).
- Supportive guidelines and procedures will contribute to addressing absenteeism in this institution of higher learning (page 62-63).
- Incentive programmes should be introduced to acknowledge good attendance records (page 64).
- Management training is an important factor in the management of absenteeism (page 65).
- Employees should be kept informed of trends and patterns in absenteeism (page 66).
- A good absenteeism management programme should promote uniformity and must be applied consistently (page 63).
- A good absenteeism management programme is one that seeks to reduce costs within the organization (page 71).
- An absenteeism management programme could potentially fail if it lacked the buy-in of relevant stakeholders such as organised labour unions and employees (page 73-74).
- An absenteeism management programme could fail if proper policies and procedures were not implemented (page 75).

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made to management as guidelines to managing absenteeism at UNISA:

- Managers will be assisted in coming up with a clear, agreed-upon and concise definition of what constitutes absenteeism, in order to create uniformity.
- A specific programme aimed specifically at dealing with and addressing absenteeism should be developed in consultation with all the relevant stakeholders (management, unions, employees, medical schemes and human resources).
- As part of the programme, a system should be put in place for identifying and monitoring trends in absenteeism and patterns so as to flag them on a monthly basis to the relevant management function.
- As part of the programme, there should be an absenteeism management policy to give a specific indication of what line managers should do in addressing absenteeism.
- As part of the programme, conducting a return to work interview following a period of absenteeism should not be an option but should be a compulsory duty in the management role.
- Rules and standards that would form part of the programme should be documented, disseminated within the institution and applied consistently and fairly to avoid favoritism and inconsistency.
- A programme should include reward initiatives to boost staff morale and enhance consistent attendance records.
- The programme should encourage mandatory EAP referral for those identified as presenting with absenteeism for further assistance and support.
- The cooperation of unions and their members should be enlisted at the initial stages of programme development, not only to raise their awareness but also to

engage their support and avoid the possibility of dealing with their resistance at a later stage of implementation.

- Line managers should be empowered to be proactive in dealing with absenteeism by pre-planning and anticipating staff shortages so as to eliminate the burden of work overload and financial costs.
- Information on the financial costs of absenteeism should always be shared with all concerned and should be linked to performance management.

5.4 CONCLUSION

This study was exploratory in nature. The researcher used a collective case study to gain firsthand insight into what line managers would like to see in a programme to be used for managing absenteeism within an institution of higher learning. The following objectives outlined in Chapter One were achieved.

- The first was to conduct an in-depth literature review on the manifestation of absenteeism as a problem and a challenge in the workplace. Literature analysed in Chapter Two looked deeper into the definition of absenteeism, its causes and effects, the different theories of absenteeism, the contents of a programme and the most common barriers to implementation.
- The second objective was to explore line managers' perceptions of absenteeism by means of an empirical study. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather firsthand information from line managers on an absenteeism management programme. The research study was ethically guided to ensure that it was conducted in a just manner and the dignity of the participants was promoted at all times (see Chapter Three). Data collected from participants was analysed and broken down into themes and sub-themes to derive rich meaning and to understand the phenomena under study. Relevant literature was integrated with these responses for further understanding and confirmation (see Chapter Four).

- The third objective was to determine the needs of line managers regarding the management of absenteeism. This objective was addressed in Chapter Four from the perspective of line managers' needs concerning the necessary guidelines. These would serve as a relevant point of reference should management decide to endorse a decision to develop an absenteeism management programme.
- The final objective was to make recommendations to management on the development of a structured programme for dealing with absenteeism in the workplace. The researcher was able to make the necessary recommendations in Chapter Five.

It can therefore be concluded that the goal and objectives set out in Chapter One were successfully achieved in this investigation.

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APPENDIX A: PERMISSION LETTER FROM UNISA



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27 July 2010

Ms T Mogobe
EAP Specialist
Division Employee Wellness
UNISA

Dear Ms Mogobe

REQUEST FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE: Guidelines for an Absenteeism Management Programme within an Institution for Higher Learning

Your application for ethical clearance in respect of the above study has been received and was considered by the PARC on the 14th July 2010

The Committee is pleased to inform you that ethical clearance has been granted for this study as set out in your application for ethical clearance.

We trust that sampling and processing of the relevant data will be undertaken in a manner that is respectful of the rights and integrity of Unisa's students, as stipulated in the Unisa Research Ethics Policy, which can be found at the following website:

http://www.unisa.ac.za/contents/research/docs/ResearchEthicsPolicy_apprvCounc_21Sept07.pdf

Congratulations on an interesting and very relevant study. We would like to wish you well in this research undertaking.

Kind regards


PP

PROF T S MALULEKE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH

cc. **MR H SWANEPOEL**
DIRECTOR: EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLNESS



APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT



14/11/2011

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Participants name:.....

Principal Researcher: Thabang Mogobe

INFORMED CONSENT

Title of the study: Guidelines for developing an absenteeism management programme within an institution of higher learning.

Purpose of the study: The purpose of the study will be to gain insight into what should guide an absenteeism management programme.

Procedures: The researcher will ask questions which I need to answer. In order to gain understanding, the researcher may ask me to explain further my response (s). I will be interviewed during working hours. I am aware that the interview may last for 45 minutes- 1 hour. The institution has given permission for the study to be conducted and senior management gave permission for me to be contacted as part of the study.

Risks and discomforts: There are no identified risks or discomforts linked with this study. Should I feel tired before the interview is concluded, I will be allowed by the researcher to take a break.

Benefits: The results of the study will identify what line managers want in a programme and will assist with guiding management to deal with employee absenteeism.

Participants' rights: My participation in the study is voluntary. I may withdraw my participation at any time without suffering any negative results.

Confidentiality: I am aware that a tape recorder will be used by the researcher in order to record accurately what I have said. I understand that my name will not be mentioned anywhere in the research report. The report will be made available to the University of Pretoria and management of this institution and I can have access to it. Results of the study may be published in a journal article and presented at conferences. However, my name will not be revealed at any time. I understand my rights as a research subject and I voluntarily consent to participation in this study. I understand what this study is about, how and why is it done. I am fully aware of the fact that all research data will be stored for 15 years at the Department of Social Work and Criminology according to the policy of the University of Pretoria. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Right to access the researcher: Should I have further questions or need clarity, I can call Thabang Mogobe at 082 420 0957/012 429 2006.

Participant's signature:----- Date:-----

Researcher's signature:----- Date: -----

Supervisor's signature:----- Date: -----

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APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Guidelines for developing an absenteeism management programme in an institution for higher learning.

Section A: Background Information

1. How long have you been working for this institution?
2. When were you appointed in your manager position?
3. How many employees do you have reporting to you?

Section B: Knowledge of Absenteeism

1. Please explain your understanding of absenteeism
2. What is expected of you as the manager when it comes to absenteeism of an employee?
3. What impact does absenteeism have on daily operational requirements?

Section C: Guidelines for an absenteeism management programme

1. What knowledge can help you manage absenteeism within the institution?
2. What would you like to be the contents of a programme that will manage absenteeism within the institution?
3. What would the anticipated benefits be for you of having such a programme?
4. What could be anticipated barriers to the implementation of such a programme?

APPENDIX D: LETTER FROM EDITOR

Professor Karen Batley

11-07-25

BA (Hons), BEd, UED (UCT); MA (UP); D Litt et Phil (Unisa)

(Academic and language practitioner)

To whom it may concern

I hereby give the assurance that I have carried out extensive editing on the Master's thesis written by Ms Thabang Mogobe. Should there be any queries, I will be happy to answer them.

Karen Batley (Professor)
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