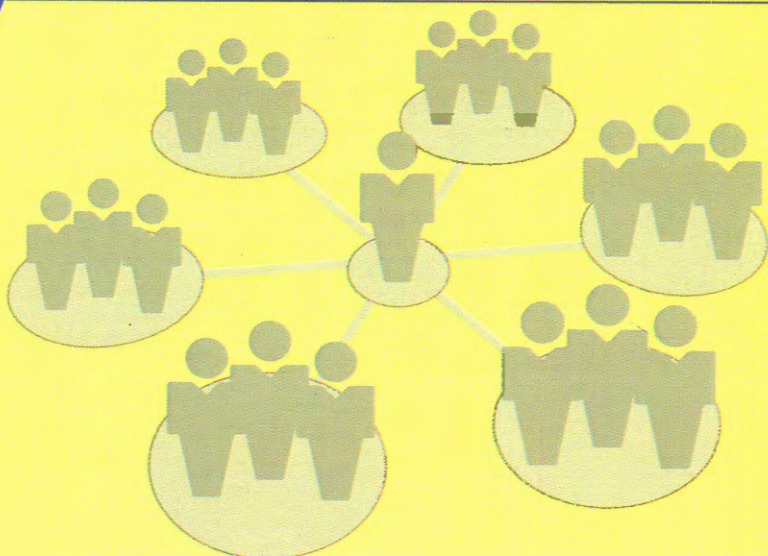




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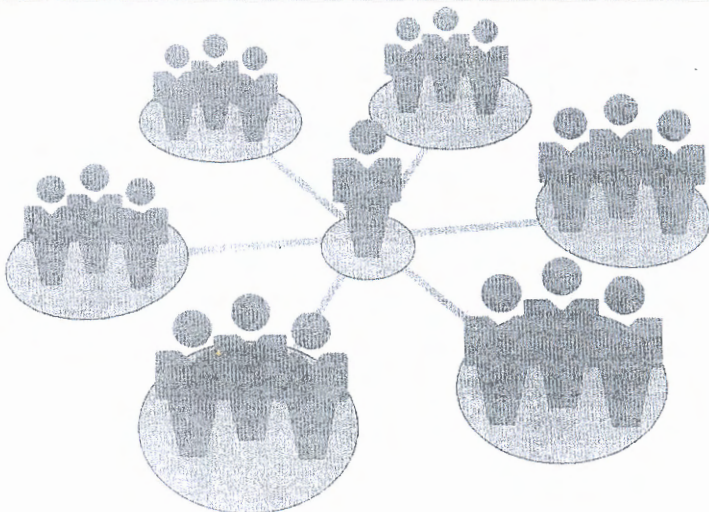
Vol. 1, No. 1, Dec. 2015





LASU Journal of
**Public Administration
& Management**

Vol. 1, No. 1, Dec. 2015



LASU

Journal of

Public Administration &

Management

Vol. 1, No. 1, Dec. 2015

Editorial oversight, design, layout & production:

FREE ENTERPRISE PUBLISHERS, LAGOS

HEAD OFFICE: 45, Thomas salako Street, Ogba, Lagos.
0807.7255.288
free.ent.publishers@gmail.com

LAGOS OFFICE: LASU Strategic Business Unit (L.S.B.U.)
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LASU Journal of Public Administration & Management

Vol. 1, No. 1, Dec. 2015

Published by: Dept. of Public Administration
Faculty of Management Sciences
Lagos State University, Ojo,
Lagos, Nigeria

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The board of *LASU Journal of Public Administration and Management*, in the Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, Lagos State University, Ojo, invites contributions to this journal, which should cover related and contemporary issues in public administration and management. The *Journal* is published twice a year, April and October, although submissions are accepted throughout the year.

Guidelines and conditions for submission of articles include:

- Articles must be original, based on practical and theoretical studies and must not have been published elsewhere.
- Articles should not be more than 18 pages A4 size, including references, tables [in Harvard style] and must be typed double-spaced, with 12 point Times New Roman.
- The article/paper must be accompanied with an abstract of not more than 250 words. Some keywords [at least five] are required at the end of the abstract.
- Manuscripts should be accompanied with a cover page with the title of the paper, the name of the author, author's affiliation with address for editorial correspondence.
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5



Toward An Understanding of Presenteeism and its Effects in the Workplace

Abasilim, U. D. / Salau, O. P. /
Falola, H. O.

ABSTRACT

The effect of presenteeism in the workplace has not been sufficiently addressed in most organizations. Efforts have been on ensuring that employees are not absent from work irrespective of sickness, stress, family issues or even the working conditions of the organization, without taking cognizance of the effects of being present at work at all cost. Based on the foregoing, this work examines the concept of presenteeism and its effects in the workplace with a view to suggesting ways in which it can be managed. This research is qualitative in nature and relies solely on secondary sources of data collection, and concludes that employees can be present but absent (not productively engaged), which has adverse effects in the workplace, and recommends that empirical studies be carried out to ascertain the actual effects of workplace presenteeism.

Keywords: Absenteeism, presenteeism, productivity, sickness, workplace

INTRODUCTION

THE ISSUE OF WORKPLACE PRODUCTIVITY OR PERFORMANCE HAS BECOME a critical factor in assessing the state of any organization. In doing this, organizations make sure that the human elements are productively engaged in the day-to-day activities of the organization (Abasilim, Salau, and Falola, 2015). However, efforts are usually taken to identify employees that are absent to work, thereby encouraging employees to be present at work, without taking into cognizance the other side of absenteeism (presenteeism) and its cost on the workplace environment (Harrison and Martocchio, 1998; Johns, 1997; Johns, 2008; Johns, 2009; Koopman, et al., 2002; Hemp, 2004).

Although the other side of absenteeism (which refers to the habitual or failure of an employee to report for work), termed presenteeism (which is more than the opposite of absenteeism) is relatively new (Johns, 2009; Gervais, 2013), attention has not been adequately paid in this regard but this is obviously going on in the workplace. In fact, most organizations have different mechanisms (attendance register/time-book, biometrics, radio frequency identification reader, and so on) to ascertain the number of employees that shows up at work or absent themselves from work. Emphasis is placed on the absentees, to the extent that adequate records exist on these staffers, but no record exists for those who fall within the spectrum or syndrome of presenteeism without noting the cost/effects of presenteeism relative to absenteeism (Hemp, 2004; Johns, 2010; Baker-McCleam, Greasley, Dale and Griffith, 2010). What is witnessed in most organizations is that employees can be physically present but emotionally absent; that is, their presence at the workplace is as good as being absent or not showing up at all to work, and what this means is that employees' efforts at work are not targeted toward adding value to the organization but to other things they perceive more relevant to themselves.

It is on this premise that the phrase "present but absent syndrome" was formulated. This is simply so because this situation is rampant in the workplace. Some of this presenteeism attitude often manifests when employees are only conscious of coming to work to record their attendance because of fear of being sanctioned or because they want to put up to the organization that they are committed staff, but unfortunately when they show up to work they are busy attending to personal issues rather than organizational concerns.

Based on the above, this work aims at popularizing, sensitizing and enlightening all stakeholders (human resource managers/practitioners, researchers, among many others) on what actually is presenteeism and its effects in the workplace.

The concept of presenteeism

The term “presenteeism” has been in use for many years, although its definition was rather vague or seen as the opposite of absenteeism or the act of not being absent from work (Johns, 2010; Baker–McCleam, Greasley, Dale and Griffith, 2010; Depetrillo, 2014). The term is now being used to describe the practice of “going to work despite complaints and ill-health that should prompt rest and absence from work, are still turning up at their jobs” (Aronsson, Gustafsson and Dallner, 2000: 503). Put differently, it is seen as a situation where workers show up at work when ill and are thus unable to perform as required due to their ill-health, resulting in productivity loss, which has been estimated to cost organizations more than the sickness absence, and as such should be monitored to a greater extent (Gervais, 2013). In the same vein, Cooper (1996: 15) also sees presenteeism as

being at work when you should be at home, either because you are ill or because you are working such long hours that you are no longer effective.

What this connotes is that employees are at work, but their cognitive energy is not devoted to their work (Demerouti et al., 2009: 51). While Lack (2011: 77) sees presenteeism as “employees being present at work but unable to be fully engaged in the work environment.”

Presenteeism is also seen as the opposite of absenteeism; that is, an act whereby a person calls in to work sick or might be unable to focus on his/her work on due to discussions that are outside work (Depetrillo, 2014). In a similar manner, D’Abate and Eddy (2007: 361) define presenteeism as

the situation when workers are on the job but, because of illness, injury, or other conditions, they are not functioning at peak levels.

They further state that the term presenteeism combines the ideas of the “present” employee, and “absenteeism” where the employee is present on the job but somewhat absent in mind or behavior. Put differently, Willing-

ham (2008) opines that presenteeism is the loss in productivity when workers are on the job, but not performing at their best.

From these definitions, one can deduce the various shades of what presenteeism means. It could either be seen as a situation when an employee shows up to work despite illness or any other thing that would have made them stay off work or an act of showing up at work but not adequately engaged or productive at work. Better still, their presence leads to reduced productivity. However, their presence is as good as their absence because the difference between their presence at work and their absence is similar, if not actually costing more, to the workplace. Hence the notion of being present but absent. This leads to another fundamental issue: What are the causes of presenteeism?

Causes of Presenteeism

Numerous factors have been cited as responsible for presenteeism in the workplace. In fact, studies that focus on sickness presenteeism identify the following illness (allergies, depression, diabetes, allergy, arthritis, asthma, sadness, diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, migraine/headache; respiratory infections, financial challenges, family issues and workplace conditions, burnout, depression, chronic pain disorders such as neck and back pain, exhaustion—the list is endless) as the cause of this kind of presenteeism (McKevitt et al., 1998; Aronsson et al., 2000; Grinyer and Singleton, 2000; Wang et al., 2003; Burton et al., 2004; Levin–Epstein, 2005; Kivimäki et al., 2005; Caverley, Cunningham and MacGregor 2007; Bergström et al., 2009; Baker–McCleam, Greasley, Dale and Griffith, 2010).

While for Johns (2009) organizational characteristics happens to be one of the causes associated with presenteeism, he asserts further that organizations that increase regular employee pay or try to control the attendance of employees may reduce their absenteeism rates, but cause presenteeism to increase. In the same manner, scholars are of the view that the reasons adduced for employees showing up at work while they are actually sick or challenged, include their perceived pressure from colleagues not to let them down and cause them more work, a “trigger-point” system providing incentives for attendance, the fear that sick leave will put promotion opportunities at risk, and the fear of dismissal (McKevitt et al., 2000, Baker–McCleam, Greasley, Dale & Griffith, 2010).

For Caverley et al. (2007), two main factors account for presenteeism in

the workplace despite being sick or whatever challenges faced by the employees. First, the situation whereby a replacement is impossible and they do not want their colleagues to bear additional workload. The second has to do with the position they occupy in the workplace, especially when it has to do with managing a team or being responsible for their subordinates and wanting to ensure that the activities run smoothly. They further state that presenteeism can also be caused when employees are hired on fixed-term contracts and intend to achieve a permanent status (2007). This kind of behavior is termed “voluntary” presenteeism (resulting from an individual’s decision), while that which is caused by organizational demands is termed “involuntary” presenteeism (Gosselin and Lauzier, 2011). Put differently, Roe (2003) states that there are also positive reasons why people continue to work when they could stay at home sick. The reasons are that interesting and stimulating work and good relationships with colleagues and clients account for their being present at work.

However, some researchers believe that there is no difference between what causes absenteeism and presenteeism: they are seen as the same; that is to say, whatever reasons employees make for being absent is likely the same reasons that makes employee to fall within the presenteeism spectrum; they both share common causes or reasons (Caverley, Cunningham and MacGregor, 2007). Cigna (2008) observes that 40 percent of workers who report presenteeism experiences do so because of their “work ethic” or “dedication to the organization,” while 25 percent came to work while ill because they “needed the money.” Other reasons (Aronsson et al., 2000) include: “toughing [the sickness] out” and not being able to find someone to cover their shift or duties. They state further that if employees are permanent workers (not temporary staff or under threat of being downsized), they exhibit less presenteeism. Employees with higher job demands, those who work in teams, and others who feel their work is piling up when they are absent also have higher levels of presenteeism (Aronsson et al., 2000; Demerouti et al., 2009).

Some organizations also have cultures that promote few absences, or even no absence, among employees. These organizations may be influencing employees to practice presenteeism. For example, in the Swedish workforce, primary-school teachers, who may be under the influence of the noabsence type of culture, have a presenteeism rate of 55 percent, while

engineers and computer scientists have a presenteeism rate of 27 percent (Aronsson et al., 2000).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theories abound in literature to justify why people act the way they do in workplace. In most cases, it is referred to as employee motivation. Some of these motivational theories include Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1970), Alderfer's ERG theory (1972), McClelland's managerial needs theory (1951), Adams's equity theory (1963), Vroom's expectancy theory (1964), Herzberg's twofactor theory (1957), and McGregor's X and Y theory (1964). Here, however, the X and Y McGregor's theory (1960) is adopted as the framework of analysis, with specific focus on theory Y.

Theory X centers on work and people that work in an organization. Traditionally, this theory is also known as the carrot-and-stick theory that relies on the integration of human behavior either through coercive compulsion or through motivational self-control. The relationship that exists is termed to be mechanistic (Sapru, 2013). In clear terms, it is the use of rewards and punishments in order to induce desired behavior. The assumptions of this theory, as postulates McGregor (1960: 33-34), are:

- a. The average human has an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if he can.
- b. Because of human characteristics of dislike of work, most people must be coerced, controlled, directed and threatened with punishment to get them to put forth adequate effort toward the achievement of organizational goals.
- c. Humans prefer to be directed, wish to avoid responsibility, have relatively little ambition, and want security above all.

Theory Y's guiding principle, on the other hand, is of "integration to replace traditional concepts of direction and control." The assumptions of this theory are:

- a. The expenditure of physical and mental effort on work is as natural as play or rest. That is, the ordinary person does not inherently dislike work.
- b. External control is not the only means for obtaining effort. "Man will exercise selfdirection and selfcontrol in the service of objectives to which he is committed."
- c. The most significant reward that can be offered in order to obtain

commitment is the satisfaction of the individual's self-actualizing needs. This can be a direct product of efforts directed toward organizational objectives.

- d. "The average human being learns under proper conditions not only to accept but to seek responsibility."
- e. Many more people are able to contribute creatively to the solution of organizational problems than are actually contributing.

Theory Y serves as the major guide for this study due to the fact that most organizations, whether in the public or private sector, need to understand that the application of theory X being applied to ensure that employees present themselves to work in most cases lead to another challenge known as presenteeism. In the words of McGregor (1964: 43),

so long as the assumptions of theory X continue to influence managerial strategy, we will fail to discover, let alone utilize the potentialities of the average human being.

While theory Y concerns itself with the nature of relationships and creating an environment that encourages employee commitment to organizational objectives, which will provide avenues for the maximum exercise of initiative, ingenuity and selfdirection in achieving them (McGregor, 1964: 43; Sapru, 2013).

EFFECTS OF PRESENTEEISM IN THE WORKPLACE

Presenteeism and its effects in the workplace has been a wellstudied topic in occupational medicine, when compared to other related disciplines having to do with human resource management and organizational behavior (Aronsson et al., 2000; Hemp 2004; Baker–McCleam et al., 2010: 311; Ferreira and Martinez, 2012). However, whenever the effect of presenteeism is examined, it has always been viewed as a negative organizational behavior (Demerouti et al., 2009). This is so because the employees that show up at work despite ill-health only postpone sickness leave to a later date, which will lead to more serious illness; thereby leading to absenteeism on the part of the employee, which is considered a risk behavior (Grinyer and Singleton, 2000; Bergström et al., 2009). Buttressing the foregoing, Roe (2003) identifies two consequences of presenteeism for organizations. The first consequence is that the employee's performance will be impaired; that is, the sick employees present at work will not be as productive as their

healthy colleagues. For those employees present at work despite sickness to perform their tasks, they will have to put in more time and exert more effort. Second, because of the employee's present situation (sick but present at work), performance that is hitherto predicated on their collective application will suffer and this will make fellow colleagues who should have concentrated on their own tasks to be involved in assisting sick colleagues. He further notes that the sick employees may pass on infectious illnesses to colleagues and clients because they are present at work, instead of reporting to the health center, as the case may be.

However, the focal effects of presenteeism studies in most research relate to employee productivity (Chatter and Tilley, 2002; Goetzel et al., 2004; Hemp, 2004; Turpin et al., 2004). That is to say that the cost of presenteeism is a decreased onthejob productivity, which accounts for a large part in the total healthrelated expenses of employers (Kivimäki et al., 2005: 102). In the same manner, Goetzel et al. (2004) also state that presenteeism costs are significantly higher than medical or absence costs when compared. What this implies is that showing up at work when sick may be more costly and more harmful to productivity and performance than choosing to stay at home for the day (Berger et al., 2003; Hemp, 2004; Stewart et al., 2003; Wang et al., 2003). Supporting the claim by Goetzel et al. (2004) as it pertains to the high cost of presenteeism when compared to absenteeism, EUOSHA (2011) research also reveals that presenteeism costs twice as much for organizations as absenteeism. U.S. studies report that sickness presenteeism costs its companies over \$150 billion a year (Hemp, 2004) and 225 billion euro per year for Europe's biggest economy, Germany. Another study has shown that coming to work with ailments like migraine/headache and allergies costs U.S. organizations 12 and 2.8 billion dollars, respectively, through loss of productivity (Burton et al., 2004).

Now the issue is, what are the manifestations of presenteeism in the workplace where the syndrome is inherent? According to D'Abate and Eddy (2007), presenteeism happens when employees are present at the workplace but spend a considerable portion of their workday engaging in personal work. This behavior is classified as nonwork-related presenteeism (NWRP). They further state that activities such as emailing friends, browsing the internet, online chatting, paying bills, making appointments with the doctor or hairstylist becomes the order of the day in

the workplace. That is to say that employees are at work but may not be performing at peak levels (“present but absent”).

While for ACOEM (2008) the following are the outcomes of presenteeism: additional time of tasks, decreased quantity and quality of work, impaired executive functions (initiative), decreased capacity of peak performance, impaired social functioning with peers, and decreased motivation. Consequently, the behaviors that account for presenteeism have serious implications for individuals and organizations (Polach, 2003), noting further that specifically engaging in nonwork-related presenteeism on the job may adversely affect human resource development (HRD).

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Drawing from this review, it is observed that most studies on presenteeism are within the Western milieu. Which implies that there is a dearth of literature that examines or assesses the effects of presenteeism within the Nigerian work context. Based on the foregoing, we conclude that for any organization to be said to be productive, it must ensure that employees present at work are in good frame of mind and their presence does not lead to a loss in productivity, because when this happens presenteeism becomes evident. It is on this note that the following suggestions are made:

- a. Empirical studies should be carried out in Nigeria to ascertain the actual effects of presenteeism in the workplace.
- b. There is need for scholars to intensify their effort through writings/publications to increase awareness of presenteeism and its effects in the workplace.
- c. Managers/supervisors and leaders should also take into consideration that workplace absenteeism is not the only impediment to both employee and organizational performance, but presenteeism is also, so efforts should be made to factor the indices of presenteeism into their measures of productivity or employee performance.
- d. Similarly, these leaders must as a matter of urgency take an interest in the welfare of their employees/subordinate, thereby ensuring a worklife balance by building flexibilities into the work schedules assigned to employees/subordinates and show understanding about family commitments, doctor’s appointment, and so on, to boost employee morale and motivation which ultimately leads to optimal performance and the organization at large.
- e. Flex time in organizations should be introduced where “possible” and “practicable” to avoid employees falling into the trap of presenteeism.

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