THE MANAGEMENT OF THE ANTECEDENTS OF ABSENTEEISM AT A MOTOR MANUFACTURING COMPANY

By

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DECLARATION

I, Oscar Mandleni (20324557), hereby declare that THE MANAGEMENT OF THE ANTECEDENTS OF ABSENTEEISM AT A MOTOR MANUFACTURING COMPANY is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another University or for another qualification.

Oscar Mandleni
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ABSTRACT

Absenteeism is a complex set of behaviours masquerading as a unitary phenomenon. Absenteeism is a big problem in the motor manufacturing industry, especially, because of the number of processes that are labour intensive. Absenteeism is a multifaceted problem with many antecedents which make it challenging to resolve or contain. Financial impact is one of the consequences of absenteeism on a business, especially when one thinks that the primary objective of a firm in to make money. Absenteeism defeats these objectives through cost incurred for overtime to catch up production losses. Furthermore, in cases where replacement of personnel is necessary, this may include administrative costs related to the time human resource personnel spend looking for replacement employees or the time production management spends re-assigning employees. Absenteeism results in decreased productivity and may affect the quality of the product due to the increased workload and burden put on employees who are at work.

Absenteeism is classified into scheduled and unscheduled absenteeism. Although some absenteeism is avoidable, it is important to understand that some absence is unavoidable. This is because people may fall ill, get injured or have unavoidable obligations which may lead to absenteeism.

The purpose of this study was to identify the antecedents of absenteeism, with the assumption that once they are identified, they can be controlled, reduced or eliminated and the absenteeism rate thus reduced. The theoretical study focused on defining absenteeism, ascertaining the impact of absenteeism in the workplace, especially in an international organisation in the motor manufacturing industry and discussing the antecedents of absenteeism and strategies that can be used to manage these antecedents.
The empirical study consisted of a survey, with a questionnaire as a data collecting tool. The process used to conduct the survey was to distribute the questionnaire among production employees in three operational units; namely Final Assembly, Paint Shop and Body Shop at a motor manufacturing company. Employees were approached, the purpose of the questionnaire explained and they were asked if they would be willing to complete the questionnaire. Employees who agreed to complete the questionnaire were briefed on the contents of the questionnaire and the completion process.

The relationship between biographical variables and absenteeism was discussed. For the purpose of this study the following independent variables were discussed: age, marital status, gender, work area, length of service and number of dependents.

The empirical study focused on the antecedents of absenteeism, and specifically job, organisational and personal factors, as well supervisors’ attempts to manage absenteeism.

The respondents indicated that they believed absenteeism was a problem in the study and that people stayed away for reasons other than genuine illness. It was recommended that absenteeism figures, such as the overall Gross Absence Rate (GAR) and Absence Frequency Rate for the organisation, and specific work areas and teams, are regularly communicated to employees and displayed prominently to emphasise the importance of attendance. Some suggestions were that:

- Supervisors should foster a genuinely respectful relationship between themselves and employees which will results in employees feeling obliged to be at work.
The company should introduce a day care or crèche at work to allow female employees to bring their kids to work in the event they are unable to be looked after at home.

Alcohol and drug abuse should not be seen as an external problem in the organisation but rather as something an organisation should get involved in to assist employee who might have a problem. The first step was to create a channel where employee can feel free to approach the company if they are in need of help.

The study demonstrated that it was important to identify antecedents in order to address the real problems related to absenteeism.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM STATEMENT AND DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 PROBLEM DEFINITION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 MAIN PROBLEMS, SUB PROBLEMS AND OBJECTIVES</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.1 Sub-problems</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 DELIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.1 Geographical demarcation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.2 Organisational level</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.3 Theoretical delimitation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 DEFINITION OF SELECTED CONCEPTS</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.1 Absenteeism</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.2 Antecedent</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.3 Management</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6.1 Research methodology</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6.1.1 Literature study</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.6.1.2 Empirical study 12
1.6.1.3 Analysis of the results 12
1.7 KEY ASSUMPTIONS 12
1.8 ORGANISATION OF THE REMAINDER OF THE STUDY 12

CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF ABSENTEEISM

2.1 INTRODUCTION 14
2.2 DEFINITION OF ABSENTEEISM 17
2.3 CLASSIFICATION OF ABSENCE 19
2.4 ANTECEDENTS OF ABSENTEEISM 23
   2.4.1 Integrated multiple-factor explanations of absence 26
      2.4.1.1 Nicholson’s model of attendance motivation 26
      2.4.1.2 Rhodes and Steers model of employee attendance 29
   2.4.2 Factors Impacting Absenteeism 31
      2.4.2.1 Personal factors 31
      2.4.2.2 Job factors 34
      2.4.2.3 Organisational factors 41
      2.4.2.4 Personal circumstances 45
   2.4.3 Results from the interviews 54
      2.4.3.1 Human resource management 55
      2.4.3.2 Production Management 57
2.5 THE IMPACT OF ABSENTEEISM WITH SPECIFIC EMPHASIS ON
   AN ORGANISATION THAT COMPETES IN A GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT 62
2.6 STRATEGIES TO COMBAT ABSENTEEISM

2.7 CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION
3.2 EMPIRICAL OBJECTIVES
3.3 SAMPLING DESIGN
3.4 DATA COLLECTION
3.5 MEASURING INSTRUMENT
  3.5.1 Section A: Biographical information
  3.5.2 Section B: Antecedents of absenteeism
  3.5.3 Section C: Management of absenteeism
3.6 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE
3.7 VARIABLES
3.8 PILOT STUDY
3.9 RESPONSE RATE
3.10 DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES
3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS FROM THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

4.1 INTRODUCTION
4.2 SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHICAL DATA
4.2.1 Age 91
4.2.2 Gender 93
4.2.3 Marital status 94
4.2.4 Number of dependents 96
4.2.5 Departments 98
4.2.6 Tenure at VWSA 99
4.2.7 Open-ended question – “Is absenteeism a problem in your work place?” 100
4.2.8 Open-ended question – “Do employees take sick leave when not really sick?” 102

4.3 SECTION B: ANTECEDENTS OF ABSENTEEISM 104
4.3.1 Job factors 104
4.3.2 Organisational Factors 107
4.3.3 Personal Factors 110

4.4 SECTION C: MANAGEMENT OF ABSENTEEISM 115

4.5 CONCLUSION 118

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 RESOLUTION OF THE MAIN PROBLEM 119
5.1.1 Demographic information 122
5.1.2 Antecedents of absenteeism 122

5.2 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 121

5.3 PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS 127
LIST OF FIGURES, CHARTS AND GRAPHS

FIGURE 2.1. Nicholson’s model of attendance motivation 27
FIGURE 2.2. Rhodes and Steers model of employee attendance 29
CHART 4.1: Response rate (Corresponds to Table 3.1) 92
CHART 4.1: Responses with regard to age (Corresponds to Table 4.1) 92
CHART 4.2: Responses with regard to gender (Corresponds to Table 4.2) 93
CHART 4.3: Responses with regard to marital status
(Corresponds to Table 4.3) 95
CHART 4.4: Responses with regard to number of dependents
(Corresponds to Table 4.4) 97
CHART 4.5: Responses with regard to department (Corresponds to Table 4.5) 98
CHART 4.6: Responses with regard to tenure
(Corresponds to Table 4.6) 100
CHART 4.7: Responses with regard to the question “Is absenteeism is a problem in your workplace?” (Corresponds to Table 4.6) 101
CHART 4.8: Responses with regard to the question “Do employees take sick leave when not really sick?” (Corresponds to Table 4.6) 103
CHART 4.9: Results with regards to job factors (Corresponds to Table 4.6) 106

CHART 4.10: Means and standard deviations for scores for Section B (Organisational factors). (Corresponds to Table 4.10) 109

CHART 4.11: Results with regards to personal factors. (Corresponds to Table 4.11) 111

CHART 4.12: Results with regards to frequency and reasons for absenteeism. (Corresponds to Table 4.12) 114

CHART 4.13: Results with regards to the management of absenteeism. (Corresponds to Table 4.13) 117
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM STATEMENT AND DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

1.1 PROBLEM DEFINITION

Volkswagen South Africa (VWSA) is a manufacturer of automobiles for both the local and export market. VWSA was experiencing an average absenteeism rate of 4.2 per cent (Divisional absenteeism reports, 2011). Internationally an absenteeism rate under 3 per cent is considered acceptable. This level matches an aggressive benchmark that has been achieved in excellent organisations but highly competitive organisations strive towards improving on existing benchmarks and therefore seek to reduce absenteeism even further (Oakland, 2003:152).

In general, absenteeism levels should not be more than 2 per cent per annum that is, if an employee is expected to work 250 days during a year then they should not be off sick more than five days per annum on average. Absenteeism is found to be higher for lower paid employees than for high income earners. This is often however, more related to differences in responsibility levels rather than income levels (Corporate Absenteeism Management Solutions, 2010).

Low paid employees, generally, have less responsibility, which then affects job satisfaction and morale, which has an impact on absenteeism. The benchmarked absenteeism rate for the Automotive Industry (based on South African statistics) according to records is 1.77 per cent. This is calculated using the equation of Incident Days / Exposed Days as a % (Corporate Absenteeism Management Solutions, 2010).
As a vehicle manufacturer for the global market, VW SA does not only compete against other vehicle manufacturers but also faces stiff competition with other plants across the globe for orders from within the VW group. To produce vehicles of an acceptable quality within cost restraints is thus paramount. The plant with good quality and productivity figures is more likely to obtain business.

There is reason to believe that absenteeism is becoming even more of a concern to organisations. This is because global competition and the pace of environmental change have put an increased premium on speed, quality, service, and teamwork factors that are especially vulnerable to the lack of coordination prompted by elevated absenteeism (Thomas & Hersen, 2002:437).

Unauthorised or unscheduled absenteeism is a problem for every organisation or business. It creates cost and productivity problems, puts an unfair burden on the majority of employees who show up for work, ultimately hinders customer satisfaction, and drains the country’s economy. Experience shows that good attendance is synonymous with better quality, lower costs, and greater productivity (Ledman, 2001). It is clear that, for a business such as VW SA to remain viable, absenteeism has to be curbed to acceptable levels. High absenteeism affects the ability to build good quality automobiles and leads to poor productivity. Thus, before even talking about quality or productivity, the issue of absenteeism has to be dealt with in order to set a good foundation.

VW SA provides 30 days sick-leave to employees, which is divided into three cycles of ten days each (VW absenteeism policy, 2011). The study showed that employees sometimes perceived sick leave as a benefit that should be used, and handled sick leave as a form of annual leave. If employees took all their paid sick leave even when they were not sick, the company would experience a high level of absenteeism. This would be costly both in terms of direct sick leave payments and loss of productivity.
According to Erasmus, Van Wyk and Schenk (2005:235) the main purpose of workforce planning is to identify future human resource requirements and to develop action plans to eliminate any discrepancies between the demand and supply of labour that may be foreseen. The focus of this study was on the antecedents of absenteeism. An antecedent can be described as a preceding circumstance, event, object, style or phenomenon (Levine, 2010). This implies that there are conditions or situations in an organisation that could create a fertile ground for absenteeism to take place, without being the direct cause of absenteeism. In more straightforward terms, an antecedent describes the cause or trigger of an event, which in the context of this study, is absenteeism.

Skinner (2007) states that a ‘cause’ becomes a ‘change in an independent variable’ and effect a ‘change in a dependent variable’. What was previously known as a ‘cause-and-effect connection’ becomes a ‘functional relation’. These terms do not suggest how a cause exercises its effect: but merely assert that different events tend to occur together in a certain order. The concern is therefore for what causes human behaviour. Any condition or event, which can be shown to have an effect upon behaviour, must be taken into account. By discovering and analysing these causes, behaviour can be predicted to the extent that it can be manipulated and controlled. The purposes of this study was to isolate factors that contributed to absenteeism with the assumption that if these factors were eliminated or controlled, absenteeism would be reduced, and to identify strategies that could be used to reduce the impact of these antecedents, by either eliminating or reducing them. Organisations can utilise various strategies to eliminate or control these antecedents. Due to the nature of this research, the study was conducted from a multidisciplinary approach using both the positivistic and phenomenological approach.

The positivistic approach seeks the facts or causes of social phenomena, with little regard to the subjective state of the individual. Thus, logical reasoning is applied to the research so that precision, objectivity and rigour replace hunches, experience and intuition as the means of investigating the research problems.
The phenomenological paradigm is concerned with understanding human behaviour from the participant’s own frame of reference. This qualitative approach stresses the subjective aspects of human activity by focusing on the meaning, rather than the measurement, of social phenomena (Collis & Hussey, 2003:52).

The above discussion gives a background to the main problem in this study, which is presented below.

1.2 MAIN PROBLEM, SUB-PROBLEMS AND OBJECTIVES

The main problem of the study was identified as follows:
What are the antecedents of absenteeism at Volkswagen South Africa?
The following sub-problems were derived from the main problem:

1.2.1 Sub-problems

Sub-problem 1
What is the impact of absenteeism on the competitiveness of a global organisation? This sub-problem was addressed by a literature study of the impact of absenteeism on businesses, especially those that operated in a competitive international environment. An interview was also conducted with line managers at VWSA to develop an understanding of the impact of absenteeism on VWSA, and with the HR manager responsible for the management of absenteeism at VWSA to gain an understanding of perceptions in the organisation of the general antecedents of absenteeism.
Sub-problem 2
What are the antecedents of absenteeism?
This sub-problem was addressed by means of a literature study that specifically investigated factors such as personal, job and organisational factors, and personal circumstances.

Sub-problem 3
What strategies can be utilised by organisations to eliminate or reduce the impact of antecedents on absenteeism?
This sub-problem was also addressed by means of a literature study. Specific attention was given to the preventative and corrective measures to improve absenteeism.

Sub-problem 4
What antecedents, as revealed through the resolution of Sub-problem two, are evident amongst employees at VWSA?
This sub-problem was addressed by means of a survey, which was conducted among employees in the production department at VWSA.

Sub-problem 5
What are the perceptions of employees at VWSA of the strategies used by the organisation to eliminate or reduce the antecedents of absenteeism?
This sub-problem was also addressed by means of the survey which was conducted among employees in the production department at VWSA.
1.3 DELIMITATION OF RESEARCH

The purpose of delimitating a study is to provide a specific focus and to make the study manageable.

1.3.1 Geographical demarcation

The empirical part of the study was conducted at VWSA which is situated in Uitenhage in the Eastern Cape.

1.3.2 Organisational demarcation

The study was conducted within the production department among permanently employed production line operators on the final assembly, paint shop and body shop lines.

The following personnel were not included in the study:

- Line Managers and Group Leaders.
- Employees not working in the Production Department
- Production operators who were not permanently employed.

1.3.3 Theoretical delimitation

The study focused on the antecedents of absenteeism and strategies to eliminate or reduce the impact of the antecedents on absenteeism.
1.4 DEFINITION OF SELECTED CONCEPTS

In this section, concepts of absenteeism, antecedents and management thereof are presented and discussed. The presentation begins with defining absenteeism, followed by antecedent and ending by defining the term management.

1.4.1 Absenteeism

According to Cascio (2006:49), absenteeism is any failure of an employee to report for or to remain at work as scheduled, regardless of reason. The term “as scheduled” is very significant, for it automatically excludes vacations, holidays, jury duty, and the like. It also eliminates the problem of determining whether an absence is excusable or not. Medically verified illness is a good example. From a business perspective, the employee is absent and is simply not available to perform his or her job.

According to Stone (2002:802), absenteeism is the failure of employees to report to work when they are scheduled to do so. It does not include planned absence such as annual leave, public holidays or rostered days off. Unauthorised or unscheduled absenteeism is a major social problem with cost implications for the individual worker, the economy and the general community. Unfortunately, there is a misconception among some employees that absences such as taking a “sickie” after a late night are excusable. From a business standpoint, all unscheduled absences cost money.
1.4.2 Antecedent

Bambara and Kern (2005:31) define an antecedents as the immediate stimuli in the environment that set off a particular behaviour referred to as antecedent stimuli or discriminative stimuli or, more colloquially, triggering stimuli or triggers.

Antecedent events are those stimuli that lead directly to the occurrence of problematic behaviour. These are usually immediate, simple, and discrete events that are said to evoke or trigger problem behaviours. These stimuli tend to be present during, or immediately prior to, the occurrence of problem behaviour, and lead to its immediate occurrence. These direct events predict problem behaviour by serving as a signal that reinforcement is available, given the occurrence of such behaviour (Bambara & Kern, 2005:34).

For purposes of the study, antecedents of absenteeism are defined as factors that lead to or cause an employee not to attend or not be present at work when scheduled to work.

1.4.3 Management

MBA Knowledge Base (2011) presents the following as a definition of management:

- “Management embraces all duties and functions that pertain to the initiation of an enterprise, its financing, the establishment of all major policies, the provision of all necessary equipment, the outlining of the general form of organisation under which the enterprise is to operate and the selection of the principal officers. The group of officials in primary control of an enterprise is referred to as management”.


• “Management is a social process entailing responsibility for the effective and economical planning and regulation of the operations of an enterprise, in fulfillment of a given purpose or task, such responsibility involving: (a) judgment and decision in determining plans and in using data to control performance, and progress against plans; and (b) the guidance, integration, motivation and supervision of the personnel composing the enterprise and carrying out its operations”.

From the definitions quoted above, “management” is defined as a technique of extracting work from others in an integrated and co-ordinated manner for realising the specific objectives through productive use of material resources. It involves mobilising the physical, human and financial resources and planning their utilisation for business operations in such a manner as to reach the defined goals. Management could be further defined as “a distinct ongoing process of allocating inputs of an organisation (human and economic resources) by typical managerial functions (planning, organising, directing and controlling) for the purpose of achieving stated objectives (MBA Knowledge Base, 2011).

For the purpose of this study management relates to the process of allocating human and economic resources through organising, directing and controlling for the purpose of achieving stated objectives relating to employee absenteeism.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

Absenteeism is expensive and affects the bottom line of organisations. Many factors impact on absenteeism and it is important for organisations to isolate antecedents so that they can take corrective action to eliminate or reduce the impact of these factors.

The study could be significant to:
• The human resource department at VWSA, who are faced with the challenge of understanding the cause and effects of absenteeism at VWSA in order to take appropriate action and steps to reduce absenteeism levels.

• Line managers and team leaders at VWSA faced with the struggle of managing absenteeism, which leads to losses in production, output levels and reduced revenues and profits.

• Scholars in the field of management, human resources management, industrial psychology or businesses that study organisational behaviour and might be confronted with the issue of absenteeism in organisations.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN

For the purpose of this study, a positivistic research design was followed. A positivistic research design perspective is predicated on the ideas that it is possible to conduct objective and value free enquiry, observations are the final arbiter in theoretical disputes and the methods of the natural sciences are appropriate for the study of social phenomena (Kisber, 2010:6).

A positivistic research design was suitable for this study because the positivistic approach seeks the facts or causes of social phenomena, with little regard to the subjective state of the individual. Thus, logical reasoning is applied to the research so that precision, objectivity and rigour replace hunches, experience and intuition as the means of investigating research problems. Positivism is founded on the belief that the study of human behaviour should be conducted in the same way as studies conducted in the natural sciences. It is based on the assumption that social reality is independent of us and exists regardless of
whether we are aware of it. Therefore, the ontological debate of ‘What is reality?’ can be kept distinct from the epistemological question of ‘How do we obtain knowledge of that reality?’ The act of investigating reality has no effect on that reality (Collins & Hussey, 2003).

1.6.1 Research methodology

The following broad procedure was followed to address the main and sub-problems.

1.6.1.1 Literature study

A literature study was conducted to determine antecedents of absenteeism and strategies that management could use to deal with these antecedents.

The literature study focused on the factors that influence absenteeism such as personal, job and organisational factors, and personal circumstances, as well as strategies that management could use to control and manage these antecedents. Results from the literature study were used to develop a questionnaire, which was used as a data-collecting tool in the empirical part of this study.

1.6.1.2 Empirical study

A survey with a questionnaire as data collecting tool was conducted among production operators at VWSA to collect information about the antecedents that contributed to absenteeism, and their perceptions of the strategies that were used to eliminate or reduce the impact of these factors on absenteeism.
1.6.1.3 Analysis of the results

The data obtained from the survey were recorded in an Excel Spread Sheet. The data was presented in tables and figures in Chapter four. Mean scores and standard deviations were computed.

1.7 KEY ASSUMPTIONS

It is assumed that antecedents to absenteeism can be isolated through a survey, and that these antecedents can be eliminated or reduced through intervention strategies, which will have a positive impact on absenteeism figures.

1.8 ORGANISATION OF THE REMAINDER OF THE STUDY

The thesis contains five chapters:

- Chapter one introduced the research, the main problem, sub-problems, and significance of the study and key concepts.

- Chapter two presents a theoretical study of absenteeism and specifically the impact of absenteeism on global organisations, the antecedents of absenteeism and strategies that can be used to reduce the impact of these antecedents by either eliminating or reducing them.

- Chapter three describes the research methodology used in conducting the research.
• Chapter four presents the findings from the empirical study.

• Chapter five presents the final conclusions and recommendations made for the management of absenteeism.

Chapter two, which covers the literature study, follows.
CHAPTER 2

A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF ABSENTEEISM

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter one, the problem statement, delimitation of the study, definition of selected concepts and significance of the research, research design and organisation of the study were discussed.

In this chapter, absenteeism is defined, as well as the impact of absenteeism in the workplace, especially in an international organisation in the motor manufacturing industry; finally the antecedents of absenteeism and strategies that can be used to manage these antecedents are presented and discussed.

Absenteeism is a complex set of behaviours masquerading as a unitary phenomenon (Thomas & Hersen, 2002:439). Absenteeism presents a huge cost and disruption to employers. It is difficult for an organisation to operate smoothly and to attain its objectives if employees fail to report to their jobs. The work flow is disrupted and often important decisions must be delayed. In organisations that rely heavily on assembly-line production, absenteeism can be considerably more than a disruption; it can bring about a complete shutdown of the production facility. Levels of absenteeism beyond the normal range in any organisation have a direct impact on the organisations effectiveness and efficiency (Robbins & Judge, 2009:29).

According to Aldag and Kuzuhara (2002:119), failure to attend can be quite costly for companies. Typically, companies continue to pay absent employees. Further,
absenteeism causes costly disruptions, such as a need to reschedule work and reassign employees. Disruptions result in decreased quality, since regular employees are replaced by “swing” employees who move from one job to another. The defect-plagued “Monday car”, largely assembled by “swing” employees because of high absenteeism in auto assembly plants on Mondays, is an example.

Aldag and Kuzuhara also (2002:119) state that, in the United States of America (USA), an estimated 400 million person-days are lost annually through absenteeism - about four times the number lost in strikes. Total annual costs of absenteeism have been put in excess of $25 billion (R182.5 billion), and are on the rise. It is hard to tell how much of this absenteeism is avoidable (that is, due simply to employee’s desire not to go to work that day) or unavoidable (due to factors such as illness or transportation problems).

Sick absenteeism should be at about 1.5 per cent, which means that for every 250 working days per year, the average employee should take not more than 3.75 days off sick (Corporate Absenteeism Management Solutions, 2010). Most South African companies have an overall absenteeism rate of between 3.5 and 6 per cent, way over the acceptable limit (Johnson, 2007). Johnson (2007), using Absolv Software as a basis for the statistical analysis, showed that:

- 14.0 per cent of the total sick absenteeism incidents in corporate South Africa are related to influenza.
- 13.8 per cent of all sick leave taken by males are due to influenza.
- Influenza accounted for 11.55 per cent of all sick leave taken in the female segment of the 150 000 strong sample.
- 7.14 per cent of the total incidents relate to back pain and back symptom complaints.
• The second highest reason for sick leave amongst males was lower back pain.
• For women, the second highest reason for sick leave taken was acute bronchitis.
• 6.09 per cent of the total sick leave incidents relate to gastroenteritis every year.
• The biggest difference in sick leave diagnoses between males and females was depressive disorder. While a mere 0.70 per cent of men took sick leave because of depressive disorders, it accounted for 1.2 per cent of sick leave taken by women.

As already indicated in Chapter one, in explaining the terms “cause” and “effect” Skinner (2007) states that a “cause” becomes a “change in an independent variable” and an “effect” a “change in a dependent variable.” The old “cause-and-effect connection” becomes a “functional relation.” The new terms do not suggest how a cause causes its effect: they merely assert that different events tend to occur together in a certain order. People are concerned, then, with the causes of human behaviour. Any condition or event, which can be shown to have an effect upon behaviour, must be taken into account. By discovering and analysing these causes behaviour could be predicted to the extent that it could be manipulated and kept under control.

The above information emphasises that absenteeism does not result from one cause but rather a set of conditions. Absenteeism is very costly and has an impact on the bottom line for most companies: hence from an investor or management point of view, it should be kept in check. Absenteeism is a reality that cannot be completely eradicated as, although some absenteeism may be avoidable, some is unavoidable. Hence from the literature most companies do
not aim to completely eradicate it but rather minimise it to a manageable and acceptable level.

The purpose of this study was to identify the antecedents of absenteeism, with the assumption that once they are identified, they can be controlled, reduced or eliminated and the absenteeism rate thus reduced.

In the next paragraph absenteeism is defined and classified.

2.2 DEFINITION OF ABSENTEEISM

According to Hunter (2010:195) absenteeism is unauthorised absence of employees from the workplace and is expressed as the percentage of workdays lost as a result of absenteeism.

Pierce and Gardner (2002:272) state that absenteeism occurs when employees habitually do not report to work when scheduled. Tardiness may be considered a form of absenteeism in that the employee reports to work late.

Absenteeism is any failure to report for work as scheduled or to stay at work as scheduled. The cause does not matter when counting someone absent. Absenteeism is expensive, costing an estimated $645 (R4708) per employee each year. Being absent from work may seem like a small matter to an employee. But if a manager needs 12 people in a unit to get the work done, and four of the 12 are absent most of the time, the work of the unit will decrease, or additional workers will have to be hired to provide a margin. Though some absences are justified, many are of the “three-day weekend” or “mental health days” variety. Many employees feel that such absences are acceptable. Such incidental
absence account for as much as 80 per cent of all absence and 33 per cent of lost workdays. For a company with 1600 employees who cost the employer an average of $50000 (R365000) a year, each (in compensation, benefits), incidental absences will incur about $16 million (R116.8 million) annually in direct costs. One study suggested that companies spend 15 per cent of their payroll on absenteeism each year (Mathis and Jackson, 2006:71).

According to Sutherland and Canwell (2004:1), absenteeism refers to chronic absence from work. In effect, this is deliberate absence. A business can calculate the level of absenteeism within its workforce (excluding ill-health and genuine absences) by using the following formula:

\[
\text{Absentee rate} = \frac{\text{number of staff absent} \times 100}{\text{staff total}}.
\]

Absenteeism can drastically affect the production and profitability of a business and may require a business to reschedule projects, miss deadlines, and ensure that any vital duties carried out by the absent individual are covered.

Another manifestation of absenteeism is presenteeism. According to D'Abade and Eddy (2007) presenteeism describes 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 argue that presenteeism also occurs when employees go to work but spend a portion of the workday engaging in personal business while on the job, such as e-mailing friends, paying personal bills, or making personal appointments. 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 behaviour. Munro (2007) states that presenteeism is intertwined with loss of productivity due to real health problems of employees, such as allergies, rheumatoid arthritis, chronic back pain, and so on. These health problems are not severe enough, so the employees report for duty but their productivity will be below par. Studies undertaken on absenteeism suggest that presenteeism causes greater loss to an organisation than the costs attributed to absenteeism.
According to Pierce and Gardner (2002:271) employees sometimes withdraw psychologically from the workplace. Psychological withdrawal is a mental state in which an employee is disengaged from the work environment. Psychologically withdrawn employees are physically present, but their minds are elsewhere. They do just enough to get by. Psychologically withdrawn employees are not interested in improving themselves or their job performance, or helping the organisation achieve its goals, nor do they care to socialise with their co-workers. Research has shown that employees who don’t think very much about their jobs are less likely to react to either good or bad features of the workplace (like supervision). Psychologically withdrawn workers would prefer to be absent, but cannot for fear of losing their job.

For purposes of this study, absenteeism was defined as failure of employees to report to work when they are scheduled to do so, deemed as unauthorised or unscheduled absence.

2.3 CLASSIFICATION OF ABSENCE

Mathis and Jackson (2006:71) maintain that employees can be absent from work for several reasons. Clearly, some absenteeism is inevitable because illness, death in the family, and other personal reasons for absence is unavoidable and understandable. Many employers have sick leave policies that allow employees a certain number of paid days each year for those types of involuntary absences. Grobler, Waenich, Carell, Elbert and Hatfield (2002:420) point out that sick leave is generally accrued by employees at a specific rate; for example one day per month from the first day of employment. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act, No 75 of 1997, contains the following in this regard:

- An employee is entitled to six weeks’ paid sick leave in a period of 36 months.
• During the first six months an employee is entitled to one day’s paid sick leave for every 26 days worked.

• An employer may require a medical certificate before paying an employee who is absent for more than two consecutive days or who is frequently absent.

However, some absenteeism is avoidable, or voluntary. Often, a relatively small number of individuals are responsible for a disproportionate share of the total absenteeism in an organisation. Many people see no real concern about being absent or late for work (Mathis & Jackson, 2006).

According to Nel (2004: 549) the three main categories of absence are the following:

• Sick absence – occurs when a person is absent due to a reported illness, whether genuine or not. The company policy will state at what stage a medical certificate is required.

• Authorised absence – occurs when the employee is absent for any reason other than illness, and it is accepted by management. Employees should be encouraged to seek permission beforehand if the situation allows for it.

• Unexcused absence – is considered as unacceptable and should not be tolerated. Progressive discipline is used to handle this problem.

Pierce and Gardner (2002:272) classify absenteeism under the following categories:

• Excused absence – those in which employees notify their employer in advance that they will not be at work on a given day, and the employer approves of the absence.

• Unexcused absences – when an employee, with no advance approval, simply fails to show up for work when scheduled.
• Voluntary absenteeism - when employees chooses not to go to work when they could have (they are not ill) and should have (they were expected).

• Involuntary absenteeism - when an employee is absent because of illness or factors out of the employee’s direct control (such as a car accident on the way to work).

Absent does not only mean not being at work. Absent also means:

• *Arriving late* (or poor timekeeping, is still absence as long as the employee is not at work).

• *Leaving early* (again, poor timekeeping, is still absent as the employee is not at work).

• *Extended tea or lunch breaks* (the employee is not at the workstation, and therefore absent).

• *Attending to private business during working hours* (the employee is at work, but is not attending to his/her duties in terms of the employment contract - and is therefore absent).

• *Extended toilet breaks* (same as extended lunch or tea breaks).

• *Feigned illness* (thus giving rise to unnecessary visits to the on-site clinic, or taking time off to "visit the doctor" - which employees often do not do, because they are not required to submit a medical certificate if they are absent for less than 2 days).

• *Undue length of time in fetching or carrying* (tools from the tool room, for example, or drawings from the drawing office).

• *Other unexplained absences* from the workstation or from the premises (The South African Labour guide, 2011).

From these definitions, it is clear that non-attendance such as vacation leave, military service, block release leave and suspension does not qualify as
absenteeism, as explained by Grobler, Warnich, Carell, Elbert and Hatfield (2002:420) in discussing paid time off.

In the following paragraph public holidays are discussed. Not attending on public holidays is normally not seen as absence although in some industries some employees may be required or scheduled to work on public holidays; thus failure to attend work under such circumstances may be deemed as absence. In terms of the Public Holidays Act, No 36 of 1994, a new schedule of public holidays came into effect from 01 January 1995. According to section 2 of the Act, days mentioned in the schedule shall be public holidays and whenever any of these public holidays fall on a Sunday, the following Monday shall be a public holiday.

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act, No 75 of 1997, lays down regulations and rules related to the provision and management of leave. It contains the following regarding public holidays: Workers must be paid for any public holiday that falls on a working day. Work on a public holiday is by agreement and paid at double the rate. A public holiday is exchangeable by agreement (Section 18). From the information presented above, employees are legally entitled to take a day off on public holidays unless they agree to attend under special arrangement by which they have to be re-reimbursed in accordance with the law.

Employees may receive full pay for a number of personal absences, such as attending a funeral, appearing as a witness in court, writing exams, playing a sport for a national team or moving house. These are normally specified in an absenteeism policy and regarded as authorised absence. An employee has to inform the manager or supervisor of such absence before it is required.

Sick leave pay provides income during personal or family illness. Sick leave should normally be taken only for illness; however, it is often used for personal reasons other than illness.
Leave of absence associated with the birth of a child is normally granted to all female workers. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act, No 75 of 1997 contains the following in this regard:

- A pregnant employee is entitled to four consecutive months maternity leave.
- A pregnant employee or employee nursing her child is not allowed to perform work that is hazardous to her or her child (Section 25-26).

As a response to fathers' need for leave when their children are born, many companies in South Africa have over years implemented a number of schemes in this regard. The view of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, No 75 of 1997, is as follows:

- Full-time employees are entitled to three days paid family responsibility leave on request, when the employee’s child is born or sick, or in an event of the death of the employee’s spouse or life partner, or the employee’s parent, adoptive parent, grandparent, child, adoptive child, grandchild or sibling.
- An employer may require reasonable proof of such an event (Section 27).

The focus of this study is on absenteeism in general, whether recorded as sick, authorised or unexcused. While all kinds of absenteeism can be abused, the purpose of the study is to uncover the real reasons or antecedents behind absenteeism so that appropriate corrective action can be taken.

2.4 ANTECEDENTS OF ABSENTEEISM

It is not easy to identify with confidence what the main reasons for absence are, either in general terms or in particular organisations, because research findings on the issue have tended to differ. Undoubtedly, the uncertainty stems in part
from the fact that employees are often unwilling to admit that they have been absent for reasons other than serious illness. However, it is also the case that there are no simple answers to the question, and that a variety of reasons may contribute to an individual employee’s being absent from work on a particular day (Taylor, 2008:409). A survey of 1336 employees undertaken by a research company, My Voice in 2001 (Taylor 2008), found that 56 per cent of employees confessed to taking between one and five “sickies” the year before the survey (i.e pretending to be ill when actually taking time off for other reasons). As many as 12 per cent said that they had taken more than five days off on the pretence of being ill. According to Taylor (2008), when they were asked what the real reasons were, the following were rated high:

Being tired or hung over: 33 per cent  
Stress: 27 per cent  
Hating the job: 15 per cent

According to Martin (2010:5) a number of sources suggest that absence from work can result from a number of factors that can be categorised under the following headings:

- **Job content and context factors**

These can include factors such as the design of the job, work output pressures, the stress levels associated with work, work group dynamics, management style, company procedures and policies, nature and type of employment contract (permanent or fixed/short term), and group/organisational norms with regard to attendance and job satisfaction.
• *Employee values*

The level of responsibility that the individual feels towards the job, customers, the work group, management, and the organisation. The personal values that an individual holds in relation to regular attendance under particular conditions (their personal work ethic).

• *Employee characteristics*

Factors such as age, education, family circumstances and background, and personality.

• *Pressure to attend work*

Factors such as economic and market conditions, company wage policies and incentive arrangements, company disciplinary and other absence management policies and practice, work group norms and dynamics, and level of organisational commitment.

• *Ability to attend work*

Factors such as illness (short or long-term, accidents at work or outside, family responsibilities and commitments, and transport difficulties.

According to Evans and Walters (2003:29) much of the research into absence focused on trying to find a single factor to explain it. By implication, if the single
factor causing absence from work could be identified, employers could tackle it through the implementation of appropriate policies.

Evans and Walters (2003:31) indicate that more recent research has tended to emphasise the complex nature of factors influencing absence and attendance, and mention in particular, research done by Nicholson (1977), Rhodes and Steers (1990), who present an integrated multi-factor model for the explanation of absenteeism. These models are presented and discussed below.

2.4.1 Integrated multiple-factor explanations of absence

Evans and Walters (2003:31) state that the implication of most research regarding absenteeism is that absence is avoidable as long as its exact cause could be pinned down and the appropriate policies applied. Yet this did not explain how one employee might have a good attendance record while another might have a poor one. They argued to take variations in the personal characteristics, attitudes, values and backgrounds of individuals have to be taken into account.

Nicholson’s model of attendance motivation and Rhodes and Steers model of employee attendance are discussed below.

2.4.1.1 Nicholson’s model of attendance motivation

One approach which does take into account factors influencing both absence and attendance is put forward by Nicholson (Evans & Walters, 2003:31) and is illustrated in Figure 2.1.
Figure 2.1: Nicholson’s model of attendance motivation (Evans & Walters, 2003)
According to Evans and Walters (2003) Nicholson starts from the not unreasonable assumption that attendance is normal behaviour, arguing that most people, most of the time, will normally attend regularly and that the search for causes of absence is a search for those factors that disturb the regularity of attendance. They further mention that whether people actually attend in a specific set of circumstances depends on a number of variables. The key variables are those that affect attachment and attendance motivation, each of which is influenced by a contextual factor. These factors are firstly, the personal characteristics of individuals, such as age or gender influence absence. For example, older workers are likely to take more time off through sickness. Secondly, orientations or attitudes to work differ according to occupational experience and background, reflected for example, in higher levels of absence among manual workers. Thirdly, the nature of jobs and the opportunities they provide for satisfaction and involvement vary as again reflected in the differences between manual and non-manual worker absence. A fourth influence arises out of the rules of the workplace which may be either strict or lenient on absence. A final influence is referred to as random and refers to domestic or travel difficulties which may affect the ability to attend. The result is an absence continuum ranging from unavoidable influences (A), which impact on frequency of absence, to avoidable influences (B), which impact on frequency of attendance (Evans and Walters 2003).

Another integrated model that explain absenteeism is that of Rhodes and Steers.

2.4.1.2 Rhodes and Steers’ model of employee attendance

Steers and Rhodes (1978), as quoted by Evans and Walters (2003:33), developed the process model of employee attendance which starts from the characteristics of the job, which, in turn, influence job satisfaction and motivation to attend. This model is presented in Figure 2.2.
Job satisfaction and motivation are in turn affected by personal characteristics which influence attendance. For example, old age affects the likelihood of sickness and higher educational attainments are more likely to lead to the pursuit of a career or profession with which lower absence levels are associated. The model also emphasises pressure on employees not to be absent. In times of economic uncertainty, for example, fear of losing one's job may result in pressure
not to be absent. Work group or peer pressure may either encourage absence or attendance according to the prevailing cultural norms. Loss of pay or an attendance bonus may also discourage absence. Finally the model recognises the ability to attend. Even for the most highly motivated employee, circumstances arise in which attendance is not possible. Genuine illness is one obvious example, as are family responsibilities and travel difficulties. The ability to attend is also influenced by the employee’s personal circumstances. For example, size of family is likely to increase constraints on ability to attend as is distance from home to work or the complexity of the journey undertaken. Absence patterns thus vary between individuals according to the particular influences on the behaviour. These models therefore stress the importance of understanding the prevailing influences on absence for each group of employees and applying the appropriate policies.

When comparing Nicholson’s model with Rhodes and Steer’s model, it is evident that there is some commonality between the models. Nicholson refers to domestic or travel difficulties as random variables which may affect the ability to attend. Rhodes and Steers recognise the ability to attend as a factor which influences absenteeism. Their view is that even for the most highly motivated employee, circumstances arise in which attendance is not possible.

However, the models differ in that Nicholson assumes that attendance is normal behaviour, arguing that most people, most of the time, are on automatic pilot to attend regularly and that the search for causes of absence is a search for those factors that disturb the regularity of attendance. In contrast, according to Rhodes and Steers, employee attendance starts from the characteristics of the job which in turn influence job satisfaction and motivation to attend. According to Rhodes and Steers job satisfaction and motivation are in turn affected by personal characteristics which influence attendance.
Nicolson’s argument is based on variables that affect attachment and attendance motivation, each of which is influenced by a contextual factor, namely personal characteristics, attitudes to work and the ability to attend.

Nicholson describes a continuum ranging from unavoidable influences (A) which impact on frequency of absence, to avoidable influences (B) which impact on frequency of attendance.

Rhodes and Steers’ model emphasises pressure on employees not to be absent and work group or peer pressure which either encourage absence or attendance.

2.4.2 Factors impacting absenteeism

Factors impacting on absenteeism can be categorised according to personal, job and organisational factors, and personal circumstances. These factors are presented below.

2.4.2.1 Personal factors

- **Personal factors refer to factors such as age and gender.**

Evans and Walters (2003:37) argue that there is general agreement from the research that younger people tend to have more frequent short spells of absence, whereas older people have fewer short spells but are absent longer in each spell, especially after the age of 50. Research has suggested proneness to absence declines as people get older. However, older workers tend to have longer periods of illness and tend to take fewer absences of short, unauthorised variety than younger employees (Taylor, 2008:411). Barnby (1999) as quoted by Evans and Walters (2003) indicates that an analysis of the data generated by the United Kingdom (UK) government’s General Household Surveys and Labour Force
Surveys reveal patterns of absence by age. Male absence is constant at a little over 2 per cent of time lost up to age 40 and increases thereafter, peaking at about 7.5 per cent for 60 to 64 year olds. Female absence increases from around 3 per cent to about 4 per cent from entry into the job market as school leavers to early thirties, stabilises at this level until their early forties, then rises steadily to peak at 7 per cent at age 60. After normal retirement age, the absence rate falls for both genders. It is suggested that this is due to a “sorting effect” as only those employees in better health tend to remain at work. Age is, therefore, an important factor in absence, especially in the pattern of absence that consists of frequent short spells with younger employees which is often seen as more disruptive.

Robbins, Millet and Waters (2004:40) point out that most studies show an inverse relationship between age and absenteeism, but close examination finds that the age-absence relationship is partially a function of whether the absences avoidable or unavoidable. In general, older employees have higher rates of unavoidable absence, probably due to the poorer health associated with ageing and longer recovery period that older employees need when injured or ill.

In discussing the influence of gender, Robbins, Millet and Waters (2004:42) state that research indicates that women have higher absenteeism rates than men do. The most logical explanation for this finding is that the research was conducted in North America, where the culture has historically placed home and family responsibilities on the women. When a child is ill or someone needs to stay home to wait for the plumber it has been the woman who has traditionally taken time off from work.

- Marital Status
Robbins, Millet and Waters (2004:43) further point out that research indicates that married employees have fewer absences and are more satisfied with their jobs than unmarried co-workers. Marriage imposes increased responsibilities that may make a steady job more valuable and important.

- **Family circumstances and background**

According to Taylor (2005:321) there is evidence that attitudes and orientation towards work are correlated with social class and family background. Those who have had instilled in them a strong work ethic tend to also have a pronounced sense of family responsibility and a desire to do their jobs well. Such people tend to have excellent attendance rates and often come into work when in truth they are too ill to do so.

- **Personality**

Absence research has indicated that a relatively high proportion of absence within a particular workforce can be attributed to a relatively small proportion of the total workforce. It has been found that up to half of all absence can be accounted for by as little as five per cent to ten per cent of the workforce. Absence research has endeavoured to investigate this phenomenon by attempting to identify personality factors that might lead an individual to become “absence prone”. General agreement has emerged that there are five important personality traits which are predictors of job performance. These are: introversion/extroversion, emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. In relation to the links between these personality factors and absence, Judge (1997) (in Evans & Walters, 2003) indicate that extraversion was related to higher absence rates, and conscientiousness to lower absence rates.
Taylor (2008:410) reveals that a number of authors have cited research that suggests some people are more prone to absence than others throughout their working lives. He further mentions that a presence of a poor history of attendance was one of the few factors that could be used to predict future absence rates with any confidence. Huczynski and Fitpatrick (1989), as quoted by Taylor (2008), suggest that some five per cent to ten per cent of individuals in any work group usually account for around 50 per cent of all absence. They go on to point out that studies have consistently shown particular personality types to be more absence prone than others. It would seem that there is more likelihood that individuals who are tense, anxious and emotionally less stable will be absent more often than colleagues who exhibit traits of introversion and stability.

- *The level of responsibility that the individual feels towards the family*

Home circumstances may also determine the importance of the economic incentive to come to work. It is often the case that one member of a household earns a great deal more than the others. The second or third income, while useful, is not, therefore essential, and reduces the importance of the work to members concerned. Because there is less incentive for employees in these categories to earn more, they are less likely to be deterred from being absent by the prospect of losing pay or promotion opportunities.

In the following paragraph the impact of job factors on absenteeism is discussed.

2.4.2.2 Job factors

Job factors refer to the characteristics of the job which influence absenteeism and refer to aspects such as job context, job content and shift work.
• **Withdrawal**

Pierce and Gardner (2002:271) define withdrawal as the physical and psychological avoidance of employees of their workplace. Employees will avoid their workplace when they are dissatisfied with one or more aspects of the organisation. At first they might try to change the work feature that is causing dissatisfaction. If attempts to change the work environment fail, then they begin to withdraw from it. Employees withdraw from the workplace through physical withdrawal, the act of physically removing oneself from the work environment through such behaviours as absenteeism. Employees engage in physical withdrawal to prevent themselves from experiencing the negative aspects of their work environments. If they are not at work, they don’t experience the offensive situation and thus reduce or postpone their feelings of distress. When employees cannot find acceptable alternative employment, they may become habitually absent, within the limits of company policy.

When employees are dissatisfied with their jobs, they try to find ways of reducing their exposure to them. That is, they stay away from their jobs - a phenomenon known as employee withdrawal. Absenteeism is one of the main forms of employee withdrawal. By not showing up for work, people may be expressing their dissatisfaction with their jobs or attempting to escape from the unpleasant aspects which they may be experiencing. Dissatisfaction with one’s job is likely to be just one of many factors influencing people’s decisions to report or not report to work. For example, even someone who really dislikes her job may not be absent if she believes her presence is necessary to complete an important project. However, another employee might dislike his job so much that he will stay away from work without permission without showing any concern over how the company will be affected. Thus, although is not a perfectly reliable reaction to job dissatisfaction, absenteeism is one of its most important consequences (Greenberg & Baron, 2003:156).
• **Job content and job context**

In discussing the job-person match, Nel (2004:549) maintains that if an employee’s personality, ability, and skills are not congruent with the job requirements, the person becomes either bored or stressed, and withdraws from the situation by being absent. If there is a good match between the job characteristics and those of the employee, the person will accept responsibility and stay committed to her/his job.

Pierce and Gardner (2002:591) reveal research findings which suggest that employees experience more job satisfaction when they work in complex jobs. Positive relationships are also found between job complexity and motivation and performance, although not as strong as the job design-job satisfaction relationship. In addition, absenteeism is generally less common in complex jobs. Employees, who experience their work as meaningful, who have a sense of responsibility for their work outcomes, and who possess knowledge of the results of their work are likely to be intrinsically motivated, job satisfied, perform quality work, and avoid absenteeism.

Van Aswegen (2009:49) assert that, because of advances in technology, more and more jobs are being created. This has an impact on how jobs are designed. For a given job, job design means identifying and organising tasks, duties and responsibilities that have to be carried out, and the methods used in carrying them out. The job design also shows how the job relates to other work in an organisation. The effect on employees of doing a certain job should also be considered. Job design is important as it can influence how a person performs in certain jobs, especially as the motivation of employees can make a difference in how well or badly they do the job. A good job design will lead to lower employee absenteeism.
• **Shift work**

Cooper and Robertson (2001:307) perceive attendance and tardiness as potential negative consequences of shift work. While most alternative work schedules are designed with the intent of reducing withdrawal behaviours of employees, night shift work, particularly rotating schedules, may result in increased absenteeism and tardiness. Jamal’s research (1990), as quoted by Cooper and Robertson (2001), reports that nurses on rotating shifts have higher absenteeism as compared to nurses on non-rotating shifts. The increase in withdrawal behaviours of employees may be the result of physical problems and/or psychological problems. If an individual is apathetic about an upcoming night shift, he/she may choose to call in sick or be late in reporting to work. Furthermore if an individual is experiencing fatigue due to night shift work, the individual may call in sick to an upcoming day shift.

Research by Nicholson, Jackson and Howes (1978) as quoted by Cooper and Robertson (2001) demonstrated a relationship between shift workers’ absence and day of the week: absences are higher for shift workers on days of the week that precede off-days. This might have implications for both night shift and evening shift workers.

• **Stress**

Evans and Walters (2003:44) identified a number of causes of stress at work:

- **Conditions in which a job is performed.** Poor working conditions, physical dangers, even distractions created in an open-plan office, all cause stress. Research has shown that factories that have poor standards of housekeeping or poorly equipped or maintained machinery, or offices
which are drably furnished, poorly lit or poorly heated, result in more absence.

- Work overload or under load (including repetitive work or periods of low activity, causing boredom between periods of high activity).

- Role ambiguity (lack of clarity about what is expected) and role conflict (where the expectations are clear, but they conflict with each other). Role conflict can arise where there is conflict between work demands and other non-work roles, such as the family.

- Career development where there are two aspects: over promotion, associated with difficulties in coping, and under promotion, associated with feelings of lack of status or recognition and stifled career ambitions.

According to Thomas and Hersen (2002:437), work stress is the perceived failure to cope with job demands, a perception that is often expressed as anxiety or tension. Stressors are environmental characteristics that may stimulate feelings of stress. They further state that research evidence reveals that both stress and stressors, usually measured via questionnaires, are associated with elevated absence. However, according to Johns, both null findings and counterintuitive signs suggest that the stress-absence connection is a complicated one. This complication stems from the fact that several implicit and potentially contradictory models underlie the connection, a point generally ignored in the typical research study in this domain. These include the following:

- A medical model

In the medical model, stress is implicated in infectious disease, pregnancy complications, and cardiovascular disease. The infectious disease connection is especially well established, in that stress is associated with depressed immune
system functioning as well as related disease such as upper respiratory problems. Medical reasons are often given as reasons for absence.

- **An escape model**

In the escape model, absenteeism is framed as a means of simply removing oneself from stressful organisational conditions. Medical mediation may or may not be implied. By far, stress-provoking job designs and role relationships have been studied the most. High job demands, low control, and role complications sometimes have been associated with elevated absence, but at the same time, finding many null and some reversed-sign associations have placed some doubt on the findings. This concept is similar to ‘withdrawal’ which was discussed earlier in this section.

- **An off-job model**

The off-job model points out that non-work demands can cause stressful role conflict that result in absenteeism. Although this topic has not been studied very much, research does show that family-work conflicts mediate the relationship between elder care responsibilities and self-reported absenteeism.

- **The restorative model**

The restorative model advances the idea that absenteeism may be a more positive, proactive reaction to stress, rather than passive escape or medical surrender. Although there is almost no research probing this idea, it would account for some of the anomalies in stress-absence research because it implies that absence can sometimes reduce stress.
Statistics show that in 2009, absenteeism due to stress increased slightly in companies in South Africa, compared to 2008. This is in line with indications that the country was experiencing an economic downturn. From January to June 2009, 3.4 per cent of all sick leave incidents were due to psychological illness such as stress, depression and anxiety. In the same period in 2008, 3.1 per cent of all sick absenteeism incidents were related to stress.

With the economic situation worsening in the country, many organisations (especially in the industrial sector) cut back on staff. Employees fear that they will lose their jobs and stress takes its toll, both financially and emotionally (Corporate Absenteeism Management Solutions, 2010).

Aamodt and Raynes (2001:37) see burnout as the state of being overwhelmed by stress, which includes workers who become emotionally exhausted and no longer feel they have a positive impact on other people or their job. People who feel burnout have a lack of energy and are filled with frustration and tension. Emotional symptoms of burnout include dreading coming to work each day (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993), as quoted by Aamodt and Raynes (2001:37). Behavioural signs may include cynicism towards co-workers, clients, and the organisation. People who are burnt out display detachment towards people with whom they work. Eventually, these burn out people may become depressed and respond through absenteeism, turnover and lower performance.

In the following paragraph organisational factors are discussed as an antecedent of absenteeism.
2.4.2.3 Organisational factors

Organisational factors refer to factors linked to the organisation, including management style, company policy, work group norms and economic and market conditions affecting the organisation.

Management style

Evans and Walters (2003:45) mention a number of studies which have identified links between the style of first-line supervisors and absence behaviour in work groups. For example, employees who feel more able to discuss their problems with their supervisor have been found to be absent less than those who felt unable to do so.

- Company procedure and policies

Evans and Walters (2003:48) assert that in current literature, organisational absenteeism policies and practices are conventionally viewed as part of the cure for absenteeism, and not its cause. By implication, the causes of absenteeism are considered as the result of decisions consciously or unconsciously made by management, and therefore lie within their power to alter. Research suggests that traditional, fragmented job roles involving routine and repetitive tasks, a minimum of variety and a lack of opportunities to learn new skills tend to encourage higher absence levels. It is therefore open to management to redesign the tasks to be undertaken by flexible, self-managing teams. Research suggests that such jobs tend to encourage higher attendance levels.
In discussing the links between an organisation’s sick pay policies and levels of absence, Evans and Walters (2003:49) state that the general conclusion from Britain and other countries is that, where more generous sickness benefits are provided, absence levels tend to rise. This has been found both for where the costs of sickness benefits are met mainly by the state or where they are met through the employer’s occupational sick pay schemes. Research has also shown that employees in organisations not covered by occupational sick pay – such as those with short service or on temporary contracts – have lower levels of absence than employees who are covered by such schemes. A related issue is the emergence of cultural expectations to the effect that a certain amount of paid sick leave is an entitlement to be taken, rather like paid holiday entitlement.

- **The organisation**

In discussing the effects of organisational size, Pierce and Gardner (2002:489) state that evidence to date indicates that size appears to increase withdrawal behaviour, with greater turnover and absenteeism associated with larger social systems. The research conducted to date also suggests that job dissatisfaction is higher for people working in large social systems. Organisational behaviour scholars reason that large social systems lead to low cohesiveness, poor communication, and division of labour which in turn cause job dissatisfaction. This contributes to absenteeism, turnover, and labour strife, each of which negatively impacts worker and firm productivity.

- **Work group norms and dynamics**

Huczynski and Fitpatrick (1989) as quoted by Taylor (2008), mention that personal attitudes towards work and absence are also shaped by the prevailing values and norms of the work group. Those who have hitherto been absent
relatively seldom may become poor attenders if they join a group of employees who share an “absence culture”. Conversely, in groups that display a strong work ethic, colleagues are less likely to be absent, for fear of letting down fellow employees or attracting their disapproval.

The working conditions also relate to co-worker relationships. Frequently employees do not go to work because they are fearful of or angry with another employee. These employees usually report they just could not deal with "so and so" today, so they call in ill. Companies, that adopt policies and values that promote employee respect, professionalism and promote an internal conflict resolution procedure reduce employee stress. A reduction in stress reduces absenteeism (Vikesland, 2007).

According to Evans and Walters (2003:46) absence levels may be associated with the process of both formal and informal organisational socialisation. The formal process of socialisation involves the communication of the organisation’s rules and standards of conduct, reinforced by the subsequent behaviour of those authorised to enforce them. People fairly quickly get to understand whether the rules operate in practice or whether they are just part of management rhetoric and can effectively be ignored. Informal socialisation occurs where new employees on arrival within a work group, fairly quickly learn what behaviour is appropriate. In the case of absence, they learn by observation the absence behaviours of the group and their consequences in terms of any action taken by superiors. Because most people want to be accepted by the group of which they are a part, they tend to conform to the established norms: groups will often bring a range of pressures to bear to ensure that behavioural norms are enforced. Norms can be of various types but probably the most common related to standards of performance of which absence is a part. Norms arise therefore out of formal rules established by management and the rigour with which
management enforces them on the one hand and the informal rules established by work groups on the other hand.

According to Aamodt and Raynes (2001:352) personal problems with other employees or with management constitute another reason for wanting to avoid work. If the employees feel they are not liked or will be verbally abused, they will want to avoid dealing with their fellow employees or supervisor.

If a permissive absence culture exists within an organisation, employees will consider sick leave as a benefit that needs to be utilised, or it will be lost. On the other hand, if unnecessary absence is frowned upon by either management or the co-workers, the employee will think twice before abusing sick leave (Nel, 2004:549).

- **Factors impacting on the organisation, such as economic and market conditions**

Research provides some evidence that employees' propensity to attend or take time off is related to their perception of the state of the job market. During times of economic boom, relatively lower levels of unemployment and plentiful job vacancies, people feel more secure in their jobs or more confident of their ability to find another one and are more prepared to take time off. Conversely, in times of recession, higher unemployment and less job security, the reverse is true and absence levels tend to fall (Evans & Walters, 2003:50). Huczynski and Fitzpatrick (1984:65) suggest, the correlation could reflect a tendency on the part of managers to clamp down on absence when profit margins are particularly tight. By contrast, absence appears to rise during economic recessions among individuals under notice of redundancy (Taylor, 2008:421).
Company wage policies and incentive arrangements

According to Robbins, Millet and Waters (2004:55) most organisations provide their salaried employees with paid sick leave as part of employee’s benefit programme. But organisations with paid sick leave programmes experience almost twice the absenteeism of organisations without such programmes. The reality is that sick leave programmes reinforce the wrong behaviour – absence from work. When employees receive ten paid sick days a year, they will usually use up all ten days, regardless of whether they are sick.

In the following paragraph personal circumstance are discussed as a factor influencing absenteeism. Personal circumstances refer to factors influenced by the social circumstances and the environment in which the employee lives.

2.4.2.4 Personal circumstances

Personal circumstances refer to factors associated with the employee, which influence absenteeism like job satisfaction, illness, substance abuse and family responsibility.

Job satisfaction

Aldag and Kuzuhara (2002:119) explain that research shows that satisfaction and absenteeism are negatively related but that the association is not as strong as we might expect. In fact, a meta-analysis of studies that examined the relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism found that just over two per cent of the variance in satisfaction is somehow associated with variance in absenteeism. However, satisfaction may play a larger role in determining absenteeism than
such figures indicate. This is because, as just indicated, much absenteeism is unavoidable due to things such as illness and family emergencies. If the relationship of satisfaction to avoidable absenteeism could be assessed, it would probably be considerable.

In discussing the causes of absenteeism, Thomas and Hersen (2002) assert that job satisfaction is an important component of general life satisfaction and is a prominent contributor to mental health. The idea that attitudes towards the job might affect attendance perhaps constitutes the oldest scientific model of absence causation, and it is still dominant among industrial-organisational psychologists. The essence of this model is that absenteeism is assumed to be a manifestation of withdrawal from dissatisfying aspects of the job.

Traditionally, job satisfaction has been considered to be influenced by situational factors such as compensation, job design, and human relations practices. Research has shown that a broad personality construct called core self-evaluation is reliably related to job satisfaction (Thomas & Hersen, 2002:443). In research, individuals who were more satisfied reported higher self-esteem and self-efficacy, exhibited higher internal control, and were lower in neuroticism. Two factors, doing interesting work and viewing one’s job as complex and challenging have been implicated in the association between personality and job satisfaction. Satisfaction with the content of the work is the best facet predictor of absence. Thus it is certainly feasible that some variance in absence is due to personality, mediated by satisfaction. In fact, job satisfaction has been shown to mediate the relationship between personality characteristics and propensity to quit, a withdrawal variable often associated with absenteeism (Thomas & Hersen, 2002:443).
• *The personal values that an individual holds in relation to regular attendance under particular conditions (their personal work ethic).*

Employees with a strong work ethic tend to have a pronounced sense of family responsibility and a desire to do their jobs well. Such people tend to have excellent attendance rates and often come into work when, in truth, they are too ill to do so (Taylor, 2008:411).

• *Met expectation*

Nel (2004) mentions that new employees enter an organisation with expectations relating to the opportunities to apply their skills and abilities, equal treatment, receiving respect, or enjoying satisfactory working conditions. If the employee’s expectations are not met, the employee could abuse sick leave as a mechanism to withdraw temporarily from the job or the job situation.

• *Illness*

According to Evans and Walters (2003:51) the existence of genuine illness as a cause seems obvious, yet it is sometimes neglected in writings on the subject which tend to imply that the problem of absenteeism can be solved totally through the application of the appropriate policies. Although it is impossible to be certain about the extent to which genuine illness features in total absence statistics, 70 per cent of respondents to an absence survey considered that genuine illness was the major contributor to time lost among manual workers, and 80 per cent thought this to be the case with non-manual workers. It has been estimated that genuine illness accounts for between a half and two thirds of all absence. Genuine sickness absence must be seen as a major cause of days lost, but one
which more and more organisations are seeking to tackle through the rapid rise in employee assistance programmes, counselling and other initiatives to promote better health awareness.

- Depression

Affective disorders, including depression and neurosis, have been implicated consistently in the occurrence of absenteeism. Furthermore, it is possible that some reports of common minor illnesses, are, in fact, disguising depression. Research on a host of illness-related and environmental constraints on attendance found that employees were least likely to endorse the legitimacy of depression. The spectre of depression also runs through the other health-related causes of absence (Thomas & Hersen, 2002:443).

- Substance abuse

As stress levels rise and anger increases, so often does the abuse of drugs and alcohol. Most incidents of domestic violence and other types of violence occur after an individual has been drinking and/or using drugs. This doesn't excuse the violator's behaviour, but it does indicate the relationship between drugs, alcohol, anger and rage. Of those violent events that are carried out by employees, many are by employees who have abused drugs and alcohol (Aamodt & Raynes 2001:37).

According to Flannes and Levin (2001:212) problems involving substance abuse are frequently observed in all work groups and industries. They involve issues with drugs or alcohol or both. Substance abuse problems can involve illegal drugs and prescription drugs. The team member with a substance abuse issue
may display the problem in overt ways (for example, alcohol on the breath coupled with slurred speech and poor performance) or in more subtle ways (for example, attendance problems or lack of punctuality on project work). The following behaviours are described as indicators of abuse:

- On-going substance abuse, regardless of the amount or the type, may lead to a failure to meet obligations at home, school, or work. Problems in the work setting can include issues with attendance, “on the job absenteeism” (that is, extended breaks, long lunch hours), increased accident rates, missed deadlines, mistakes as a result of poor concentration, excessive use of sick days, decrees of personal responsibility and truthfulness and interpersonal problems with co-workers.

- On-going abuse of the substance in a pattern that causes significant interpersonal problems or social problems for the individual, either at home or in the work setting. Substance abuse can be viewed as a process (some professionals prefer to term “illness”) that is progressive in nature, with the first steps often involving episodic intoxication or abuse followed by dependence and possible withdrawal risks.

- Accidents at work or outside

Reddy (2004:53) believes accidents are also a cause of absenteeism. Due to defective arrangements in industries, lack of skill and training of workers, accidents generally occur. On such occasions a worker remains absent from his work.

Similarly Currie (2006:226) refers to accidents at work which may invoke a variety of recollections ranging from those of our own individual experiences of witnessing or being personally involved in minor accidents or to those major incidents that remain in our minds such as large factory fires. Explanations of accidents are many and varied and they include the following:
- Environmental causes – the working environment is extremely important, especially in industries that are hazardous. While the current high level of safety consciousness has resulted in fewer accidents, such industries are still regarded as high risk. Industries which are less hazardous by nature have higher incidences of minor accidents. With many people, environmental causes of accidents are thought of as “factory floor” phenomena, but the point has to be made that an office environment, with illegal wires laid across the floor, faulty electrical fittings and insufficient working space, can be a dangerous place.

- Behavioural causes – Particular aspects of social learning are responsible for accidents at work. This refers to learning that has not been developed through formal education or training, but picked up from copying the behaviour of others, conformity to norms and through trial and error. A new employee, for example, may notice that in order to achieve particular productivity levels which carry extra pay, some workers breach health and safety regulations, by removing machine guards or engaging in other unsafe practices, which enable them to reach bonus figures. Also, people experiencing stress undergo changes in behaviour. When they are worried about their marriage, home and family, job security and career prospects, they are thinking about those things when they should be concentrating on what they are doing. It has long been known that “daydreaming” can be a cause of accidents at work.

- Physiological causes – There are several physiological causes of accidents. Poor eyesight, colour blindness, poor hearing, a limited sense of smell and other physiological problems can cause slow reactions to situations and might turn a prospective “near miss” into an accident. Not everyone is fit and healthy, and managers and supervisors should be
aware of their staff’s state of health and fitness, in relation to the nature of the work that they are assigned.

- Non-accidental health problems – Not all health and safety problems are accident related. When we think of accidents we think of events that cause physical injuries or even death. Serious damage to health, however, can be caused in the workplace by inhaling noxious gases or ingesting certain substances which can be caused by a failure to use safety equipment, or alternatively caused by carelessness, incorrect storage or faults in production machinery and equipment.

- **Family responsibilities and commitments**

One factor which contributes to gender differences in absence statistics relates to responsibilities for the family – dependent children and elderly relatives may affect the ability of women to attend work and a proportion of male absence can be attributed to this factor also. Research has shown that up to 15 per cent of all people at work are carers, rising to a quarter in the 45 to 64 age group (Evans, 1998 as quoted by Evans and Walters, 2003). Research also indicates that absence rates increase with family size, but decline as the age of dependent children increases. The overall absence statistics for women show that absence rates also decline as they get older. This provides fairly strong evidence in support of the view that family responsibilities are significant causes of absence. Moreover that view is supported by the opinions often expressed by managers in absence surveys. In the Industrial Society’s (1997) (in Evans & Walters, 2003) survey, more than half of the managers identified sickness in the family, childcare problems and other domestic responsibilities as significant causes of absence, placing it third in causes after colds and flu and stress).
According to Taylor (2008) family responsibilities are important “hidden” causes of absence as such obligations often produce split loyalties for employees who otherwise exhibit a robust attachment to their jobs or possess a strong work ethic. This is the main reason cited in the literature for the tendency for younger women to have relatively high absence rates, because it is they who are most likely to take time off to care for sick children or elderly relatives.

- **Transport difficulties**

Transportation difficulties can affect the propensity to take days off work. The implication is that people, who live some distance from their place of work, or have to undertake a difficult journey every morning, are more likely to opt for a day away from work than those whose travel-to-work arrangements are less disagreeable. In such cases it is not dislike of the job that deters people from making the effort to come to work, but the unpleasantness of commuting. Studies have found that it is not just the length of the journey that is off-putting, but that its complexity and cost are also important factors (Taylor, 2008:411).

Evans and Walters (2003:52) also reveal that a number of studies have shown that transport and travel difficulties can affect people’s ability to attend work even if they are motivated to do so. Associated factors include the length of the journey to work, weather conditions, traffic congestion, and the standard of public transport services. Studies have tended to show that the longer the journey – especially exacerbated by bad weather or traffic congestion – the greater the likelihood that people will give up or not even attempt it.
To summarise, then, the theoretical overview so far has revealed the following potential antecedents of absenteeism:

- **Personal factors**
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Marital Status
  - Family circumstances and background
  - Personality
  - The level of responsibility that the individual feels towards the family

- **Job factors**
  - Withdrawal
  - Job content and job context
  - Shift work
  - Stress

- **Organisational factors**
  - Management style
  - Company procedures and absence policies
  - The organisation
  - Work group norms and dynamics
  - Factors such as economic and market conditions that impact on the organisation
  - Company wage policies and incentive arrangements
• Personal circumstances
  Job satisfaction
  Personal values
  Met expectations
  Illness
  Depression
  Substance abuse
  Accidents at work or outside
  Family responsibilities and commitments
  Transport difficulties

2.4.3 Results from the interviews

Interviews were conducted with an HR Consultant, HR Manager and Line Managers from the Body Shop, Final Assembly and Paint Shop at a motor manufacturing organisation to get their perceptions of the impact and antecedents of absenteeism in the organisation. Interviewees were selected randomly due to availability and shift work. Interviewees were interviewed telephonically or sent questions via-email to which they responded. In this section their opinions about the practical impact of absenteeism on the company are discussed, while the perceived antecedents of absenteeism are discussed in the preceding section.
2.4.3.1 Human resource management

The following questions were posed to the HR consultant and the HR Manager in the HR department. The answers received are included after each question.

Question 1 (HR Consultant)

In your opinion what would you say are the main causes or reasons leading to employee absenteeism at this company?

Answers obtained

- Alcohol and drugs are some of the catalysts and causes of absenteeism, which does not only affect our company but many other companies or industries.

- The most problematic issue about absenteeism is that most employees take off a day or two, mostly on Monday and Fridays. Employees will go to a doctor and claim that they are ill and a doctor will not be able to tell whether an employee is genuinely or just pretending to be ill.

Question 2 (HR Consultant)

How does employee absenteeism affect your organisation?

Answers obtained

- Absenteeism affects the company in the ability to archive volume and quality targets. With high absenteeism productivity drops and the company cannot meet its objectives.
• The other problem is that because employees bring sick certificates, they have to be paid even if they did not work which is costly to the company.

Question 1 (HR Manager)
In your opinion what would you say are the main causes or reasons leading to employee absenteeism?

Answers obtained
• Absenteeism is divided into two categories. The first one is people are absent because they are ill. Statistics show that most people who are ill generally take a longer period of sick leave, about three days or more.
• The second one is opportunistic absenteeism. With opportunistic absence employees tend to take one to two days leave. Statistics also show that the top three causes of sick leave noted on these sick notes are respiratory, muscular skeletal and stomach problems. The problem found with these types of illnesses is that the employee tells the doctor what is wrong during the diagnosis process rather than the doctor trying to diagnose the illness.

Question 2 (HR Manager)
How does employee absenteeism affect your organisation?

Answers obtained
• Absenteeism is divided into authorised and unauthorised. Although some absence is authorised, all absence is costly to the company. For the period of January to June calculations of authorised absence have amounted to over R 7 million, whereas unauthorised absence cost over R 14 million.
The other problem related to absence is that the company has to pay Direct Cost as employees are paid for leave even if they were absent.

Lastly the Indirect Costs associated with having to reorganise the production line to cater for absenteeism have to be considered. Furthermore, re-arranging the line means the line might have to run slower leading to production losses and reduced quality.

It is evident from the answers received, that alcohol abuse is a problem in the organisation, and that is it assumed many people abuse the sick-leave system. This results in organisational ineffectiveness and additional and unnecessary costs. It is also acknowledged that people do get sick and do not always feign illness. Reasons for absenteeism given are respiratory, muscular skeletal and stomach problems, but these issues are not always confirmed by medical examination.

2.4.3.2 Production Management

The following questions were posed to the Line Managers in the Production department. The answers received are included after each question.

Question 1(Line Manager, Body Shop)

In your opinion what would you say are the main causes or reasons leading to employee absenteeism?

Answers obtained

• Most employees know and understand the company policy, thus abuse it. For instance most employees view Allocated Sick Leave as per the Absence
Policy as part of their annual leave. Thus, most employees will use all the allocated sick leave days as they feel these are days due to them and if they do not use them they lose them. So they operate within the boundaries of the Absence Policy while still getting paid their salaries.

- Due to high demand for vehicles, employees are required to work long hours and including weekends. Long working hours lead to line workers being fatigued, thus taking a day or two off to recover and break the cycle of long hours. In other instance due to fatigue, some employees might have a lower resistance and fall ill.

- Family responsibility leave is seen as another problem as employees also view this as days due to them, thus if not used will be lost. Therefore employees will claim these days on Mondays or Fridays as an excuse for family responsibility. Also due to long hours some employees see Family Responsibility as an opportunity to spend time with their families irrespective of whether the request for leave being genuine or not.

Question 2 (Line Manager, Body Shop)

How does employee absenteeism affect your organisation?

Answers obtained

- Increasing absenteeism, especially when it gets to between four and five per cent puts a heavy burden on the team.

- High absenteeism affects quality and productivity as during high absenteeism the team might have to be reshuffled, thus putting people in unfamiliar positions with consequences for quality. Furthermore, Group Leaders might have to fill in for absent employees, meaning that their function is compromised or taken over by the Supervisor. This means the Supervisors have to do their own work and that of the Group Leader. In extreme cases of
absenteeism a decision might be taken to slow down the line to ensure quality, which leads to reduced productivity.

- High absenteeism demoralises employees who are at work. This leads to those employees who are at work also taking time off from work. Absenteeism further makes it difficult to cross train employees within a team, due to lack of flexibility.

Question 1 (Line Manager Final Assembly)

In your opinion what would you say are the main causes or reasons leading to employee absenteeism?

Answers obtained

- The working environment can be one of the causes of absenteeism; for instance the temperature of the workshop can be as low as six degrees Celsius. Due to low temperatures some employees may be susceptible to illness like flu and have to book off sick.

- Customs also play a role as in some communities it is the norm that a group of people will hold social gatherings every weekend where there will be a lot of alcohol intake throughout the weekend till late on Sunday. Hence some employees might not feel well enough to go to work on Mondays.

Question 2 (Line Manager Final Assembly)

How does employee absenteeism affect your organisation?

Answers obtained

- A person being absent leads to a change point as their position has to be filled. This means placing a person who is trained to do the job but may not be
able to operate at the level of the person normally assigned to the post. Thus the productivity and quality might be affected and result in group leaders having to check the quality of the output. In some instances the line speed might be reduced to minimise quality defects thus leading to production losses.

- Due to regular absenteeism there is an allowance of 2 per cent in additional labour to cater for absence. The problem is absenteeism, which surpasses the absence allowance, puts an extra load on the rest of the team and if extreme may even lead to a line closure.

Question 1 (Line Manager Paint Shop)

In your opinion what would you say are the main causes or reasons leading to employee absenteeism?

Answers obtained

- Absenteeism occurs for a variety of reasons. The most common one is employees who are ill, then take sick leave as a result of being ill.

- Employees also take off work due to personal reasons like family responsibility or having to attend to private activity. The problem is some employees use sick leave to attend to private activity. In some cases employees may for instance request leave for Friday. If that leave is refused due to operational requirement. That is, high absenteeism rate at the time of the leave request, an employee will take sick leave for that day.

- Most employees take sick leave as a means of paid leave. This is because most employees view sick leave as days due to them as they get paid full pay even if they book of sick and do not get reimbursed for not booking of sick.
Question 2 (Line Manager Paint Shop)

How does employee absenteeism affect your organisation?

Answers obtained

- Absenteeism affects us in that when people are not at work we have to make plans to rearrange the work force to cover the gaps. In some cases this results in group leaders having to work on the line, meaning their job function is compromised, that is quality checks.

- In order to be prepared for absenteeism, cross-training is an important aspect of change point management. However high absenteeism affects our ability to send people on training, thus creating a domino effect to the problem.

It is evident from the answers received, that from a production point of view absenteeism is a difficult problem as one cannot plan for it. It is not feasible to have a backup for every single employee within the production environment. In most case management will only find out moments away from the start of a shift that an employee would be absent, thus leaving no time to prepare or rearrange the teams which may result in production losses.

Absenteeism has an impact on production due to manpower limitations where the number of employees absent is so high that there would not be enough people to cover absent employees. In such a situation group leaders would be expected to cover absent employees, meaning that supervisors would have to cover group leaders. This results in other administrative work falling behind.

Furthermore, high absenteeism puts additional pressure on employees who are at work. These employees may feel that if others can be absent and so can they. This results in a culture of absenteeism within the whole group, especially when
the consequences of absenteeism are not seen immediately by fellow employees. It seems that absenteeism is especially negative in a team context, where members are interdependent. Main reasons for absenteeism are seen as a ‘use it or lose it’ mentality and the demanding working environment in the manufacturing industry. Sick-leave is available to people who are genuinely ill, but factors such as withdrawal behaviour, alcohol abuse and fatigue contribute to high absenteeism.

2.5 THE IMPACT OF ABSENTEEISM WITH SPECIFIC EMPHASIS ON AN ORGANISATION THAT COMPETES IN A GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT.

At the job level, a one day absence by a clerical employee can cost an employer several hundred Rands in reduced efficiency and increased supervisory load. Furthermore it is difficult for an organisation to operate smoothly and attain its objectives if employees fail to report to their jobs. The work flow is disrupted, and often important decisions must be delayed. In organisations that rely heavily on assembly-line production, absenteeism can be considerably more than a disruption; it can result in a drastic reduction in the quality of output, and in some cases, it can bring about a complete shutdown of the production facility (Robbins, Millet & Waters, 2004).

According to Stone (2002) one US study estimates that a 2.5 per cent reduction in productivity occurs for each one per cent increase in absenteeism. Stone further quotes Allen and Iggins (1979) in saying we live in an environment with an absenteeism culture. Taking a day off and calling in sick is supported and encouraged by our society. Many people’s attitude is that of “the time is owing to us.” The cost of employee absenteeism stems from three main sources:

- Cost associated with absentees themselves (for example, pay and benefits).
• Cost associated with managing problems of absenteeism (pay and benefits to supervisors for counselling absentees, completing necessary reports, recruiting and training substitute employees).

• Cost not associated either with absentees or with managing absenteeism problems (for example, machine down-time, extra scrap and wasted materials, overtime costs for replacement workers).

2.6 STRATEGIES TO COMBAT ABSENTEEISM

Absenteeism can be decreased by setting attendance goals and providing feedback on how well employees are reaching those goals. A study by (Harrison and Shaffer, 1994)(in Aamodt & Raynes, 2001:352) found that almost 90 per cent of employees think their attendance is above average and estimate the typical absenteeism of their co-workers at a level two times higher than the actual figures. Thus one of the reasons employees miss work is because they incorrectly believe their attendance to be higher than their co-workers.

Absenteeism can be reduced by removing the negative factors employees associate with going to work. To increase attendance the negative factors must be eliminated. The first step in the elimination is to become aware of the negative factors that bother employees. These can be determined by asking supervisors or by distributing employee questionnaires. After the problems are known, management should work diligently to eliminate the identified problems from the workplace (Aamodt & Raynes, 2001:37).

According to Mathis and Jackson (2006:72) voluntary absenteeism is easiest to control if managers understand its causes clearly. Once they do, they can use a variety of approaches to reduce it. Organisational policies on absenteeism should be stated clearly in an employee handbook and stressed by supervisors and
managers. Approaches to control absenteeism fall into several categories; namely:

- Disciplinary approach

Many employers use a disciplinary approach. People who are absent the first time receive an oral warning, and subsequent absences bring written warnings, suspensions, and finally dismissal.

Aamodt and Raynes (2001:351) suggest that absenteeism can be reduced by punishing or disciplining employees who miss work. Discipline can range from giving a warning or a less popular work assignment, to firing an employee.

- Positive reinforcement

Positive reinforcement includes such methods as giving employees cash, recognition, time off, or other rewards for meeting attendances standards. Offering rewards for good attendance, giving bonuses for missing fewer than a certain number of days, and “buying back” unused sick leave are all positive methods of reducing absenteeism.

- Combination approach

A combination approach is the ideally. This “carrot and stick” approach uses policies and discipline to punish offenders, and various programmes and rewards to recognise employees with outstanding attendance. One firm that has used attendance incentives effectively is Continental Airlines. As part of its “Go
Forward” programme, employees with perfect attendance receive incentives to travel and other rewards.

- “No fault” policy

With a “no fault” policy, the reasons for absences do not matter, and the employees must manage their own attendance unless they abuse that freedom. Once absenteeism exceeds normal limits, then disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment can occur. The advantages of the “no fault” approach are that all employees can be covered by it, and supervisors and HR staff do not have to judge whether absences count as excused or unexcused.

- Paid time-off (PTO) programmes

Some employers have paid-time-off programmes, in which vacation time, holidays, and sick leave for each employee are combined into a PTO account. Employees use days from their accounts at their discretion for illness, personal time, or vacation. If employees run out of days in their account, then they are not paid for any additional days missed. PTO programmes generally have reduced absenteeism, particularly one-day absences, but they often increase overall time away from work because employees use all of “their” time off taking unused days as vacation days.

- Non reinforcement and punishment

According to Pierce and Gardner (2002:237) at times it is necessary to discourage a worker from repeating an undesirable behaviour. The techniques managers use to make behaviour less likely to occur involve doing something
that frustrates the individual’s need satisfaction or that removes a currently satisfying circumstance. Punishment is an adverse consequence that follows behaviour and makes it less likely to reoccur. Managers have another alternative, known as non-reinforcement, in which they provide no consequence at all following a worker’s response. Non-reinforcement eventually reduces the likelihood of that response reoccurring, which means that managers who fail to reinforce a worker’s desirable behaviour are also likely to see that desirable behaviour less often. Non-reinforcement can also reduce the likelihood that employees will repeat undesirable behaviours, although it does not produce results as quickly as punishment does.

While punishment clearly works more quickly than non-reinforcement, it has some potentially undesirable side effects. Although punishment effectively tells a person what not to do and stops the undesired behaviour, it does not tell them what they should do. In addition, even when punishment works as intended, the worker being punished often develops negative feelings toward the person who does the punishing. Although sometimes it is difficult for managers to avoid using punishment, it works best when reinforcement is also used. An experiment conducted by two researchers at the University of Kansas found that using nonmonetary reinforcement in addition to punitive disciplinary measures was an effective way to decrease absenteeism in an industrial setting (in Pierce and Gardner 2002:238).

In discussing the linkage of attendance to consequence, Aamodt (2004:336) states that the basis behind rewarding attendance and punishing absenteeism is that employees make a decision each day as to whether they will or will not attend work. It includes weighing the consequences of going to work against the consequences of not going. If in fact employees make conscious decisions about attending work, attendance can be increased in several ways: rewarding attendance, disciplining absenteeism, and keeping accurate attendance records.
Financial incentives and recognition

Again according to Aamodt (2004:336) attendance can be increased through the use of financial incentives and recognition programmes:

Financial incentives programmes – use money to reward employees for achieving certain levels of attendance.

One of these programmes involves paying employees for unused sick leave like paying employees a sum of money for each unused absence. Give employees a sum of money as a bonus for six months of perfect attendance and enter them into a draw for a bigger prize after one year of perfect attendance.

A second method provides a financial bonus to employees who attain a certain level of attendance. With this method, an employee with perfect attendance over a year might receive a bonus and an employee who misses 10 days might receive nothing.

A third financial incentive method is to use games to reward employees who attend work. One company used poker as its game, giving a playing card each day to employees who attend. At the end of the week, employees with five cards compared the value of their cards and the winning employee would be given a prize such as dinner for two at the best restaurant in town or a gas barbecue grill.

The Return-to-Work Interview

In discussing the role of the supervisor in addressing absenteeism, Yorges (2010) states that training of supervisors in how to best manage absenteeism should include instruction on how to conduct effective and fair return-to-work interviews. Recent surveys indicate that these interviews are regarded as one of
the most effective tools for managing short-term absenteeism. The return-to-work discussion will enable the supervisor to welcome the employee back to work, in addition to demonstrating management’s strong commitment to controlling and managing absenteeism in the workplace. The interview will enable a check to be made that the employee is well enough to return to work.

The necessary paperwork can be completed, so that the absence and its conclusion are properly recorded. The fact that an established procedure is in place to investigate and discuss absence with an employee may, on its own, act as a deterrent for non-attendance for disingenuous reasons.

Interviews need to be carried out as promptly as possible following the absentee’s return to work (no later than one day after his or her return). The employee should be given ample opportunity to outline the reasons for his or her absence. The supervisor should use the interview as a time to explore any issues that the employee may have which are leading to absence.

The goal is to foster an open and supportive culture. The procedures are in place to make sure that help and advice are offered when needed and to ensure that the employee is fit to return to work. Employees will usually appreciate the opportunity to explain genuine reasons for absence within a formalised structure. Should the supervisor doubt the authenticity of the reasons given for absence, he/she should use this opportunity to express any doubts or concerns.

At all times, the employee must be aware that the interview is not merely part of company procedures, but a significant meeting during which the absence has been noted and may have implications for future employment. The company’s disciplinary procedure, in the event of unacceptable levels of absence, should be explained to the employee.
The manager may choose to outline how the absence affected the department. The message should be that the employee was missed and that productivity suffered. The manner in which the department was required to reorganise staffing arrangements might also be explained. This would demonstrate that the efficiency of the work unit was adversely affected by the absence.

A synthesis of the above information reveals the following as strategies that can be used to combat absenteeism:

- Setting attendance goals
- Providing feedback on how well employees are reaching those goals
- Removing negative factors employees associate with going to work
- Managers understanding causes of absenteeism clearly
- Disciplinary action
- Giving employees cash, recognition, time off, or other rewards for meeting attendances standards
- Non-reinforcement approach (Provide no consequence, reduces the likelihood of that response reoccurring)
- Strategic leader communication
- Direction-giving language
- Empathic language by managers (to share concern and humanity with employees)
- Conducting return-to-work interviews
- Fostering an open and supportive culture
2.7 CONCLUSION

Absenteeism is a serious problem that affects the bottom-line. From the literature presented in the preceding paragraphs, it is evident that absenteeism is a big problem, especially in the motor manufacturing industry especially because of the number of processes that are labour intensive. Absenteeism is a multifaceted problem with many antecedents which make it challenging to resolve or contain. Financial impact is one of the consequences of absenteeism on a business, especially when one thinks that the primary objective of a firm is to make money. Absenteeism defeats these objectives through cost incurred for overtime to catch up production losses and, furthermore in cases where replacement of personnel is necessary this may include administrative cost related to the time human resource personnel spend looking for replacement employees or the time production management spend re-assigning employees. Absenteeism results in decreased productivity and may affect the quality of the product due to the increased workload and burden put on employees who are at work.

Absenteeism is classified into scheduled and unscheduled absenteeism. Although some absenteeism is avoidable, it is important to understand that some absence is unavoidable. This is because people may fall ill, get injured or have unavoidable obligations which may lead to absenteeism.

It is important for Production Management and HR Management to identify the antecedents of absenteeism because when these are known, the organisation can be better prepared to address them through proactive countermeasures. The main antecedents revealed in the theoretical study included aspects such as sick absence. The root cause of sick absence is the fact that an employee is unwell and where the employee is incapacitated, there exists a state of being unfit for work. However, being unwell and being unfit for work are not necessarily synonymous. Research into causation identifies scope for the exercise of
employee judgement in deciding at which point “being unwell” corresponds with “being unfit for work”. In effect, employee perceptions and decision making impact upon levels of workplace sick absence. There are a number of influences on employee perceptions and decisions: first, the individuals employee’s attitudes and values; second, the level of job satisfaction and whether absence is considered as legitimate in remedying a perceived imbalance in the employee effort to reward relationship; third, discomfort or tensions at work may predispose an unwell individual to engage in pain-avoidance behaviour inducing a state of unfitness for work; fourth, the prevailing absence or attendance culture within the organisation; and fifth, the nature of organisational policies, procedures and practices relating to sick absence. These causation influences, which need to be considered at individual, group and organisational levels, are introduced to demonstrate that a holistic approach to management of sick absence is necessary (Corbridge & Pilbeam, 2001). Antecedents of absenteeism are divided in the following main groups: Personal factors, job factors, organisational factors personal circumstances.

Strategies for reducing absenteeism include communicating targets and goals to employees. Absenteeism can be reduced by providing a good working environment for employees to look forward to going to work. Various approaches can be adopted to help control absenteeism; for example taking disciplinary action against employees who are absent without reason. Giving employees cash, recognition, time off, or other rewards for meeting attendance standards which are the desired behaviour and punishing undesired behaviours, are other approaches. Introducing paid-time-off programmes, in which vacation time, holidays, and sick leave for each employee are combined into a PTO account which employees can use at a later stage can also be an approach. Introducing financial incentives programs which use money to reward employees for achieving certain levels of attendance and paying them a sum of money for each unused absence is another consideration and conducting return-to-work interviews with employees returning to work after absence. Leadership to foster
an open and supportive culture within the organisation can create an environment where people want to come to work.

In the next chapter, the research methodology used in conducting the research will be discussed.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the focus is on the research methodology followed in the study, with a discussion of the empirical objectives, sampling design, measuring instrument, data collection and the reliability and validity of data obtained.

The term research paradigm refers to how research should be conducted. It offers a framework comprising an accepted set of theories, methods and ways of defining data. There are two main research paradigms or philosophies. The two paradigms can be labelled as positivist and phenomenological. The positivist paradigm and phenomenological paradigms are also known as quantitative and qualitative respectively (Collis & Hussey, 2003:47).

The positivistic approach seeks the facts or causes of social phenomena, with little regard to the subjective state of the individual. Thus, logical reasoning is applied to the research so that precision, objectivity and rigour replace hunches, experience and intuition as the means of investigating the research problems (Collis & Hussey, 2003:52).

The phenomenological paradigm is concerned with understanding human behaviour from the participant’s own frame of reference. This qualitative approach stresses the subjective aspects of human activity by focusing on the meaning, rather than the measurement, of social phenomena (Collis & Hussey, 2003:52).
For the purpose of this study a multidisciplinary approach using both the positivistic and phenomenological approach was adopted. According to Collis and Hussey (2003) it is not unusual in business research to take a mixture of approaches, particularly in the methods of collecting and analysing data. This allows one to take a broader and often complimentary view of the research problem.

For the measuring instrument both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used. A questionnaire survey providing quantitative data was used together with interviews to provide insights into the perceptions of absenteeism.

### 3.2 EMPIRICAL OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the study was to identify the antecedents of absenteeism, with the assumption that once they are identified, they can be controlled, reduced or eliminated and the absenteeism rate thus reduced. The theoretical study focused on the impact of absenteeism on an organisation (Sub-problem 1), the antecedents of absenteeism (Sub-problem 2) and strategies that organisations can use to manage these antecedents (Sub-problem 3).

The empirical research questions identified for the study were:

Sub-problem 4

What antecedents, as revealed through the resolution of Sub-problem two, are evident amongst employees at VWSA? To address this sub-problem a survey was conducted among employees in the production department at VWSA.
Sub-problem 5

What are the perceptions of employees at VWSA of the strategies used by the organisation to eliminate or reduce the antecedents of absenteeism? This sub-problem was also addressed by means of the survey which was conducted among employees in the production department at VWSA.

The development of the questionnaire used in the survey is discussed in paragraph 3.5.

3.3 SAMPLING DESIGN

Sometimes, when the entire population is sufficiently small, the researcher can include the entire population in the study (StatPac, 2011). This type of research is called a census study because data is gathered on every member of the population. Usually, the population is too large for the researcher to attempt to survey all of its members. A small, but carefully chosen sample can be used to represent the population. The sample reflects the characteristics of the population from which it is drawn.

Sampling methods are classified as either probability or nonprobability sampling. In probability samples, each member of the population has a known non-zero probability of being selected. Probability methods include random sampling, systematic sampling, and stratified sampling. In nonprobability sampling, members are selected from the population in some non-random manner. These include convenience sampling, judgment sampling, quota sampling, and snowball sampling. The advantage of probability sampling is that sampling error can be calculated. Sampling error is the degree to which a sample might differ from the
population. When inferring to the population, results are reported plus or minus the sampling error. In nonprobability sampling, the degree to which the sample differs from the population remains unknown.

*Random sampling* is the purest form of probability sampling. Each member of the population has an equal and known chance of being selected. When there are very large populations, it is often difficult or impossible to identify every member of the population, so the pool of available subjects becomes biased.

*Systematic sampling* is often used instead of random sampling. It is also called an Nth name selection technique. After the required sample size has been calculated, every Nth record is selected from a list of population members. As long as the list does not contain any hidden order, this sampling method is as good as the random sampling method. Its only advantage over the random sampling technique is simplicity. Systematic sampling is frequently used to select a specified number of records from a computer file.

*Stratified sampling* is the commonly used probability method that is superior to random sampling because it reduces sampling error. A stratum is a subset of the population that share at least one common characteristic. Examples of strata might be males and females, or managers and non-managers. The researcher first identifies the relevant stratums and their actual representation in the population. Random sampling is then used to select a sufficient number of subjects from each strata. "Sufficient" refers to a sample size large enough to be reasonably confident that the stratum represents the population. Stratified sampling is often used when one or more of the stratums in the population have a low incidence relative to the other strata.
Convenience sampling is used in exploratory research where the researcher is interested in getting an inexpensive approximation of the truth. As the name implies, the sample is selected because it is convenient. This nonprobability method is often used during preliminary research efforts to get a gross estimate of the results, without incurring the cost or time required to select a random sample.

Judgment sampling is a common nonprobability method. The researcher selects the sample based on judgment. This is usually an extension of convenience sampling. For example, a researcher may decide to draw the entire sample from one "representative" city, even though the population includes all cities. When using this method, the researcher must be confident that the chosen sample is truly representative of the entire population.

Quota sampling - is the nonprobability equivalent of stratified sampling. Like stratified sampling, the researcher first identifies the strata and their proportions as they are represented in the population. Then convenience or judgment sampling is used to select the required number of subjects from each stratum. This differs from stratified sampling, where the strata are filled by random sampling.

Snowball sampling is a special nonprobability method used when the desired sample characteristic is rare. It may be extremely difficult or cost prohibitive to locate respondents in these situations. Snowball sampling relies on referrals from initial subjects to generate additional subjects. While this technique can dramatically lower search costs, it comes at the expense of introducing bias because the technique itself reduces the likelihood that the sample will represent a good cross section from the population.
In this study, a stratified sampling method was used. Stratified sampling is used when the researcher takes into account several characteristics; for example gender, age income, residence or education of the population and ensures there are participants in the study that represents that characteristic (Sampling statistics, 2008: 1). For example out of every 10 people the researcher may want to make sure that two people are within a certain gender, two within a certain age group and have an income rate between R10000 and R20000. This will ensure the accuracy of the sample frame.

The basic idea of sampling is that by selecting some of the elements in a population, conclusions may be drawn about the entire population (Sampling statistics, 2008: 1). The population applicable to this study was the employees of Volkswagen South Africa, who were based at the Uitenhage plant in the Eastern Cape. Employees from the following Production Departments were included:

- Final Assembly
- Body Shop
- Paint Shop

The sample consisted of both female and male employees in these departments. By using stratified sampling the researcher ensured that the characteristics of the population were adequately represented. Using a stratified sampling technique with random sampling ensured that employees within the three production units (Final Assembly, Paint Shop and Body Shop) were included and adequately represented in this study (Sampling statistics, 2008: 1).
3.4 DATA COLLECTION

Different methods can be used for data collection. Some of these methods will be discussed and then the choice of method for this study will be explained.

Interviews are associated with both positivistic and phenomenological methodologies. They are a method of collecting data in which selected participants are asked questions in order to find out what they do, think or feel. Interviews make it easy to compare answers and may be face-to-face, voice-to-voice or screen to screen; conducted with individuals or a group of individuals (Collis & Hussey, 2003). In this study, interviews as a main data collection method would be too time-consuming since the population consisted of all employees working in three manufacturing units at a plant.

Observation is a method for collecting data associated with either a positivistic or a phenomenological methodology. Observation can take place in a laboratory setting or in a natural setting (Collis & Hussey, 2003). In this case observation would not be suitable, as absenteeism is a phenomenon that is not focused in one area and not occurring at a specific point in time. It is also unlikely that one will be able to identify a broad range of antecedents of absenteeism through observation alone.

Questionnaires are associated with both positivistic and phenomenological methodologies. A questionnaire is a list of carefully structured questions, chosen after considerable testing, with a view to eliciting reliable responses from the chosen sample. The aim is to find out what a selected group of participants do, think or feel (Collis & Hussey, 2003). According to Collis and Hussey (2003) questionnaires are a popular method of collecting data. The advantage of using a questionnaire is that questionnaires surveys are cheaper and less time
consuming than conducting interviews, and very large samples can be taken. These are therefore also the reasons why a questionnaire was used in this study as a data collecting tool.

The process used to conduct the survey was to distribute the questionnaire among production employees in the three units as indicated above. Employees were approached, the purpose of the questionnaire explained and asked if they would be interested in completing the form. Employees who agreed to complete the questionnaire were briefed on the contents of the questionnaire and the completion process. Participants were also advised that the questionnaire would be completed anonymously; hence they did not have to include their name in the questionnaire. Questionnaires were handed out by the researcher to individuals on the production line and off-site (at their homes, in town and in the parking lot at the plant). Respondents were given an hour to complete the questionnaire. Some respondents completed the questionnaire immediately whereas others gave the researcher a time and place where it could be collected. Thereafter the completed questionnaire was collected immediately or at a later stage as per arrangements made with respondents.

In the following section the research instrument or data collecting tool will be discussed.

### 3.5 MEASURING INSTRUMENT

For the purpose of this study a questionnaire was developed based on the theoretical study and the interviews conducted as described in Chapter two. The questionnaire is included as Annexure B.

The answering options were as follows: For section B and C a Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree with a rating of five to one. A set
of questions on opinions in section B with a Likert-scale ranging between most often and never with a rating of four to one was used.

Each questionnaire was accompanied by a covering letter to help the respondents understand the context in which the questions were being asked. Each section began with an instruction of what was required. The questionnaire covering letter is included as Annexure A.

The measuring instrument consisted of the following three sections:

Section A: Biographical information

Section B: Antecedents of absenteeism (job, organisational and personal factors)

Section C: The management of absenteeism

The different sections of the questionnaire are discussed below:

3.5.1 Section A: Biographical information

Section A included questions related to age, marital status, gender, work area, length of service and number of dependents, as these were revealed in the theoretical study as determinants of absenteeism.

Two additional questions, namely “Is absenteeism a problem in your workplace?” and “Do you think that some employees take sick leave without really being sick?” were included as global questions on the prevalence and abuse of absenteeism. An opportunity to expand on these two questions by means of comment was provided in this section.
3.5.2 Section B: Antecedents of absenteeism

Section B of the questionnaire focused on the antecedents of absenteeism. It consisted of three parts, which respectively addressed job factors, organisational factors and personal factors. The respondents also had the opportunity, with an open-ended question, to indicate any other causes of absenteeism. In addition, respondents had to respond to various listed causes of absenteeism by indicating how often they believed employees stayed away from work for these specific, listed reasons.

3.5.3 Section C: Management of absenteeism

This section required the respondents to respond to statements related to the management of absenteeism and included issues such as the return-to-work interview, communication of attendance goals and rewards for good attendance.

3.6 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

According to Gillham (2005:6) reliability and validity are positivist terms, widely used in measurement psychology, for example in the justification of intelligence tests. In that context a test is judged as reliable if it gives consistent results either on re-test, or by measurements of internal coherence (different parts of the test agreeing in the metric sense). Sapsford (2007:15) states that reliability is the stability of the measures – the extent to which repeated measurement yields constant results (over a reasonably short period of time, during which change would not be expected to occur), or supposedly identical measuring instruments yield identical results. In the simplest of cases, reliability is checked by literally measuring twice and looking at the agreement of the two measures. Reliability is
essential for validity: if one is not measuring something reliably, then one cannot be measuring the desired thing validly. Measures can be reliable but invalid, however; they can measure something reliably but not the desired thing. By making a comparison between the results obtained from the pilot study and the actual survey, the researcher can determine reliability.

Again Gillham (2005:6) observes that validity is mainly judged against external criteria: in the case of intelligence tests correlation with academic performance. Since intelligence is a hypothetical construct, the value of such tests is heavily dependent on this kind of demonstrated relationship. Sapsford (2007:10) states that a research argument is said to be valid to the extent that the conclusions drawn from the data do logically follow from them. Questions, that must be asked of every survey to test this, involve:

- Validity of measurement – the extent to which the data constitute accurate measurements of what is supposed to be being measured.

- Population validity – the extent to which the sample gives an accurate representation of the population which it is supposed to represent. This is attained through proper sampling. In this study, probability sampling was used to ensure that sampling error is reduced.

- Validity of design – the extent to which the comparisons being made are appropriate to establish the argument which rest on them. The questionnaire was developed from the results of the theoretical study. Antecedents of absenteeism were isolated and then formulated into statements which were included in the questionnaire. In addition, the questionnaire was developed under the guidance of the research supervisor, who is considered an expert in the field of organisational behaviour.

- Face validity - the extent to which tests or measures used by the researcher do actually represent what they are supposed to measure or represent (Collis and Hussey, 2003). The research supervisor vouched that the questionnaire did
have value and validity and the respondents, who participated in the survey, also indicated that they thought it was a well-constructed questionnaire measuring the main aspects of the antecedents (causes) of absenteeism.

3.7 VARIABLES

Collis and Hussey (2003:152) maintain that variables can be classified as qualitative or quantitative. A qualitative variable is a non numerical attribute of an individual or object. Some qualitative variables, like gender or colour divide people or objects into groups. Other qualitative variables like job position or social class, which divides and orders, are known as ordered qualitative variables.

According to Sapsford (2007:39) a variable is a measured quantity. The different variables are described as the following:

- Descriptive variables – those which are just to be reported on, with no conclusions drawn about influence or causality.
- Dependent variables – those we want to say are caused or influenced by others.
- Independent variables – those we want to say are doing the causing or influencing.
- Extraneous variables – those which, it might be argued, could provide an alternative causal explanation and so cast doubt on the one we are advancing.
- Moderating variables - are introduced to account for situations where the relationship between the antecedent and the consequent variable is presumed to depend on some third variable.

The relationship between biographical variables and absenteeism was discussed. For the purpose of this study the following independent variable were discussed: Age, marital status, gender, work area, length of service and number of dependants.
All the issues addressed in all the sections in the questionnaire are antecedents of absenteeism, thus independent variables while absenteeism is the dependent variable.

3.8 PILOT STUDY

The term pilot study is used in two different ways in social science research. It can refer to feasibility studies which are "small scale versions, or trial runs, done in preparation for the major study. However, a pilot study can also be the pre-testing of a particular research instrument such as a questionnaire or interview schedule (Gilbert, 2001).

One of the advantages of conducting a pilot study is that it might give advance warning about where the main research project could fail, where research protocols may not be followed, or whether proposed methods or instruments are inappropriate or too complicated. These are important reasons for undertaking a pilot study, but there are additional reasons; for example convincing funding bodies that your research proposal for the main study is worth funding. Thus pilot studies are conducted for a range of different reasons (Gilbert, 2001).

The pilot study was conducted at the plant in Uitenhage. Questionnaires were handed out to three male respondents who work in Paint Shop, Body Shop and Final Assembly, while two questionnaires were given to two female employees who work in Paint Shop and Body Shop respectively. The respondents were timed to ascertain how long it took to complete the questionnaire. On completion of the questionnaire the respondents were interview further and asked if they had any difficulty in answering the questionnaire.
The questionnaire took an average of 11 minutes to answer. The respondents indicated that the questionnaire covered a comprehensive list of reasons of absenteeism and felt they could relate to the questions posed in the questionnaire. Most participants in the pilot study were concerned about why this study was conducted and whether it was being done for the organisation as it was apparent they were not comfortable with that. It demonstrated that it was important that the covering letter be discussed first to explain that the study is for an MBA qualification as that seemed to put the respondents at ease and more willing to assist.

Due to the positive response and the success of the pilot study, no changes were necessary to be made to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was then ready to be distributed and was eventually distributed in the same format as that of the pilot study.

3.9 RESPONSE RATE

Following the pilot study, questionnaires were distributed among employees in the three production areas; namely Final Assembly, Paint Shop and Body Shop as described in section 3.3.

Table 3.1 indicates the response rate.
Table 3.1: Overall response rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>No of questionnaires distributed</th>
<th>Response rate</th>
<th>Percentage response rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final Assembly</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Shop</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>92.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paint Shop</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>88.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above information is visually presented in Chart 3.1. It is evident that the response rate was lowest for the Paint Shop 66.7 per cent. This is however still an adequate response rate. The average response rate for all the sections was 88.3 per cent, which is satisfactory.

Chart 3.1: Response rate
3.10 DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

The following statistical techniques were utilised to present and interpret the data obtained from the survey.

*Mean scores*

The mean is a measure of location: the arithmetic average of a frequency distribution (Collis and Hussey, 2003:350). According to Evans (2007) the mean is the sum of observations divided by the number of observations.

*Standard deviation*

The standard deviation is a measure of dispersion, related to the normal distribution, which uses every value and is in the same units as the original data; the bigger the spread, the bigger the standard deviation (Collis and Hussey, 2003:356). According to Evans (2007) the standard deviation provides an indication of where the majority of data are clustered around the mean.

*Frequencies*

Collis and Hussey (2003) maintain that a useful first step in analysis of quantitative data is to examine the frequency distribution for each variable. A frequency is a numerical value which represents the total number of observations for a variable under study. Frequency distribution is an array of frequencies arranged in size order in a table, chart, graph or other diagrammatic form.
3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, the empirical objectives, sampling design, data collection method and measuring instrument were discussed.

In the next chapter, the analysis of findings from the empirical study will be discussed.
CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS FROM THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this section the results of the empirical study are presented and discussed. The presentation begins with the reporting of biographical data followed by an analysis of the descriptive statistics of the variables under consideration. The chapter outlines the results obtained in the study and provides a comprehensive discussion of these results. The descriptive statistics computed are presented first. Conclusions are then drawn on the basis of the obtained results. The information provided and discussed in the previous chapters is used as a reference for the analysis of the results.

4.2 SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHICAL DATA

Demographics are the most recent statistical characteristics of a population. These types of data are used widely in sociology (and especially in the subfield of demography), public policy, and marketing. Commonly examined demographics include gender, race, age, disabilities, mobility, home ownership, employment status, and even location. Both distributions and trends of values within a demographic variable are of interest. Demographics are about the population of a region and the culture of people. In this case the population referred to are employees employed in three manufacturing units at Volkswagen South Africa.

In this survey, six demographic variables; gender, age, marital status, number of dependents, divisional department and length of service, were examined.
4.2.1 Age

Question 1 required of the respondents to indicate their age bracket. The results are presented in Table 4.1 and Chart 4.1.

Table 4.1: Responses with regard to age bracket

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE BRACKET</th>
<th>RESPONSE FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Table 4.1 and Chart 4.2 it is evident that the majority (41%) of respondents were between the ages of 31 to 40 years. The second highest number of respondents 23 per cent were for the age group 41 to 50 years. It is evident from this age distribution that the majority of the employees on the production line in the organisation were between the ages of 31 and 40 and that the smallest group of respondents were between 50 and 60. This could be as a result of the nature of the work which is labour intensive. This could also indicate that VWSA focused their recruitment efforts on younger people. As discussed in paragraph 2.4.2.1, age is an important factor in the pattern of absence, especially in absence that consists of frequent short spells which is often seen as more disruptive.
4.2.2 Gender

Question 2 required of the respondents to indicate their gender. The results are presented in Table 4.2 and Chart 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Responses with regard to gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>RESPONSE FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chart 4.2: Responses with regard to gender**
From Table 4.2 and Chart 4.2 it is evident that the majority of the respondents were male (73%) while 28 per cent were female.

The manufacturing environment is physically demanding which could explain why more males than females were represented in the study. According to Statistics South Africa (2010), in the basic metals, metal products, machinery and equipment sector the gender ratio is 83 per cent male and 17 per cent female. The ratio of females employed at VWSA is 10 per cent higher than the sector average which could be attributed to high levels of automation in the workplace which makes it possible to employ more female workers.

As discussed in paragraph 2.4.2, research indicated that women have higher absenteeism rates than men do. The most logical explanation for this finding is that the research was conducted where the culture has historically placed home and family responsibilities on women. This could be a predictor of high absenteeism in this organisation as the result of female employees having to take leave for family responsibility.

4.2.3 Marital status

Question 3 required of the respondents to indicate their marital status. The results are presented in Table 4.3 and Chart 4.3.
Table 4.3: Responses with regard to marital status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MARITAL STATUS</th>
<th>RESPONSE FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widow/Widower</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 4.3: Responses with regard to marital status
From Table 4.3 and Chart 4.3 it is evident that 56 per cent of the respondents were married, 37 per cent were single while five per cent was divorced and four per cent were widowed.

As discussed in paragraph 2.4.2, research indicated that married employees have fewer absences and are more satisfied with their jobs than unmarried co-workers. Marriage imposes increased responsibilities that may make a steady job more valuable and important. Therefore a high number of employees who are married might have a positive impact on attendance, and will not be an antecedent of absenteeism.

### 4.2.4 Number of dependents

Question 4 required of the respondents to indicate the number of dependents they had. The results are presented in Table 4.4 and Chart 4.4.

**Table 4.4: Responses with regard to number of dependents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NUMBER OF DEPENDENTS</th>
<th>RESPONSE FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – 5</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or less</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Table 4.4 and Chart 4.4 it is clear that (50%) of the respondents supported two or fewer people while 41 per cent of the respondents indicated that they had two to five dependents. According to the literature discussed in paragraph 2.4.2.4 dependent children and elderly relatives may affect the ability of women to attend work and a proportion of male absence can also be attributed to this factor. It can be deduced that the high number of employees who have dependents can have an adverse effect on absenteeism in this organisation.
4.2.5 Departments

Question 5 required of the respondents to indicate the department in which they worked. The results are presented in Table 4.5 and Chart 4.5.

Table 4.5: Responses with regard department

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEPARTMENTS</th>
<th>RESPONSE FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final Assembly</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Shop</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paint Shop</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 4.5: Responses with regard to department
As shown in Table 4.5 and Chart 4.5 it can be seen that the majority of respondents (46%) were based in Final Assembly, whereas 35 per cent of the respondents were from the Body Shop and 19 per cent from the Paint Shop.

The departmental spread is representative of the population demographics in the organisation where the study was conducted. Final Assembly is a more labour intensive operation and the Paint Shop more automated.

4.2.6 Tenure at VW SA

Question 6 required of the respondents to indicate the number of years they had been working at VW SA. The results are presented in Table 4.6 and Chart 4.6.

Table 4.6: Responses with regard to tenure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TENURE AT VW SA</th>
<th>RESPONSE FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2 years</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - 5 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 10 years</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 - 15 years</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 - 20 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 - 30 years</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Table 4.6 and Chart 4.6 it can be seen that the majority (30%) of respondents had been working for the organisation for between 11 to 15 years. Another 20 per cent of the respondents had been working for the organisation for less than 2 and 6 to 10 years respectively, whereas 9 per cent of respondents had been working for the organisation for between 3 to 4 and 16 to 20 years respectively. The tenure at VWSA seemed to be evenly spread in comparison to the age bracket discussed in paragraph 4.2.1.

4.2.7 Open-ended question – “Is absenteeism a problem in your workplace?”

Question 7 required of the respondents to indicate whether absenteeism was a problem in their workplace. The results are presented in Table 4.7 and Chart 4.7.
Table 4.7: Responses with regard to the question: “Is absenteeism is a problem in your workplace?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION 7</th>
<th>RESPONSE FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 4.7: Responses with regard to the question “Is absenteeism is a problem in your workplace?”
From Table 4.7 and Chart 4.7 it can be seen that a majority 77 per cent of respondents believed that absenteeism was a problem in their work place, while 18 per cent of the respondents disagreed with the statement. Responses suggested that absenteeism was a problem in the workplace and that employees were affected by it.

4.2.8 Open-ended question – “Do employees take sick leave when not really sick?”

Question 8 required of the respondents to indicate whether they believed employees did take sick leave even when they were not really sick.

The results are presented in Table 4.8 and Chart 4.8.

Table 4.8: Responses with regard to the question “Do employees take sick leave when not really sick?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION 8</th>
<th>RESPONSE FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Table 4.8 and Chart 4.8 it can be seen that a majority, 59 per cent of respondents believed that employees did take sick leave when they were not really sick. A relatively small percentage of respondents, 18 per cent disagreed with the statement. The results to this question emphasised the significance of a study on the antecedents of absenteeism. Without understanding the true circumstances behind the decision not to come to work, it is more difficult to combat and manage absenteeism.
4.3 SECTION B: ANTECEDENTS OF ABSENTEEISM

Section B of the questionnaire covered the antecedents of absenteeism and was divided into four sub-sections, namely job factors, organisational factors, personal factors and a last section in which respondents had to indicate which reasons, from a presented list, were more often given as reasons for absenteeism. The results for job factors are presented first.

4.3.1 Job factors

In this section, factors such as stress, repetitive tasks, poor person-job fit and unclear expectations were probed to reveal the antecedents of absenteeism. Respondents were requested to indicate the extent to which they believed each statement was a cause of absenteeism. The responses were indicated on a Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree (5), agree (4), uncertain (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). The results are presented in Table 4.9.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Factors</th>
<th>Valid N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Too much job stress</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Employees having to repeat the same tasks all the time</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Employees having jobs that do not fit their skills and abilities</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Employees in jobs that do not fit their personalities</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Employees not knowing what is expected of them</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Having to work night shifts</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Too much work to do in the allocated time</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Little opportunity to move to a better position</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Working in a dangerous environment</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 The job turning out different to what employees expected when they applied</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Employees wanting a break from long hours of work</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.9 shows that a number of statements elicited fairly high means scores (above 3.5) which show a tendency towards “agree” and “strongly agree” responses. The statements related to job stress (statement 1), employees having jobs that do not fit their skills and abilities (statement 3), working night shifts (statement 6), too much work in the allocated time (statement 7), little opportunity to move to a better position (statement 8) and employees wanting a break from long hours of work (statement 11). Little opportunity to move to a better position (statement 8) obtained the highest mean score. The responses to the rest of the statements leaned towards ‘uncertain’ (between 2.5 and 3.5). The standard deviation ranged between 1.09 and 1.31 which indicates that the spread of
responses were relatively narrow, confirming a tendency towards mostly ‘agree’ responses. The aggregate mean score for this section is 3.45.

The results with regards to job factors are visually presented in Chart 4.9. The results are indicated as number of respondents and not percentages.

**Chart 4.9: Results with regards to job factors**

Chart 4.9 clearly shows the tendency towards ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ responses. It also shows that the statement 'little opportunity to move to a better position' received the most ‘strongly agree’ responses (45). The results show that the respondents did not believe that ‘not knowing what is expected of them’ was a strong antecedent of absenteeism. The chart also shows how divided the
respondents were in terms of the statement ‘working in a dangerous work environment’, hence the highest standard deviation of 1.31 for this statement.

### 4.3.2 Organisational Factors

In this section, factors such as inability to discuss problems openly with a supervisor, understanding of the absence policy, misuse of allocated sick days were probed to reveal the antecedents of absenteeism. Respondents were requested to indicate the extent to which they believed each statement was a cause of absenteeism. The results are presented in Table 4.10.
### TABLE 4.10: Means and standard deviations for scores for Section B (Organisational factors).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisational factors</th>
<th>Valid N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 Not being able to discuss problems openly with the supervisor</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Employees not understanding the absence policy</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Employees thinking sick leave is there to take when they want to</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Employee not understanding the consequences of absenteeism</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Employees not being committed to their team</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Not having a good working relationship with co-workers</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Sick leave days are seen as part of normal leave allocation</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Supervisors not setting a good attendance example</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Supervisor not strict with absenteeism control</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Employees not supporting the goals (vision) of VWSA</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.10 shows that one statement elicited a fairly high mean score (above 3.5) which showed a tendency towards ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’. This statement related to an inability to discuss problems openly with a supervisor (statement 12). This response emphasises the usefulness of using a questionnaire to investigate the antecedents of absenteeism as employees might be less willing to reveal the real reasons to management. The rest of the responses elicited mean scores of between 2.68 and 3.39 which show a tendency towards uncertain responses. The lowest mean scores were for statement 13 (employees not understanding the absence policy), statement 19 (supervisors not setting a good attendance example) and statement 20 (supervisors not strict with absenteeism control). Chart 4.10 sheds more light on the responses received to these.
statements. From this chart, it is confirmed that statements 19 and 20 slanted toward ‘disagree/strongly disagree’ responses. The results suggest that the respondents did not blame the supervisor’s conduct in terms of setting an example and dealing with absenteeism as strong antecedents of absenteeism. The statement ‘employees thinking sick leave is there to take when they want, elicited a 64% ‘agree/strongly agree’ responses.

The standard deviations for the responses to organisational factors were relatively low ranging between 1.08 and 1.27, indicating that the responses were narrowly dispersed around the mean scores.

Chart 4.10: Results with regards to organisational factors
The chart confirms the high number of strongly agree/agree responses (24 & 41) respectively for the statement “not being able to discuss problems openly with the supervisor”. All and all, the chart does indicate that there are a number of organisational factors that could be addressed to reduce absenteeism.

4.3.3 Personal Factors

The following table presents the results on the causes of absenteeism relating to personal factors. Factors such as injuries at work, transport problems, family responsibility and alcohol related problems were probed as antecedents of absenteeism.

TABLE 4.11: Means and standard deviations for scores for Section B (Personal Factors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Factors</th>
<th>Valid N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employees seeking any reason to be booked off</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injuries sustained at work</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport problems</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chest and respiration problems</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees having to look after sick people at home</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees having to deal with problems related to their children</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol related problems</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the personal factors depicted above the following conclusions are drawn based on the perceptions of the respondents: The question of alcohol related problems (statement 28) had a mean score of 3.81 which showed a tendency toward agreement with the statement.

The question of employees having to deal with problems related to their children had the largest mean score (3.92) as the respondents showed a tendency toward ‘strongly agree’. Furthermore this question had the lowest standard deviation (0.85) of the personal factors indicating that the respondents felt more or less the same about this question.

**Chart 4.11: Results with regards to personal factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal factors</th>
<th>(N) Respondents views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employees seeking any reason to be book off</td>
<td>23 43 4 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injuries sustained at work</td>
<td>13 43 23 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport problems</td>
<td>13 36 14 29 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chest and respiratory problems</td>
<td>11 31 37 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees having to look after sick people at home</td>
<td>9 30 32 24 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees having to deal with problems related to their children</td>
<td>25 54 18 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol related problems</td>
<td>36 32 22 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the graph above the following conclusion are drawn based on the perceptions of the respondents:
The chart illustrates that the last statement (alcohol related problems) elicited most ‘strongly agree’ responses, and in addition with “agree” responses a total of 68 per cent of the respondents suggested that alcohol problems were an antecedent of absenteeism. The statement ‘employees seeking any reason to be booked off obtained a total of 66 per cent ‘strongly agree/agree’ responses. For the statement ‘injuries sustained at work’, 56 per cent ‘strongly agree/agree’ responses were received, indicating that this was also an area that should receive more attention.

In the following section of the questionnaire respondents had to indicate which reasons, from a presented list, were more often given as reasons for absenteeism. The responses were indicated on a Likert-type scale ranging from most often (4), often (3), sometimes (2) and never (1). The results are presented in Table 4.12.
TABLE 4.12: Means and standard deviations for scores for Section B (Frequency of reasons for absenteeism)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of reasons for absenteeism</th>
<th>Valid N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 Being genuinely ill</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 Stress</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 Family crisis (child/parent care)</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33 Personal business to attend to</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 Not to lose their sick leave days</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 Conflict with the supervisor</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 Conflict with other employees</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 Transport issues</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38 Repetitive work</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 Long working hours</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 To avoid shift work</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 Hot/cold work environment</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42 Faking illness to take a break from work</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43 Injuries such as backache</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most frequent reasons given for absenteeism, based on the responses, included genuine illness (statement 30), family crises (statement 32), injuries (statement 43), employees not wanting to lose sick leave days (statement 34) and long working hours (statement 39). These responses received to statement 32 (family crisis) are congruent to responses received to statement 27 (having to
deal with problems related to children), while the responses to statement 43 (injury) are congruent to statement 23 (injuries sustained at work).

Chart 4.12: Results with regards to frequency and reasons for absenteeism

From the descriptive statistics on the frequency and reasons for absenteeism, being genuinely ill and family crisis were viewed to be the most often quoted reasons why employees would stay away from work. These statements also had low standard deviations indicating a general agreement to these statements among the respondents.

For the rest of the statements, respondents felt the statements posed on the questionnaire were often the reasons why employees would be absent. None of the statements posed in this category scored a mean below two indicating that a majority of the respondents did not feel that these were sometimes or never the reason why employees would stay away from work.
4.4 SECTION C: MANAGEMENT OF ABSENTEEISM

Section C of the questionnaire covered the management of absenteeism. Respondents had to indicate the extent to which they agreed with various statements relating to the management of absenteeism, such as return-to-work interviews, informing employees of attendance goals and rewarding employees for good attendance. The responses were indicated on a Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree (5), agree (4), uncertain (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). Table 4.13 presents the results on the antecedents of absenteeism related to the management of absenteeism.

TABLE 4.13: Means and standard deviations for scores for Section C (Management of absenteeism)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management of absenteeism</th>
<th>Valid N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  The supervisor records the real reasons why employees are absent</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  The supervisor conducts a return-to-work interview when an employees has been absent</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Employees are informed of the company’s attendance goals</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Employees get rewards for having a good attendance record (always coming to work)</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  The supervisor doesn’t mind when employees are booked off sick</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  The supervisor knows the real reasons why employees are absent from work</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  My team has an attendance target</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  Employees get into trouble if they are absent from work a lot</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  The supervisor encourages employees to come to work</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.13 shows that a number of statements elicited fairly high mean scores (above 4.0) which show a tendency towards 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses. These statements related to return to work interviews (statement 2), informing employees about attendance goals and abilities (statement 3), negative consequences employees face when absent (statement 8) and the supervisor encouraging employees to come to work (statement 9). The standard deviation ranged between 0.87 and 0.99 which indicates that the spread of responses were relatively narrow and low, confirming a tendency towards 'strongly agree/agree' responses on these statements.

The responses to the rest of the statements leaned towards 'uncertain' (between 2.5 and 3.5). The standard deviation for these questions ranged between 1.15 and 1.38 indicating that the respondents were less in agreement with regard to their responses to these statements. The response to statement five (the supervisor doesn't mind when employees are booked off sick) received the lowest mean with a tendency towards disagree. This response to this statement implied that supervisors did care about attendance and did not have a careless attitude towards employees booking off sick.
Based on the perceptions of the respondents depicted in the graph above the following conclusions were drawn:

Supervisors recorded the real reasons for absenteeism, conducted return-to-work-interviews, informed employees of the attendance goal, complained if employees were absent from work (‘employees got into trouble’) and encourage employees to come to work. An incongruence in the responses is the fact that the respondents indicated the supervisor recorded the real reasons for absenteeism, yet for statement “The supervisor knows the real reasons why employees are absent from work” the responses were mostly spread between ‘agree’ and ‘unsure’.

Respondents rated the statement “the supervisor encourages employees to come to work” as ‘strongly agree’ (51) and agree (44) respectively indicating a high tendency towards agreement with this statement.
A significant number of employees felt that they did not get rewarded for good attendance; 56% ‘disagree/strongly disagree’ responses. The responses to this section indicate that while employees were aware of the attendance goal of the organisation they were less aware of a team goal for attendance.

4.5 CONCLUSION

Overall, in terms of the biographical data pertaining to the participants in this study, it was found that most participants were between 25 and 50 years of age, male and married.

Respondents who took part in this survey were based in the following three departments; Paint Shop, Body Shop and Final Assembly. The majority were working in the final assembly department 50 per cent or body shop 38 per cent, with the paint shop having a lower representation of 19 per cent of respondents.

It was also important to understand the duration for which respondents had been working at VWSA in order to contextualise their responses to the survey. There was generally an even spread amongst respondents with regard to number of years in which they had been working at VWSA. As a total, almost half of respondents had been employed between six and fifteen years.

Most respondents agreed that absenteeism was a problem in the organisation and that employees took leave when they were not genuinely ill.

The empirical study focused on the antecedents of absenteeism, and specifically job, organisational and personal factors, as well supervisors’ attempts to manage absenteeism. In the next chapter, final conclusions will be drawn and recommendations will be made for the management of the antecedents of absenteeism.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter the final conclusions pertaining to the literature review and empirical study will be discussed, and recommendations will be made and discussed. In the next paragraph the main and sub-problems are restated and an explanation is given of how each problem was addressed.

5.1 RESOLUTION OF THE MAIN PROBLEM

The main problem stated in Chapter one was:

What are the antecedents of absenteeism at Volkswagen SA?

The sub-problems developed from the main problem were:

Sub-problem 1

What is the impact of absenteeism on the competitiveness of a global organisation?

Sub-problem 2

What are the antecedents of absenteeism?
Sub-problem 3

What strategies can be utilised by organisations to eliminate or reduce the impact of antecedents on absenteeism?

Sub-problem 4

What antecedents, as revealed through the resolution of Sub-problem 2, are evident amongst employees at VWSA?

Sub-problem 5

What are the perceptions of employees at VWSA of the strategies used by the organisation to eliminate or reduce the antecedents of absenteeism?

To address the main problem and sub-problems, a theoretical study was undertaken, which was presented in Chapter two. The main conclusion from the theoretical study was that absenteeism is a complex problem that consists of many variables and conditions. Absenteeism is costly and has a negative impact on the profitability of a company. Absenteeism is not just disruptive to an organisation but affects employees within the organisation as well. It is evident that absenteeism may not be completely eradicated as some absenteeism is unavoidable, thus the efforts should be rather to contain it to a manageable level rather than to attempt to eradicate it completely. The theoretical study also revealed that the antecedents of absenteeism are categorised into job, organisational and personal factors, and that the response of management to absenteeism can also encourage or discourage absenteeism.
5.2 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The empirical study, which consisted of a survey with a questionnaire as data-collecting tool, was conducted among employees in three manufacturing areas at VWSA, namely Final Assembly, Paint Shop and Body Shop. The main empirical findings and recommendations are presented below.

5.2.1 Demographic information

As was indicated in the previous chapter, the respondents were representative of the employees in the above manufacturing areas, and mostly male, between the ages of 25 and 50, and married. Absenteeism is more associated with women taking care of family, older people and unmarried people. The manufacturing environment is physically demanding and it is recommended that the health and age of prospective employees are considered during employment. The more automated the processes are, such as in the Paint Shop, the less these factors will matter.

The respondents indicated that they believed absenteeism was a problem in the organisation and that people stayed away for reasons other than genuine illness. It is recommended that absenteeism figures, such as the overall Gross Absence Rate (GAR) and Absence Frequency Rate for the organisation, and specific work areas and teams, are regularly communicated to employees and displayed prominently to emphasise the importance of attendance.
5.2.2 Antecedents of absenteeism

The antecedents of absenteeism were categorised into job, organisational and personal factors.

**Job factors**: The main factors found to contribute to absenteeism were a lack of career opportunity, job stress, too much work in the allocated time, long hours of work, working night shift and perceived poor person-job fit.

These factors could be addressed through the following:

- Career planning- which will assist in employees having a goal to work towards in terms of career development.

- Job design factors (job enrichment and rotation), where cross training will help employees with developing a variety of skills and competencies and prevent them from getting bored. By redesigning a job, the job itself becomes more meaningful and motivational, which is a more sensible way to deal with a lack of promotional opportunity. Manufacturing companies, operating in a very competitive environment, might be tempted to go leaner all the time, and this might result in the design of jobs which are not suited to employees’ abilities or repetitive performance of a narrow range of tasks. Such conditions will have a negative impact on absenteeism and companies should guide against them.

- Matching skills/competencies with jobs can be done through the assistance of HR by conducting job profile assessments on individuals before being placed in a particular area.
• Wellness programmes, aimed at identifying work-related issues such as stress, resilience with regard to demanding jobs and shift work, and personal issues such as debt management, relationship issues and optimal health. One way an organisation can help manage stress is through an introduction of a gymnasium on site for use by employees. Alternatively promote exercise through offering gym vouchers to employees. The company could organise fun runs on weekends to include family members as a family activity. This would promote good health and improve moral and engagement of employees.

**Organisational factors:** Outstanding organisational factors that served as antecedents of absenteeism were indicated as the inability of employees to be open to supervisors about their problems, employees believing sick leave was there to be used and employees not being committed to their teams. An encouraging point found was that respondents believed that supervisors were setting a good example as far as absenteeism was concerned and that supervisors were being strict with absenteeism control. Factors such as the size of the company and work groups have an impact on absenteeism. Smaller companies tend to have better control and minimal absenteeism. So absenteeism can be difficult to control due to the high number of people employed on a production line.

These organisational factors could be addressed through the following:

• Open and honest communication, as it is important that supervisors enforce discipline in the workplace especially with those employees who are transgressing the rules. However it is important that supervisors be flexible and open-minded when discussing issues of absenteeism. A good rule to follow is ‘hard on standards, soft on people’. Some employees may ask for leave in advance to take care of personal business. It is imperative that
supervisors where possible should try and assist employees and not have a general approach to this issue. Employees could also be granted a day’s leave in a period were an employee could be granted leave on request. A genuinely respectful relationship between a supervisor and employees will result in the employee feeling obliged to be at work.

- Creating a culture of attendance, where it is recommended that the focus is placed on attendance rather than absenteeism. During orientation, employees should be reminded about the importance of attendance rather than making so much of the leave benefits. Information on what to do when genuinely ill can be shared by the supervisor at a later stage or given in a written form rather than being prominently discussed as if it is an exceptional benefit.

**Personal factors:** Outstanding personal factors that served as antecedents of absenteeism were indicated as employees having to deal with problems related to their children, alcohol-related problems, injuries sustained at work and employees seeking any reason to be booked off.

These personal factors can be addressed in the following ways:

- Onsite Child Care. The results of this study showed that family responsibility, specifically with regard to children, was perceived as an important antecedent of absenteeism. Although some employees are believed to use family responsibility as a means to get time off, most employees, especially women, are faced with a genuine problem of looking after their children for various reasons. The company could introduce a day care or crèche at work so that female employees can bring their kids to work. Employees will be less tempted to call in sick if they can bring their child to the crèche at work under special circumstances. Companies such as Google and Microsoft, leaders in their field, have created workplace environments that enable employees to focus on their work and feel committed to the company.
5.2.3 Strategies to manage the antecedents of absenteeism

The results showed that supervisors did manage absenteeism well by recording the real reasons for absenteeism, conducting return-to-work interviews, informing employees of attendance goals, dealing strictly with absenteeism and encouraging employees to come to work. Areas for improvement that came to light were incentives for attendance and team attendance goals.

These factors can be combated with the aid of the following:

- Policy controls which have an impact on absenteeism. What was apparent to the researcher was that the very policy employed to combat absenteeism can be the catalyst to absenteeism. The absence policy allows for employees to take sick leave for a certain number of days before serious action can be taken by management and supervisors. It is clear that supervision takes absenteeism seriously and an effort is made to enforce attendance.

- Incentives where the absence policy could also be reviewed to include a monetary value aspect linked to allowable sick leave days where employees can be paid out if they do not take sick leave as most employees see sick leave as days due to them.

- The lack of flexibility to give employees leave came through strongly in the research. This can create a vicious circle within a team as when one employee is absent it is difficult for management to offer time off to employees who genuinely need time off leave. Therefore most employees may resort to taking unscheduled leave or sick leave if they may know in advance of an important situation at home requiring them to take leave. It is therefore recommended that employees should be encouraged to request leave when faced with a situation where they need to attend to personal business.

- Team goals where supervisors can review extending organisational and divisional targets to a group level. This way a supervisor can create an
environment where the team has an attendance goal managed at a team level. This would generate completion and awareness in the team and create an environment of a self-managing team.

- ‘Return-to-Work Interviews’ should be conducted by the supervisor every time an employee returns from sick leave. It is important that the return-to-work interviews are conducted not just as a routine but it is recommended that HR is also involved in the return-to-work interviews to enhance the seriousness of the problem of absenteeism and the importance of attendance. Return-to-work interviews should not be perceived as ‘punishment’ but rather a tool to communicate to the employee the important role played in the success of the team. The concrete consequences of not being at work should be explained.

- Reward Good Attendance by regularly recognising good attendance through various means like monthly draws were employees can win prizes or verbal praise. Another way worth investigating is through the introduction of an incentive that is linked to absenteeism which rewards good attenders and penalises poor attenders.

- Manage social factors as absenteeism can be influenced by social circumstances of which employees have no control. From a community perspective it may be a norm to consume alcohol for instance on a Sunday leading to an employee being unable to attend work on a Monday due to the after effects of weekend activities. This also talks to the issue of group norms where the group might perceive such behaviour as normal. Alcohol and drug abuse should not be seen as an external problem in the organisation but rather as something an organisation should get involved in to assist employees who might have problems. The first step is to create a channel were employees can feel free to approach the company if they are in need of help. It is therefore recommended that the organisation invest in substance abuse awareness and education campaigns/workshops that do not mostly focus on the consequences of substance abuse, but rather on teaching
employees alternative drinking patterns and behaviours through behavioural modification.

5.3 PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS

No major problems were experienced during the cause to the study. The researcher, however, had to think carefully how to distribute and administer the questionnaire not to interfere with work demands.

A limitation is that the study was conducted in the manufacturing environment and on the operational side of the company, and the results might therefore not necessarily be generalised to other organisations. However, the study does reinforce the importance of first identifying antecedents of absenteeism and then addressing these antecedents rather than dealing with absenteeism only through policies and procedures, and discipline.

5.4 OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study could provide a basis for further research. The following can be explored in future research:

- the relation between employee wellness and absenteeism
- the impact of dual career arrangements on absenteeism
- the impact of various types of incentives on absenteeism
5.5 CONCLUSION

Absenteeism is a problem for most organisations and result in financial losses for an organisation through costs incurred for overtime to catch up production losses. Furthermore in cases where replacement of personnel is necessary this may include administrative costs related to the time human resource personnel spend looking for replacement employees or the time production management spend re-assigning employees. Absenteeism results in decreased productivity and may affect the quality of the product due to the increased workload and burden put on employees who are at work.

The antecedents of absenteeism vary from job, organisational and personal factors. The response of management can also enhance or restrict the impact of absenteeism on the organisation.

The study has demonstrated the usefulness of conducting a survey to identify the real antecedents of absenteeism so that strategies for managing the problem can be focused on where it will make the biggest difference.
REFERENCE LIST


129


Dear Respondent

I am a post-graduate student studying towards my MBA (Masters in Business Administration) at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. The topic of my research project is **THE MANAGEMENT OF THE ANTECEDENTS OF ABSENTEEISM AT A MOTOR MANUFACTURING COMPANY**. The aim of the study is to investigate the antecedents of absenteeism.

It will be appreciated if you could answer a few questions in this regard, which should not take more than fifteen minutes. **Please note that the questionnaire is completed anonymously.** Please submit the completed questionnaire by 02/10/2011. We thank you in advice for your contribution in this study.

Thank you very much.

Oscar Mandleni
Supervisor: Dr A Werner
ANNEXURE B: QUESTIONNAIRE: ANTECEDENTS OF ABSENTEEISM

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Please provide the following information by making an 'X' in the appropriate block.

1. Indicate your age bracket.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>18-24</th>
<th>25-30</th>
<th>31-40</th>
<th>41-50</th>
<th>51-60</th>
<th>61+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. Indicate your marital status
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Divorced</th>
<th>Widow/Widower</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. Indicate your gender
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4. In which area are you currently working?
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paint Shop</th>
<th>Body Shop</th>
<th>Final Assembly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5. How many years have you been working at VW?
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less than 2 years</th>
<th>3 - 5 years</th>
<th>6-10 years</th>
<th>11 – 15 years</th>
<th>16 – 20 years</th>
<th>21 - 30 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

6. How many dependents (e.g. children, spouse) do you have?
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 or less</th>
<th>3-5</th>
<th>More than 5</th>
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</thead>
</table>

7. Is absenteeism a problem in your workplace?
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

8. Do you think that some employees take sick leave without really being sick?
   
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<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

9. Please motivate your answer to question Nr 8.

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137
**SECTION B: ANTECEDENTS OF ABSENTEEISM**

*Indicate how much you believe the following factors are the causes of absenteeism at VWSA.*

**JOB FACTORS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes of absenteeism at VWSA</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Too much job stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Employees having to repeat the same tasks all the time</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Employees having jobs that do not fit their skills and abilities</td>
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<td>4 Employees in jobs that do not fit their personalities</td>
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<td>5 Employees not knowing what is expected of them</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Having to work night shifts</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Too much work to do in the allocated time</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Little opportunity to move to a better position</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Working in a dangerous environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 The job turning out different to what employees expected when they applied</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 Employees wanting a break from long hours of work</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Indicate how much you believe the following factors are the causes of absenteeism at VWSA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Causes of absenteeism at VWSA</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Not being able to discuss problems openly with the supervisor</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 Employees not understanding the absence policy</td>
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<td>14 Employees thinking sick leave is there to take when they want to</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 Employee not understanding the consequences of absenteeism</td>
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<td>16 Employees not being committed to their team</td>
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<td>17 Not having a good working relationship with co-workers</td>
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<td>18 Sick leave days are seen as part of normal leave allocation</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 Supervisors not setting a good attendance example</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 Supervisor not strict with absenteeism control</td>
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<tr>
<td>21 Employees not supporting the goals (vision) of VWSA</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Indicate how much you believe the following factors are the causes of absenteeism at VWSA.

PERSONAL FACTORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes of absenteeism at VWSA</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22 Employees seeking any reason to be booked off</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>23 Injuries sustained at work</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 Transport problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 Chest and respiration problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 Employees having to look after sick people at home</td>
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<tr>
<td>27 Employees having to deal with problems related to their children</td>
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<td>28 Alcohol related problems</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

29. Is there anything else you want to mention that will explain the real causes of absenteeism at VWSA?
........................................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................................

In your opinion, how often do people stay away from work for the following reasons?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REASON</th>
<th>MOST OFTEN</th>
<th>OFTEN</th>
<th>SOMETIMES</th>
<th>NEVER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 Being genuinely ill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 Stress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>32 Family Crisis (child/parent care)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>33 Personal business to attend to</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>34 Not to lose their sick leave days</td>
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<tr>
<td>35 Conflict with the supervisor</td>
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<tr>
<td>36 Conflict with other employees</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 Transport issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>38 Repetitive work</td>
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<tr>
<td>39 Long working hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>40 To avoid shift work</td>
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<tr>
<td>41 Hot/cold work environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>42 Faking illness to take a break from work</td>
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<tr>
<td>43 Injuries such as backache injury</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please answer the following questions by making an ‘X’ in the appropriate block.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATEMENT</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  The supervisor records the real reasons why employees are absent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  The supervisor conducts a return to work interview when an employee is absent</td>
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<tr>
<td>3  Employees are informed of the company’s attendance goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>4  Employees get rewards for having a good attendance record (always coming to work)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5  The supervisor doesn’t mind when employees are booked off sick</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  The supervisor knows the real reasons why employees are absent from work</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  My team has an attendance target</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  Employees get into trouble if they are absent from work a lot</td>
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<tr>
<td>9  The supervisor encourages employees to come to work</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Thank you very much. Your assistance with completing the questionnaire is appreciated.

Oscar Mandleni