AN ANALYSIS OF KEY FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR AND INFLUENCING THE RATE OF EMPLOYEE ABSENTEEISM IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE NGQURA HARBOUR PROJECT

BY

MAGDEL KOEN-MÜLLER

Dissertation presented in fulfillment of the requirements for the Master’s Degree in Business Administration in the Faculty of Management at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University

PROMOTER: Dr S. KRAUSE

DATE: January 2005
DECLARATION

“I, Magdel Koen-Müller, hereby declare that:

- the work in this dissertation is my own original work;

- all sources used or referred to has been documented and recognized; and

- this dissertation has not been previously submitted in full or partial fulfillment of the requirements for an equivalent or higher qualification at any other education institution.”

Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the researcher and not necessarily to be attributed to the Faculty of Management at the Port Elizabeth Technikon.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- The respondents of the study who supplied the empirical data.

- My mother, Marléne, for believing in me.

- My husband, Willem Müller, for encouragement, assistance and patience during the study
ABSTRACT

Absenceism places huge financial burdens on organisations and has a detrimental effect on productivity. Aware of the direct and indirect costs associated with absenteeism, management must determine what factors are responsible for the absenteeism and how these factors can be rectified in order to reduce the rate of employee absenteeism in the organisation.

The study’s main aims were firstly to determine which key factors are responsible for employees being absent from work and secondly, how they can be rectified in order to reduce absenteeism.

From the data that was obtained from the literature study stress, substance abuse, lack of job commitment and organisational factors account for some reasons given for absenteeism. Employee absenteeism may also be partly due to not enough emphasis being placed on career development, staff retention and salaries. Other causes of absenteeism include personal responsibilities, lack of motivation and low morale in the workplace.

Only recently have managers become aware of the true impact which alcohol and substance abuse have on organisations. More productivity is lost through on-the-job absenteeism than due to any other single factor. On-the-job absenteeism is difficult to define and very difficult to identify. Such absenteeism includes the presence of employees at work while they are sick but incapable of performing to their true capabilities – this often occurring on Mondays or Fridays or the day after payday.

With current staff retention programs, mergers and joint ventures, organisations now demand the same level of production with fewer employees. This has given rise to an increase in the level of stress employees experience, which led to stress becoming a key factor responsible for absenteeism.
When managing absenteeism the implementation of a proper measurement system is essential. This will enable the company to determine the extent of their absenteeism. An evaluation and comparison of these statistics over a period of time will also shed light on the nature of the absenteeism. These will result in the proactive handling of a company’s absenteeism. This is also the first step away from the acceptance of absenteeism and subsequently the nurturing of an absence culture.

Employers can take a number of steps to reduce absenteeism, such as giving responsibility for absence management to senior or human resource managers rather than line managers, introducing return to work interviews, introducing discipline procedures and others.

The great majority of absence management solutions completely overlook organisational factors, instead focusing on individual, claim processing and health-related factors in the quest to reduce lost productive days. Absence management programs should focus on organisational (not individual) drivers of absence to encourage a present and committed workforce.

Absenteeism will never be eradicated, but through careful management organisations can reduce the absentee rate and the effect it has on the organisation.
CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS i
LIST OF FIGURES v
LIST OF TABLES vi
LIST OF GRAPHS vii
ANNEXURE viii

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND PLANNING OF THE STUDY

PAGE

1.1 INTRODUCTION 1
1.2 NGQURA HARBOUR CONTRACTORS 2
1.3 MAIN PROBLEM OF THE STUDY 4
1.4 SUB-PROBLEMS 4
1.5 DELIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH 5
1.5.1 DEMARCATION OF ORGANISATION TOT BE RESEARCHED 5
1.5.2 GEOGRAPHIC DEMARCATION 5
1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 5
1.6.1 SECONDARY SOURCES 6
1.6.2 PRIMARY SOURCES 6
1.7 DEFINITION OF SELECTED CONCEPTS 6
1.7.1 ABSENTEEISM 6
1.7.2 NGQURA HARBOUR PROJECT 8
1.8 COMMONLY USED ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS 8
1.9 ASSUMPTIONS MADE 9
1.10 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH 9
CHAPTER 2
FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR AND INFLUENCING THE RATE OF
EMPLOYEE ABSENTEEISM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 CAUSIONAL MODELS OF ABSENTEEISM</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1 PAIN-AVOIDANCE MODELS</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2 ADJUSTMENT-TO-WORK MODELS</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3 DECISION MODELS</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.4 DIAGNOSTIC MODEL OF ATTENDANCE</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 KEY FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR ABSENTEEISM</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1 DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Components of Occupational Programs</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2 STRESS</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.3 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND COMMITMENT</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.4 ABSENCE OF COMMUNICATION-ENGAGEMENT</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.5 HIV/AIDS IN THE WORKPLACE</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 CONCLUSION</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER 3
MANAGEMENT PRACTICES TO COMBAT EMPLOYEE ABSENTEEISM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 DISABILITY MANAGEMENT</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 HEALTH PROMOTION</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 EMPLOYEE INCENTIVE PROGRAMS</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 RETURN TO WORK INTERVIEWS</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 JOB FLEXIBILITY</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9 STYLE OF MANAGEMENT</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# CHAPTER 4
## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>WHAT IS RESEARCH DESIGN</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1</td>
<td>THE CONCEPT OF RESEARCH</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2</td>
<td>THE CONCEPT OF DESIGN</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.3</td>
<td>VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1</td>
<td>THE POSITIVIST APPROACH</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.2</td>
<td>THE INTERPRETATIVE APPROACH</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.3</td>
<td>THE CRITICAL APPROACH</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.4</td>
<td>MODELS AND MODELING</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>QUANTITATIVE VERSUS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.1</td>
<td>QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.2</td>
<td>QUALITATIVE RESEARCH</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.2.1</td>
<td>Characteristics of qualitative research</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.2.2</td>
<td>Inductive versus deductive logic</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.2.3</td>
<td>Choosing the most appropriate qualitative research method</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.3</td>
<td>TRIANGULATION</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>CHOOSING THE MOST APPROPRIATE RESEARCH METHOD</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>RESEARCH GOALS</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6.1</td>
<td>EXPLORATORY PROJECTS</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6.2</td>
<td>DESCRIPTIVE PROJECTS</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6.3</td>
<td>EXPLANATORY PROJECTS</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6.4</td>
<td>THE RESEARCH GOALS OF THIS PROJECT</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>RESEARCH STRATEGIES</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>THE POPULATION OF THIS PROJECT</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>GENERAL PROCEDURES USED IN THIS PROJECT</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## CHAPTER 5
### ANALYSIS OF THE PROJECT’S EMPIRICAL RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1</td>
<td>INDIVIDUAL BACKGROUND FACTORS</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2</td>
<td>HEALTH AND HABITS</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.3</td>
<td>ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER 6
### FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>MAIN FINDINGS</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REFERENCE LIST | 82
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>A Typology of Organisational Absence Cultures</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>A Process Model of Major Influences on Employee Attendance</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>A Diagnostic Model of Employee Attendance</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>A Model of Occupational Stress</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>A Conceptual Model for Research Design</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Interaction between Quantitative and Qualitative Research</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.1</td>
<td>Global Absence Rate Comparison</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.2</td>
<td>Company Specific Absence Rate 2002 – 2003</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.1</td>
<td>The Costs of Absence</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1</td>
<td>Differences between Qualitative and Quantitative Research</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2</td>
<td>Research Method Selection Model</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.3</td>
<td>Interaction between Research Goals and Research Strategy</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.4</td>
<td>Sample Population</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.1</td>
<td>Frequency Table of Individual Background Factors</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.2</td>
<td>Frequency Table of Health and Habits</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.3</td>
<td>Frequency Table of Organisational Factors</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF GRAPHS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graph 5.1:</th>
<th>Bar chart analysing section 1 – Individual Background Factors</th>
<th>72</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graph 5.2:</td>
<td>Bar chart analysing section 2 – Health and Habits</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graph 5.2</td>
<td>Bar chart analysing section 3 – Organisational Factors</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANNEXURE</td>
<td>PAGE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annexure 4.1: QUESTIONNAIRE ON FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE RATE OF EMPLOYEE ABSENTEEISM</td>
<td>88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PLANNING OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Employee absenteeism is a pervasive phenomenon that cuts across industries and national boundaries. It has broad-ranging consequences for managers, union officials, workers and their families, and the government. It is a real and present danger to corporate profits and effectiveness, and managers are constantly on the lookout for ways to reduce it.

There is a lot of discussion about absenteeism, but the extent and cost thereof is seldom realized. Van der Merwe and Miller (1988:35) described this phenomenon as follows: “Absenteeism is a problem with costly and pervasive implications, not only for effective functioning and productivity, but also for relationships among the people in an organisation, and more formally for labour relations.”

Absenteeism is but one of different methods whereby workers express discontentment with different environmental factors. Davis (1980:51) said: “Absenteeism, industrial sabotage, high labour turnover, low productivity are all manifestations of the same basic discontent.”

Absenteeism in the workplace is one of the dominant phenomena that influence productivity worldwide. The latest annual survey of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) revealed an average of 8.9 days absence per employee per annum (Kennedy, 2004:10). According to Wilson (2004:13) the CBI estimates that sick leave costs UK businesses more than £11 billion each year, with staff taking a remarkable 176 million sick days. CBI states that Construction and Manufacturing reported higher absence levels than the service sector with 7.4 days compared to 6.4 days. Manual workers also had significantly higher absence rates than non-manual workers, 8.7 days per employee compared to 5.9 days per employee.
A study by Wolmarans (1992:12) revealed that the average Gross Absence Rate (GAR) of Eastern Cape organizations was 5.5%. Comparing this figure with a number of first world countries it may be noted that the Eastern Cape organisations in South Africa have vast room for improved attendance.

**Table 1.1: Global Absence Rate Comparison**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRIES</th>
<th>GAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SA – Eastern Cape</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.5</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Wolmarans (1992:12)

While the figures are certainly important, perhaps of more interest is not only to determine the factors responsible for such high absence rates, but also how employers are actually dealing with these rising absence rates. According to Paton (2004:16) there is a distinct sense that firms are beginning to take a more proactive approach to absence. He found that 85 percent of UK employers are now taking action to reduce absence, with return-to-work interviews having the greatest impact on absence levels.

### 1.2. NGQURA HARBOUR CONTRACTORS

The contract for the construction of the Maritime Civil Works for the new Port of Ngqura has been awarded to Ngqura Harbour Contractors (NHC). The contract involves the
construction of a new harbour at the mouth of the Coega River nearly 25 kilometers north of Port Elizabeth.

NHC is a Joint Venture comprising of Hochtief Construction, an international construction company based in Germany; Concor Holdings (Pty) Ltd, a listed South African construction company; and Ngqura Empowerment Contractors, a joint venture consisting of four South African empowerment construction contractors.

NHC is suffering from an excessively high absenteeism rate; it ranges from 8 % - 11 % per shift, which affects the timely construction and completion of the contract.

On scrutinizing the patterns of absenteeism in the table below it is evident that there is a continuous and gradual rise in the number of shifts lost due to absentees as the year progresses from January through to December.

Table 1.2: Company Specific Absence Rate 2002 – 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>ABSENCE RATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ngqura Harbour Contractors
The continuous rise in absenteeism levels towards the end of the year is a strong indicator that abuse of the company’s sick leave allowance may be occurring as employees appear to use up any days which are still available.

The statistics given show that there may be a perception that each employee has a right to utilize all their days sick leave per annum regardless of whether they are ill or not and as the year draws to an end they feel entitled to use up any unused available sick leave.

It was also noted that over three-quarters of the absence incidents experienced in 2002 – 2004 were of a short duration (one or two days). This indicates that the vast majority of the absences experienced could be of a voluntary nature as past research has confirmed that short duration absences are more of a voluntary nature than longer term absences which are generally related to genuine illness. Absences of a voluntary nature can be explained as those absences where the employee decides him-/herself not to attend work due to personal reasons.

1.3 MAIN PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this research is to identify and discuss the main factors responsible for an excessively high employee absenteeism rate in the construction sector with specific reference to the Ngqura Harbour Project (NHP).

What factors lead to a high employee absenteeism rate?

1.4 SUB-PROBLEMS

In order to develop a strategy for solving the main research problem, the following sub-problems were identified:

- Which factors, according to research literature, are identified as responsible for a high absenteeism rate?
• Which factors are identified as responsible for the high absenteeism rate at the Ngqura Harbour Project?
• How can the effect of these factors be reduced in order to improve the absenteeism rate?

1.5 DELIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH

In order to ensure that the research project is manageable, it is necessary to demarcate the research to the following areas. Although this research was limited to the construction industry, it does not imply that research on the same topic is not needed in other regions and business sectors.

1.5.1 DEMARCATION OF ORGANISATION TO BE RESEARCHED

The scope of this research is limited to the employees of Ngqura Harbour Contractors working on the Ngqura Harbour Project site. To make the study more manageable, the research was limited to employees in the Quay Wall-, Precast-, and Dollos sections only.

1.5.2 GEOGRAPHIC DEMARCATION

The company researched operates in the Port Elizabeth/Coega area. This area falls under the control of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In conducting the research project data will be acquired from both secondary and primary sources in order to solve the main problem and the sub-problems.
1.6.1 SECONDARY SOURCES

A literature study will be conducted in order to identify the key factors that are responsible for and influence the high employee absenteeism rate in organisations. Data will be obtained from various publications such as textbooks, journals, previous studies, Internet and other sources on the subject.

1.6.2 PRIMARY SOURCES

Data will also be gathered by means of an empirical study. The technique to be used for obtaining useful and sensitive information will be personal interviews by means of a questionnaire that will embrace both open-ended and closed ended questions. Where appropriate, data will also be collected by means of recording observations, analyzing actual performance or any other relevant means.

The design of the questionnaires will elicit information from respondents and a five-point Lickert type questionnaire will be used during the empirical study.

1.7 DEFINITION OF SELECTED CONCEPTS

1.7.1 ABSENTEEISM

Before entering into the body of research, key concepts need to be defined in order to provide a clear insight into the meaning of the term.

According to the US Department of Labour (1962) an early and enduring definition of absenteeism is the failure of workers to report on the job when they are scheduled to work. This definition distinguishes unscheduled absenteeism from other forms of scheduled absences such as annual, compassionate, study, maternity and paternity leaves. However, no distinction is made between voluntary absences (within his/her control) and
involuntary absences (beyond his/her control). Both these forms of unscheduled absence disrupt the labour supply and the production process of the organisation.

Yolles, Carone and Krinsky (1975:3) stated that absenteeism might best be defined as one symptom of the individual’s total adjustment to the job situation. The employee’s adjustment to a job can be expressed along a continuum that ranges from creative productivity (going beyond the routine demands of the job) to discontinuing membership in the organisation (actually leaving the job). Between these extremes are a number of symptoms expressing varied degrees of adjustment, which include accident rate, number of personal grievances, rate of tardiness, and rate of absenteeism. They also state that there is a need to differentiate between the long-term absence resulting from serious illness and the short-term absences distributed over the year which are largely discretionary.

According to Chadwick-Jones, Nicholson & Brown (1982:4) the term absenteeism, as used in the context of fixed weekly work schedules, usually refers to employee absence that occurs without suitable notification of the employer and without official sanction by medical confirmation of illness. The term itself suggests that much absence from work is voluntary and avoidable, the result of a decision taken by the employee in disregard of daily work obligations. Absence of this kind may be interpreted as a relief from pressures, or even an aggressive act or retaliation; it may be an occasional choice of more attractive activities outside of the workplace.

According to Chadwick-Jones (1981:226) long duration absences tend to be the result of unavoidable illnesses, or incapacity while short duration absences are more likely to be the result of the employee’s decision not to attend work. Therefore short-duration absences (one or two days) would occur as a result of withdrawal from the work situation and would more probably be under the employee’s own control, than would longer duration absences.
Goodman and Atkin (1984) attempted to develop a theoretical framework and made the following valid observations:

- Absenteeism is a summary, composite phenomenon as the “mix” of causes and the relative importance of these causes will change over time;
- The stability of causal models over time cannot be assumed. While absenteeism research continues to capture both theoretical and practical interests, the dynamics of absence from the workplace are still not well understood.

1.7.2 NGQURA HARBOUR PROJECT

Ngqura Harbour Project refers to the construction development situated north-east of Port Elizabeth which is being developed by the Industrial Development Zone Operator and the Port of Ngqura which is being developed by the National Ports Authority.

1.8 COMMONLY USED ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CBI: Confederation of British Industry
GAR: Gross Absence Rate
NHP: Ngqura Harbour Projects
NHC: Ngqura Harbour Contractors
CIPD: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
DMEC: Disability Management Employer Coalition
IDZ: Coega Industrial Development Zone
EAP: Employee Assistance Program
HR: Human Resources
SABCCOHA: South African Business Coalition
STD: Short-term Disability
LTD: Long-term Disability
1.9 ASSUMPTIONS MADE

International authors (not South African) have written most of the available research literature. It was thus necessary to assume that the relevant research literature would also be applicable to South African organisations.

1.10 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

Unexpected absence costs corporate companies billions of rands annually in direct costs. Short, unscheduled absences - incidental absences - inflict particular damage on work schedules, increase workload for the employees who do show up and hamstring productivity. According to Anderson (2004:28) incidental absences like these can account for as much as 80% of absence events and 33% of all lost workdays.

The Confederation of British Industry calculates that during 2003 absences from work cost industry no less than £11.6 billion (Haswell, 2003:16).

Considering the cost of absenteeism and the impact it has on the productivity of organisations, management is constantly seeking ways to reduce the rate of absenteeism.

The proposed study will provide insight into key factors which are responsible for and influence the rate of absenteeism, and will describe methods how the rate of absenteeism can be reduced.
CHAPTER 2

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR AND INFLUENCING THE RATE OF EMPLOYEE ABSENTEEISM

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Sick leave and absenteeism can take a heavy toll on a company's productivity and place a huge financial burden on employers. According to a new survey by CCH Inc., an Illinois company that provides tax and accounting information to businesses, incidental absence costs employers approximately $645 per employee each year (Amore, 2004:7).

According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) absence survey, Employee Absence 2004: a survey of management policy and practice, absence levels are higher than ever being noted, much of it is short-term, stress is rampant and General Practitioners are increasingly over eager to sign off malingerers (Paton, 2004:25).

The effects of excessive absenteeism of all types are not limited to a single work group or division. In a still turbulent business environment where management is charged to do more with less, the potential effects of excessive employee absence on operational performance are dramatic. Consider these recent absence-related statistics of corporate America (Anderson, 2004:26):

- Employers spent an average of 15 percent of payroll on absence in 2002, up from 14.3 percent in 2000.
- For a 5 000-employee company with average base pay of $40 000, absence costs $30 million a year.
- Every day, 3-6 percent of any given workforce is absent due to unscheduled issues or disability claims.
• To compensate for these unanticipated, unscheduled absences, companies commonly overstaff by 10-20 percent.
• Employers set aside 4.4 percent of their total budget to pay for absenteeism.
• Companies with poor/fair morale set aside an even higher figure to pay for absenteeism, 5.3 percent of their total budget.

Additionally, a new survey on absenteeism by the Disability Management Employer Coalition (DMEC) in San Diego found that 30 percent of managers think incidental absence is increasing, and 60 percent feel that it hinders productivity (Amore, 2004:7). Incidental absence - unscheduled employee absences of one to five days - accounts for between 30 percent and 40 percent of all lost workdays, according to DMEC (Whitten, 2003:55). Such absences can reflect normal medical problems such as colds and the flu, but in some cases they can represent other, largely non-medical problems that add up to billions of dollars in lost productivity each year, according to DMEC (Bates, 2004:30). Table 2.1 illustrates the different costs associated with absenteeism.

Table 2.1: The Costs of Absence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Costs</th>
<th>Indirect Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Lost wages</td>
<td>• Lost revenue opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased temporary worker expense</td>
<td>• Lower employee morale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Embedded overstaffing</td>
<td>• Reduced customer satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased use of overtime</td>
<td>• Increased benefit administration expense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increased health care costs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Anderson (2004:31)

CCH's survey showed that most unscheduled absences, about 64 percent, are not illness-related. Stress, personal needs, family issues and lack of job commitment account for
some reasons given for absenteeism (Amore, 2004:8). A poor attrition rate and absenteeism may be partly due to not enough emphasis being placed on career development, staff retention and salaries (Call centres losing, 2004:4). Other causes of absenteeism include personal responsibilities and low morale in the workplace. Stress and recurring illness are more common among non-manual employees.

This chapter will proceed with an overview of the different causional models of absenteeism. Thereafter the key factors responsible for absenteeism will be discussed, which include drug and alcohol abuse, stress, employee engagement and commitment, absence of communication-engagement and HIV/AIDS in the workplace.

2.2 CAUSATIONAL MODELS OF ABSENTEEISM

According to Steers, Porter & Bigley (1996:408) absenteeism theories can be categorized into three types of explanatory models: pain-avoidance models, in which absence behaviour is viewed as a flight from negative work experiences; adjustment-to-work models, in which absence is seen as resulting largely from employee responses to changes in job conditions leading to a renegotiation of the psychological contract; and decision models, in which absence behaviour is viewed primarily as a rational decision to attain valued outcomes. In addition, a final category called “integrated models” can be identified that attempt to go beyond narrow sets of parameters and offer a more complex view of the causes of attendance.

2.2.1 PAIN-AVOIDANCE MODELS

The underlying assumption of the pain-avoidance models is that job dissatisfaction (or negative job attitudes in general) represents the primary cause of absenteeism. The opinion was ventured that dissatisfied workers would be absent more if their work dissatisfaction was symptomatic of being in a punishing situation. Several meta-analyses of the absence-job satisfaction relationship tend to support the conclusions that the pain-avoidance model is overly simplistic (Steers et al, 1996:408).
2.2.2 ADJUSTMENT-TO-WORK MODELS

In adjustment-to-work models absence from work is viewed as a consequence of organisational socialization and other adaptive processes in response to job demands. According to a theory developed by Hill and Trist in 1953, absence is the withdrawal from the stress of work situations. Thus, individuals experiencing conflicts of satisfactions and obligations tend to express them through labour turnover, accidents, and unsanctioned absences (absences without formal permission) (Chadwick-Jones et al, 1982: 9).

The model of Chadwick-Jones et al (1982:10) focuses on the notion of social exchange rather than individual motivations. Moreover, the amount of absences taken is influenced by the prevailing absence culture. Variations in absence cultures across organisations or groups are predicted to arise from the degree of salience of the culture and the level of trust inherent in the psychological contract. The salience of the culture refers to the degree of distinctiveness of beliefs about absence, assumptions underlying employment, and views toward self-control (the degree to which all members of a group share similar or divergent beliefs about absenteeism). The level of trust refers to whether the tasks surrounding one’s job are high or low in discretion (the amount of discretion provided employees by their management). The four types of absence cultures are described in figure 2.1.
According to Steers et al (1996:416) absence cultures can influence attendance motivation and subsequent attendance in at least three ways. First, where specific norms exist regarding the appropriate level of absence, an individual’s attendance motivation level will often reflect these norms. Second, in the case where no specific norms exist, an individual’s behaviour can be influenced by his or her observations of the absence behaviour of others and the consequences of such behaviour. Finally, absence cultures can moderate the relationship between individual values and attitudes and subsequent attendance motivation.

### 2.2.3 DECISION MODELS

Two primary streams of influence have contributed to the development of decision models of absence. These are the rational decision models provided by economists and sociologists and the expectancy-valence framework posited by organisational psychologists. What these groups have in common is that they view absence behaviour as largely rational in nature and determined by the individual’s subjective evaluation of the costs and benefits associated with absence and its alternative (Steers et al, 1996:413).
The model of Steers & Rhodes (1978:4) attempts to examine in a systematic and comprehensive fashion the various influences on employee attendance behaviour; see figure 2.2. The basic premise of this model is that an employee’s attendance is largely a function of two important variables:

- an employee’s motivation to attend and
- an employee’s ability to attend.

The theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980:41) postulates that intentions to be absent are the most immediate prediction of absence occurrences. This theory supports the first variable of the Steers & Rhodes model relating to an employee’s motivation to attend.

**Figure 2.2: A Process Model of Major Influences on Employee Attendance**

![Diagram](image-url)
The Job Situation itself is the first influence on attendance to be discussed. The job situation consists of those variables that characterize the nature of the job and the surrounding work environment. These influences are similar to those known as organisational factors which include amongst others the size of the workgroup and organisation, shift work and the nature or supervision. Job satisfaction is seen as an attitudinal factor impacting on absenteeism.

The second factor influencing employee attendance is the employee’s values and job expectations. The third factor affecting absence is pressure to attend and covers the following areas:
- economic and market conditions
- incentive or reward systems
- work groups norms
- personal work ethic
- organisational commitment

The study of Steers & Rhodes’s model suggests that more effective results may be achieved through more positive reward systems than through punishment.

The next factor to consider is the employee’s ability to attend. Three unavoidable situations or limitations on employees’ attendance are identified:
- illness and accidents
- family responsibilities
- transportation problems.

Personal characteristics may also be relevant as a factor which influences absence patterns. Issues such as education level, tenure, age, sex and family size should be considered. These characteristics are supported by considerable research and are also known as personal factors.
The model is of a cyclical nature and is a dynamic one, with employee attendance or absenteeism often leading to changes in the job situation that in turn influence subsequent attendance motivation.

The Steers & Rhodes model has proved to be difficult, if not impossible, to test in its entirety although it has generated substantial research interest.

2.2.4 DIAGNOSTIC MODEL OF ATTENDANCE

Following developments from recent literature and in an effort to delineate more clearly the major factors influencing absenteeism, a new diagnostic model of employee attendance was built; see figure 2.3. The proposed model is designed to be integrative in that it incorporates new empirical and theoretical developments, and because it includes both avoidable and unavoidable absence. Although this model is similar to the original formulation by Steers and Rhodes in focusing on the individual employee’s decision to attend, it differs in its increased attention to absence culture, organisational practices, societal context, and perceived ability to attend.

The diagnostic model of employee attendance can be described in three parts:

- major influences on attendance motivation
- major influences on perceived ability to attend and actual attendance; and
- the role of societal context and reciprocal relationships (Steers et al, 1996:415).
2.3 KEY FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR ABSENTEEISM

2.3.1 DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE

Alcoholism has always been one of the most serious public health problems. Only recently, however, has special attention been focused on the largest single subpopulation of alcoholics – persons whose alcohol abuse is associated with or occurs at their place of employment. The new concern with this subpopulation can easily be seen in the number of alcoholism treatment programs being organised by industry and governmental agencies to help job-holding alcoholics (Albertyn & McCann, 1993:14). The growth of industrial alcohol treatment programs have been motivated by the emerging realization on the part of businessmen, managers, union leaders, and industrial physicians of the staggering amount of productivity lost because of alcoholism.
Albertyn & McCann (1993:15) defines a worker with an alcohol problem as someone whose drinking problem or dependency interferes with his work, performance or ability to do his work, or with his relationships at work. Problem drinking in the workplace can be divided into two categories: drinking which results in incapacity and that which results in misconduct.

Incapacity as a result of problem drinking is defined as a physical incapacity (physical damage or absence through sickness) or such serious deterioration or behaviour at work as to render the employee unable to fulfill his work duties.

Misconduct brought about by problem drinking is a form of behavioural, rather than physical incapacity. In this case the worker’s drinking interferes with his capacity to perform his work diligently and productively. Examples of this are abusive, disobedient or violent behaviour, and sleeping while on shift.

Early investigations of the job behaviours of problem-drinking workers focused on absenteeism, accidents, and bases for identifying problem drinkers on the job. Comparing the absence and accident patterns of problem drinkers with those of normal employees, it was found that alcoholics were absent 2.5 times more often and were three times more costly to their employers in sickness payments (Schramm, 1977:15).

On-the-job absenteeism is the one factor where more productivity is lost than due to any other single factor. It is widespread, difficult to define and very difficult to identify. Such absenteeism includes the presence of employees at work while they are sick but incapable of performing to their true capabilities – this often occurring on Mondays or Fridays or the day after payday (Albertyn & McCann, 1993:81). Schramm (1977:29) states that alcohol and alcoholism can adversely affect productivity in a variety of ways and in a number of contexts. A worker’s alcohol abuse can lead to absenteeism and tardiness, and when the worker is missing or late, he obviously is not contributing to production. The worker with alcohol problems is also often less productive on the job. In addition, the alcohol abuser may well have an adverse impact on his fellow workers or
complementary factors of production. Certainly, overall production suffers when alcohol abuse causes capital equipment to be misused or damaged.

Employers and trade unions are often unaware of alcohol and drug problems among the work force. Even if they are aware of the alcohol and drug abuse, there is often an unwillingness to admit a problem exists. According to Albertyn and McCann (1993:19) the following are some of the reasons why employers frequently avoid confronting the issue:

- Fear of a situation about which they know little, and uncertainty about how to deal with it.
- A respect for individuals’ privacy and a fear of involving the organisation in a program in which the life styles of individuals may be exposed or jeopardized.
- Peer group pressures.
- Fear of committing management to a policy which they perceive would be unpopular not only among the employees but also with members of management and perhaps even with sections of the community at large.
- Fear of confrontation with the trade unions.

In considering why employers frequently avoid alcohol and drug abuse, attention must be given to the supervisors at lower levels as it is they who are often pivotal to the running of the floor. The supervisors are often afraid of confronting alcohol and drug problems, especially lower-level supervisors, who are only one level above the workers they supervise. They have a close working relationship as well as closeness in the community, particularly in rural areas where the workers’ families usually participate in shared social activities (Albertyn and McCann, 1993:19). The greater the distance in the hierarchy structure, however, the easier it becomes to address issues such as alcohol abuse.

During the 1960’s researchers in Cambridge England carried out a study on productivity levels in an English county. They discovered that 52 percent of male “alcoholics” experienced alcohol problems at work, yet only 4.2 percent had been dismissed or retired as a result of these problems. The sickness absence of employees experiencing a problem with alcohol and drugs has been researched, particularly in The United States, where it
was found that 20 percent of a sample of 764 workers with an alcohol or drug problem caused the majority of absenteeism and productivity problems (Rocha-Silva, 1987:16).

When comparing the findings of two studies carried out by the HSRC on South African drinking patterns amongst four population groups, it was noted that within a five year period there was only an increase in alcohol consumption amongst males in the Black and Indian population groups (Rocha-Silva, 1987:16).

Drug abuse, although not as predominant as alcohol abuse in the workplace, is now being recognized as a growing problem and companies must prepare themselves for it. As the incidence and prevalence of drug abuse has risen, pre-employment and in-service drug screening programs have been developed. The primary purpose of these programs is to protect the health and safety of employees through the early identification and referral for treatment of employees with drug and alcohol abuse problems. The integration of drug screening with programs of treatment, prevention and drug education is an effective way of managing substance abuse problems (Milne, 1992:46).

The extent of drug abuse among workers is more difficult to pin-point because a general unawareness of the signs and symptoms of drug abuse allow many drug users to go undetected (Quale, 1983:454). Milne (1992:43) has devised a list of the effects drug use has on productivity, which enables one to identify whether such a problem exists:

- Lateness and absenteeism are becoming a problem (usually from the same group of employees).
- Productivity is slipping for certain employees, not the whole group.
- Poor quality is affecting productivity, for example non-conformance and re-works.
- Stretched coffee breaks and abuse of lunch break time.
- There is a group of employees who always produce only what is absolutely necessary to keep from being fired.
- It often takes overtime shifts to produce what was once produced on straight time alone.
In order to effectively combat drug and alcohol abuse by employees, organisations are implementing occupational programs, which is effective in the treatment process.

* Components of Occupational Programs

Preferred strategies for identifying workers and referring them to treatment have evolved since the first programs began in the 1940’s. The key features of successful programs have been identified as the following:

- A written policy which states the procedures for identifying, confronting, and referring employees who may have a drinking or drug abuse problem. The policy should specify that its provisions are to be applied evenly throughout the work force, without regard to occupational status or position; it should specify the distribution of authority and responsibility involved in policy implementation, as well as the rights and responsibilities of workers with respect to alcohol and drug use and abuse; it should be disseminated throughout the work force to inform both supervisory and rank-and-file employees of the provisions and operation of the program and to encourage self-referral.

- A program coordinator should be appointed, both to relieve the supervisor of the onus of total responsibility for handling a substance abuser and to provide specialised expertise in counseling and/or referral to treatment.

- Supervisory and management personnel should be trained as to their responsibilities in implementing the policy and union officials should be involved at all stages of program implementation (Schramm, 1977:5).

2.3.2 STRESS

As the world of work and business has become increasingly subject to fast changing forces like increased competition, the pressure for quality, innovation and an increase in the pace of doing business, the demands on employees have grown equally dramatically. This creates stress within employees.
The level of stress is rising in workplaces; it is leading to a lack of productivity and eventually an increase in absenteeism. Many employees who are suffering from stress-related symptoms are coping day-to-day, but are working well below their capacity and are endangering their own health. According to Weeks (2004:54) problem stress can contribute to employee burnout, depression and lead to a host of physical ailments.

Formally defined, stress is an adaptive response, mediated by individual characteristics and/or psychological processes that are a consequence of any external action, situation or event that places special physical and/or psychological demands upon a person (Kreitner, Kinicki & Buelens, 2002:477). In short, stress is a behavioural, physical or psychological response to stressors.

Work-related stress is fuelling the rise of absence rates in the public and voluntary sectors. So says a recent report by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), writes Woolnough (2004:47). "The causes are significant," said Ben Willmott, CIPD employee relations adviser and author of the report. "For example, 68 percent of respondents said volume of work was the most significant cause of absence.” Performance targets were also highlighted as a cause of stress-related absence (Woolnough, 2004:47). Research recently released by Personnel Today (2003:1) showed a growing number of absence cases in the United Kingdom are caused by stress at a cost of £3.5 billion a year. An estimated half-million individuals report experiencing stress at a level they believe makes them ill. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) claims 6.5 million sick days are taken every year as a result of stress alone and urges employers to take stress as seriously as other workplace hazards.

Absence levels rose during 2004, particularly stress-related days off, according to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's (CIPD) annual absence survey. The main causes of stress-related absence were workload (68 percent), management style/relationships at work (60 percent), organisational change (45 percent), and pressure to meet work targets (41 percent) (Absence on the up among employees, 2004:4). In Britain, days lost to stress, depression and anxiety increased from 6.5 million in 1995 to
13.4 million in 2001-2002 (Never a dull moment, 2004:49). However, more than three-quarters of employers were taking action, with almost two-thirds taking steps to improve work-life balance (Absence on the up among employees, 2004:4).

Prolonged work-related stress can lead to poor mental health, heart disease, back pain, gastrointestinal disturbances and miscellaneous minor illnesses. It is often associated with an increase in unhelpful health behaviours - skipping breakfast, drinking too much alcohol, and smoking cigarettes. Stress reduces staff morale and leads to poor performance. This can lead to staff seeking alternative employment, leaving the employer with the additional costs of recruitment and training.

Stress is a fearfully woolly concept. Like depression and other mental illnesses, stress is subjective. Unlike depression, though, there is no clinical definition of stress, so there is little danger of misdiagnosis. It is also circular. "A person might complain of being stressed and likewise blame it on their stressful job," says Simon Wessely of King's College, London. Stress is both a handy concept and a limitless one (Never a dull moment, 2004:50).

The explanations of increased stress bear little scrutiny. The first of these is that working longer hours causes stress. But hours worked have been in long-term decline: in the mid-19th century the average was 60 hours per week which have dropped recently. Long hours mostly affect men: four out of five of those working 48 hours or more per week are male. Yet between 1997 and 2002, the percentage of men doing this dropped from 35 percent to 30.7 percent according to the labour-force survey. A second theory holds that innovations in communications and increased surveillance of workers have made life more stressful. Derek Sach, president of the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, says that stress and sickness have undoubtedly increased as the internet and mobile phones have quickened the pace of life in the workplace (Never a dull moment, 2004:50).
No matter what the industry, no matter what the specialty, stress is a reality in business today. It is a silent plague, eating away at the health, productivity and profitability of many organisations. Experts estimate the cost of stress and mental illness at a staggering $33 billion per year in lost production in Canada alone. According to Bill Wilkerson, co-founder and chief executive officer of the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto this is an issue that is not under control; in fact it is growing. "We simply cannot sustain the current levels of stress and mental illness in our labour force - it undermines realising optimal shareholder value” (Weeks, 2004:54).

Mental and nervous conditions (an insurance industry phrase), are now the primary and secondary causes of 55 percent to 60 percent of disability insurance claims among clients of one of Canada's largest insurers. The rising costs of stress in the workplace are astronomical and poised to climb (Weeks, 2004:55).

As organisations are going through changes, restructurings and mergers, they are trying to do the same amount of work with less people. Rochelle Morandini, national practice leader for organisational health with Hewitt Associates in Vancouver says that employees are running around doing a lot of things but not doing them well (Weeks, 2004:54).

Figure 2.4 (Kreitner et al) shows the four major types of stressors: individual, group, organisational and those outside the organisation (extra-organisational). The most common examples of stressors are job demands, work overload, role conflict, role ambiguity, everyday hassles, perceived control over events occurring in the work environment and job characteristics.
Figure 2.4: A Model of Occupational Stress

Source: Adapted from M. Koslowsky (1998:351)

It is important to manage the individual-level stressor of job security as it is associated with increased job satisfaction, organisation commitment and performance. Kreitner et al (2002:479) states that if the organisation is in an economic negative situation or there is the perceived probability that negative changes would occur over the next three years and employees are experiencing feelings of low self-esteem, then it is possible to predict that worries about job losses will be held by all. This insecurity will lead to higher job...
exhaustion and higher absentee-rates later on. Therefore, by preventing the experience of job insecurity, employers can promote employees’ well-being at work.

Weeks (2004:55) identifies four main office characteristics as the primary causes of stress in the workplace:

- Unreasonable demands and deadlines from top or middle management.
- The withholding of important information that employees really need in order to efficiently complete tasks.
- Not allowing employees’ discretion in setting their own work priorities or in determining effective and productive resolutions to work related problems.
- Lack of recognition for the work which employees do on a day-to-day basis.

These four office characteristics can be linked to the individual level stressors of figure 2.4.

When these four management practices tend to dominate, it creates an environment where employees distrust their own judgment as well as that of their employers. If this type of atmosphere goes unchecked, it can lead to a high level of stress in the workplace. In this environment, employees are unsure about resources and uncertain of their own job skills. They experience common interruptions and end up not believing that the projects they are being forced to work on are really the priorities of the day. In short, the work environment becomes poisoned - a veritable stress factory. And experts indicate that no amount of time off to 'recharge your batteries' will alleviate the root of the problem if employees eventually return to a workplace where poor management practices are still in place. When they come back to the office, the stress returns and the cycle continues, with costs continuing to escalate.

Tackling the issue is proving to be a momentous task. On one hand, there is the traditional stigma attached to stress; people are wary of disclosing their symptoms to an employer or even a third party. Many employees do not want to be seen as having a weakness, particularly when they think it can jeopardize their position. On the other hand, there is the tricky business of recovery and prevention.
If employers do not attack the root of the problem, namely flawed management processes, the problem will not be solved. Implementing an employee assistance program (EAP) and benefits packages are not sufficient. According to Wilkerson (Weeks, 2004:55) the problem is the environment in which people are placed. Stress is not only a health issue, it is also a management issue and management practices can make people unhealthy or keep them healthy.

Paton (2004:16) states that for more than a year, a framework is being developed within pilot organisations which employers feel comfortable using to tackle work-related stress. He believes that a lot of work-related stress can be tackled by organisational intervention. The framework could be put into place by a variety of people within the organisation using health and safety, risk management, Human Resources (HR) etcetera. The increasing stress rate is being seen as an issue for HR to deal with. The experience of the pilot organisations is that HR has an important role to play.

The first component of intervention is educating managers to spot the early indicators of employee stress. This speaks to the quality of the manager-employee relationship. The next challenge is acting quickly to address it and get employees the help they need. This can include introducing what Morandini calls 'recovery facilitators' into the workplace to assist with the process. These facilitators help ensure that employees get the right help, whether it be a matter of getting them to the right counseling, coaching them on a treatment plan, etcetera. According to Morandini once the employee is recovering, there is still a significant responsibility for the employer. The employer has an obligation to get them some recovery facilitation help and to empower them to make sure they access the resources they need and to do the proper return to work implementation (Weeks, 2004:55).

According to Swanepoel, Erasmus, Van Wyk, and Schenk (1998:605) by incorporating some of the following practices in the company's management processes, harmful employee stress can be prevented or reduced:
• Employees should be allowed to communicate freely with one another.
• Personal conflicts on the job should be reduced
• Employees should be given adequate control in how they perform tasks.
• Employees’ efforts should be supported.
• Competitive personal and vacation benefits should be provided.
• Employees should be recognized and reworded.

The HSE advises managers to carry out a risk assessment to find out if they are placing undue demands on their workforce. Support from the employer may include the following:

• being approachable and open to discussing problems
• avoiding encouraging people to work excessively long hours
• prioritising tasks and cutting out any unnecessary work
• giving warning of urgent or important work
• providing training
• increasing the variety of work tasks
• ensuring workplace hazards such as noise, harmful substances or abuse are controlled.

External assistance can be useful in helping managers and HR departments to reduce stress in the workplace. Occupational health professionals are skilled in assessing the workplace for causes of absence and this is equally true for causes of stress. An alternative is employee assistance programs (EAPs) designed to help employees cope with stress affecting their work. This can involve anything from a telephone counseling service to a more wide ranging plan implemented in conjunction with HR departments covering health, finance and legal affairs (Haswell, 2003:17).

According to Paton (2004:17) high profile cases have highlighted the potential costs to employers who do not take steps to deal with stress in the workplace. Awards of over £150,000 have been upheld for complaints about stress where employers have not taken
appropriate steps. With proper benefit structures and employment contracts in place, there is no reason for employers to be fearful of recent court decisions or legislation.

2.3.3 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND COMMITMENT

Current approaches to absence management, such as focused attendance management, integrated disability management, benefit design and wellness programs, are necessary but not sufficient. Employers should focus on building a "present and committed" workforce, reducing the number of absences and using technology to link absences to the bottom line. Employee engagement can reduce absenteeism and boost profits.

At the center of the productivity-killing absence cycle are the workplace conditions and processes that either bind employees closer to their employer or push them further away. Market research, survey statistics and real-life company case studies indicate the organisation plays a much larger role in causing employees to withdraw and driving absence than was previously understood. The day-to-day employment environment either reinforces or undermines a present and committed workforce (Anderson, 2004:26).

The great majority of absence management solutions completely overlook organisational factors, instead focusing on individual, claim processing and health-related factors in the quest to reduce lost productive days. With the focus in the wrong place, typical lost time initiatives end up critically deficient by omission. Anderson (2004:25) suggests that for absence management programs to encourage rather than to erode a present and committed workforce, they need to include the following four ingredients:

- Focus on organisational (not individual) drivers of absence
- Prevention through the reduction of absence incidence
- Linkage to the bottom line
- Technology-driven measurement

According to Anderson (2004:27) without any one of the abovementioned four, standard absence reduction efforts will not have a sustained impact on reducing lost time.
Curbing absence is about understanding and addressing the organisational or operational issues that cause employees who are well enough to work, to choose not to – to withdraw from the workplace. When employees are dissatisfied with particular workplace realities, for example job design, management, policies, work climate, etcetera, they use the absence avenues available to them - sick leave, paid time off etcetera. The result is a high number of unplanned, unscheduled lost days that disrupt the workplace and impair operational performance.

The basic notion of workforce productivity in any form assumes that a company's employees are at work and are committed both to the work they do and to the organisation for which they do it. Without a present and committed workforce, most productivity initiatives involving people are doomed to fail or under-perform before they have even begun. To the extent that employees are "withdrawing" from their commitment to the organisation, the sting of absence will be felt across the company. Employee commitment is important, because absence is a behavior of employees.

2.3.4 ABSENCE OF COMMUNICATION-ENGAGEMENT

Savvy business leaders are going back to basics in search of ways to reduce the absentee rate and boost employee performance. They are building the capability of their workforce through informed, involved people who understand how they influence the business and are excited about contributing to a greater good. They are creating businesses where the people think and act like business owners. Informed, involved people perform at higher levels than those who aren't. When a business informs and involves its people through a high-performance communication system, it can take performance to unprecedented levels (Shaffer, 2004:22).

"We are absolutely convinced there's a competitive edge to be gained by engaging our people through better managed communication," says Dave Brown, CEO of Owens Corning in Toledo, Ohio, USA. "We've seen it pay off already in measurable improvements in costs and productivity" (Shaffer, 2004:22).
Several Owens Corning plants have attacked the engagement issue head-on and have results to prove its worth. After building engagement among its employees, an upstate New York plant improved production volume by 12 million pounds, while cutting costs by US$2 million and substantially reducing absenteeism and injuries (Shaffer, 2004:23).

It is essential to reinvest in the people of the business - to engage them in the turnaround that is needed. There is a huge performance lift that can be gained simply by turning to the people who do the work every day, helping them see how they can make a difference, giving them the resources to do so and helping them see how it is in their best interests to improve. Dave Brown says that the people of the plant have turned it around. Their entire effort has been grounded in wide open, carefully managed communication to build trust, to reduce the number of absences and to improve operating and financial performance (Shaffer, 2004:25).

Independent data from the Gallup Organisation, the U.S. Department of Labor, the American Compensation Association, Towers Perrin and Rutgers University reveal a new trend in the direction of communication-engagement. Research shows that engaged people are more likely to have lower turnover, absenteeism and accidents, and higher customer loyalty, profitability, sales per employee, market value and gross return on capital than those who are not engaged. According to the Gallup Organisation research into employee engagement the opportunity to improve seems to be huge. Among employees in 11 countries surveyed by Gallup, no country's engagement level exceeded 27 percent. Those employees categorized as "not engaged" and "actively disengaged" ranged from 73 to 94 percent of the workforce (Shaffer 2004:26).

Creating the communication-engagement-performance linkage depends on the following factors:
a) Create a high-performance communication system

Real communication is an attitude, an environment. It requires countless hours of eyeball-to-eyeball back and forth. At the heart of it, a high-performance communication system engages people in a way that improves performance. Here are four ways to link engagement with high performance:

- Build a line of sight where people can see the direct link between what they do and how it influences the organisation.
- Increase involvement, which improves information exchanges, gives people a means to influence the organisation and increases ownership.
- Facilitate the sharing of accurate decision-making information at "twitch" speed.
- Enhance intrinsic and extrinsic reward and recognition, thereby helping people to understand their gain when they act to improve performance.

An increasing number of companies are shifting from low-performance communication systems, where the desired end is information distribution, to high-performing communication systems where the desired end is improving performance. This role shift also requires rethinking a function's needed capabilities, skills, and knowledge, structure and working methods. It's paying off in much higher value-to-cost ratios than the traditional model.

b) Select the right performance targets

Many traditional communication practitioners follow a hierarchy of communication effectiveness. This hierarchy ascends from communication that builds awareness, to understanding, to acceptance, to commitment and, finally, to action.

A high-performance communication system begins with the business strategy and its drivers, the causes of under-performance and the flaws within the communication system that, once removed, will cause performance around the business drivers to accelerate. In
this way, process-oriented goals associated with the hierarchy are replaced by results-oriented goals associated with the business strategy.

The process often begins by asking the question: where are the best opportunities to improve performance that matters by better managing communication, information and knowledge?

The emphasis is on "performance that matters," because some performance areas are not as important to achieving an organisation's strategic goals as others.

c) Narrow the focus for more leverage

The most suitable performance measure for a high-performance communication system is the relationship between what a company spends to manage communication and the value it creates with the investment. It is called value to cost. Therefore, efforts to engage people and improve performance need to be carefully directed.

A high-performance communication system begins with the business strategy and its drivers, the causes of under-performance and the flaws within the communication system that, once removed, will cause performance around the business drivers to accelerate. When you build the capability of the entire workforce, your company is creating a new competitive advantage that will be hard to top.

2.3.5 HIV/AIDS IN THE WORKPLACE

Increased absenteeism, lower productivity and increased employee benefit costs are among the biggest effects HIV and AIDS are having on businesses in South Africa, a study reveals. A survey of 1 006 South African companies, sponsored by the South African Business Coalition (SABCOHA) on HIV and AIDS and conducted by the South African Bureau for Economic Research, found that 39 percent of respondents said HIV/AIDS had reduced labor productivity and increased absenteeism, while 33 percent
said employee benefit costs had increased because of the country's epidemic (Veysey, 2004:14).

About 5.3 million people - or one in five adults - are living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa, according to SABCOHA (Veysey, 2004:14).

2.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter four causional models of absenteeism have been presented and discussed. The chapter proceeded with the identification and discussion of the key factors responsible for a high rate of employee absenteeism. Chapter 3 will describe different methods of reducing absenteeism.
CHAPTER 3

MANAGEMENT PRACTICES TO COMBAT EMPLOYEE ABSENTEEISM

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The discussion of causes of absenteeism is usually linked to the advocacy of cure, and both the identification of causes and the claims made for cures seem to vary with the specialization of different experts. That is, health specialists will advocate health programs; management experts tend to advise creative leadership activities, supervisory controls or job enrichment; psychologists suggest reinforcement learning and behaviour modification methods translated into monetary incentives of various kinds.

Three-quarters of employers have introduced changes to their policies on absence management during 2003/4, according to the annual CIPD absence survey. The poll also indicated that employers are moving towards a more punitive approach to managing absence, particularly in manufacturing and production (Griffiths, 2004:8).

There was a four percent rise in firms rating disciplinary procedures as the most effective intervention. Half of manufacturing and production employers rated disciplinary procedures as the most effective way of tackling absence, compared with seventeen percent of employers in the public sector. Overall, the 1 110 responding companies identified the three most effective methods in dealing with short-term absence as return-to-work interviews, use of discipline and line management involvement (Griffiths, 2004:8). However, the DMEC survey, conducted by Arlington, found that traditional punitive attendance practices create tension in the workplace and do not reduce incidental absence (Incidental Absence Targeted, 2004:21).

According to Anderson, executive vice president for Nucleus, there is no single method for eliminating incidental absence. But the survey of DMEC members, with about 270 respondents, revealed that companies that are aware of the problem and make addressing
it a priority tend to be successful. Dr Anderson further concluded that worker-friendly practices such as the implementation of employee assistance programs and the recognition of worker contributions seem to help, and failure to address the issue can affect customer retention, product quality and administrative overhead (Incidental Absence Targeted, 2004, 25).

Although employers have recognised that the majority of leave taken by workers is for genuine reasons related to ill health, the cause of greatest concern appears to be how to tackle intermittent absence where there appears to be no underlying cause of ill health and incidences of absence are unconnected. Fears that workers may falsely report themselves absent from work on grounds of illness are common, and there is a widespread concern that absence levels may escalate further (Hodgkiss, 2004:16).

Ben Willmott, CIPD adviser, employee relations, said organisations were becoming less tolerant of the small number of employees who were abusing their sick-pay policies. According to Willmott the absenteees are taking advantage of employers and colleagues and, because employers are under cost pressures, absence is one of the costs that can be managed (Griffiths, 2004:9).

It is clear however that, within Human Research at least, attitudes to absence are changing. Both the CIPD's survey of more than 1000 HR professionals and the CBI’s similar study of 500 employers, entitled Room for Improvement: absence and labour turnover 2004, clearly show employers - and HR in particular - are making slow, albeit significant headway in tackling this issue (Paton, 2004:25).

Just as manual clocking in is becoming something of a rarity, so talk of 'sickness absence', with is giving way to 'attendance management'. This is much more of an organisational issue. Alongside this, HR is taking a much more proactive approach to making sure people turn up to work. The days of waiting passively for the employee signed off sick simply to walk back in through the door are long gone. Sickness absence is becoming a strategic issue for employers.
Looking at the detail within the CIPD survey, while absence overall has risen slightly, the number reporting a decrease (39 percent) is higher than those reporting an increase (31 percent) (Paton, 2004:25).

Better methods of recording absence and tighter policies are cited as major influences in this change. For short-term absence, employers are increasingly finding return-to-work interviews effective, and are backing policies up with disciplinary procedures. They are also getting line managers involved and using trigger mechanisms to ring alarm bells.

Similarly, for long-term absence, more organisations are embracing rehabilitation programs, changing job patterns or designs and using the services of occupational health (OH) professionals.

HR has become and is becoming much savvier about absence, especially the need to intervene early, argues CIPD adviser, Ben Willmott. He adds that employers have realised that the issue of absence is not just medical, but involves geography, organisation and personal outlook, and HR has a part to play in all those areas.

However, there seems to be another side to the situation. From individually focused attendance management, to integrated disability management, to benefit design and wellness programs, employers are addressing particular absence types in one form or another. They just are not having much success. In many cases absence rates remain constant. In others, reductions in one absence type result in increases in another, for instance the reductions in short-term disability (STD) or workers' compensation can result in simultaneous increases in incidental absences. When achieved, gains are often short-lived and thus hard to attribute to any particular activity. According to Chadwick-Jones et al (1982:122) job incentives, supervisory controls, and health programs do contribute to reducing absentee levels, and there are evidence proving that each approach do work well, but only over the short term.
That these typical absence approaches produce uneven results is not to assert they are
unnecessary. Quite the contrary, each can play a meaningful role in a comprehensive
absence management approach in its own way so long as it is not the only way.

The chapter will proceed with the discussion of practices management implement in
order to combat employee absenteeism.

3.2 ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT

Individually focused attendance management is perhaps the most common, time-honored
approach to managing employee absence. Centered on the attendance record of
individual employees, attendance management programs use a series of carrots and sticks
to enforce company-time-off policies. On the carrot side, employees receive recognition
and rewards for exemplary attendance. On the stick side, a series of punishments are
meted out for unexcused absences or excessive use of "excused" absences. Some
companies focus more heavily on recognition while others place greater emphasis on
punitive actions. Bates (2004:30) states that according to the Disability Management
Employer Coalition’s (DMEC) survey, it is rarely effective to use discipline to solve the
problem. In DMEC's survey, participants rated the effectiveness of 30 practices used to
manage absenteeism. Most managers surveyed did not rate discipline as an effective
tool for managing incidental absence.

These attendance management programs require significant time and effort from line
managers. They rarely have a lasting impact on reducing organisational absence. At best,
employees who generate higher absence leave the organisation though they are often
replaced with new "high-absence" employees. The same underlying organisational
factors that drove absence in the departed employee will also drive new hires to withdraw
from the organisation.
3.3 DISABILITY MANAGEMENT

Disability case managers focus their efforts on managing short term disability (STD), long-term disability (LTD) and workers’ compensation claims in order to help return an employee to the workplace as soon as is medically appropriate. In contrast to attendance management where the emphasis is on preventing additional individual employee absence events, disability management strives to reduce the duration of existing claim-based absences while meeting the health needs of employees. It does so by placing its emphasis solely on the activities of individuals, not organisations. As a result, disability management focuses exclusively on the "what" of events that have already occurred with little or no attention paid to "why" they are occurring.

3.4 HEALTH PROMOTION

The list of medically related absence reduction programs is long: wellness initiatives, on-site fitness centers, smoking cessation and diet education programs, and chronic disease management. All of these efforts aim to reduce absence by creating a healthier workforce. These programs are voluntary and support healthy lifestyle changes. The problem is that absence is a behaviour and organisational factors influence an employee's “absence behavior”. Absence is not a health problem. Typically, analysis of absence and medical data has shown that medical factors could be associated with less than one-third of all unscheduled absences. Although useful for some participating individuals, health promotion is not the solution for controlling absence across the entire organisation.

3.5 EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

There is increasing evidence that alcohol and other drug abuse has a marked impact on effectiveness, productivity and the rate of absenteeism. Abuse of both is a major, yet unrecognized and often denied, workplace problem. Employees must be seen as an impartial asset to the company, an asset that needs to be maintained. The responsible approach to such problems has been to offer positive guidance through Employee
Assistance Programs (EAPs). The EAP is one of the fundamental ways in which a company can attempt to treat the alcohol and drug abuse problem in its constituency. The key principle if the EAP is the referral of the employee to the EAP by his supervisor, manager or fellow workers when work performance is affected, particularly when it manifests as a sudden deterioration.

An EAP can be described as a manpower management control system designed not only to facilitate early identification of and intervention with employees with a variety of medical and/or behavioural, emotional and financial problems that impair these employees’ job performance and productivity but also to motivate them to receive assistance to resolve these problems, thereby improving their job performance and ultimately enhancing their quality of life (Van der Burgh, 1988:30).

Reasons for not starting EAPs varies from a belief that the EAP will not make a difference or save any money to an assumption that the company did not have an employee substance abuse problem. Many executives believe that alcoholism and drug addiction cannot be treated and that their obligation to the shareholders is to get rid of these employees instead of rehabilitating them (Quale, 1983:457).

The EAP can function as an internal corporate resource or together with the assistance of an external agency. There are two types: the “broad-brush” approach or the specific substance abuse (particularly alcohol) approach.

The broad-brush approach should be modified to give greater emphasis to those employees with specific substance-abuse problems, as they are most likely to be the major cause of individual performance problems. This approach is to be preferred provided that the supervisor concerned is alert to and cognizant of the performance indications of substance abuse.

The specific substance abuse approach can lead to unnecessary confrontation between the supervisor and the employee concerned, because of the supervisor’s attempt to identify
substance-abuse factors that are relevant to the job performance (Albertyn & McCann, 1993:126).

3.6  EMPLOYEE INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

Workplace absenteeism is on the rise, but incentives can help stem the tide.

Companies that have problems with employee absenteeism should try to identify possible reasons - and then look to incentives as a possible solution, suggests Marcia Carruthers, executive vice president of DMEC. She recommends an incentive campaign in which employees gain points that can be redeemed for merchandise. Reward the little things employees do that contribute to business success, for example meeting regular deadlines, or having a month's worth of perfect attendance. Carruthers explains that when employers offer even a small payout, employees are more attentive to ways they can earn points, which will ultimately influence their behaviour (Bates, 2004:30).

Lori Rosen, a workplace analyst with CCH, also recommends incentive programs that reward perfect attendance. In addition, boosting the level of employee morale can help reduce incidental absence, she adds (Bates, 2004, 31). Among CCH's suggestions for improving morale are offering a flexible time-off plan, improving the possibility of advancement for good employees, helping employees understand how they contribute to the organisation, and implementing a program for employees to express suggestions or complaints.

According to Woolnough (2004:22) the following points are crucial to guarantee the effective implementation and use of the incentive scheme.

- Employers should communicate the goals and the rewards for achieving those goals to employees. Employees need to be able to relate to both the goals and the rewards or they will disengage.
• Establish how the incentive scheme is going to improve the absenteeism rate. Employers need to know what this objective is worth to the company in monetary terms in order to determine how much to spend to generate the desired return on investment.

• As such schemes are all about staff participation, it makes sense to get the staff involved from the beginning. Employers should determine what would motivate employees to work harder. According to John Davis, managing director of Argos Business Solutions a common mistake to avoid is assuming that staff will all want the same rewards. "Rewards have to be relevant to the employee," says Davis. Davis warns that employers must clarify what the reward limits are. "If you're polling employees, you have to be careful not to raise expectations too high because this could have a demotivating effect," he says.

• The success of the scheme should be measured. This is best done by measuring whether you are meeting your objectives. Assess performance and the return on investment. Consult the HR statistics in order to determine whether the absenteeism rates are lower. Staff can be polled through employee opinion surveys, although the best measure is employee take-up and factual results.

According to Steers et al (1996:500) the best designed reward systems can often go awry in producing their intended results because of the manner in which they are implemented. One important issue in implementing reward systems, and perhaps the most basic issue of all, concerns the evaluation or appraisal of performance. If rewards are to be distributed in such a way that they have a positive impact on the individual’s motivation to attend, participate and perform, it is crucial that the organisation have effective means of assessing attendance, and the quality and quantity of performance.
3.7 RETURN TO WORK INTERVIEWS

Under this approach, on a worker's return to work following a period of absence, managers aim to meet with the worker face to face. Not only does this offer an opportunity to identify any long-term health issues, but also provides an opportunity to discuss any issues with workers which are contributing to their ill health for example pressure of work or domestic pressures for which solutions may be sought (Hodgkiss, 2004:16).

An individual who may have been considering taking a day off is more likely to think twice about doing so in the knowledge that he will have to explain the reason for his absence in person, rather than by merely completing the employer's self-certification form.

3.8 JOB FLEXIBILITY

Many sickness days are due to non-work issues such as staff supporting family members with problems or experiencing marriage difficulties (Blyth, 2003:22). Veronica Hellwig, a senior consultant at Watson Wyatt, also confirms that the majority of unscheduled absences are due to pressures on employees outside the workplace. According to Hellwig a very large portion of unscheduled absences are controllable. An employer must determine whether any portion of these absences could be scheduled. She states that to the employees some level of choice, such as some flexible days, can be encouraging (Weber, 2003:26).

In its Unscheduled Absence Survey for 2003, CCH Inc. found that programs such as a compressed workweek that increase work-time flexibility are among the most effective strategies to combat unscheduled absences. With this information at hand, the company decided to set up a scheme that would give staff the opportunity to acquire skills to help them deal with their situations or give them access to a colleague who could point them towards professional support (Blyth, 2003:22).
But while the CCH survey showed a small decrease in unscheduled absenteeism as a whole this year, it also showed a decline in the use of flexibility strategies, suggesting that employers may be cutting such programs just as they are beginning to reap the benefits. In 2002, the number of companies offering a compressed workweek dropped 18 percent and job sharing was down 19 percent. According to CCH workplace analyst Lori Rosen a lot of the cutting back of these programs is based not on their effectiveness, but on their perceived cost. She also states that based on this study these programs do help cut the cost of unscheduled absences. If companies cut these flexibility options, it will lead to higher costs because people will not come in to work (Weber, 2003:26).

3.9 STYLE OF MANAGEMENT

While many senior Human Resources and operations executives will readily acknowledge that employee absence has a negative impact on productivity, few are able to draw a clear line leading directly from absence reductions to demonstrable improvements in the bottom line. Without established links between managing absence and increased profits, absence management slips down the crowded priority list for HR initiatives. The same organisational factors that drive increased employee absence of all types impact bottom-line performance metrics like productivity, quality and efficiency.

Ninety percent of corporate managers believe that incidental absence is a manageable problem, but most think that they do not have the resources to address it effectively, according to a survey of the DMEC. The DMEC further states that their survey is the first of its kind to determine the awareness and ability of corporate managers to deal with incidental illness (Bates, 2004:30). The survey results clearly shows the significant costs managers are often ill-equipped to reduce.

Yolles, Carone and Krinksky (1975:25) state that management can play an extremely important role in controlling absenteeism. This can best be done by centering attention on two major factors. Firstly, no matter what kind of a job the employee may have, the way he/she is treated has a direct bearing on his attendance record. Second, absence for
both plant and office personnel is directly related to supervision, work associates, job status, job satisfaction, job interest, and job environment. These are important factors of which employers have only recently become aware.

Anderson, (2004:30) states that absence management solutions that hope to catch the financial attention of senior management must demonstrate these strong absence-performance relationships with the many areas where lost workdays leave their imprint on a company:

- Reduced cost of hiring temps and paying associated overtime
- Increased productivity and revenue opportunity
- Improved customer service, reduced errors and defects, employee retention, employee and customer satisfaction
- Reduced administrative costs
- Improved profits.

Controlling absenteeism requires that the problem be handled at the lowest level of management, the foreman or supervisor. Here the worker must clearly understand the importance of his effort to the total team. When a worker is absent and his attendance record begins to look questionable, the supervisor must discover the reasons. He must check the frequencies of an employee’s absences, find out how he is getting along, and talk to him when he returns to the job. On the basis of facts, the supervisor must evaluate the problem and decide what action should be taken. It is not enough for a supervisor to know that a worker will not be in on a certain day. He should try to distinguish between a good reason and a real reason for the absence.

In checking over a man’s attendance record, more is involved than just knowing the days he has been off the job. Unless a supervisor keeps and understands absentee records, he cannot do a good job when trying to get to the root of the problem. Through keeping record, it is possible to identify patterns and attempt to correct them (Yolles et al, 1975: 27).
Managers today need to develop the ability to think strategically and be forward-looking and entrepreneurial. They need to network and build virtual communities of knowledge and expertise, buying the best quality at the best price. They need to manage more educated staff that have high work expectations and want to feel that they are contributing. The nature of work has changed radically and the psychological contract between employer and employee must change alongside it.

HR professionals need to rehumanise the workplace so that managers know how to bring out the best in their people and support them through the achievement of bottom-line objectives. These soft skills - communicating, delegating, negotiating, motivating - can be taught.

Through renewing motivation and clarifying priorities the soft skills training will reduce absenteeism and improve productivity. Employees will learn to recognize what is important to them both at work and at home. The key skills of personal management will help them achieve individual and organisational goals. If employees are the modern machinery, acquiring and regularly servicing these types of soft skills will ensure that the machine runs more smoothly and productively - all for greater company profitability.

Training needs to be put into the context of business issues, undertaken in teams that work together, and then reviewed, if skills and knowledge are to be put into practice.

Line managers need help from HR to understand the bottom-line impact of soft skills in today's world. Today 60 percent of companies are service-based, so relationships and managing knowledge are what counts. Despite this, people are still rewarded for their technical ability, rather than the ability to manage the creativity, intelligence and expertise of their employees.

It is seldom that the "technical" aspects of work are the main problem when absenteeism is high and productivity is low. It is usually down to attitude, energy, effort and
knowledge. Rising stress and staff turnover are just some of the damaging effects of the trend to ride roughshod over soft skills.
CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about social science research. Some authors follow a more philosophical approach to research design, while others follow a pragmatic approach. The importance of including both schools of thought in a study of social science research is increasingly emphasized by contemporary social scientists (Leedy, 1993:143; Yin, 1994:93; Neuman, 1994:65; Jackson, 1995:18; Rosnow & Rosenthal 1996:74; Leedy & Ormrod 2001:90).

The objective focus of this chapter is to establish an appropriate research strategy for a given research problem. The research strategies must be applicable to the nature of the problem. It will be assumed that the nature of the research problem, the objectives of the research and the methodology of the research, focus the research strategy towards triangulation with the primary research methodology focused on quantitative research and the secondary research on qualitative research.

4.2 WHAT IS RESEARCH DESIGN

4.2.1 THE CONCEPT OF RESEARCH

Various definitions can be given of the concept research. According to Kerlinger (1984:10) scientific research is systematic, controlled, empirical and the critical investigation of natural phenomena guided by theory and hypotheses regarding the presumed relations among such phenomena. Mouton and Marais (1992:7) define research as a collaborative human activity in which social reality is studied objectively with the aim of gaining a valid understanding of it. Another definition states that research can be seen as a process of expanding the boundaries of one’s ignorance.
The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1995:1169) defines research as the systematic investigation into sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions or collate old facts by the scientific study of the subject or by a course of critical investigation. Finally, Leedy (1993:11) and Leedy and Ormrod (2001:4) define research as studious inquiry or examination, having for its aim the discovery of new facts and their correct interpretation.

A closer look at this definition reveals the importance of the italicised words, in comprehending the nature of basic research. These ideas are listed below:

- If there is no discovery, there is no research.
- There must be the interpretation of data for the enlightening awareness of what the facts mean.
- Research must always answer questions to solve problems.
- Research is a human activity that promotes critical thinking in a cross-functional approach.
- Effective research is rational, systematic and is guided by constructive, critical assumptions and measurable data (Leedy 1993:12).

### 4.2.2 THE CONCEPT OF DESIGN

Yin (1994:20) defines design as the preparation of a working plan aimed at systematically assembling, organising and integrating data, in order to solve the research problem. Leedy and Ormrod (2001:91) state that research design includes the planning, visualisation of the data and the problems associated with the employment of the data in the entire research project. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1995:1169) states that design is a preliminary plan, concept or purpose.

From the above definitions research design can be interpreted as the preparation of an action plan aimed at organising and integrating data in an overall framework in order to
solve the research problem. Basic to design are four fundamental questions that must be resolved with respect to the data:

- What are the data needed?
- Where are the data located?
- How will the data be secured?
- How will the data be interpreted?

### 4.2.3 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

There does seem to be a broad consensus amongst theorists on a framework for research design. Some researchers focus on the philosophical aspects of design (Mouton & Marais 1992; Dooley 1995), while others have developed useful pragmatic frameworks (Yin 1994; Neuman 1994; Jackson 1995).

The views of these authors have been consolidated into a conceptual model of decision steps. This model, as illustrated in Figure 4.1, forms the foundation on which the research design for this research project has been based.
With any type of measurement, two considerations are very important - validity and reliability. Validity is concerned with the soundness, the effectiveness of the measuring instrument. The following questions can be asked: does the measuring instrument measure what it is supposed to measure? What is the accuracy of the measurement?
There are several types of validity, the more common types according to Struwig and Stead (2001:139); Leedy and Ormrod (2001:103) are:

- Face validity – relies basically upon the subjective judgement of the researcher.
- Criterion related validity – employs two measures of validity, the second as a criterion check against the accuracy of the first measure.
- Content validity – is the accuracy with which an instrument measures the factors or situations under study.
- Construct validity – is any concept such as honesty that cannot be directly observed or isolated.
- Internal validity – is the freedom from bias in forming conclusions in view of the data.
- External validity – is concerned with the generalisability of the conclusions reached from a sample to other cases.

Reliability deals with accuracy. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001:31), it is the extent to which, on repeated measures, the indicators yield similar results. Reliability in quantitative research projects can be evaluated by repeating a question in a questionnaire. Reliability asks one question above all others, with what accuracy does the measurement, test, instrument, inventory or questionnaire measure what it is intended to measure?

The focus of research design is to maximize the validity and reliability of the research findings. According to Leedy (1993:128), the use of human subjects in research raises the question of ethical standards and should not go without careful scrutiny.

### 4.3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

There are three important contemporary methodological research approaches, namely: the positivist, interpretative and the critical approaches. Researchers usually adopt one of these approaches and then formulate a strategy that is consistent with the approach selected by them.
4.3.1 THE POSITIVIST APPROACH

The positivist approach is the approach used in the physical sciences, and believes society is organised according to scientific observations and experiments (Jackson, 1995:5; Dooley, 1995:5). With this paradigm it is always possible to establish a cause and effect relationship between variables systematically and statistically. Scientists supporting positivism would argue that the general laws of science would be just as applicable to the social sciences as to the physical sciences. Positivist research is likely to do quantitative research and use experiments, surveys and statistics (Gummesson 1991:152).

4.3.2 THE INTERPRETATIVE APPROACH

According to the interpretative approach, doubt is expressed over the question whether it is always possible to establish cause and effect between variables in the social sciences. An example: can the effect of poor management decision-making always be linked to a specific objective cause? The interpretative approach represents a reaction against unqualified application of positivism in the social sciences. Instead of trying to explain causal relationships by means of objective truth and statistical analysis, hermeneutics provides a process to interpret, understand or reconstruct reality. Language, pictures, sound, text and symbols play a central role in qualitative projects and replace quantitative data such as facts and figures as the primary sources of information (Neuman, 1994:61; Jackson, 1995:9).

4.3.3 THE CRITICAL APPROACH

The critical approach is based on the argument that the researchers cannot distance themselves from people in their research. They have to empower people through their research in order to bring about social justice (Jackson 1995:11). The relative success of research in South Africa may in the future be measured against its ability to conform to the requirements of the critical approach. It is important to state that there is no specific method or technique associated with this research approach and this method or technique
does not seem to be that important. According to Jackson (1995:11, 13), researchers using this approach show a preference for the historical method of research.

### 4.3.4 MODELS AND MODELING

This research proposes to attempt to formulate a generic model of excellence. Mouton and Marais (1994:138) describe the term “model” as one of the most ambiguous in the vocabulary of the social scientist. The terms “model” and “theory” are frequently used as synonyms. Mouton and Marais (1994:138) continue that a model performs a heuristic function as opposed to a theory that performs an explanatory function.

Dooley (1995:348) defines a model as “one set of causal paths that can be compared with observed data.” Fellows and Liu (1997:61) view modeling as the process of constructing a model representing a designed, actual object, process or system or a representation of a reality.

Gains and Shaw (2004:58) state that a model is the theoretical image of the object of the study. Furthermore, Kemp (1997:6) states that a model is a tool used by social scientists to explain a phenomenon.

Emory and Cooper (1991:64) point out that there are three types of models: descriptive models that seek to describe the behaviour of the elements in a system; explicit models, that seek to extend the application of the current theories; and finally simulation models which replicate current phenomena. The model to be used in this study is a descriptive model as the study sets out to establish and describe the essential factors responsible for an excessively high absenteeism rate.

According to Gains and Shaw (2004:62), descriptive exploratory research means that hardly anything is known about the matter at the outset of the project. The researcher begins with a rather vague impression of what should be studied, and it is also impossible to make a detailed work plan in advance. Gains and Shaw (2004:63) believe that in the
absence of tried models and definite concepts the exploratory study must start from what is available such as one or more objectives of study. It is common, according to Gains and Shaw (2004:63) that in the beginning of exploratory studies, a holistic look at the objectives is taken, this means gathering as much information about the objectives as possible and then cutting away unnecessary data to form a better picture.

According to Gains and Shaw (2004:65), the goal of research is to create a theoretical picture of the object of study which resides in the empirical world. All the theoretical knowledge, concerning empirical things, makes up a more or less complete picture of the empirical world. The researcher’s task is to construct a model of the objects of study into the world of theory.

According to Audet and d’Amboise (2001:121), understanding a phenomenon that has barely been researched requires a qualitative approach that is both adaptive and innovative to give insight to this phenomenon. Strategic scanning must be done to gain an in-depth knowledge of the organisation’s environment. Audet and d’Amboise (2001:122) define strategic scanning as the collection, dissemination and interpretation of information related to a company’s environment. Further, scanning is directed towards those sectors that are the most strategically uncertain. To conclude, it is sometimes difficult to define what is relevant in advance, it only becomes apparent through research and analysis.

4.4 QUANTITATIVE VERSUS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Quantitative research is usually associated with positivism and qualitative research with interpretativism. It is best to visualise the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research as a continuum. All research methods could be placed somewhere between the extremes of pure quantitative and pure qualitative research (Jackson, 1995:13). It is, however, plausible to indicate whether research projects have a more qualitative or more quantitative nature. This in turn would play an important role in decisions on process to
follow and measuring instruments to select (Van Biljon, 1999:37). A summary of the main differences between qualitative and quantitative research is given in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Differences between Qualitative and Quantitative Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Test hypothesis that researcher begins with. Hypotheses are stated explicitly and are formulated beforehand.</td>
<td>• Capture and discover meaning once the researcher becomes immersed in data. Hypotheses are frequently undeclared or stated in the form of a research goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Concepts are in the form of distinct variables. Concepts have an ambiguous meaning.</td>
<td>• Concepts are in the form of themes, motifs, generalisations, taxonomies. Concepts can be interpreted in a number of ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Measures are systematically created before data collection is standardised. The researcher remains largely aloof.</td>
<td>• Measures are created in an ad hoc manner and are often specific to the individual or researcher. The researcher is involved with the events/phenomena.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Data are in the form of numbers from precise measurement.</td>
<td>• Data are in the form of words from documents, observations and transcripts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Theory is largely causal and is deductive.</td>
<td>• Theory can be causal or non-causal and is often inductive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Procedures are standard, and replication is assumed.</td>
<td>• Research procedures are particular, and replication is very rare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analysis proceeds by using statistics, tables or charts and discussing how what they show relates to hypotheses.</td>
<td>• Analysis proceeds by extracting themes or generalisations from evidence and organising data to present a coherent, consistent picture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


An important choice that researchers face is the research method to be used. Leedy (1993:145) believes that the answer to this question can be found in the nature of the data, the problem of the research, the location of the data, obtaining of data and the intention with the data. If the data is verbal, the methodology is qualitative, if it is numerical, the methodology is quantitative (Van Biljon, 1999:37).
4.4.1 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Mouton and Marais (1992:159) define quantitative research as more highly formalised and also as more explicitly controlled, with a range that is more exactly defined, and which, in terms of the methods used, is relatively close to the physical sciences. This definition once again shows a preference for the positivist approach.

Quantitative research seeks to quantify, through numbers, observations about human behaviour. The emphasis is on precise measurement, the testing of hypotheses based on a sample of observations, and a statistical analysis of the data. Relationships among variables are described mathematically and the subject matter is, as in the physical sciences, treated as an object (Van Biljon, 1999:40). Variables play key roles in quantitative research. Variables take on two or more values. Attributes, on the other hand are the values of categories of a variable and people sometimes confuse variables with attributes.

A quantitative research project would usually test the most important causal links to be found in the research domain. This relationship between variables is usually expressed as a hypothesis, and hypotheses are tested to answer the research question or to find empirical support for a theory (Neuman, 1994:99).

4.4.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research relies on interpretative and critical approaches to social sciences. The aim of qualitative research is to study individuals and phenomena in their natural settings in order to gain a better understanding of them. It is also evident that qualitative research does not follow a fixed set of procedures. The researcher will, however, need to develop a set of strategies and tactics in order to organise, manage and evaluate the research (Neuman, 1994:317 & Dooley 1995:258). Scientists who wish to describe everyday life from the point of view of the phenomenological perspective prefer qualitative research. Quantitative researchers manipulate figures and statistics, the data
of the qualitative researcher is in the form of words, sentences, and paragraphs. Qualitative research is more at risk in terms of validity and reliability (Miles & Huberman 1994:2).

Mouton and Marais (1992:155) define qualitative research projects as those in which the procedures are not strictly formalised, while the scope is more likely to be under-defined, and a more philosophical mode of operation is adopted.

4.4.2.1 Characteristics of qualitative research

- It is not always easy to describe the meaning of qualitative research.
- It is not always possible to classify methods in terms of the level of qualitativeness.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994:7), these features can be referred to as core and recurring features for naturalistic studies, configured and used differently in any particular research tradition.

4.4.2.2 Inductive versus deductive logic

According to Patton (1987:15), qualitative research methods are particularly orientated towards exploration, discovery and inductive logic.

- Inductive designs begin with conjecture, guesses, ideas and expectations.
- No hypotheses are designed, nor are any theory-building exercises performed.
- Data is collected through observation, interviews and other qualitative methods.
- The product of the research is a new model, theory or hypothesis.

Quantitative research methods, on the other hand, support deductive reasoning and analysis. Deductive designs begin with an explicit conceptual framework developed from existing theory and models. It requires the formulation of specific research
hypotheses leading to a theory-building exercise. A known data collection instrument, the fixed alternative questionnaire, is used to collect the data. The hypotheses are accepted or rejected and a causal relationship between variables is established (Miles & Huberman 1994:44; Dooley 1995:65).

4.4.2.3 Choosing the most appropriate qualitative research method

Considering the model shown in Table 4.2 can solve the problems of a qualitative method.

**Table 4.2: Research Method Selection Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiment</th>
<th>Form of research question</th>
<th>Requires control over behavioural events?</th>
<th>Focuses on contemporary events?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>How, why</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Who, what, where, how many, how much</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival analysis</td>
<td>Who, what, where, how many, how much</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>How, why</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>How, why</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Yin (1994:6).

The most appropriate research method or strategy to use depends on three conditions:

- The type of research question posed;
- The extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioural events;
- The degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events.
4.4.3 TRIANGULATION

Leedy (1993:143) describes the situation where it is possible to combine qualitative research methods with quantitative research methods in the same project. This process is called triangulation and many research projects could be enhanced considerably if a triangulation approach were taken. According to Struwig and Stead (2001:19), the triangulation method could include various methods such as interviews, Likert type questions and focus groups. The interactions between quantitative and qualitative research are illustrated in Diagram 4.2.

Figure 4.2: Interaction between Quantitative and Qualitative Research

THE METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

Qualitative research (Data: principally verbal)
- Observations
- Survey studies
- Historical studies
- Case studies
- Unstructured interviewing

Quantitative research (Data: principally numerical)
- Surveys
- Experimental studies
- Quasi-experimental studies
- Statistical-analysis studies

Triangulation
A compatibility procedure designed to reconcile the two major methodologies by eclectically using elements from each of the major methodologies as these contribute to the solution of the major problem

Source: Adapted from Leedy (1993:145).
4.5 CHOOSING THE MOST APPROPRIATE RESEARCH METHOD

From the setting of the problem it can be concluded that the research project firstly is suited to quantitative research methods as it supports deductive reasoning and analysis. Secondly, this research project embraces defined themes to solve stated research problems through a well-defined methodical process of investigation, analysis and reconstruction.

A deductive design begins with an explicit conceptual framework developed from existing theory and models. The project requires the formulation of specific research hypotheses leading to a theory building exercise. Questionnaires are used to collect data, the hypotheses are accepted or rejected and causal relationships between variables established.

Focusing on the problem and sub-problems of the study, the type of questions asked is how, what and where. A contemporary study of working conditions and labour force needs were undertaken with no control over behavioural events.

This concludes and configures the introduction of qualitative research in the form of interviews and observations to further enhance this project by supporting the outcomes of the hypotheses.

Methodological triangulation was used because inductive and deductive approaches are often combined in practice and further to ensure that the data from the questionnaires is tested in more than one way with the theory.

4.6 RESEARCH GOALS

The research goals provide a broad indication of what a researcher wishes to accomplish with the research. The researcher needs to determine whether the aim of the project is to describe, explain or to explore (Neuman 1994:18 & Jackson 1995:18).
4.6.1 EXPLORATORY PROJECTS

The goal pursued in exploratory projects is the exploration of a relatively unknown topic, situation or phenomenon. The objectives of such a project may be to:

- gain new insights into the phenomenon by becoming familiar with facts, people and concerns involved;
- undertake a pilot investigation and determine feasibility before a more structured study of the phenomenon;
- generate many ideas and develop tentative theories and conjectures;
- determine priorities and develop techniques for future research; and
- develop new hypotheses about an existing phenomenon.

Exploratory projects usually lead to insight and comprehension rather than the collection of accurate and replicable data. The methods frequently used in exploratory projects include in-depth interviews, the analysis of case studies and the use of informants (Mouton & Marais 1992:43; Neuman 1994:18; Van Biljon 1999:53).

4.6.2 DESCRIPTIVE PROJECTS

The primary aim of descriptive projects is to accurately portray the characteristics of a particular individual, group, situation, or organisation, tribe, subculture, interaction or social objective. The outcome of a descriptive project is a detailed picture of the subject. The aims of descriptive projects may be to:

- provide an accurate profile of a group;
- describe a process, mechanism or relationship;
- give a verbal or numerical picture;
- find information to stimulate new explanations;
- present basic background information in context;
- create a set of categories or classify types;
• clarify a sequence, set of stages or steps; and
• document information that contradicts prior beliefs about a subject.

The description of some phenomena may arise from a narrative type of description as in historical analysis to a highly structured statistical analysis (Mouton & Marais 1992:43; Neuman 1994:19; Van Biljon 1999:54).

4.6.3 EXPLANATORY PROJECTS

Explanatory projects are built on exploratory and descriptive projects and go on to identify the reason something occurs. The primary aim of explanatory projects is to test a hypothesis of a cause and effect relationship between variables. A given phenomenon is explained in terms of specific causes (Mouton & Marais 1992:46; Neuman 1994:20; Van Biljon 1999:55). The aim of explanatory projects may be to:

• determine the accuracy of a principle or theory;
• find out which competing explanation is better;
• advance knowledge about an underlying process;
• link different issues or topics under a common general statement;
• build and elaborate a theory so it becomes more complete;
• extend a theory or principle into new areas or issues; and
• provide evidence to support or refuse an explanation.

4.6.4 THE RESEARCH GOALS OF THIS PROJECT

The factors that are compelling NHC to overcome an excessively high absenteeism rate have been investigated. A detailed and critical analysis of the theory on the factors responsible and reasons for high employee absenteeism, and best operating practices have been performed. This is the basis for the study and the intention of this project is to describe the various strategies used by organisations to explain the reasons and
consequences of existing absenteeism problems. Quantitative variables have been set for this research project to establish causal relationships between variables.

4.7 RESEARCH STRATEGIES

Mouton and Marais (1992:49) believe it is possible to distinguish between types of research strategies. Therefore, it is possible to distinguish between:

- Case one: phenomena are studied in terms of their immediate context and these projects are focused on contextual research strategy. Examples of projects of contextual interest are:
  - historical sciences;
  - hermeneutic sciences such as languages, arts, jurisprudence and theology; and
  - social sciences.
- Case two: phenomena are studied because they are regarded as representative of a larger population of similar phenomena.

These projects are referred to as involving a general research strategy. The main aim is to study a representative number of events or people with a view to generalising the results of the research project to a defined population. Examples of projects of general research interest are:

- experimental studies;
- comparative research; and
- various types of surveys.

In this research project, reasons responsible for and factors contributing to employee absenteeism have been analysed and reported on. By integrating the research strategies and research goals a model as per Table 4.3, depicting the interaction, can be developed (Mouton & Marais 1992:51).
Table 4.3: Interaction between Research Goals and Research Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Goal</th>
<th>Research strategy</th>
<th>General interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploratory projects</td>
<td>Overview of phenomenon by means of case studies and in-depth interviews</td>
<td>Overview of phenomenon by means of exploratory surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive projects</td>
<td>Case studies, in-depth interviews, participant observation</td>
<td>Sample surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanatory projects</td>
<td>Contextual explanations by means of case studies, historical analysis</td>
<td>Experimental and quasi-experimental studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Mouton & Marais (1992:51).

4.8 THE POPULATION OF THIS PROJECT

The research project was conducted in three phases: the empirical survey, observations and in-depth interviews. Three empirical surveys were planned, one for general information, one for NHC and one for employee absenteeism issues covered in the literature review. For the purpose of this research project the population consisted of employees of NHC working on the site in the Quay Wall-, Precast-, and Dollos sections. Further, the population also included union leaders, shop stewards and human relations personnel.

The total population used in the study may be seen in Table 4.4.
Table 4.4: Sample Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Size of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construction workers on specific site</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union representatives and human relations personnel</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To identify 30 participants who were willing to participate in the research project 40 potential participants had to be identified. As a result of absenteeism and the sensitivity of the information, only 30 workers on site participated in the questionnaires. To further enhance this research project, interviews were conducted with an additional 10 respondents not working on the construction site itself.

4.9 GENERAL PROCEDURES

The methodology adopted in this research project was discussed earlier in this chapter. The empirical data collection was done by means of questionnaires and interviews. The secondary data used in this research project were obtained from various local and international sources in various forms, such as articles, research publications, books, reports, the most predominant being international books originating in America and Europe.

The primary data used in this research project was acquired from observations by means of interviews and questionnaires. Gaining access to the respondents working on the site seemed quite troublesome as the respondents work on different sections of the site which covers quite a vast area along the shoreline. Other problems experienced were:

- Completion of the questionnaire may not have interfered with shift time.
• Respondents were suspicious of the repercussions for divulging information.
• Respondents were very wary of the researcher due to a difference in race and culture.
• Language seemed to be a problem as not all respondents were English speaking.

The approximately forty five minutes’ interviews conducted among employees not working on the site yielded a favourable outcome with some interesting observations and facts that would not have surfaced from any postal survey questionnaires. These interviews were unstructured to gain a better understanding of the company.

The questionnaires that originated from the actual survey were recorded on computer disk and the data was processed. These results are presented in Chapter 5.

4.10 CONCLUSION

A formal systematic approach to research design is crucial to ensure that a research project conforms to the principles of validity and reliability. The research design decisions guide the researcher in effectively addressing the research problem. A quantitative approach was the most appropriate research strategy for this research project. Questionnaires and interviews were the main methods of data collection.
CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF THE PROJECT’S EMPIRICAL RESULTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The empirical research methodology used during the study is presented in chapter 4. The data was analysed and interpreted in terms of the framework of the questionnaire. Thirty questionnaires were distributed. In addition to the questionnaires, ten interviews were conducted. Areas that were investigated included:

- The influence of the individual’s background on absenteeism;
- The influence of the individual’s health and habits (alcohol and drug abuse) on absenteeism;
- The influence of organisational factors (motivation, incentives, competition) on absenteeism;
- Interviews

All the results of the subsections of the questionnaires were documented in tabular form as frequency.

5.2 QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Due to the small sample, the five point Likert-type scale was reduced to a three point scale. This was represented as follows:

- “Agree” and “Strongly Agree”, 1 and 2 were combined as “agree” and represented as 1;
- “Uncertain” remained the same and was represented as 2;
- “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree”, 3 and 4, were combined as “disagree” and represented as 3.
The study was designed to determine which key factors identified in the literature study in chapter 2 significantly influenced the absenteeism rate at the Ngqura Harbour Project. However, certain questions were included to determine the influence of factors not identified in the literature study, but because of their specific reference to the harbour project.

### 5.2.1 Individual Background Factors

Individuals bring a unique set of background factors to the organisation and this impact on absenteeism. Table 5.1 shows the percentage responses for each statement.

**Table 5.1: Frequency Table of Individual Background Factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 I get enough sleep every night feeling well-rested for my working day.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 I eat regular, healthy meals every day.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>73.3%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 I have spare time to relax or exercise</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 I am part of a close-knit family.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 I see my family members regularly.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56.7%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Results of part 1 – statements relating to individual background factors, of empirical study.
The results of section 1 show that employees feel relatively content with their home environment and family life. The high degree of support of statement 1.1 – 1.3 indicates that employees have enough time to recuperate from pressure and work-stress. It is however important to note that stress is a very difficult concept to define and measure, and a very subjective experience.

The high support of statement 1.4 clearly indicates that the employees are very family oriented. Although support for statement 1.5 is still high, it shows the lowest degree of support of all the statements in section 1. During the interviews interesting and relevant information regarding statement 1.5 was obtained which can explain the lower support percentage of this statement:

With the building of the large Ngqura harbour, Ngqura Harbour Contractors aimed at mainly employing residents of the Nelson Mandela Metropole and surrounding areas. This policy is followed to ensure that NHC actively participate in the economic and socio-economic development of the region and its people. Although this practice seems admirable, the implementation of this practice seems to pose problems.

Many of the employees relocate to the Nelson Mandela Metropole, and more specifically to the Motherwell Township which is situated very near to the harbour project, in the hope of finding employment on the project. These employees now have the required residential address in the Nelson Mandela Metropole and can thus be employed on the project. The problem is however that although the employees relocate, the rest of their families remain at the original address of which most are situated very far from the Nelson Mandela Metropole and even outside the Eastern Cape. Traveling to visit their families is very time consuming and a normal week-end is too short. This has a definite influence on absenteeism as employees need more than just a week-end to travel and visit their families and are thus “forced” to take a leave of absence.

Graph 5.1 shows that in all the statements in section 1 the “Agree”-category was strongly supported in relation to the “Uncertain”- or “Disagree”-categories.
GRAPH 5.1: Bar chart analysing Section 1: Individual Background Factors
5.2.2 Health and Habits

The health and habits (for example drug abuse) of individuals have a direct influence on the employee absenteeism rate. The frequency of the analyses is presented in Table 5.2. Graph 5.2 visually illustrates the frequency of the analysis with relation to the different statements.

Table 5.2: Frequency Table of Health and Habits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.1 I have a medical condition or illness which affects my ability to work.</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.2 I have been absent more than once due to this medical condition or illness.</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.3 I believe that when I was absent from work, I have to give my supervisor a medical certificate.</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.4 I drink alcohol.</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.5 I drink more alcohol during the weekend than during the week.</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73.3%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.6 I drink more alcohol during the pay-weekend.</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.7 I have been absent on a Monday due to using too much alcohol during the weekend.</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>76.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.8 I use drugs, not including alcohol and cigarettes.</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.9 I have been absent from work due to the use of drugs (not including alcohol and cigarettes).</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to statement 2.1 many employees suffer from some illness or medical condition which affects their ability to work. The results of statement 2.2 show that illness does affect absenteeism.

The results of statement 2.5 indicate that employees consume more alcohol during the weekend, than during the week. Statement 2.6 indicates that even more alcohol is consumed during the weekend after employees are remunerated. Although the results show that there is not an increased rate of absenteeism on a Monday due to the consumption of alcohol, this seems dubious. According to additional information gathered through unstructured interviews practice shows that there does seem to be an increased rate of absenteeism on a Monday.

Statement 2.9 shows that drug use or abuse does not influence the rate of absenteeism. The number of drug users is low (2.8).

The results of this section of the questionnaire clearly demonstrate that the respondents were suspicious and wary of the researcher and that this distrust had a significant influence on the results. This is proved by the results of the study not correlating with the information gathered during the unstructured interviews. Employees were too wary to be completely honest and truthful in answering the questions.

### 5.2.3 Organisational Factors

Certain organisational factors can influence the rate of employee absenteeism. Table 5.3 shows the results of section 3 of the questionnaire. Graph 5.3 visually illustrates the rating of the statements.
Table 5.3: Frequency Table of Organisational Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 There is sufficient transport from my home to the workplace.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 I have been absent from work due to transport problems.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 I look forward and feel motivated to come to work every day.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 If the workplace provides one extra meal per day, it will motivate me to not be absent for a whole month.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 If the workplace provides a bonus at the end of every month during which I was not absent, it will motivate me to not be absent for a whole month</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Our team receives regular updates on our progress on the project.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 If the IDZ-bonus was paid every second month, it will motivate me to not be absent.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>93.3%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 I feel very proud of my work and of my part in the Ngqura Harbour Project.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9 Teams in our section compete against each other.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GRAPH 5.3: Bar chart analysing Section 3 - Organisational Factors

STATEMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATEMENT</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to the results certain organisational factors have great influence on the rate of employee absenteeism.

Transport problems do not have a major impact on the absenteeism rate. Ngqura Harbour Contractors provide transport on three routes in the Nelson Mandela Metropole covering the areas where most of their local employees reside. The bus service transports employees to and from work at each shift. The few cases in which employees were absent due to transport problems were when employees did not make use of the service provided or were not on time at the point of departure.

From the results of statement 3.6 the lack of employee motivation is evident. A number of factors contribute to this lack of motivation:

Most employees on site are employed as contract workers. The length of contracts varies from a few months to a number of years. When the work is completed and the contract fulfilled, the workers are no longer employed by NHC. The employees however, struggle to accept that their contract with NHC is fulfilled, often experience feelings of being retrenched and lose motivation. Also seeing co-workers suddenly being unemployed evoke negative feelings toward the organisation and demotivate workers.

The results of statement 3.6 indicate that employees experience a lack of regular updates on their progress. Regular progress reports (oral or visual) are essential to keep employees motivated. Without constant feedback on their progress, employees tend to lose their focus, enthusiasm and motivation.

The exceptionally high score in the “Agree”-category of statements 3.5 and 3.7 indicate that employees need extrinsic rewards to keep them motivated. The Industrial Development Zone-bonus is rewarded to employees whose record shows no unscheduled absences. Although this is an effective extrinsic reward to motivate employees to always be present at work, it lost all its effectiveness and value due to poor implementation. If the employee earns the IDZ-bonus, it will only be rewarded at the completion of the
employee’s contract which usually is months. As this is too far ahead in the future, employees are not motivated to fulfil the condition to earn the bonus. The bonus has thus lost its usefulness and efficiency as an extrinsic motivator. If, however the bonus could for example be earned every second month, it will be a very effective motivation to be present every day.

The lack of competition between teams (statement 3.9) should be rectified. Competition between teams will not only make employees more productive, but also motivate them to not be absent and thus let the team down. Employees must become aware of their importance as a team member and also the importance of being present.

All of these factors that influence employee motivation, eventually influence the absenteeism rate, as employees who are demotivated will more easily be absent from work than motivated, enthusiastic employees.
CHAPTER 6
FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Absenteeism places huge financial burdens on organisations and has a detrimental effect on productivity. Aware of the direct and indirect costs associated with absenteeism, management must determine what factors are responsible for the absenteeism and how these factors can be rectified in order to reduce the rate of employee absenteeism in the organisation.

6.2 MAIN FINDINGS

The study’s main aims were firstly to determine which key factors are responsible for employees being absent from work and secondly, how they can be rectified in order to reduce absenteeism.

From the data that was obtained from the literature study stress, substance abuse, lack of job commitment and organisational factors account for some reasons given for absenteeism. Employee absenteeism may also be partly due to not enough emphasis being placed on career development, staff retention and salaries. Other causes of absenteeism include personal responsibilities, lack of motivation and low morale in the workplace.

Only recently have managers become aware of the true impact which alcohol and substance abuse have on organisations. More productivity is lost through on-the-job absenteeism than due to any other single factor. On-the-job absenteeism is difficult to define and very difficult to identify. Such absenteeism includes the presence of employees at work while they are sick but incapable of performing to their true capabilities – this often occurring on Mondays or Fridays or the day after payday.
With current staff retention programs, mergers and joint ventures, organisations now demand the same level of production with fewer employees. This has given rise to an increase in the level of stress employees experience, which led to stress becoming a key factor responsible for absenteeism.

The feedback from the questionnaires and the interviews showed that alcohol and substance abuse do not affect absenteeism at the Ngqura Harbour Project. An organisational factor that does influence absenteeism at the harbour project is motivation or low morale. This can be rectified by more regular progress reports, competition between teams and the more regular payment of the incentive bonus.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

When managing absenteeism the implementation of a proper measurement system is essential. This will enable the company to determine the extent of their absenteeism. An evaluation and comparison of these statistics over a period of time will also shed light on the nature of the absenteeism. These will result in the proactive handling of a company’s absenteeism. This is also the first step away from the acceptance of absenteeism and subsequently the nurturing of an absence culture.

Employers can take a number of steps to reduce absenteeism, such as giving responsibility for absence management to senior or human resource managers rather than line managers, introducing return to work interviews, introducing discipline procedures and others.

The great majority of absence management solutions completely overlook organisational factors, instead focusing on individual, claim processing and health-related factors in the quest to reduce lost productive days. Absence management programs should focus on organisational (not individual) drivers of absence to encourage a present and committed workforce.
Absenteeism will never be eradicated, but through careful management organisations can reduce the absentee rate and the effect it has on the organisation.
REFERENCE LIST


ANNEXURE 4.1

QUESTIONNAIRE ON FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE
THE RATE OF EMPLOYEE ABSENTEEISM
INTRODUCTION

This study is based on the premise that there are certain key factors that are responsible for and influence the rate of employee absenteeism. This study is being conducted among employees constructing the Nqgura Harbour 25 km from Port Elizabeth. As the timely completion of the Nqgura Harbour is essential, information on the causes and methods of reducing employee absenteeism became significant to Nqgura Harbour Contractors.

The questionnaire is designed to determine which factors influence the rate of absenteeism at the Nqgura Harbour Project significantly.

A definition of absenteeism for the purpose of this study is as follows:

- employee absence that occurs without suitable notification of the employer and without official sanction by medical confirmation of illness
- the failure of workers to report on the job when they are scheduled to work

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete the questionnaire using the following scale:

1 = STRONGLY AGREE
2 = AGREE
3 = UNCERTAIN
4 = DISAGREE
5 = STONGLY DISAGREE
1. **INDIVIDUAL BACKGROUND FACTORS**

Employees bring a unique set of background factors to the organisation and these affect absenteeism.

Please indicate the degree to which you agree/disagree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 I get enough sleep every night feeling well-rested for my working day.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 I eat regular, healthy meals every day.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 I have spare time to relax or exercise</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 I am part of a close-knit family.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 I see my family members regularly.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. HEALTH AND HABITS

Employees’ health and living habits have a direct impact on the absenteeism rate of the organisation.

Please indicate the degree to which you agree/disagree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 I have a medical condition or illness which affects my ability to work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 I have been absent more than once due to this medical condition or illness.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 I believe that when I was absent from work, I have to give my supervisor a medical certificate.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 I drink alcohol.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 I drink more alcohol during the weekend than during the week.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 I drink more alcohol during the pay-weekend.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 I have been absent on a Monday due to using too much alcohol during the weekend.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 I use drugs, not including alcohol and cigarettes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9 I have been absent from work due to the use of drugs (not including alcohol and cigarettes).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. **ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS**

Certain organisational factors can have an influence on or contribute to a high absenteeism rate.

Please indicate the degree to which you agree/disagree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 There is sufficient transport from my home to the workplace.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 I have been absent from work due to transport problems.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 I look forward and feel motivated to come to work every day.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 If the workplace provides one extra meal per day, it will motivate me to not be absent for a whole month.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 If the workplace provides a bonus at the end of every month during which I was not absent, it will motivate me to not be absent for a whole month.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Our team receives regular updates on our progress on the project.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 If the IDZ-bonus was paid every second month, it will motivate me to not be absent.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 I feel very proud of my work and of my part in the Ngura Harbour Project.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9 Teams in our section compete against each other.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you for completing the questionnaire.