

# Absenteeism in Public Sector Organizations - An Overview of Dimensions, Causes and Remedial Strategies.

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**Abstract** Public sector organizations are under pressure to reduce its working costs — which can be easily achieved through proper absence management. As high level of absenteeism results in deferred services and decline in productivity, it leads to dissatisfaction towards the organization. Thus, this study examines the reasons and results of absenteeism in public sector organization. Employees reporting late to work were sometimes found to be absent from work due to low morale. The main challenge with absenteeism is human attitude, that make employees withdraw themselves from work, which is difficult to change, and the other problem is manipulation of attendance registers by employees for others employees. Thus, absenteeism can be minimized by proper absenteeism management and biometric login in public sector offices along with proper training.

**Keywords:** Absenteeism, Productivity, Public sector.

## INTRODUCTION

***“Absenteeism refers to the absence of an employee from work, who is scheduled to be at work. It refers to the loss of man – hours on account of the absence of a percentage of workers scheduled to be at work”.***

Absenteeism has been recognized as a vital issue affecting discipline and productivity in the public sector organizations today. It is a major socio – psychological problem in all the industries. Absenteeism in Indian organizations is not a new phenomenon. Absenteeism is a serious problem for Government because it seriously involves heavy expenditure and loss of productivity.

The impact that employee absenteeism has on productivity, morale, and performance is alarming. Other important thing to be noted is using manual processes to track, calculate, and combining absence- and leave-related information can lead to huge, sudden costs that may threaten the economic feasibility of a public sector organization.

Employee motivation, team work and other means of enhancing employee happiness and job satisfaction have been applied by the Government to reduce employee absenteeism in order to improve overall organizational performance. However, despite the awareness of the adverse effect of absenteeism on overall productivity and performance, the level of absenteeism tend to remain high in public sector organizations.

Though lots of efforts have been put to eliminate absenteeism permanently, a permanent solution couldn't be arrived. Public sector organizations also undergo another challenge in the form of lateness to work. Lateness in public organizations affects both the economic and psychological output of the organizations. Thus, it is highly important to control and minimize it.

Reduction of absenteeism is beneficial not only to the organization but also to the nation as a whole. Absenteeism leads to reduction in man-hours which directly influences the productivity and results in lack of services to the public. This underlines the importance of the need for employees to be present.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study are:

- ⇒ To identify the causes of absenteeism.
- ⇒ To find the effects of absenteeism.
- ⇒ To find measures to control absenteeism.

## **NEED FOR THE STUDY**

Absenteeism is a common factor prevailing in the Indian organizations. The main objective of public organization is to provide maximum service to the public by employing minimum number of men, material and money. When there is a problem of absenteeism the above said factors are not fairly utilized. So the need for reducing absenteeism is not only the need for the organization but also the need of the nation.

## **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

Absenteeism is not a new problem in the Indian organizations. It is a worldwide fact. Absenteeism is one of the common factors, which affects both the productivity of the employees, and also ruins the image of the Government among the public. So controlling and preventing absenteeism become the aim of the whole nation. The focus of the study is on employee's absenteeism at public organizations.

## **CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM**

Various causes of employee absenteeism have been discussed below: The causes of absenteeism can be categorized into three. It includes:

- In-plant causes
- Personal causes
- Community causes

### **In – Plant Causes**

In – plant causes of absenteeism include:

- Excessive fatigue
- Over – staffing
- Under – staffing
- In – effective use of skills
- Poor supervision
- In – adequate training program
- Low morale

### **Personal Causes**

The personal causes of absenteeism are:

- Illness of oneself or of one's family
- Household responsibilities
- Child care
- Recreation
- Use of alcohol

## Community or Social Causes

The community or social causes include:

- Inadequate housing
- Poor transportation
- Marketing and shopping difficulties
- Lack of social facilities such as hospital and credit
- Seasonal factors such as cultivation season, marriage season, amusement and religious festivals

Apart from the above mentioned causes, some other reasons that prevail in public sector organizations are discussed below:

### \* **Cumbersome Manual Processes:**

In India, most of the public organizations still do manual process of maintaining attendance registers, which pave way for employees to over-loop the rules. This would be the major cause for absenteeism and lateness of employees in public organizations.

### \* **Decentralized management:**

As Government organizations are composed of many departments and divisions, it may range from large to small depending on the size of the organization. Thus absenteeism management in government organizations is decentralized due to departmentalization. Here comes a question that, who's responsible for policies related to absenteeism and enforcement, whether the organization or superior of the department. This has to betake care in order to reduce absenteeism and lateness to work.

### \* **Lack of Visibility:**

As public sector organizations don't maintain a leave tracking systems as in private companies, it is highly impossible to measure the impact of absenteeism in their daily and long term operations. And so they are unable to take appropriate steps to minimize and diminish it.

## **EFFECTS OF ABSENTEEISM**

The effects of absenteeism are widespread. Absenteeism leads to

- Reduced employee productivity
- Reduced employee morale, and
- Increased overhead costs.

### **(a) Low Productivity**

Lateness of an employee can negatively affect the day to day operations in a public organization. It not only affects the employee's performance but also the functions of other employees in the department.

### **(b) Low morale**

Employees reporting late to the organization are found to have low motivation, dissatisfaction and low level of dedication to their work.

### **(c) Cost**

Lateness results in many financial and non-financial expenses. Disruption and delay of services are the result of employee lateness and absenteeism. Thus, it needs to be controlled.

## MEASURES USED IN CONTROLLING EMPLOYEE ABSENTEEISM

Several methods have been adopted to minimize and reduce the rate of absenteeism. It can be decreased by carefully analyzing the records and high quality supervision. It is also necessary to note when the absenteeism rate is high, who are all involved in it and why they are involved. Thus, this helps in identifying the reasons for absenteeism.

Other than this, adequate training can be given to employees, penalty can be charged for absence, and rewards for good attendance records, effective personal practices and improved working conditions helps in bringing down the absenteeism rate.

### (i) Punishment and Counseling

It's not necessary to deal all the situations positively, at times negative treatment is necessary to deal with undisciplined or less committed employees. Initially an employee can be given few chances to correct himself when he/she is absent/ late for a long time. If it doesn't work, counseling can be given to the employees on the problems through which they are late. If nothing works, they can be charged an amount as penalty for being absent/late.

### (ii) Strict Policies

Though lot of policies exists on employee discipline, working hours/time, nothing is enacted properly. Thus, all the rules have to be put into action strictly. Employees who perform well and more committed to work can be rewarded and appreciated for their work.

### (iii) Absence Management Programs

Disciplinary procedures can be strictly followed when the absenteeism rate is high. The authorities must check on the reasons for why the employees ask for leave, and whether the reason stated is true. Even they may be asked to submit supporting documents for availing leave.

### (iv) Childcare

Child care is the first and foremost reason for women employees getting absent from their work. Thus, crèches can be setup at a nominal cost for the employees to leave their children. This helps in reduction of absenteeism of women employees and also improves their concentration and commitment.

### (v) Incentives

Incentives can be given to employees for not taking leave. This motivates not only that employee but also others to obtain the same.

### SUGGESTIONS:

Some of the suggestions for minimizing the rate of absenteeism are discussed below:

#### ⇒ Increase in Salary

Apart from increasing salaries, incentives can also be given. Other than monetary incentives educational support for development, best employee award, public recognition for good performance, regular staff meetings for staff to express their concerns on issues, prize for punctuality can also be given to motivate the employees and reduce absenteeism.

#### ⇒ Promotions and Creation of Opportunities for Advancement

Delayed promotion and fewer opportunities for advancement are common in public sector organizations. Thus, promotion should be made without any delays and if it's not possible proper justifications are to be given to employees as it reduces dissatisfaction towards their work.

#### ⇒ Tying Promotions and Cash Incentives to Attendance

Promotion and salary increment decisions can be tied to attendance, so that all the employees will be in pressure to come to work. Thus, keeping track on attendance and lateness of employees helps in making them regular and on time.

## ⇒ **Biometric Clocking System**

Manual attendance maintenance paves way to various malpractices, biometric system is a boon to the organizations. Here, the local bodies can be connected through the server to a main office in the city, from where a superior officer can view the employee's attendance details. It is to be noted that, biometric system is not only useful for attendance purpose but also provide clues during accidents, thefts etc.

## ⇒ **Strict Policies**

Government must come out with strict policies regarding absenteeism and lateness. They should make it clear that none will go unpunished for being default. Various punishments regarding their defaults can be prepared and circulated among the employees. A complaint box and/ number can be posted in all the government offices for letting the public to complain about the employees unavailability.

## ⇒ **Control measures**

Proper control measures can be adopted to avoid employee absenteeism. Proper supporting documents are to be supported for availing leave. For example submission of medical certificate signed by a Doctor in case of sick leave. This would prevent employees from taking unnecessary excuses to stay away from work. Setting up crèches in every city will help working mothers from availing leave for childcare responsibilities.

Apart from the above measures, the following measures can also be adopted to reduce absenteeism in public organizations.

- An officer should be made in charge for enquiring about the reasons for the absenteeism of the employees and they may be given counseling for their problems.
- Frequent absentees are to be identified and their reason for absence can be found and proper measures can be taken to avoid the same.
- Monetary and nonmonetary incentives can be given to the employees for not being absent to work.

## **CONCLUSION**

As manpower is the most important asset to an organization, absenteeism affects the same. The main reason for being default in Government organizations is low morale. Thus, government should to take proper measures to increase the morale and satisfaction of the employees through various training and development programs.

It is also necessary to make the employees realize how important their role in the organization is. Being in public service, the employees should be aware of how their absence affects many people. Delayed promotion, fewer opportunities for promotion and advancement, low salary are some of the main reasons for absenteeism. Thus, this causes dissatisfaction among employees. Therefore Government should take necessary steps to reduce absenteeism.

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