

AN INVESTIGATION OF ABSENTEEISM AMONGST  
BLUE-COLLAR WORKERS: A MIXED METHODS  
APPROACH

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of

MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

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by

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## DECLARATION

Hereby I, Kim Kroon, declare that this research is my own original work and that all the sources have been accurately reported and acknowledged, and that this document has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university in order to obtain an academic qualification.

K. Kroon

30 October 2015

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## ABSTRACT

Absenteeism affects organisations in many different ways, therefore it is essential to investigate absenteeism with the aim of minimising absence levels. The focus of the research was to investigate absenteeism amongst blue-collar workers at a Global Logistics Supplier. The objectives of this research were to identify the main types of absenteeism, to compare the views of blue-collar workers and management on the causes attributed to absenteeism, to describe how absenteeism has been measured and managed, and to make recommendations to the company on ways to minimize absenteeism based on the findings.

Quantitative data in the form of monthly absenteeism statistics relating to each leave type, was examined for trends relating to absenteeism levels amongst blue-collar workers at the company. Semi-structured interviews were then carried out with management and blue-collar workers to examine the causes of absenteeism and its management.

The results showed that there was a discrepancy between the views of management and blue-collar workers at the company on the perceived causes of absenteeism. On the other hand, both management and the blue-collar workers identified Monday and Friday as the most prevalent days on which employees are absent from the workplace. This finding suggests that more research should be conducted on this trend in blue-collar workers. In exploring how absenteeism is dealt with, management within the company stated that discipline was the most effective way of keeping absenteeism levels low amongst employees.

The limitations and delimitations of the research were recognised and further research ideas were given. It was also recommended that managers and supervisors address the workplace issues and identify when a worker's performance and interpersonal relationships are strained in order to effectively minimise absenteeism. It is also recommended they implement a wellness programme.

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# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

Given the many pressures placed upon organisations to achieve increased levels of performance and at the same time reduce costs, it is vital that aspects of organisational life which adversely affect these are minimised (Farrell, 2005, p.1). Absenteeism is an indirect cost to an organisation and has a great impact on the bottom line as it results in a loss of productivity and increased organisational costs. It was estimated that one day's absenteeism cost can be one and a half times the daily rate of pay to the organisation (Jones and Chung, 2006, p.32; van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.3). Organisations can no longer fund or carry unnecessary absenteeism; therefore, they need to investigate ways in which they can reduce incidences of absenteeism within their organisation.

Previous research has shown that there are many reasons which contribute to the absence of employees within an organisation. The Business Roundtable did a series of reports on productivity and found six main reasons why employees were absent from their workplaces; “(1) unsafe working conditions, (2) excessive rework, (3) travel distance to the worksite, (4) poor supervision, (5) poor overall management, (6) personal and family illness” (The Business Roundtable, 1982).

The organisation used for this research was a Global Logistics Supplier. The majority of the labour force at the organisation where the research was conducted is temporary blue-collar workers. The workforce employed is largely involved in labour-intensive work. While some are drivers, the majority of the workers are pickers and material handlers. The company uses the services of a local labour broker which provides them with the labour they require to work certain jobs within the organisation. The labour broker specialises in providing blue-collar employees to their clients within certain industries. Through initial data received from the company, they reported absence categorised according to the following reasons; sick leave, annual leave, FRL (family responsibility leave), absence without leave (AWOL), study leave, training, union leave, unpaid leave and other (this includes court appearances, hearings and shop steward leave).

The aim of this research was to identify the main types of absenteeism of blue-collar workers and their perceived causes according to managers and workers. There were four objectives the research was to investigate through data received from the company, and based on worker absenteeism numbers for the period, April 2014 – July 2015, as well as interviews with employees and managers at a global logistics company.

1. The first objective was to identify the main types of absenteeism so that these can be further investigated:

- The two main types of absenteeism would be probed further in the interviews with both the blue-collar workers and management.

2. The second objective was to compare the views of blue-collar workers and management based on causes attributed to absenteeism:

- Firstly, focusing on overall absenteeism at the company.
- Secondly focusing on the two main types of absenteeism.

3. The third objective was to describe how absenteeism has been measured and managed.

4. The fourth of objective was to make recommendations to the company on ways to minimize absenteeism based on the findings.

In the chapters to follow is the context of research, which will focus on different aspects of absenteeism; defining absenteeism, looking at blue-collar and white-collar workers, classifying absenteeism, focussing on causes attributed to absenteeism, the effect absenteeism has on a company and how absenteeism is measured and managed. Chapter three focuses on the research methodology which states the aim and objectives, the research paradigm, the research methodology, quality and ethics and the research procedure. Chapter four follows with the findings which are laid out according to the objectives set out in chapter three. Chapter five looks at the discussion which focuses on answering the research question. In chapter six the conclusion is reported where the similarities and discrepancies as well as the limitations and delimitations of the research are set out and discussed.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1. Introduction

Within this chapter, absenteeism will be defined using sources which are relevant to the research. The difference between blue-collar workers and white-collar workers will be discussed; a classification of absenteeism will follow which focuses on sickness absence, absence with permission and absence without permission. The causes of absenteeism; personal factors, organisational factors, attitudinal factors, the person-work relationship and alcohol consumption will be examined. Following this information are the effects of absenteeism and managing absenteeism which can be done through; employee assistance programmes (EAP), wellness programmes, incentives and discipline. The conclusion then closes off the chapter and brings together all relevant points made.

#### 2.2. Absenteeism defined

Absenteeism is a source of great discussion and research in the fields of organisational and industrial psychology and has a long research history (Dineen, Noe, Shaw, Duffy, and Wiethoff., 2007; Harrison and Martocchio, 1998; Johns, 2010, p.519). It has been defined as the “non-attendance of an employee from scheduled work when they are expected to attend” (Kim and Garman, 2003, p.2 and Furnham, 1992). According to van der Merwe and Miller (1987, p.3) a precise definition of absenteeism is essential for purposes of accurate record keeping within any organisation. The traditional characterisation of absenteeism is deemed to be due to a negative working environment which results in the withdrawal response from the employees (Dunn and Youngblood, 1986, p.668). According to Restrepo and Salgado (2013, p.401), absenteeism is viewed as a phenomenon which clearly affects both individual/personal performance and organisational performance in terms of cost to the company. Absenteeism relates to the notion of not attending work for part of or an extended period of time due to a number of reasons which includes “sick leave, going on holiday, family responsibility leave, elderly or child care, maternal/paternal leave or another related situation” (Avey, Patera and West, 2006, p.43). It is the temporary withdrawal from the workplace in terms of sickness absence, absence with permission or when an employee does not show up for scheduled work

in the case of absence without permission (Deery, Iverson and Walsh, 2006, p.172; Jones, Jones, Latreille and Sloane, 2009, p.144; Johns, 2010, p.519; van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.3). As absence is temporary, it is important to note that the employee withdraws from the organisation only temporarily and does not sever any relationship between them and the employer and that it does not jeopardise their employment within the company (van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.5). Employee motivation is seen as the primary influence on an employee's actual attendance (Steers and Rhodes, 1978, p.393). Evidence however suggests that there is a combination of (a) an employee's emotional responses relating to the job situation and (b) numerous "internal and external pressures" to attend work (Hackman and Lawler, 1971; Locke, 1976; Porter and Lawler, 1968; Vroom, 1964). Included in the work situation which characterises the nature of employment in the work environment are (1) employment scope, (2) employment level, (3) "role stress", (4) size of the work group, (5) leadership style, (6) relationships with colleagues and (7) prospects for advancement in the workplace (Steers and Rhodes, 1978, p.393; van der Merwe and Miller, p.5). There are instances where certain non-attendance circumstances do not fall under absenteeism; namely vacation leave, block-release leave, military service, suspension and strikes (van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.3).

### 2.3. Blue-collar and white-collar workers

The labour market is divided into two non-competing groups known as the primary and secondary divisions. Poggi and Silber (2010, p.123) adapt this understanding of labour market segmentation from Doeringer and Piore (1971) which states that the primary division refers to white-collar workers and the secondary division refers to blue-collar workers. Certain attributes are linked to these different divisions of the labour market; (1) the primary division of white-collar workers is linked to high-status jobs with better pay and educational levels and certain credentials are also essential in this division; (2) whereas the secondary division of blue-collar workers consists of low-skilled jobs, a high labour turnover due to low wages and decreased levels of training (Poggi and Silber, 2010, p.123). However, blue-collar employees are seen as integral to the organisation's competitive business advantage, especially in a production-orientated environment (CemErsoy, Born, Deros and van der Molen, 2011, p.366). Hedges (1973) found that absenteeism levels were higher in jobs where there was a recorded increase in stress levels such as those in assembly line jobs.

Hu et al., (2010, p.317) state that blue-collar workers are less satisfied with their jobs than white-collar workers due to the fact that the objective job characteristics of the two job types

(level of control and autonomy) is lower in blue-collar workers than in white-collar workers. In addition, CemErsoy et al., (2011, p.357) state that in addition to decreased levels of job satisfaction, blue-collar workers have adverse feelings towards their superiors when compared with their white-collar counterparts. This is due to the fact that blue-collar employees do not easily identify with their supervisors and feel there is no need for an increase in the amount of effort required to perform their job. Furthermore the blue-collar workers feel “trapped” within the secondary division of labour and are not afforded the opportunity by their supervisors to move into the primary division due to a lack of skills and market knowledge; therefore resulting in high levels of absenteeism amongst blue-collar workers in organisations (CemErsoy et al., 2011, p.365; Poggi and Silber, 2010, p.124). Workers who are on temporary contracts are characterised as lowest in terms of seniority and therefore run the highest risk of being laid off especially in times of high unemployment (Arai and Thoursie, 2005, p.270). The authors state that workers who are on temporary contracts experience a lower sense of job security and are therefore incentivised to minimise their absence rates as it will affect future employment chances within the organisation (Arai and Thoursie, 2005, p.279).

## 2.4. Classification of absenteeism

An employee’s reason for being absent determines the employers’ way of dealing with the situation (Dekker, 2010, p.104). It is therefore essential for an employer to determine the categorization of absence correctly as it can be problematic if an absent employee has been dealt with unfairly. According to van der Merwe and Miller (1987, p.9), there are three classifications of absenteeism within the workplace.

### 2.4.1. *Sickness absence*

Afsa and Givord (2013, p.287) state that finding out the determinants of sickness absence is essential due to the increase in paid sick leave in the workplace. The majority of employee absences are directly related to a medical event (Harte, Mahieu, Mallett, Norville and Van der Werf, 2011, p.20). Therefore, it is essential that an employee who is genuinely ill and who cannot come to work returns with a valid doctor’s certificate after a period of absence (van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.10). Genuine sickness may result from factors outside of the workplace or be as a result of stresses within the work situation (van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.10). Kim and Garman (2003, p.2) state that employees who phone in ‘sick’ often has more to do with reasons other than personal health issues. Irregular working hours were also

found to increase the absence rate of manual workers and this relationship seemed to increase with age (Afsa and Givord, 2013, p.287). It is however not always possible to distinguish whether an employee is genuinely sick or not and a genuine doctor's certificate cannot be easily disputed (van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.10). However, Bruniquel (2012, p.25) suggested to show concern for worker's who appear to take sick leave if a pattern arises. By identifying an employee's individual absence record and confronting them, it is often enough to stop Monday/Friday absence in employees (Bruniquel, 2012, p.25).

Poor working conditions such as "exposure to noise, high temperatures, smoke or fumes, carrying heavy loads, working in painful positions which put pressure on the joints and working irregular hours" have a negative effect on the health of the workers and therefore increase sickness absence amongst employees (Afsa and Givord, 2013, p.287). Griffiths (2004, p.9) reported that the Institute of Administrative Management conducted a study based on 1,391 factory workers across a range of industries. The findings found an increase in levels of stress and absenteeism due to poor working conditions which included "inappropriate tools, poor ergonomic design and a lack of control over working hours". Absenteeism of workers within industrial organisations can be attributed to the working environment as well as the many factors they may be exposed to when working (Watkins, Ellis, Girardi, Cragle and Richter, 2014, p.165). If an employee works in unfavourable working conditions, the employer must pay premiums which will compensate to equalise the worker's value to the company (Rosen, 1974). Rosen (1974) argued further that merely looking at the working conditions as a source of employee's sickness-absence would be going against what economists stand for. Therefore, by focussing on the monetary advantages and disadvantages would be more fruitful in finding a reason behind sickness-absence (Rosen, 1974). According to Harte et al., (2011, p.13) employees continue to receive their salaries when they are absent due to sick leave. All employees employed temporarily by the labour broker for the company comply with the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) in the event that the employee is absent due to sickness (Labour broker, 2015). The conditions for sick leave as laid out in the BCEA are as follows:

"In the event that the Temporary Employee is prevented from performing his/her duties owing to sickness and/or ill health, the Temporary Employee is entitled to one (1) day's paid sick leave for every twenty-six (26) days worked.

The Temporary Employee shall complete the Employer's prescribed certificate of absence in the event that sick leave is taken for a period of two (2) consecutive days or less.

In the event of the Temporary Employee taking sick leave for a period exceeding two (2) consecutive days or where the Temporary Employee is absent for more than two working days or more than two occasions within an 8 week period, an original medical certificate to the satisfaction of the Employer booking the Temporary Employee off for the period and signed by a registered medical practitioner, must be provided. In the event that this clause is not complied with, the Temporary Employee shall not be paid for such leave of absence and disciplinary action may be taken”.

The medical events that employees experience set off the benefits available to them and impact on the cost of absence as well as productivity (Harte et al., 2011, p.20).

#### *2.4.2. Absence with permission (authorised absence)*

Entitling an employee to take unpaid leave is not stipulated in the BCEA (Labour Guide, 2015). In the Act, unpaid leave is referred to only “in terms of what the employer is entitled to do when an employee’s sick leave or annual leave has been exhausted; the employer may then allow (or require) the employee to take unpaid leave. However, there is no provision in the Act that allows an employee to demand that he/she be permitted to take unpaid leave (Labour Guide, 2015). This classification includes all other absences other than sickness absence where a valid excuse for absence is presented by the employee and accepted by the employer (van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.11).

#### *2.4.3. Absence without permission (unauthorised absence)*

Huczynski and Fitzpatrick (1989, p.3) state that unauthorised absence is “the non-attendance of employees for scheduled work when they are expected to attend”. Furthermore, Dekker (2010, p.104), states AWOL absence or absence without permission is when an employee is absent for a short period of time with the intention of returning. When doing so, the worker gives no reason for the absence or the reason given is not accepted by the employer (van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.11). Culbertson (2009, p.78) states that absence without permission can either be voluntary or involuntary. He further states that voluntary absence reflects work lost due to reasons within a person’s control such as simply not going to scheduled work. Whereas in contrast, involuntary absence occurs when there are factors present which are outside a person’s control such as feeling too ill to attend work or family issues which should be attended to. There is an inherent need to address unauthorised absences in the workplace as it results in expensive worker replacement costs and causes disruptions around the workers’

ability to deliver products and goods which are to the standard upheld by the organisation (Harte et al., 2011, p.20). It is particularly difficult for employers when employee's phone in on the day of absence as it then becomes the company's responsibility to find a replacement worker to fill the position which can cost a company one and a half times the wages of the absent employee (Harte et al., 2011, p.20).

## 2.5. Causes of absenteeism

According to van der Merwe and Miller (1987, p.7), there is no cause-effect relationship to the multi-faceted problem of absenteeism. There seems to be a lack of uniformity in the measurement of absenteeism which has led to many contradictory findings in the literature where the symptoms are treated rather than identifying and dealing with what causes absenteeism in the workplace (van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.7). Therefore, it is important and necessary in understanding what causes employees to absent from the workplace.

### 2.5.1. *Personal factors*

Personal factors which can contribute toward absenteeism in the workplace include "age, sex, education, marital status, income level, family, size length of service, previous attendance record and personal value of non-work activities" (Kim and Garman, 2003, p.3; van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.7). Frey and Stutzer (2002, p.3) mention that happiness is also an important factor to consider as it can influence absence in the workplace. Satisfaction with one's work can have a positive influence on an individual's happiness according to Frey and Stutzer (2002, p.3). Workers who possess positive or negative feelings about their jobs and the organisation they are in, have an effect on their standard of organisational commitment which plays a role in the level of absenteeism in the workplace; workers who possess positive feelings are less likely to be absent whereas those who are negative are more likely to be absent (Falkenburg and Schyns, 2007, p.711; Riggio, 2009, p.226). However, it is no longer possible for employees to perform as committed members of a team as organisations have had to downsize, restructure and transform in order to respond to competitive pressures of the work environment; therefore, there is no guarantee of job security for its employees (Coetzee and Botha, 2012, p.1).

Personal life stresses such as "marital, financial, family and illness" problems can influence an individual's psychological state as well as their performance at work (Families and Work Institute, 1997). Peirce, Frone, Russel and Cooper (1996) state that financial stress can cause distress in an employee's personal life as it is the resource needed to fund many essential

activities of daily living. Financial stress is also said to have an impact on family issues (Mills, Grasmick, Morgan and Wenk, 1992; Kim and Garman, 2003, p.1), a person's personal health (Drentea and Lavrakas, 2000) as well as increases in illness-related absence amongst employees (Hendrix, Steel and Schultz, 1987; Hendrix, Spencer and Gibson, 1994; Ivancevich, Matteson and Preston, 1980; Jacobson, Aldanam, Goetzel, Vardell, Adams and Pietras, 1996). Studies show that greater financial stress experienced by employees results in increased levels of absenteeism whereas decreased levels of financial stress experienced by employees' results in decreased levels of absenteeism (Bagwell, 2000; Garman, Camp, Kim, Bagwell, Baffi and Redican, 1999; Hendrix et al., 1987; Jacobson et al., 1996).

### *2.5.2. Organisational factors*

Organisational factors which have been examined are "size of the organisation, size of group, quality and the nature of supervision, shift work, overtime, absences control policies and organisation control systems, incentive schemes and the type of work undertaken by employees" (van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.7). Fischer, Oliveira, Nagai, Teixeira, Junior, Latorre (2005) and De Cuyper, Bernhard-Oettel, Bernston, Witte and Alarco (2008) found that job insecurity was related to working overtime. Shift work, overtime and absence control policies in operations have medium to strong correlations with absenteeism (van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.8).

In 1985 a study was completed by Hinze, Ugwu and Hubbard on the reasons for absenteeism on different construction projects and the cohesiveness between the relationship of employee and employer. They made use of a questionnaire they developed which focussed on, job satisfaction, reasons as to why they miss work, the overall number of times there were employees absent and employee's attitudes towards superiors and other members of their workforce (Hinze et al., 1985). The following results were found between absenteeism and job satisfaction; (1) absenteeism was reportedly lower in groups of employees where there was a high rate of team spirit, (2) absenteeism was lower on projects where supervisors criticised employees if they were absent, (3) there were fewer absences for employees who found their work mentally stimulating, (4) if the travel distance to a work site was greater for employees there was a clear increase in the amount of absences (Hinze et al., 1985). This coincides with factors that influence team performance and therefore individual performance in the workplace (Hewage, Gannoruwa and Ruwanpura, 2011, p.680); team cohesiveness, an individual's motivation, perceptions about team ability and performance, compatibility of team members,

the workplace environment where the team works and the motivation levels of all team members. Established social influence mechanisms caused by absenteeism in the workplace have an impact on the organisation which include; “organizational or work-unit absence norms, peer-referent absence norms, support from a supervisor, climate of the work group, group cohesiveness, group demography, group-effective tone and shared attitudes” (Russo, Miraglia, Borgogni and Johns, 2013, p.209).

Work-group norms as an influence on absenteeism has been studied in great depth by Steers and Rhodes (1978), Johns and Nicholson (1982) and Chadwick-Jones, Nicholson and Brown (1982). The setting of group norms amongst employees becomes part of the absence “culture”; if an employee has remained employed at a company for more than nine to twelve months, he/she adjust their absence behaviour to the stresses of staying in that organisation in a way which is acceptable to the employer (Hill and Trist, 1955). Attendance of employees has been shown to be related to group size, where larger work groups have a higher level of absenteeism; this has only been found in blue-collar workers. This increase in the size of the work groups can lead to poor communication between management and employees as well as result in a decrease in group cohesiveness (van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.7). However, when communication between management and employee’s is positively associated with favourable attitudes, such as job satisfaction, it is done so through a degree of autonomy given to employees by team leaders (Dionne, 2000). Trusted followers of the team leader fall into the “in-group” whereas the “out-group” is made up of individuals who have a low level of authority with the team leader (Hewage et al., 2011, p.680). Stutzer and Frey (2008, p.339) state that workers who spend a lot of time travelling to and from work often find it a burden. From an economic perspective, travelling to and from work can be costly and it is only compensated by an inherently or financially rewarding job (Stutzer and Frey, 2008, p.339).

### *2.5.3. Attitudinal factors*

Attitudinal factors have had the most consistent results in research between the frequency of absence in the workplace and the unfavourable attitudes of employees towards the job (van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.8). There is evidence of a strong positive relationship between dissatisfied employees with certain aspects of their job and absenteeism. LePine, Podsakoff and LePine (2005) state that lowered motivation of employees in the workplace has a negative effect on performance. Met expectations are used by Porter and Steers (1973, p.152) as part of their conceptual framework for absenteeism which can be defined as the inconsistency of the

positive and negative experiences a person may have on the job and what he/she expected to experience in the workplace. This finding suggests that job satisfaction arises out of the total of one's met expectations while at work; positive met expectations will result in decreased levels of absence whereas expectations not being met results in an increased amount of absenteeism amongst workers. The degree to which employees are satisfied and can relate to their supervisors, "co-workers, pay and benefits as well as the nature of their work"; which can result in dissatisfaction amongst employees (Hu, Kaplan and Dalal, 2010, p.317).

#### *2.5.4. Person-work relationships*

The person-work relationship is not a static one as there will be changes within the employee, job and/or work environment (van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.5). Therefore, the extent to which an employee believes that the organisation values their contribution, the more likely it will enhance the overall attitudes of employees toward the organisation (Parkes and Steelman, 2008, p.60; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa, 1986). If the person-work relationship is a satisfying and positive one, the employee is likely to be content and settle becoming a valuable, hard-working and unwavering affiliate of the workforce (van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.5). However, if the relationship is not a satisfying one, the employee will withdraw from the workplace situation in the most available way, known as absenteeism.

#### *2.5.5. Alcohol consumption*

Brook and Price (1989) conducted a study which testes a causal model for absenteeism in the workplace. They found that alcohol involvement had an effect on employee absenteeism. Researchers have established that there is a positive alcohol-absence relationship (Lennox, Steele, Zarkin and Bray, 1998; McFarlin and Fals-Stewart, 2002). The alcohol-absence relationship is based on the form of consumption where in most cases it is off-the-job drinking which is more complicated for management to control (Bacharach, Bamberger and Biron, 2010, p.335). An elevated level of modal alcohol consumption has a negative impact on employee wellbeing which results in an increase in the likelihood and/or duration of absenteeism from the workplace (Bacharach et al., 2010, p.335). Bacharach et al., (2010, p.344) found that any relationship between employee drinking behaviour and absenteeism is due to the way in which alcohol is consumed. Furthermore, the alcohol-absenteeism relationship is due to the acute impairment linked with heavy (binge) drinking incidents (Bacharach et al., 2010, p.344).

## 2.6. Effects of absenteeism

Absenteeism is known to have direct and indirect costs to an organisation which may include; losses of productivity, interference in work flow as well as a high monetary cost to the organisation. Absenteeism contributes to high losses of productivity and costs organisations billions of rand every year in South Africa (Butler, 1995; Gool, 1996; Morgan, 1998; Taho, 2004; Johnson, 2007; Stokes, 2008). The cost to the company caused by absenteeism has an effect on the delivery of service, as well as employee health and safety. Furthermore, there is additional pressure placed on the employees still present in the workplace. This allows organisations to use information on absenteeism as a gauge to regulate absenteeism in the workplace (Staufenbiel and Konig, 2010, p.104; Diestel, Wegge and Schmidt, 2014, p.353; Hanna, Menches, Sullivan and Sargent, 2005, p.1212; Chaudhury and Ng, 1992, p.615; Munro, 2007; Kim and Garman, 2003, p.1; Johns, 2010, p.519). This indirect cost of absenteeism has an effect on the bottom line of organisations which results in high organisational costs which have been estimated that one day's absenteeism cost can be one and a half times to three times the daily rate of pay to the organisation (Jones and Chung, 2006, p.32; van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.3).

Absenteeism clearly has a great effect on the cost of the organisation but it has also been known to interrupt the flow of work, impede decision-making, have implications on "effective functioning and productivity", employee relationships and obstruct operations within the workplace (Restrepo and Salgado, 2013, p.401; van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.3). Stress and financial stress experienced by employees and brought to the workplace is also likely to influence an employee's productivity (Kim and Garman, 2003, p.1; Brown, 1999). Furthermore, a decline in worker productivity could be due to the feeling of alienation and a decreased morale in employees which results in absenteeism and tardiness (Proudfoot Consulting, 2002; Morgan, 1998; Hillard, 1996). This is as a result of a lack of motivation and commitment in employees, a lack of autonomy, a lack of being in command of the work environment and a lack of skilled labour. Research has been conducted that focuses on the relationship between the levels of job satisfaction and decreased productivity with workplace absenteeism (Diestel et al., 2014; Dineen et al., 2007; Hausknecht, Hiller and Vance, 2008). Harrison, Newman and Roth (2006, p.306) found correlations between contextual performance and certain effects of this performance on the organisation; there were small to medium correlations between job satisfaction with absenteeism.

Results from the quantitative analysis of the data from a study conducted by Hanna et al., (2005, p.1212), found that when the rate of absenteeism was between 0 and 5%, there was no loss in productivity. However, when the rate of absenteeism was between that of 6 and 10%, there was a 24.4% loss in productivity. Their study focused on trying to understand why the employees within an electrical construction company missed work as well as the relationship between absenteeism and productivity (Hanna et al., 2005, p.1212). They looked at both the employees and managers in this study in order to verify if there was a discrepancy in the results found between manager's reasons why employees were absent and the reasons employees gave for being absent. According to Hanna et al., (2005, p.1214) the top five causes for employee absence perceived by manager's included; "(1) personal and family illness, (2) simply did not feel like working, (3) doctor/dental appointments, (4) drugs or alcohol and (5) lack of responsibility". On the other hand, the worker's reported the following as their top five reasons for being absent; "(1) personal and family illness, (2) injury, (3) doctor/dental appointments, (4) bad weather and (5) unsafe working conditions". There were discrepancies between the perceived causes of absenteeism in workers between management and the worker's themselves. Where there were similarities between the two groups was for personal and family illness and doctor/dental appointments (Hanna et al., 2005, p.1215).

## 2.7. Managing absenteeism

Whilst complying with the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, organisations need to use strategies to address absenteeism issues whilst broadening their company strategy and aligning the programme with the mission and culture of the organisation (Harte et al., 2011, p.15&21).

### 2.7.1. *Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP)*

EAP's have been used in business strategies in order to enhance "employee functioning, loyalty as well as performance" in organisations (Matlhape, 2003, p.29). EAP's are designed specifically to assist employees with socio-economic issues and improve on employer-employee communication as well as create a positive atmosphere within the workplace (Ramakrishan and Balgopal, 1992, p.4).

### 2.7.2. *Wellness programmes*

Wellness programmes are implemented by organisations either as on or off-site services in order to not only improve the health and well-being of employees but also to manage the health

care of staff, deal with absence and the cost of absenteeism as well as provide supplementary benefit to employees (Bly, Jones and Richardson, 1986; Wolfe, Parker and Napier, 1994; Parkes and Steelman, 2008, p.59). These wellness programmes can be classified as either fitness only or comprehensive (Parkes and Steelman, 2008, p.58). They are said to have a positive impact on job satisfaction amongst employees as well as create a willingness to contribute both energy and effort to produce exceptional outcomes for the company (Parkes and Steelman, 2008, p.59 and Louw, Sutherland; Hofmeyr, 2012, p.9).

### *2.7.3. Incentives*

Hassink and Koning (2009) conducted research at a Dutch manufacturing firm on the effectiveness of implementing a monthly lottery for workers who had not taken any sick leave in the three months prior to the draw and who had not previously won the lottery. The authors found significant variations in the absenteeism patterns across the different groups based on eligibility for the prize by focussing on attendance records and who had won in the past. Hassink and Koning (2009, p.327) firstly found that the absenteeism numbers rose amongst workers who had previously won and those who were not eligible for the prize. Secondly, the authors found that there was a decrease in firm-wide absence linked to the lottery. Incentives have the opportunity to be successful in any organisation; however, in the case of the lottery there was a post-win spike in absenteeism due the removal of the explicit incentive from the employees (Hassink and Koning, 2009, p.341).

### *2.7.4. Discipline*

Procedurally fair treatment in the workplace can result constructive organisational outcomes; “organisational commitment, job satisfaction, organisational citizenship behaviour and increased job performance” (Cropanzano, Bowen and Gilliland, 2007; Engelbrecht and Chamberlain, 2005; Mohyeldin and Suliman, 2007; Stetcher and Rosse, 2005; Thompson and Heron, 2005). According to van der Bank, Engelbrecht and Strumper (2009, p.1) the disciplinary procedure is there to promote equality and procedural justice when dealing with employees. There are three advantages for consistent disciplinary procedures in organisations; firstly, it adds value to the constancy of the workforce, secondly it minimises labour turnover and thirdly it endorses productivity amongst the workforce (Nel, Van Dyk, Schultz, Sono and Werner, 2007). Greenberg and Baron (2007) suggest that although rewards encourage wanted behaviour, discipline discourages workers to commit any form of counter-productive

behaviour. It is important to apply an agreed upon procedure to guarantee that the manner in which the discipline is administered is procedurally fair and consistent (Finnemore, 2006).

There is no point in applying employee absence programmes if managers and supervisors are not addressing workplace issues as well (Harte et al., 2011, p.24). Supervisors and managers need to be trained in identifying when a workers' performance and interpersonal relationships among co-workers have become strained due to personal or work matters (Harte et al., 2011, p.24). These can include financial issues, family problems, relationship difficulties or relieving stress in recreational ways such as consuming too much alcohol in the evenings which sees an employee not working to his/her full capacity.

## 2.8. Conclusion

There has been extensive research in the field of absenteeism worldwide based on the causes attributed to absenteeism, sickness absence, the effects of absence and the management and measurement of absence. However, AWOL (unauthorised) and unpaid (authorised) absenteeism require further research as they are fast becoming an issue in the South African workplace amongst temporary blue-collar employees. There is an apparent Monday/Friday trend which was mentioned by Bruniquel (2012, p.25) which is too becoming an issue in the workplace and which also needs further research to be conducted.

The research intends to highlight some of the reasons associated with these two types of absenteeism as well as to look at the comparison between the views of management and blue-collar workers regarding the causes attributed to absenteeism. It also intends to bring forward reasons for the Monday/ Friday absence trend in blue-collar workers.

This chapter concludes that there are many causes for absenteeism amongst blue-collar workers. However, some causes are more relevant than others in a South African context such as alcohol abuse, organisational factors and personal factors. There are many available ways in which organisations can manage absenteeism, but it depends on the organisation itself and what works best for them to decrease their levels of absenteeism in the workplace.

## Chapter 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Introduction

The chapter outlines the methodology used in obtaining the information needed regarding absenteeism. A mixed methods approach was adopted as the research used both quantitative and qualitative information from the organisation. The chapter includes the aim and objectives of the research, the research paradigm, methods used in the research, the data collection techniques, validity and reliability of the research, data analysis techniques, quality and ethics of the research and the research procedure.

The Global Logistics Supplier has over 400 blue-collar employees which make up the majority of the labour force. Most of the blue-collar workers are employed by the labour broker the company uses for casuals as well as their temporary workers. All employees within the different sites of the company are split into teams where there is a team leader who accounts for all the members within his/her team (Management, 2015).

#### 3.2. Aim and objectives

The aim of this research was to identify the main types of absenteeism of blue-collar workers and the perceived causes according to managers and workers. There were four objectives the research was to investigate through data received from the company based on worker absenteeism numbers for the period, April 2014 – July 2015, and interviews with employees and managers at a global logistics company.

1. The first objective was to identify the main types of absenteeism so that these can be further investigated:

- The two main types of absenteeism would be probed further in the interviews with both the blue-collar workers and management.

2. The second objective was to compare the views of blue-collar workers and management based on causes attributed to absenteeism:

- Firstly, focusing on overall absenteeism at the company.

- Secondly focusing on the two main types of absenteeism.

3. The third objective was to describe how absenteeism has been measured and managed.

4. The fourth of objective was to make recommendations to the company on ways to minimize absenteeism based on the findings.

### 3.2. Research paradigm

The methodology that was utilized in this study was a mixed methods approach. It is a mix of both qualitative and quantitative methods of research. Consequently, it straddles two research paradigms. The paradigm of any research is a belief, a value and an assumption which groups of researchers have a shared view regarding the nature and manner of research (Musa, 2013, p.41). Positivists gather quantitative data and “applied deductive reasoning” by testing hypotheses from theories which have been made (Musa, 2013, p.42). Positivists “embrace objective epistemology” where they search for the truth through observed verification of hypotheses (Musa, 2013, p.42). Interpretivists assume “relativism epistemology” which it is depicted as the group and individual understandings of reality (Musa, 2013, p.42). According to Musa (2013, p.42), their knowledge stems from the profound understanding of the context in which information is embedded in.

### 3.3. Research Method

Mixed methods research is the combination of elements of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner, 2007, p.123). The version of mixed methods that was used is the *connecting data* version (Creswell, Klassen, Plano Clark and Smith, 2010, p.5). The integration of both qualitative and quantitative data involves analyzing one data set; for example, quantitative data and then using the information to inform the subsequent data set; for example, interview questions or questionnaires (Creswell et al., 2010, p.5). The integration occurs through connecting the investigation of the initial phase results with the second phase of research in the form of the data collection. Quantitative data was analyzed statistically by focusing on absenteeism figures which were collected from a Global Logistics Supplier. Qualitative information from interviews was used to reach possible conclusions for reasons of absenteeism from the perspectives of both management and workers. Analyzing and connecting the data collected through interviews with the quantitative data received from the labour broker of the logistics company; deductions were made with regards

to the two main types of absenteeism amongst the blue collar workers at the organisation, its causes and its management.

### 3.4. Data collection techniques

A statistical analysis was done first to identify the two main types of absenteeism recorded by the organisation. The time frame which was analyzed was April 2014 – July 2015. Appropriate descriptive statistics were used to reach conclusions on the prevalence of the two main types of absenteeism among employees. The different groups who were interviewed included the blue-collar workers and managers. The questions were open ended and informed by the outcomes from the analysis of the quantitative data. The interview questions were substantiated and based on trends found in the quantitative data. There was a maximum of ten blue collar workers who were interviewed, who were conveniently selected and who were able to converse in English. Between three and five managers who deal with blue collar workers within the company were also interviewed. Their interviews gave insight as to how they measure and manage absenteeism levels within the organisation as well as their understanding of absenteeism.

### 3.5. Data analysis

The research set out to investigate absenteeism amongst blue-collar workers. Firstly, descriptive statistical analysis was undertaken on the data received from the company. This data included absenteeism records per month for employees, and was categorized by type of leave, covering the period April 2014 – July 2015. Descriptive statistics gave information regarding the skewness, kurtosis and average mean of the data sets for AWOL and unpaid leave over the entire period. Secondly, informed by the findings from the quantitative data analysis, which had identified patterns and prevalence of absenteeism, semi-structured interviews were conducted with management and the blue-collar workers within the organisation to gather more in depth information on the causes of absenteeism and its management. Some of the interview questions were therefore based on the analysis of the absenteeism data, while additional questions were derived from the literature. The two main types of absenteeism were the focal point of the study and allowed for deductions to be made regarding these two. An analysis of themes in the semi-structured interviews was deduced using the literature that was presented in chapter two.

### 3.6. Quality, reliability, validity and ethics

The quality of the data received from the organisation was not aligned with the previous ideas for findings associated with the study. The data did not contain absence of leave type per day as previously intended which limited the amount of deductions and statistical analyses. Quality of the interviews was vital in providing the researcher with valuable information relating to the quantitative data as well as additional findings in the literature. If interviewees did not feel comfortable in answering certain questions posed to them, they had a right to not answer. Making use of interviews to gather information based on absenteeism from the managers and the blue-collar workers allowed for a more reliable set of results than questionnaires may have provided. However, interviews are not always reliable due to interviewees not being able to answer a question truthfully or at all based on the fact that they are feeling uncomfortable in the interview situation. This posed a problem for the researcher due to the fact that so few people were being interviewed for this research and questions may have gone unanswered or questions were not truthfully answered. Resultantly, this may have been problematic in terms of the validity of the research if interviewees did not answer truthfully in the interview session; where some of the findings gathered from the interviews may not be a true representation of what the researcher was claiming to measure.

The ethics approval form was accepted and passed by the Rhodes Business School. Consent to use the company's data as well as to interview managers and workers was given by the company on condition of anonymity. This allowed for the research to incorporate findings from semi-structured interviews.

### 3.7. Research procedure

To achieve the objectives set out above, data was received from the labour broker who provided the organisation with temporary employees. The data was recorded in the period by leave type per month. From the data received, a deduction was made regarding the two main types of absenteeism through a simple calculation. Due to extensive research done on sick leave, the next two largest quantity of leave types were used in the research. Using findings from research done on absenteeism, interviews were prepared for both blue-collar workers and management. It was vital to structure the interviews similarly in various aspects in order to acquire the comparison between the perceived causes of absenteeism from both blue-collar workers and management's views. All interviews were recorded for ease of transcribing once the interview process was completed. Interviews with management were conducted in the offices of the

interviewees at the organisation. Each interview with management was no longer than ten minutes. Interviews with the blue-collar workers were conducted at a neutral venue as to not put any of the interviewees under pressure from co-workers. The semi-structured interviews were no longer than ten minutes for each blue-collar worker.

### 3.8. Conclusion

Using a mixed methods approach in conducting the research; by using both quantitative and qualitative data from the organisation was sufficient in providing the researcher with the information needed to carry out the research and achieve the research aim as well as fulfill the research objectives set out at the beginning of this chapter.

## Chapter 4

### FINDINGS

#### 4.1. Introduction

The aim of this research was to identify the main types of absenteeism of blue-collar workers and the perceived causes according to managers and workers. The findings will follow the objectives set out in chapter 3 through analysis of the data and the semi-structured interviews. The two main types of absenteeism were identified from the quantitative data received from the labour broker and were subsequently probed further in the interviews with the blue-collar workers and management from the organisation. Supplementary questions based on absenteeism trends identified in the literature were also incorporated into the interviews. A comparison between the causes of absenteeism perceived by both the blue-collar workers and management was found. Members of the management team were interviewed regarding the measurement and the control of absenteeism within the organisation.

#### 4.2. Defining absence and identification of main types

##### *4.2.1. Absenteeism defined*

Management suggested that absenteeism was tracked as “total people not at work”. It was also defined as when a regular staff member is not at work and is therefore deemed as being either lawful or unlawful. Once it has been believed to be either lawful or unlawful, an investigation regarding the reason for the absence is done and the absence is categorised under a certain leave type; sick leave, annual leave, unpaid leave, union matters, study leave, on training, FRL (family responsibility leave), AWOL and other. However, workers who are not at scheduled work for training or planned annual leave and the like are not recorded in the data as being absent.

##### *4.2.2. Employee perspective of absenteeism*

Five out of the eight blue-collar workers said that absenteeism was a problem within the company. One respondent went further to say that casuals are not always brought in to cover for the regular workers when one is absent and that they themselves have to pick up the extra

capacity for the absent employee which they find demanding on their time and energy. Other respondents said that absent workers were not a problem and it was nothing that they could not manage themselves.

#### 4.2.3. Sum totals of leave type

**Table 1: Sum totals of all leave types for the period April 2014 – July 2015**

Month	Leave Type								
	Sick	Annual leave	Unpaid	Union matters	Study	Training	FRL	AWOL	Other
Apr	71	46	10	9	0	6	20	111	2
May	98	40	9	9	84	13	26	49	4
Jun	143	27	8	4	58	1	27	39	11
Jul	47	1	3	0	0	0	7	48	4
Aug	148	14	17	1	0	0	17	47	1
Sep	126	19	15	0	0	0	8	17	0
Oct	145	26	41	2	1	1	27	25	4
Nov	97	1	59	5	0	0	25	6	0
Jan	112	12	46	5	3	1	11	84	2
Feb	174	9	53	4	0	0	10	31	7
Mar	231	11	36	5	0	0	2	36	8
Apr	159	20	22	7	0	0	15	34	7
May	212	9	39	2	0	1	3	2	3
Jun	237	4	46	1	21	0	24	8	3
Jul	232	2	49	0	7	0	3	13	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>2232</b>	241	<b>453</b>	54	174	23	225	<b>550</b>	59

Table 1 depicts the totals of all leave types for the entire period of data collection. The values in the table represent the number of workers absent per month based on the certain leave type recorded by the company. As stated above, there has been extensive research done on sickness absence amongst blue-collar workers therefore the focus was placed on AWOL and unpaid

absenteeism. As seen in Table 1, AWOL and unpaid absenteeism had the second and third highest values of all leave types. AWOL absenteeism had a total of 550 incidences over the recorded period and unpaid absenteeism had 453 incidences in the same period.

### 4.3. Causes attributed to absenteeism

Within the subsections, the causes attributed to absenteeism according to members in management and the blue-collar workers are discussed.

#### *4.3.1. Causes attributed to general absenteeism*

General absenteeism refers to absenteeism which does not include AWOL and unpaid absenteeism. Management and blue-collar workers within the company were asked why they thought workers were absent in general from the workplace (No specific leave type of absenteeism was asked as in section 4.3.2.).

##### *4.3.1.1. Management feedback*

1. **Strikes and intimidation.** When there are service delivery strikes within the communities where workers live, they are often not allowed to leave their homes to go to work. If they default on this, there is a chance that they and their families will be intimidated and threatened by the people taking part in the strike. This puts workers as well as their families at risk of being targets to the striking members of public keeping them from work.

2. **Habitual absence.** Absence most often occurs on a Monday and Friday or after public holidays due to family problems, illness or drinking over the weekends.

3. **Public transport problems.** There is always a battle at the end of the month to pay for public transport to and from work as some workers may not have any money left.

Two other causes of absence which management mentioned that followed closely behind the top three were; a situation when the workers are under investigation from a previous grievance and they take off with no explanation as well as where workers have found employment at another company with greater opportunities, more pay or where the job is better situated. They do not arrive for scheduled work and do not inform anyone of their intentions of not returning.

#### *4.3.1.2. Blue-collar worker's feedback*

All respondents were asked what their personal opinions were for the three main reasons as to why employees are absent from the workplace. Majority mentioned family issues as the main reason where two respondents spoke about lack of motivation. One employee said that they felt employees are absent from the workplace in order to stay at home and look for better work which offers greater opportunities. All respondents had different reasons as to why they thought people are absent from work; they are recorded from the most prevalent to the least prevalent reason.

1. **Family issues.** Majority (6/8) of the respondents pointed out that family issues were one of the main reasons employees were absent from the workplace. This includes family member illness, taking family members to the doctor and marital or other family problems.

2. **Illness.** Half the respondents said that they themselves and the other workers get sick and cannot come into work. Chronic illnesses such as asthma and arthritis are also problems that workers have to deal with.

3. **Lack of motivation.** Two of the respondents referred to a lack of motivation as a reason for some people not going to scheduled work. The lack of motivation sees the employees rather staying at home to look for better work opportunities.

4. **Strikes and intimidation.** The individuals, who take part in the strike, close the roads with burning tyres and rocks and do not allow anyone to leave in cars or public transport.

5. **Public transport problems.** Most of the blue-collar workers who live a considerable distance from work take public transport. There are often problems with the transport or people do not have money to pay for transport to get to or from work, thus playing a role in absenteeism as it can be unreliable.

6. **Feeling ill from the weekend.** One respondent said that often employees are not at scheduled work due to feeling ill after a weekend of festivities.

#### *4.3.2. Causes of AWOL and unpaid absenteeism*

Members of the management team and blue-collar workers were asked a question based on their thoughts on why blue-collar workers were absent based on reasons of AWOL and unpaid

absence. The following subsections include feedback from management and blue-collar workers as well as feedback from the quantitative data are given.

#### *4.3.2.1. Management*

According to management, unpaid absenteeism is not seen as risky from an absenteeism point of view as the person has chosen to be absent without pay and has authorised permission from the human resources department to do so. AWOL absence is depicted as when there is no sick leave and no authorised leave is given to the employee. It is usually followed up with corrective action which involves counselling, discipline and progressive discipline over time which may eventually lead to dismissal. One of the respondents said these two categories of absence were most prevalent amongst the blue-collar workers as majority of the staff are largely unskilled. Furthermore, they do not have the same responsibility and professionalism that you would expect from a more senior level staff member. The blue-collar workers are employed on a temporary basis through a labour broker as the work they do is more purpose driven (ad hoc) and not as regulated as the employment contracts of the managers within the company.

a. **Seasonality.** Where the winter months get cooler, illness becomes more prevalent resulting in fewer people at work. The workers as well as members of their families may be ill. One finds that between May and August, the sick leave amongst employees goes up as one would expect it to do in winter.

b. **Strike action, intimidation and stand over tactics of staff.** As mentioned above, it can be a big problem when there are service delivery strikes and the workers are not allowed to leave their communities to go to work.

c. **Socio-economic issues.** Family issues, financial issues and housing challenges can be a cause for workers not coming to work as scheduled. An example is if there is no one to look after a worker's sick child for the day while they are at work.

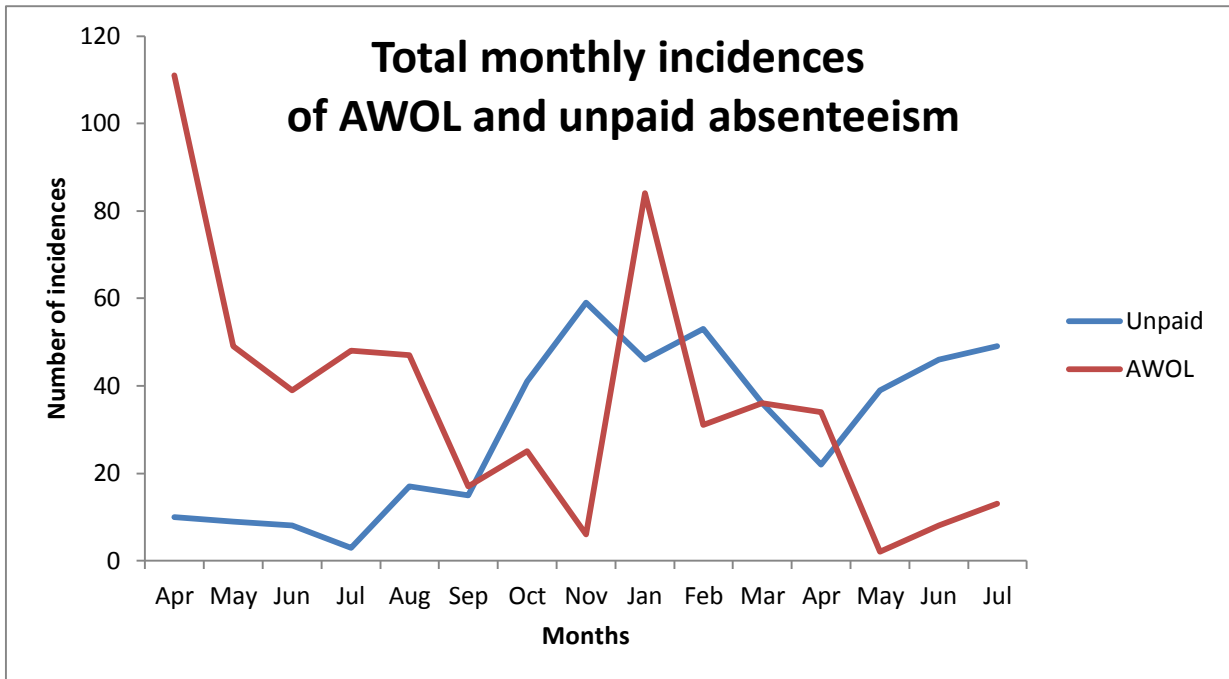
According to one manager, the majority of AWOL absenteeism is categorised as fraudulent sick leave as many cases of sick leave were not viewed as genuine. People buy sick certificates or attain sick certificates from someone else who is not a recognised doctor. It is unauthorised, but a lot of it is driven by the circumstances in which the employees find themselves. Management try to be as sympathetic as possible to the workers, but once they open the door

to increased amounts of sympathy with over 400 employees, there will be a problem every day and there comes a point where the company need to draw the line.

#### *4.3.2.2. Blue-collar workers*

The blue-collar workers mentioned that one of the main reasons why AWOL and unpaid absenteeism are most common amongst workers is due to their lack of motivation and decreased happiness in the workplace. The employees said that most of them do not feel like going to work and would rather be at home or that they may have a responsibility at home which needs to be seen to. Another respondent mentioned that if their team leader or a manager has discriminated against them about work issues, it results in a decrease in motivation and they make a decision to go AWOL for a few days. One respondent mentioned that workers may be absent due to unhappiness over their wages. Workers often relay messages to colleagues to inform their team leader or manager that they will not be attending work that day. These messages often do not reach the intended person. This results in the worker being marked as AWOL in a red pen instead of “abs” (absent) where a legitimate reason was accepted by the company.

4.3.2.3. Monthly incidences of AWOL and unpaid absenteeism



**Figure 1: Sum total of monthly incidences of AWOL and unpaid absenteeism for the period April 2014 – July 2015**

Figure 1 illustrates the increases and decreases in the numbers of AWOL and unpaid absenteeism at the company. As a member of management mentioned, one does not know from a management perspective what is happening at the worker's homes or what they may be going through outside of the workplace and this may affect the spikes in absenteeism levels for the two leave types.

4.3.2.4. Descriptive statistics of unpaid absenteeism

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics of total incidences of unpaid absenteeism for the period of April 2014 – July 2015**

<i>Unpaid Leave</i>	
Mean	30.2
Standard Error	4.875790534
Median	36
Mode	46
Standard Deviation	18.88385554
Sample Variance	356.6
Kurtosis	-1.62998909
Skewness	-0.034129337
Range	56
Minimum	3
Maximum	59
Sum	453
Count	15

Information from Table 2 depicts a mean average of 30 incidences of unpaid absence per month for the duration of the period in which the data was captured; almost one incidence per day of unpaid absence. The standard deviation of 18.9 advises one that the sample observations were widely spread and not tightly distributed around the mean. There is a negative skewness which indicates that the mean is less than the median and mode due to the low number of incidences that took place in the first months of the year over the period in which the data was recorded. The negative kurtosis also points to the data being more widely spread relative to the normal distribution. The negative skewness can be due to the recordings in the data set; in the beginning months of the 2014 year, there was a small amount of recorded unpaid leave which

may be due to the workers using up their sick leave days before taking unpaid leave. The small standard error of 4.9 verifies that the sample is more representative of the overall population of the workforce.

4.3.2.5. *Descriptive statistics of AWOL absenteeism*

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics of incidences of AWOL absenteeism for the period April 2014 – July 2015**

AWOL	
Mean	36.66666667
Standard Error	7.636171234
Median	34
Mode	#N/A
Standard Deviation	29.57476402
Sample Variance	874.6666667
Kurtosis	1.845365783
Skewness	1.288795695
Range	109
Minimum	2
Maximum	111
Sum	550
Count	15

Table 3 indicates an average mean of 37; this indicates at least 37 incidences of AWOL absenteeism per month at the Global Logistics Company. The large standard deviation of 29.6 indicates that the sample observations are widely spread out around the mean. AWOL absenteeism had some months where it was more prevalent. However, in order to identify any patterns in the data, a longer time period would have to be observed. The positively skewed sample data set indicate a right skewed distribution where the mean is larger than the median

and the mode and the distribution has a longer tail to the right. The kurtosis indicates that the data set has a thin tail and is closely centred around the mean. The great standard error of 7.6 tells one that this is not a good representation of the overall population of the company.

#### 4.4. Measurement and management of absenteeism

The following subsection focuses on how management measure and control absenteeism within the organisation.

##### *4.4.1. Effect of absenteeism*

Management mentioned that once the percentage of full time equivalent hours lost due to absenteeism in the company goes above 4%, the productivity of the organisation is affected. Another way in which absenteeism affects productivity is through the substitution of absent workers with less skilled casuals. The pool of less skilled casuals cannot do the work the trained employees can. As a result, the skilled blue-collar workers are moved around to take on more skilled jobs which they may know more about and a less skilled casual worker moves into an area where no skills are needed to perform the job satisfactorily. The shuffling around of workers at the different sites in the company as a result of absenteeism ends up doubling the number of absentees due to the workers not being in their original work spaces.

The respondents also spoke of the direct and indirect costs that absenteeism has on an organisation. A direct cost to the company is the cost of paying workers for sick leave and paying workers for annual leave taken. The indirect cost that absenteeism has on the organisation is the cost of moving skilled workers around the warehouse to accommodate the casual staff in less critical roles. Therefore, instead of having a 5% absenteeism rate, it results in being double as workers are not in their usual positions resulting in decreased productivity. Moving the workers around impacts on the quality of service; whether it is breaking of parts or stock losses which may have an impact on the service the organisation provides resulting in an increased cost to the company. It is evident that absenteeism results in a knock-on effect throughout the business.

One respondent pointed out that if a member of the management staff is absent, it is recorded in the absenteeism data but no replacement staff is brought in. This is due to the specialised nature of the work the management staff does and the cost it would have on the organisation to bring in a replacement. In order to identify the cost that absenteeism has on the organisation,

they base the information on full time equivalent hours lost due to absenteeism. They then subsequently graph the findings and put a percentage to it. Any number over 4% of the wage count is considered a high cost to the company. Another way of measuring absenteeism is by identifying the number of casuals which were brought in. The company itself does not measure absenteeism in their financial statements but each operation follows the number of casuals in order to observe how much it is costing the organisation. According to one of the respondents who work in the financial department, it does not necessarily cost the company more to pay casuals as the organisation would typically be paying a regular staff member for the work done. It does however cost the company in terms of training and time as well as the cost of keeping a pool of casuals ready and trained so they can fill in when regular staff members are absent.

#### *4.4.2. Measurement process*

All management respondents pointed out that there is a standard measurement procedure for absenteeism which is supplied by the labour broker as majority of the staff are employed by them. Absence is governed by how the company measures it from a pay point of view. Each category of absence or leave type has a certain way in which it is dealt with and a certain process which is expected to be followed. For example, AWOL absence results in no pay and a disciplinary process which follows the absence. FRL and annual leave get logged through payroll with supporting documents from the absentee to give a reason as to why they were absent or hand in an application for leave. It is considered standard procedure by virtue of the fact that the organisation knows they are dealing with people's pay and it is therefore integral to follow certain procedures and protocols when dealing with absenteeism.

#### *4.4.3. Strategies*

Other than disciplinary action, the organisation has done correlations between absenteeism and the general well-being of staff members, but was not able to identify anything of worth which would assist in the decrease of overall levels of absenteeism in the company. There was the carrot and the stick strategy which the organisation has tried doing. This was done by focussing on how much staff enjoy being at work and how motivated the staff are to come to work. One can influence a person's decision to come to work by a certain extent by creating a motivated staff and a workplace environment that is reasonably pleasant to be in where everyone feels the need to have that sense of belonging in the workplace. That is more of the carrot part of the strategy whereas the stick is the tracking of the absenteeism trends of the organisation and

focussing on individuals who have gone over their due sick days owed to them and therefore move on to disciplinary action to deal with it (Management, 2015).

**a. Incentives.** Employee(s) of the month incentives have been carried out where workers were eligible if they had been in attendance at work without taking extended periods of leave as well as decreased levels of AWOL absenteeism. The organisation have tried to bring a sense of belonging into a team where a team has outputs and goals they need to achieve; the employees therefore feel they have let their team down if they do not go to work and have not contributed to the overall quality of work of the team. This incentive however only appeals to 50% of the staff who would respond to that kind of motivator whereas the other 50% of the employees go to work to get their wages. There is not a good enough handle on absenteeism other than discipline; therefore, incentives such as employee(s) of the month have fallen away.

**b. Sporting groups.** This was implemented to improve welfare as well as improve the general happiness of employees in the workplace. Sporting groups are not to everyone's enjoyment so it was done away with.

**c. Disciplinary action.** Following procedure and going through the protocols for the specific incident is said to be the greatest motivator for staff. Depending on the category or leave type under which the worker falls into when absent, they are dealt with according to the procedure and protocol set out by the labour broker. This in turn decreases the administrative burden on the organisation. Following the absenteeism trends and identifying repeat offenders and workers who are often absent without reason or who tend to be absent more on a Monday or Friday is another way the organisation finds those who need to go through the disciplinary procedure. Counselling takes place first depending on the offence and the worker is told; "irrespective of the fact that you were sick or had family problems or faced challenges but at the end of the day, the most basic requirement of your contract of employment is to present yourself at work and if you going to continue to not be available, then you not upholding your side of the contract and we are going to look to terminate your services". Most offenses are monitored with corrective action but by trying to create an environment where people want to work does help.

What has been effective for the organisation is having acquired one labour broker and not eight as they had before dealing with absenteeism. However, it has been a challenging and arduous process aligning the company with one labour broker as well as setting it up and finalising it. Management state that now it is a more streamlined process. These processes of dealing with

absenteeism are however not all perfect as there are different people in the different regions taking on different roles within the labour broker.

#### 4.5. Subsequent questions based on literature

The questions were based on findings of absenteeism in the literature. These findings were used to probe the issue of absenteeism and find out whether the organisation experienced any of these issues amongst the blue-collar workers.

##### *4.5.1. Team leader criticism, team spirit and overtime*

Four of the blue-collar workers thought that when a team leader criticises someone for being absent in front of other employees they were motivated to not be absent. Each team holds a meeting in the mornings where absenteeism amongst employees is verified and is subsequently tracked on an absenteeism board. Workers who are AWOL are marked with a red dot whereas sick absence or authorised absence is written “abs”. The red marks for AWOL absence are a good motivator for employees to go to work. Some of the respondents felt it was inappropriate for team leaders to call them out in front of other employees. A personal conversation would be preferable and would most likely reveal the actual reason for their absence rather than the team leader berating them in front of co-workers. The way in which a team leader speaks to the absent employees may be a form of motivation or may not be any motivation for them.

Six of the eight blue-collar workers confirmed that a good team spirit within a team is important in keeping the levels of absenteeism low amongst employees. One respondent said good team spirit did not play any role in decreasing levels of absenteeism as it was based more on who you are friends with in the workplace.

Seven of the eight respondents said that overtime did not have an effect on employee absenteeism. They pointed out that working overtime is more of a motivator for majority of the employees as it results in more pay at the end of the week. One of the respondents stated they were happy to help the organisation in any way possible even if it meant working overtime. They said instead of being at home doing nothing, they would rather work overtime and get the extra pay at the end of the week to enjoy over the weekend.

#### *4.5.2. Monday/Friday trend*

##### *4.5.2.1. Management*

Mondays and Fridays mentioned by management as the days which employees are most often absent. One of the respondents also said that days around a long weekend can be cause for concern. However, there is no clear 80/20 split between Mondays and Fridays as it does vary. However, the Monday/Friday trend inconsistent as there are a lot of factors which may come into play which results in absenteeism on other days of the week. Consequently, absenteeism numbers increase and decrease at different times. This may be due to strikes and protests within the community where employees live or extreme weather conditions on certain days. The extreme weather conditions can result in illness where the majority of the workers are genuinely sick and not fraudulently sick. Babies and small children in addition get sick; workers have to take their children to hospital, clinic, or the doctor. The company does give FRL but often people do not arrive for scheduled work which is cause for concern.

##### *4.5.2.2. Blue-collar workers*

Every participant said that employees were more often than not still inebriated or not feeling well on a Monday after a night of festivities that they may have had over the weekend. In addition to this, they stated that family issues may also be to blame for Monday absence. The majority of the respondents said that employees were often absent on a Friday as they had received their wages that day; allowing them the opportunity to go places as they had money to spend. This can include going to the bank, paying accounts at clothing stores or going to the doctor or clinic. One employee stated that they see no point in showing up to work on Friday if they have been present all week.

##### *4.5.3. Effect of distance travelled*

All blue-collar respondents stated that distance from work does not play a role in employee absence as most employees live close to the workplace. Only those who live a considerable distance from work would be affected. Workers who live far away rely on public transport to get them to and from work on time; many of workers find the public transport unreliable.

#### *4.5.4. Negative work environment*

Half of the blue-collar participants said that a negative working environment can have an effect on employee absenteeism. A small number of the workers did say that it is not a crippling problem for the company and it only happens in certain areas of the organisation. Two of the participants added that if people are absent due to a negative working environment, they are not absent from work for long periods of time. The main cause of absenteeism due to a negative work environment is that of picking up heavy parts; this applies to the work the blue-collar workers at the organisation do. The other half of participants stated that it does not play a role in employee absence.

#### 4.6. Conclusion

In this chapter the findings of the research on absenteeism patterns and the reasons for absenteeism were presented. It is apparent that the absenteeism data received was not informative enough in terms of daily absenteeism records which would have been preferred rather than a monthly record. Figure 1 showed the monthly incidences of the two main types of absenteeism picked up in Table 1. There is no clear pattern relating to seasonal absence, therefore more information is needed to make clear deductions based on the quantitative data.

The interviews with management and blue-collar workers from the company were conducted thoroughly and with the consent of all parties involved. Anonymity was assured in order for interviewees to answer as accurately and correctly as possible to provide information which added value to the research paper.

In some cases, there were similarities between the views of both management and the blue-collar workers at the company based on the causes attributed to absenteeism in general. Both groups mentioned strikes and intimidation, public transport issues and habitual absence or absence related to drinking over the weekend as the causes attributed to general employee absence. However, there were some discrepancies in their views of the causes attributed to both general absence and AWOL and unpaid absenteeism. The blue-collar workers included family issues, illness and a lack of motivation as additional reasons for general absence amongst employees. When it came to causes attributed to AWOL and unpaid absenteeism management mentioned seasonality, socio-economic issues and strike action, intimidation and stand over tactics of staff. The blue-collar workers stated that a lack of motivation, team leader

discrimination and unhappiness over wages was the reason why AWOL and unpaid absenteeism were the most prevalent.

The negative skewness related to unpaid absenteeism can be seen in the original data where there were not many incidences in the beginning months of the year 2014. However, these increased toward the end of the period of the data set resulting in the negatively skewed data set. AWOL absenteeism had a higher mean than unpaid absenteeism due to the higher number of recorded incidences of AWOL. The positively skewed AWOL data set is due to the lack of a clear pattern in the recordings resulting in data which is widely spread around the mean.

Management stated that the incentive schemes and sporting groups did not have any effect on the absenteeism numbers within the organisation. They have found that the only way to actively control absence amongst employees is through disciplinary action.

There were further discrepancies between the views of both management and blue-collar workers in the findings of why workers are most often absent on Mondays and Fridays. The blue-collar workers mentioned that individuals were not well after the weekend, family issues kept them from the workplace and wage payments on Fridays allowed them to activities and pay accounts. Management said that the absenteeism relating to those specific days varies due to many reasons, strikes and intimidation, illness as well as changes in the weather.

Half of the blue-collar workers felt that criticism from a team leader resulted in increased levels of motivation to attend work. Majority of them felt that a good team spirit was a good motivator to attend scheduled work. Overtime was said to have no effect on the levels of employee absence. The distance that employees travel to and from work was said to have no effect on absenteeism according to the blue-collar workers. A negative work environment was said to only have an effect on employee absence by 50% of those interviewed, whereas the rest of the respondents said it had no effect on absence.

## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION

#### 5.1. Introduction

The research question of the paper intends to focus on what are the main types of absenteeism and what are the perceptions of management and the blue-collar workers, guided by findings in the literature review. The aim of this research was to identify the main types of absenteeism of blue-collar workers and the perceived causes according to managers and workers. In the chapter the discussion will follow the outline of the objectives set out in chapter 3. First focusing on defining absenteeism, followed by a discussion based on the comparison of perceptions of management and blue collar workers on the causes attributed to absenteeism as a whole and the causes of AWOL and unpaid absenteeism, how absenteeism is measured and controlled by management and then focusing on the subsequent questions and how they differ from the literature.

#### 5.2. Defining absenteeism

##### *5.2.1. Absenteeism defined*

Interviews with management revealed that absenteeism was defined as when a regular staff member is not at work and is therefore deemed as lawful or unlawful; lawful absenteeism is where an employee has permission or supporting documentation for their absence whereas unlawful absence is categorised as not arriving for scheduled work or providing fraudulent certificates for illness or an illegitimate reason for a problem. This coincides with the information from numerous research articles that absenteeism is the temporary withdrawal from the workplace either in terms of sickness absence, absence with permission or absence without permission (Deery et al., 2006, p.172; Jones et al., 2009, p.144; Johns, 2010, p.519; van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.3). The organisation tracks absenteeism under the definition; “total people not at work” which is a consistent measure around the organisation at the different sites and allows for comparisons to be made monthly and yearly. This is consistent with the findings of van der Merwe and Miller (1987, p.3) where accurate recording keeping is based on the organisation’s definition of absenteeism.

### 5.3. Causes attributed to absenteeism

#### 5.3.1. *Causes attributed to general absenteeism*

##### 5.3.1.1. *Management*

Managements' responses to the question were answered on assumption as they do not have enough evidence to provide exact causes as to why employees are absent from the workplace. Strikes and intimidation, habitual absence and public transport problems were mentioned as the top three causes of absenteeism by management. Habitual absence can be identified through an employee's personal absence record and assumptions can be made on whether there is an apparent problem or not (van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.10). The view of public transport issues is supported by Stutzer and Frey (2008, p.339) who state that employees who spend a lot of time travelling to and from work find it a burden. As Harte et al., (2011, p.24) state, supervisors and managers should address workplace issues and identify when a workers' performance becomes strained due to personal or workplace issues.

##### 5.3.1.2. *Blue-collar workers*

The blue-collar workers mentioned family issues, illness, lack of motivation, strikes and intimidation, public transport issues and feeling ill after a weekend of festivities as contributing factors to absenteeism in the workplace. A lack of motivation results in a decrease in performance of an employee (LePine et al., 2005) as well as having an effect on an employee's actual attendance (Steers and Rhodes, 1973, p.393). Family issues can influence an individual's psychological state as well as their performance in the workplace (Families and Work Institute, 1997). This can be attributed to stresses at home or financial stress which can cause personal distress in an employee's life (Peirce et al., 1996). A view that agrees with the employee's view of feeling ill after a weekend is that of Harte et al., (2011, p.24) which states that one reason for an employee not working to his/her full capacity is due to relieving stress in recreational ways as in the consumption of alcohol. Modal alcohol consumption by employees results in an increase in the likelihood and/or duration of absence from the workplace which is in line with absence after the weekend (Bacharach et al., 2010, p.344). Employees mentioned that they can often not afford fares for public transport and they find the service unreliable at times which is in line with Stutzer and Frey (2008, p.339) who stated that travelling to and from work is costly for employees. The respondents also mentioned that finding a job elsewhere with better pay,

greater opportunities and where it was better situated were reasons why employees were AWOL or subsequently left permanently. It is clear that the blue-collar workers from the organisation lack organisational commitment and encompass a low sense of job security. It corresponds with research done by Falkenburg and Schyns (2007, p.711) and Riggio (2009, p.226) where organisational commitment plays a role in employee absence. The employee's low sense of job security could be in line with two factors found in the literature; due to the fact that they are temporarily employed and can be laid-off at any time (Arai and Thoursie, 2005, p.279) and due to the restructuring of organisations to respond to competitive pressures resulting in no guarantee of job security for the employee's (Coetzee and Botha, 2012, p.1). Also, the extent to which the employee feels that the organisation values their contribution, it will more than likely increase their attitudes toward the organisation (Parkes and Steelman, 2008; Eisenberger et al., 1986).

### *5.3.2. Causes of AWOL and unpaid absenteeism*

#### *5.3.2.1. Management*

Management mentioned that unpaid absenteeism is not of great concern as is AWOL absenteeism due to the fact that people who are AWOL do not have the authorisation to be absent from work whereas those on unpaid leave have authorisation. This is supported by work done by van der Merwe and Miller (1987, p.11) where all absences other than sickness absence with a valid excuse which has been accepted by an employer are deemed as authorised absence whereas an instance where no valid reason is given or accepted by the employer is deemed unauthorised absence. In the BCEA, an employee is entitled to unpaid leave once they have exhausted their sick leave or annual leave (Labour Guide, 2015).

Management stated that seasonality plays a role in AWOL and unpaid absenteeism as people generally get sick prior to, during and just after the winter months. However, in order to analyse seasonality from the data received, there would need to be an assessment of a longer time period of more common months relating to the reasoning of seasonality. As Figure 1 illustrates, there are spikes and dips in the recorded data. Two years with fifteen accumulated months is not enough to make an accurate analysis based on seasonality. Although there is a slight increase in the number of incidences of absence based on leave type moving toward winter months, it does not illustrate a clear trend as there are dips in the data during winter. This speaks to what

one member of management mentioned and that is that due to circumstances whether personal, financial or familial, there will be spikes and drops in the data recorded.

Strike action and intimidation were other reasons mentioned for AWOL and unpaid absenteeism. Not only are the workers themselves at risk, subsequently their families are as well. This coincides with the views of Hackman and Lawler (1971), Locke (1976), Porter and Lawler (1968) and Vroom (1964) which state that there are “internal and external pressures” employees face which can impact on attendance. Management spoke of socio-economic issues workers may face such as financial issues, family issues and housing problems. This view is supported by many authors which state that financial stress has an impact on family issues (Mills et al., 1992; Kim and Garman, 2003, p.1), a person’s personal health and well-being (Drentea and Lavrakas, 2000) and an increase in illness-related absence amongst employees (Hendrix et al., 1987; Hendrix et al., 2004; Ivancevich et al., 1980; Jacobson et al., 1996).

#### *5.3.2.2. Blue-collar workers*

The blue-collar workers who were interviewed had very different motives as to why AWOL and unpaid absenteeism are the highest forms of absence following sick absence. Lack of motivation to work, unhappiness and were mentioned by majority of the respondents as the main reasons workers are often AWOL in the workplace. Unhappiness in the workplace coincides with the findings of Frey and Stutzer (2002, p.3) which state that happiness influences absence; where in the case of the blue-collar workers, their unhappiness is refraining them from the workplace. The blue-collar worker’s views correspond with Steers and Rhodes (1978, p.393), Hackman and Lawler (1971), Locke (1976), Porter and Lawler (1968) and Vroom (1964) where a combination of an employee’s emotional responses to the job and “internal and external pressures” to attend work play a role in employee motivation, as it is seen as the primary influence of absence amongst employees. The view of the employee’s is in line with research that states that a lack of motivation and commitment can result in feelings of alienation and decreased morale in employees (Proudfoot Consulting, 2002; Morgan, 1998; Hillard, 1996). A lack of enthusiasm as a result of a bad relationship with an employer or supervisor was another reason mentioned for AWOL absenteeism. Research which overlaps with this view where employee absence was lower on projects where supervisors criticised employees less (Hinze et al., 1985) and where there was sufficient support from a supervisor (Russo et al., 2013, p.209). The increase in size of teams also has an impact on communication between employees and management (van der Merwe and Miller, 1987, p.7). One employee

mentioned that workers are absent from the workplace in order to seek more advantageous employment. This is not uncommon as Coetzee and Botha (2012, p.1) state where employee commitment is low due to restructuring of company guidelines, it does not provide the job security for employees they once did.

The other respondents mentioned responsibilities at home which kept them from the workplace which includes illness and spousal problems to name a few. This again lends itself to the study done by The Business Roundtable (1982) where personal and family illness were one of the six main reasons employees were absent from the workplace. A decline in employee happiness in the workplace plays a role in absence amongst employees according to the blue-collar workers. This coincides with the study by Frey and Stutzer (2002, p.3) where happiness which has an impact on absence in the workplace. Majority of the employees of at the organisation do not have a strong person-work relationship with the company. This view is similar to that of Parkes and Steelman (2008, p.60) and Eisenberger et al., (1986) which state that the more an employee believes an organisation values his/her contribution the more likely it will enhance their overall attitude. Employees state that their main motivation to work is money driven and they often do not attend work due to their unhappiness over the wages they get paid. These views of the blue-collar workers are substantiated by Peirce et al., (1996) which states that financial stress can cause distress in an individual's life as it is the resource needed to fund essential activities of daily living. Therefore, greater financial stress results in increased levels of absenteeism whereas less financial stress results in decreased levels of absenteeism (Bagwell, 2000; Garman et al., 1999; Hendrix et al., 1987; Jacobson et al., 1996). Van der Merwe and Miller (1987, p.7) spoke of income level as a contribution to employee absence which is evident from the employees at the company.

There were similarities and discrepancies of the perceived causes of absenteeism between management and blue collar workers at the company. Under general absence, management and blue-collar workers mentioned strikes and intimidation, public transport issues and habitual absence/drinking over weekends as reasons why workers were absent from the workplace. They differed in their reasons as the blue-collar workers mentioned family issues, illness and a lack of motivation as reasons for absence. Perceived causes of absence attributed to AWOL and unpaid absenteeism were different in the views of both management and the blue-collar workers; management said that seasonality, strike action and socio-economic issues were the reasons whereas the blue-collar workers stated that a lack of motivation, team leader

discrimination and unhappiness over wages were the reasons for those two main types of absenteeism amongst the workforce.

These views are supported by research done by Hanna et al., where there is a discrepancy between the views presented by both management and the blue-collar worker's based on the perceived causes of absenteeism in workers. The discrepancy coincides with research done by Hanna et al., (2005, p.1214) where the top five reasons management gave for absence in workers was different in three categories to the reasons the workers gave. Where there was a similarity in results for the perceived causes of worker absence was for personal and family illness and doctor/dental appointments. There were discrepancies between management's views and worker's on worker absence; management mentioned that the workers were absent due to the fact that they simply did not feel like working, that there was drug or alcohol use and they had a lack of responsibility whereas the worker's mentioned their reasons for absence as being injury, bad weather and unsafe working conditions.

## 5.4. Measurement and management of absenteeism

### *5.4.1. Effect of absenteeism*

Management spoke of the direct and indirect costs that absenteeism has on the organisation. The direct costs simply refer to paying workers for owed sick leave as well as paying casuals to stand-in for absent employees. The indirect cost to the company includes moving trained blue-collar workers into skilled job areas of absent employees to accommodate the casual staff in less critical roles. However, in the interviews, management mentioned that it does not necessarily cost the company extra to pay casuals but what does cost them is time taken to train and keep a pool of casuals. As a result, there is a decrease in productivity and quality of service through breakages and losses which has an impact on the cost to the company; therefore, resulting in a snowball effect caused by absenteeism. This is in line with the study by Harte et al., (2011, p.20) which states that unauthorised absences from the workplace result in worker replacement where it causes disruptions in the workers' ability to deliver products and goods which the company expects. Research conducted by Restrepo and Salgado (2013, p.32) coincides with information provided by management due to the fact that in the findings, absenteeism has an effect on work flow, obstructs operations and decreases "effective functioning and productivity" of employees. Where there is a discrepancy with the research is that the organisation find there is no cost associated with finding replacement workers as Harte

et al., (2011, p.20) reported. The company states that they are able to identify when there is an increase in the cost to the organisation and a decrease in productivity and quality of service when any figure over 4% of equivalent hours lost is recorded. This is in contradiction to a study done by Hanna et al., (2005, p.1212) which mentioned that any figure between 0 and 5% would have no impact on productivity. This could be as a result of the organisation having fewer employees than the company the research by Hanna et al., (2005, p.1212) was based on.

#### *5.4.2. Measurement process of absenteeism*

The organisation uses a standard measurement procedure for absenteeism which is supplied by the labour broker as majority of the staff are employed on a temporary basis by the Global Logistics Supplier. The company measures absence from a pay point of view where each category or leave type is measured and dealt with according to a certain process and protocol. FRL and annual leave with supporting documentation are logged through payroll and not marked as absent whereas AWOL absence results in no pay and a disciplinary procedure to follow. This is in line with van der Merwe and Miller (1987, p.3) where certain categories of absence do not fall under absenteeism.

#### *5.4.3. Strategies implemented by management to minimise levels of absenteeism and their effectiveness*

The Global Logistics Supplier believes that a motivated staff and a pleasant work environment are key points in lowering the levels of absenteeism amongst employees. Incentives such as employee(s) of the month have been implemented but have not worked due to disinterest from employees. Results from the research done by Hassink and Koning (2009) confirmed this disinterest of employees in incentivised schemes as the employees within the study were not eligible for the lottery prize if they had been sick or won the lottery before; therefore, resulting in a post-win spike in absenteeism numbers in the Dutch manufacturing firm. Sporting groups have also been put into practice but these have also fallen away due to only a few members of the workforce finding it enjoyable. The company should rather focus on wellness programs or EAP's which includes all members of the workforce and not only those who partake in sporting activities as Parkes and Steelman (2008, p.58) suggest. It may not only help in dealing with absenteeism, manage the health care of the employees (Bly et al., 1986; Wolfe et al., 1994 and Parkes and Steelman, 2008, p.59), enhance "employee functioning, loyalty and increase performance" in the workplace (Mathlape, 2003, p.29). Disciplinary action has been the only

strategy to be effective throughout the organisation in lowering levels of absence. This view is supported by Nel et al., (2007) who suggest that consistent disciplinary procedures in organisations result in a constancy of the workforce, it minimises staff turnover and endorses productivity amongst the workforce. Another research paper suggested that rewards may encourage sought after behaviour, it was discipline which discouraged workers to commit any form of counter-productive behaviour (Greenberg and Baron, 2007).

## 5.5. Subsequent questions based on literature

### *5.5.1. Team leader criticism, team spirit and overtime*

Half the respondents from the interviews with the blue-collar workers indicated that when members within a team were criticised for absence by a team leader in morning meetings, it was a form of motivation for them to come to scheduled work. This corresponds with the findings in Hinze et al., (1985) and The Business Roundtable (1982), where absenteeism was reportedly lower on projects where supervisors criticised employees if they were absent. However, half of the respondents found it had no effect on absenteeism levels but that it depended on the manner in which the team leader criticised absent employees which resulted in either an increase or decrease in levels of motivation. This view coincides with the research done by Russo et al (2013, p.209) which states that the support an employee receives from a supervisor may influence his or her rate of absenteeism.

When the blue-collar workers were asked whether a good team spirit was integral in contributing to lowering levels of absenteeism, six of the eight respondents said it was important. This result coincides with the research of Hinze et al., (1985) which said absenteeism was lower in groups where there was a high rate of team spirit. Hewage et al., (2011, p.680) states that there are certain factors which influence team performance can impact on individual performance too; such as team cohesiveness, compatibility of team members, motivation levels of all team members and perceptions about team ability and performance. One of the blue-collar worker's mentioned that a good team spirit did not have any role in decreasing levels of absenteeism as it was dependent on who your friends were in the workplace. This is in line with the views of Hewage et al., (2011, p.680) who state that trusted followers of team leaders fall into the "in-group" whereas those members of the workforce who are not trusted fall into the "out-group". A member of the management staff stated that creating a sense of belonging in a workplace is important in motivating staff, therefore working with

what they have they increase team spirit and uplift employees in order to minimise absenteeism and motivate staff to come to work.

Seven of the eight blue-collar respondents stated that overtime did not negatively affect absenteeism at the workplace. This does not correspond with findings by van der Merwe and Miller (1987, p.8) where there was a strong correlation between absenteeism and overtime. There is similarly a discrepancy in the research conducted by Fischer et al., (2005) and De Cuyper et al., (2008) which stated that job insecurity was related to working overtime. Furthermore, the blue-collar workers at the organisation stated that working overtime was a form of motivation as it results in remuneration at the overtime rate. The influence of this trend on productivity and profitability warrants further investigation.

#### *5.5.2. Monday/Friday trend*

Management and the blue-collar workers of the Global Logistics Company both mentioned Monday's and Friday's as the days which employees were most often absent. This is counter-intuitive for the blue-collar workers as it results in no pay and potential disciplinary action. It remains uncertain whether this situation is prevalent within the logistics industry. Bruniquel (2012, p.25) pointed out that by identifying absenteeism trends within an employee's individual absenteeism record and then confronting them about the noticeable trend, it can often stop the Monday/Friday absence trend. However, more research into this trend amongst temporary blue-collar workers needs to be done.

#### *5.5.3. Effect of distance travelled*

The distance that majority of the employees travel to work daily is very minimal as most of the temporary blue-collar workers live in the surrounding suburbs to the work site. However, there is a need for public transport for employees who live considerable distances from the workplace. In the study by Hinze et al., (1985) and The Business Roundtable (1982), they found that travel distance to work had an effect of absenteeism if employees lived a considerable distance away. The research done by Stutzer and Frey (2008, p.339) coincides with the views of employees where it is considered a burden for employees who spend a lot of time travelling to and from work.

#### *5.5.4. Negative work environment*

Within the Global Logistics Supplier organisation, a negative work environment does not have a great impact on employee absence. 50% of the employees stated that a negative work environment had an impact on absence in the workplace but it was not a crippling problem and only minor cases had been reported. However, 50% of the respondents stated it can have an effect on employee absenteeism just as Afssa and Givord (2013, p.287), Griffiths (2004, p.9) and Watkins et al., (2014, p.165) stated. According to Rosen (1974), if an employee worked in unfavourable working conditions the employer should pay a premium to compensate that employee if they were affected by the negative work environment. At the moment, the organisation does not have reason to be concerned as their incidences resulting from a negative work environment are only minor and have been contained.

#### **5.6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, there are differences in views of both blue-collar workers and management in the perceived causes of absence amongst blue-collar workers in the organisation. Strategies that were implemented by the company were not successful in minimising levels of absenteeism. It was found that team leader criticism can have an effect on employee absence but depends on the support the employee receives from his/her supervisor. The findings coincided with the literature where a high team spirit was vital in reducing levels of absenteeism within teams. This was however dependent on whether the worker fell into the “in-group” or the “out-group”, as one employee stated that it was heavily reliant on who your friends were in the workplace. Working overtime for the employees at the organisation was seen as an extra source of income which did not correspond with the literature. The distance majority of the employees travel to and from work has no impact on their absenteeism levels as most of the blue-collar workers live in the surrounding neighbourhoods. There is a discrepancy between the literature and answers given by employees as the literature states that the distance from the workplace plays a role in employee absence. A negative work environment is not considered to have a great effect on the levels of absenteeism for the blue-collar workers at the company.

## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSION

#### 6.1. Introduction

The research set out to investigate the reasons as to why blue-collar workers were absent from the workplace. The aim of this research was to identify the main types of absenteeism of blue-collar workers and the perceived causes according to managers and workers. The objectives of this research were to identify the main types of absenteeism, to compare the views of blue-collar workers and management on the causes attributed to absenteeism, to describe how absenteeism has been measured and managed, and to make recommendations to the company on ways to minimize absenteeism based on the findings. Within the chapter, the similarities and discrepancies between the views of management and the blue-collar workers will be discussed, and the delimitations and limitations of the research will also be discussed.

#### 6.2. Similarities and discrepancies

There were similarities and discrepancies of the perceived causes of absenteeism between management and blue collar workers at the company. There were similarities in the views of the blue-collar workers and management in the causes mentioned for general absence; strikes and intimidation, public transport issues, and habitual absence due to drinking over the weekend. There were discrepancies between the views of both groups in the perceived causes for general absence of blue-collar workers where the workers mentioned family issues, illness and a lack of motivation. The views of the blue-collar workers and management of the perceived causes of AWOL and unpaid absenteeism differed. Management mentioned seasonality, strike action and socio-economic issues. Whereas the blue-collar workers spoke of a lack of motivation, team leader discrimination and unhappiness over wages as their reasons for AWOL and unpaid absenteeism prevalence in the workplace.

Mondays and Fridays are the days which are most prevalent for employee absence in the workplace. This was reiterated by members of the management team as well as the blue-collar workers during the semi-structured interviews. Reasoning was similar for both groups which stated that consumption of alcohol over the weekend had a role to play for Monday absence.

Furthermore, weekly salaries are electronically paid on Friday irrespective of whether the worker is present or not. This tempts the worker to attend to his financial obligations on Fridays rather than attending work. Additionally, blue-collar workers mentioned missing Friday work days to look for better employment with greater opportunities and improved wages. Management stated that habitual absence on Mondays, Fridays and after public holidays was one of the main reasons for absence amongst the blue-collar workers. However, the blue-collar workers did not mention habitual absence on specific days as a reason for absence; it was only brought up as an apparent issue when confronted by this question in the semi-structured interview. Another similarity that was mentioned by both groups was absence due to strike action and intimidation. This can have a crippling effect on productivity and quality of service particularly if a large amount of workers who live in an area where strike action is occurring.

Management spoke of sporting teams which they implemented and tried as a means of encouraging team spirit and therefore lowering levels of absenteeism. They also mentioned trying incentives such as employee(s) of the month. However, these strategies implemented in order to minimise levels of absenteeism in the organisation did not work. Management stated that the only effective way to minimise absenteeism levels was through discipline of employees which were similar to the views of authors in the literature.

### 6.3. Limitations, delimitations and recommendations

The scope and the scale of the study was small, which allows room for more studies to be conducted based on the research question and objectives set out in this paper. The research was unique to a single company which had a majority of blue-collar workers. Research of similarly structured companies could be conducted. Furthermore, research can be conducted to explore absenteeism in companies employing both white-collar workers and blue-collar workers to see if the patterns of absenteeism and their causes differ, or not.

Furthermore, the blue-collar workers who were the subject of investigation in this study were all temporary employees of the organisation. This suggests that further research can be done in organisations with workers with various types of employment contracts, to see if the reasons for absenteeism vary based on contract type.

In this study, there were differences in the views of management and workers on the causes that they attributed to absenteeism. Interviews with additional members from the management team (i.e. an increased sample size), could have given a greater insight into reasons for general

absence, AWOL and unpaid absence, as well as additional information on the measurement and management of absenteeism.

The quantitative data received from the company depicted monthly values of absence based on leave type. An analysis of daily absenteeism data could have been advantageous in identifying any Monday/Friday trends. This trend requires further investigation as there were also differences in the reasons given for this absence pattern by management and the blue-collar workers at the organisation.

The issue of distance from work was brought up in both the literature and in the results. The organisation itself does not suffer in levels of absence due to the distance employees have to travel from work unless they live a considerable distance away and rely on public transport to get to and from scheduled work. The labour broker utilized by the organisation to locate temporary workers, sources people for the position from neighbouring suburbs, thereby ensuring that the distance travelled to get to the workplace does not play a role in employee absence. These results are skewed compared to the literature where distance an employee travels plays a role in absenteeism. This warrants further investigation as not all labour brokers or companies employing staff look to the neighbouring suburbs for potential candidates. Another issue which needs further investigation is that of public transport and whether the availability or unavailability of public transport systems play a role in absenteeism.

Questions based on the management of absenteeism in the company could have been posed to the blue-collar workers as well, and not only members of management. Receiving views from both groups may have been more beneficial in finding which forms of management of absenteeism is most effective in motivating employees to come to work as scheduled. In addition to interviews with more members from the management team, interviewing staff in human resources could have given a greater insight into the measurement and management of absenteeism.

In addressing absenteeism, instead of using sporting teams to boost worker morale, managers and supervisors need to address the workplace issues and identify when a worker's performance and interpersonal relationships are strained in order to effectively minimise absenteeism. It is also recommended they implement a wellness programme, which is said to have a positive effect on job satisfaction, as well as contribute both effort and energy to produce exceptional outcomes for the organisation.

It would be beneficial for the organisation to do further research based on Figure 1 depicting the sum total of monthly incidences of AWOL and unpaid absenteeism. Due to the short period covered in the research, one cannot identify trends within the data which significantly show that there is an increased amount of AWOL absenteeism heading into the winter months as mentioned by management. The contribution made by the research is the insight that there are comparisons to be made between the views of management and blue-collar workers on the causes attributed to general absenteeism as well as to AWOL and unpaid absenteeism. It shows a disconnect in communication between members in management roles and the blue-collar workers.

Finally, overtime and distance travelled to and from work were found to have different effects on the blue collar workers at the company compared to what was found in the literature. Overtime was described as being beneficial to the employees as it provided them with extra income. The distance an employee had to travel to get to and from work was dealt with by the labour broker who found temporary employees who reside close to the company. The organisation recognises that there is a Monday/Friday trend but do not have sufficient evidence why this is apparent in the workplace amongst blue-collar workers. There are discrepancies in the reasons blue-collar workers and management give for this trend, which requires further research.

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## APPENDICES

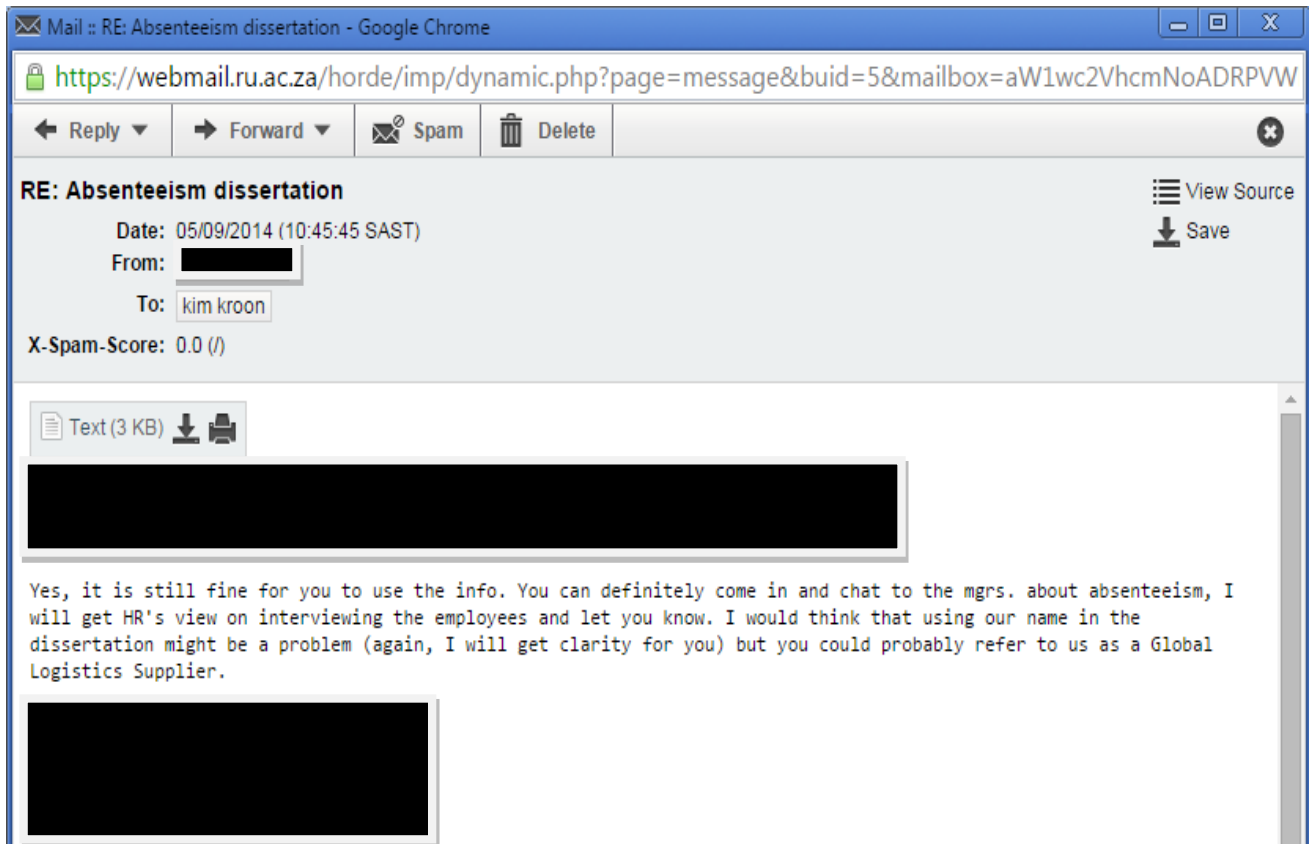
Appendix 1: Absence data from the Global Logistics Supplier (April 2014 – November 2014)

Absenteeism 2014									
Month	Leave Type	Warehouse	Sub Assembl	Sites	Month	Leave Type	Warehouse	Sub Assembly	Sites
April	Sick	21	18	32	August	Sick	66	7	75
	Leave	22	7	17		Leave	0	0	14
	Unpaid Leave	0	1	9		Unpaid Leave	4	3	10
	Union Matters	6	2	1		Union Matters	0	0	1
	Study Leave	0	0	0		Study Leave	0	0	0
	On Training	4	0	2		On Training	0	0	0
	FRL	8	3	9		FRL	8	2	7
	Other	0	0	2		Other	0	0	1
	AWOL	47	4	60		AWOL	15	2	30
May	Sick	34	20	44	September	Sick	63	15	48
	Leave	11	16	13		Leave	0	1	18
	Unpaid Leave	2	1	6		Unpaid Leave	11	1	3
	Union Matters	3	2	4		Union Matters	0	0	0
	Study Leave	52	9	23		Study Leave	0	0	0
	On Training	5	2	6		On Training	0	0	0
	FRL	11	8	7		FRL	5	2	1
	Other	0	1	3		Other	0	0	0
	AWOL	21	8	20		AWOL	10	0	7
June	Sick	83	19	41	October	Sick	86	17	42
	Leave	13	3	11		Leave	5	0	21
	Unpaid Leave	0	1	7		Unpaid Leave	17	9	15
	Union Matters	2	1	1		Union Matters	1	0	1
	Study Leave	36	0	22		Study Leave	0	0	1
	On Training	0	0	1		On Training	0	0	1
	FRL	9	1	17		FRL	15	3	9
	Other	2	2	7		Other	2	1	1
	AWOL	10	8	21		AWOL	9	7	9
July	Sick	21	3	23	November	Sick	64	17	16
	Leave	0	0	1		Leave	0	0	1
	Unpaid Leave	0	3	0		Unpaid Leave	26	5	28
	Union Matters	0	0	0		Union Matters	1	2	2
	Study Leave	0	0	0		Study Leave	0	0	0
	On Training	0	0	0		On Training	0	0	0
	FRL	3	0	4		FRL	9	3	13
	Other	0	1	3		Other	0	0	0
	AWOL	19	0	29		AWOL	2	0	4

Appendix 2: Absence data from the Global Logistics Supplier (January 2015 – July 2015)

Absenteeism 2015									
Month	Leave Type	Warehouse	Sub Assembl	Sites	Month	Leave Type	Warehouse	Sub Assembly	Sites
January	Sick	46	5	61	May	Sick	89	9	114
	Leave	10	0	2		Leave	1	1	7
	Unpaid Leave	14	2	30		Unpaid Leave	18	0	21
	Union Matters	2	0	3		Union Matters	2	0	0
	Study Leave	3	0	0		Study Leave	0	0	0
	On Training	1	0	0		On Training	0	0	1
	FRL	11	0	0		FRL	2	0	1
	Other	2	0	0		Other	2	0	1
A/WOL	20	1	63	A/WOL	1	1	0		
February	Sick	86	3	85	June	Sick	97	2	138
	Leave	6	1	2		Leave	2	0	2
	Unpaid Leave	17	1	35		Unpaid Leave	15	1	30
	Union Matters	1	0	3		Union Matters	1	0	0
	Study Leave	0	0	0		Study Leave	9	0	12
	On Training	0	0	0		On Training	0	0	0
	FRL	1	0	9		FRL	6	0	18
	Other	5	0	2		Other	3	0	0
A/WOL	16	0	15	A/WOL	1	0	7		
March	Sick	97	11	123	July	Sick	92	7	133
	Leave	8	0	3		Leave	1	0	1
	Unpaid Leave	6	0	30		Unpaid Leave	9	0	40
	Union Matters	2	0	3		Union Matters	0	0	0
	Study Leave	0	0	0		Study Leave	5	0	2
	On Training	0	0	0		On Training	0	0	0
	FRL	1	0	1		FRL	0	0	3
	Other	0	1	7		Other	1	2	0
A/WOL	15	2	19	A/WOL	9	0	4		
April	Sick	74	8	77					
	Leave	11	0	9					
	Unpaid Leave	7	0	15					
	Union Matters	1	0	6					
	Study Leave	0	0	0					
	On Training	0	0	0					
	FRL	0	0	15					
	Other	0	0	7					
A/WOL	2	8	24						

## Appendix 3: Company consent



[Redacted]

Aug 16 ☆ ↩ ▾

Hi Kim

As discussed, I propose you interview 2 people from each operation. I suggested ½ hr before lunch and ½ hr after lunch, one day in the whse and one day in plant but next week is a hectic week with us introducing a new model down the line. I think warehouse will be fine but we'll need to confirm in plant.

Guys, Kim is doing her thesis on worker behaviour, specifically absenteeism and what drives it and has requested to interview 8 shop floor staff members. [Redacted] can she liaise with you to arrange at a time that suits you guys? Approx. 15 mins each. If you need to advise [Redacted] then do so, it's anonymous and confidential, no hidden agenda. We'll talk to [Redacted] tomorrow to confirm a time for in plant.

[Redacted]

## Appendix 4: Invitation to participate

**Title of the study:** An Investigation of Absenteeism Amongst Blue Collar Workers: A Mixed Methods Approach.

I, Kim Kroon, a MBA student at Rhodes University, from the Rhodes Business School, invite you to participate in a research project entitled, “An Investigation of Absenteeism Amongst Blue Collar Workers: A Mixed Methods Approach”.

The purpose of this research project is to investigate reasons as to why the blue collar workers at the Global Logistics Company are absent due to the reasons of AWOL (absence without leave) and unpaid absenteeism. Should you choose to participate in this research project, you will be asked to answer a few questions in an informal interview setting.

The expected duration of the interview should be no longer than 20 minutes. A maximum of 10 blue collar workers and 5 managers from the Global Logistics Company is needed to gather prevalent information for the research.

This research should benefit the Global Logistics Supplier in understanding the prevalence of different causes of absenteeism in the different areas of the company.

If you have any questions regarding the interview, please feel free to contact me (see contact information below).

Thank you,

Kim Kroon

MBA student

084 207 1354

[g09k0397@campus.ru.ac.za](mailto:g09k0397@campus.ru.ac.za)

## Appendix 5: Informed consent form

### **Informed Consent Form**

**Date:**

**Study Title or Topic:** An Investigation Of Absenteeism Amongst Blue-Collar Workers: A Mixed Methods Approach

**Researcher:** Kim Kroon, MBA candidate, Rhodes University

**Supervisor:** Professor Noel Pearse

**Benefits of the Research:** To provide an understanding of absenteeism and the main reasons as to why employees are absent from the workplace. Using the findings, the organization can find ways in which to decrease the causes of absenteeism amongst employees.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to answer any question or refuse to no longer participate in the study at any time even if consent has already been given and the interview has commenced. If you decide to withdraw from the study, please note all information supplied by you will be destroyed and not be used in the research. Your decision to participate or withdraw from the research will not impact on your relationship with the company or with the University in any way.

**Confidentiality:** All the information that you supply during the research interview will be held in confidence and kept by the researcher. No personal information will be needed for the interview and none will appear in the report or the final write up of the dissertation. The interview will be recorded for the purpose of data analysis and it will not be used as a tool in identifying the information given in the interview. Your anonymity will be maintained.

**Further Questions about the Research:** If you have any further questions regarding the research in general or about your role in the study, please contact Kim Kroon, MBA student at the Rhodes Business School at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, who is conducting the research. You may contact me by telephone 084 207 1354 or by email ([g09k0397@campus.ru.ac.za](mailto:g09k0397@campus.ru.ac.za)). The research has been approved and reviewed by the Rhodes Business School Ethics Committee and conforms to the standards of their ethical guidelines.

I \_\_\_\_\_ consent to participate in the study of absenteeism in blue collar workers conducted by **KIM KROON**. I have understood the nature of this study and wish to participate. My signature below indicates my consent.

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Participant

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher

## Appendix 6: Questions for semi-structured interviews – Management

1. How is absence defined within the company?
2. What is the overall cost of absenteeism to the company? How do you measure and track this cost?
3. Does absenteeism affect the productivity of the company?
4. Is there a standard measurement process for absenteeism throughout the company or does each area within the company have different measurement process?
5. By glancing through the data of your company, AWOL and unpaid absenteeism are the most prevalent amongst workers. What do you think are the main reasons for these to be so prevalent?
6. What do you think the three main causes of absenteeism amongst employees are?
7. In your area that you manage, on which days are employees most often absent from the workplace?
  - 7.1. What do you think is the reason behind employees being absent on these days?
8. What strategies does the company use in order to decrease the levels of absenteeism amongst its employees?
  - 8.1. Are any of these effective in decreasing the levels of absenteeism?

## Appendix 7: Questions for semi-structured interviews – Blue-collar workers

1. Do you feel that absenteeism is a problem within the company?
2. What do you think are the three main reasons employees are absent from work?
3. Based on numerical data received by the company, AWOL (absence without leave) and unpaid leave had the highest values of absence in the company. Why are they the most common forms of absence in the company?
4. If a team leader criticises a worker within their team for being absent, do other workers in the team try and decrease their own levels of absenteeism?
5. Do you think that a high level of team spirit within a team is important in keeping the levels of absenteeism low?
6. Does working overtime have an effect on employee absence?
  - 6.1. If so, how?
7. Why do you think workers are most often absent on Mondays and Fridays as well as after public holidays?
8. Does the distance from where workers live to the company play a role in employee absence?
9. A negative working environment includes one where there are loud noises, where one works in painful or uncomfortable working positions, carrying heavy loads as well as working in fumes. Do you feel that any of these have an impact on absenteeism amongst workers within the company?