

Absenteeism : Aspects and Measures

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Abstract :

This research paper analyses the absenteeism problem in the three plants of an auto industry and offers recommendations for bringing the absenteeism under control. Particular emphasis has been placed on the underlying causes for the high absenteeism rates and the procedure for effective controls, so that absenteeism can be reduced to the acceptable levels.

Keywords :

Absenteeism, Production, Measures, High, Correlation

Introduction

Purpose and Scope :

The purpose of this study is to establish more effective controls for reducing absenteeism. The weaknesses or deficiencies causing this high rate of absenteeism have uncovered by examining and evaluating past data of absenteeism. This report also focuses correlations between absenteeism and production.

Absenteeism Defined :

The term absenteeism means unauthorized absence and the term absence is absence with previous intimation. But, since this study dealt with affect of absenteeism on production, here absence has considered as 'a failure of workmen to report for work when they are scheduled to work.'

According to the Webster's Dictionary, 'absenteeism is the practice or habit of being an 'absentee' and an absentee is one who habitually stays away from the work.'

Signalman says that absenteeism is, 'time lost in industrial establishments by the avoidable or unavoidable absence of employees. Absenteeism is measured either by the percentage of time lost as compared with the total scheduled time of work including authorized overtime.'

Peculiar Features of Absenteeism :

(1) The rate of absenteeism increases immediately after payment of wages and bonus; because workmen go to their native places.

- (2) The percentage of absenteeism varies from department to department within an unit.
- (3) The percentage of absenteeism is generally high in the night shift than in the day shift because the workmen in the night shifts experience greater discomfort and uneasiness in the course of their work.

Overview

Statistical Presentation of the Problem :

The data covers workmen of the production and production related shops in all the four shifts, i.e., First shift, General shift, Second shift and Third shift. The figures of percentage of the absenteeism are rounded up to the nearest point five, as the general purpose of the data is to know the trend of the absenteeism, rather than statistical accuracy.

The collected data show that the average absenteeism for the three years - 2017 ,2018 & 2019 for the entire plant consisting of the plant I, II & III is constant between 10 to 11 percent. For the year 2017 it is 10% (9.84%), for the year 2018, it is 11% (10.90%) and for year 2019, up to the month of November, 2019, it is again at 11% (10.95%).

Interestingly enough, average authorized absenteeism during these three years, for the entire plant is always comparably high than the unauthorized absenteeism. For the year 2017, it is 6% whereas unauthorized absenteeism is constant at 4%, in the year 2019, up to the month of November, authorized absenteeism is constant at 7% and unauthorized absenteeism is again constant at 4%. It simply crystallizes that to complain about growing rate of the unauthorized absenteeism is just much ado about nothing.

Correlation between Absenteeism and Production :

Table - A, indicates average absenteeism in the production shops of the plant I, from January 2018 to December 2018, and the average off-line production for these twelve months :

TABAL - A

| Month | Percentage of Absenteeism | Percentage of Off-line Production |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|--|
| January,2018 | 14 | 97.30 |
| February,2018 | 13 | 78.10 |
| March,2018 | 17 | 66.70 |
| April, 2018 | 13 | 95.20 |
| May, 2018 | 18 | 92.30 |
| June, 2018 | 14 | 94.10 |
| July, 2018 | 10 | 102.10 |
| August, 2018 | 10 | 92.60 |
| September, 2018 | 11 | 101.00 |
| October, 2018 | 09 | 80.90 |
| November, 2018 | 12 | 92.60 |
| December, 2018 | 11 | 96.60 |

(Percentage of absenteeism is from the data collected at the Time Office and percentage of off-line production is from the data provided by the Logistics Department)

These figures of percentages clearly show an uneven correlation between absenteeism and production. So, while adjudging production loss, causes other than absenteeism, like machine breakdowns, power supply failures, material shortages, work stoppages, climatic conditions affecting efficiency of the workmen should also be considered. One more fact, which may possibly make these figures deceiving one, is that the percentage of absenteeism covers workmen of all the trades and grades. So it is possible that even minor absenteeism of skilled workmen may severely affect the production, than the high absenteeism of unskilled workmen.

The same thing is observed in the case of absenteeism in the plant II, during the year 2018. Table B indicates month-wise absenteeism percentage and month-wise production percentage in the year 2018 :

TABLE - B

| Month | Percentage of Absenteeism | Percentage of Off-line Production |
|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| January,2018 | 08 | 75.70 |
| February,2018 | 12 | 59.80 |
| March,2018 | 18 | 61.30 |
| April, 2018 | 10 | 93.90 |
| May, 2018 | 16 | 84.90 |
| June, 2018 | 13 | 86.30 |
| July, 2018 | 10 | 87.30 |
| August, 2018 | 10 | 84.40 |
| September, 2018 | 10 | 84.90 |
| October, 2018 | 08 | 88.40 |
| November, 2018 | 10 | 90.70 |
| December, 2018 | 10 | 93.30 |

(Percentage of absenteeism is from the data collected at the Time Office and percentage of Off-line production is from the data provided by the Logistics Department.)

The uneven correlation between the percentage of the absenteeism in the Plant II and the percentage of the production in the Plant II can be explained on the same grounds as the Plant I.

Notwithstanding, considering absenteeism as the main reason for the production loss, this report elucidates the causes of absenteeism and explores the possible measures to curtail the percentage of the absenteeism.

Causes Of Absenteeism And Measures To Curb The Absenteeism :

Some of the common causes of the excessive absenteeism are :

- (i) Sickness (ii) Domestic problems (iii) Personal maladjustments
- (iv) Outside job opportunities (v) Nature of the job and working conditions

To test these common causes, the explanations given by 178 workmen who are earmarked for disciplinary actions for chronic and habitual absenteeism in the year 2018, are worth considering. Out of these 178 workmen 58 (32.58%) had absented themselves for the sickness of family members and relatives, 41 (23.03%) were absent due to domestic problems, 28 (15.73%) for self-sickness / accidents, 20(11.24%) for self-marriages, 14(7.87%) for construction of houses and property matters, 8 (4.49) due to sudden death of family members/relatives, and 9 (5.06%) for other miscellaneous reasons. But, after all this is what appeared on the record. The workmen may have given false explanations which may be misleading.

The pretext of self-sickness is the most popular explanation among the absentee prone workmen. No doubt, the medical certificates produced by these workmen to cover their absenteeism are mostly fake ones. Thorough medical check ups and investigating the authenticity of the medical certificates are the measures to discourage such absenteeism. In the long term, dispensing with the services of such employees on the ground of continued ill health is possible measure.

The examples of maladjustments are very rare. These cases generally get covered under the cause of sickness. Only ten cases (.13%) of the mentally disturbed workmen were separated during the year 2018. Out of these ten cases, six are of Schizophrenia, two are of Depression, one is of Hypo-mania and one is of Paranoid Psychosis. It is also possible that a workman can obtain and produce a fake certificate of mental illness from a private psychiatrist to cover up his prolong absence, safely. To counter such possibility, thorough medical check ups with the help of Department of Psychiatry, Government Medical Hospitals and personal follow up of such cases by the Social Counsellor is advisable.

The absenteeism on the ground of domestic problems is more frustrating one to control, since such absenteeism results from the common attitude toward taking time off. This type of absenteeism may be reduced by the middle of the road approach with reward and reprimand. Schemes of monetary awards, gifts for the best attendance and personal counselling should go parallel with the punitive measures.

The nature of the job and working conditions is not a cause worth considering in the context of present report. Since this study dealt with the workmen who are performing particular types of jobs as set by the industrial engineering department. Similarly the working conditions provided by the organization under study, are excellent one as compared to the other industries in this region. But, still there are certain clues to draw some conclusions. For example, from the available data it can be observed that, in the both plants, absenteeism in the Paint Shops, Heat Treatments, Final Assemblies and Chassis Shops is high in comparison with the other shops.

Even from the chronic absenteeism cases, it can be found that majority of the cases are from the Final Assembly and Paint Shop. The available data of the chronic absenteeism cases also reveal an interesting picture of the trade-wise absenteeism. Out of 177 cases, 56 are Assemblers, 27 are Helpers and 17 are Machinists.

Does it mean that, working in the shops with the high absenteeism percentages require more toiling than the other shops ? Do the trades ranking high in absenteeism need to put more physical efforts ? Do their jobs are more tiresome ? Do their jobs are more tedious ? Do their jobs are more monotonous ? Such questions to be probed to streamline and smooth-en the operations of these particular trades in the particular shops.

From the three years data (2017, 2018 & 2019) a spasmodic hike in the absenteeism during the months of April, May and June is observed. Especially, in the month of May, absenteeism percentage shoots up.

A habit of taking vacation during summer days, which is cultivated since the school days, marriage ceremonies and oppressive climatic conditions are the possible underlying causes of these abnormal increase in the absenteeism during the summer days.

Instead of clumsily trying to arrest these inevitable increase in the absenteeism, hammering out a strategical plan to provide alternative manpower and setting of low production targets during this temporary phenomenon is more reasonable and formidable step.

The outside job opportunity, rather a sort of self-employment with lucrative remunerations, a less efforts is a major cause of chronic and habitual absenteeism. Only then and then, one can afford prolong absenteeism at a substantial loss of pay. This typical cause of absenteeism has remained off the record, as the Certified Standing Orders of the organization under study have clearly prohibited taking up any outside employment, with or without remuneration. But, loop holes in the provisions of Certified Standing Orders have hamstrung the Personnel Department. Generally, such activities go under cover using the name of keens, especially of wives to escape the charges of double employment. The credit collection rings, money lending, the insurance or like agencies, private taxi's, professions like photography, electrical wire man, carpentry, vehicle repairing and servicing, work shops with plastic moulding machines, lathe machines, spray painting guns, die making, fabrication are the some examples.

These workmen parasitically cling to their present employment only for the security of the confirmed job, though they are getting enough remuneration from their outside activities to re-coupe absence without pay.

In such cases, constant follow up and nagging is the only measure to force these workmen to give up their present employment or to dismiss them after holding domestic enquiries. This will create demoralizing effect among the habitual offenders.

The Saturday Night Fever Phenomenon

It can be observed that the absenteeism fluctuates on the previous day of the weekly offs paid holidays and on the next day of the weekly offs and paid holidays. Instead of desperately trying to control this universal phenomenon, to abate production schedules on these particular days and make it up when the absenteeism is at a normal rate is a way out. Besides, earmarking offenders for disciplinary actions who repeatedly absent themselves on these particular days, five days week is a drastic but worth considering solution to overcome this phenomenon.

Conclusion :

Generally, Personnel Department plays an auxiliary role in controlling of the absenteeism. And let it be auxiliary one. The authorized absenteeism, which was always high during the three years considered for this report, can be controlled by the respective departments only . The post facto sanctioning of the leaves should be avoided, except only in the genuine cases. The praise and reprimand techniques can be used by the Supervisors themselves to discipline the workmen, instead of expecting Personnel Department to play a 'school master's role'.

In the case of unauthorized absenteeism, the respective departments can dig out the underlying causes of such absenteeism by using their established rapport with the workmen and can communicate the same to the Personnel Department. Such information s received from the various departments will make the disciplinary actions more meaningful and fruitful.

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