Gauging the Issue of Absenteeism in the Workplace: Evidence from the Public Sector

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Abstract

The thrust of this article is to scrutinize the causes and drawbacks of absenteeism on employee morale and worker productivity in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. A descriptive research survey was undertaken and a total of 91 questionnaires out of 110 were collected from enterprises located and operating in Abidjan. This represents an 82.72%. The findings of this paper indicate that in the Ivorian context, absenteeism is a complex situation that significantly influences employees' morale and their productivity. Therefore, the adoption of a management by objective (MBO) approach and a model of motivating employees to optimize output are conducive to organizational performance.

Keywords: Absenteeism; job satisfaction; MBO; leadership approach; people-centered management; public sector

1. Introduction

Absenteeism is probably one of the biggest problems that a managerial employee has to handle on an ongoing basis as it influences service delivery, staff morale, and could be conducive to financial losses. Unmotivated, unsatisfied workers do not show any interest in their work life. In the Ivorian socio-cultural context, this lack of interest in their work will influence the motivation of the workers to report for work, which will give room to absenteeism that is a considerable burden for enterprises to be competitive with the advent of the new economy driven by technological changes, as it will favor the rise of the knowledge workers who should use their intellect to convert their ideas into products, services, or processes (Ezané, 2009).

The Research Aims and Hypotheses

The aims of this research inquiry were to:

1. Identify the reasons or causes that justify the phenomenon in the public sector in the Ivoirian context;
2. Identify the implications of the issue (Absenteeism);
3. Find suitable solutions to bring about employee motivation and satisfaction in the workplace to increase workers' output (productivity).

Based on the research aims (1, 2, 3), the following hypotheses were tested:

H_1: *Job dissatisfaction and the lack of a strategic motivation policy (SMP) bring about absenteeism.*
H_2: *Influence of socio-cultural and behavioral variables also gives room to absenteeism.*

The contributions of the study continues with a highlight on absenteeism in the workplace, after which discussion of literature review on absenteeism and the causes of this situation that negatively impact work, motivation theories and their implications are presented. Following this, the findings of this paper are highlighted and discussed with the implications, limitations, suggestions and recommendations for future research directions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Absenteeism Defined

Many researches have defined the concept of absenteeism. Absenteeism has been defined as: a "deviation of cooperative state" (Elton, 1945); as a means to solve the perceived inequity in that the probabilities of absence would increase with the level of inequity if other means to reduce the inequity were not available (Adams, 1965).

For this study, absenteeism is defined as the fact that those who are not satisfied with their work; that job dissatisfaction would be the direct cause of absenteeism in the workplace.

2.2. Motivation Theories

2.2.1. Maslow's Theories of Motivation

Abraham Maslow (1968) categorized human needs in a pecking order with physiological needs at the base. For Maslow, the physiological needs are satisfied by food, shelter, clothing, sleep and sex. Next is the need for job security and safe working conditions or environment. This need is followed by social needs satisfied by human contacts and assurances of belonging. This is followed by the desire for achievements, status, esteem and respect from others and finally the urge to achieve one's potential and new responsibilities which is self-actualizing. Maslow argued that lower level needs had to be satisfied before the next higher level need would motivate employees.

2.2.2. Herzberg's Theories of Motivation

Herzberg's work categorized motivation into two factors: motivator and hygiene (Herzberg et al., 1957) factors. Motivator or intrinsic factors, such as achievement and recognition, produce job satisfaction. Hygiene or extrinsic factors, such as pay and job security, produce job dissatisfaction. Frederick Herzberg claims that dissatisfaction will decrease when a worker enjoys good pay and security; good working conditions; good interpersonal relationships; good company policies; and good supervisors. Satisfaction, on the other hand, will increase when a worker enjoys the feeling of achievement; recognition; fulfilling work; a feeling of responsibility; and advancement and growth.

2.2.3. Adams' Theory of Motivation: The Equity Theory

The equity theory focuses on the fact that individuals compare their job inputs and outcomes with those of others and then respond so as to eliminate any inequities. The equity theory explains how people develop perceptions of fairness in the distribution and exchange of resources. Adams (1965) admits that when a worker finds himself in a situation of inequity, he/she becomes unsatisfied and will mobilize all his/her energy to reduce those inequities through thoughts or behavior. For Adams, equity is achieved when the ratio of employee outcomes over inputs is equal to other employee outcomes over inputs. This can be illustrated by the following equation:

$$\frac{individual's\ outcomes}{individual's\ own\ inputs} = \frac{relational\ partner's\ outcomes}{relational\ partner's\ inputs}$$

2.2.4. McGregor's Theories of Motivation (Theory X and Theory Y)

The two most commonly held streams of management philosophy are known as Theory X and Theory Y, which were developed by Douglass McGregor (1960). Theory X holds that workers are generally irresponsible, unwilling to work, and must be persuaded to perform their obligations to their employers. On the other hand, Theory Y holds that given an appropriate work environment and in the absence of exceptional disincentives, workers are dedicated to their tasks, are generally self-motivated, and will carry out their tasks with minimal direction from their supervisors. The two basic styles are reflected in management policies on job design, training, employee security, reward structure, organizational structure, and industrial relations.

2.2.5. McClelland's Theories of Motivation (Achievement Motivation Theory)

David McClelland's of motivation (1961) focuses on three needs: Need for achievement (the drive to excel, to achieve in relation to a set of standards, to strive to succeed); need for power (the need to make others behave in a way that they could not have behaved otherwise); and need for affiliation (the desire for friendly and close interpersonal relationships). If one of these needs is on the rise, its intensity will determine the behavior.

2.2.6. Vroom and Lawler's Expectancy Theory

As John Ivan Fosu (2010) indicated, a key point in this approach is that an individual behavior is formed not on some sense of object reality but on how he actually sees the world around him. The core of the theory relates how a person perceives the relationships between three things—efforts, performance and reward (Cole, 1995). The strength of the attraction of particular outcomes or rewards for an individual is termed "valence". The degree of belief that a particular act will produce a particular outcome is termed "expectancy".

Valence and expectancies depend on the individual's own perception of the situation. For example, the prospect of promotion could be low if he perceives that promotion is attained primarily on the length of service. In such a situation, performance does not lead to rewards, so effort in that direction is not seen as worthwhile.

2.3. What the Motivation Theories Imply

The survey of the different theories of motivation questions the issue of the most efficient motivation theory. Looking at all of them (those used in our study) we realize that all of them focus on the variable "need". The simple message embedded in all of the above motivation theories is that people need to be kept satisfied in order to perform well in a workplace. Managerial employees should try to treat all workers correctly and never make the mistake of playing workers against each other; while, at the same time, they should also be aware that the ways in which workers get motivated vary richly. A good link between departmental management and human resources (HR) is therefore recommended, although, unfortunately, it is not implemented too often yet in the Ivorian context.

3. Methodology

To achieve the objective of our research, we targeted the public sector. 110 questionnaires were personally distributed but only 91 responded (59 Males and 32 Females), which represents an 82.72%. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to the respondents. The non-response was due to the employees being on leave for illness when data was collected. The questionnaire consisted of the reasons for workers not to report for work; satisfaction in the workplace; and importance of work. The questionnaire items were respectively taken from Mogenet (1985) and Lodahal and Kejner (1965). As Cote d'Ivoire is a French-dominated culture, the questionnaires were thoroughly translated from French to English. The respondents were asked to state the reasons why they were not reporting for work. For the variable "job satisfaction", they were instructed to say whether they were satisfied, not satisfied, or not at all satisfied with their work. They were also invited to say "yes" or "no" to the variable "importance of work". Descriptive survey approach was utilized to analyze the data and draw conclusion; state the implications of the study; the suggestions and the recommendations that the study reveals.

4. Findings and Discussions

Table 1 highlights the results for the reasons why employees in our sample absent from work in the public sector.

Table 1: Reasons for Employees not to Report for Work

	Variables (Reasons)	Male	Female	Total	%
1	Political reasons, transfer, and appointment (V1)	4	2	6	6.59%
2	Difficulties for transportation (V2)	5	3	8	8.79%
3	Lack of motivation (V3)	7	3	10	10.98%
4	Professional consciousness (V4)	3	2	5	5.49%
5	Personal shopping (V5)	8	4	12	13.18%
6	Leadership Style (V6)	2	1	3	3.29%
7	Illnesses (V7)	9	4	13	14.28%
8	Working environment (V8)	6	5	11	12.08%
9	Insufficient pay (V9)	10	5	15	16.48%
10	Social events & family (V10)	5	3	8	8.79%
	Total	59	32	91	100%

The table presents the ensuing findings: Insufficient pay (16.48%); Illnesses (14.28%); Personal shopping (13.18%); Lack of motivation (10.98%); Social events & family problems (8.79%); Working environments (12.08%); Difficulties for transportation (8.79%); Professional consciousness (5.49%); Political reasons, transfer, and appointment (6.59%); Leadership style (3.29%). A look at the findings from the different variables indicated in the table 1 illustrate that the variable "V_9" has the highest score (percentage) indicating that, that variable is a very important item to consider in the reasons for employees to absent from work. 16.48% of respondents indicate that their wage is not enough, which really impacts on their morale when we know that in African families and mainly in Cote d'Ivoire, some systems of values bring the workers to be significantly attached to their community, family, parents and friends.

As wages are the main source of income for the family, the insufficiency in pay impacts on workers morale to work toward the objectives and goals of the organization. Wages are the main source of income for the family and the insufficiency in pay will bring the workers to leave their offices to compensate the wage deficit by the exercise of parallel activities to make both ends meet as wages in the country do not increase simultaneously as the cost of living increases interminably in the country. This brings a limitation to their purchasing power.

In the consideration of the variable "illness", the researcher notices that 14.28% of the respondents at the time of data gathering point out that, they absent from work because of their state of health, such as fever, fatigue, headache. This can be explained by a range of reasons, namely the influence of extraprofessional life (exercise of lucrative activities on weekend; visiting parents and friends in villages most of the time far from their workstation). 13.18% of the respondents mention that they do not report for work as they need to go for personal shopping. An explanation of this situation can be found in the fact that tradition and a couple of systems of values that force the workers in Cote d'Ivoire to be considerably attached to their community, family, parents and friends as highlighted previously. Therefore, the workers have to attend events like weddings, naming ceremonies, mourning to name just a few. It is then understandable (according to the Ivorian traditional society) that workers absent from work for events of that dimension. Though it is a sign of solidarity and respectability for workers to attend those events, force is to recognize that some workers make use of those events to absent from their workstation, unfortunately.

The variable "working environment" scores 12.08%, indicative of the lack of good working environments can affect employees' morale and prevent them from reporting for their workstation. Difficult working conditions prevent a human resource to do his/her job properly. Workers cannot be in a position to be productive since the lack of infrastructures for the workers to do their job is conducive to the workers' lack of motivation, which will lead to absenteeism in the workstation. Workers need to be working in good environments (health, wellness, safety, security).

Table 2 presents the findings from the variables about importance of work. It highlights 10 items (variable 1 to Variable 10) taken from Lodahal and Kejner (1965) for the collection of data.

Table 2: Results from the Variable about the Importance of Work

N0	Variables / Answers	Public Sector		Total Cumulated
		Yes	No	
1	I was more involved in my job than presently (V1)	74.35%	25.65%	100%
2	till keep my job even if I do not have money. My job is my life (V2)	58.45%	41.55%	100%
3	I was worried for my job, but now I realize that there are other things more important (V3)	62.87%	37.13%	100%
4	I personally feel involved in my work (V4)	12.43%	87.57%	100%
5	I will do extra hours to finish my work even if they are not paid (V5)	30%	61%	100%
6	I have sleepless night thinking about my work (V6)	32.65%	67.35%	100%
7	My biggest satisfaction comes from my work (V7)	30.77%	69.23%	100%
8	I have other activities more important than my work (V8)	40.11%	59.89%	100%
9	I often come to work early to get prepared and ready (V9)	38.5%	61.5%	100%
10	Most of the time I want to remain home rather than reporting to work (V10)	47.65%	52.35%	100%

From the table 2, we notice that the variable (V1) has 74.35 % of respondents who say "Yes" and 25.65% for "No" response. V2 has the following: "58.45%" of "Yes" and 41.55% of "No" response. V3 and V4 respectively have 62.87% and 12.43% for "Yes" and 37.13% and 87.57% for "No". 30% of the respondents say "Yes" and 61% say "No" for V5. V6; V7; V8; V9; and V10 respectively have 32.65%; 30.77%; 40.11%; 38.5%; 47.65% of respondents who say "Yes" and ; 67.35%; 69.23 %; 59.89%; 61.5%; 52.35% who say "No". The variable "V10" with 47.65% of "Yes" response against 52.35% of "No" response, indicate that only 47.65% of the respondents find their work important and meaningful for them. The variable "V6" with 32.65% of "Yes" and 67.35% of "No" also highlight the respondents' appreciation of the importance of their work.

The different results of our findings reveal that absenteeism is sometimes due to the desire and the deliberate will of the workers to report or not for work. Therefore, there should be stern measures to punish those kinds of misconducts.

Table 3 highlights the results from the variable about job satisfaction. The respondents were instructed to use the following: "Satisfied (S)", "Not satisfied (NS)", "Not satisfied at all (NSA)" to respond to the 7 items (adapted from Mogenet, 1985) indicated in the table.

Table 3: Results from the Variable about Job Satisfaction

Questions \ Sector	Relations with colleagues		Transfer	Tasks and conditions of execution	Relations with superiors	Appointment of superiors	Promotion	Pay	Total
Public Sector	S	5.0%	0%	3.0 %	3.5%	1.5 %	1.0 %	0 %	14 %
	NS	0 %	3.5 %	13.5 %	6.5 %	4.0%	20.5 %	10.0 %	60.0 %
	NSA	0 %	0 %	7.0 %	0 %	4.0 %	3.0%	5.0 %	17.0 %

We observe a total of 60% of "not satisfied" response against 14% of "satisfied" response and 17% of "not satisfied at all". 13.5% of the respondents, state that they are not satisfied with the variable in relation with "Tasks and conditions of execution". For employees to be productive and work toward the objectives and goals of the organization they work for, they need to be working in a good environment. An environment that is apt to motivate them. They (employees) should also have the required tools and infrastructures to perform their tasks. A good environment, that is, an environment that cares for employees' health, safety, wellness, and security is a source of motivation and productivity for workers. The variable "promotion" scores 20.5% of "not satisfied" response which implies that in the public sector and in the Ivorian setting, the respondents do not appreciate the way promotion of workers is done. According to the respondents, the managerial board does not respect the principles guiding the promotion of an employee. Some workers are promoted not because they deserve it but simply because those workers have some connections or ties with the managerial board. This situation brings about two categories of workers within the organizations, namely the in-group members and the out-group members (See Table 4).

Table 4: Hypothesized Relations between Managers and Employees Based on Ethnic Affiliations

In-group members	Out-group members
Close relations with supervisors	Formal relations with supervisors
Sense of job security and protection	Sense of insecurity/protection
Frequent communications with supervisors	Formal communications with supervisors
Trust	Lack of trust/suspicious
Important extra benefits	Limited Important extra benefits

Adapted from Beugre (2004:141)

From the table above, the researcher observes that the behavior of a manager towards employees depends on which categories of employees it belongs to. If the employee is from the same ethnic group, family or regional ties with the manager, the behavior of the manager towards the employees will bring about the "management of affection" as Beugre (2004) stated. An enterprise's potential to find and maintain a qualified workforce is an important consideration in any decision to expand into the competitive business environment. 10% of the respondents assert that they are not satisfied with the variable "Pay". This brings about dissatisfaction in the workstation because; wages are the main source of income for the family.

The low income of the workers will impact on their will to stay longer at the workstation according to the normal working hours as they have to leave their offices to compensate the wage deficit by the exercise of parallel activities to make ends meet. Increasing the salary of workers in the country will help combat absenteeism.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study is to identify the causes of absenteeism in the public sector in Cote d'Ivoire. Our study looked at various motivation theories and a couple of variables that explain the phenomenon of absenteeism.

The results of our findings indicated that our hypotheses (3) are all verified; that the rate of absenteeism in the public sector is high, and the affection of employee morale and the reasons for them to absent from work are manifold. Therefore, to combat absenteeism in the public sector in Cote d'Ivoire, solutions should be identified and implemented. If employees still absent from workstation in spite of the implementation of solutions, the unique solution is to resort to disciplinary procedures. With limitations in mind, the sample size of this current study is 110 respondents from the public sector only. There should be more data collected from all over the country both from the public sector and private sector for better understanding of the phenomenon under study.

As suggestions and recommendations, we adopted a better and concrete motivation issue on the basis of the determinants of Douglass Macgregor's theory of motivation from his book "*The Human Side of the Enterprise*" (1960). We consider the assumption which supposes the existence of two styles of management, namely "System X" and "System Y". The leaders practicing System X have implicitly admitted that human being is naturally lazy, easily slinger, generally undisciplined. Only obligation to earn his/her living constrained him/her to work. The company must thus set up one solid hierarchical system, of the rigorous disciplinary means, one close connection between wages and really assured production. Those who practice the System Y admitted that given an appropriate work environment and in the absence of exceptional incentives, workers are dedicated to their tasks, are generally self-motivated, and will carry out their tasks with minimal direction from their supervisors.

Management by Objective (MBO) is a logical style of management which methodically organizes each member of the personnel in bringing about a strong motivation based less on the constraint than on the identification between need for development of each one and the professional objectives that management proposes to him/her. It is the occasion which consists for example for a superior and the chief who is his/her subordinate to adopt the objectives together and that the subordinate engages in its achievement. The promoters of the MBO affirm that it answers this basic aspiration in inciting the collaborators of the hierarchy to apply their unemployed energy of motivation and engagement for their daily labor.

The need for a well known policy and clearly defined to solve the issue of absenteeism is essential. It will take into account the points of view of the supervision and the workers on the plague and how he/she intends to solve it. The system of human relations elaborated and that demanded all the levels of administration must be accessible to all on the issue of absenteeism. These individual reports on daily absences must contain the number of lost days, the frequencies in absences, and the statistics should be necessary to appreciate the extent of the phenomenon from one period to another. The sanctions and the supervision are part of the program, not to penalize but rather to help to correct, to improve and to lay the basis of an everlasting professional conscientiousness. With that, one could add premiums of assiduity and output. An officer (specialized agent) of full-time presences should be mandated to examine the appropriateness of absence just as for its implications. The meaning of the responsibility for the implication of work should be the culture that the organization has that should be at all levels.

The leadership style of management should respond to the aspirations and needs of the workers compared to the climate of work and the level of communication. It must also ensure a rational management of working hours in so far as we have observed important losses of time in administration. Any model of motivation of the personnel should take into account the real needs of the subjects involved in according to their needs. Different people perform better under different circumstances, and that they also get motivated in different ways: What works for one may not work for another. Motivation is determined by the urging need of want. It implies a mobilization of tension and of energy (activation) which can lead to a satisfaction or not, which determines the behavior towards the search for satisfaction of other needs for higher degree and the cycle starts again. Any style of leadership that takes into account these various stages in the search for the emulation of love for work can help in reducing job dissatisfaction which is without any doubt sources of absenteeism.

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