

Why Some People Attend All the Time... and Others Don't

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Introduction

This paper was originally intended to be a representation of 12 months of my PhD research on the link between value congruence and short-term absenteeism. However, after spending 2 months systematically reviewing an initial count of 332 papers on 'causes of absence', it became apparent that the important question is not why people go absent from work, but why people attend work, particularly, why some people are very high attendees, and others are not? My new angle is to look at the relationship between 'fit' and attendance. I am hoping that feedback can be obtained on this new direction of research and welcome any feedback, particularly on:

- Research methods
- Ethos of research
- Proposed measurement of dependant variable (attendance)
- Proposed measurement of independent variable (fit)

Attendance Models

Models of attendance can be traced back to Nicholson (1977) and most famously to Steers and Rhodes (1978). This model determines attendance based on an employees ability and motivation to attend. Ability to attend is linked with involuntary absence due to issues of severe health problems, transportation problems and family illness. Motivation to attend is linked to satisfaction with the job and pressure to attend. Motivation is defined as being linked with voluntary absence. Due to its complex nature, only one study using all components has been done, this being a study by Lee (1989) where he found motivation to attend was weakly related to attendance. No correlation was found between values and attendance; however, values and not value congruence were measured, plus, the measurement of absence included both voluntary and involuntary absences,

Proposal

High levels of P-O fit will have a positive correlation with an employee's maximum possible attendance. The maximum possible attendance is defined as 'the number of days an employee is expected to attend minus unavoidable/involuntary absence', e.g. family illness, chronic illness etc.

Causes of absence

It is fully understood that a negative correlation to absence does not automatically identify a positive correlation to attendance; however, much research exists claiming various forms of satisfaction/dissatisfaction are linked to absence. Farrell (1983) claims job dissatisfaction leads to increased absence, Cheloha & Farr (1980) claim job satisfaction (JS) is negatively related to absence, however, they also claim JS is not related to absence when job

involvement (JI) is controlled for, further claiming that JI is linked more to absence than JS. Hirschfeld (2002) claims those satisfied with pay against perceived skill level were less absent, whilst Tharenou (1993) claims that satisfaction with supervisor is negatively related to absence. Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly (2003) claim that dissatisfaction with the state of the psychological contract is positively related to absence.

In addition to the ‘satisfaction’ components related to absence and attendance, there are numerous other reported causes of absence. Breugh (1981) claims white collar employees in a scientific engineering company employed via newspaper advertisements were more prone to absence than those recruited through other means. Castellano (1976), Spencer and Steers (1980) and Keller (1983) all claim tenure is negatively related to absence. Nicholson, Brown and Chadwick-Jones (1977) when reviewing 16 prior empirical investigations of absence, claim tenure is not related to absence. Castellano (1976) claims rural workers are more prone to absence, whilst Popp and Belohav (1982) state marital status is negatively related to absence. Other facets deemed relevant include autonomy, past absence, gender, smoking, drinking, goal setting, training, stress, the need to attend, number of children, shift work, levels of overtime and the ratio of pay between base and bonus.

Steers and Rhodes’s (1978) model claims motivation to attend is influenced (moderated) by a pressure to attend. I am arguing this point in that motivation to attend will not be moderated by a pressure to attend for those employees with high levels of fit. From this, I understand my research will need to take into consideration a variety of moderators and take account of mediators previously claimed to be causes of absence/attendance.

Attendance Measurement

My intention is to measure attendance by means of deducting days absent from the number of working days available; however, the crucial aspect here is that days lost via longer-term absences are not relevant. The only relevant days lost are those classified as voluntary short-term absences. It is proposed that the only days deducted are those where absence is either reported on the day of absence itself or not reported at all, and does not continue on into a long-term involuntary absence.

For example,

Expected days – 233 (based on 365 days, minus weekends and holiday entitlement)

Chronic illness – 10 days absence

Maximum possible attendance: $233 - 10 = 213$ days.

The above falls into line with Steers and Rhodes’s (1978) model that distinguishes between motivation to attend and ability to attend. If an employee has more than 3 days continuous absence, they are then generally required to present return to work notes from their doctor, plus, they are in danger of losing pay (blue collar workers). Longer-term absences that require return to work notes and loss of pay are involuntary absences (ability to attend). Short-term absences reported on the day or not at all are voluntary (motivation to attend) absences.

Support for the ethos of ignoring involuntary absence as a relevant factor can be found in Hammer, Landau and Stern (1981), who claim frequency of absence is more a predictor of voluntary absence than is total time absent. They claim frequency measures are more stable and less susceptible to skewness and leptokurtosis, and are a more reliable method in measuring absence. Accepting Hammer and Landau’s (1981) claims have credence, expected attendance days, minus short-term absence days, and not long-term

absence days, will offer true data relating to those who are motivated to attend. Scott and Taylor (1985) claim not all measures of absence capture the same phenomenon: this research is investigating P-O fit with attendance. Attendance lost due to involuntary absences has little to do with attitudes or P-O fit.

Value Measurement

Research conducted by Adkins, Ravlin and Meglino (1996) when claiming value congruence has a positive but weak relationship with attendance, used self-reported values via a Comparative Emphasis scale. This model measures across four values, similar to that developed by Netemeyer, Boles, MacKee & MacMurrian (1997). This model, used by Vilela, Gonzalez and Ferrin (2008) claimed a positive correlation between P-O fit and organizational citizenship behaviours. My intentions are to use Schwartz's (1992) ten-value model, which crucially incorporates cross-cultural thinking, particularly relevant taking into account the modern-day demographics of a workforce. With an apparent abundance of value measuring models available, any advice on choice of model would be appreciated.

Fit

In addition to the options of value measuring tools, there is also the issue concerning the mode of fit to be utilised. Muchinsky and Monahan (1987) and Cable and Edwards (2004) offer clear distinctions between supplementary and complementary fit, however, the latter claim both forms of fit are "interrelated, but that both contribute independently to outcomes". They further suggest an integrated framework should be considered. Chatman's (1989) conceptualisation of VC proposed a Q-sort method, using objective fit. Edwards and Cable (2009) support a subjective measurement, claiming attitudes are subjective and subjective measures should relate more strongly to these attitudes. However, Edwards, Cable, Williamson, Lambert & Shipp (2006) investigated three approaches to perceived P-E fit, (a) atomistic (b) molecular and (c) molar, claiming the three are not interchangeable and should be treated as distinct entities. All forms of fit, whether objective, subjective or perceived will have their positives and negatives. Ideally it would be beneficial to investigate all three, however, this may not be feasible. Taking the context of the situation into consideration, any feedback or suggestions on the most suitable direction would be greatly appreciated.

Research to be undertaken is expected to take place in manufacturing or retail/food retail: industries where attendance is closely monitored. It is anticipated blue or pink-collar workers will be the chosen subjects. Taking this into consideration, it is being proposed that fit be measured via P-O, P-G or P-P; these being forms of fit defined by Jansen and Kristof-Brown (2006) as being relevant to the post-hire temporal stage. Any advice would be welcome with regard to the most suitable forms or forms of P-E fit.

Fit and Attendance

I am suggesting that P-O fit has strong correlations with high or full attendance. Initial intentions are to look at supplementary fit, multi-dimensionally, using Schwartz's (1992) value model. Attendance will be measured via maximum possible attendance days. Quantitative data will be obtained and analysed using various forms of analysis.

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