


2016

Absenteeism in an International Custom Software Engineering Company

Jennifer M. Mudek
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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Jennifer M. Mudek

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Walden University
2016

Abstract

Absenteeism in an International Custom Software Engineering Company

by

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MBA, Walden University, 2010

BS, University of Wisconsin, 2005

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2016

Abstract

Absenteeism has a negative impact on organizational output in the form of lost productivity and profit reduction for software engineering companies. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore the strategies that software engineering managers utilize for reducing absenteeism. The theory of planned behavior formed the conceptual framework for this study. Data were collected through semistructured interviews from a purposeful sample of 11 managers at an international custom software engineering company. Data collection also included organizational data on employee absences for the past 5 years (2011-2015), e-mail memos, newsletters, employee handbook, and employee performance reviews. Based on methodological triangulation of the data sources and inductive analysis of the data, 4 themes emerged. Emergent themes from the analysis revealed that communication was key to reducing absenteeism, flexible work hours and working from home reduced absence, comradery and employee support positively impacted absenteeism, and that there was a lack of a clear and formal processes for addressing employee absenteeism. These findings suggest that, at this company, an absenteeism reduction strategy could help reduce employee absenteeism to lessen the negative impact on organizational productivity and profitability. These findings may contribute to social change by providing a template for effective absenteeism reduction strategies that managers can use to promote a decreased incidence of absenteeism, organizational profitability, reduction of the unemployment rate, employee stress, and mental health problems.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my husband, Marty. He was supportive and encouraging throughout my entire doctoral journey. Thank you for being incredibly patient with me when I struggled, and thank you for being flexible when I had to change our plans so I could complete revisions and resubmit immediately. This doctoral study is also dedicated to my miracle, my son, Vincent James. Mommy loves you! Furthermore, my dedication goes to my mother, my sisters Julie and Jeanine, and my brother, Jonathan. Thank you, Mom for raising me to value education and teaching me to keep working no matter how difficult things get. A special thank you to Julie for encouraging me go back to school again for the last time. Thank you to Jeanine and Jonathan for helping me to take a break and relax when I needed to and did not know it. I could not have completed the DBA program without each and every one of you!

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	iv
List of Figures	v
Section 1: Foundation of the Study.....	1
Background of the Problem	1
Problem Statement.....	2
Purpose Statement.....	3
Nature of the Study	3
Research Question	5
Interview Questions	5
Managerial Interview Questions.....	5
Conceptual Framework.....	6
Operational Definitions.....	7
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations.....	8
Assumptions.....	8
Limitations	8
Delimitations.....	8
Significance of the Study	9
Contribution to Business Practice.....	9
Implications for Social Change.....	10
A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature.....	11
The Theory of Planned Behavior	12

Behavioral Theories	13
Absenteeism	15
Contributing Factors of Absenteeism	16
Absenteeism Models and Intervention Framework	23
Strategies to Reduce Absenteeism	26
Transition	37
Section 2: The Project.....	38
Purpose Statement.....	38
Role of the Researcher	38
Participants.....	41
Research Method and Design	44
Research Method	44
Research Design.....	46
Population and Sampling	47
Ethical Research.....	50
Data Collection Instruments	52
Data Collection Technique	55
Data Organization Technique	58
Data Analysis	59
Reliability and Validity.....	61
Reliability.....	61
Validity	62

Transition and Summary.....	64
Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change.....	65
Introduction.....	65
Presentation of the Findings.....	66
Theme 1: Communication is Key to Reducing Absenteeism.....	68
Theme 2: Flexible Work Hours and Working From Home Reduces Absence.....	73
Theme 3: Comradery and Employee Support Positively Impact Absenteeism.....	76
Theme 4: Lack of Clear, Formal Processes for Addressing Employee Absenteeism.....	79
Applications to Professional Practice.....	83
Implications for Social Change.....	85
Recommendations for Action.....	86
Recommendations for Further Research.....	88
Reflections.....	89
Conclusion.....	90
References.....	91
Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation.....	119
Appendix B: Letter of Consent.....	120
Appendix C: Informed Consent Form.....	121
Appendix D: Interview Questions.....	123
Appendix E: Interview Protocol.....	124
Appendix F: NIH Certificate of Completion.....	125

List of Tables

Table 1. Summary of Participants Contacted 66

List of Figures

Figure 1. Employee absences in relation to number of employees.....83

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

According to Prater and Smith (2011), absenteeism is a significant problem for organizations because it can result in costs that exceed the employees' sick pay wages and benefits. In addition to sick pay wages and benefits, costs including compensation for replacement personnel and lost productivity increase the organizational costs of absenteeism (Sandal, Click, Dowling, & Guzik, 2014). Kivipõld and Ahonen (2013) suggested that a higher level of job satisfaction of information technology employees leads to an increase in employee productivity and reduction of absenteeism. An effective motivational strategy can also enable managers to influence their staff to use 80-90% of their potential and increase employee productivity (Achim, Dragolea, & Balan, 2013). Previous researchers discovered that positive relationships between employees and supervisors (Halbesleben, Whitman, & Crawford, 2014; Kivipõld & Ahonen, 2013) with effective communication, participation in organizational planning processes (Kivipõld & Ahonen, 2013), and successful motivational strategies (Achim et al., 2013) contributes to a lower level of absenteeism and higher levels of job satisfaction. Further research was necessary to gain an understanding of the strategies that managers can use to reduce absenteeism in the information technology industry.

Background of the Problem

Absenteeism is a problem that managers contend within organizations from a variety of industries including technology, consulting, and food service (Johnson, 2014), financial services (Tlaiss, 2013), and healthcare (Gupta, Paterson, Lysaght, & von Zweck, 2012; Mazurenko & O'Connor, 2012). Employment relationships and job

satisfaction are determinants of employee motivation and incidence of absenteeism for employees in the financial services industry (Tlaiss, 2013). Mazurenko and O'Connor (2012) noted that empowering employees can influence job satisfaction and motivation, which results in better service in the hospitality and healthcare industries. Failure to empower employees and increase job satisfaction results in employee burnout and absenteeism (Gupta et al., 2012; Mazurenko & O'Connor, 2012). Johnson (2014) studied several companies across industries including technology, food service, employment assistance, consulting, energy, and travel and discovered that consideration, understanding, and support from managers contributes to employee empowerment, employee motivation, and employee job satisfaction. Work-related factors including continuous technological advances, organizational commitment, and trust significantly impact employee motivation, performance, and absenteeism in the information technology industry (Tezergil, Köse, & Karabay, 2014).

Problem Statement

Technical services industry employees' absences total an average of 2,000 days per year (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Employee illness accounts for 32% of absenteeism, and personal reasons account for 44% of employee absenteeism (Gangai, 2014). Software engineers indicated that absenteeism significantly impacts productivity and profitability because the absence results in a near shutdown effect on output (Cocker, Martin, & Sanderson, 2013). The general business problem was that absenteeism has a negative impact on organizational output in the form of lost productivity and profit

reduction for software engineering companies. The specific business problem was that some software engineering managers lack the strategies to reduce absenteeism.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore the strategies that software engineering managers use for reducing absenteeism. The target population consisted of 21 managers of an international custom software engineering company in the United States and India. The data from this study might assist managers in understanding what strategies are effective to reduce absenteeism. Enhancing managers' understanding of effective strategies that help to reduce absenteeism might positively impact society and social change by reducing unemployment, job stress, and mental health problems.

Nature of the Study

The research question determines if a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approach is appropriate. A qualitative method is appropriate when the goal of the researcher is to explore, understand, and interpret (Szyjka, 2012) using subjective data (Krohne, Torres, Slettebø, & Berglund, 2014). When the goal of a researcher is to describe, explain, and predict, the appropriate research method is quantitative because quantitative researchers identify variables for testing hypotheses or for explaining cause-and-effect relationships between variables (Szyjka, 2012). A mixed methods study is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods and consists of a core component and a supplemental component (Spillman, 2014). Quantitative and mixed research methods were not appropriate for this study because the purpose of this study was not to test a hypothesis or to explain cause-and-effect relationships between

variables. A qualitative research method was appropriate for the purpose of this study, which was to discover what strategies are effective for reducing absenteeism of employees at an international custom software engineering company.

Within the qualitative method, there are several designs such as phenomenology (Wahyuni, 2012), ethnography, and case studies (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013). A case study is appropriate for understanding a phenomenon using multiple data collection sources such as interviews, observations, and analysis of documents (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy 2013). Moustakas (1994) posited that when the goal of the researcher is to understand the lived experiences of the participants, a phenomenological approach is appropriate. A phenomenological design was not suitable for understanding what strategies managers can use to reduce absenteeism because the research will not involve understanding the meaning of participants' lived experiences. Researchers can use multiple sources of data collection for ethnographies, including on-site observations and researcher participation to understand people within groups and groups within society (Case, Todd, & Kral, 2014). An ethnographic design was not suitable for this research study because the focus is to understand strategies to reduce absenteeism rather than understanding people within groups and those groups within society. A case study design involves the analysis of a case to gain an understanding of a problem or situation (Baškarada, 2014). Conducting a case study enabled me to understand the problem of absenteeism using multiple data sources such as interviews and company document review. Utilizing a case study design allowed me to explore the strategies managers can use to reduce absenteeism in custom software engineering companies.

Research Question

Qualitative research is exploratory, and the focus of the study lies in the study population and the research question (Hunt, 2014). The central research question in this qualitative descriptive case study was: What strategies do software engineering managers use to reduce employee absenteeism?

Interview Questions

Collecting data via semistructured, face-to-face, and telephone interviews will permit examination of the perceptions of the participants. The purpose of the data collection techniques was to gather data that may reveal the factors that contribute to effective motivational strategies, and may provide information on ways that an improvement in job satisfaction may promote a reduction in the rate of absenteeism. The interview questions were as follows (Appendix D):

Managerial Interview Questions

1. What aspects of the job, if any, lead to employee absenteeism?
2. In your experience, why do those job aspects lead to employee absenteeism?
3. How does absenteeism affect your company?
4. What do you do when an employee is frequently absent?
5. What method do you use to encourage employees to attend work or to strive for fewer absences?
6. What strategies have you used to reduce employee absenteeism?
7. What strategies were effective in reducing employee absenteeism?

8. How did your employees respond to these strategies?
9. What are some positive outcomes as a result of reduced absenteeism rates?
10. What are some of the benefits of implementing an absenteeism reduction strategy?

Conceptual Framework

The theory that served as the conceptual framework of this study was the theory of planned behavior (TPB), which Ajzen developed in 1991. This theory was used to offer an explanation for employee behavior based upon the idea that the behavior is deliberate and planned, and that people change other people's behavior. Key propositions underlying the theory are (a) behavioral beliefs and the expected consequences, (b) normative beliefs and the expected behavior of others, and (c) control beliefs and the factors that facilitate or impede behavior. As applied to this study, the TPB holds that I expected the propositions advanced by the theory to allow participants to effectively explore what software engineering managers need to change employee absenteeism behaviors through effective absenteeism reduction strategies.

A theory that helps to explain employee behavior was crucial to my study because the TPB provides the foundation for studying the absenteeism of employees of an international custom software engineering company. Many researchers choose the TPB to support their research of employee behavior (Sardzoska & Tang, 2012; Stedman-Smith, DuBois, & Grey, 2012; Wu & Zhu, 2012). Alok, Raveendran, and Prasuna (2014) used the TPB to support their research of Indian software engineering employees' withdrawal behavior in the workplace as a result of workplace conflict. Sardzoska and Tang (2012)

used the TPB to support their study of the impact of the work environment on employee behaviors such as absenteeism in various Macedonian organizations including software engineering companies. The TPB offered a starting point for examining effective strategies to reduce absenteeism for managers of employees an international custom software engineering company.

Operational Definitions

Absenteeism: Absenteeism is an unscheduled absence from work for any reason (Senel & Senel, 2012).

Deviant behavior: Deviant behavior is inappropriate workplace behaviors including theft, fraud, gossip, tardiness, absenteeism, and aggression (Ahmad & Omar, 2013).

Job satisfaction: A phenomenon that is observed through an employee's performance, and involves employee's satisfaction with working conditions and employer's expectations (Nafei, 2015).

Motivation: Motivation is the stimuli that provoke an individual to perform a behavior (Achim et al., 2013).

Organizational commitment: Organizational commitment is an employee's positive attachment to the firm (Flynn & Schaumberg, 2012).

Presenteeism: Presenteeism is attending work despite feeling ill (Cocker et al., 2014).

Productivity: Productivity is the quality and quantity of employees' labor output that contributes to organizational profitability (Huang & Rust, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

This qualitative descriptive case study was subject to various assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Various situations or circumstances could have affected my research. The following is a description of the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

Assumptions

Ismal and Haryati (2013) defined assumptions in a research study as the concepts that the researcher believes to be true. The first assumption was that the participants would agree to participate outside of work hours. Another assumption was that the participants can articulate their experiences with motivational strategies and that their responses would be truthful.

Limitations

Limitations are the potential weaknesses in research studies (Baldo, 2014). This qualitative case study was limited to one international custom software engineering company; therefore, the transferability of the results of this study may be limited. Another limitation was that the participants may hold back information for fear of repercussions with organizational leadership staff.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the scope or boundaries of the study (Vladu, Matis, & Salas, 2012). There were four delimitations of this study. This qualitative study was limited to one international custom software engineering company. Another delimitation of the study was the exclusion of some employees as participants. I excluded employees that

were under 18 years of age and those that have less than 1 year of employment with the custom software engineering at the time of data collection. The sampling method and size were additional delimitations of this study. The selected sampling technique was purposeful and only 10-15 participants took part in this study. The fourth delimitation was the exclusion of other technological companies such as computer and electronics manufacturers because the focus of the study was an international custom software engineering company.

Significance of the Study

Baldo (2014) referred to the significance of the study as the value of the work and the relevance of the findings. I addressed how this study and the findings might contribute to business practice. I also described the implications for social change this study might have.

Contribution to Business Practice

Negative impacts to organizations as a result of absenteeism include a reduction in productivity, the creation of a need for additional staff, and an increase in organizational costs through overtime pay and hiring additional staff (Gangai, 2014). Managers in an organization can avoid such negative effects in various ways. Supportive managerial behavior and communication can positively impact employee behaviors including absenteeism, job withdrawal, and turnover by decreasing the chances of burnout (Beheshtifar & Omidvar, 2013). This study shed light on the contributing factors of absenteeism for organizational managers to reference. Ushadevi (2013) stressed the importance of determining the causes of absenteeism because absenteeism can impede

organizational success resulting from a decrease in employee commitment and productivity. The findings of this study might contribute to improving managerial efforts to change employee absence behavior with effective absenteeism reduction strategies.

Implications for Social Change

According to Carmel, Yoong, and Patel (2013), a decrease in absenteeism might lead to a reduction in organizational costs and increased retention of institutional memory, both of which are vital to organizational profitability because the loss of institutional memory negatively affects profitability. Organizational profitability is essential not only to the organization but to the people in the same community. Profitable organizations can lead to lower number of unemployed individuals within the community and this is important. Long-term results might include a reduction in absenteeism. Shoss and Penney (2012) discovered that a high unemployment rate one year results in an increase in the absenteeism rate in the following year. High unemployment rates negatively impact employee job stress (Shoss & Penney, 2012), and employees experiencing job stress and mental health problems have a higher occurrence of absenteeism (Cocker et al., 2013). Implications for positive social change include a better understanding of effective absenteeism reduction strategies might positively impact society and social change by reducing unemployment rate, job stress, and mental health problems. Jobs provide an opportunity for social interaction and engagement during and after work hours. Working with others in a satisfying work environment may transform into collaborating efforts to improve the community such as volunteering, fundraising, and participating on a committee. Individuals and teams positively investing in the future

of their community can lead to positive social changes in society as a whole.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore the strategies that software engineering managers use for reducing absenteeism. This literature review provided a foundation for research about absenteeism and factors that might relate to absenteeism including job satisfaction, motivation, and productivity. Motivation is a crucial factor for promoting job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and less absenteeism (DeMenezes, 2012). Gosselin, Lemyre, and Corneil (2013) posited that factors for using a sick day include employee job satisfaction, motivation, and commitment to the organization. Reducing absenteeism can help to avoid organizational costs such as a decrease in productivity due to understaffing or costs to replace the absent employee (Frick, Goetzen, & Simmons, 2013).

The organization of the literature review was by themes. These themes included behavioral theories, absenteeism, contributing factors of absenteeism, absenteeism models and intervention framework, and strategies to reduce the negative impact of absenteeism. The sources for the literature review section of this study were published between 1977 and 2016, and 86% are recent and peer-reviewed articles that were published between 2012 and 2016. The literature review included 95 published sources such as journals, periodicals, and books. Eighty-two of the sources were recent and peer-reviewed. Published sources were located by searching Google Scholar and databases including ProQuest Central, ABI/Inform Complete, and Business Source Complete/Premier via the Walden University Library. Keywords for searches using

Google Scholar and the databases included *absenteeism, organizational impact, job satisfaction, motivation, strategy, productivity, commitment, and employee behavior.*

The Theory of Planned Behavior

The TPB was developed by Ajzen in 1991. Ajzen theorized that behavior is not strictly voluntary and under control; behavior is a result of an individual's readiness to engage in a behavior, attitude towards the behavior, and the consequences of the behavior (Wu & Zhu, 2012). Ajzen (1991) categorized three considerations that guide human action including behavioral beliefs or consequences, normative beliefs or expectations of others, and control beliefs or factors that facilitate or that impede behavior. Ajzen (2011) defined behavioral beliefs as personal beliefs of the probable outcome of behavior. Behavioral beliefs influence the positive or negative attitude that an individual has about the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Normative beliefs are what people expect the beliefs of their spouse, close friends, coworkers, or supervisor to be (Ajzen, 2011). Normative beliefs or subjective norms are an individual's perception of the social pressure to comply with the beliefs about the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Control beliefs are beliefs in the existence of factors that enable or hinder performance (Ajzen, 2011). Control beliefs can also be referred to as perceived behavioral control. Perceived behavioral control is the individual's perception of their ability to complete a behavior given the resources and opportunities that are available to them (Ajzen, 1991).

These beliefs, along with resources and opportunities, embody an individual's control over the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In other words, if an individual has the intention and the resources to complete the behavior, they will perform the behavior. Sardzoska

and Tang (2012) researched various Macedonian organizations including software engineering companies using variables representing Ajzen's three beliefs including corrupt intent, work environment, and coping strategies. When the work environment and coping strategies are met with an individual's corrupt intent, behaviors like absenteeism occur (Sardzoska & Tang, 2012).

Behavioral Theories

Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior is similar to the BEM that Gilbert developed in 1978, but Gilbert's capacity component evolved into Ajzen's various beliefs. Gilbert developed the behavior engineering model (BEM) in 1978. The BEM has six total variables including data, instruments, and incentives to comprise the environmental supports; and knowledge, capacity, and motives to comprise the behavior components (Gilbert, 1978). Researchers use the BEM to identify individual's competence or incompetence in regards to the environmental supports and behavior components (Gilbert, 1978). When a manager identifies an area of incompetence in employees, the cause is most often an environmental support that a manager can adjust to change the employee's behavior (Gilbert, 1978). Gilbert also posited that incompetence as a result of the behavior components are difficult and costly to identify, understand, and change.

Based on the data collected on the topic of motivation for over 70 years, researchers have developed several motivational theories such as Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory and Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior. Vroom's expectancy theory was instrumental in studying workplace behavior. Facer, Galloway, Inoue, and

Zigarmi (2014) conducted quantitative research using a survey to collect data from employees of a global consulting company in the US. Facer et al. (2014) measured the motivational experiences and perceptions of the research study participants by how they related to the stimuli, task, or goal that the researchers provided. Researchers focused on how intrapersonal and social conditions affect human work behavior (Facer et al., 2014). Employees' actions are contingent upon the assumption that engaging in a particular behavior elicits a reward (Carter, 2013). Facer et al. suggested that based on the expectancy theory, the employee behavior that managers can expect to see in employees is contingent on managerial actions and decisions. Such finding indicated that rewards, incentives, and managerial behavior influence employee motivation and behavior.

Herzberg's two factor theory consists of motivation factors and hygiene factors (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 2011). Motivation factors are intrinsic and include achievement, recognition, and advancement (Arifin, 2015; Herzberg et al., 2011). Hygiene factors are extrinsic and include company policy, working conditions, and salary (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005). Herzberg et al. (2011) suggested that what motivates and satisfies employees is different from what demotivates and dissatisfies employees. There are four scenarios that result when the motivation and hygiene factors are combined. A combination of both high motivation and hygiene factors is the ideal mixture of the factors and results in employees with high levels of motivation with few complaints (Herzberg et al., 2011). Employees that are working simply for the paycheck have few complaints, but do not have high levels of motivation, which is an example of a combination of high hygiene and low motivation factors (Herzberg et al., 2011). The

third scenario is a combination of high motivation and low hygiene, which results in high employee motivation with many complaints (Herzberg et al., 2011). The final and worst scenario is a combination of low motivation and hygiene. This scenario results in a lack of motivation and numerous complaints (Herzberg et al., 2011). According to Bassett-Jones and Lloyd (2005), salary and recognition are not factors of employee motivation or satisfaction. Researchers Ajzen (1991), Gilbert (1978), Basset-Jones and Lloyd (2005), and Herzberg et al. (2011) provide organizational leadership staff a foundation for determining a successful employee motivation strategy. Researchers publish studies on motivation frequently and reveal motivational factors for consideration in the development of motivational strategies including organizational support (Sacchetti & Tortia, 2013), public services motivation and organizational citizenship behavior (Cun, 2012), and policy-related factors (Cong & Nguyen, 2013).

Absenteeism

Several definitions and classifications of absenteeism exist. A basic definition of absenteeism is a failure to attend work (Biron & Bamberger, 2012). Another basic definition is the decision not to attend work (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Belita, Mbindyo, and English (2013) classified absenteeism in four ways including voluntary, involuntary, planned, and unplanned. Other definitions are a combination of various basic definitions including Senel and Senel's (2012) definition of absenteeism as any unscheduled absence from work for any reason. I chose to use Senel and Senel's definition of absenteeism for this study because it is a comprehensive definition that incorporates various aspects of several definitions.

Contributing Factors of Absenteeism

Shoss and Penney (2012) used unemployment and absence data from the Bureau of Labor and Statistics to examine how economic events affect organizations. Shoss and Penney found a positive association between the unemployment rate and sickness and workplace violence-related absenteeism, but there was a lagged effect. Shoss and Penney supported previous researchers who found that organizational downsizing or restructuring increase the incidence of sickness absenteeism. Yandava (2012) suggested that ensuring organizational success while facing challenging economic times does not consist solely of cutting costs like absenteeism; organizational success requires constant adaptation to external factors.

Technological advances are an example of an external factor that may contribute to employee absenteeism. Because of absenteeism, implementation of a new technology can lead to complications, delays, reduction of productivity, and retraining of employees (Bamber & Lansbury, 2013). Such problems and delays not only increase the cost to the organization, but they also negatively affect employees' perceptions before experiencing the technology (Bamber & Lansbury, 2013). In a study on organizational productivity and employees' health, Bamber and Lansbury (2013) demonstrated that new technology implementation negatively impacts an organization. Employees perceive that learning a new technology does not meet their expectations or that there is an increase in job demands, which can lead to a negative impact on morale (Bamber & Lansbury, 2013), employees' well-being, job commitment, job satisfaction, and productivity (Knani, 2013). Employees' perception or expectation of the new technology can lead to an increase in

employees' stress, fatigue, exhaustion, absenteeism, and conversely, presenteeism (Knani, 2013). The negative impact that new technology has on employees' absenteeism and the organization may decrease over time as familiarity with the new technology develops (Knani, 2013).

Implementing new technologies helps to enhance communication, productivity, and work arrangements (Olaniyi et al., 2014); however, implementing new technologies contributes to negative impacts to the organization. Olaniyi et al. (2014) discovered that technological advances increased physical and emotional stress, which increased absenteeism and turnover. Since technological advances will continue to occur, organizational leadership staffs' focus lies in reducing the negative impacts, such as stress that the technology has on the employees so that absenteeism decreases. A decrease in physical and emotional stress was possible by reducing ergonomic hazards in the workplace with the use of foot rests at sitting work stations and sit-to-stand work stations that allow employees to adjust their computer monitor and keyboard so they can work in a standing position (Olaniyi et al., 2014; Perry, 2012).

Leadership staffs of some organizations can utilize technological advances to support flexible work arrangements such as telework, to reduce the incidence of absenteeism. Telework, work-sharing, and flexible working hours can have several positive effects on employees and organizations including reducing commute time, increasing productivity, decreasing absences, and contributing to the employee's ability to achieve a work-life balance, especially for employees with children (Bukchin & Cohen, 2013; Clark, Karau, & Michalisin, 2012; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; Ritchie,

2012; Singh & Monga, 2013). However, Maruyama and Tietze (2012) posited that despite the positive effect telework has on absenteeism, telework can contribute to an increase in negative effects such as turnover because of career development and visibility in the organization can be reduced when there is a lack of professional interactions. If telework has a larger negative impact to the organization than absenteeism, telework is not a viable option.

The numbers of external factors that contribute to absenteeism are significantly less than the number of internal factors. Internal factors that contribute to absenteeism are stress, tenure, and level of education (Prater & Smith, 2011), deviant behavior (Ahmad & Omar, 2013), and employee disengagement (Howard & Cordes, 2010), and organizational leadership staff can manage the internal factors. Work stress and burnout can cause employees to feel that they need to recover resulting in their absence from work (Chênevert, Jourdain, Cole, & Banville, 2013). Overwork or work-life balance, lack of motivation, poor management, and illness can cause stress and burnout (Prater & Smith, 2011). Reducing the incidence of stress and burnout that employees experience is vital in reducing the negative organizational impacts such as absenteeism. Tryon (2014) posited that the managerial capability is crucial for controlling, anticipating, counteracting, and mitigating occupational stress to avoid low productivity, absenteeism, and job dissatisfaction. Prater and Smith (2011) corroborated Tryon's (2014) supposition regarding absenteeism with statistical data indicating that 40% of absenteeism is a result of stress and mental health issues.

In addition to stress and burnout, employee tenure may impact the rate of absenteeism. In a quantitative study conducted in a large, private, Italian organization, Dello Russo, Miraglia, Borgogni, and Johns (2013) found that absenteeism increases as employee tenure increases but reaches equilibrium with medium and long-tenured employees. The study participants included an equal number of employees with fewer than 3 years of tenure and employees with more than 19 years of tenure. Lower levels of absenteeism occur with employees who have fewer than 3 years of tenure with the organization (Dello Russo et al., 2013). Conversely, Senel and Senel (2012) discovered that tenure does not impact the rate of absenteeism in a quantitative research study of blue-collar employees in an automobile manufacturer in Turkey. Garland, Hogan, Kelley, Kim, and Lambert (2013) indicated that an employee's tenure does not impact the rate of absenteeism of prison personnel in the United States, but factors such as advanced education and fewer or no children positively impact absenteeism. Cun (2012) discovered that tenure with an organization has no significant effect on organizational citizenship behavior and job satisfaction, but public services motivation is higher in employees with fewer than three years of tenure (Cun, 2012). Cun also suggested that level of education had no significant effect on public services motivation, organizational citizenship behavior, and job satisfaction. The variation of the researchers' findings indicated that employee tenure can have an effect on employee absenteeism, but may differ across organizational types, industries, and countries that the organization resides.

Another internal factor was deviant behavior. Ahmad and Omar (2013) defined deviant behavior as a voluntary violation of the organizational norms that negatively

affect the organization. Ahmad and Omar (2013) separated deviant behavior into two categories: organizational and interpersonal. Theft, tardiness, and absenteeism are considered acts of organizational deviance, and bullying, aggression, harassment are considered interpersonal deviance (Ahmad & Omar, 2013). Organizational and interpersonal deviant behaviors can lead to low performance that negatively affects productivity (Ahmad & Omar, 2013; Prater & Smith, 2011; Senel & Senel, 2012). Additionally, interpersonal deviant behavior can lead to organizational deviant behavior. For example, bullying in the workplace can result in employee absence. The Productivity Commission (2010) reported that workplace bullying contributes to workplace stress that increases absenteeism and inefficiency, costing the Australian economy \$14.8 billion per year. In a quantitative study of female employees of a Danish elder-care services company, Clausen, Høgh, and Borg (2012) posited that workplace bullying leads to stress and long-term absence, which hinders productivity and increases organizational costs. Addressing deviant employee behavior is crucial to reducing these negative impacts to the organization.

Determining the correct way to address deviant behavior begins by identifying what contributed to the deviant behavior. Avery, Volpone, McKay, King, and Wilson (2012) used data collected from 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce and the 2007 Gallup telephone survey of working people in the US to ascertain that supervisor and subordinate demographic dissimilarity contribute to deviant employee behaviors such as tardiness and absenteeism. Avery et al. (2012) came to this conclusion because employees with demographically similar supervisors have a lower rate of tardiness and

absenteeism. Demographic dissimilarity is difficult to address because, by law, organizations cannot consider demographic similarity during the recruitment and hire process.

Alternatively, Gosselin et al. (2013) provided data to support that demographic similarity or dissimilarity does not affect the rate of absenteeism. However, Gosselin et al. conducted research in Canada so this may be an indication that demographic similarity or dissimilarity is not a consistent contributor to deviant behavior such as absenteeism. Howard and Cordes' (2010) quantitative research across several organizations in various industries included the demographic similarity variable as the previous studies, but Howard and Cordes studied additional variables including emotional exhaustion and distributive and procedural justice. Emotions affect the occurrence of deviant behaviors, and perceived unfavorable justice judgments negatively affect employee emotions, which can lead to emotional exhaustion (Howard & Cordes, 2010). Howard and Cordes (2010) suggested that supervisors should ensure that current employees are engaged regardless of demographic or other types of similarities because disengaged employees may exhibit deviant behaviors including absenteeism, turnover, work alienation, and alcohol use because of emotional exhaustion.

Managers may not have the ability to address all causes of deviant behaviors including employee perceptions, employee health, and organizational commitment. Ejere (2010) conducted research in the teaching profession in Nigeria where the teaching profession is not perceived as meaningful, and discovered that an employees' perception of the meaningfulness of their work affects the rate of absenteeism. As the level of work

meaningfulness decreases, the rate of absenteeism increases or as the level of the work meaningfulness increases, the rate of absenteeism decreases (Ejere, 2010). The meaningfulness of work in the teaching profession is an example of a factor that managers can attempt to address at an individual level, but may be difficult to manage because it is a cultural perception. Another possible cause of deviant behavior is mental illness; it is common for employees to conceal mental illness (Dewa, Loong, Bonato, & Hees, 2014). Concealing mental illness affects managers' ability to determine that this is causing absenteeism and underperformance (Dewa et al., 2014).

Absenteeism has several negative effects on the organization regardless of the factors that contribute to employee absenteeism. The negative effects include reduction of manpower and resource effectiveness (Eswaramurthi & Mohanram, 2013), decrease in productivity (Bukchin & Cohen, 2013), and financial burdens (Senel & Senel, 2012). A reduction of manpower as a result of work absence disrupts the work process, decreases productivity, and increases the workload for present employees (Ogunsanya & Olorunfemi, 2012). An increase in workload for present employees leads to an increase in the level of stress because present employees have to work harder to compensate for short staffing (Gaudine & Thorne, 2012). Replacement personnel help to minimize the loss of productivity and cost of the absence (Siukola et al., 2013). Consequently, the absent employee may have a longer absence because the work is not accumulating during their absence. The replacement personnel prevent the accumulation of work during the employees' absence (Siukola et al., 2013). When HR does not implement a practice of a

replacement personnel, the absent employees have more frequent short absences and less long term absences to prevent the accumulation of their work (Siukola et al., 2013).

The absent employees are unable to contribute to organizational objectives (Ejere, 2010), impede productivity (Bukchin & Cohen, 2013), and may contribute to staff turnover and healthcare costs (Colling, 2012). The negative impact that absenteeism has on the work process, productivity, workload, loss of skill base, and healthcare costs instigates financial burdens that result in a negative impact to organizational profitability. According to Senel and Senel (2012), organizational costs incurred as a result of absenteeism are 57% of the total value of goods and services in the three factories of a Turkish company. The impact to organizational profitability may vary in other organizations and industries. Therefore, strategies to reduce the negative impacts to organizational profitability may also vary.

Absenteeism Models and Intervention Framework

Various models have been developed to guide organizational leadership in identifying elements for consideration in developing and implementing strategies to reduce absenteeism. The models include the Nicholson (1977) attendance motivation model, Steers and Rhodes (1978) model, and Brooke and Price (1989) model of absenteeism. Steensma (2011) proposed the integration of the expected model of absenteeism, the stress model, and the organizational model. Civility, respect, engagement in the workplace (CREW) intervention framework outlines an immediate absenteeism reduction strategy for implementation.

Nicholson (1977) proposed an absence and attendance motivation model for analyzing and predicting employee absence. Nicholson described the cause of absence as a two-stage process where proximal and immediate events influence a person in Stage 1 and events are filtered according to a person's disposition and needs in Stage 2. The motivational state determines how susceptible the employee is to the causes of absence (Nicholson, 1977). In addition, the employee's personal need system in relation to work and non-work environments affects absence and attendance motivation (Nicholson, 1977). Nicholson defined four absence influences including personality traits, orientation to work, work involvement, and employment relationships. The amount of exposure to absence inducing events is mediated by the employee's level of attachment but does not account for unpredictable events such as abnormal weather conditions or unexpected crises at work or home (Nicholson, 1977).

Steers and Rhodes's (1978) model of employee attendance builds on Nicholson's model. Two primary factors influence attendance and the factors are attendance motivation and ability to attend work (Steers & Rhodes, 1978). Steers and Rhodes indicated that there are antecedents to attendance motivation, including personal characteristics, employee values and job expectations, ability to attend, job situation, job satisfaction, and pressure to attend. Steers and Rhodes explained that absenteeism could affect the employee and supervisor relationship resulting in leadership style changes. Widespread absenteeism can lead to the implementation of incentives and reward systems because the model is a process model, so attendance, absenteeism, and antecedents are cyclical.

The Brooke and Price (1989) model is an extension of the Steers and Rhodes (1978) model. The Brooke and Price model includes routinization, centralization, pay, distributive justice, work involvement, role ambiguity, conflict and overload, kinship responsibility, job satisfaction, organizational permissiveness, job involvement, organizational commitment, health status, and alcohol involvement as possible causes of absenteeism. Routinization and work involvement are determinants of job satisfaction only, while centralization and role ambiguity are determinants of job satisfaction and absenteeism (Brooke & Price, 1989). Pay, organizational permissiveness, kinship responsibility, and alcohol involvement are determinants of absenteeism only (Brooke & Price, 1989).

Steensma (2011) provided an integrated model that expands upon the previous models by adding possible strategies for absenteeism reduction. Steensma combined the expected utility model of absenteeism, the stress model, and the organization model to create an integrated model for maximum effectiveness in explaining the cause and reducing the incidence of absenteeism. The expected utility model of absenteeism or decision model assumes that the workers have the freedom to choose to call in sick and that the employee will only be absent if the rewards outweigh the costs (Steensma, 2011). Steensma indicated that the foci of the stress model are the work stressors and the employees' ability to cope. The rewarding properties of working in an organization are the focus of the organizational model (Steensma, 2011). According to Steensma, rewarding properties include rich job content, autonomy, and fair pay, and might lead to

job satisfaction, motivation, and overall well-being. The integration of the three models can provide a framework for absenteeism-reducing strategies.

Workplace incivility that contributes to absenteeism may necessitate an immediate intervention framework rather than using a model as a guide for absenteeism reduction. Leiter, Laschinger, Day, and Oore (2011) defined incivility as rude or uncivil social exchanges between employees. A CREW intervention is a framework that aims to encourage civility and social relationships among employees. Leiter et al. (2011) outlined the CREW process of 6 steps that must occur in order to ensure effectiveness of the intervention: (a) preparation period, (b) initial survey, (c) initial gathering of employees and CREW facilitators, (d) 6 months of weekly CREW meetings, (e) mid-point gathering of employees and CREW facilitators, (f) final gathering of employees and CREW facilitators at the end of 6 months. After 3 months, CREW had a positive effect on unit civility, burnout, job attitudes, management trust, and absenteeism (Leiter et al., 2011). The positive civility behaviors that result from CREW contribute to an increase in employee social behavior and motivation (Leiter et al., 2011).

Strategies to Reduce Absenteeism

Developing a strategy to manage or decrease absenteeism can reduce the negative impact that absenteeism has on an organization. A proactive hiring approach to encourage organizational commitment is an example of an absenteeism reduction strategy. A proactive hiring approach that supports organizational commitment can positively impact profitability through a reduction of costs from absenteeism and replacement training (Garland et al., 2013). Jonsson and Rancano (2013) discovered that

certain personality traits relate to tardiness, absenteeism, and turnover. Furthermore, a person that is a good fit with the organization has certain personality traits (Jonsson & Rancano, 2013). Jonsson and Rancano (2013) posited that a utilizing a proactive hiring approach will ensure that employees have specific personality traits that are an appropriate fit with the position and organization, and that organizational fit can lead to good attendance. The personality traits that correlated with a good attendance record included extraversion, dutifulness, and efficaciousness (Jonsson & Rancano, 2013).

Garland et al. (2013) found that employees that share similar values as the organization have a higher level of commitment to the organization and lower level of absenteeism. A proactive hiring approach is not the last step in ensuring organizational commitment and employee-organizational fit; ensuring organizational commitment and person-organization fit must continue throughout the duration of the employees' tenure. Connor (2014) suggested that career plateau and organizational climate influence person-organization fit and absenteeism. A career plateau occurs when an employee can complete all organizational tasks and cannot advance in the organization (Connor, 2014). Reaching a career plateau can lead to personality changes in employee behavior and results in a negative employee attitude, lower productivity, and absenteeism (Connor, 2014). Job rotation, cross training, mentoring, career counseling, incentives for early retirement are examples of organizational strategies that managers can use to reduce the likelihood that a career plateau will not occur; thus, eliminating the possibility a negative employee attitude, lower productivity, and absenteeism (Connor, 2014).

Another absenteeism management or reduction strategy is to invest in employee well-being initiatives. Investing in employee well-being initiatives has positive effects including managing absence, employee performance, and eliminating unnecessary organizational costs such as absenteeism. Gosselin et al. (2013) indicated that ensuring employee well-being can result in positive effects on absenteeism rates. Elimination of absenteeism may not be possible, but organizations report a decrease in absenteeism and the costs associated with absenteeism when leadership staff supports health and wellness initiatives that aim to reduce workplace bullying, stress, and tobacco use (Devonish, 2014; Gillan et al., 2013; Olive & Cangemi, 2015), to encourage healthy dietary changes, and to improve physical fitness for employees (Arena et al., 2013). Establishing measurable health metrics including health-related program costs, health-related program participation, biometric screenings, utilization of medical care and preventative care, lost time from work, lost productivity, and employee engagement for reporting workplace health will enable organizations to encourage employee wellness; thus, reducing absenteeism and increasing productivity (Parry & Sherman, 2012; Tromp, 2015).

Unnecessary organizational costs as a result of absenteeism will increase further if organizations do not invest in employee well-being initiatives (Dumay & Marini, 2012). Gillan et al. (2013) suggested that organizations that invest in employee wellness initiatives that include providing healthier food options at the worksite, providing more time for meals, providing time for stress breaks, and providing physical activity or stress management sessions reduce employee absenteeism. Employee wellness initiatives also contribute to employees making healthy lifestyle changes outside of work; thus,

effectively reducing employee absenteeism (Arena et al., 2013). Encouraging a work-life balance can positively impact employee wellness because it allows employees to meet work demands and fulfill family obligations (Hofäcker & König, 2013). When an employee is unable to effectively balance work demands and family obligations, they may use absence to reconcile the imbalance (Hofäcker & König, 2013). Therefore, supporting employee work-life balance reduces the necessity for reconciling work-life imbalances and reduces absenteeism (Mubanga & Nyanhete, 2013).

A work-life imbalance also contributes to employee stress levels (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2012). Flexible work hours, parental leave, employer-provided childcare, and profit sharing positively impact stress that results from work-life imbalance (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2012). Mubanga and Nyanhete (2013) discovered that helping employees balance work and family life by providing a child care center at work, allowing flexible working arrangements, and educating employees on integrating work and family life to prevent the necessity of working overtime contributes to a reduction in absenteeism. Gabbidon and Higgins (2012) added that flexible work hours give employees more personal time to devote to spending time with their spouse and children. Eldridge and Nisar's (2011) research of the British Workplace Employee Relations Survey expanded on Gabbidon and Higgins' findings and posited that employees tend to be more stressed when work and family priorities conflict. Preventing an increase in stress levels for employees by assisting in work and family balance will reduce absenteeism (Mubanga & Nyanhete, 2013). Paton (2014) recommended offering options for purchasing additional

leave days in addition to the annual amount given as a strategy for managing employee absence.

Policy development and disciplinary programs are key aspects of strategies for managing absence, and there are several caveats for managers to consider during policy development. Reducing absenteeism without generating additional negative impact to the organization is a necessary element to consider during strategy development and administering disciplinary programs. Policies that have a significant influence on reducing absenteeism include fairly enforcing organizational absenteeism policies (Sharma & Magotra, 2013), changing facilities and administrative structures to support employee health (Marzec et al., 2011), and administering absence policies that include sick pay (Collier, 2014). Prakash and Kannan (2012) suggested that organizations should implement various policies and offer incentives to reduce absenteeism. Return to work interviews, sickness reporting, attendance initiatives, induction program for families, disciplinary action, and motivation programs are some of the possible policies and initiatives (Prakash & Kannan, 2012). Sickness reporting is a policy that requires employees to share why they cannot attend work and when they will return (Prakash & Kannan, 2012). The induction program is an example of a policy that includes incentives. The induction program involves informing an employee's family of the losses the employee's absence incurs and involves the family in encouraging the employee to attend work by providing incentives such as home appliances or valuables (Prakash & Kannan, 2012). Employees consider several things when deciding to be absent from work or to attend work despite illness including absence policies (Collier, 2014), and disciplinary

action (Prakash & Kannan, 2012). Collins and Cartwright (2012) found that strict absence policies are an ineffective strategy because they may impede employee motivation, decrease job satisfaction, and contribute to absenteeism. A return to work policy is more effective than an absence policy in reducing absenteeism; but, the employee may be less productive upon their return to work (Collins & Cartwright, 2012).

Managing employee perceptions of human resources (HR) practices for organizational effectiveness relate positively to organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and intent to remain with the organization (Kehoe & Wright, 2013). Improving HR practices to positively affect organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and intent to remain with the organization is an absenteeism reduction strategy that HR may develop and implement without generating additional negative organizational impact (Kehoe & Wright, 2013). Garland et al. (2013) defined organizational commitment as the attachment that an employee has to the organization itself rather than specific aspects including the job, work group, or profession. Organizational commitment consists of affective commitment and continuance commitment (Garland et al., 2013). Affective commitment is the emotional attachment an employee has to the organization, and continuance commitment is an attachment that occurs over time as a result of organizational investment in employees through salary, skill, and social relationships (Garland et al., 2013). Garland et al. (2013) discovered that focusing on affective commitment by strengthening the psychological relationship with employees has a significant impact on reducing absenteeism and turnover. Continuance commitment did not have a significant impact on reducing

absenteeism until the amount of missing work impacts the employee's position in the organization (Garland et al., 2013). In addition to improving employees' affective commitment, consistently implementing HR practices including communication with employees, employee development opportunities, increasing the participation in the decision-making process, and promotion within the organization are a few ways that organizations can encourage a strong organizational climate and positive employee outcomes (Kehoe & Wright, 2013; Sharma & Magotra, 2013). Positive employee outcomes include job engagement, organization engagement, job satisfaction, intention to quit reduction, increase in organizational citizenship behaviors, and reduction of absenteeism (Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Kehoe & Wright, 2013). Employees that are satisfied with the organizational climate contribute to increases in positive organizational outcomes including job performance and organizational commitment (Fu & Deshpande, 2014), and reductions in negative organizational outcomes such as turnover and absenteeism (Randhawa & Kaur, 2014).

Organizational strategies for the reduction of absenteeism may vary in relation to the size of the organization. Small businesses may experience higher levels of organizational success by using employee incentive programs as a strategy to reduce absenteeism (Nandanwar, Surnis, & Nandanwar, 2010). In a small business, employees perceive that incentive programs are motivational, contribute to job satisfaction, and reduce absenteeism (Nandanwar et al., 2010). Work health promotion programs are an incentive that small and medium-sized organizations may consider. Work health promotion programs include physical activity, nutrition, stress management, and drug

cessation assistance (Waldmann & Sowada, 2012). Waldmann and Sowada (2012) established that work health promotion programs reduce the rate of absenteeism and that costs to the organization are lower for the program than the cost of absenteeism. Employees who participate in worksite nutrition programs have lower levels of absenteeism, higher levels of job satisfaction, and increased productivity (Gillan et al., 2013). There is a direct correlation between decreasing absenteeism and an increase in productivity and profitability of organizations with worksite nutrition programs (Gillan et al., 2013). Incentive based strategies may not be successful in a large organization because Addae, Johns, and Boies' (2013) research did not support that incentives significantly decrease absenteeism. Addae et al. researched large multinational organizations to determine the factors for that positively contribute absenteeism reduction and that account for cultural differences. Locus of control is the most significant factor and Addae et al. (2013) defined locus of control as the amount that individuals attribute their behavior to themselves or external factors (Addae et al., 2013). Therefore, the size of the organization is not the sole element for determining an appropriate absenteeism reduction strategy; there are additional elements for consideration.

Attempting to motivate employees using financial motivators or incentives, non-financial motivators, or a combination of the two motivators, can be an effective absenteeism reduction strategy (Achim et al., 2013). Non-financial motivators include recognition, promotional opportunities, employee development opportunities (Adzei & Atinga, 2012). Adzei and Atinga (2012) conducted research on financial and non-financial motivators in hospitals in four regions in Ghana. Adzei and Atinga (2012)

posited that financial motivators alone were not adequate, and that a combination of financial motivators and non-financial motivators in the form high salaries, salary supplements, benefits, and recognition or promotional opportunities were the highest motivators in the population studied. Providing employee development opportunities to employees can impact an employees' ability to earn a promotion, which results in a higher salary; thus, positively impacting employee behavior (Adzei & Atinga, 2012). Conversely, Aubert and Hollandts (2015) discovered that financial motivators alone are sufficient for positively impacting employee behavior in a French-listed organization. Short-term forms of financial motivators such as profit sharing reduce absenteeism by 7% (Aubert & Hollandts, 2015). Long-term financial motivators including employee ownership through purchasing of stock at a discounted price has a more significant impact on employee behavior because it reduces absenteeism by 14%. Ziebarth's (2013) analysis of the German Socio Economic Panel Study substantiated financial motivators including unequal wage structures and salary increases are viable strategies to deter or reduce absenteeism. Ziebarth (2013) conducted research in Germany; therefore, this may not be a viable strategy in the U.S. Prater and Smith's (2011) research in the US corroborated the research conducted in Germany, and they introduced another potential cost to the organization. Rather than calling in sick, employees are going to work sick, which negatively affects productivity and organizational profitability (Prater & Smith, 2011). Sauer and Valet (2013) proposed that wage increases can reduce job satisfaction and absenteeism if the employee perceives the wage increase as an overpayment. Employees that perceive wage overpayment may feel obligated to work harder and have

fewer absent days (Sauer & Valet, 2013). Presenteeism may also increase because employees with a higher salary believe that no one else can do their job (Prater & Smith, 2011).

The behavior of leaders and leadership style can impact specific the success of an absenteeism reduction strategy. Employees of positive and supportive leaders are more satisfied and less likely to be absent, experience burnout, and leave the organization (Laschinger, Wong, Cummings, & Grau, 2014). Gharibvand, Mazumder, Mohiuddin, and Su (2013) discovered that support, guidance, and encouragement to share ideas and collaborate are examples of how supervisors can improve morale and increase job satisfaction. Furthermore, employees experience higher levels of job satisfaction when they feel that their supervisor cares about them, helps them to succeed, and values them as professionals (Gharibvand et al., 2013). Dasgupta, Suar, and Singh (2014) posited employees of dominant and unsupportive leaders are less satisfied and more likely to be absent, experience burnout, and leave the organization.

Effective leadership styles vary; but, an effective leadership style that improves job satisfaction will contribute to a reduction of employee absenteeism (Schreuder et al., 2013). In a study of expatriate managers, Ngah et al. (2013) found that expatriate managers with a transformational leadership style that take action by solving problems or dealing with issues, produce a higher level of job satisfaction in comparison with local managers (Ngah et al., 2013). Transformational leadership increases employee job satisfaction but has no effect on legitimate absenteeism; however transformational leadership decreases illegitimate absenteeism (Frooman, Mendelson, & Murphy, 2012).

Productivity increases and job satisfaction improves in employees of transformational leaders (Brown & May, 2012). Transformational leaders can positively impact job satisfaction by encouraging group goal achievement to contribute to employee's sense of accomplishment and perception that their skills are being used effectively (Yi-Feng & Islam, 2012). Transformational and transactional leadership styles affect job satisfaction, but transformational leadership has a more significant effect than transactional leadership on job satisfaction (Ahmad, Adi, Noor, Rahman & Yushuang, 2013). A participative leadership style is another leadership style that managers can utilize to increase job satisfaction as an absenteeism reduction strategy. A participative leadership style positively affects the level of employees' job satisfaction (Gharibvand et al., 2013). Additionally, supervisors who invest in their employees by adjusting their leadership style to enhance employee capabilities and encourage employee involvement in organizational processes contribute to job satisfaction (Birasnav, Rangnekar, & Dalpati, 2011). Schreuder et al. (2013) corroborated the findings of Birasnav, Rangnekar, and Dalpati, and posited that a situational leadership style is the most effective because it allows a manager to decide whether to use a task-oriented approach or relationship-oriented approach to leadership depending on the situation and employees. Ensuring that employees are experiencing job satisfaction will result in fewer occurrences of absenteeism; therefore, ensuring employee job satisfaction is in the best interest of the organization's success (Bagul, 2014).

Transition

In Section 1, I introduced the topic of research for this study in the problem statement, which includes the general and specific business problem. The general business problem was the cost of absenteeism, and the specific business problem is that software engineering managers lack an absenteeism reduction strategy. The purpose of the study was to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of managerial perceptions of effective strategies for reducing absenteeism. The nature of the study was a qualitative descriptive case study, which I chose after evaluating all possible methods and designs. The central research question and interview questions align with the business problems described in the problem statement. The TPB served as the conceptual framework for this study. Section 1 also contained definitions of terms as they relate to this study, and an explanation of assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. The significance of the study and the literature review with research studies conducted within the last 5 years concluded Section 1.

Section 2 includes a restatement of the purpose of the study, research method, and research design. I explain what my role as the researcher entails. I describe the study participants, population, and sampling method. Additionally, I discuss how I plan to conduct the research in an ethical manner, data collection techniques, analysis of the data, and the reliability and validity of this study. The study concludes with Section 3, which includes presenting the findings of data collection, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action and further research, and reflections.

Section 2: The Project

In this study, my focus was to understand what strategies positively impact the problem of absenteeism of software engineering employees at an international custom software engineering company. In Section 2, I described the methodology and process to explore and interpret the business problem of ineffective strategies that increase absenteeism in an international custom software engineering company. This section also contains an explanation of the purpose of the study, which is to understand what strategies are effective in relation to employee absenteeism. I described my role as a researcher, the participants, population, and sample. I also explained the techniques I planned to employ for data collection, organization, and analysis. This section concludes with a description of data instruments, and the reliability and validity of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive, single case study was to explore the strategies that managers use for reducing absenteeism. The target population consisted of managers of an international custom software engineering company in the United States and India. The data from this study might assist managers in understanding what strategies are effective to reduce absenteeism. Enhancing managers' understanding of effective strategies that help to reduce absenteeism might positively impact society and social change by reducing unemployment, job stress, and mental health problems.

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative study, the role of the researcher is to be the primary data collection instrument (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). As the primary data collection instrument for

this qualitative exploratory case study, I collected data via semistructured interviews with managers and collected data from company documents including e-mail memos, newsletters, and employee performance reviews. The researcher's role during an interview is to create a conversational environment so that the participants can share their honest perceptions and experiences of the phenomena under study (Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012). A researcher's role is to ask questions based on a full understanding of the subject matter review of existing literature to develop in-depth questions for semistructured interviews, conduct and record the interviews (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012), analyze the data, and to interpret the findings (Pezalla et al., 2012). Preparing an interview protocol can reduce inconsistencies and omission of key elements in data collection (Morton, Rivers, Charters, & Spinks, 2013), and conducting a pilot study might reveal inconsistencies and omission of key elements prior to data collection with the study participants (Rao et al., 2012). My role in this study was to follow the interview protocol (Appendix E), interview participants using in-depth questions, record the interview, analyze the data, and interpret the findings.

Prior knowledge of a topic or participants can introduce bias in a research study (Cooper, Fleischer, & Cotton, 2012). Yin (2013) posited that researchers may study and understand the topic issues before conducting research. It is an ethical obligation of researchers to manage any bias they have with the topic under study (Chapman & Schwartz, 2012). Throughout my education and my professional experience, I learned about and witnessed employees engaging in absenteeism behaviors without intervention

from managers or leadership staff. My professional experiences were central to my choice to research absenteeism for this study.

I followed the three ethical principles that members of National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research outlined in the Belmont Report protocol. The three ethical principles include respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (The Belmont Report, 1979). I adhered to the ethical principles by (a) ensuring that participants enter my study voluntarily after receiving sufficient information, (b) inflicting no harm to the participants, and (c) treating each participant equally.

Disclosing known biases can help to mitigate bias in research (Chapman & Schwartz, 2012). Hansen (2013) noted that researchers can introduce experimenter bias into their studies by expecting certain responses during data collection and by indicating these expectations involuntarily through facial expressions and body movements in face-to-face interviews. For that reason, I attempted to mitigate experimenter bias during face-to-face interviews by limiting facial expressions and body movements that communicate my expectations. I used bracketing as a strategy to mitigate bias. Bracketing is the effort that a researcher makes to disregard previous knowledge, beliefs, and experiences that relate to the topic of study (Chan et al., 2013).

Using an interview protocol might enhance a researcher's ability to establish rapport, obtain consent, and ensure rich data collection. An interview protocol contains procedural prompts to follow during the interviews. Procedural prompts include a brief

introduction prior to the interview, a reminder to collect informed consent, and reminders of the information the researcher wants to collect (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Participants

Confirming that a participant meets the eligibility requirements contributes to the quality of the research (Pollock, 2012). Killawi et al. (2014) recommended creating inclusion and exclusion criteria for recruiting and selecting participants. Disclosing details of the study contributes to transparency and preventing bias (Renert, Russell-Mayhew, & Arthur, 2013), and because of the disclosure of research details to gain approval, the approving partner of the custom software engineering company is not an eligible participant. Many employees were eligible for participation because they met the eligibility criteria. In order to participate in the study, the participants were at least 18 years of age or older, held a management position at the custom software engineering company for at least one year, and used strategies to reduce absenteeism. Participants were at least 18 years of age or older to ensure that they could sign a consent form. The eligibility requirement of at least 1 year of employment might contribute to the amount of experience the participant has with absenteeism reduction strategies in the technology industry. Declining to participate in this study, being less than 18 years of age, holding a position outside of management, and lacking experience with absenteeism reduction strategies were the exclusion criteria for this study.

Requesting approval from organizational leadership staff to conduct research may be difficult because the interview response data may contain confidential information (Wahyuni, 2012). For that reason, I requested a face-to-face meeting to discuss the

research, the measures taken to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the custom software engineering company and individual employees, and the company partner's role as gatekeeper in the recruitment process. The role of a gatekeeper is to provide the researcher access to the participants (Namageyo-Funa et al., 2014). Researchers may also use flyers posted in common areas, but flyers may not catch the attention of participants and may be covered or removed to accommodate other flyers or announcements (Namageyo-Funa et al., 2014). Another strategy is a telephone outreach when researchers are unable to recruit an adequate number of participants through written outreaches (Brown et al., 2015). My recruitment strategy began with contacting the company partner to provide potential participants' names and e-mail addresses. I sent invitation e-mails to 21 potential participants, and recruited three participants from that initial contact. After 2 weeks, I sent a follow-up e-mail to the remaining 18 potential participants. Over the next week, eight more participants were recruited. Recruitment via e-mail was sufficient; therefore, additional recruitment via telephone and posting a flyer on a company notice board or sending the flyer via electronic announcement was not necessary as a means for further recruitment.

According to van Wijk (2014) and Namageyo-Funa et al. (2014), establishing and maintaining a relationship with authorities at the research site can be difficult, yet vital to successful recruitment. Prior to recruiting participants, the company's partner signed a letter of cooperation (Appendix A). Gaining access to participants with the assistance of a gatekeeper is more effective than posting a recruitment flyer in a public area (Whiting & Sines, 2012). With a company partner's approval, proposal approval, and IRB approval

to conduct research, I contacted the approving company partner for a list of employees' e-mail addresses in order to invite potential participants via e-mail from the custom software engineering company to participate in this study. The National Institute of Health requires that all participants be 18 years of age or older, and I confirmed with the company's partner that all employees met this requirement. The initial e-mail included the participant criteria to ensure that only managers that met the three requirements for participation will reply with their intent to participate. A letter of consent should contain a clear statement regarding the purpose of this study, benefits of participation for the researcher and participant, and the time necessary for participation (Mabery, Gibbs-Scharf, & Bara, 2013). The initial e-mail also included a letter of consent (Appendix B) with information and details of the study.

Establishing a trusting relationship with participants can be a challenge for qualitative researchers (Whiting & Sines, 2012). The strategies that enable researchers to form a trusting relationship with participants include (a) communication (Varga-Dobai, 2012), (b) research transparency and emphasizing participants' confidentiality (Renert et al., 2013), and (c) incentives to participate (Killawi et al., 2014). Renert et al. (2013) suggested that providing details to the participants about recording the interview (Killawi et al., 2014), data storage (Paull, Boudville, & Sitlington 2013), and the privacy of the interview setting (Chan et al., 2013) will ensure research transparency. I communicated and ensured transparency with the participants by providing details of how I would conduct the research study in order to establish and maintain a trusting relationship with participants.

Research Method and Design

The business problem and research question were important aspects of the foundation for this study. The business problem and research question were factors in determining the research method and design of this study. Selecting the appropriate research method and design for this study enabled me to collect rich data for analysis.

Research Method

The purpose of the research contributed to determining the appropriate research method. Researchers using a qualitative method can gain an understanding of people and their behavior in multiple environments including social, cultural, and economical (Hazzan & Nutov, 2014). A qualitative method enables researchers to gather data from participants including the participants' feelings, attitudes, and learning processes from a variety of participants' perspectives (Hazzan & Nutove, 2014). Researchers using qualitative research methods can gain an understanding from several perspectives and contexts in order to provide information on the evolution of work practices and interactions (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013). Qualitative methods are most appropriate for researchers when the objective of the research is to interpret participants' explanations (Paull et al., 2013) by asking open-ended questions (Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014). Several data collection methods are appropriate for qualitative research including focus group sessions (Fusch & Ness, 2015), observations, interviews (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013), and archival records (Baškarada, 2014).

Quantitative methods are appropriate when the purpose of the research is to test hypotheses for cause-and-effect relationships, study larger groups of participants, and

collect numerical data (Szyjka, 2012; Terrell, 2012). The analysis of numbers in quantitative research serves an explanatory purpose as it allows researchers to make a group generalization (Spillman, 2014). A researcher investigates the object of study without direct interaction during the quantitative research process (Kipo, 2013). Kipo (2013) added that quantitative researchers can investigate a phenomenon without influencing the participant because they do not develop a relationship with the participants as is the case with qualitative research (Varga-Dobai, 2012). Some examples of quantitative methods include multiple linear regression, nonlinear regression, probability analysis, Monte Carlo methods, Markov chains, and Lyapunov exponent (Gilstrap, 2013). Each of these methods requires variables and numerical data in order to make calculations and accept or reject hypotheses (Gilstrap, 2013).

A mixed method research method is a combination of the qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative data collection, quantitative data analysis, qualitative data collection, and qualitative data analysis make up the mixed method research method (Terrell, 2012). Both the quantitative and the qualitative phases are priorities; however, the researcher's research strategy determines the sequence of the phases (Terrell, 2012). Depending on the research strategy chosen, the researcher might collect and analyze data after completing one phase or after completing both phases of quantitative and qualitative research (Terrell, 2012). The researcher can also choose to collect both quantitative and qualitative data before analyzing any collected data (Kipo, 2013; Terrell, 2012). Spillman (2014) posited that a mixed method is appropriate when the goal of the research is to include multiple perspectives to answer the research question. Quantitative and mixed

methods designs were not appropriate for the purpose of this study. The intent of this study was to understand participants' accounts of absenteeism reduction strategies in an international custom software engineering company by asking open-ended questions during interviews with the participants and through a review of archival data; therefore, a qualitative research method was appropriate for that purpose.

Research Design

Research designs within the qualitative method include narrative research, ethnography, case studies, and phenomenology (Wahyuni, 2012). Narrative research is appropriate when the goal of the study is to use participants' detailed stories to understand how people view their lives (Allbon, 2012). I did not choose a narrative research design because the focus of this study was a business problem and developing theory is not applicable to a DBA study. Ethnography is a derivative of anthropology, and the purpose of ethnographical research is to understand a culture sharing group (Case et al., 2014). Researchers can use multiple sources of data for ethnographies and case studies, but the validity of ethnographic studies is contingent upon interviews and field notes (Walker, 2012); therefore, I did not choose an ethnographical design. A researcher utilizing a phenomenological design (Wahyuni, 2012), ethnographical design, or case study design (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013) can collect data about a phenomenon for analysis by conducting interviews using open-ended questions (Cooper et al., 2012).

Understanding the meaning behind a phenomenon through participants' experiences is the purpose of phenomenology (Converse, 2012). Yin (2013) posited that a case study design is appropriate to answer *how* and *why* questions, to investigate a

phenomenon where the investigator has little control over events and to study a phenomenon in real-life context. A case study is qualitative research of realities that encompass the interaction between self and environment and collection of data from at least two sources such as observation, interviews, and documents (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013). Kipo (2013) added that case study researchers examine participants' views and assumptions of a phenomenon to understand the magnitude of the phenomenon on the group or case. A qualitative case study enables researchers to use multiple sources of evidence to discover a variety of points of interest (Yin, 2013). A qualitative case study design enabled me use data from interviews and archival data to discover points of interest in participants' experiences and company archival documents during data analysis.

Glad, Jergeby, Gustafsson, and Sonnander (2012) defined data saturation as the point in data collection where no new information is expressed by the participants. Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) described data saturation in qualitative studies as utilizing interviews for data collection and continually recruiting participants for interviews until the data set is complete. Researchers can achieve data saturation with at least six participants (Walker, 2012). I continued to interview additional participants until the data set is complete and interview data begins to replicate or become redundant.

Population and Sampling

The custom software engineering company has approximately 450 employees. Employees were eligible to participate if they met three criteria including that they were 18 years of age or older, they had at least one year of employment with the custom

software engineering company, and they had used absenteeism reducing strategies. I collected data and information for this study through interviews of managers and company documents including employee absence data from work for the past 5 years (2011-2015), e-mail memos, newsletters, employee handbook, and employee performance reviews from an international custom software engineering company.

A qualitative research method enables researchers to make sampling decisions on a substantive level (Marshall et al., 2013). A purposeful sampling method is a method that researchers can use to recruit participants who will provide informative data (Sutton, Hocking, & Smythe, 2012), and purposeful sampling increases research credibility (Suri, 2011). I chose a purposeful sampling method to enable me to collect rich data. An additional aspect of a purposeful sampling method is that purposeful sampling allows for variation in participants (Suri, 2011).

Purposeful sampling for case studies occurs at a case level and data source level (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). Yin (2014) posited that a small sample size is adequate in qualitative studies. Marshall et al. (2013) recommended a sample size of at least 15 participants, and noted that there is a variation in acceptable single case study sample sizes. For a single case study, roughly 12 participants is adequate (Gentles et al., 2015). My sample size consisted of 10-15 eligible managers of an international custom software engineering company, which contributed to collecting rich data that enabled me to understand effective absenteeism reduction strategies and to reach data saturation.

Defining data saturation in universal terms can be difficult because the parameters for reaching data saturation vary from one study to the next (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Glad et al. (2012) defined data saturation in qualitative research studies as recruiting and interviewing participants until participants present no new information or the participants' information becomes redundant. Determining an adequate sample size prior to data collection and data analysis can be difficult because the researcher cannot predict when the data will replicate or become redundant (Marshall et al, 2013). Although my goal prior to data collection and data analysis was 10-15 participants, I continued to recruit participants and conduct interviews until no new information emerged in the collected data.

Namageyo-Funa et al. (2015) posited that the interview location may impact participant recruitment. Researchers should offer a variety of options in regards to the interview setting. Securing private rooms in several local businesses with varying working hours contributes to the variety of options the researcher is able to provide (Namageyo-Funa et al., 2015). Jacob and Furgerson (2012) recommended choosing a quiet and semi-private interview setting. A possible interview setting is a library for their convenience, but the researcher must ensure the setting is quiet enough for a quality recording (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Other possible interview settings include a private office in the custom software engineering company or a coffee shop that has private rooms available for reservation. Chan et al. (2013) stated that participants feel more comfortable if the interview occurs in a venue where the interviewer can close the door to prevent interruptions. Giving participants options in regards to the interview setting

allows the participant to choose the setting that is comfortable to them. Chan et al. (2013) posited that if a participant is comfortable during the interview, the participant may be more likely to give honest answers. Standa (2013) suggested that an interview setting must be a quiet room where a recording device will clearly record sounds for playback. In addition to listening to the participants' responses and taking notes, I utilized a digital voice recorder, and the various options for the interview setting will be conducive to a clear recording.

Ethical Research

There were several ethical issues to consider in conducting research regarding motivational strategies, employee job satisfaction, and absenteeism. The issues included obtaining permission from one of the partners of the organization, ethical recruitment of participants, confidentiality of participants and the organization, and proper storage and eventual deletion of data. Ethical recruitment practices include informing the company partners of the organization and potential participants of the objectives of the study and nature of the research (Killawi et al., 2014). Information regarding the objectives of the study, nature of the research, and the confidentiality of the organization and participants will be given to a company partner during a meeting to finalize details for approval to conduct the research. Upon approval to conduct research within the organization, I asked the custom software engineering company partner to sign a letter of cooperation (Appendix A). An explanation of my research parameters and invitation to participate was sent to potential participants via e-mail including instructions on providing initial consent, and request that participants give initial consent via e-mail indicating their intent

to participate. An additional request for consent by signature on the consent form occurred prior to a face-to-face and telephone interview. For telephone interviewees, I requested that a scanned copy of the consent form is sent to me via e-mail. Flynn, Kramer, Dombeck, and Weinfurt (2013) discovered that consent forms may contain legal terms that the potential participants may not understand; for this reason, I provided a definition of unfamiliar legal terms and explain them in person prior to the interview if necessary.

Ethical recruitment practices also include providing information regarding confidentiality of participants and participant coding (Killawi et al., 2014). Pollock (2012) stated that the use of codes rather than participants' names in the results and conclusions of this completed study to prevent adverse consequences of research participation. To prevent adverse consequences to the participants, the participants were assigned a random numeric code preceded by a numerical identifier. For example, the first managerial employee of the custom software engineering company to indicate that they are willing to participate was P1, and the second managerial employee that indicates willingness to participate was assigned code P2. Master et al. (2013) posited that the majority of participants prefer the right to withdraw their consent at any time, and participants of my study were able to withdraw from the study at any time by e-mail or phone prior to the interview, or verbally at any time during the interview. I ensured that the participants were aware of this prior to obtaining their signature on the consent form.

Paull et al. (2013) indicated that a suitable location for secure data storage is in a file cabinet for printed data or password protected hard drive for electronic data. I stored

printed data in a locked file cabinet that no other person has a key for, and stored electronic data on a password protected computer. Paull et al. (2013) also denoted that proper procedure for elimination of data is to shred printed data and permanently delete electronic data. After 5 years, I will shred printed data and permanently delete electronic data.

Sandberg and Copes (2013) suggested that Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval can be difficult because the research involves human subjects, and there are privacy concerns with audio recordings. Ensuring transparency in this research study proposal is vital to obtaining approval from the Walden University IRB. Approval was obtained for this study, and the IRB approval number for this study is 05-02-16-0077267. To ensure transparency, participants received full disclosure of the steps that I took to conduct the research. To assure confidentiality to the participants, it is important for researchers to assign codes in place of participant names (Pollock, 2012). Researchers use assigned codes rather than the participants' names in the results or conclusions sections of completed research studies to ensure confidentiality (Renert et al., 2013). I assigned a random numeric code preceded by a "P" for "participant." For example, the third managerial participant will be P3, and the ninth managerial participant was P9.

Data Collection Instruments

Data collection for qualitative case studies can include observations, interviews, or documents (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy 2013). Types of research interviews include structured, unstructured, and semistructured (Baškarada, 2014). Semistructured interviews are intensive and allow the researcher to refocus the interview questions to

incite more information (Baškarada, 2014). Researchers can gather facts and opinions using in-depth interviews (Yin, 2013). As the primary data collection instrument, I used semistructured, in-depth interviews to collect data for this study. I also reviewed company documents including employee absence data from work for the past 5 years (2011-2015), e-mail memos, newsletters, and employee handbook, employee performance reviews as another method of data collection.

Researchers utilizing interviews to collect data can achieve an understanding of a topic through the perspective of individuals with relevant experience (Sutton et al., 2012). Researchers use interviews as a data collection tool to ensure the focus remains on the topic (Baškarada, 2014) and as a way to connect to participants in order to elicit the best information possible (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Conversely, collecting data using interviews can introduce bias through poorly phrased questions and the interviewee can feel influenced to give information that they believe the interviewer wants to hear (Pezalla et al., 2012). Properly phrased interview questions should be open-ended and focus on the topic of study (Chan et al., 2013). I created the interview instrument for this study. The instrument consisted of 12 open-ended questions for managers (Appendix D). The open-ended questions align with this study's research question. Upon completion of the interviews, I reviewed company records from the international software engineering company. Company or archival records consist of government provided public use files, service records, organizational records, maps, charts, and data from surveys (Yin, 2013). The company records available for review in this study consisted of e-mail memos, newsletters, and employee performance reviews.

Researchers use member checking to prevent misunderstandings in data interpretation and ensure credibility of the research (Killawi et al., 2014). Member checking is the process of giving participants the opportunity to clarify and correct erroneous interpretations after the interviews (Reilly, 2013). Harper and Cole (2012) added that member checking immediately following the interview consists of summarizing the information to the participant to confirm accuracy of the summary. Another form of member checking is sharing analyzed data and findings with the participants near the end of the research study (Harper & Cole, 2012). I employed the process of member checking immediately following the completion of each interview to ensure that my interpretation of the participants' responses is accurate prior to analyzing the data. Ensuring the correct interpretation of participants' responses enhances the reliability and validity of this research study by eliminating misinterpretations of the interview data.

Baškarada (2014) recommended creating an interview protocol in the planning stages of research. Following the interview protocol is important to ensure the researchers follows each step and asks all questions; however, the interviewer may vary the order of the questions to provide a conversational interview flow (Snyder, 2012). Interview protocols can reduce inconsistencies during data collection (Morton et al., 2013). Utilizing an interview protocol (Appendix E) enabled me to reduce inconsistencies in the data collection process with each participant by ensuring that each step in the interview process is consistent.

Data Collection Technique

An interview approach that portrays a researcher's focus and curiosity can positively impact the quality and quantity of data collected (Chan et al., 2013). Researchers conducting semistructured interviews for data collection develop open-ended questions that are flexible and allow the researcher to refocus the question or prompt for additional information during the interview (Baškarada, 2014). Collected data for this study came from semistructured, face-to-face and telephone interviews using open-ended questions, and company documents including employee absence data from work for the past 5 years (2011-2015), e-mail memos, newsletters, employee handbook, and employee performance reviews. I ensured that my approach to collecting interview data portrays curiosity and focus. Choosing a date, a time, and interview setting occurred prior to conducting interviews. Obtaining a clear audio recording during the interview requires a quiet room (Standa, 2013). For this purpose, suitable interview settings included participants' home, a private office in the custom software engineering company, or a private room in a coffee shop or restaurant. There were several restaurants and coffee shops with private rooms available to reserve within five miles of the custom software engineering company. Researchers that use a script or interview protocol will remember to explain the consent form and to obtain a signed consent form from each participant prior to collecting interview data (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Following the interview protocol (Appendix E) ensured that I consistently asked each participant to sign a consent form and gave each participant a hard copy of the consent form prior to beginning the interview.

Interviews were the primary source of data for this study. As a data collection method, the interview has advantages and disadvantages. The first advantage is that interviewers can ask open-ended and focused questions during the interview (Chan et al., 2013). Another advantage is that interviewers can observe participant reactions and listen carefully to participants' responses in order to facilitate the participants' willingness to express themselves freely (Chan et al., 2013). These advantages contribute to the possibility that the participant could introduce themes that the interviewer did not previously consider (Chan et al., 2013). A disadvantage of using interviews as a data collection method is that despite a perceived understanding, misinterpretation of questions and answers may occur (Baškarada, 2014). I encouraged participants to ask for clarification of the interview questions and allow sufficient time for participants' to respond to interview questions and follow-up questions.

The other source of data for this study was company documents including employee absence data from work for the past 5 years (2011-2015), e-mail memos, newsletters, employee handbook, and employee performance reviews. Using company records is appropriate as a secondary source of data for case studies, but researchers must be attentive in their interpretation of the documents because each company creates their own documents for their purpose and audience (Yin, 2013). Company data in the form e-mail memos, newsletters, and employee performance reviews may supplement the data collected from participants during the interview. The e-mail memos, newsletters, and employee performance reviews may contain quantitative and qualitative evidence to supplement interview data. Reviewing company documents including employee absence

data from work for the past 5 years (2011-2015), e-mail memos, newsletters, employee handbook, and employee performance reviews had both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of documents and archival records included the ability to repeatedly review the data, the accuracy of the data, the broad coverage of the data, and the concise and quantitative nature of the data (Yin, 2013). Retrievability, biased selectivity, reporting bias, and accessibility are potential disadvantages for company document and archival record data (Yin, 2013).

Pilot studies are a tool that researchers can use to test the clarity of interview questions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Pilot studies can reduce inconsistencies during data collection (Rao et al., 2012). Another purpose of a pilot study is to ensure that the research method, data collection, and data analysis methods align (Reiter, Stewart, & Bruce, 2011). Because I underwent a rigorous review process and have an interview protocol (Appendix E) to follow, I did not conduct a pilot study after IRB approval.

The purpose of member checking is to ensure the accuracy of the interviewer's interpretations of the participant's responses (Harper & Cole, 2012). Participants are able to correct errors and confirm or refute certain portions of the data during the process of member checking (Reilly, 2013). Researchers can complete the process of member checking via e-mail (Snyder, 2012). I used the process of member checking via e-mail within a week of the interview in an attempt to alleviate or reduce the possibility that the participants experience difficulties with recognition.

Data Organization Technique

Yin (2013) recommended a data organization technique that includes storing data in separate electronic databases. Databases may contain case study notes, case study documents, tabular materials, and narratives (Yin, 2013). Swim (2012) recommended that researchers store interview recordings, interview transcriptions, reflective journal notes, and consent forms in electronic folders. Margarian (2014) posited that researchers should name the folders according to the last name or alias of the participant, the data type, data, and results of data analysis. I categorized the data and create electronic folders based on (a) data type – interview or document, (b) document file name, (c) collection date, (d) reflective journals, (e) research logs, (f) data analysis, and (g) results. Interview data folders were labeled with the participant’s code to maintain confidentiality throughout the research process.

There are several ways to store raw data to ensure confidentiality of research participants (Paull et al., 2013). Wahyuni (2012) suggested that any external hard drives or USB drives with confidential research information and paper copies of each signed consent form should be locked in a file cabinet. Proper storage not only ensures confidentiality of participants; proper storage protects against a loss of data (Swim, 2012). In order to comply with Walden DBA program requirements and to ensure confidentiality described, I will erase the electronic data and shred the paper documents 5 years after completion of the study.

Data Analysis

Paull et al. (2013) referred to sensemaking as the process of examining participants' responses and determining the context of that information. Sensemaking in qualitative research is also the process of listing and grouping textual data (Paull et al., 2013). First, I listed and grouped textual data through the process of sensemaking. The next step I followed in the analysis process was reduction and elimination, which Carter and Baghurst (2014) described as the process of reviewing the interview transcripts and removing unclear or irrelevant responses. Upon completion of the interviews and member checking, I reviewed my notes to eliminate unclear or irrelevant responses. NVivo is compatible with data types including interviews, field notes, and documents (Castleberry, 2014). After I removed unclear and irrelevant responses and code the participants, I uploaded the data from interviews, notes, and archival data into NVivo 11. Wahyuni (2012) defined cleaning the data as the process of assigning a code based on participant information. I applied codes consisting of the letter "P" for "participant" and a number. The number is based on when the participant is interviewed. For example, the code assigned to the fifth managerial employee that is interviewed is P5. Coding ensures that the data analysis output will not contain participants' names, which ensures their confidentiality (Cooper et al., 2012). After completion of the interviews, I used member checking to give participants the opportunity to clarify and correct erroneous interpretations of their responses that I made in my notes. Bekhet and Zauszniewski (2012) defined methodological triangulation as an approach to collect and understand data using two methods. A reduction in data misinterpretation and enhancement of

research quality and trustworthiness may occur when researchers use methodological triangulation (Cho & Lee, 2014). Additionally, Fusch and Ness (2015) indicated that exploring multiple levels and perspectives of a phenomenon is an advantage of triangulation. I used methodological triangulation for this study as an approach to collect data from interviews and company documents including employee absence data from work for the past 5 years (2011-2015), e-mail memos, newsletters, employee handbook, and employee performance reviews.

Several data analysis software programs exist including NVivo, Atlas.ti, MAXQDA, Transana, and Excel. I chose NVivo 11 because of its similarity to the Microsoft Office interface, the ability to upload Microsoft Word documents (Castleberry, 2014), and the discount pricing for students. I inputted the data from interviews, notes, and archival data into NVivo 11. NVivo is a software program that is designed to review and group data, eliminate irrelevant sections of data, and extract themes from the data (Goble, Austin, Larsen, Kreitzer, & Brintnell, 2012). Davidson (2012) noted that NVivo software does not contain visual analysis components that are as strong as Atlas.ti or Transana, but my study does contain any visual data.

A characteristic of qualitative research is the ability to code data (Castleberry, 2014). Coding qualitative data consists of identifying key themes in the data (Castleberry, 2014). Researchers can identify key themes by searching the data for word frequency (Castleberry, 2014; Yin, 2013). Chan et al. (2013) stated that the justification for research lies in the ability of the researcher to correlate themes that emerge from data with theory and existing literature. Yin (2013) also stated that relating the themes to the study

framework is one data analysis strategy. Therefore, I related key themes discovered in data analysis to the conceptual framework and to published literature. I expected that the themes that will surface will be similar to the constructs of absenteeism, managerial behavior, employee behavior, managerial and employee beliefs, and managerial and employee expectations, that will reflect the framework of the theory.

Reliability and Validity

Researchers provide evidence throughout the proposal by substantiating research choices and procedures in choosing the research design, the data collection, and data analysis method (Yin, 2013). The proposal for this study contains a comprehensive explanation of the research design, data collection process, and data analysis process. The following is a description of how I ensured the reliability and validity of this case study.

Reliability

Researchers can establish reliability of research by ensuring dependability. One vital step for establishing dependability is to ensure that the research method and design align with the research question (Munn et al., 2014). Providing distinguishable and clearly documented details on how the research method and design align with the research question is also crucial to research dependability (Munn et al., 2014). Data stability over time and in different settings also demonstrates the dependability of research (Elo et al., 2014). The reliability of a research study also consists of the ability to reproduce a reasonably similar research result by using the same data collection instrument or procedure (Lakshmi & Mohideen, 2013). In the proposal writing process, I provided details of the alignment of the research question to the research design,

research, method, and interview instrument. Zohrabi (2013) posited that the researcher's choice of participants, definition of constructs, and choice of data collection and data analysis methods also contribute to the dependability of a research study. Gearity (2011) stated that ensuring dependability occurs in the preparation stage of research and requires the researcher to be clear in the research question, literature review, and framework. Additionally, it is important that the researchers provide details on the potential site, data collection, and data analysis prior to conducting the study (Gearity, 2011). To ensure dependability, I provided a detailed discussion concerning the research site, data collection methods, and data analysis process. Member checking also ensures research dependability. Member checking is the process of giving participants the opportunity to clarify and correct erroneous interpretations of interview data (Reilly, 2013). I shared my interpretations of the interview data with the participants to allow them the opportunity to correct misinterpretations.

Validity

The criteria for judging research quality include (a) credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Reilly, 2013). Houghton et al. (2013) defined credibility as conducting research that yields plausible findings. I demonstrated the credibility of this study by using methodological triangulation. Bekhet and Zauszniewski (2012) defined methodological triangulation as using more than one data collection method to study a phenomenon. Triangulated data for this study included information from interviews and company documents. Methodological triangulation promotes a reduction in data misinterpretation and enhancement of research quality (Cho & Lee, 2014).

Elo et al. (2014) described transferability as the ability to apply the findings of one research study to another setting. An important aspect of a researcher's role is to provide a thorough description of the research context to ensure transferability (Wahyuni, 2012). Providing a thorough description allows readers and future researchers to decide whether the findings of a study are transferable to another context (Yilmaz, 2013). Threats to transferability in qualitative research derive from the researcher's failure to provide a generous description of the research (Morse & McEvoy, 2014). High quality results, reporting of the analysis process, and clear descriptions of participants and research context contribute to readers and future researchers' ability to evaluate if the findings are applicable to another context (Elo et al., 2014). I provided a rich description of the participant, research context, analysis, and findings. Providing detailed information in my study enabled readers and future researchers to make an informed determination about the transferability of my research study.

Confirmability is the extent to which the findings accurately convey the participants' experiences rather than the researcher (Wahyuni, 2012) or the accuracy of the data (Houghton et al., 2013). Killawi et al. (2014) posited that member checking or allowing the participants to review transcripts and results ensures confirmability. Giving participants the interview transcriptions will only allow them to confirm their words rather than the researcher's interpretation of the participants' statements (Houghton et al., 2013). To correct misinterpretations that can occur during the interview, I utilized member checking by allowing the participants to review my notes from their interview. Zohrabi (2013) indicated that collecting data from one source can result in biased

research findings. For that reason, I collected data from multiple sources including interviews and company documents to reduce bias and enhance the confirmability of this study. An audit trail and reflexivity are two strategies for ensuring research confirmability (Houghton et al., 2013). The audit trail is a documented account or log of the researcher's decisions and activities throughout the study (Houghton et al., 2013). The audit trail for this study consisted of the proposal as an outline and justification for data collection and analysis, the notes taken during the data collection and analysis processes, and the NVivo 11 analysis record.

Marshall et al. (2013) defined data saturation as collecting data from participants until the data replicates. Achievement of data saturation occurs when no new information emerges in the data (Walker, 2012) and when no further coding is feasible (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To achieve data saturation, I interviewed managers until no new information emerged and no further coding is feasible.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 contained a description of the methodology, ethical data collection, and data analysis for this qualitative descriptive case study. I restated and elaborated on the purpose of the study, and justified the research method and design. I also explained the role of the researcher. Additionally, a description of the participants, population, and sampling method was provided. I also discussed the reliability and validity of this study. In Section 3, I will present the findings of the data collection. I will discuss how the research findings apply to professional practice, the implications for social change, recommendations for action and further research, and reflections.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Section 3 begins with an introduction of the study where I describe the purpose of the study, state the research question, and provide brief summary of the findings. This section also contains a detailed presentation of the study findings, application of the findings to professional practice, and the positive social change impact of the study findings. This section concludes with recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, and my reflections on the research.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore the strategies that software engineering managers use for reducing absenteeism. The central research question in this qualitative descriptive case study was: What strategies do software engineering managers use to reduce employee absenteeism? I conducted semistructured, in-depth interviews with 11 managers (Table 1) who have spent at least 1 year in a managerial position at an international custom software engineering company. Other sources of data used for the data analysis were company memos, absence - from work data for the past 5 years (2011-2015), employee performance reviews. Prior to the interviews, participants reviewed consent forms, and provided their consent, and indicated their willingness to participate by responding to my invitation e-mail. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, and all interviews took place via telephone as requested by the participant. I used 10 interview questions to gain an understanding of effective absenteeism reduction strategies that international custom software engineering managers use. Analysis of the data collected from participants' responses to the interview

questions and data from the company documents revealed that a positive work environment and effective absenteeism reduction strategies are contributing to reduced absenteeism in the company. The four themes that emerged from the data analysis were as follows:

- Communication is key to reducing absenteeism
- Flexible work hours and working from home reduces absence
- Comradery and employee support positively impact absenteeism
- There is a lack of a clear, formal processes for addressing employee absenteeism

These themes affirmed the theory of planned behavior (TPB). From the findings, I identified strategies that software engineering managers can use to reduce employee absenteeism.

Table 1

Summary of Participants Contacted

Replies to Invitation Letter	Number	Total Percentage
Agreed to Interview	11	52.4%
No Response	10	47.6%
Total Contacted	21	100%

Presentation of the Findings

The central research question in this qualitative descriptive case study was: What strategies do software engineering managers use to reduce employee absenteeism? I conducted semistructured, in-depth interviews to understand what strategies are effective for reducing absenteeism at an international custom software engineering company. To ensure that I established a trusting relationship with each participant, I followed the

interview protocol (Appendix E), which included greeting and introduction, a description of the interview and member checking process, and assurance of the confidentiality and privacy of the participants' identity and information. Using semistructured interviews enabled the participants to share their experiences of incidences of absenteeism with their employees, absenteeism impacts to their company, and the strategies they use to prevent or reduce absenteeism. Participants revealed their perspectives on the factors that contribute to absenteeism and absenteeism reduction strategies in their department and location for the company. I recorded and transcribed the interviews, and I made notes during the interview. I employed the process of member checking immediately following the completion of each interview to confirm that my interpretation of the participants' responses was accurate. The process of member checking enabled me to eliminate and correct misinterpretations in the interview data, which enhanced the reliability and validity of this research study.

The director of human resources acted as the gatekeeper by providing company documents at my request. In addition to the interviews, I reviewed the company documents provided including company memos, employee absence data from work for the past 5 years (2011-2015), employee performance reviews, employee handbook, and the employee handbook. Collecting data from multiple sources allowed me to gain a full understanding of the strategies that managers used at the international custom software engineering company to reduce absenteeism and to improve the quality and timeliness of the final software package. To explore multiple perspectives during the data collection and analysis process, I used methodological triangulation in this study. Researchers that

use methodological triangulation reduce data misinterpretation and enhance the quality of the research (Cho & Lee, 2014) through the collection of data from two sources (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). Wynn and Williams (2012) emphasized the importance of methodological triangulation in a case study as it enables researchers to take advantage of the strengths of each method of data collection and offset the weaknesses of each method of data collection.

The data analysis phase consisted of several steps. As previously stated in the proposal, I listed and grouped the textual data, eliminated unclear interview responses, and uploaded the interview transcripts, field notes, and company documents into NVivo 11. In order to maintain participant confidentiality, I applied the participants' assigned code to the corresponding uploaded data. Four themes emerged from the triangulation and coding process including (a) managers communicating with employees to keep employees informed is an important aspect of absence reduction strategies, (b) flexible work hours and working from home reduces absence, (c) comradery and employee support positively impact absenteeism, and (d) lack of clear, formal processes for addressing employee absenteeism

Theme 1: Communication is Key to Reducing Absenteeism

Communication is key to reducing absenteeism was the first theme that emerged from exploring the participants' responses. Four participants articulated that communication with employees is important because it keeps employees informed about the current project and the manager's expectations in regards to project tasks (P1, P2, P3, and P7). Some participants noted that enabling employees to communicate openly with

managers was also important because employees were able to share if there are barriers to completing their project tasks or if there is a lack of challenge or interest in their assigned project tasks (P4, P5, P8, and P11). Participant 6 mentioned that employees become dissatisfied with their jobs when their job roles become boring, and some develop the mindset of just calling in sick because they do not want to be at work. Participant 11 also mentioned that employees tend to call in sick when not invested in current projects. Overall, participants P1 through P11 emphasized the importance of open communication with their employees as a strategy to reduce absenteeism. These findings were similar to those of Baket et al. (2013). The researchers found that managers that encouraged dialogue with their employees experienced decreased levels of absenteeism.

When asked about the strategies used to encourage employees to attend work, several participants mentioned that leadership used scrum meetings as a way to encourage two-way communication with employees, which was a great source of motivation to come to work (P2, P3, P7, and P10). Four participants noted that scrum meetings, or stand up meetings were important for communicating daily expectations so there were no misunderstandings of what needed to be done for the day (P2, P3, P7, and P10). Participant 3 stated, “Scrum meetings are where employees get to share if they are encountering road blocks, lagging behind, and if they need other employees to pitch in to finish up projects.” Participant 10 also used the phrase “road blocks” when discussing scrum meetings, and added that these discussions help to address the challenges and lessen the chances that employees would lose motivation to come to work to complete their tasks, instead of calling out. Participant 2 communicated that all managers use

scrum meetings, but managers can determine what intervals the meetings occur.

Participant 10 stated that when the entire team attends a scrum meeting, the decision making process is faster because each team member can give their immediate input.

Participant 9 mentioned that scrum meetings could also help employees understand why overtime is necessary at certain phases of a project as well as getting an understanding of how extra work hours are evenly distributed throughout the team. Participant 7 indicated:

The company's leadership started holding scrum meetings in an attempt to reduce, prevent, and discourage absenteeism as well as to enable employees to take ownership in their part of projects. Leadership understood the importance of maintaining productivity while keeping employees engaged and motivated.

These findings are similar to those of Samios (2013), Grantham and Garcia (2015), and Persson and Schlichter (2015) findings. Samios (2013) found that managers could use scrum meetings to give energy to team members; not just hold a scrum meeting for status update. Furthermore, Grantham and Garcia (2015) found that working with a team can be challenging, and individual status updates and the discussion of roadblocks can contribute to keeping the team focused. In addition, Persson and Schlichter (2015) found that scrum meetings were a strategic way to reduce task uncertainty, clearly define processes, and equally divide responsibilities amongst team members.

Several participants mentioned that one-on-one meetings were the most effective method of communication with employees (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, and P11). Participant 1 stated that one-on-one meetings that occur on a regular basis are particularly valuable because employees may disclose any personal or professional challenges before resorting

to absenteeism as a corrective measure. Participant 4 stated, “One-on-one meetings enable managers to be proactive, rather than reactive.” Three participants indicated that the purpose of one-on-one meetings was to set expectations (P2, P5, and P11). Some participants articulated that another purpose of one-on-one meetings was to communicate with employees after an absenteeism problem already existed; the one-on-one meeting was the first step in the process towards terminating employment (P3, P5, and P6). These findings are similar to those of Pulakos (2015). Pulakos found that one-on-one meetings enhance the employee and manager relationship by establishing trust, opening lines of communication, and contributing to improving employee performance.

Some of the participants mentioned that once hired they were given an employee handbook, which contained a clear and strict absence policy (P2, P5, P6, P8, and P9). After reviewing the “On the Job – Attendance and Punctuality” section of the employee handbook, I gained a better understanding of the company’s absenteeism policy. The following is an excerpt from the company’s absenteeism policy:

Attendance and punctuality are important factors for your success within our corporation. We work as a team and this require that each person be in the right place at the right time. If you are going to be late for work or absent, notify your manager as soon as possible. If you are absent for three days without notification, it is assumed that you have voluntarily abandoned your position with the corporation, and you will be removed from the payroll.

I comprehended the importance of employees’ attendance and the connection to the international custom software engineering company’s day-to-day operations success

and at that very moment, I understood why the company's leadership took the initiative to implement strategies to reduce employee absenteeism. Clear communication about absenteeism at the company begins the day a person accepts employment, and is required to sign a document stating that he or she has read the policies in the employee handbook, and agrees to adhere to all policies written. Collins and Cartwright (2012) noted that a strict policy is not effective because it can impede employee motivation, decrease job satisfaction, and contribute to absenteeism. On the contrary, several managers stated that the absence policy is effective, and the managers did not describe adverse effects on employee motivation and job satisfaction (P2, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, and P11). Seven participants mentioned that having a clear policy and communicating expectations of employees are vital to preventing absenteeism as well as preventing bias when disciplinary action is necessary for absenteeism (P2, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, and P11). Participant 8 indicated that, "It's always good to have something in writing that clearly tells the employees what the expectations are and what the consequences are of absenteeism." Some participants stated that company leaders have fairly enforced the absence policy in cases where the employee fails to attend work without notifying their manager (P2, P5, and P6). These findings are similar to those of Sharma and Magotra (2013). The authors found that in order for absenteeism policies to be effective in reducing absences, management must enforce the policies fairly.

Eight participants mentioned that most of the employee absenteeism issues are not that simple (P1, P2, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, and P11). The absenteeism problems that

participants described varied in length of absence and the employees notified their managers. In the words of Participant 4:

The two biggest ones [strategies] are one-on-one communication and directly explaining the importance of their participation in the day-to-day activities of the job. And then just also having those conversations too to explain where in the big picture their piece fits so that they understand what the consequence is when something doesn't get done or they're not coming into work.

Seven participants noted that when an absenteeism problem occurs, the first step is to initiate communication with the employee (P2, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, and P11). Theme 1 relates to Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior (TPB). Ajzen (2011) indicated that employees' performance and behavior are dependent on their work environment; specifically, the factors in the work environment that facilitate or impede productivity. In the context of this study, absenteeism impedes productivity. Communication and feedback are factors that contribute to reducing negative employee behaviors like absenteeism (Ajzen, 2011).

Theme 2: Flexible Work Hours and Working From Home Reduces Absence

Flexible work hours and allowing employees to work from home reduces absence was the second theme that emerged from analyzing the participants' responses. Nine participants articulated that giving employees the flexibility to adjust their work hours, as well as working from home helped in reducing absenteeism (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, and P11). Participant 1 indicated that when they encouraged employees to take a break whenever necessary, leave early and rest, or work from home, there was a decrease

in employee absenteeism. Additionally, allowing employees to leave early or work from home was helpful in terms of reducing illness absenteeism because it prevented the illness from spreading to other employees (P1). The majority of participants advocated the importance of giving employees the option of working from home on a regular basis (P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, and P11). Seven participants noted that employees can choose to work from home almost at any time due to conflict with co-workers, taking care of a disabled or sick child, and if they are solely responsible for taking care of their elderly parents with approval from their managers (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, and P9).

Participant 3 mentioned that allowing flexibility of working hours as well as allowing employees to work from home increases employee productivity, which helps to reduce absenteeism. These findings are similar to Maruyama and Tietze (2012), who researched the impact of work flexibility in organizations. The researchers found that telework or working from home contributed to a reduction of employee stress and reduction in employee absenteeism (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012).

When asked about the positive outcomes of flexibility as an absenteeism reduction strategy, three participants indicated that a healthy work-life balance was a positive outcome of flexibility with working hours and working from home (P2, P5, and P6). Participant 6 stated that, “We’ve got to be flexible when those situations arise...we recognize that everybody can’t fit the norm sometimes in a working environment.”

Participant 6 went one to articulate their understanding of the need for accommodations for family situations that occur. In the words of Participant 2:

There are times where like 3 weeks are busy, but then once those 3 weeks are over, it's going to be smooth sailing and super laid back. I think they [employees] are happy with that. At least they come back to work and they are able to have a work-life balance and take care of what they need to when they are on the slower weeks.

Participant 5 mentioned that flexibility is crucial to prevent employee burnout as well as enabling the employee to achieve balance between his or her professional and personal life. Two participants indicated that working from home and having flexible working hours enabled employees of the international custom software engineering company to achieve a work-life balance, which helped to eliminate the need to correct imbalances through absences (P2 and P6). These findings were similar to those of Clark, Karau, and Michalisin (2012), Hofäcker and König (2013), Maruyama and Tietze (2012), Mubanga and Nyanhete (2013), and Ritchie (2012). These findings were similar to those of Clark et al. (2012), and Hofäcker and König (2013). Clark et al. (2012) discovered that telework and flexible working hours can have several positive effects on employees and organizations including decreasing absences and contributing to the employee's ability to achieve a work-life balance, especially for employees with children. Furthermore, Hofäcker and König (2013) found that providing a work environment that supports employee work-life balance reduces the compulsion for reconciling work-life imbalances through absenteeism.

Some of the participants articulated that the majority of employees know that flexible work hours and working from home are options that happen to be more

preferable than absenteeism; therefore, they choose flexibility over being absent (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, and P11). Participant 2 mentioned that employees respect the flexibility offered and understand that being absent during a busy peak in a project would cause a negative impact on the team morale and the outcome of the project. Participant 5 stated that employees need to know their input is important in improving productivity and teamwork, so employees should make the effort to avoid being absent whenever possible. Theme 2 also relates to Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior. Ajzen (2011) suggested that the more positive individuals' beliefs are about behavior, the more positive their attitude will be. In the context of this study, flexibility contributes to employees' positive beliefs about attending work because they do not always have to work scheduled hours and have the opportunity to work from home.

Theme 3: Comradery and Employee Support Positively Impact Absenteeism

The third theme that emerged from participants' responses was that relationships with colleagues and employee support for career development positively impacted the reduction of absenteeism. Participant 2 indicated that having friends on their team or at work reduces absenteeism because employees are more likely to come to work if they like their teammates or coworkers in the office. Catered lunches are one way to create a positive work environment and to facilitate the organic formation of relationships between employees (P9). Team event days are another way to foster a positive work environment and encourage comradery (P9 and P11). Participant 11 indicated that team events outside of the office are important because leaving the office can help to forget the work aspect and enable employees to "establish more of a comradery between the

employees so that they are not just coworkers, but they become friends.” Participants used words such as “friendship, fun, and comradery” when describing the goal of the team events that occurred in the office or away from the office (P1, P2, P9, and P11).

One of the largest events was the celebration of their 10th year in business in Las Vegas. The company partners paid for all employees’ flights and hotels for a celebratory trip to Las Vegas. Employees were allowed to bring their spouse, but the employee had to pay for their spouse’s flight. When asked about their absenteeism reduction strategies, participants 1 and 2 articulated that financial motivators or incentives are not used; however, non-financial motivators are a facet of their absenteeism reduction strategy. Successful non-financial motivators include team building aspects such as recognition and team outings or team trips (P1, P2, P9, and P11). These findings are similar to Achim et al. (2013). The authors discovered that motivating employees using financial or non-financial motivators, or a combination of the two motivators, can be an effective absenteeism reduction strategy (Achim et al., 2013). Participants 2, 4, 5, and 10 mentioned that a career plateau or lack of person-job fit can contribute to absenteeism. Participants 2, 4, 5, and 10 explained:

The first step is to talk to the employee and determine if the absenteeism is a result of a lack of interest in their role in the company. Being observant of absenteeism and other deviant behaviors their employees might engage in is important for addressing the problem early on. Talking to the employee might uncover the employee’s career goals. Changing the employee’s role or

transferring to another team are examples of we help the employee take a step toward their career goal.

If someone is not in a role where they are not challenged, it may be a case of the employee being in a position that will not assist them in reaching their career goal (P10). A role that makes the employee feel stuck or like there is a lack of progress towards their career goal results in a lack of engagement and facilitate occurrences of absenteeism (P5 and P10). Participants 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9 explained that employees are cross trained in order to prevent a delay in progress on a project when an employee is absent. Cross training enables the managers to reassign tasks to other employees or allow employees to engage in job rotation (P4, P5, P7, P8, and P9). These results are consistent with Andrew and Sofian (2012), Connor (2014), Kehoe and Wright (2013), and Sharma and Magotra (2013). Communication with employees, employee development opportunities, and promotion within the organization can foster a strong organizational climate and positive employee outcomes including job engagement, organization engagement, job satisfaction, and reduction of absenteeism (Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Kehoe & Wright, 2013; Sharma & Magotra, 2013). There are several strategies that managers can use to reduce the likelihood that a career plateau will occur and reduce the possibility of the occurrence of absenteeism as a result of the career plateau including job rotation, cross training, mentoring, and career counseling (Connor, 2014). Connor (2014) noted that reaching a career plateau can lead to personality changes in employee behavior and results in a negative employee attitude, lower productivity, and absenteeism.

Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 11 described several ways that they support their employees including organizing team building activities, ensuring employee-job fit, allowing employees to change roles or to transfer to other teams, and encouraging employees to work towards career goals. Theme 3 also relates to Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior. There are three factors that impact an individual's intentions towards the behavior including attitude, beliefs, and the ease or difficulty in performing the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Team building positively impacts employees' attitudes, which influences their feelings towards engaging in absenteeism (P1, P2, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P11). Thus, engaging in absenteeism becomes more difficult because the employees are aware of how their absence will negatively affect their team (P1, P2, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P11). Previous researchers discovered that managers that support collaboration from their employees, and that value their employees as professionals have more satisfied employees and less absenteeism (Dasgupta et al., 2014; Gharibvand et al, 2013; Laschinger et al, 2014).

Theme 4: Lack of Clear, Formal Processes for Addressing Employee Absenteeism

The final theme to emerge from participants' response was that overall; there is a lack of a formal process for addressing employee absenteeism except the clear-cut termination after 3 days absent without notifying their supervisor. According to most of the participants, there is no specific absenteeism reduction strategy used by all managers in the company; but, their strategies are effective (P1 through P11). Participant 7 was the only participant to describe an absenteeism reduction strategy that the company partners require managers to follow. Participant 7 explained:

There is a three step process for addressing employee absenteeism, and the steps are to talk to the employee about the absenteeism and give warning of the next step, which is a formal write-up such as a performance improvement plan. Step three is to inform human resources and determine if termination is necessary. Steps two and three are only used if the absenteeism problem persists.

As previously stated, the employee handbook contains a clear absence policy that does not include a description of the three step process as P7 mentioned. Participant 5 mentioned a one-on-one as a precursor to beginning the “HR process” for absenteeism issues to determine if the employee has a genuine problem where accommodations could be made to stop the absenteeism or to determine if the next step is a performance improvement plan. In the event that their individual absenteeism reduction strategies are ineffective, participants described three types of communication used after absenteeism occurs including one-on-one discussions, performance improvement plans, and performance evaluations. One-on-one discussions consist of a face-to-face conversation with the employee about the absenteeism (P5, P11). Participant 11 mentioned that the objective of a one-on-one was to explain the expectations again, reiterate the importance of coming into work and being prepared, and to let the employee know that a performance improvement plan (PIP) will be put in place if the problem persists. “Often times the performance improvement plan involves working directly with the employee to find a solution together so that they don’t feel like you are just dictating to them what needs to be done” (P11). Another important aspect of the PIP is to create measureable milestones in order for the manager to help the employee work through road blocks and

monitor the employee's progress so they are able to remove the performance improvement plan or terminate the employee (P7 and P11). The participants' description of a PIP is consistent with research conducted by Pulakos et al. (2015) that indicated the importance of documentation of the areas where performance was below expectations and the timeline for when improvements were expected.

Only two participants mentioned performance reviews as a method of communication or method for communicating to employees on their performance. Performance reviews were a medium for talking to employees about career growth, career opportunities in the company, and areas for improvement (P10). Participant 2 contacted me via e-mail explaining that the performance review platform is underutilized. In fact, most managers do not complete performance reviews because the goals in the performance review platform do not align with the goals of the managers and employees. Unfortunately, there was lack of sufficient documentation to prove or disprove P2's claim because the company purchased an upgraded version of the software, and that upgrade is in process. I was informed that it was not possible to access the previously submitted performance evaluations until the upgrade was complete. The performance reviews I was given had only one of the metrics that some managers use in the performance review process. The metric related to increasing the revenue of collected for services from new or existing accounts. A metric that relates to revenue does not apply to all departments and employees. Participant 11 described the product life cycle during their interview. In the words of participant 11:

There are several steps in the product life cycle including production, development, testing, and training on-site with the customer. These are all steps that occur after the sales team “wins” the project with the customer. The sales team consists of the only employees that can increase the revenue collected for services because it is based on their bid to win the contract with the customer.

Based on the participants’ information and the lack of documentation, I cannot postulate whether good or bad performance evaluations are an outcome of absenteeism reduction strategies for this company.

Despite the lack of a company-wide absenteeism reduction strategy, employee absences have decreased over the last 5 years (Figure 1). From 2011-2015, the number of employees increased by 140%. Overall, the percentage of absences decreased each year, with the exception of 2013-2014 where there was less than a 2% increase. The largest increase in number of employees per year was from 2014 to 2015, and the lowest percentage increase for employee absences was also 2014 to 2015. Therefore, despite the lack of a company-wide absenteeism reduction strategy and significant company growth, the absenteeism reduction strategies that each individual manager utilized have been effective.

The Organization's Data on Employee Absenteeism

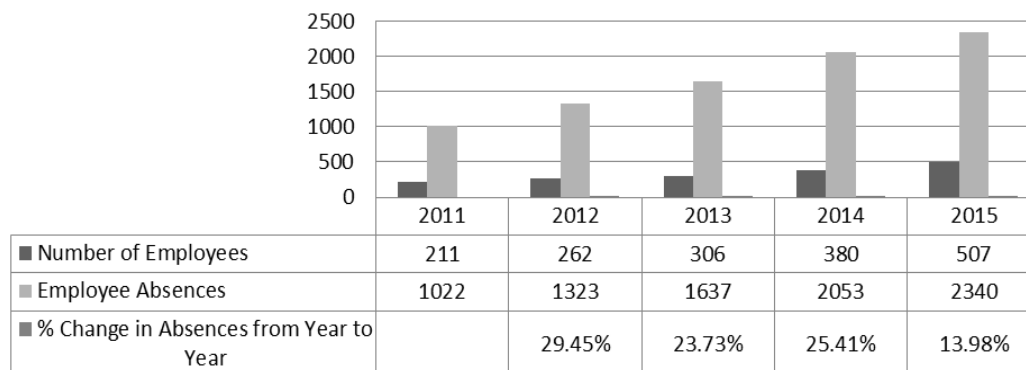


Figure 1. Employee absences in relation to number of employees.

Applications to Professional Practice

Kocakulah, Kelley, Mitchell, and Ruggieri (2016) stated that absenteeism is disruptive to organizational productivity and costly to the organization. Absenteeism is an increasing trend; therefore, an absenteeism reduction strategy is vital for organizations experiencing an absenteeism problem (Kocakulah et al., 2016). Employee engagement is a vital factor in facilitating positive organizational outcomes including the reduction of absenteeism and organizational success (Radda, Majidadi, & Akanno, 2015). Managers can ensure employee engagement in several ways including communicating effectively, providing clear expectations, allowing flexibility, promoting work/life balance, giving recognition, and encouraging supportive colleague relationships (Radda et al., 2015). Biswas and Kale (2012) also emphasized the importance of communication between managers and employees in absenteeism reduction strategies.

I conducted this qualitative case study to explore effective absenteeism reduction strategies that managers utilize at an international custom software engineering company.

The interviews and company documents provided information on effective absenteeism reduction strategies. Based on data collected, most participants affirmed that there were prior issues with employee absenteeism. Some participants indicated that employee absenteeism had occurred with less than two of their employees. Overall, the international custom software engineering company maintains a work environment that is supportive of the obligations that employees have outside of the office, and a work environment that nurtures the employees' abilities and interests. By maintaining this type of work environment, managers at the international custom software engineering company can effectively reduce absenteeism through communication, flexibility, team building, and employee support.

The findings in this study may provide managers, organizational leaders, and business professionals with information that may enable them to understand what the facets of an effective absenteeism strategy are in order to implement an effective absenteeism reduction strategy in their organization. Furthermore, the findings of this study may allow employers to recognize the benefits that absenteeism reduction can have in an organization including increased morale, motivation, engagement, and retention. Additionally, the findings from this study may provide pertinent information on how effective absenteeism reduction strategies provoke positive impacts on employees, which in turn generates positive impacts to the business in terms of productivity, product quality, client satisfaction, future projects because of good word of mouth, and improved bottom line because of the positive financial impact.

Implications for Social Change

Shoss and Penney (2012) posited that employee stress, unemployment, and absenteeism are influenced by the state of the economy. As the economy continues to tighten, employees may experience an increase in financial related stress (Kocakulah et al., 2016). The stress then leads to absenteeism, which negatively impacts productivity and profitability, and increases costs to the employers (Carmel et al., 2013; Kocakulah et al., 2016). An absenteeism reduction strategy that consists of elements that relieve employee stress may provide several benefits to employees, organizations, communities and society as a whole. Implications for social change through implementation of an absenteeism reduction strategy include decreased incidence of absenteeism, organizational profitability, reduction of the unemployment rate, employee stress, and mental health problems. Profitable businesses and a decrease in unemployed individuals positively impact the individual and communities. An absenteeism reduction strategy that encourages a work/life balance places value on the employee's family and obligations outside of work, which has a positive effect on the employee's stress level by reducing work/life conflict. As previously stated, jobs provide an opportunity for individuals for social interaction during and after work hours. Working with others in a satisfying work environment may transform into collaborating efforts to improve the community such as volunteering, fundraising, and participating on a committee. Individuals and teams positively investing in the future of their community can lead to positive social changes in society as a whole.

Recommendations for Action

The objective of my research was to explore effective absenteeism reduction strategies that software engineering managers at an international custom software engineering company utilize to reduce absenteeism. The findings provided evidence that the communication between managers and employees, flexibility in working hours and locations, team building, and employee support are associated with reduced occurrences of absenteeism. There was one area of improvement in the absence policy. The absence policy is clear in the event that there are three consecutive absences without notification, the employee is terminated. The participants revealed their own processes with addressing absenteeism, and some included notifying the human resources department; however, the policy does not outline the process for absenteeism that is sporadic or less than 3 consecutive days. Collier (2014) expressed the importance of an absence policy that discourages abuse and that discourages presenteeism. For example, employees should be given an adequate number of sick days; however, an absence policy that allows employees to accrue sick days without allowing the days to carry over to the next year may encourage absenteeism to use the accrued days. As the findings revealed, despite the lack of a more detailed absenteeism policy or company-wide policy, the managers at the international custom software engineering company have been successful at addressing and minimizing the occurrence of absenteeism. The findings also showed that flexibility in regards to working hours and working from home was a component to most of the participants. There can be communication or knowledge sharing challenges with working from home (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012). Despite the challenges that working from home

may have, the benefit of enabling employees to achieve a work-life balance reduces absenteeism (Paton, 2014). For these reasons, I recommend that organizational leaders and business professionals review their absenteeism policies and discuss with managerial employees to determine the effectiveness of the organization's absenteeism reduction strategy. In doing so, organizational leaders and business professionals may discover that an effective absenteeism reduction strategy is necessary, and that an effective absenteeism reduction strategy may result in additional benefits including employee engagement, increased productivity, and greater profitability.

Based on the above information, I recommend that organizational leaders and business professionals focus on communicating with employees at all levels to define absence policies and absenteeism reduction strategies. Monitoring the execution of the absenteeism reduction strategies is a vital step to the effectiveness of the absenteeism reduction strategy. Furthermore, I recommend that organizational leaders and business professionals create a work environment where communication is encouraged, employees can achieve a work/life balance, employees are supported in their career goals, and employees are recognized for their efforts and achievements.

As the researcher, I am dedicated to communicating the findings of this study to organizational leaders and business professionals as they relate to their organizational practices. Organizational leaders and business professionals have the responsibility to determine the need for an effective absenteeism reduction strategy in their organization. Therefore, organizational leaders and business professionals can examine the information in this study and decide if the information is applicable to their organization.

Additionally, using the information in this study to create an effective absenteeism reduction strategy for their organization may contribute to the reduction of absenteeism, creation of a supportive work environment, implementation of a flexible work schedule, and profitability as the international custom software engineering company has experienced.

My goal is to publish the findings of this study where organizational leaders and business professionals can access it. I will submit this study to the following professional journals: (a) human resource management journal, (b) journal of management and strategy, and (c) journal of organizational behavior management. In addition, I intend to submit this study for presentation at multiple conferences including the 2017 International Academic Business Conference and Annual Conference on Management and Social Sciences. The findings of this study indicate that an effective absenteeism reduction strategy not only reduces absenteeism; but an effective absenteeism reduction strategy can instigate several other organizational benefits.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study on effective absenteeism reduction strategies that custom software engineering managers utilize to reduce employee absenteeism at an international custom software engineering company is important to business practices. The results from this study, while noteworthy, come from a single international custom software engineering company. For this reason, I recommend that researchers conduct similar case studies at other software engineering companies. In doing so, researchers could contribute to a better understanding of effective absenteeism reduction strategies for implementation.

Some participants may have held back information for fear of repercussions with organizational leadership staff. Researchers that conduct similar case studies could attempt to establish a trusting relationship with participants prior to interviews using more than an invitation letter and e-mail communication.

Reflections

My choice to research absenteeism and strategies for reducing absenteeism emerged from my education and professional experiences. I witnessed employees in my current workplace engaging in absenteeism behaviors and become fascinated with creating strategies that could be utilized by organizational leaders to reduce absenteeism. I became interested to know what absenteeism reduction strategies were, in fact, effective. For this reason, my role as the researcher in this qualitative exploratory case study was to collect data without bias.

During the data collection and data analysis components of the DBA Doctoral Study process, I was motivated to write up the findings of my research so that the findings can be shared with organizational leaders and business professionals. My hope is that the findings of this study will help employees to have a positive work environment with supportive leadership so that they do not engage in absenteeism behaviors. The doctoral study experience enabled me to learn from my participants about their commitment, experience, and wisdom about managing employees in a positive way. Additionally, the study participants may have learned the importance of research and how sharing their experiences was significant to my study and the communities they serve.

Conclusion

The results from this case study analysis revealed that there are four vital components to an effective absenteeism reduction strategy. The four components include communication, flexibility, team building, and employee support. All of these components can be of little or no cost to employers, and at the same time valuable to the employees. With the current state of the economy, organizational leaders and business professionals must continually evaluate their success and the contributing factors of that success. Organizational success relies on the ability of organizational leaders to effectively lead employees to maintain or increase employee engagement, productivity, and profitability. When organizational leaders fail to effectively lead and evaluate employee satisfaction in the work environment, organizational success may suffer. I encourage readers and practitioners to use the findings, recommendations, and conclusion of this study in their professional practices.

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Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation

To fulfill the requirements for earning a doctoral degree, I am completing a qualitative research study. The focus of my research is to determine the need for effective motivational strategies to positively impact job satisfaction and absenteeism. I have chosen to focus my research on managers and employees in financial services. I am requesting your employees' participation in the study. I will assign a code in place of your name, so the identity of the organization and the participants will remain confidential to my research committee and the names of the organization and participants will not appear in the published study.

Participation requires a 45-60 minute interview in person at a location of the participants' choosing or via telephone. The interviews will occur outside of work hours.

The participants will confirm their willingness to participate via e-mail and I will send a consent form to review and sign prior to the interview. The participants' names will be coded for discussion of the findings in the published study. The organization's name will not appear in the published study.

Printed Name of President _____

Date of Consent _____

President's Signature _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Appendix B: Letter of Consent

Dear [Insert Name],

To fulfill the requirements for earning a doctoral degree, I am completing a qualitative research study. The focus of my research is to determine the need for effective motivational strategies to positively impact job satisfaction and absenteeism. As an employee in a custom software engineering company, I am requesting your participation in the study. I will assign a code in place of your name, so your identity will remain confidential to my research committee, and your name will not appear in the published study.

Your participation requires a 45-60 minute interview in person at a location of your choosing or via telephone. To ensure accuracy, the interview will be recorded and you will be asked to review notes taken during the interview. If you find errors or miscommunication, you will be asked to provide clarifications.

I am willing to answer any questions you have regarding participation in this study. If you are willing to participate, please e-mail jennifer.mudek2@waldenu.edu, meg12183@hotmail.com, or call 651-324-2448. When I receive confirmation of your willingness to participate, I will send you a consent form to review and sign prior to the interview.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Mudek

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of the need for effective motivation strategies to positively impact job satisfaction and absenteeism. You are invited to participate in this research study because of your managerial position in an international custom software engineering company for at least 1 year. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to ensure you understand this study before confirming your willingness to participate.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Jennifer Mudek, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand what motivational strategies are effective for increasing job satisfaction, and what factors contribute to the incidence of absenteeism.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in a 45-60 minute interview, which will be audio recorded.
- Answer follow-up questions for clarification immediately following the interview.
- On one occasion, meet face-to-face or via phone for the interview and follow-up.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. No one in your workplace will have knowledge of your participation in this study. You may withdraw from this study at any time. You may print or save a copy of this consent form for your personal records.

Risks and Benefits to Participation:

There are no personal risks to participation. The benefit of the study will be adding to the existing body of knowledge of strategies that reduce absenteeism. No compensation will be provided for participation in this study.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The information you provide will be used for this research study only. Your name will not appear in the published research study because a code will be assigned in place of your name prior to the results write-up.

Questions and Contact Information:

You may ask questions at any time. You can contact the researcher via e-mail at jennifer.mudek2@waldenu.edu or via phone at 651-324-2448. The researcher received approval to conduct this study from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure ethical research practices, and the approval number is 05-02-16-0077267. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you can contact Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at 1-800-925-3368 ext. 3121210.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I believe that I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By replying to the invitational e-mail with "I Consent", I am agreeing to the terms above.

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Managerial Interview Questions

1. What aspects of the job, if any, lead to employee absenteeism?
2. In your experience, why do those job aspects lead to employee absenteeism?
3. How does absenteeism affect your company?
4. What do you do when an employee is frequently absent?
5. What method do you use to encourage employees to attend work or to strive for fewer absences?
6. What strategies have you used to reduce employee absenteeism?
7. What strategies were effective in reducing employee absenteeism?
8. How did your employees respond to these strategies?
9. What are some positive outcomes as a result of reduced absenteeism rates?
10. What are some of the benefits of implementing absenteeism reduction strategy?

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Interview Title: Exploring the perceptions of managers regarding absenteeism reduction strategies, their role in reducing employee absenteeism, and how absenteeism impacts their company.

1. The interview session will commence with greetings and introductions.
2. The study participants will have previously read the informed consent form and provided their consent via e-mail, agreeing to participate in the research. I will thank the participant for their agreement to participate in the research study.
3. I will provide information regarding the member checking process that will follow the interview. Following the interview, I will summarize my interpretations of the interview data to confirm accuracy. If the participants find errors or miscommunication they can immediately provide corrections or clarifications to assist with ensuring the reliability and validity of the data.
4. I will turn on the audio recorder and I will note the date, time, and location.
5. Each participant will be given the required time to fully answer each predetermined interview question in detail (including any additional follow-up questions).
6. At the close of the interview, I will thank each research participant for their time and participation in the study.

Appendix F: NIH Certificate of Completion

