

## OF PRESENTEEISM AT WORKPLACE: A STUDY EMPLOYEES IN I.T. SECTOR IN INDIA

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### **ABSTRACT:**

The present study deals with presenteeism in India in IT sector.

Key words: Presenteeism, Non-work related presenteeism, work-life balance

## DIFFERENT MANIFESTATIONS OF PRESENTEEISM AT WORKPLACE: A STUDY OF BEHAVIOR OF EMPLOYEES IN I.T. SECTOR IN INDIA

When employees are absent to work, the total rhythm gets disrupted. Absenteeism has been a menace in almost every type of organization across the world. When too many people miss too much of work, often productivity goes for a toss. Most studies on absenteeism identify causes for the same and suggest remedies and also predict organizational performance under conditions of absenteeism.

Workplace productivity is something that is always on the top of employers' minds and they keep devising ways and means to combat it. While absenteeism has occupied a significant place in the minds of the researchers as a workplace nuisance, a parallel phenomenon called presenteeism has been highlighted in 2004 by Paul Hemp which is incurring huge costs and devouring organizational productivity.

Presenteeism (Hemp, 2004) is the problem of workers being on the job but because of illness or other medical conditions not fully functioning and can cut individual productivity by one-third or more. He asserted that Presenteeism is more expensive a concern than absenteeism because it is easy to identify who is missing at workplace. But, it is very tough to state how an illness is hampering ones on the job performance.

Presenteeism is identified as opposite of Absenteeism, but, it is becoming just as huge a problem and it is getting worse. Workers who are on the job but just taking up space, cost companies an estimated \$ 150 billion a year, far outstripping the other big productivity killer, absenteeism (Hemp, 2004). 70% of depression related productivity loss can be attributed to Presenteeism while the other 30% comes from absenteeism (American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM), 2004). ACOEM (2004) combined the economic toll from Absenteeism and Presenteeism and stated that based on average impairment and prevalence estimates, the overall economic burden of illness was highest for hypertension (\$392 per eligible employee per year), heart disease (\$368), depression and other mental illnesses (\$348), and arthritis (\$327). Presenteeism costs were higher than medical costs in most cases, and represented 18% to 60% of all costs. Studies show that productivity losses cost employers \$ 2 to \$ 3 for every \$ 1 of direct medical costs. In fact, direct medical costs, which include group

only for 24% of total medical costs while the other 76% disability, short term disability, absenteeism, and presenteeism (Williams, 2010). In spite of the above figures, Presenteeism often is overlooked because it is difficult to measure or demonstrate. A paper by the New Zealand Treasury in November 2010, (The cost of ill health) states that working fewer hours, or not working at all, owing to ill health are estimated to affect widely different numbers of people; 458,500 and 42,300 respectively. However, in terms of costs their impact is more similar; \$1.442 billion and \$1.755 billion respectively. Taking the estimate of presenteeism nearest the mid-point of the range, indirect costs are estimated to be \$7.483 billion; 4.9% of GDP. Presenteeism accounts for 55% of this cost, not working 23%, working less 19% and absenteeism just 3%. For instance, Bank One looked at its health-related costs and found that presenteeism cost \$ 311.8 million per year, while medical treatments and prescriptions, absenteeism, and disability costs were combined to \$ 176.2 million per year (Hemp, 2004).

Presenteeism is showing up at work in spite of illness and it doesn't involve pretending illness (Hemp, 2004). The New York Times Magazine has hailed presenteeism as one of the top discoveries of 2004. Majority of research on Presenteeism focuses on illness-related issues and it appears in the medical literature. This research suggests that being at work but unable to be fully productive due to sickness or medical conditions may cut productivity (Chatter & Tilley, 2002; Goetzel et al, 2004; Hemp, 2004). Coming to work when sick may be more costly and more harmful to productivity and performance than choosing to stay at home for the day (Berger et al, 2003; Hemp, 2004; Stewart et al, 2003; Wang et al, 2003).

Presenteeism covers a broad spectrum from health related issues like allergies, depression, diabetes, common cold, hay fever, asthma, sinus, arthritis, toothache, body ache, headache, backache to non-health related issues like family issues, financial problems and workplace conditions (Willingham, 2008). If left unaddressed Presenteeism may also lead to absenteeism. Major ailments like heart problems, epidemics like bird flu and swine flu don't attract presenteeism because these ailments cause absenteeism on medical advice. According to US Census Bureau (2004), chronic conditions are leading cause of disability. With the link between health-related presenteeism and disability, researchers and organizations have even more reason to examine presenteeism more closely.



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Though Presenteeism in the workplace has existed for many years, the term has been recently defined. In 1994, Prof. Cary Cooper, a psychologist specializing in organizational management coined the term Presenteeism to describe workers who remain on the job but who are not as productive as usual due to illness, stress or any other type of distraction. Simpson (1998) describes another type of presenteeism: an employee who is present at work but is not longer performing effectively on job due for example to lack of concentration. Thus, Presenteeism can be seen as a broader construct than sick workers. ACOEM (2008) presents different manifestations of presenteeism which can affect employee productivity such as: a) additional time of tasks, b) decreased quality and quality of work, c) impaired executive functions (initiative), d) decreased capacity of peak performance, e) impaired social functioning with peers, and f) decreased motivation

D'Abate and Eddy (2007) argue that presenteeism also occurs when employees go to work but spend a portion of the workday engaging in personal work. This behavior is called non-work related presenteeism (NWRP). They suggested that activities such as e-mailing friends, browsing Internet, online chatting, paying bills, making appointments with doctor and hairstylist while on the job are some ways that employees are at work but may not be performing at peak levels. This behavior has serious implications for both individuals and organizations. For instance, engaging in NWRP on the job may have an effect on the human resource development (HRD) as HRD is a means to heighten individual and organizational effectiveness through an integrated approach to training and development, career development and organizational development. Now, HRD's role is extending into work-life issues (Polach, 2003). Traditional HRD argues that if individuals engage in personal work at workplace, they are less prepared for promotion while modern HRD that this behavior dilutes the construct of work-life balance. Thus, NWRP is a HRD issue but examination of the implications of Presenteeism from HRD perspective is lacking. Despite a brief mention in *Personnel Journal* in 1955 (Canfield & Soash), Presenteeism is a relatively new area of interest (Aronsson et al, 2000) and there are only a few management related publications in this area (Canfield & Soash, 1955; Chatterji & Tilley, 2002; Hemp, 2004; Sheridan 2004; Simpson, 1998). Also, work-life integration received little attention in HRD literature (Polach, 2003). D'abate(2005) conducted a qualitative study and

nal activities people engage in, during workday and the

Presenteeism, in its illness related form is tied to work-related outcomes such as productivity losses; there is a need to determine if NWRP is related to performance outcomes. Some studies that have come after 2004 have highlighted that Internet is the biggest source of performance distraction at workplace. John Paul-Kamath (2004) surveyed 361 IT firms in Great Britain and found that employees spend an average of 50 minutes on social networking in a day. Later, they identified that this time raised to 62 minutes per day. The survey also revealed that 50% of the employers were worried about time wastage while 17% worried about company security and 3% worried about damage to reputation. Some employers, in order to curb this practice, allow limited access to these sites while some imposed a ban totally. Peacock (2008) surveyed 220 senior HR professionals and identified what employers think of facebook usage by employees and found that 50% of the employers would restrict personal Net use to lunch times; 33% considered a total ban, 70% would consider disciplinary action and if they discovered inappropriate photos on networking sites that identify the employers and 25% felt that employees are doing job search. Salary.com(2007) said that biggest distraction for respondents is Internet use where 44.7% cited web surfing as the biggest distraction. A study was conducted on 10000 workers and it was identified that engaging in personal business, socializing with peers, running errand, phone calls are major distracters at work. Also, it was identified that younger the employee, more the time waste. The three sectors of the economy in which workers wasted the most time are Insurance, Government and Education. MSNBC.com (2005) found that 35% employees spend more time on web news, 25% read newspapers, 25% browse journals and magazines, 17% listen to music, and 6% watch TV. It concluded that the average work week in IT sector is 54 hours. Accenture survey (2009) said that though employees were physically present for 5 days a week, they were only productively using 3 days. It was also observed that 90% of managers squander their time. More than one in twenty employees suffered from relationship problems due to excessive use of Internet. 12% said they often stay online more than they would like to and 14% said it is difficult to stay offline for several days. Goldborough (2007) says that the flip side is that, employees who have Internet at home too, often end up doing office work at home which often exceeds their Internet access at work for non-work



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of Maryland found that workers with Internet access at 3.7 hours/week of time for personal internet use and 5.9

hours per week on the Internet for work purposes outside office hours. Adams (2007) says that monitoring employees' web usage not only helps see what employees are doing but you can make them accountable for how they spend their time on the computer. It changes decision making. Riley (2008) conducted a web based survey in August 2008, during Olympics and found that Yahoo's Olympic website visitors were up by 86% in that week. Nielsen Online (2008) conducted a web based survey in August 2008, during Olympics and found that more than 2 million people visited [nbcolympics.com](http://nbcolympics.com) website during working hours. Hagadone (2009) highlighted that amid tough economic times, employees are coming to work saddled with mountains of financial stress and Presenteeism is increased by a function of emotional distress. He stated that unhappy worker is often just a presentee worker. Silcox (2010) surveyed Swedish adults and young workers with highly performance-based self-esteem are more likely to turn up to work when ill than the other staff. The effect of performance based self-esteem on sickness presenteeism was four times higher among individuals with poor health when compared to those with good health.

What makes Presenteeism so frightening is how tough it is to spot. A big part of the problem is that it is not the same as just sitting and wasting time. Catching someone merrily surfing on the Net is not the same as someone who is so stressed out that they can't perform or work, and/or whose heart burn or allergies are driving them to distraction.

In India, there appears no proper study in this area. In 2011, the newspaper Times of India reported that Presenteeism is a new work place problem where employees turn up to work but their productivity and effectiveness is reduced. The present study extends the presenteeism construct to include not only illness related issues but also non-work related issues. It explores the extent to which engaging in personal business on the job such as Internet surfing, chatting, social networking, job searching, and so on may result in on the job productivity loss.

The objective is to study the NWRP behavior of IT employees in India and propose ways to engage them in the idle time that is created.

on IT sector employees only across India. The employees work in office setting with fixed work timings ( for instance, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.). The data is obtained through interviews, questionnaires (some of them were mailed). The questionnaire consisted of 43 questions which are of multiple choice type. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling is used to select individuals who work within fixed work timings and avoided those whose job calls for being outside the job most of the time. Also, IT sector is particularly chosen as part of purposive sampling because employees here definitely have access to phone, email, internet and other media of communication though the literature says that presenteeism is mostly seen in Insurance, Government and Education sectors. In India, the stereotype with respect to Government organizations is that people idle away the time and don't work at all due to heavy job-security, but, whether all Government departments have full access to Internet or not is a doubt. Thus, this sector is avoided for the study. Similarly, Insurance sector is nearer to the customer only through Insurance agents and these people are mostly expected to be outside work place on work. Thus, studying presenteeism on these people would not be a useful proposition. With respect to Education, only professional colleges professors have full access to Internet and not all types of educational institutes have this provision. Thus, the author avoided these sectors and chose IT which is conducive for the study.

The participants were personally contacted or by phone with a brief explanation about the study before the administration of questionnaire vis-à-vis interview. In case of mailed questionnaires, the respondents were contacted by phone followed by a brief explanation regarding the study. 78 respondents completed the questionnaire out of which 28 questionnaires were identified as not meeting the sampling criterion: working in office with fixed timings. The resulting sample of 50 employees was 22% female and 78% male. The mean age range was, 15% belonged to the age range of thirty to forty years; another 15% belonged to twenty six and thirty years, while the rest 70% were above twenty and below twenty five years of age. The activities are derived from DøAbates qualitative research (2002, 2005) were presented to the respondents to and were asked to report how many times they had engaged in each activity in the past work week on work time (frequency)





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