

Leave Planning Problem Brief

Vision & Strategic Opportunity

AbsenceSoft aims to transform the leave planning and accommodations experience by addressing the complexity and confusion that employees and HR teams face today. Layered policies, state-by-state differences, compliance nuances, and rigid intake flows create uncertainty for employees and unnecessary work for HR. Our vision is to empower employees with dynamic, transparent planning tools that help them understand their potential benefits and next steps, without creating false expectations. At the same time, we aim to streamline compliance and case management for HR teams so they can focus on compassion, not just compliance. By introducing a maternity leave planning MVP that addresses real-world complexities such as overlapping accommodations and state or employer specific eligibility and entitlement rules, AbsenceSoft has the opportunity to set a new standard for usability, empathy, and legal clarity in the leave experience

The Problem:

Challenges in Dynamic Leave & Accommodation Intake

Navigating leave planning and accommodations is a complex, often confusing journey due to the intertwined nature of laws, policies, and personal circumstances. These challenges form barriers that make informed decision-making difficult for users, highlighting the critical need for a nuanced planning solution.

Dynamic Intake Elements & Challenges

1. Relationship to Leave Planning & Benefits Understanding

- Leave planning solutions can clarify benefits for employees upfront. AbsenceSoft's current intake process collect data without providing enough context on eligibility and entitlements. Employees often face decisions (e.g., start and end dates) without fully understanding their benefits, especially when planning for future events like maternity leave. This lack of insight leads to premature choices and increases rework for HR teams.

2. Dynamic Questioning by State, Leave Type, and Event Complexity

- Questions posed during intake differ widely based on state and policy requirements. For example, some states provide protected leave for prenatal appointments under specific

pregnancy-related laws, while others do not consider routine prenatal care a qualifying event unless it meets a medical disability threshold.

- These differences in required information are caused by nuanced eligibility criteria, and entitlement calculations. For example, some state policies adjust entitlement based on the method of childbirth or whether the parent is having multiple children.
- These intricate differences necessitate asking varied questions to accurately determine leave benefits for different geolocations, employers, and reasons for leave.
- Certification requirements and forms vary by policy. Many times employees don't know what documentation they need upfront, which can further delay the approval process.

3. Accommodation vs Leave

- AbsenceSoft's current product and many other leave and accommodation softwares often enforce a rigid distinction between leave and accommodations. However, real-world cases like maternity often require a blend of both. An employee might be entitled to take breaks during pregnancy while also planning for maternity leave. Recognizing these dual needs in a seamless way is challenging but necessary to meet legal requirements and reduce friction during intake.

4. Employee's Initial Request Framing

- Employees' initial requests can range from explicit leave applications to subtle comments that hint at a need for support. When these signals aren't clearly communicated using regulatory language, important needs can be missed. Today, leave managers must actively identify and interpret these clues to ensure employees are informed of their rights. A leave planning tool can shift that burden by enabling employees to explore their options independently—helping them recognize potential entitlements before ever reaching a case manager.

5. Conflict of Informed Employees vs. Final Eligibility

- There is a tension between giving employees the information they need to plan for leave and employers' concern that doing so may be interpreted as a promise of entitlement. Today, some employees receive benefit information through HR conversations or shared documentation before formally submitting a leave request—but in many cases, they don't receive specific, personalized details until after eligibility has been determined by a case manager. This creates a gap: employees want to explore their options early, but employers are cautious about sharing too much too soon, fearing it could set false expectations or introduce legal risk.
- The distinction here is between exploring benefit information and offering it. If employees can review and understand potential leave benefits on their own outside of the formal intake and approval process they may be more likely to see that information as educational,

not guaranteed. This reduces the perception that a benefit has been promised while still giving employees the clarity they need to make informed decisions.

6. Dynamism in Leave Benefits and Accommodations

- There is no universal solution for leave and accommodations due to the complexity and variability of employee situations. Employees' needs can vary based on their condition and job requirements, influencing what accommodations or benefits are applicable. A flexible, responsive system is required to manage this effectively, accounting for different types of job protection, pay, and accommodations.

Employee Pain Points in Leave and Intake Planning:

summarized findings from conversations and testing with present day customers

“Many of our field team members have just enough resources to get to and from work. When something disrupts that routine—like needing to take leave—they often don’t have the know-how to navigate the process, they’ll sometimes give up on applying altogether.” - HR Ops Supervisor, Pilot Flying J

1. Employees want to understand their leave options before submitting a request

- Employees often try to plan out their leave (especially for pregnancy and bonding) and want to know how much time they can take, what portion is paid, and what policies apply.
- Visual timelines and summaries are highly valued by employees. Customers consistently responded well to visual timelines, summaries of leave duration, and lists of next steps.

2. Employees seek clarity on how different policies stack or interact

- Several testers asked how PTO, FMLA, STD, and state leaves work together.
- Employees want to model scenarios (e.g., “What if I use PTO + state leave?”) to understand impact on pay and job protection.
- Employer-specific policies add another layer of complexity to leave entitlement. The combination of paid leave available can vary depending on the timing or nature of the leave—for example, taking leave before birth may require one set of benefits, while taking it after delivery may trigger another. Today, these employer-driven nuances are not reflected in most leave planning tools, leading to confusion and inaccurate expectations.

3. Confusion around paid vs. unpaid leave is common

- Today AbsenceSoft does not do a good job providing clarity for employees between pay and unpaid leave. Often entitlement is communicated in dates, but the benefit information can be hidden. Many employees don’t understand the difference between employer-provided pay, state-administered benefits, or unpaid leave. They often assume they will be paid if they qualify for leave, which is not always the case.

4. **Employees have difficulty identifying which leave type applies to them**

- Terms like “parental,” “bonding,” “pregnancy,” and “accommodation” and “intermittent leave” are often misunderstood and require familiarity with leave compliance. Most employees approach the process based on their personal situation, not legal or policy definitions, which can lead to confusion and misclassification of their leave needs.
- Customers find that Non-birthing parents frequently select pregnancy, and intermittent needs are often interpreted as accommodations rather than leave.

5. **Employees don’t understand certification requirements**

- Many aren’t sure which form they need to upload based on their leave and eligible policies.
- They worry about uploading the wrong form and having to pay to get another one filled out.

Competitive Landscape:

see more [here](#)

The leave planning tool space is a mix of large HCM platforms (Sedgwick, Workday, ADP), dedicated leave planners (Veer, Cocoon, PERKY, Tilt), and emerging AI-powered chatbots (Aidora, CareValidate, general GenAI). Common themes include:

- Automated timelines for leave and pay, often focused on parental/bonding scenarios, at least in public version of tools
- Clear, step-by-step breakdowns of eligibility, benefits, and required actions
- Visuals showing job protection and partial/full pay periods
- Use of disclaimers to manage legal risk—tools clarify projections are not guarantees
- Tools provide clear, visual roadmap for straightforward cases like maternity leave in California, but when layering intermittent ADA accommodations or handling complex policy overlaps, many tools do not do provide that support.
- Growing reliance on rule-based and generative AI to support employee Q&A and workflow navigation
- Some tools like Veer and Aidora act as a pre-intake planning tool, handing users off to another provider or HR for final decisions

Despite this progress, few solutions combine deep compliance rigor, dynamic policy/entitlement logic, and a transparent, empathetic user experience.

Leave Planning Solution:

- **Scenario-Based Guidance:** Users receive tailored pathways, only seeing questions and later policies and entitlements relevant to their stated reason and personal circumstance.

- **Transparent, Contextual Exploration:** Employees can explore “what-if” leave and accommodation scenarios—seeing potential pay, job protections, and duration—without triggering formal requests or legal promises.
 - **Dynamic Q&A Flows:** Intake dynamically adapts questions based on state, leave type, and level of event complexity, collecting only necessary information while minimizing fatigue.
 - **Integrated Accommodation + Leave Flow:** Planning recognizes the reality that many needs overlap—offering seamless paths for employees uncertain if they need leave, accommodation, or both.
 - **Clear Communication of Projections vs. Guarantees:** Visual and text cues clarify that forecasted entitlements are estimates, not approvals, addressing employer and legal risk.
 - **Support for Case Managers:** Reduces “information scavenger hunt,” equipping HR professionals to focus on empathetic, value-driven conversations rather than repetitive, compliance-heavy Q&A.
 - **Dynamically personalize the experience:** Given many of the problems in our current experience stem from the rigidity of our current experience and the lack of customization based on an employee’s specific situation, it could be a strong use case for AI. AI can support by adjusting questions, timelines, and benefit information in real time and based on the employee’s specific inputs.
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Maternity/Pregnancy and Parental Leave Planning as an MVP

- **Proactive Planning Need:** Pregnancy and bonding leave are often anticipated far in advance, employees seek information early to plan for time off and job security.
- **Complex Overlap:** Maternity can involve both leave and accommodations (e.g., flexible hours before birth, extended bonding time after).
- **High-Volume, High-Impact:** Most frequent “planned” leave scenario for many organizations, with major personal and operational stakes.
- **Framework for Expansion:** Successfully handling maternity/pregnancy sets the platform for handling other scenarios like planned surgeries, major family caregiving events, or chronic illness.

Other Resources:

- [Improving Case Intake Through AI](#)
- [Miro of AI Leave Intake](#)