Title:
Absence Management and Workforce Management

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609

Summary:
That absence management is a key component of workforce management does not really need an explicit mention. However, planned and unplanned absence is a universal fact of work and many organizations might take it as something that cannot be avoided.

Keywords:
Time and Attendance, time, attendance, Employee Scheduling, Absence Management, Rostering, workforce management, workforce scheduling

Article Body:
That absence management is a key component of workforce management does not really need an explicit mention. However, planned and unplanned absence is a universal fact of work and many organizations might take it as something that cannot be avoided.

There are ways to minimize both absence and its impact. First, we need to look the factors that cause absence, particularly unplanned absence that is more disruptive to work.

<b>Reasons for Absence</b>

<ul>
<li>SHORT-TERM SICKNESS: Short-term sickness is a major contributor to unplanned absence. An employee might call in sick, or produce some kind of certificate to prove the sickness</li>
<li>LONG-TERM SICKNESS: This kind of absence is usually covered by a certificate</li>
<li>UNAUTHORIZED ABSENCE OR PERSISTENT LATECOMING: The employee might just absent himself or herself without any excuse, or might be a habitual latecomer</li>
<li>AUTHORIZED ABSENCE: Employees are entitled to different kinds of leave under the provisions of employment laws. These include annual vacations, maternity (and paternity) leave, educational leave, and so on. These kinds of absence can be scheduled and alternative work arrangements can be made through advance

planning</li>
</ul>

<b>Measuring Absence and its Cost</b>

Many organizations do not take the trouble to find out the cost of employee absence, the reasons for the absence and ways of reducing its impact. With proper focus, absence is controllable to some extent, and the resultant benefits can be significant.

By accumulating absent hours (including late hours) and comparing it to total available hours during the period, we can calculate the percentage of time lost owing to absence. By comparing the percentage for different periods, the trend of absence can be monitored.

By department and section wise monitoring of the trend, it might even be possible to identify some of the reasons underlying high absenteeism. For example, poor working conditions or a bad manager or supervisor might be aggravating the problem in a department or section.

Absence can also be measured by individual workers. The number and length of absences of each employee during a 52-week period is noted. Problem employees can be identified and the reasons underlying their absence can be investigated.

<b>Policies and Actions for Absence Management</b>

Surveys have revealed that sickness is a major factor for absence. The studies also indicate that stress-related absence is increasing compared to earlier periods.

Absence management starts with clear policies for allowing employees to take time off due to sickness. The policies should meet the minimum requirements under the law, and can be more liberal to attract better employees.

The policies must be communicated clearly to employees. In particular, employees must be fully aware of the procedures for availing sick leave, such as whom to notify, when a doctor's certificate or examination by company doctor is required and also any return-to-work interview requirements.

Implement systems to measure absence by departments/sections and by employee. Seeking the help of occupational health professionals to reduce the incidence sickness and stress can help reduce incidence of occupational health and injury problems.

Unacceptably high and persistent levels of absence need to be handled through disciplinary procedures.

<b>Conclusion</b>

Absence management is an important component of workforce management. Absences can occur owing to different factors. Managing absences start with the organization measuring the levels of absence and identifying the reasons for it. Once a clear picture is available, organizations would find it easier to tackle unacceptably high levels of absence.

Studies indicate that sickness and stress are major contributory factors to absence. These are unplanned absences and cause more disruption. We look at sickness absence in more detail in a separate article.