Managing Employees' Absence and Attendance in Nigerian Organizations

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Abstract

Employees presence at workplace during the scheduled time is highly essential for the smooth running of the organization. Despite the significance of their presence, employees sometimes fail to report at the workplace during the scheduled time, which is known as absenteeism. This means failure of a worker to report for work when he or she is scheduled to work; which is the total man-shifts lost because of absence as a percentage of the total number of man-shifts

scheduled to work. Thus, absenteeism is the practice or habit of being an 'absence' and an absentee is one who habitually stays away. This work reviewed employees' absence and attendance for sustainable organizations in Nigeria. The study adopted literature survey method to gather information relevant to the work. The information obtained was analyzed qualitatively due to the nature of the research. The study observed that employee absence continues to be a major problem for both country and organization for lost performance. The study also recommended that absence review group should be set up, and be charged to review all absence and identify those who have hit trigger points which will then require intervention, such as an absence review meeting with the employee in Nigerian organizations.

Key Words: Managing, Employees', Absence, Attendance, Employers, Organizations, Workplace

Introduction

For many organizations in Nigeria to achieve their optimum performance depends to the extent in which employees are not absent from their place of work. Absence has always been a matter of concern to all employers, and methods for reducing it have frequently focused on disciplinary or punitive measures. More recently in Nigerian organizations absence has been framed in a more positive discourse, and the focus is now on what organizations can do to promote attendance and rehabilitation of employees with long-term absence, (Okere, 2005).

Traditionally, employers have concentrated on short-term absence, and while long-term absence accounts for only around 20% of absence incidents which represents more than 40% of total working time lost, although figures do vary. A research conducted by CIPD (2003) revealed that long-term absence was most significant in the public sector where it accounts for

27% of absence, compared with 18% in manufacturing and 11% in private services. Reducing such absence is increasingly seen as having the potential to create significant costs savings. Cost is not the only factor in influencing organizations to attend to long-term absence (Derek, Laura and Stephen, 2005). In addition, the Disability Discrimination Act requires employers in Nigerian organizations to provide reasonable adjustments to enable disabled workers to continue in employment, and the term "disabled" extends to those suffering from long-term ill health. It has been argued that employers have a more explicit duty of care to their employees due to Nigerian legislation, and there is a growing concern for the well-being of employees, partly due to fear of litigation.

Objective of the Study

The purpose of this study is to review the issues concerning employees absence and attendance for sustainable organizations in Nigeria.

Scope of the Study

The study focused on employees' absence and attendance. The work reviewed the process and causes of employees' absence and how to manage attendance in Nigerian organizations.

Research Method Adopted

The research design adopted was literature survey method to collect information relevant to the study. The study also employed qualitative technique to analyze the information obtained due to the nature of the research.

Types of Absenteeism

Absenteeism is of four types, viz;

1. **Authorized Absenteeism:** If an employee absents himself from work by taking permission from his superior and applying for leave, such absenteeism is called authorized absenteeism.

2. **Unauthorized Absenteeism:** If an employee absents himself from work without informing or taking permission and without applying for leave, such absenteeism is called unauthorized absenteeism.
3. **Willful Absenteeism:** If an employee absents himself from duty willfully, such absenteeism is called willful absenteeism.
4. **Absenteeism Caused by Circumstances Beyond One's Control:** If an employee absents himself from duty owing to the circumstances' beyond his control like involvement in accidents or sudden sickness, such absenteeism is called absenteeism caused by circumstances beyond one's control.

Features of Employee Absenteeism

Research studies undertaken by different authors revealed the following features of absenteeism (Okere, 2005).

1. The rate of absenteeism is the lowest on pay day, it increases considerably on the days following the payment of wages and bonus.
2. Absenteeism is generally high among the workers below 25 years of age and those above 40 years of age.
3. The rate of absenteeism varies from department to department within an organization. Generally it is high in the production department.
4. Absenteeism in traditional industries is seasonal in character.

Calculation of Absenteeism Rate

Absenteeism can be calculated with the help of the following formula.

$$\text{Absenteeism Rate} = \frac{\text{Number of Man-Days Lost}}{\text{Number of Man-Days Scheduled to Work}} \times 100$$

Absenteeism rate can be calculated for different employees and for different time periods like month and year.

Frequency Rate: The frequency rate reflects the incidence of absence and is usually expressed as the number of separate absence in a given period,

irrespective of length of absences. The frequency rate represents the average number of absences per worker in a given period.

$$\text{Absenteeism Rate} = \text{Total } \frac{\text{Number of Days Absent During a Period x100}}{\text{Total Number of Times Absent During That Period}}$$

Severity Rate: Severity rate is the average length of time lost per absence and is calculated by using the following formula:

$$\text{Absenteeism Rate} = \text{Total } \frac{\text{Number of Days Absent During a Period x100}}{\text{Total Number of Times Absent During That Period}}$$

A high severity rate indicates that the employee is absent for longer durations each time. High frequency and severity rates indicate that the employee is absent more frequently and for longer durations each time, resulting in high absenteeism even in absolute terms.

Process and Causes of Employee Absence

The CIPD (2003) study has discovered that 81% of organizations collected data on the causes of absence, with the public sector being more likely to do this. The most frequent stated causes of absence are minor illness for short-term absence and back pain mainly for manual workers, and stress for non-manual workers, for long-term absence. The increase in stress as a cause may well be partly due to the fact that this is now a more legitimate reason for non attendance than previously. It is important to bear in mind that recorded causes of absence in Nigerian organizations will be those causes which employees perceive the organization to view as legitimate. In Nigerian organizations, causes of absence are complex and interrelated and a process approach is generally agreed to be the most useful way of understanding absence behaviour (Okere, 2013), although there are criticisms that such models are not supported by the evidence. One of the most widely quoted models is from Rhodes and Steers (1990) and in our

view this is the most useful of the process models. For an alternative model is Nicholson (1977).

The Rhodes and Steers (1990) model not only includes content information on the causes of absence but also incorporates a range of interdependent processes. In essence the model focuses on attendance motivation and the ability to attend in terms of resulting attendance behaviour. Rhodes and Steers (1990), suggested that attendance motivation is directly affected by two factors: satisfaction with the job and pressure to attend. Pressure to attend may result from such factors as market conditions. These include the likelihood that there will be redundancies at their workplace and how easy it would be to get another job; incentives to attend, such as attendance bonuses; work-group norms on what is acceptable in the work-group and the effects of absence on other group members; personal work ethic producing internal pressure to attend based on beliefs about what is right; and commitment to the organization through an identification with the beliefs and values of the organization and an intention to remain with the organization. On this basis threat of redundancies, attendance bonuses, team structures where team members have to cover the workload of an absent member, a personal ethic about the need to attend work wherever possible, and feelings of loyalty to the organization should all promote the motivation to attend.

Rhodes and Steers (1990) also suggested that satisfaction with the job is determined by the job situation and moderated by employee values and job expectations. Factors in the job situation are identified as job scope and level of responsibility and decision making; role stress such as work overload, under-load, difficult working conditions or hours; work-group size; leadership and how easy it is to discuss and solve problems jointly; strength of relationships with co-workers; and the opportunity for promotion. On this basis higher levels of responsibility and the opportunity to make decisions in relation to job demands, balanced workload and good working

conditions, small work group size, an open relationship with immediate manager, good relationships with colleagues and the opportunity for promotion should all improve attendance motivation in Nigerian organizations. However, as pointed out by Okere (2013) Job satisfaction is moderated by the values and expectations of the employee. Such values and expectations are shaped by both personality and personal characteristics and life experiences, but can also change during the course of one's life. The extent to which the job matches up with expectations and values will have a bearing on job satisfaction; a close match is more likely to lead to satisfaction than a mismatch.

Personality and personal characteristics influence expectations and values and job satisfaction in Nigerian organizations (Okere, 2013). According to Bevan (2002) length of service also has been identified as having an influence; and age and sex on absence rates. However, Johns (2001), and Evans and Walters (2002) observed that none of these relationships is clear-cut, and different pieces of research often produce different findings. There is most evidence for suggesting that younger male and female workers have the highest rates of absence, and it is argued that younger workers value free time to a greater extent than older workers. Thus, this brings to use the last influence on attendance which is the ability to attend. This influence is interposed between attendance motivation and actual attendance. For instance, an employee could be highly motivated to attend, but may have insurmountable transportation difficulties, family or domestic responsibilities, or may be genuinely ill. In all these cases motivations to attend does not result in attendance.

According to Rao (2014), the general causes of employee absence include (1) Maladjustment with the working conditions, (2) Social and religious ceremonies, (3) unsatisfactory housing, (4) Industrial fatigue, (5) Unhealthy working conditions, (6) Poor welfare facilities, (7) Alcoholism, (8)

Indebtedness, (9) Maladjustment with the Job demands, (10) Unsound personnel policies, (11) Inadequate leave facilities, (12) Low Level of Wages.

Managing Attendance in Organizations

The complex interrelationships of the causes of absence needs to be taken into account in its management in Nigerian organizations. Many organizations have introduced policies for managing absence that focus on minimizing short-term rather than long-term absence in Nigerian organizations (Okere, 2005). The role of sickness in long-term absence has been given little priority in the past, as has the issue that short-term absence, if badly handled, can lead to long-term absence. Typically, long-term absence and short-term absence require different approaches. Attendance management policies need to take into account causes of absence, which may be identified by patterns of absence and by enabling individuals to be open about why they are not at work. Measures range from proactive methods intended to reduce the risk of ill health; measures intended to reduce spells of absence and those intended to reduce the length of absence. Typically, there is a mix of processes both to discourage absence and positively to encourage attendance, but these work differently with those on long-term and short-term sickness absence.

Whatever approach is chosen, there is a great need for consistency in the construction and implementation of absence management policies and procedures in Nigerian organizations (Okere, 2005), not only in terms of ensuring fairness and as a support for any disciplinary action taken, but also in terms of providing employees with clear expectations about how absence will be tackled, and promoting an attendance culture. While different approaches work in different sectors and with different types of staff, there is a strong argument that the policies themselves need to be consistent in any organization in Nigeria, to encourage employee acceptance and line manager support. On this premise, Dunn and Wilkinson (2002), report the difficulties that a line manager in a production

company experienced due to the fact that manufacturing staff were subject to more stringent absence procedures than other staff in the company.

Okere (2007), in his investigation in Nigerian industries observed that lack of consistency in implementation also weakens any policy and procedures. That the role of the line manager is key and there is much emphasis on giving the line manager ownership of absence and attendance issues, with support from human resource manager. Whatever policies and procedures that are set up in Nigerian enterprises, it is critical that the line manager feels ownership of these and applies them in practice. This is in line with the research of James, Cunningham and Dibben (2002) who found that two-thirds of their interviewees in an long-term absence management study noted that there were problems in the way that line managers carried out their responsibilities. Managers frequently did not follow the guidelines in matters such as ongoing contact with absent employees, and consequently human resource manager did not know what was going on and often has to step in and manage cases. James, Cunningham and Dibben (2002) also found that managers' behaviour resulted from time pressures, lack of awareness of what the procedure was and lack of training.

It has also been found that some measures to manage absence actually increase absence, so monitoring any new policies and procedures in Nigerian organizations is critical. In terms of implementing a new absence strategy, the advice given by Huczynski and Fitzpatrick (1989) still holds good. The ALIEDIM process they suggested comprises the following stages:

1. Assess the absence problem.
2. Locate the absence problem.
3. Indentify and priorities absence causes.
4. Evaluate the current absence control methods.
5. Design the absence control programme.

6. Implement the absence control programme.
7. Monitor the effectiveness of the absence control programme.

The mix of policies and methods chosen will be specific to the needs of the individual Nigeria organizations.

Approaches/Measures of Managing Absence in Organizations

Some of the most frequently used approaches to managing absence in organizations are displayed below. Some are most appropriate for short-term absence, and some better suited to long-term absence, others meet the needs of both.

Accurate Records

Managing employees absence in Nigerian organizations is almost impossible without an accurate picture of current absence levels and patterns in terms of the identification of areas of high absence and the most common reasons for absence in the organization. According to Okere (2007) in Nigerian organizations, absence reports are frequently produced by human resource manager and sent to line managers, and such reports will often include details of employees where trigger points have been hit and where intervention is required by the line manager. However, Dunn and Wilkinson (2002) demonstrated that the attention line managers gave to these reports varied, and some managers never even looked at the reports, because they did not agree that this was the best way to manage staff. Some managers also argued that the reports were of little use because the employees they managed often worked long hours (beyond contract) and came in at weekends. It was felt that to punish such employees, who were clearly committed to the company, because they had reached certain absence levels was unreasonable, and would be counter-productive.

Absence Review and Trigger Points

In order to focus attention on those with less satisfactory absence records many Nigerian organizations has to identify trigger points in terms of

absence spells or length which indicate that action is needed when an individual's absence record hits the trigger (Okere, 2005). Such policies for reviewing absence appear to be critical in absence reduction. Some organizations in Nigeria have absence review groups and the role of the groups varies, they are frequently used to review all absences and identify those who have hit trigger points which will then require intervention, such as an absence review meeting with the employee.

Absence Targets and Benchmarking

Many organizations have absence targets phrased in terms of a reduction on current absence levels or a lower absence level to attain. An alternative approach, used by some organizations, is to give managers absence targets for their group, and tie this into their performance review and performance payments. Such targets need to be carefully used, however, so as not to give the impression to employees that absence is not allowed.

Training and Support for Line Managers

Most organizations in Nigeria recognize that line managers play a key role in making absence procedures work and in reducing absence levels, and training is usually available when a new absence system is introduced. Some organizations have introduced a creative form of training. They take managers to an employment tribunal to view an absence – related case so that managers will understand the consequences of not dealing fairly and consistently with employees when they have to deal with similar situations at work. Some organizations uses training videos showing role plays of return to work interviews. These demonstrate that such a meeting is not about accusation or recrimination. The idea is that managers watch the video with their team of supervisory staff and then discuss the issues that arise. However, there is evidence that further training is needed. Both James, Cunningham and Dibben (2002), and Dunn and Wilkinson (2002) found that managers who could not understand hour "sickness" could be

managed, were scared of dealing with the situation and were embarrassed about asking personal questions about an employee's state of health.

Absence Notification Procedures

Many organizations in Nigeria have specified that when employees phone concerning absent, they must phone themselves, rather than asking another person to phone on their behalf. Many also specified that the employee must speak to their direct line manager or nominated representative. This means that such a telephone conversation can be the first stage of the absence management process (Okere, 2005). The conversation is welfare based and the intention is that the manager is able to ask about the nature of the problem and the anticipated date of return to work. Some organizations, such as First Direct in United Kingdom, make every effort to offer alternative work (IDS, 2001). For instance, a telephone operator who cannot do telephone work with a sore throat may be able to do other work, and managers are asked to bear this in mind when employee phone in sick and try to encourage the employees to come in, where appropriate, to carry out other tasks. This telephone conversation is also seen as an important tool in reducing the length of the absence.

Better Understanding of the Causes of Absence

Analysis of absence data can show the primary causes of absence in any particular organization and this may help employers develop absence management methods relevant to the most frequent causes. However, the reasons employees give for absence will be those that the organization considers legitimate, and further investigation may be necessary (Derek, Laura and Stephen, 2005). Organizations can encourage individuals to be open about the real cause for their absence, for example, a minor illness may be used as an excuse to cover for caring responsibilities, a stressful working environment or alcohol or drug problems. However, this is easier said than done. The London Borough of Brent has decided that the next stage in its efforts to tackle long-term absence is to try to unpick the causes of such

absence (IRS, 2002b). The employer has a feeling that the explanation may be partly related to issues of stress and the nature and organization of the work. Helping employees to feel they can trust the employer sufficiently to admit the real cause of absence means that absence can then effectively be tackled by providing the appropriate form of support. Another key tool is risk assessment, so for example, some organizations will assess the risk of back pain or stress, and then training can be provided to meet identified needs (Derek, Laura and Stephen, 2005).

Ongoing Contact During Absence

Maintaining contact during absence is considered by many organizations as a method of reducing length of absence, demonstrating to the employees that the organization is interested in them, and maintaining employees motivation. In some organizations it is the line manager who will keep in touch, and in others, such as Walter Holland and Son, there are liaison officers who fulfill this role. Contact may be by telephone, and with longer periods of absence may involve home visits, also. The Employers Organization for Local Government (EO) in Britain suggests that more effort should be made to keep in touch with employees after operations, partly to keep them up to date, but also to see if it is possible for them to come back to work on light duties or on a part-time basis (HSE, 2002a). In working out its policy of visits, Bracknell Forest Council pays due attention to the requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998 (IRS, 2002a). The council recommends one visit per month in working hours and considers this is reasonable in terms of the need to demonstrate "respect for private and family life", and the wish to avoid putting pressure on employees to return to work too early.

Return to Work Interviews and Formal Absence Review

Return to work interviews are increasingly used as a key part of attendance procedures. CIPD (2003) reports that these were used by 77% of organizations in 2003 compared with 57% in 2000. CIPD also reports that

these interviews are regarded as the most effective way of managing short-term absence. For some organizations these interviews are mandatory, even following a single day's absence, but there is frequently some flexibility about the nature of the interview depending on the circumstances (Derek, Laura and Stephen, 2005). In general the purpose of such interviews are identified as to: (1) welcome the employee back and update them on recent events; (2) check that the employee is well enough to resume normal duties and whether any further organizational support is needed; (3) reinforce the fact that the employee has been missed and attendance is a high priority in the organization; (4) review the employee's absence record (Derek, Laura and Stephen, 2005). Dunn and Wilkinson (2002) found managers in their research who said that there was no time to concentrate on return to work interviews, as the practicalities of getting the job done were more critical. They also found a view among line managers that they were just so glad to get the employee back that they did not want to "rock the boat". Where formal absence reviews are held these need to be handled with sensitivity and tact, and care needs to be taken so that the interview does not become recriminatory or accusatory (Derek, Laura and Stephen, 2005).

Use of Disciplinary Procedures

If someone is genuinely ill and unable to work as a result, disciplinary action whether threatened or real is unlikely to bring about a return to work in Nigerian organizations. It would not be desirable from the point of view of the employee or the employing organization were this is to be the case. There are, however, situations in which people who are too ill to work have to be dismissed (Okere, 2005). This is never a pleasant task, but it often falls to the human resource manager to carry it out. The key is to make sure that the dismissal is carried out in a legally sound manner. This issue is greatly summarized below:

1. Dismissing someone who is unable to work because of ill health is potentially fair under unfair dismissal law.

2. It is necessary to warn the individuals concerned that they may be dismissed if they do not return to work and to consult with them ahead of time to establish whether a return in the foreseeable future is feasible.
3. It is necessary to act on whatever medical advice is available.
4. In larger organizations, except where a person's job is very specialized or senior, it is normally considered reasonable to refrain from dismissing a sick employee for at least six months.
5. In any case no dismissal should occur if the employee falls under the definition of 'disabled' as set out in the 'Disability Discrimination Act' of Nigerian Labour Law.

In these cases an employee should only be dismissed once the employer is wholly satisfied that no reasonable adjustments could be made to accommodate the needs of the sick employees so as to allow them to return to work. Where someone is persistently absent for short periods of time, the course of action taken will depend on whether or not there is a genuine underlying medical condition which explains most of the absences. If so, the matter should be handled in the same way as cases of long-term absence due to ill health (Derek, Laura and Stephen, 2005). If not then it is feasible for the employer to take a tougher line and to threaten disciplinary action at an earlier stage. It is quite acceptable in law to dismiss employees whose absence records are unacceptably high, provided they have been warned ahead of time and given a fair opportunity to improve their attendance. It is also necessary to treat different employees in a consistent fashion. Taking disciplinary action in the form of issuing a formal warning is therefore credible and likely to be successful (Derek, Laura and Stephen, 2005).

Absence Levels and Performance Assessment

Some organizations have communicated to employees the message that attendance levels are measure of their performance, so they are included in annual assessments (Okere, 2001). Dunn and Wilkinson (2002) discovered

that in the three retail companies in their case sample, employees were assessed via a separate rating category on their absence levels. In addition employees with unacceptable absence levels would not be put forward for transfers or promotions. According to IDS (2001), "The Metropolitan Police Service" considers absence records as an indication of reliability, although it does not wish to give the message that absence is not permitted.

Attendance Bonus and Rewards

Some organizations pay bonuses direct to employees on the basis of their attendance records (Derek, Laura and Stephen, 2005). For instance, some organizations pay a quarterly attendance bonus at the end of each 13-week period for full attendance and an addition lump sum if an employee has had no sickness absence during a full calendar year. In addition, the organizations sends out letters commending employees for improving their absence record. However, research has provided that some managers do not support attendance bonuses as they feel that employees are already paid to turn up and they are effectively being paid twice (McFadzean, 2003). Research has also established that managers felt that attendance bonuses were a signal to employees that managers cannot control the work environment themselves, and that they have relinquished all responsibility for managing absence. On the other hand, Dunn and Wilkinson (2002) reported that managers felt attendance bonuses were unfair as they penalized those employees who were genuinely ill.

Occupational Health Support and Health Promotion

Many organizations in Nigeria do carryout pre-employment screening to identify any potential health problems at this stage (Okere and Okere, 2004). The organizations screen employees for general fitness and for potential job hazards, such as working with radiation, or VDUs. General screening may involve heart checks, blood tests, eye tests, well-woman/man clinics, ergonomics and physiotherapy, and discussions about weight and lifestyle, such as smoking, drinking and fitness levels. The

value of such screening is that problems can be identified at an early stage so that the impact on sickness absence will be minimized (Derek, Laura and Stephen, 2005). In some organizations positive encouragement will be given to employees to follow healthy lifestyles, such as healthy eating, giving up smoking, taking up exercise routines. For long-term absence the CIPD (2003) reports that the involvement of occupational health professionals was seen to be the most effective management tool, although HSE (2002c) demonstrated that only one in seven workers has the benefit of comprehensive occupational health support. However, IRS (2002b) show that such support does not have to be in-house and can be purchased.

Derek, Laura and Stephen (2005) says physiotherapists, counselors and psychologists are often employed, and the occupational health role may include remedial fitness training and exercise therapy for those recovering from an illness. Stress counseling is increasingly being provided and if this is offered as part of an employee assistance programme can reduce the liability in stress-related personal injury cases. Also training in stress management may be offered.

James, Cunningham and Dibben (2002) in their research found that the role of occupational health was ambiguous and problematic. Their respondents suggested that while occupational health worked on behalf of the employer, they tended to see themselves as representing employee interests. They also found that employees were very skeptical about visiting occupational health workers as they saw it as the first step in the termination of their employment.

Changes to Work and Work Organization

In the opinion of Derek, Laura and Stephen (2005), many employers appear to offer flexible working hours, part-time work and working from home. Employers also sometimes consider offering light duties or redeployment. However, James, Cunningham and Dibben (2002) observed that

operational factors often limit what was possible. In the three manufacturing organizations they visited it was not always feasible to offer light duties or make adjustments to the workplace. They also reported that other departments were reluctant to accept someone who was being redeployed after sickness, partly because they felt the employee might have lost the work habit, and also because there might be problems with pay if the levels of the old and new job differs. They also noted that there might be no budget to pay for adaptations to equipment or purchase further equipment.

Practical Support

Derek, Laura and Stephen (2005) says that there are many ways in which the employer can provide practical support to minimize sickness absence. Many organizations have experienced frustrations while employees are on waiting lists for diagnostic procedures and operations. In order to speed up medical treatment that employees need some organizations are prepared to pay the medical costs for employees where there is a financial case to do this. Training in areas such as stress management and time management may help employees minimize feelings of stress, and childcare support may simplify childcare arrangements.

Rao (2014) believe that absenteeism affects the organization from multiple angles. It severely affects the production process and the business process. The effect of unauthorized absenteeism is more compared to other types of absenteeism. However, it would be difficult to completely avoid absenteeism. The management of Nigerian organization can also minimize absenteeism by adopting the following measures to supplement the above approaches already discussed.

1. Selecting the employees by testing them thoroughly regarding their aspirations, value systems, responsibility and sensitiveness.
2. Adopting a humanistic approach in dealing with the personal problems of employees.

3. Following a proactive approach in identifying and redressing employee grievances.
4. Providing hygienic working conditions.
5. Providing welfare measures and fringe benefits, balancing the need for the employees and their ability of the organization.
6. Providing high wages and allowances based on the organizational financial position.
7. Improving the communication network, particularly the upward communication.
8. Providing leave facility based on the needs of the employees and organizational requirement.
9. Providing safety and health measures.
10. Providing cordial human relations and industrial relations.
11. Educating the workers.
12. Counselling the workers about their career, income and expenditure, habits and culture.
13. Free flow of information, exchanging of ideas, problems etc. between subordinate and superior.
14. Granting leave and financial assistance liberally in case of sickness of employee and his family members.
15. Offering attendance bonus and inducements.
16. Providing extensive training, encouragement, special allowances in cash for technological advancements.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to tackle the problem of employees absence to work and how to manage attendance in Nigerian organizations.

- Nigerian organizations should make serious endeavours to promote attendance and rehabilitate employees with long-term absence.
- Public sector organizations have been observed to have the highest employees absence rate. On this note, effort should be made to

reduce the employees absence by motivating them to regularly come to work. Both financial and non-financial motivators should be designed in this regard.

- Since the causes of employee absence are complex and interrelated, a process approach should be applied to understand absence behaviour.
- Attendance management policies need to take into account the causes of absence, which may be identified by patterns of absence and by enabling individuals to be open about why they are not at work either by telephone conversation or face to face discussion.
- Research has proved that some measures to manage absence actually increase absence, so monitoring any new policies and procedures is critical.
- Absence report should be generated by human resource manager and send to line managers regularly.
- Absence review groups should be set up, and be charged to review all absence and identify those who have hit trigger points which will then require intervention, such as an absence review meeting with the employee.
- Return to work interviews should be used as a key part of attendance procedures.
- Dismissing employee who is unable to work because of ill health is potentially fair, but that should not be done under unfair dismissal law.
- In any case no dismissal should occur if the employee falls under the definition of disabled as set out in the Disability Discrimination Act.
- Organizations should inform the employees in advance that attendance levels will also be used as a measure of their performance appraisal.
- Bonuses should be paid to the employees directly on the basis of their attendance records.

- Pre-employment screening is important to identify any potential health problems at the entry stage.
- To manage employees attendance effectively, organizations should offer flexible working hours, part-time and working from home, light duties or redeployment.
- Line managers should be trained whenever a new absence reduction system is introduced.
- In order to speed up medical treatment that employees need, organizations should be prepared to pay the medical costs for employees where there is a financial case to do this.

Conclusions

Employee absence continues to be a major problem for both the country and business in terms of direct costs and lost performance. The most often reported cause of short –term absence is minor illness; however, back pain for manual workers and stress for non-manual workers are the leading causes of long-term absence. It is important to understand the true nature of the causation of absence, as remedies can only be developed with this knowledge. The causation of absence can result from a complex interrelationship of factors.

Typically, attendance management policies included absence monitoring and reporting, absence review and trigger points, training and support for line managers, absence notification procedures, better understanding of the causes of absence, risk assessments, ongoing contact during absence, return to work interviews and absence review interview, use of disciplinary procedure, absence-influenced performance assessments, absence bonus and rewards, occupational health support, changes to work and work organization, and practical support. The mix of policies and processes used needs to be tailored to the needs of the organization.

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