Presenteeism at Work: The Agony and the Ecstasy

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What Is Presenteeism???
How Did I Get into This?

• What about people who are at work but “not there”?
• National Post interview on Toronto SARS crisis, 2003
• CBC radio interview, December 2004
• Looming SSHRC deadline, summer 2005
Guess Who...
Definitions of Presenteeism

- Attending work, as opposed to being absent (Smith; 1970)
- Exhibiting excellent attendance (Canfield & Soash, 1955; Stolz, 1993)
- Working elevated hours, thus putting in “face time” (Simpson, 1998; Worrall et al., 2000)
- Being reluctant to work part time rather than full time (Sheridan, 2004)
- Being unhealthy but exhibiting no sickness absenteeism (Kivimäki et al., 2005)
- Going to work despite feeling unhealthy (Aronsson et al., 2000; Johns, 2010)
- Going to work despite feeling unhealthy or experiencing other events that might normally compel absence (e.g., child care problems) (Evans, 2004; Johansson & Lundberg, 2004)
- Reduced productivity at work due to health problems (Turpin et al., 2004)
- Reduced productivity at work due to health problems or other events that distract one from full productivity (e.g., office politics) (Hummer et al., 2002; Whitehouse, 2005)

Source: Johns, JOB, 2010
The Absence-Presence-Engagement Continuum

Absenteeism  Presenteeism  Presenteeism  Full Engagement

0%  ___________  Productivity  ___________  100%
## The Two Faces of Presenteeism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low productivity</th>
<th>Some productivity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Downstream illness</td>
<td>Self-affirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contagion</td>
<td>OCB attributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsafe behavior</td>
<td>Reflects Job Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Robert Rubin, Consummate Presentee

I was intent on not letting my back pain interfere with... Goldman..., so I did everything I could to keep functioning. For many months, I’d have to lie down at the office on a couch... I was in the hospital three times... and each time I ran the arbitrage business from my bed. I was on the board of Studebaker-Worthington, and I participated in one meeting lying on the conference table. Once, the CEO of the company... called and asked me to meet him at his office on a Saturday to talk about selling the company... I couldn’t walk for more than a few yards at the time, or even sit, but I went to [his] office and lay on the window seat... trying not to miss a beat by working from a horizontal position. (Rubin and Weisberg, 2003: 88)

Source: Rubin & Weisberg, In an Uncertain World, 2003, as excerpted in Michel, ASQ, 2011
Presenteeism among NZ Senior Public Sector Medical Personnel

Source: Chambers, *Superheros Don’t Take Sick Leave*, 2015
Web Of Science—Presenteeism in Title, Abstract, or Keywords

Published items

Citations

Source: Web of Science, September 13, 2016
Consensus around Health Emerges and a New Scientific Construct is Born

• Economic criteria join efficacy and safety as key outcomes of medical interventions; “outcomes” research emerges

• In a clinical trial of a migraine drug, Adelman et al. (1996) find that productivity loss when present is more clinically responsive than absenteeism

• Aronsson et al. (2000) include an interesting question in the Statistics Sweden labor market survey
  – “Has it ever happened over the previous 12 months that you have gone to work despite feeling that you really should have taken sick leave because of your state of health?”

• Organizational and occupational health scholars speculate that mergers, acquisitions, layoffs, and downsizing stimulate insecurity that forces the sick to go to work
Role reversal between management scholars and medical researchers

Work productivity is medicalized to facilitate health plan coverage of state-of-the-art (\$\&\pounds\) pharmaceuticals (cf. Coveny et al., 2009)

Are USFDA-approved productivity claims the goal? (Evans, 2004; Prasad et al., 2004)

A lengthy Harvard Business Review article attributes US presenteeism costs at $150 billion per annum (Hemp, 2004)

A whole sub-industry develops: Opticians; “Go-Kits”
A Simple, Inexpensive Solution For Improved Presenteeism

Employees come to work for a wide variety of reasons, ranging from big meeting to the need for a paycheck. One sick employee can easily infect five others, causing a costly chain of infection. Now, there's a program called Healthy Office which can dramatically increase the productivity gains associated with increased presenteeism.

The Iceberg Analogy to Productivity Loss

Absenteeism

Presenteeism
Medical Costs at Bank One

Source: Hemp, *HBR*, 2004
**Weekly Cost of Presenteeism versus Absenteeism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>RA</th>
<th>Percentage of total costs</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Percentage of total costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRODISQ</td>
<td>€</td>
<td></td>
<td>€</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absenteeism</td>
<td>120 (0–1351)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9 (0–200)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenteeism (QQ)</td>
<td>299 (0–1447)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>154 (0–1371)</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total costs</td>
<td>419 (0–2437)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>163 (0–1372)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPAI-GH</td>
<td>€</td>
<td></td>
<td>€</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absenteeism</td>
<td>116 (0–530)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6 (0–93)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenteeism</td>
<td>318 (0–1508)</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>72 (0–1357)</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total costs</td>
<td>381 (0–2024)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>78 (0–1357)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Braakman-Jansen et al., *Rheumatology*, 2012
Presenteeism at Lockheed Martin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Prevalence</th>
<th>Average productivity loss</th>
<th>Aggregate annual loss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Migraine</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>$434,385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthritis</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>$865,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic lower-back pain (without leg pain)</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>$858,825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allergies or sinus trouble</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>$1,809,945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asthma</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>$259,740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GERD (acid reflux disease)</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>$582,660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dermatitis or other skin condition</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>$610,740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flu in the past two weeks</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>$607,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>$786,600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lerner et al., Tufts NE Medical Center, from Hemp, *HBR*, 2004
Annual Cost of Presenteeism by Occupational Class and Industry

Source: Scuffham, Vecchio, & Whiteford, *Medical Decision Making*, 2014
Lack of Theory

“Conceptual models of how to measure self-reported productivity are largely absent from questionnaire developers’ publications…the conceptual model is neutral or free and the subsequent psychometric analysis is used to determine appropriate constructs” (Evans, JOEM, 2004)

- Failure to incorporate multidimensionality of performance
  - Can’t grasp how, why, when of productivity decrements
- Inattention to temporal issues
  - Instability versus aggregation
- Inattention to absence/presence tradeoff
  - Data collected, not analyzed
Conflation of Cause and Effect

*Presenteeism = Reduced productivity at work due to health problems*

- Definition preempts studying the psychosocial correlates of going to work ill
- Definition leads to the common practice of attributing 100% of reported productivity loss to illness (Goetzel et al., 2004; Schultz & Edington, 2007)
- Definition precludes the study of other consequences of the act (e.g., health, family life, perceived OCB)
- The correlates of presenteeism days and productivity loss differ, and the latter is associated with a range of non-medical variables (Johns, 2011)
Difficulties with the Concept of Productivity Loss

• 60 years of I-O psychology research ignored
• Relatively few contemporary jobs amenable to objective, countable productivity, and this criterion is deficient in any event
• Single item measures of productivity loss can’t capture the multidimensionality of the concept
• Some measures ignore the basic input-output tenets of productivity
  – My health problem distracted me from taking pleasure in my work (SPS-6, Koopman et al., 2002)
• How stable is this variable? Verstappen et al. (2012) note reporting periods ranging from 2 weeks to one year
Limited Evidence for Construct Validity of Productivity Loss

“Enormous variability found in estimating on-the-job productivity losses…is somewhat disconcerting when trying to get a clear sense of the big picture” (Goetzel et al., 2004)

- The sample lost either 91 or 82 or 12 hours of work in a week (Brouwer et al., 1999)
- Two week productivity loss was either 1.6 or 4.0 or 13.5 or 14.2 hours over 2 weeks ($30-$285 CDN) (Zhang et al., 2010)
- Weekly productivity loss cost from €79 - €318 (Braakmann-Jansen et al., 2012)
- Annual per capita cost of presenteeism is either hundreds or thousands of dollars (Goetzel et al., 2004 vs. Collins et al., 2005)
A Tale (Tail?) of Two Distributions

Source: Data from Johns, *JOHP*, 2011
Potential for Common Method Artifacts

The basic problem: People self-report both their health and their productivity, contiguously

- The inherent vagueness of productivity
- Implicit theories connecting health to productivity
- Health probe primes productivity loss estimate
Conflicts of Interest?

“Brooks, Hagen, Sathyanarayanan, Schultz, and Edington (2010) call attention to the elephant in the room, the appearance of conflict of interest among health consultants and practitioners who have incentives to exaggerate the prevalence and cost of presenteeism.”

Johns, COHP, 2012
Conclusions Concerning the Productivity Consequences of Presenteeism

• Presenteeism causes productivity loss—the question is how much

• Be leery of very high cost estimates for presenteeism, but remember these usually omit indirect costs

But what causes presenteeism? See next slide!!
Why Would Someone Go to Work Ill?
Some Possible Contributors

- The substitution hypothesis (Caverley et al., 2007)
- Strategic use of presence and absence to manage relationships with coworkers, clients, customers, the larger organization, one’s family
- Attitudes toward absence (Addae, Johns, & Boies, 2013)
- Personal resiliency
Food for Thought

• Should healthier people engage in more or less presenteeism than sicker people?
• What is the relationship between presenteeism and absenteeism—positive, negative, or zero?
• Should job demands be positively or negatively related to presenteeism?
• Should job control be positively or negatively related to presenteeism?
• Should people experiencing work stress be more or less inclined to exhibit presenteeism?
• Should people who are high in job satisfaction exhibit more or less presenteeism?
• Should men or women exhibit more presenteeism?
A Heuristic Model for the Meta-Analysis

Constraints on Absence

Job Demands & Stress

Job Resources

Personal Resources

Job Attitudes

Health

Presenteeism

Absenteeism
Meta-Analytic Database

• Searched Google Scholar, PsychInfo, MedLine, Web of Science, ProQuest Business, ProQuest Dissertation and Thesis, and Business Source Complete using the keywords presenteeism, sickness presence, and sickness attendance

• Accessed the fifth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) from the United Kingdom Data Service archive, conducted by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions and Gallup Europe in 2010, sampling 43,816 employees from 34 countries (28 EU plus Macedonia, Turkey, Norway, Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro); the average sample was 1,289, ranging from 1,000 to 4,001
Meta-Analytic Database and Procedure

- 313 studies identified
- 61 studies retained
- $K = 109$ independent samples
- $N = 175,965$ respondents

- $r (K = 63)$, joint frequency distributions, $X^2$, $d$, $RR$, $OR$
- Coding inter-rater reliabilities $\geq .99$
- Hunter & Schmidt random effects procedure corrected for unreliability in presenteeism and its correlates
- 100 meta-analyses for 50 correlates
- Copious sensitivity analyses
- State-of-the-art tests for publication bias (funnel plots, trim and fill, Egger’s intercept)
Measures of the Act of Presenteeism

**Exact Days** “How many days did you go to work in the past six months even though you were sick or not feeling well?” (Johns, 2011)

**Likert or relative frequency** “Over the past six months I have gone to work despite feeling that I really should have taken sick leave due to my state of health” (Aronsson et al., 2000); “I have continued to work when it might have been better to take sick leave” (McKevitt et al., 1997)

**Indirect** Respondents report health complaints but no sickness days (Bracewell et al., 2010)
Health, Absence, and Productivity

• Health status - - - $\rho = -.31$ ($K = 67$)
• Mental health - $\rho = -.05$ ($K = 14$)
• Depression + + $\rho = .20$ ($K = 40$)
• Absenteeism + + + + $\rho = .35$ ($K = 55$)
• Productivity loss + + + $\rho = .28$ ($K = 5$)
• Performance ratings 0 $\rho = -.01$ ($K = 4$)
Constraints on Absenteeism

- Strict absence policies $+++$ $\rho = .39$ $(K = 5)$
- Job insecurity $+$ $\rho = .08$ $(K = 44)$
- Permanent/temporary job 0 $\rho = -.01$ $(K = 44)$
- Income - $\rho = -.02$ $(K = 47)$
- Personal financial difficulty $+$ $\rho = .10$ $(K = 43)$
- Ease of replacement -- $\rho = -.13$ $(K = 8)$
Job Demands and Stress

- Overall demands + + \( \rho = 0.16 \ (K = 46) \)
- Workload + + + \( \rho = 0.28 \ (K = 7) \)
- Understaffing + + + \( \rho = 0.25 \ (K = 5) \)
- Supervisory duties + \( \rho = 0.05 \ (K = 45) \)
- Overtime + + \( \rho = 0.15 \ (K = 35) \)
- Time pressure + + \( \rho = 0.11 \ (K = 40) \)
- Work stress + + + \( \rho = 0.25 \ (K = 44) \)
- Emotional exhaustion + + + + \( \rho = 0.36 \ (K = 10) \)
- Discrimination + \( \rho = 0.10 \ (K = 34) \)
- Harassment + + \( \rho = 0.16 \ (K = 34) \)
- Abuse + + \( \rho = 0.20 \ (K = 34) \)
- Work -> family conflict + + \( \rho = 0.14 \ (K = 38) \)
A Vicious Cycle?

Source: Morneau Shepell, 2015
Job and Personal Resources

- **Overall control** $\rho = -0.03$ ($K = 54$)
- **Adjustment latitude** $\rho = -0.08$ ($K = 39$)
- **Work significance** $\rho = 0.00$ ($K = 36$)
- **Collegial support** $\rho = -0.07$ ($K = 42$)
- **Supervisory support** $\rho = -0.10$ ($K = 49$)
- **Organizational support** $\rho = -0.17$ ($K = 4$)
- **Quality leadership** $\rho = -0.13$ ($K = 36$)
- **Conscientiousness** $\rho = 0.05$ ($K = 5$)
- **Optimism** $\rho = -0.22$ ($K = 34$)
Attitudes and Justice

- Job satisfaction $++$ $\rho = .12$ ($K = 51$)
- Affective commitment $++$ $\rho = .20$ ($K = 6$)
- Work engagement $++$ $\rho = .13$ ($K = 3$)
- Organizational justice $--$ $\rho = -.13$ ($K = 6$)
Meta-Analytic Structural Equation Model for Presenteeism and Absenteeism

Source: Miraglia & Johns, JOHP, 2016
Why Manage Presenteeism?

- **Downstream illness and absenteeism** (Skagen & Collins, 2016)
- **Contagion** (Luksyte et al., 2015; Widera et al., 2010)
- **Unsafe behavior** (Niven & Ciborowska, 2015)
- **Reduced citizenship behavior** (Christian et al., 2015)
- **Some of your best employees do it** (Miraglia & Johns, 2016)
- **If you don’t manage it someone else will**
Managing Presenteeism—Some Things to Remember

• You can’t see it, but you can count it

• Presenteeism isn’t just about health

• Presenteeism seems responsive to management; you can do something about it

• Extreme absenteeism policies unleash the law of unintended consequences

• Excessive job demands almost guarantee presenteeism

• Job resources help, but don’t seem to fully offset demands

• The social dynamics of this behavior can’t be ignored
Managing Presenteeism—Some Things to Do

• Develop some written policy

• *Measure* presenteeism in employee surveys and health audits

• Need CEO/top management involvement

• Develop or extend work-at-home protocols

• Don’t encourage or reward “face time”

• Critical to empower front-line managers on this
Thanks!

http://www.concordia.ca/news/articles/2012/presenteeism-hurts-productivity.html

“No, I’m not sick. That’s not medication, it’s coffee.”