

## The Influence Of Motivation To Attend, Ability To Attend, And Organizational Commitment On Different Types Of Absence Behaviors

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In the past twenty years over 500 books and papers have been written about absenteeism (Harrison and Martocchio, 1998). This is not surprising considering the importance of controlling absenteeism from an organizational perspective. In the United States, for example, it is estimated that employee absenteeism costs organizations approximately \$40 billion per year (Gaudine and Saks, 2001). In addition, recent meta-analyses have demonstrated that absenteeism is negatively correlated ( $r = -.29$ ) with performance (Bycio, 1992).

The majority of the work done in this field has focused on how individ-

ual factors such as personality (Porter and Steers, 1973), demographics (Lee, 1989), and job attitudes (Steers and Rhodes, 1978) influence absence behavior. The results from these studies have been inconsistent (Harrison and Martocchio, 1998). One reason for this inconsistency may be that the majority of these studies are non-theory based. In addition, most examined overall absenteeism rather than specific categories of absenteeism. In this article, we propose extending the highly influential Steers and Rhodes (1978) model of absenteeism by focusing on various types of absenteeism as well as utilizing three dimensions of organizational commitment.

### THE STEERS AND RHODES MODEL OF ABSENTEEISM

The Steers and Rhodes (1978) model of absenteeism has been called one of the most influential and often-cited models in the absenteeism literature (Harrison and Martocchio, 1998). In the model, employee attendance is primarily determined by an employee's ability and motivation to attend. These two variables also are theorized to interact such that someone's perceived ability to attend moderates the motivation to attend—attendance relationship. Motivation to attend is influenced by a person's satisfaction with his/her job situation and various pressures to attend (i.e., economic conditions, organizational commitment, etc.).

Although highly influential, the Steers and Rhodes (1978) model has received relatively few direct overall tests (Harrison and Martocchio, 1998). Due to the complexity of the model, most researchers have only tested portions of the overall model (e.g., Brooke and Price, 1989). The only study that tested all theoretical components of the original Steers and Rhodes model is Lee (1989). In his study, he found that motivation to attend predicts attendance but ability to attend had no direct or indirect effect on attendance. Moreover, motivation to attend was only weakly related to attendance. Rhodes and Steers (1990) suggest that the few partial and one complete test provide some support for their original model.

#### **Multidimensionality of Absence Behaviors**

One reason why the limited research on motivation to attend and

ability to attend has found mixed results is that, in order to be consistent with Steers and Rhodes' model, these studies focused on measures of overall absenteeism. It may be that absenteeism is multidimensional rather than unidimensional. Therefore, separating and predicting different types of absences may be useful (Martocchio and Harrison, 1993). Kohler and Mathieu (1993) and others (e.g., Blau, 1985) argue that research in absenteeism may be missing significant findings by relying on a unidimensional framework of absenteeism (e.g., avoidable—unavoidable, paid—unpaid). They recommend and test the notion that absenteeism is a multidimensional construct. In Kohler and Mathieu's study of transit workers, they found that separating absenteeism into several components (illness, personal, family, transportation) enabled them to find results that would have been hidden by examining overall absenteeism.

In this article, we suggest expanding the Steers and Rhodes model to focus on absenteeism due to illness, family issues, transportation problems, and failure to report for work without notice. The predictiveness of different components from the Steers and Rhodes model may depend on the type of situation causing an employee's absence. For example, if someone in an employee's family is ill, that person may need to stay home from work no matter how great the motivation for attendance. As such, motivation to attend should not be related to actual absenteeism. From an organizational perspective, this type of absence should not cause as much alarm (as long as it does not happen frequently) compared to the kinds of absence that are caused by someone's low motivation to attend.

If absence is caused by someone's low motivation to attend, the organization may be able to take steps to increase attendance.

Although the empirical evidence is not entirely consistent, the preponderance of the evidence indicates that family variables relate to absences. For example, Goff *et al.* (1990) found that conflict between one's work and family role was related to an increased frequency of absenteeism. Further, Zaccaro *et al.* (1991) found that larger families did not necessarily lead to a greater frequency of absenteeism, but they found that the relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism was stronger for employees with smaller families. Therefore, it could be that affect toward one's job or level of motivation to attend becomes less important in predicting absenteeism when one has increasing family responsibilities. Taken as a whole, absenteeism attributed to family issues should be related to one's perceived ability to attend but not motivation to attend.

*Hypothesis 1: Ability to attend will be positively related to the frequency of absenteeism that is attributed to family issues.*

Besides absenteeism due to family issues, we also expect ability to attend and motivation to attend to predict differently absences due to illness, transportation problems, and failure to report for work without notice. It is expected that absences due to transportation problems should be related to one's perceived ability to attend rather than motivation to attend. No matter how high a person's level of motivation to attend, if the person has transportation problems (e.g., car trouble or public transpor-

tation problems), it is unlikely the individual will report for work.

*Hypothesis 2: Ability to attend will be positively related to the frequency of absenteeism that is attributed to transportation problems.*

Absences due to illness or failure to report to work without notice (advance notice or subsequent notice) should be more likely to be related to one's motivation to attend than ability to attend. It is commonly thought that absences due to illness represent involuntary absenteeism and therefore should be related to one's ability to attend. However, some theoretical and empirical research in the field suggests that absences due to illness may not strictly represent involuntary absenteeism but rather may be voluntary in nature (Brooke, 1986). For example, research by Judge and Martocchio (1996) indicates that employees may cite illness as a reason for absenteeism when there are actually other causes of this behavior. Therefore, we offer competing hypotheses regarding the relationship between absences attributed to illness and ability to attend and motivation to attend.

*Hypothesis 3a: Motivation to attend will be negatively related to the frequency of absenteeism that is attributed to illness.*

*Hypothesis 3b: Ability to attend will be positively related to the frequency of absenteeism that is attributed to illness.*

Finally, although there has not been empirical or theoretical work relating one's failure to report for work without notice to ability to attend or motivation to attend, we expect that motivation to attend will be related to this type of absence behavior. Our reasoning behind this expectation is that if someone fails to report for work and does not notify the organization prior to the absence or following the absence, it is more

likely that they were able to make it to work, but chose not to attend. If ability to attend was a factor in their decision to be absent from work, it is likely that the employee would notify the organization the reason they missed work.

*Hypothesis 4: Motivation to attend will be negatively related to the frequency of absenteeism that results in a failure to notify the organization.*

### Organizational Commitment

Employees' attitudes toward their job and the organization are expected to influence absenteeism indirectly through motivation to attend in the Steers and Rhodes model. For our study, we chose to focus on the role of organizational commitment. Recent advances in our understanding of organizational commitment suggest that the Steers and Rhodes model needs to consider type of commitment.

Organizational commitment originally focused on an individual's emotional attachment to an organization (Mowday *et al.*, 1979). Based primarily on the measure developed by Mowday and his colleagues, a meta-analysis by Farrell and Stamm (1988) found that organizational commitment was negatively related to absence frequency ( $r = -.23$ ). However, organizational commitment has recently been expanded to a more comprehensive view. Meyer and Allen (1991, 1997) assert that organization commitment is comprised of an affective, continuance, and normative component. Affective commitment relates to an individual's emotional attachment or identification with an organization. It is akin to the traditional notions of organizational commitment. In other words, a person participates in an organization be-

cause he/she "wants to." Continuance commitment relates to an individual's awareness that there are associated costs with withdrawing temporarily or permanently from an organization. It may be that the person perceives that they have devoted too much time or energy to leave the organization or may not be able to find another job. In other words, a person perceives that he/she "needs to participate." Finally, normative commitment is an employee's feeling of obligation to participate in an organization. The employee believes it is the right thing to do or that he/she "ought to participate."

A variety of recent studies have examined the relationship between the different kinds of commitment and absenteeism. Overall, it appears that affective commitment has the strongest relation with absence behavior (Meyer, 1997). The results for normative commitment are less consistent. Meyer *et al.* (1993) found that normative commitment was negatively related to absenteeism while Somers (1995) found no relationship between normative commitment and absenteeism. It should be noted that Meyer *et al.* (1993) used a self-reported measure of absences while Somers (1995) used organizational records to measure the total number of days absent per employee. Measurement issues of this type may account for some of the inconsistent findings in the area. Finally, continuance commitment has not found strong support in the absenteeism literature (e.g., Mayer and Schoorman, 1992). It should also be noted that the majority of these studies have been conducted on nurses in large hospitals. It seems justified to expand the study of organizational commit-

ment and absenteeism to a non-professional sample.

Although organizational commitment and its various dimensions have been shown to be directly related to absenteeism, their effect is weak, accounting for less than ten percent of the variance explained in absenteeism. Thus, Meyer (1997) and Johns (1997) have suggested it may be advisable to see if these attitudes affect absenteeism indirectly. As Rhodes and Steers (1990) point out, one such intervening variable is motivation to attend. Affective, normative, and continuance commitment should all be positively related to motivation to attend but may differ in their relative strength. For example, it is expected that affective and normative commitment will be strongly related to a person's motivation to attend with continuance commitment relating to a lesser extent. It could be expected that if someone has high levels of affect toward their job or organization (affective commitment), they would be more likely to be motivated to attend work everyday. In addition, if someone feels he or she ought to (normative commitment) go to work each day, this should be strongly related to motivation to attend. On the other hand, if someone feels he or she has to (continuance commitment) go to work, a weaker relationship with motivation to attend could be expected. In this case, economic conditions, personal finances, and other non-organizational factors likely enter into the decision to attend. For the present study, we predict that the various dimensions of organizational commitment will indirectly influence the level of absenteeism through a person's motivation to attend.

*Hypothesis 5: Motivation to attend will mediate the relationship between affective, normative, and continuance commitment and absenteeism.*

## METHOD

### Participants and Procedures

Surveys were administered to customer service employees in the Internet division of a large national retailer. Respondents completed the surveys during a 15-minute work break provided by the organization. They completed the surveys in a conference room at individual tables without supervision. We guaranteed confidentiality to all respondents in a letter sent in advance of the survey. Two hundred and sixty-five employees completed the surveys, while the remaining 15 customer service representatives of this organization did not because they were either on leave or absent, yielding a response rate of 94.6 percent. Twenty-two respondents did not self-identify. Consequently, for the analyses requiring matching data from the organization, only 243 respondents are included.

The respondents who provided names do not appear to be different from respondents who did not in terms of gender ( $t = -.67, p > .10$ ) or tenure with the organization ( $t = 1.25, p > .10$ ). All employees surveyed were at the same job level (customer service representatives). The average age of respondents was 28.43 years, 75 percent were female, and 19 percent were married. On average they had worked in their current position for 1.04 years and 1.49 years for the organization. Fifty-one percent worked full time.

### Measures

**Dependent Variable.** In this study, a time lost measure of absence was

used where the total number of days absent per employee was observed for a period of ten months following the administration of the survey for the 214 employees who we could match absenteeism with their self-provided identification number. Due to some employees leaving the organization prior to the ten-month period, an average monthly absenteeism figure was calculated for all employees. Pro-rating absenteeism over a particular period has been commonly used in absenteeism studies (e.g., Goff *et al.*, 1990). The participants in this study averaged 1.52 days absent per month.

Absence data are known for their lack of normality and positive skew (Hammer and Landau, 1981). In this study, overall absenteeism exhibited a positive skewness of 1.52, a kurtosis of 2.48, and was not normally distributed. To correct for this problem, absence data were subjected to a square root transformation. The transformed absenteeism exhibited a low skewness (.25) and kurtosis (-.03). Moreover, a Kolomogoro-Smirnov test indicated that the transformed absenteeism data were normally distributed ( $KS = 1.21, p > .10$ ). Therefore, all analyses were conducted using the square root transformation of the absenteeism data.

The organization provided the number of absence incidents and the perceived cause of the absence event (as reported by an employee's supervisor). The organization classified the perceived cause of the absence event according to the following categories: *family situation*, *illness*, *notify* (advance notice of illness), *childcare* issues, *transportation*, failure to report for work (*no show*), and *other* issues. Due to the similarity of several of the categories, we chose to combine several of the categories of absenteeism. Spe-

cifically, we chose to combine absenteeism attributed to family and childcare issues since we believe it is possible that managers may have coded an employee's absence as "family" even if the employee reported it as a childcare issue. In addition, absences attributed to illness and those classified as "notify" were combined because both deal with sickness as the cause of absence. Two Ph.D. students not affiliated with the current project were also asked to independently categorize the absence classifications given to us by the organization. These two individuals were in 100 percent agreement in their categorization of absence behavior at the organization and in agreement with the combinations suggested above. Finally, we chose to eliminate absence due to "other" causes when examining the various dimensions of absenteeism because we could not accurately determine what was the perceived cause of the absence event. Therefore, all analysis conducted in this study used the following categories: absence due to illness, absence due to family issues, absence due to transportation problems, and failure to report for work without notice (no show).

As in the case of the overall measure of absenteeism, the various categories of absenteeism were also subjected to a square root transformation. The transformation of absences attributed to illness exhibited a low skewness (.23) and kurtosis (-.07). A Kolomogoro-Smirnov test indicated that the transformation resulted in a normal distribution ( $KS = 1.05, p > .10$ ). The square root transformation of the remaining absence categories differed significantly from normality. However, Hammer and Landau (1981) indicated that the



magnitude of the deviation is more important than the level of significance. In particular, it has been suggested that researchers only need to be concerned with skewness values above 2 and kurtosis values greater than 5 (Kendall and Stuart, 1958). The square root transformations of absences attributed to family issues (skewness = 1.68, kurtosis = 2.42), transportation problems (skewness = 1.67, kurtosis = 2.09), and no show (skewness = 1.69, kurtosis = 3.06) were within these requirements.

To establish the discriminant validity of the various absence categories, we examined the correlation between the different types of absence behaviors. Overall, we found that the absence categories were weakly correlated ( $r = .19$ ). The magnitude of the individual correlations ranged from a low of .06 (family issues and no show) to a high of .35 (illness and no show). Although we cannot be completely sure if the employees gave their supervisors the true reason for their absence, the low correlations between the various categories of absences indicates they represent different behaviors.

**Independent Variables.** *Motivation to attend* was measured with three items assessing the degree to which participants felt motivated to go to work every day. These items were based on the work of Steers and Rhodes and obtained from Lee (1989). A sample item includes, "All in all, I usually feel motivated to come to work each day." A factor analysis with varimax rotation revealed that all items measuring motivation to attend loaded on one factor ( $\alpha = .73$ ).

*Ability to attend* was measured with four items designed to measure participant's beliefs on situations that

limit their ability to attend work. The four items were, "Public transportation problems often are the reason why I am absent"; "When I am absent, it is because of illness"; "Child-care issues are most often the reasons why I miss a shift"; and "If I miss work, it is usually because of car problems." Brooke (1986) states that ability to attend does not represent one underlying construct, but rather represents a label for the various categories listed above. Corroborating Brooke's observation, a factor analysis with varimax rotation revealed a two-factor solution for ability to attend (based on eigenvalues over 1 and observation of scree plot). This result is counter to what the Steers and Rhodes' model indicates but not unexpected based on past theoretical and empirical work in the field that has questioned the construct validity of the ability to attend measure. Therefore, based on the factor analysis and past theoretical work, we decided to sum (as opposed to average) the responses to the categories listed above. The logic behind this approach is that individuals who indicate more barriers to attendance should be less able to attend. It is important to note, like Brooke (1986), that ability to attend is not a traditional psychological construct. Instead, it is a summation of not-necessarily-correlated forces acting on attendance behavior. Because there is no necessary correlation across these (summed) forces, measures of internal consistency are not appropriate. Aggregating these items into one measure offers a parsimonious solution and may best capture the true aspects of ability to attend.

*Organizational commitment* was measured with items from Meyer and Allen's (1991, 1997) expansion of the

organizational commitment construct. Affective commitment ( $\alpha = .87$ ), normative commitment ( $\alpha = .78$ ), and continuance commitment ( $\alpha = .79$ ) were all measured with eight items.

**Control Variables.** Based on the nature of our sample and past empirical and theoretical work in absenteeism, we chose to control for *age, gender, tenure* in the organization, and level of *education* (Brooke, 1986). All of these variables have been shown to be related to absenteeism in past research and therefore need to be controlled in order to increase the internal validity of our study.

## RESULTS

### Types of Absences

Means, standard deviations, and the correlation among the main variables in this study are provided in Table 1. Hypotheses 1 through 4 indicated that ability to attend and motivation to attend would relate differently to different types of absence behaviors. Consistent with hypothesis 1, absence due to family issues was not significantly related to motivation to attend ( $r = -.12, p > .05$ ), but was significantly related to ability to attend ( $r = .18, p < .01$ ). The relationships suggested in the remaining hypotheses were in the proper direction (except for absences classified as no show), but did not reach statistical significance.

To test whether certain types of absenteeism are more related to motivation to attend and ability to attend in the Steers and Rhodes model of absenteeism, regression analyses were conducted examining absenteeism attributed to family issues, illness, transportation problems, and no

show. The results of the significant analyses are shown in Table 2.

Absenteeism coded as a no show and transportation problems failed to gain significant  $R^2$  when the various absenteeism variables were regressed onto motivation to attend and ability to attend. However, motivation to attend and ability to attend explained a significant amount of incremental variance in absenteeism attributed to family issues ( $\Delta R^2 = .04, p < .05$ ) and illness ( $\Delta R^2 = .03, p < .05$ ). In support of hypothesis 1, when measures of ability to attend and motivation to attend were entered into an equation predicting absenteeism attributed to family issues, ability to attend became significant while motivation to attend did not. In support of hypothesis 3a, when motivation to attend and ability to attend were regressed onto absence due to illness, only motivation to attend was significantly related, thereby supporting the notion that absence attributed to illness may represent a voluntary absence behavior.

### Organizational Commitment

Tests of mediation proposed in hypothesis 5 could not be conducted because motivation to attend was not significantly related to overall absenteeism (Baron and Kenny, 1986). However, the various dimensions of organizational commitment were strongly related to motivation to attend. Affective ( $r = .49, p < .01$ ), normative ( $r = .39, p < .001$ ), and continuance commitment ( $r = .13, p < .05$ ) are positively related to a person's level of motivation to attend. Although strongly related, factor analyses demonstrate the discriminant validity of the items representing motivation to attend, affective, normative, and continuance commitment.



TABLE I<sup>a,b,c</sup>  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Sqrt. Overall Absence	1.52	1.39													
2. Sqrt. Family Issues	.07	.16	.47***												
3. Sqrt. No Show	.13	.30	.51***	.06											
4. Sqrt. Illness	.51	.91***	.27**	.35***											
5. Sqrt. Transportation	.07	.17	.34***	.24***	.07	.15*									
6. Ability-to-Attend	10.09	2.34	.10	.18**	.01	.06	.11								
7. Motivation-to-Attend	2.25	.83	-.10	-.12	.08	-.11	-.03	-.10	(.73)						
8. Affective Comm.	2.83	.73	-.13	.01	.05	-.19**	.00	-.04	.49**	(.87)					
9. Continuance Comm.	2.81	.76	.00	-.02	.07	-.04	-.02	-.08	.13*	.27***	(.79)				
10. Normative Comm.	3.08	.61	-.19**	-.11	-.07	-.16*	-.16*	.03	.39***	.50***	.26***	(.78)			
11. Age	28.43	10.43	-.22**	-.09	-.19**	-.17**	-.14*	-.13*	-.35***	-.19***	.06	-.17**			
12. Tenure in Organization	1.49	2.26	-.19**	-.08	-.09	-.14*	-.11	-.05	-.05	.06	.05	.03	.18**		
13. Gender	--	--	.05	-.09	.11	.02	.02	-.10	.15*	.06	.04	.07	-.08	-.08	
14. Education	--	--	-.23***	-.27***	.00	-.17**	-.07	-.07	-.04	.18***	.13*	.09	.28***	.13*	-.05

<sup>a</sup> \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001

<sup>b</sup> Means and standard deviations are for original (non-transformed) variables.

<sup>c</sup> Numbers in parentheses are coefficient alpha.

TABLE 2<sup>a</sup>  
 Test of Extension of Steers & Rhodes Model

Absence due to Family Issues<sup>b</sup>

Step 1				
Variable	Std. Beta	R <sup>2</sup>	Change in R <sup>2</sup>	
Age	-.016			
Tenure	-.048			
Gender	-.111			
Education	-.262***			
		.086***		
Step 2				
Age	-.044			
Tenure	-.041			
Gender	-.080			
Education	-.249***			
MTA <sup>c</sup>	-.125			
ATA <sup>d</sup>	.133*			
		.121***		.035*

Absence due to Illness

Step 1				
Variable	Std. Beta	R <sup>2</sup>	Change in R <sup>2</sup>	
Age	-.117			
Tenure	-.107			
Gender	-.001			
Education	-.127			
		.058*		
Step 2				
Age	-.182*			
Tenure	-.104			
Gender	.022			
Education	-.116			
MTA	-.182**			
ATA	.004			
		.087**		.029*

<sup>a</sup>\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001

<sup>b</sup>Dependent variable is square root of specific kind of absenteeism.

<sup>c</sup>MTA = Motivation-to-Attend.

<sup>d</sup>ATA = Ability-to-Attend.

A factor analysis with varimax rotation indicated four separate factors (based on eigenvalues over 1 and observation of scree plot). Therefore, it appears that motivation to attend represents a different employee attitude

than commitment. Regression analyses indicate that these three dimensions of organizational commitment explain approximately 26% of the variance in motivation to attend. In addition, although not directly hy-

pothesized, but suggested in the discussion, affective ( $\beta = .40$ ,  $t = 6.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and normative commitment ( $\beta = .20$ ,  $t = 3.16$ ,  $p < .01$ ) had stronger relations with motivation to attend than continuance commitment ( $\beta = -.02$ ,  $t = -.43$ ,  $p > .10$ ).

### Suppressor Relationship

Although not hypothesized in this article, examination of the correlation matrix indicates that motivation to attend is in the expected direction (Rhodes and Steers, 1990), but not significantly related to overall absenteeism. The lack of a significant relationship between motivation to attend and overall absenteeism is surprising. Based on interviews conducted with supervisors at our data collection site, we explored the effect of age on the relationship between motivation to attend and absenteeism. Supervisors at our site indicated that there may be large motivational differences between older and younger workers. Through *post-hoc* analyses, we discovered that age acts as a *suppressor* to the relationship between motivation to attend and overall absenteeism in this particular sample.

Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) indicate a suppressor relationship exists where one independent variable (e.g., motivation to attend) is not related to the dependent variable, another variable (e.g., age) is significantly related to the dependent variable, and the two independent variables are correlated. As discussed earlier, motivation to attend is not significantly related to overall absenteeism ( $r = -.10$ ,  $p > .10$ ). However, age is significantly related to overall absenteeism ( $r = -.22$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and

motivation to attend ( $r = -.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Regression analyses were conducted to further test the suppressor effect of age on motivation to attend. Table 3 illustrates these results. When age is entered first into the equation, motivation to attend becomes significant and explains an additional 3.6 percent of the variance in overall absenteeism. Thus, a suppressor effect is suggested. A median split conducted on the sample demonstrated that motivation to attend is a significant predictor of overall absenteeism for younger workers ( $r = -.16$ ,  $p < .10$ ), but not for older workers ( $r = -.13$ ,  $p > .10$ ). In addition, we examined whether age moderated the relationship between motivation to attend and overall absenteeism. As shown in Table 3, the moderation effect was not supported.

### DISCUSSION

This study proposed and tested theoretical extensions to the Steers and Rhodes model of absenteeism. We suggested that testing the model against various dimensions of absenteeism (e.g., family issues, illness, transportation problems, and failure to report to work without notice) would be useful for future research and managerial practice. Specifically, we suggested that motivation to attend is not necessarily related to all forms of absenteeism and in these cases, ability to attend would be the primary predictor of employee absence. We also suggested that the different dimensions of organizational commitment may influence motivation to attend differently.

This study makes significant contributions to the absenteeism field. To our knowledge, no other studies have



examined the influence of motivation and ability to attend on different types of absenteeism. Considering the importance of these two variables in the Steers and Rhodes models of absenteeism, this is an important contribution in the absenteeism literature. In addition, this study is the first to examine the influence of affective, normative, and continuance commitment on the main components of the Steers and Rhodes model.

Our results demonstrate initial support for our extensions. A person's perceived ability to attend but not their motivation to attend significantly predicted absenteeism attributed to family issues. In addition, motivation to attend predicted absences attributed to illness. This study lends support for the view proposed by other absenteeism researchers that absenteeism should be viewed as a multidimensional construct (e.g., Kohler and Mathieu, 1993; Martocchio and Harrison, 1993). We found relationships between absenteeism and motivation to attend and ability to attend that would have been missed if we had only examined overall absenteeism. Future research should continue to examine both overall and specific dimensions of absenteeism.

The different dimensions of organizational commitment were found to have different relative strengths to motivation to attend and the different classifications of absence behavior. Affective and normative commitment were found to be strongly related to motivation to attend. This is an important finding since factor analyses indicated that motivation to attend and the various dimensions of commitment represented different employee attitudes. Researchers in this area should explore the relation-

ship between these two constructs further. In addition, affective and normative commitment significantly predicted several types of absences. Consistent with past work, it appears that affective and normative commitment are more important in a person's decision to be absent than continuance commitment. Future work in this area should continue to examine the various dimensions of organizational commitment on a person's decision to be absent. In addition, future researchers should examine the relationship between multiple measures of the absence criterion and the dimensions of commitment.

Surprisingly, we also found that a person's motivation to attend was not significantly related to the level of overall absenteeism. However, we found that an employee's age acts as a suppressor to the relationship between motivation to attend and overall absenteeism. Excluding age from absenteeism analyses limits the predictive ability of motivation to attend. In our particular sample, motivation to attend becomes a significant predictor of overall absenteeism only when one considers younger workers. An important implication for future research thus arises. The weak relationships in past research between motivation to attend and absenteeism may have been caused by the failure to include other potential suppressor variables. In this particular study, we found that excluding age from the analyses limited the predictive validity of motivation to attend. It may be that there are other employee demographics that influence the relationship between motivation to attend and absenteeism. In addition, the particular suppressor variable of interest may depend on the organiza-

tional context. Considering the importance of motivation to attend in the Steers and Rhodes models, it is necessary to examine these issues in future research. This is especially important given that the Steers and Rhodes model of absenteeism often provides the theoretical foundation for research in the absenteeism field.

An analysis of this study's sample also contributes to the absenteeism literature and suggests directions for future research. Recall that roughly half of the sample in this study is considered part-time. Smulders (1993) indicates that there is no clear pattern across studies examining differences between full-time and part-time workers and absenteeism. He claims that one reason for the inconsistency in these studies is the failure to control for alternative explanations (e.g., work conditions, level of education). Our study informs this area because all individuals in this study performed the same tasks, we controlled for demographic differences, and still found no significant differences between full-time and part-time workers and the various categories of absenteeism.

This study's findings should be viewed in light of its limitations. First, the items representing ability to attend failed to form one underlying construct. However, past research has also found less than consistent results using ability to attend measures. Although our additive measure may be criticized, we believe the emerging evidence suggests ability to attend may well be multidimensional. Thus, our measure may more accurately represent the construct of interest and it is consistent with past theoretical suggestions (Brooke, 1986). The notion of ability to attend is conceptually and empirically extended in this study.

Another limitation to this study is the exclusive use of a time lost measure of absenteeism. We would have preferred to collect both a time lost and a frequency measure of absences in this study (Smulders, 1980), but due to the nature of the sample and the data provided by the organization, we were unable to collect data in this manner. However, our measure of absenteeism in this study is consistent with much of the past research in absenteeism by focusing on "unexcused" or "unpaid" absenteeism since absences due to vacation or holidays were excluded from the analyses. Future work in this area should continue to try to obtain both frequency and time lost measures of absenteeism.

A strength of our study is that we used a predictive design. Roughly half of the studies in the absenteeism literature claim they are predicting absenteeism but then use a postdictive design (Harrison and Martocchio, 1998). We, on the other hand, collected data from employees representing their attitudes about absenteeism and commitment prior to their actual decision to be absent. In addition, Harrison and Martocchio (1998) state that a time period of three months to a year is most appropriate when studying the effects of attitudes on absenteeism. Observing absenteeism for a ten-month time period is appropriate for the purpose of this study considering we are interested in the effects of attitudes on the decision to be absent.

### **Managerial Implications**

An important implication arises for managers based on the results in this article. Managers and organizations should monitor the perceived cause



of absenteeism (e.g., family issues, illness, etc.) in order to implement proper methods to reduce these absences. For example, if someone is continually absent due to family issues, managers may decide to offer their employees opportunities to modify their work schedules with programs such as flextime (Baltes *et al.*, 1999). These programs may enhance a person's ability to attend. If someone frequently attributes their absenteeism to illness, an organization may implement wellness programs to help the employee monitor and improve

their health. In addition, if management suspects that illness is not the true cause of absenteeism, they could implement absenteeism feedback programs (Gaudine and Saks, 2001), employee share ownership plans (Brown *et al.*, 1999), or self-management training and goal settings programs (Latham and Frayne, 1989) in an attempt to increase the employee's motivation to attend. These programs may be especially effective for younger workers whose motivation to attend appears to be strongly related to their overall level of absenteeism.

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