

Societal Impact Highlights



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Research Group: Organizational Behavior & Human Resources

Case study: Personal Activities not Related to Work and Presenteeism

Summary

Presenteeism is the behavior of going to work despite having a physical or a psychological problem and appears as relatively new concept in the management literature; even among professionals this concept is somewhat unknown. Since 2006, Aristides Ferreira has been studying and developing the concept through different research projects in diverse economic sectors. Specifically, most of the studies have been conducted with samples of nurses and teachers. These studies have been published in important Impact Factor journals and have brought important practical implications for managers and academicians. Even more importantly was the capacity to introduce this (apparently) new concept in the Portuguese-speaking countries, namely in Brazil and Portugal, which has brought interesting international collaborations that helped to extend the findings beyond the Portuguese boundaries.

Underpinning research

Aristides Ferreira and colleagues' (2010) (Martinez from Nova School of Business and Economics, Sousa from University Atlântica and Cunha from Europeia and Aarhus Universities) early work consisted in the analysis and comprehension of the presenteeism literature. One main concern was the absence of measurement instruments validated for the Portuguese population. With this aim in mind, a sample of 305 Portuguese workers from the health, education and bank sectors was included in the study. Two presenteeism scales were approved for the Portuguese

language and presented the metrical properties of the short versions of the Work Limitations Questionnaire (WLQ) and the Stanford Presenteeism Scale (SPS-6). As expected, these instruments revealed good psychometric evidence to measure employees' productivity of workers being present on the job but - due to physical or psychological disorders - not being fully functioning (1).

Building on these findings, Martinez (from Nova School of Business and Economics) and Ferreira (2012) examined the prevalence and consequences of presenteeism among employees working in the health sector. Specifically, they aimed to describing and understanding the major causes of presenteeism among nurses. Through a collaborative research project conducted in one of the main public hospitals in Portugal, it was found that stress (33.9%) and anxiety (28.5%) were the most prevalent psychological conditions in nurses. As for the main causes of physical illness antecedents of presenteeism, it was found that lower-back pain (46.1%) and breath infections (41.4%) were the most common health conditions (2).

In the same year (2012), Ferreira and Martinez shifted the attention on studying presenteeism in the educational sector and its effect on burnout. Research revealed that teachers from both private and public institutions have the same predictive of teacher burnout: personal and contextual characteristics, as well as presenteeism. It was also found that public school teachers exhibited higher levels of both presenteeism and burnout (3). The key results stated that private and public institutions develop different HR practices with significant impact on employees' physical and psychological health, affecting their productivity despite presenteeism and burnout.

Aristides Ferreira and co-workers (2015) initiated a project with Cary Cooper, one of the most recognized researchers in the field of occupational health and organizational behavior. The aim was to explore and measure a new emergent concept in the presenteeism literature: the presenteeism climate. Despite the fact that the construct appears mentioned in several papers, no evidence was found regarding its measurement and empirical contribution to the presenteeism literature. To fill this gap, a new instrument was developed for identifying five dimensions of presenteeism climate. Additionally, the authors contributed to the literature on leadership and presenteeism by studying the influence of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) on presenteeism climate. The investigation emphasized the importance of favorable behaviors between leaders and employees in order to decrease presenteeism and its adverse consequences (4).

Previous research on presenteeism opened one important avenue with managerial implications. Firstly, to differentiate presenteeism from personal activities developed at work. Secondly, to understand, within an ethnographic approach, the real impact of these activities with regards to the time spent during a five-working-day period of eight hours per day. A study supervised by Aristides Ferreira and conducted by Joana Esteves from Pepsi Corp. (2016), found that individuals spent around 58 minutes per day doing personal activities. During this time, individuals engaged mainly in socializing through conversation, internet use, smoking and taking coffee breaks. Results revealed that employees did not perceive the time they spent on non-work related activities accurately, as the values of these perceptions were lower than the actual time (5).

References to the research

- 1) Ferreira, A.I., Martinez, L.F., Sousa, L.M., & Cunha, J.V. (2010). Tradução e validação para a língua Portuguesa das escalas de presentismo WLQ-8 e SPS-6. *Avaliação Psicológica*, 9(2), 253-266.
- 2) Martinez, L.F., & Ferreira, A.I. (2012). Sick at work: Presenteeism among nurses in a Portuguese public hospital. *Stress and Health*, 28, 297–304.
- 3) Ferreira, A.I., & Martinez, L.F. (2012). Presenteeism and burnout among teachers in public and private Portuguese elementary schools. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 23(20), 4380–4390.
- 4) Ferreira, A.I., Martinez, L.F., Cooper, C. & Gui, D. (2015). LMX as a negative predictor of presenteeism climate: A cross-cultural study in the financial and health sectors. *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, 2 (3), 282 – 302.
- 5) Ferreira, A.I. & Esteves, J. (2016). Perceptions of time at work: why the clock ticks differently for men and women when they are not working at work. *Personnel Review*, 45 (1), 29 – 50.

Details of the impact

The impact of the research on presenteeism and the measurement of what employees do when they are not working at work have received attention and had an impact on the Academia and also feedback from private and public organizations. Research findings captured interest from researchers and students. In this sense, Ferreira's findings regarding the responses of presenteeism has had an impact on productivity and the measurement of non-related work activities, and has inclusively, stimulated debates in several conferences, such as a participation in the Transdisciplinary Advanced Topics in Psychology (in conjunction with the Psychology

Research Centre) of the Autonomous University of Lisbon. This participation had important media coverage with an interview to a local radio station [D], where Aristides Ferreira discussed the main contributions and managerial implications of studying presenteeism. Moreover, this discussion was also extended to other domains of intervention such as the economical and sociological fields. Furthermore, Aristides Ferreira was also invited to participate in the 22nd edition of ENEP (National Meeting of Psychology Students), which was held in Peniche from the 19th to the 22nd of March 2015 [A].

Previous findings have shown that presenteeism has an important impact on employees' performance. A mean reduction of productivity expected if the person would not go to work while ill is between 30 to 40%. In accordance, Aristides Ferreira and Joana Esteves were invited to write for the "*Revista Pessoal*" which is a regular non-scientific magazine [C]. This publication highlighted that people spend a lot of their time developing activities not related to work. For example, international studies reported that people spend a day of about 1h20m, whereas in an ethnographical study conducted by Ferreira and Estevez found that people spend (at the day-level) 58 minutes in personal activities with an annual cost of 3.216 euros / employee. This publication had important repercussions on several companies and, for example, appeared highlighted as one of the main daily clippings for PepsiCo Portugal [B].

Ferreira's research has had an important impact on different sectors, namely in the educational and health sectors. Although presenteeism is present in most professions, it is particularly high in the education and health sectors. As for the health sector, over the last decade protocols have been established with several hospitals (e.g., Hospital S. José, Hospital Curry Cabral in Lisbon), where research was done with important implications for all of the implied stakeholders. Currently, Aristides Ferreira and co-workers are in the process of collecting data in the Centro Hospital Barreiro – Montijo. Future results will be presented to and discussed with the executive board of the Hospital in order to find the best implications and contributions to reduce the level of presenteeism among employees.

Moreover, in the educational sector, Aristides Ferreira has found that job burnout and stress are associated with high levels of presenteeism and high levels of presenteeism climate. Essentially, the educational environment and culture do not allow employees to stay at home while ill due to numerous factors, such as pressure from inflexible schedules and competitiveness among workers. From previous studies it is known that about 48 % of people feel guilty missing their job, 20 % feel harassed by managers, while 18 % of people are afraid of consequences in terms of productivity loss. Based on the research, several interventions were intended: i) to increase

harmony between work and family; ii) to encourage the support and closeness of supervisors; iii) to Invest in occupational health; iv) to increase flexibility in schedules and work processes; v) to encourage physical activity in companies; vi) to implement ergonomics and a more balanced relationship at work between Human-Machine and vii) to introduce allergy-screening (among other diseases) and treatments in terms of health and safety at work. This was an initial call, with important repercussions among different professionals, which led to a project from FNE/MGEN (a Portuguese Educational Union), who wants to promote initiatives and training activities about health problems among teachers in Portugal [E].

These initiatives are a first small, but important step to encourage well-being at work and to promote quality of life in the different spheres of life. Within these initiatives, companies are expected to create the best conditions to improve their employees' productivity allowing Portugal to be a more competitive country.

Sources to corroborate the impact

[A] <https://www.facebook.com/23ENEP/?fref=photo&rc=p>

[B] <http://www.pt.cision.com/cp2013/ClippingDetails.aspx?id=eb3c06fb-56f1-4cdc-af5e-2c37fb715dc1&analises=1>

[C] [Ferreira, A. & Esteves, J. (2014). O que andam os Portugueses a fazer no local de trabalho? Revista Pessoal, Setembro, P. 16. <http://www.rhonline.pt/revista-pessoal/2014/09/08/revista-pessoal-setembro-no139/>

[D] UAL Media Redação multimédia dos alunos de Ciências da Comunicação: "Psicologia Para Todos: Presentismo?" Sousa, J. & Pires, P. (27/04/2015). Podcast retrieved from <http://www.ualmedia.pt/ra/?v=2963>

[E] Projeto FNE/MGEN Saúde entre os profissionais de educação. Campanha Nacional para a sensibilização e formação sobre doenças profissionais dos trabalhadores da educação.

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http://www.fne.pt/uploads/cms/documentos_gerais/20151130112945_Conf_final_5dez2015.pdf