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Experiences of managers in managing absenteeism: a case study of the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

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CHAPTER 1
ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Managing absenteeism is an issue that needs urgent attention in the South African workforce. The Occupational Care South Africa (OCSA) revealed that about 15 to 30 percent of employees are absent in a day, on the other hand 2 out of 3 employees who call in sick they are not even physically ill (Skosana, 2014). According to Special Reports (2015) absenteeism costs R16 billion annually in South Africa. Apart from the huge costs of absenteeism in the workplace the management of absenteeism is also a major factor. In view of the above the researcher deemed it necessary to explore the manager's experiences and perceptions regarding the management of absenteeism. Based on the aforementioned the chapter will focus on the following: problem statement and the rationale for the study, research questions, primary aim and secondary objectives, the theoretical framework of the study, brief summary of research methodology, and limitations of the study as well as chapter outlines.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Managing absenteeism is one of the challenges that managers have to deal with on a daily basis. What has been noted is the fact that many organizations do not track employee absenteeism and they also do not have clear policies on managing absenteeism (Van Eeden, 2007). This results in the manager being the only person who takes responsibility in terms of how to manage absenteeism (Yorges, 2015). This is because the manager is the only person who is informed when an employee is absent. Therefore, the manager can identify the reasons surrounding the absence by identifying if it is going to be a short or long term problem (Van Eeden, 2007).

Based on the aforementioned it would seem that most managers have not received the guidance and training that is needed regarding the management of absenteeism. This is because it is their sole responsibility to identify, confront and also resolve issues relating to the abuse of absenteeism in the workplace (Yorges, 2015). In ensuring that managers are knowledgeable and experienced in their role regarding the management of absenteeism, senior management needs to give them their full support (Van Eeden, 2007). The challenge for managers is to balance not

being aggressive or coercing the employee to come to work when they are not feeling well, to intimidate the employee so that he or she should come back to work when they were off sick even when they are not physically healthy to do so, being lenient by ignoring regular trends of absenteeism that may be negatively impacting on the individual's ability to work. Furthermore, being aggressive or forceful may result in the increase of absenteeism levels, failure in the relationship between a manager and his or her employees, and also employee disengagement with the organization (Direct Health Solutions, 2016).

Management and employees must be familiar with the absence management policy in the organization and have background knowledge of it in terms of its aim and procedures (Pillay, 2009). Such knowledge will assist management and employees in knowing important details such as the level of absenteeism that is regarded as an issue, how to deal with excessive absenteeism and lastly how to appropriately request leave. To provide consistency, a manager needs training regarding the issue of effective management of absenteeism, therefore training should also comprise of how to address absenteeism, have a discussion with an employee about their absenteeism problem, and they should also be trained on how and when can they make use of disciplinary processes and procedures if needs be (Pillay, 2009). Empowering managers on how to manage absenteeism by utilizing statutory laws is important, the emphasis should be based on how to correct behaviour that is deviant, and the emphasis should also be based on how to effectively discipline employees who do not act in accordance within the rules and regulations of the organizations (Muller, 2013). When the manager is familiar with the processes and procedures of any absenteeism policy, and also being trained, provided with the knowledge and being empowered on how to manage absenteeism that on its own can assist them in their managerial role of managing absenteeism.

Managing absenteeism in the public sector of South Africa (SA) is a problem; hence the absenteeism rate in SA is 10 days per annum, although globally the average rate is 2.5 days in a year (Mail & Guardian, 2015). Therefore failure to manage absenteeism also creates a problem in the SA economy hence it is costing the country R12 to R16-billion per annum and it is an alarming growing trend (Skosana, 2014). As a result the aforementioned issues negatively impact on productivity and service delivery on the other hand accumulating more costs for the

organization. Therefore it is imperative that in any organization absenteeism must be efficiently managed and controlled.

An Employee Health and Wellness ICAS Engagement Report quarter 3 in 2015/16 (GDARD ICAS Engagement Report, 2016) revealed that with the current workforce of 1 043 employees the amount lost due to absenteeism (sickness and non-related sickness) for the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) was R14, 178.480 million in the previous financial year (2014/2015). This is a significant loss as a result of absenteeism (GDARD ICAS Engagement Report, 2016). The Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) therefore consider addressing the monetary loss due to absenteeism as an important area to be addressed.

The Employee Health and Wellness ICAS Engagement Report (GDARD ICAS Engagement Report, 2016) also highlighted the contributing factors to this huge loss as:

- Poor management of performance coupled with poor work environment i.e. the inability to contain absenteeism costs: One employee presents with 3 or more lifestyle risks (health related risks, organizational issues, relationship issues, etc.)
- Lack of reactiveness in managing problems: this is to say that management takes time before addressing presenting issues within the department. This may be linked to the management of absenteeism as the Department wants to react to the issue now because of the amount that it has lost due to absenteeism (GDARD ICAS Engagement Report, 2016).

Based on the ICAS Engagement Report the researcher realized that the experiences of managers at GDARD in attempting to manage absenteeism and to respond to the cost of R14 million did not receive any attention (GDARD ICAS Engagement Report, 2016). Noting that managers are instrumental in this process not forgetting the pressure that comes with it; therefore the study intended to focus on exploring the experiences of line managers when it comes to managing absenteeism within the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development highlighting their experiences, perceptions, their needs, challenges of what they have encountered or have

undergone and the dynamics involved when managing and addressing absenteeism and also the management gaps associated with managing absenteeism within the department. By drawing attention to the experiences and challenges that line managers have gone through, it is hoped that they will receive the support needed from management to derive effective strategies on how best to manage absenteeism at GDARD. The study will assist the GDARD senior management on proposing strategies to effectively manage absenteeism within the department. The policy makers within the department may use the study results when developing the absenteeism policy for the department. Lastly, the study can assist researchers who are interested in the topic in the future to further explore the findings and recommendations made in the study.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

a. What are the manager's perceptions with regards to absenteeism within the department?
b. What are the existing strategies that are currently available in managing absenteeism within the department?
c. What are the challenges faced by managers when managing absenteeism in the GDARD?
d. What are the roles of managers when it comes to managing absenteeism within the department?

1.4 PRIMARY AIM AND SECONDARY OBJECTIVE

The primary aim was based on exploring the experiences and perceptions that line managers have when it comes to managing absenteeism of employees within Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Gauteng. The focus was on the gaps, challenges, what they encounter or undergo and the dynamics involved when managing and addressing absenteeism within the department.

The objectives of the study comprised of:

i. Exploring how managers perceive and experience absenteeism of employees.
ii. Highlighting strategies that may be relevant to managing absenteeism
iii. Indicating the effective roles that managers can make use of when managing absenteeism
iv. Determining the challenges that managers are faced with and also the benefits of implementing absenteeism management strategies

v. Deriving recommendations on how absenteeism can be managed effectively based on the research findings.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The theoretical framework of the study comprised of Bronfenbrenner (1979) theory of the *Ecology of Human Development*. The model suggests that outcomes such as behaviour, health and absence have various influences consisting of individual characteristics and environmental factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The model defines five main levels of environmental influences that interact with individual characteristics. 1) Microsystem comprises of personal interactions that are direct to the individual an example would be colleagues in the workplace, family etc. (individual characteristics, skills, behaviors). 2) The mesosystem refers to different backgrounds including the workplace, school, family to name a few (interaction between the workplace and home). 3) The exosystem refers to the larger influence of economic forces, cultural beliefs and societal factors (the physical environment, and the policies and procedures in place); 4) the macrosystem comprises of the all-encompassing patterns of micro, meso, and exosystems; 5) The chronosystem refers to factors of the community (the boundaries and the relationships that organizations have); whereas the public policies comprise of government and state laws that are being implemented (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The model revealed the type of impact the aforementioned factors have, particularly interpersonal issues, based on sustaining the management of absenteeism within the workplace and employees decision making in terms of being absent and going to work.

A qualitative research approach was utilized and a descriptive case study design also called the intrinsic case study design was used in the study. The population of the study involved eleven managers within the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Managers were purposively sampled for the reason that the researcher wanted to get an in-depth understanding of the manager's experiences and perceptions relating to the management of absenteeism. The data collection method was interviews, the research instrumentation being the semi-structured in-depth interview schedule. The semi structured interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity to ask open-ended questions, and also exploring manager's experiences and perceptions about the management of absenteeism. Data was analyzed using

thematic analysis by thoroughly categorizing important themes that emerged in the study based on the participant's perceptions and experiences.

1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The first limitation of the study comprised of managers not giving desired answers; this is to say managers did not want to give a bad impression of their employees, their role when it comes to managing absenteeism and also the departmental strategies that are put in place

Another challenge is that there is lack of transferability, this is to say that the results of the study will not be generalised to other government departments because the study focused on experinces so it was specific to certain individuals which in this regard were managers within the department

1.8 CHAPTER OUTLINES

The study is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter 2: Literature on managing absenteeism

The emphasis on the chapter is on the literature on managing absenteeism and derives the study's sub-research questions from the points that emerge from the literature. The literature review will address the definition of terms, the causes of absenteeism, cost of absenteeism, the consequences of absenteeism, importance of the management of workplace absenteeism, the managers role, benefits of managing absenteeism, recording and monitoring absenteeism, addressing absenteeism, how to deal with desertion and abscondment, training of managers on how to manage absenteeism, theoretical framework underpinning the study and the strategies to managing absenteeism.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The emphasis on the chapter is on research approach and design, data collection method, research instrumentation, sampling procedure and the method of data analysis (which was thematic analysis), trustworthiness, and the ethical considerations in the study covering:

permission for conducting the study, informed consent for participation in the study, anonymity and confidentiality

Chapter 4: Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

Emphasis was on presenting the findings of the study. The chapter presented data that was derived from the participant's perceptions and experiences which were line managers. The themes of the study comprised of knowledge of absenteeism, how managers perceive their role, impact of absenteeism, challenges in managing absenteeism, strategies being utilized, and training for managers.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

The emphasis on the chapter was to summarize the findings of the study and also the discussions which were made, the study gave a conclusion of the negative impact absenteeism has within the department and made recommendations in terms of how absenteeism can be managed effectively grounded on the findings of the research.

1.9 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The focus of the research comprised of the experiences and perceptions of managers in managing absenteeism, therefore it was imperative to conceptualize key terms comprising of; absenteeism, abscondment, line managers, employees, experiences as it underpins the research study.

1.9.1 Absenteeism

The manner in which the application of the term absenteeism has not been carefully defined leading to its confusion with concepts such as lateness, abscondment and desertion (Johns, 1994). The problem with the definition of the term has been confusing because of the fact that researchers themselves are uncertain as to whether lateness, for example, should be considered part of absenteeism, since both are examples of what has been called withdrawal behaviour (Johns, 1994). While some authors believe that lateness can be integrated into the general discussion of absenteeism, others think there are differences. Adler and Golan (1981, p. 544), for example, note that "the instrumentalities and valences associated with lateness in a given

situation differ from those associated with absenteeism". This then raises the question what is absenteeism?

Absenteeism can be defined as when person is absent, and they are not physically present where they are expected to be present (Rentsch & Steel, 2003). On the other hand, there are employees who work from home making the aforementioned definition meaningless (Rentsch & Steel, 2003). For that reason the above definition can be linked to the common description of employment. According to Geurts and Demerouti (2003, p. 281) employment is "a set of (prescribed) tasks that an individual performs while occupying a position in an organization". This is to say an employee that is absent reports that he or she is not capable to come to work therefore the employee will not be able to carry out the prescribed tasks that they are expected to irrespective of being there personally (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003). On the other hand Anderson (2009, p.13) argues"absenteeism is the employee's failure to report for work, regardless of the reason".

Absenteeism can also be differentiated between voluntary absenteeism and involuntary absenteeism. Involuntary absenteeism can be defined as "missing work for reasons beyond the employee's control, such as illness or family events such as mourning or marriage" (Garcia-Serrano & Malo, 2009, p. 374). Voluntary absenteeism can be defined as "missing work for reasons that the employee can control such as leisure activities or searching for a new job" (Garcia-Serrano & Malo, 2009, p. 374). Nel, Van Dyk, Haasbroek, Schultz, Sono, and Werner (2004) distinguish three categories of absenteeism, which comprise of unauthorized absence, authorized absence and sick leave. Nel et al. (2004) separates sick leave from voluntary absenteeism which can be linked to authorized absence and involuntary absenteeism which can be linked to unauthorized absence. If the employee is absent from work because of a sickness then sick leave is usually approved, irrespective of whether the sickness is sincere or not. In a case whereby the employee does not come to work for more than two days, the policy in the organization should clearly state at what point should the employee submit a medical certificate (Nel et al., 2004). Authorized absence usually take place when an employee reports reasons besides illness comprising of family responsibility leave, maternity leave to name a few then these are acceptable to management (Nel et al., 2004). Unauthorized absence is when an

employee does not inform his or her manager of their absence or does not give a valid reason for their absence (Nel et al., 2004). Based on the aforementioned, the definition of absenteeism for the study was: failure or incapability of the employee to report for duty especially when they are expected to be at work.

Based on the aforementioned discussion absenteeism can be defined as when an employee does not show up for work or they are not at their work station regardless of the fact that it can be justified or not. In instances when it is voluntary absenteeism or the absence is planned in advance, the employee has the responsibility to notify their manager of the planned absence in advance. Even when it is involuntary absenteeism whereby it is events that are out of the employee's control, the manager should also be notified of the employee's absence so that the manager can know of his or her employee's absences and whereabouts.

Managers still get confused when it comes to differentiating between absenteeism, abscondment and desertion in the workplace, which results in them dealing with it the wrong way. All of the above terms comprise of some form of "absenteeism", however when it comes to current labour law such as the Public Service Amendment Act, 1996 there is a clear distinction between each one of them (Albertyn, 2015). Based on the abovementioned for the purpose of the paper absenteeism will be used in conjunction with abscondment and desertion which will be explained below:

Abscondment

Abscondment refers to when an employee does not show up for work for three weeks without any explanation and without informing the manager of the absence (Albertyn, 2015). For example, the employee misses work for a number of days without a valid reason number or without informing the employer of his absence and/or the employer is unable to make contact with the employee. The employer still has to follow a specific process before the employee can be dismissed, but in such circumstances it would be reasonable to assume that there is no intention of the employee to come back to work (Albertyn, 2015). Public Service Amendment Act 1996 section 17 subsection(5) (b) "states that if an officer who is deemed to have been discharged, reports for duty at any time after the expiry of the period referred to in paragraph (a)

stated below, the relevant executing authority may, on good cause shown and notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in any law, approve the reinstatement of that officer in the public service in his or her former or any other post or position" (Public Service Amendment Act, 1996).

Desertion

Desertion takes place when the employee has no intention of returning to work (Albertyn, 2015). For example, the employee is absent from work or fails to return to work after an authorized period, such as annual leave or sick leave and evidence suggests he would not return. For example:

- His/her locker or desk is empty;
- He/she has received his/her normal wages and annual bonus;
- His/her co-workers do not know where he is. or he has told them he is not coming back to work;
- The manager tries to contact him/her but there is no response
- The employee does not reside at the address given to the employer, to name a few (Albertyn, 2015).

Public Service Amendment Act (1996) section 17 subsection(5)(a) states that "An officer who absents himself or herself from his or her official duties without permission of his or her head of department, office or institution for a period exceeding one calendar month, shall be deemed to have been discharged from the public service on account of misconduct with effect from the date immediately succeeding his or last day of attendance at his or her place of duty" (Public Service Amendment Act, 1996).

Manager

A manager can be defined as a person who supervises a unit, a person who is also accountable for accomplishing the organizations important goals by performing tasks comprising of decision making and developing policies (Bendix, 2000). On the hand a manager has the accountability to manage a team within a unit or individual employees. At the same time managers' report back to their senior managers on the wellbeing and job performance of the teams or individual employees that they supervise (Bendix, 2000). Therefore, a manager needs to be assertive on

their role in making sure that the organization operates to its best ability. A manager is not only liable to employees but is also responsible for managing resources in pursuit of achieving specific functional or organizational goals (Bendix, 2000). Developing and implementing policies such as absenteeism policies is also part of the responsibilities a manager has. Therefore, it is imperative that a manager has confidence, knowledge and skills on how to effectively play their role as well as knowing at which stage they can include the relevant parties that should be involved. When the manager cannot comprehend his or her role, there is likelihood that he or she cannot follow the correct policies and procedures within an organization (Bendix, 2000).

The Labour Relations Act (LRA) section 213 defines a manager as "any person, institution, organization, or organ of state who employs or provides work to an employee or any other person and directly supervises, remunerates or rewards such employee for services rendered" (LRA, 1995). Based on the definition it can be argued that a manager provides employment to an individual and therefore has a duty to manage that person.

Employee

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act, no 75 of 1997 Section 1 (a) defines an employee: "as any person, excluding an independent contractor, who works for another person and is entitled to be paid for it, or who in any manner assists in carrying on or conduct the business of the employer" (Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997). On the other hand Bendix (2000, p. 6) argues that "an employee is subject to the supervision of the employer, and receives regular monthly or weekly remuneration and is obliged during working hours to place his or her productive capacity at the employer's prescribed disposal".

Experiences

Experiences can be well-defined as the knowledge or mastery of an event or subject gained through involvement in or exposure to it (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2016). An individual who has extensive knowledge in a particular field can gain a reputation as an expert, in this regard line managers are experts in terms of how absenteeism can be managed in the department. The notion of experience can also be defined as practical knowledge that one obtains during job training rather than book learning (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2016).

Therefore the purpose of the intended study, the experiences will reflect on the understanding, knowledge and perceptions of managers and of absenteeism.

CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE ON MANAGING ABSENTEEISM

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Managing absenteeism is important to the survival of any organization and it is a continuous process that aims to tackle the issue of absenteeism. To effectively manage absenteeism there is a great need for reliability, perseverance and the manager should also take into consideration the applicability of any legal framework as a way of improving attendance in the workplace (Van Eeden, 2007). On the other hand the overall wellbeing of employees whether financial or health related needs to be taken into consideration when managing absenteeism. The literature on managing absenteeism is presented under sub-headings that were derived from the study's sub-research questions which will attend to causes of absenteeism, the cost of absenteeism, the consequences of absenteeism, the importance of managing workplace absenteeism, the role of the manager, benefits of managing absenteeism, recording and monitoring absenteeism, addressing absenteeism, how to deal with desertion and abscondment, training of managers on how to manage absenteeism, theoretical perspective and strategies to managing absenteeism.

Absenteeism in the public sector has become a topic of discussion throughout the world based on research undertaken in various disciplines such as economics, management, sociology and occupational health and providing the overview that absenteeism is a challenge and it needs urgent attention (McFarlane, 2014). The number of public servants who are absent from work has risen, and the effects of that absence on service delivery, other employees, the wellbeing of employees in the workplace, and cost of absenteeism in relation to the economy have become impossible to ignore (Munro, 2007). Absenteeism is a major problem that managers are faced with therefore negatively impacting "on service delivery, staff morale and the workload of the remaining employees in the workplace with resulting financial losses" (Munro, 2007, p. 21). On the other hand "employees perceive demands enforced by management and pressure from a heavy workload as threats. The resulting stress manifests itself in a lack of concentration as well as physical and mental ill-health. Such a situation could lead to employees paying less attention to their job behaviour, possibly resulting in absenteeism" (Nel, Van Dyk, Haasbroek, Schultz, Sono & Werner, 2004, p. 300-301).

2.2 CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM

Managers are required to become familiar with reasons why employees stay away from work and need to develop strategies for managing absenteeism while also communicating to employees the costs and concerns that follow as a result of absenteeism (Edwards & Greasely, 2010). When there are no consequences, employees might analyze or interpret a situation or behaviour in such a way that they end up believing that this behaviour is acceptable and tolerated within the organization (Edwards & Greasley, 2010). A culture could develop in the workplace that absenteeism is acceptable. Addressing unacceptable issues in the workplace could reduce absenteeism rates in the long run thereby increasing productivity (Edwards & Greasley, 2010). However Lokke-Nielsen (2008, p, 7) argued that "there has been a considerable amount of investigation of the causes of workplace attendance and absenteeism. Much of this takes the form of exploring associations between various factors and individual or group behaviour". In paragraphs to follow the researcher attempted to discuss the contributing factors of absenteeism comprising of individual, organizational as well as societal factors known as integrative model by Løkke-Nielsen (2008). One should also take into consideration the fact that there are many causes of absenteeism as much as there are different models that can be used to describe absenteeism. However the study was only limited to the integrative model and only what was highlighted in the model. For the department this is what was indicated by the GDARD Employee Health and Wellness ICAS Engagement Report quarter 3

Problem cluster	**%**	**Dominant problem types (in order of problem type with the highest count)**
Relationship issues	**16.5**	Family related, divorce/separation, infidelity, sexual issues, interpersonal work, conflict
Stress	**16.5**	Occupational stress work/life balance and personal finances
Organizational issues	**8.5**	Absenteeism, work conflict, work discontent, management style, workload, working hours/shift work
Child and family care	**8.4**	Child behaviour problems, parenting, learning problems and child counseling issues
HR issues	**6.6**	Performance management, performance appraisal,

		disciplinary, conditions of employment
Loss issues	**6.5**	Bereavement, abortion/miscarriage
Mental illness/Psychiatric	**5.8**	Depression, anxiety disorder, Post traumatic stress, psychiatric disorders
Money Management	**4.9**	Debt management, budgeting, debt counseling, other financial matters
Trauma	**4.9**	Armed robbery, motor vehicle accidents, general trauma, critical incidents, rape
Addictive behavior's	**4.0**	Chronic illness condition, medical information

Table 1: The causes of absenteeism at GDARD

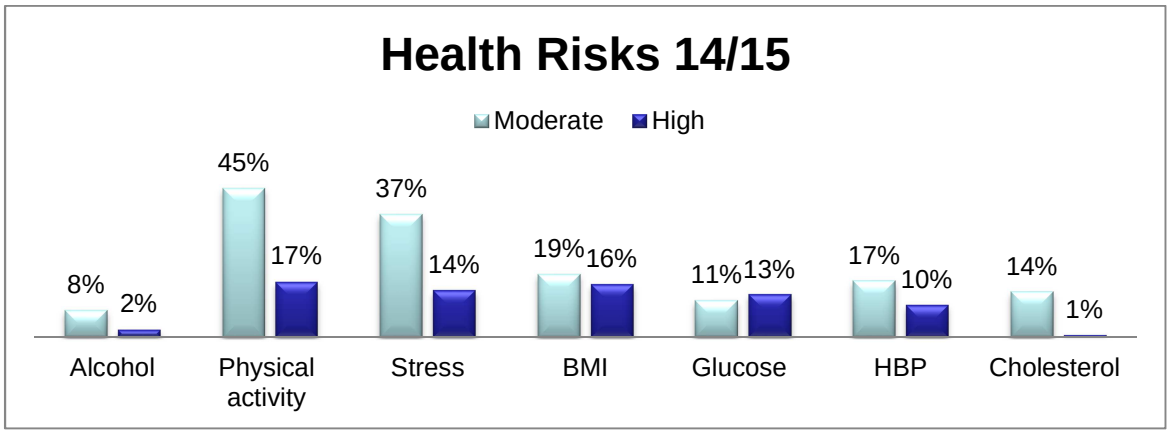
Source: GDARD Employee Health and Wellness ICAS Engagement Report quarter 3

The table above reflects the causes of absenteeism at GDARD. Even though the above mentioned factors do link with the organizational, individual and societal factors that will be discussed below it gives one an overview of the factors that the department comes across as the root causes of absenteeism when compared to the general causes of absenteeism.

2.2.1 INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

Personal factors such as family related issues and stress give a description of the different factors that contribute towards absenteeism of employees (Pillay, 2009). "The assumption behind the individual approach is that the motivation to be absent from work is determined by either personal characteristics (e.g. demographics) or individual responses to the job situation. Regarding the latter, the individual reacts to conditions created in the social and organizational work system. Hence absence becomes a behavioural outcome in terms of an escape from negative aspects of the work situation" (Mathiesen & El-Santi as cited in Løkke-Nielsen, 2008). The graph below reflects the health risk within the department. It is associated with the high absenteeism rate with regard to ill health within the department. In the graph there are different lifestyle risks that the employees present with including alcohol, physical activity, stress, body mass index (BMI), glucose, high blood pressure (HBP) and cholesterol which are indicated in the graph below. It should be noted the norm was that one employee presented with three lifestyles risks.

2.2.2.1 HEALTH



Graph 1: Health Risks

Source: GDARD annual report 2014/2015

According to the Government Employee Medical Scheme (2014) there has been a development that emerged from 2014 as an important change taking into consideration the global view by the organization of employee wellbeing in the workplace. The development is based on focusing on the improvement and management of employee health and wellbeing taking into consideration how this may be negativity impacting on the productivity for the organization. GEMS (Government Employee Medical Scheme, 2014, p. 6) further argues that "this is due to the worsening and alarming general state of health around the world, in particular with chronic disease of lifestyle- including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory conditions and certain cancers play a significant role in employee illness and absenteeism, as well as reduced levels of workplace morale, engagement and productivity". Research from Discovery Health Company Index (2014) has indicted that the above mentioned diseases of lifestyle can be largely mitigated through tailored interventions to promote a healthier diet, increased levels of physical activity and regular health checks. Since employees spend a great deal of their lives at work, and work significantly impacts stress and lifestyle, employers have a unique opportunity to positively influence their employees ability to make healthy choices and assist them to manage stress and reduce illness" (Government Employee Medical Scheme, 2014, p. 7). There should be wellness programmes in organizations hence this can be an initiative for employees and the workplace itself to become an environment that takes into consideration the health and wellbeing of its

employees. Therefore in order to have a healthy working environment it can be recommended that there should be cafeterias that provide affordable and healthy food which can be subsidized where possible (Government Employee Medical Scheme, 2014). Furthermore providing a flexible working environment to employees in being active after work, engaging health representatives and sponsors in supporting employee health and wellness goals can assist organizations in taking control of their employee health and wellness (Government Employee Medical Scheme, 2014).

2.2.2 ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS

Organizational factors relate to the working environment comprising of low employee morale, the entitlement of sick leave, poor working conditions, inadequate remuneration and poor working conditions. Pillay (2009, p. 2) argues that "these are likely to contribute to employees absence from work in order to avoid the strain arising from unfavourable work conditions". What becomes important for the manager is the type of impact the organization will have based on the level of absenteeism and the disciplinary procedures that are put in place (Løkke-Nielsen, 2008). Therefore, the decision on being absent or not from work is based on how the employee perceives the behaviour that is related to the absenteeism of their colleagues and managers, there is a possibility that the employee will learn that a certain level of absenteeism is acceptable and adopt the same behaviour as well (Rentsch & Steel, 2003).

2.2.2.1 Job satisfaction

Boyne (2002) argues that the public sector puts much emphasis on the promotion and protection of employee wellbeing, and health and safety matters. On the other hand when taking into consideration an employee's job satisfaction, "absenteeism is expected to be influenced by the individual's evaluation of his or her psychosocial work characteristics as well as the individual's experience of work stress and job satisfaction" (Løkke-Nielsen, 2008, p. 9). Being employed in the public sector is not the same as being employed in the private sector hence the working environment is different; however an assessment of a comparable working environment can have a different influence on the absence behaviour of the employees working in these sectors (Boyne, 2002). Working conditions can in a different way influence employees and managers which can lead to absenteeism behaviour that is different (Mathiesen & El- Salanti, as cited in Løkke-

Nielsen, 2008). Therefore as a manager it is important to encourage a culture of attendance to their employees to result in an increased employee morale and productivity within the team.

2.2.2.2 Managers' personal characteristics

Employee's characteristics interact with their manager's personal characteristics (Perry, Kulik, & Zhou, 1999). This notion of similarity and dissimilarity has been confirmed, this is to say the superiority between the manager and their subordinates results in the employee being less attracted to their working environment (Perry, 1999). Therefore "demographic similarities have an influence on the absence of disciplinary decisions" (Løkke-Nielsen, 2008, p. 10). The aforementioned is based on the notion that if the manager and their employees are comparable in relation to gender as an example, then the employees will be provided with support and assistance by their managers, on the other hand the employees will be loyal towards their managers (Tsui as cited in Løkke-Nielsen, 2008).

2.2.2.3 Managerial behaviour

A study on *Determinants of absenteeism in a large Danish bank conducted in the private sector* shows that a manager that has an absenteeism level that is high has a direct influence on the high absenteeism level of their employees (Kristensen, Juhl, Eskildsen, Frederiksen & Møller-Bisgaard, 2006). This is to say that a manager's level of absenteeism is a contributing factor towards the management of absenteeism hence it indicates the acceptable and unacceptable level of absence. Regardless of its importance, a manager's absenteeism usually ignored, on the other hand research on the influence of the manager's level of absence on their employee's behaviour is inadequate (Johns & Nicholson, 1982). Rhodes & Steers (1990) argue that it is not only the absence behaviour of a manger that is essential for their employees' inclination to report for duty but the management style is also important. A study conducted in Singapore firms by Lund revealed that when a manager possess a transformational leadership style, they are likely to have less issues relating to absenteeism (Lund as cited in Løkke-Nielsen, 2008). A transformational leader possesses intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration and inspirational motivation. (Zhu as cited in Løkke-Nielsen, 2008). It is therefore important to note that a manager can be able to monitor and control the level of absenteeism within their unit by setting a good example to their employees (Kristensen et al., 2006).

2.3 SOCIETAL FACTORS

Poverty, crime and an unreliable transport system can negatively impact on absenteeism. Most of the workers in SA depend on the public transport to commute daily to and from their workplaces. Therefore, if there is a strike by bus, train and taxi operators, organizations are also affected hence there will be a high rate of absenteeism for that particular day (Pillay, 2009). Another societal factor affecting absenteeism comprises of HIV/AIDS (Pillay, 2009, p. 3). In table 1 above on the causes of absenteeism within the department trauma related issues (societal factors) accounted for 4.9%

Managers' knowledge of the causes of absenteeism can assist in the decision making process with regards to preventative initiatives, such as the employee health and wellness programme, wellness days (health screening) assistance and support with substance abuse issues and free testing for diabetes and cholesterol to name a few (Van Eeden, 2007).

2.4 THE COST OF ABSENTEEISM

The enormous cost of absenteeism is considered one of the contributing factors in the failure to meet performance targets of companies, organizations and government departments (Robbins, Odendaal & Roodt, 2003). Based on the consciousness of the consequences of absenteeism on organizational performance, is has become vital for management in organizations, employees, investors, government and other stakeholders to be concerned about reducing the negative effects related to absenteeism as a way of improving the general performance within the organization (Du Plessis, Visser & Fourie as cited in Robbins et al., 2003). In SA because of absenteeism organizations lose R16 billion per annum (Skosana, 2014). Based on the high costs managers therefore consider employee absence as a problem that is related to discipline. On the other hand if it is not controlled and monitored, the issue will "spread like an epidemic, creating a range of disciplinary problems for organizations" (Robbins et al., 2003, p. 19). The difficulty might be that employees have the notion of thinking that sick leave is their "benefit" in the same manner as annual leave; therefore they are allowed to take it whenever they feel like it regardless of being sick or not (Kehinde, 2011). Therefore, this has dire repercussions hence it would be difficult for organizations to operate in the manner they should when employees report for duty

(Kehinde, 2011). Nonetheless, absenteeism is a multifaceted issue that calls for a multi-faced approach.

Eurofound (2010, p. 13 – 18) recorded global costs of absenteeism in 2010. Some of the countries highlighted were: Austria with a cost for absenteeism of R59.4 billion per annum; Belgium with R103.95 billion per annum; Spain with R125 730 million; Norway with R792-R990 billion (Eurofound, 2010, p.13 – 18). Finland calculated the cost of absenteeism per day as R 2970 (Eurofound, 2010, p.13 – 18).

The above indicates the high cost of absenteeism globally and that it is not only an issue in South Africa.

According to the GDARD Employee Health and Wellness ICAS Engagement Report quarter 3 in 2015/16 a total of R119 000 Gauteng Provincial Government (GPG) employees accounted for over 55% of budgeted costs = (R52.6 billion of the R95. 3 billion allocated in 2015/16). Monetization of productivity loss due to health and lifestyle risks indicates that:

- 2% of salary costs is lost to indirect health costs and
- 2% is lost to direct health care costs
- This totals to a shocking R2.1 billion lost in 2015/2016 Financial Year with the current workforce of 1043 the lost sum for GDARD amounted to R14,178.480 million in the previous financial year This is equals 50.1% of the compensation budget (GDARD Employee and Wellness ICAS Engagement Report quarter 3, 2016).

2.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF MANAGING WORKPLACE ABSENTEEISM

Organizations are becoming gradually concerned with the pressures that are created by global competition and the requirements to increase competence and productivity (Boyne, 2002). Therefore, more and more organizations are exploring different methods to improve the overall organisational competence and effectiveness; on the other hand many are unsuccessful in recognising the need of the labour force to be managed (Boyne, 2002). “By managing employees’ attendance effectively, organizations could control the largest expense item and the largest source of productivity” (Rhodes & Steers, 1990, p. 9). One should take into consideration

the fact that the management of employee absenteeism does not comprise of a direct and smooth process. Therefore managers should note that every absenteeism case needs to be addressed differently hence the aforementioned clearly states that absenteeism management does not comprise of an effective strategy (Beira, 2008). Regardless of the fact that there is no direct process of effectively managing absenteeism, it should still be monitored and addressed, failure to do so will result in consequences comprising of the costs of absence and the risk of the company not being able to function optimally due to mass absence and/or absence of key staff. (Van Eeden, 2007). This is to say that managers do not have the opportunity of choosing not to record, monitor and address absenteeism as it could have serious financial implications and a negative impact on the performance of the organisation (Van Eeden, 2007). The consequences of not managing absenteeism comprise of but are not limited to "…an increase in legal costs and the possibility of low profits and productivity" (BUPA, as cited in Van Eeden, 2007, p. 38). Beira (2006) argues that it is not necessary to implement costly new programmes to manage sickness absence, but significant savings can rapidly be achieved by using existing data as the basis for appropriate interventions.

Organizations have a responsibility to develop and improve their absence and attendance management policies. To achieve this absence management policies need to recognize and take into consideration the causes of absenteeism the ones discussed earlier comprising of individual, organizational and societal factors, the policies need to focus on these causes (Rhodes & Steers, 1990).

- The senior management team has a role to play in supporting managers by ensuring that they are competent and comfortable in their role of managing absenteeism. This can be done through well written and explained human resource departmental policies such as guidelines on steps that should be taken when dealing with cases of short and long term absence (Beira, 2008).
- Senior management needs to understand the causes of absenteeism as mentioned above and derive strategies to address them (Beira, 2008).

Therefore the management of absenteeism from the organizational level not only includes deriving strategies that can assist managers in managing absenteeism but also deriving strategies to reduce the root cause of the problem.

2.6 CHALLENGES IN MANAGING ABSENTEEISM

One should take into consideration the fact that managers are often at times reluctant and have a difficulty in addressing cases of employees who are in the process of exceeding the level of absenteeism that is acceptable (Yorges, 2015). Since managers deal with a lot of pressures within the work environment, the constant monitoring and evaluation of policies relating to absenteeism management is not their priority (Yorges, 2015). Levy (2003) argues that when managing absenteeism it is important that employees are all treated in the same manner. Failure to do so can result in low job dissatisfaction, decreased productivity and low morale of employee's. Employees are likely to feel that there is no equal treatment should they perceive their absent colleagues as "getting away with it" (Yorges, 2015). Managers should also take into consideration the fact that the programs and policies that would be put in place need to be supportive, rather than disciplinary (Yorges, 2015). Disciplinary processes that oblige employees to report for duty can cause employees to become, "absent while at work." The processes do as little as possible and resist any effort to get them to do more. Some of the programmes that can be implemented to encourage employee attendance consists of but not limited to attendance awards and equal job distribution (Yorges, 2015)

Any strategy to manage absenteeism can work, but not every end result of each strategy can be successful. An absenteeism strategy can be short-term or long term (Van Eeden, 2007). A short-term strategy should be an indication of the effect absenteeism has in the organization. The long-term strategy of effective management of absenteeism has a duty to disseminate information on factors that contribute to the absenteeism of employees. Therefore such information can assist the organization in deriving effective strategies that can address the issue of absenteeism (Gaudet as cited in Van Eeden, 2007). It is important that managers derive plans based on how they are going to be successful in the management of absenteeism hence there is a difference between effective monitoring and evaluation of absenteeism, also persuading employees to report for duty when they are not capable to perform their duties (Van Eeden, 2007). When developing and

designing any strategy for effective management of absenteeism, managers need to be responsive to the following consequences comprising of:

2.6.1 Presenteeism

When an employee reports for duty and they are not well enough to perform their duties that can be explained as presenteeism. This occurs because of different reasons such as heavy workload, having incentives for good attendance or job security (Munro, 2007). Regardless of the aforementioned, an employee should not feel obliged to come to work because the very same employee is going to be less productive and make more mistakes. To combat presenteeism, many organizations have implemented employee health and wellness programs as a strategy to assist in reducing not only presenteeism but absenteeism as well. (Van Eeden, 2007).

2.6.2 Increased stress

Mental health issues and stress can be heightened especially when an employee is pressured to report for duty. Also, when the manager makes the return-to-work interview as a way to punish or cross-examining the returning employee, this can result in certain employees trying to avoid such stress by reporting for duty even though they are not physically well to do so (Yorges, 2015). As a way of preventing this from happening, the manager needs to make it a point that during the return to work interview they are welcoming towards the employee and also showing interest towards the employee in finding out why they have been absent from work, the manager should also check if they are well enough to be back at work (Yorges, 2015).

2.7 THE ROLE OF THE MANAGER

2.7.1 RECORDING AND MONITORING ABSENTEEISM

The recording and monitoring of absenteeism requires a continuous and coordinated effort by each manager. Therefore it is important for managers to document absenteeism of every employee that is under them. Historical records also give a way to identify the trends of particular employees in specific departments which will result in the development of appropriate standards and measures for performance in each department (Van Eeden, 2007). To manage and control absence an organization first needs to establish policies and procedures to measure and record absence. Managing absence with the implementation of policies and procedures is a

control management tool (Kinicki & Wiliams, 2003). Kinicki and Wiliams (2003, p. 543) continues to say “successful control systems are strategic and results orientated, timely, accurate and objective, realistic, positive, simple, flexible and easy to understand and they encourage self-control”. Among the numerous obstacles towards having an effective strategy comprises of when the manager has more power and does not involve employees in the process, “overemphasis on the how instead of what and too much focus on one approach” (Kinicki & Wiliams, 2003, p. 544 –546).

Keeping records of absent employees may possibly be performed by observing the length of the absent employee, patterns regarding the type of sickness and also the number of days most employees are absent. “This can be done by the line manager checking attendance registers and sick leave absenteeism records” (Kinicki & Wiliams, 2003, p. 546). By means of properly recording and keeping records of every absence, even though emphasis is on the employee; however the total number of employee absences which can be accepted at a given time can be easily determined (Kinicki & Wiliams, 2003). Relating to this, SA organizations including the GDARD “…operate on the principle that an employee is entitled to 36 sick leave days over a three-year leave cycle, as per provisions of the legislation” (Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997). This is to say if one is absent and they are not on leave they end up taking sick leave. This then highlights a misuse of sick leave.

2.7.2 ADDRESSING ABSENTEEISM

Managers need to accept that employees will be absent from work at various times of their careers. It should also be taken into consideration the fact that the impact of absenteeism is not only constrained to just the absent employee (Horton, 2016). Failure to address absenteeism efficiently and effectively can lead to an impact being felt across the organization and it can cause a multitude of associated problems (Horton, 2016).

The following guidelines outline the recommended steps to be taken in cases where short-term absence is considered to be above an acceptable level in a particular period of time (Yorges, 2015, p. 3-5).

Stage 1: Counseling Interview

- "The manager should advise the employee of their concern over the absences, they should try to establish the reasons for the absence or sickness absence and determine what needs to be done to improve attendance.
- Should at this stage be a medical condition that is acknowledged, and should it have an influence on job suitability, it is the duty of the manager to make the necessary arrangements with a doctor that is approved by the organization. However the employee should be made aware of this in writing within five working days.
- Based on the discussion, if ever the presenting problem is not related to any causal unfitness for work, the employee should be given advice on the fact that while the recorded sickness may be genuine, a sustained improvement in attendance is expected or the next stage in the procedure will be taken.
- A review of the attendance will automatically be made each month for the next six months" (Yorges, 2015, p. 3).

Stage 2: First Formal Review (Verbal Warning Stage)

- "If the employee's absences continue to worsen following analysis and regular monitoring, the employee should be invited to attend a formal review meeting with the manager.
- The absenteeism record should be detailed in a letter inviting the employee for this interview. The employee should be advised that he/she is entitled to be represented by a union representative or a colleague as appropriate" (Yorges, 2015, p. 3).

The purpose of this meeting will be to:

- "Continue to discuss the underlying reasons for the absences,
- Advise the employee of the service and cost implications of his/her absence,
- Warn the employee (except when deciding to seek medical advice) that if there is not a substantial and sustained improvement, his/her employment may be terminated because of his/her inability to maintain an acceptable attendance level. This constitutes the verbal warning.

- Where medical attention is warranted, action must be taken immediately. The meeting is therefore only adjourned to allow this part of the process to be completed. Within five working days, the employee must receive medical advice. The meeting is then resumed with HR and the doctor's opinion is discussed.
- If the doctor confirms fitness for work, the employee should be warned about the consequences of continued absence" (Yorges, 2015, p. 4).

Stage 3: Second Formal Review (Written Warning Stage)

- "Where regular monitoring indicates that no improvement in the absence pattern has occurred, a second formal meeting will be arranged with HR.
- The letter inviting the employee to the meeting will include the absence record and, again, advice on representation.
- During the meeting if any new information arises regarding change in the nature of sickness or ill health, it would need to be assessed by the organizations-approved doctor.
- The employee should be given the opportunity to explain his or her absence record. If appropriate, the manager should inform the employee that a formal written warning is being issued and that this warning will remain in the employee's file for a specified period. A copy of the warning should be issued to the employee and to his/her representative.
- At this stage it is important that the employee is informed of the failure to comply with the organizations attendance expectations, and that it is essential that the employee improves on their unacceptable record of absence, failure to do so will result in the termination of the employee's employment.
- Where fitness for work is in doubt, proceed with redeployment options according to the guidance received by the doctor. Consult with the employee's union representative (if applicable) on the redeployment process and options" (Yorges, 2015, p. 4).

Stage 4: Temporary Suspension from Work

- If, following the implementation of the previous stages of the disciplinary process, no improvement in attendance occurs, management may proceed with a temporary suspension without pay. The intention to suspend should be confirmed in writing with

details of start and end dates. A copy of the letter of suspension should be sent to the employee's representative: if applicable (Yorges, 2015).

Stage 5: Termination of Employment

- "This is the final stage in the disciplinary process whereby the employee is dismissed for inability to comply with the organization's requirements for attendance at work. Dismissal can only take place with the written authorization of a senior manager and HR.
- The letter calling the employee in will, again, include advice on representation and will outline the absence record. The employee should be advised that, as a result of the interview, he or she may be dismissed for incapability to perform work duties.
- Yet again, the organization's doctor might have to be referred to should any new information arise in regard to the employee's health or capacity for work.
- Where redeployment is not possible, or appropriate, consider proceeding with dismissal for reasons of capability. Eligibility for disability benefit will depend on the circumstances of each case.
- When necessary if a decision is made to dismiss on the basis of capability, a copy of the letter of dismissal should be sent to the employee's representative
- The employee may have the right to appeal against dismissal. The appeal should be in line with the company's disciplinary procedures" (Yorges, 2015, p. 5).

2.7.3 HOW TO DEAL WITH DESERTION AND ABSCONDMENT

2.7.3.1 Desertion

In terms of labour law, desertion amounts to a breach of contract (Albertyn, 2015). It is a contractual obligation for the employee to provide their services to their manager and the organization in which they work. If the employee breaches this duty, he/she rejects the contract. However, this does not mean the manager can dismiss the employee right away (Albertyn, 2015). Previous court rulings in South Africa make it clear that desertion does not terminate an employment contract. It only terminates when the employer accepts the employee's rejection of the employment contract. What this means is, the employer first have to confirm that the employee's absence really is desertion. To do this, the employer needs to look for proof in stating that there is no intention of the employee to report for duty (Albertyn, 2015).

The following three elements must be present before an employer can consider an employee's absence as desertion:

- He/she is absent without the employer's authority;
- The employee has not been in contact with the employer to give reasons why he/she is absent
- Their intention is never to return to work (Albertyn, 2015).

While it may be difficult to assess if an employee has no intention to come back, the manager has to take reasonable steps to find the employee and the reasons for not coming to work (Albertyn, 2015). If after such an investigation into the employee's whereabouts and reasons for absence, the manager finds he/she definitely does not intend to return, holding a disciplinary hearing in this regard would be essential (Albertyn, 2015). The manager can then dismiss the employee if he cannot give an acceptable reason for his or her absence. Managers need to remember that following the wrong procedure when dealing with an employee's absence could land the employer at the CCMA for claims of unfair dismissal (Albertyn, 2015).

2.7.3.2 Abscondment

Abscondment as indicated earlier refers to when an employee does not show up for work for three weeks without any explanation and without informing the manager of the absence (Albertyn, 2015). The problem needs to be investigated by the manager and come to the conclusion that the employee has absconded then follows the correct steps to dismiss the employee (Albertyn, 2015). However, this is not where the matter ends. Just because an employee absconds does not mean that the employer does not have to pay him/her. The manager should make it a point that the employee is paid what is due to them. The manager should pay the employee any amount of money owed to the employee (Albertyn, 2015). This comprises of but not limited to the employees monthly salary, outstanding leave pay, any incentives or bonuses the employee would have received, and overtime pay (Albertyn, 2015). Although in terms of labour law, the principle of 'no work, no pay' applies to a period of unauthorized absence. This is to say the manager is not obliged to compensate the employee when they did not report for duty, the employer needs to make all outstanding statutory payments owed to the employee (Albertyn, 2015).

2.8 BENEFITS OF MANAGING ABSENTEEISM

Managing absenteeism has many benefits for managers, but there are also benefits for the employees as well as the organization (Van Eeden, 2007. Excessive absenteeism could be an indicator of poor employee health and wellness within the organization. It is therefore important that absence policies should be implemented in conjunction with health and wellness programmes (Van Eeden, 2007). Effective absenteeism management can increase attendance levels which would be to the advantage of both employee and employer. An organization needs to maintain acceptable levels of attendance for excellent service delivery and this could also have a positive effect on staff morale (University of Sunderland as cited in Van Eeden, 2007).

Beira (2008, p. 28-29) argues that some of the many benefits associated with managing absenteeism in organizations, as listed below:

- "Provides insight into genuine medical needs that could be supported with well-structured employee health, lifestyle and wellness programmes;
- Provides support for employees who genuinely need assistance;
- Saves existing paid sick leave costs by preventing abuse of the system;
- Reduces the risk of human capital loss through burnout, exhaustion and fatigue;
- Good attendance record signals reliability and suitability for promotion"

Therefore the benefits of managing absenteeism within GDARD (ICAS Engagement Report, 2016) comprise of the following:

- Preventing small problems from developing into larger ones
- The department will be able to identify and tackle the root cause of the problem
- Measuring and monitoring absenteeism can assist managers on how to identify and deal with different types of absenteeism
- The financial costs associated with absenteeism are likely to decrease

2.9 TRAINING OF MANAGERS ON HOW TO MANAGE ABSENTEEISM

Training can provide managers with the skills they need to carry out their responsibilities for managing absenteeism. It also provides organizations with the opportunity to set expectations based on the training provided (Horton, 2016). This can be done through:

- Formal training (courses and workshops)
- Informal training (working and learning from more experienced managers (Horton, 2016)

The training of managers in how to best manage absenteeism should also include instruction on how to conduct effective and fair return-to-work interviews (Levy, 2003). National surveys on absenteeism indicate that these interviews are regarded as one of the most effective tools for managing short-term absenteeism (Levy, 2003). The return-to-work discussion will enable the manager to welcome the employee back to work, in addition to demonstrating management's strong commitment to controlling and managing absenteeism in the workplace (Yorges, 2015). The interview will enable a check to be made that the employee is well enough to return to work. The necessary paperwork can be completed, so that the absence and its conclusion are properly recorded (Levy, 2003). Interviews need to be carried out as promptly as possible following the absentee's return to work (no later than one day after his or her return). The employee should be given an opportunity to outline the reasons for his or her absence (Yorges, 2015). The manager should use the interview as a time to explore any issues that the employee may have which are leading to absence. The goal is to foster an open and supportive culture (Yorges, 2015). The procedures that are in place should assist in making sure that help and advice is offered when needed and to ensure that the employee is fit to return to work. Employees will usually appreciate the opportunity to explain genuine reasons for absence within a formalized structure (Yorges, 2015).

If the manager doubts the authenticity of the reasons given for absence, he/she should use this opportunity to express any doubts or concerns. At all times, the employee must be aware that the interview is not merely part of organizational procedures, but a significant meeting during which the absence has been noted and may have implications for future employment (Yorges, 2015). The organizations disciplinary procedure, in the event of unacceptable levels of absence, should be explained to the employee. The manager may choose to outline how the absence affected the department (Levy, 2003). The message should be that the employee was missed and that productivity suffered. The manner in which the department was required to reorganize staffing arrangements might also be explained. This would demonstrate that the efficiency of the work unit was adversely affected by the absence (Levy, 2003).

A trained manager will know how to manage absenteeism and follow the correct procedure. Managers have the responsibility to make sure that work is appropriately covered during the employee's absence, adding to that there are a number of other critical actions that managers need to take to manage absenteeism (Yorges, 2015, p. 4-5). "They should:

- Ensure that all employees are fully aware of the organization's policies and procedures for dealing with absenteeism
- Managers should be the first point of contact when an employee is sick
- They should maintain appropriately detailed, accurate and up to date absence records for their staff (e.g. date, nature of illness/reason for absence, expected return to work date, doctor's certification if necessary)
- Managers should identify patterns or trends of absenteeism that cause concern
- Speak to employee on the first day back at work after each absence -they should conduct return to work interviews
- They should also implement disciplinary procedures where necessary
- The managers should make employee aware of organization's procedures, expectations concerning attendance standards and consequences of failure to achieve those standards
- They should also create a team atmosphere which encourages people to aim for full attendance" (Yorges, 2015, p. 4-5).

2.10 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The theoretical framework for the study is based on Bronfenbrenner (1979) Ecological Models of Human Development. The model accepts holistic conceptions whereby biological, psychological, sociocultural and physical environmental elements are seen to cumulatively affect wellbeing (Stokols, 2000). The model states that human development is influenced by the different types of environmental systems. The theory helps us understand why we may behave differently when we compare our behavior in the presence of our family and our behavior when we are in school or at work. The holistic conception of employee absenteeism as well utilizing the holistic model of analysis is ideal in addressing the challenges faced by managers when it comes to managing absenteeism within the department.

2.10.1MICRO SYSTEM

A micro system is a “pattern of activities, social roles and interpersonal relations experienced by physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit or inhibit engagement in the immediate environment” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 24). The example in this regard comprise of family, school, peer group and the workplace. From an ecological perspective “certain behaviors, social roles, and environmental conditions within an individual’s life situation can exert a disproportionate influence on his or her well-being” (Stokols, 2000, p. 131). Micro settings are directly experienced by the employee and include the workplace and home. This can be linked to absenteeism in the sense that micro level social interactions are directly experienced by the employee on a daily basis, they comprise of the causes of absenteeism that were discussed earlier, and they are highly influential to the perceptions of their workplace as either a supportive and rewarding environment or alternatively a detrimental context where well-being is threatened. This is to say that an employees workload is determined by their manager, when their colleagues are absent they have to do work of the absent person this then negatively impacts on the employee resulting in low productivity and morale within the unit. As a strategy of managing absenteeism, the manager can focus on problem solving, based on the causes of absenteeism the manager can refer the employee to the EHWP so that they can be assisted with the challenges that they are faced with which result in them being absent from work.

2.10.2 MESO SYSTEM

The mesosystem comprises of “the relations between the diverse parts of an individual’s microsystem. This system is whereby an individual micro system cannot function individually however it encompasses the relationship between two or more settings” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 24). In this regard “the relationship between home and the workplace, the type of relationship the managers have with their employees, co-worker relationship, the different roles of the manager in the management of absenteeism” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 24). It can be argued that a meso system is a system of micro systems

2.10.3 EXO SYSTEM

The exo system includes “the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that

indirectly influence processes within immediate setting in which the developing person lives" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). An example would be the leave policy in place used to assist managers in managing absenteeism. The policy provides guidelines and procedures for managers on how to manage absenteeism of employees. The policy places the department in a position of responsibility and investigations into the issue of absenteeism and deriving strategies on how best to address and manage the issue. The exosystem policies acknowledge that workplaces are controllable environments that can actively support employee well-being (Stokols, 2000). Another example would be the manner in which a manager addresses the issue of absenteeism. Their management style could also be the contributing factor towards the high rate of absenteeism. However, if nothing is being done and employees are not confronted about their behaviour it negatively impacts on the remaining employees who have to do work for two people.

2.10.4 MACRO SYSTEM

The macrosystem comprises of "the all-encompassing patterns of micro, meso, and exosystems characheristics of a given culture or subculture, with specific reference to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, lifestyles and opportunity structures that are embedded in each of the broader systems'" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26). In order to gain an all inclusive understanding of absenteeism influencing workplaces in the west it is necessary to consider how the macro levels within "Western civilisations (government, capitalism, culture, society) are influencing individual and community behaviours and attitudes" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26). This can be linked to the importance of managing absenteeism because if it is not managed then it negatively impacts on the morale of employees, costs, productivity, the department and government as a whole. The leave policy can also be linked in this regard because it has an impact on how managers address and deal with absenteeism.

2.10.5 CHRONO SYSTEM

A chronosystem comprises of "change or consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person but also of the environment in which that person lives. An example would be changes over the life course in family structure, employment, socio economic status to name a few" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26). The system also examines over time the influence of

environmental changes on an individual's development (Stokols, 2000). If managers can get the strategies, skills and training on how to manage absenteeism then the department is likely to see a decrease in absenteeism costs and more on employee attendance.

The model demonstrated the influence these determining factors, especially the interpersonal factors (micro system), have had on making and sustaining management of absenteeism within the workplace and employees decision making in terms of being absent and going to work. Based on the study the model proposed that individual behavior was affected by and also impacts the surrounding environment including social interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This can be linked to absenteeism in the sense that at times absenteeism represents individual withdrawal from dissatisfying working conditions. Such a negative attribution about absenteeism then can bring three outcomes: that behaviour is open to social control, absence is complex to the social context and lastly it is a potential source of workplace conflict. The model provided a useful framework for achieving a better understanding of the many factors and barriers that impact on managers being able to manage absenteeism effectively in the workplace. The model was based on the premise that absenteeism is a product of interdependence between employees and the systems mentioned above. When viewing absenteeism and absenteeism management as complex systems within the ecological models of human development, providing individuals with motivation and skills to change behaviour cannot be effective if the workplace environment and strategies put in place make it difficult or impossible for employees to change behaviour of being absent from work.

SUMMARY

Even though the management of absenteeism is very challenging, it is an important part of controlling absenteeism. The literature has highlighted important points when it comes to managing absenteeism in any organization. It is important for the manager to know the organizational policy being implemented that addresses absenteeism. Such knowledge can assist the manager in knowing the processes and procedures involved on how to manage absenteeism. Therefore training in this regard is essential so that they can be equipped with the skills to manage absenteeism effectively. It is also important for the manager to know how to refer an employee to the internal Employee Health and Wellness Programme so that the employee can be

assisted with the different challenges that they are often faced with or the challenges that make them to be absent from work. As a result the literature has highlighted that employee absenteeism is a difficult problem to monitor not comprehending that it can negatively impact on the organization. However, by combining the strategies mentioned above can assist in monitoring, controlling and effectively managing everyday absenteeism in the workplace.

CHAPTER 3:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The chapter covers the research design, sample, instrumentation, procedure, data analysis, trustworthiness of the study and ethical issues such as: permission, informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity.

3.1.1 PRIMARY AIM AND SECONDARY OBJECTIVE

The primary aim of the study was to explore the experiences of line managers when it comes to managing absenteeism of employees within the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The focus comprised of the gaps, challenges, what they encounter or undergo and the dynamics involved when managing and addressing absenteeism within the department.

The objectives of the study comprised of:

The objectives of the study comprised of:

- **i.** Exploring how managers perceive and experience absenteeism of employees.
- **ii.** Highlighting strategies that may be relevant to managing absenteeism
- **iii.** Indicating the effective roles that managers can make use of when managing absenteeism
- **iv.** Determining the challenges that managers are faced with and also the benefits of implementing absenteeism management strategies
- **v.** Deriving recommendations on how absenteeism can be managed effectively based on the research findings.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND STRATEGY

Qualitative research is a strategy for exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009). The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations in the meaning of the data. "Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation" (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). When seeking

people's input on a subject, it is important to interact with them and establish their needs in their own words. Therefore, this made the qualitative research approach the most appropriate in the present case. Conducting qualitative research enabled the researcher to gain an understanding of how absenteeism management is viewed and experienced by line managers.

The qualitative research strategy that was used is a case study research design. Case studies are strategies of inquiry whereby the researcher explores in-depth an event, programme, or process of one or more individuals, groups, movements and geographic units (Neuman, 2011). Cases are bounded by time and activity and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake as cited in Creswell, 2009). Case study research thoroughly investigates one or a small set of cases, focusing on many details within each case and the context. In short it examines both details of each case's internal features as well as the surrounding situation (Neuman, 2011). A case study enabled the researcher to link micro level or the actions of individuals to the macro level, or a large scale structures and processes. Case studies are likely to produce the best theory. According to Neuman (2011, p. 42) this occurs for three reasons:

- "Firstly, when a researcher becomes very familiar with the in-depth detail of the specific case, the researcher is likely to create or build on new theories as well as reshape current theories to complex cases or new situations
- Secondly, researchers examine specific cases, the complex details of social processes and cause-effect relations become more invisible. The increased visibility allows the researcher to develop richer, more comprehensive explanations that can capture the complexity of social life
- Lastly, case studies produce evidence that more effectively depicts complex, multiple-factor events/situations and processes that occur over time and space"

The type of case study that was utilized for the research is the descriptive case study also called the intrinsic case study. Yin as cited in Creswell (2009) argues that this type of case study attempts to describe, analyze and interpret a particular phenomenon. The purpose is not to understand a broad social issue but merely to describe the case being studied. Stake (1994) argues that this type of case study is aimed at understanding a particular case because the case

itself is of interest. An example provided by Stake is how one person managed a stroke. This would link to the research topic in terms of how a manager manages absenteeism. A case may be of interest because it has particular features or because it is ordinary (Stake, 1994). Based on the aforementioned, the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development was the case study. The department has 20 units in total and each have 200 employees who operate the same shift pattern, 40 hours a week, 5 days in a week and they also have the same organizational structures. However, the management style and culture within each unit differs significantly and more importantly the absence levels per unit also differ. Therefore it was decided to limit the case study to eleven units within the department. Therefore, the researcher aimed to further her understanding on the experinces and challenges line managers go through when managing workplace absenteeism and utilizing inputs from line managers regarding the necessary recommendations on how absenteeism management can be enhanced.

3.3 POPULATION SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

Population refers to individuals who possess specific characteristics that represent all the measurements of interest to the researcher (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2011). The population of the study comprised of managers. Eleven managers were used as an area of focus of the study: managers who participated in the study made a total number of eleven participants. The purpose of sampling in qualitative research is to collect the richest data (Creswell, 2009). According to Creswell (2009) purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which the participants to be observed or interviewed are selected on the basis of the researcher's judgment about which ones will be the most useful or representative (judgmental sampling) and they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem of the study. Grinnell and Unrau (as cited in De Vos et al., 2011) argues that is also based on the premise that the sample is composed of elements that contain the most characteristic, representative or typical attributes of the population that serve the purpose of the study best. De Vos et al. (2011) argues that in purposive sampling the researcher must first think critically about the parameters of the problem and then choose the sample case accordingly. Clear identification and formulation of preselected criteria for the selection of respondents is therefore, of cardinal importance (De Vos et al., 2011).
The type of sampling that was utilized in the research is non-probability sampling-purposive sampling. The selection criteria of prospective participants comprised of managers:

1. Who have been a manager in the unit for a minimum of 3 years
2. Who have been working in the department for 3 years
3. Who had encounters with individual cases of people who were absent in the last two years.

These selection criteria were chosen as it was felt that they had the most experience and will make the most valuable contribution to the objectives of the study. Also they may have a wealth of experience that could be unearthed not only in the department but also past experience and the different organizations that they used to work in.

The researcher gained entry in the department by obtaining permission from the Head of Department (HOD), following that the researcher requested the HOD to allow her to speak to the managers as a way of recruiting them and informing them about the research that was undertaken in the department. The researcher also requested the HOD to speak to the managers and tell them about the research so that the HOD can recommend prospective participants. The researcher gave the managers participant's information sheet which can be found in Appendix A, the researcher also provided them with consent forms for participation in the study and also consent form for audio taping of the interview which can be found in Appendix B. The reason being it was important for the researcher to give participants the information sheet for informed consent so that they could know what is expected of them before the actual study began.

3.4 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTATION

The study made use of a semi-structured interview schedule as the research instrument. The one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were chosen for the purpose of this research because it offered the researcher the opportunity to ask open-response questions about how absenteeism policies in place can enhance for the management of absenteeism within the department. The participants (managers) were able to explain or reveal concerns relating to the issue at hand. De Vos et al. (2011) argue that a semi-structured interview is focused and discursive, and allows the researcher and participant to explore an issue. It is used to determine individual's perceptions, opinions, facts and forecasts and their reactions to initial findings and potential solutions. The in-depth interviews were flexible and they encouraged the research participants (line managers) to speak at length, introduce and articulate their own concerns. The semi structured interviews were

respectively one hour long. According to Boyce and Neale (2006) in-depth semi-structured interview is a technique designed to produce a vivid picture of the participant's perspective on the research topic. The person being interviewed is considered an expert and the interviewer is considered the student. For that reason the researchers interviewing techniques are motivated by the desire to learn everything the participant can share about the research topic (Boyce & Neale, 2006). The one-on-one, semi-structured interviews provided the interviewer the opportunity to ask in-depth questions and the participants to express their experiences in their own words. The aim of the interviews comprised of determining the views and experiences of line managers on a variety of issues in relation to the management of absenteeism within the department. They comprised of but were not limited to the absence level per unit, the causes of absenteeism, how line managers address, record and report on absenteeism and the effectiveness of the current management strategies put in place to name a few.

3.5 PRE-TESTING THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

It is necessary to test the research instrument before a full research project so that the researcher knows whether or not the study is valid and that the study's design will be able to capture the data being required (Creswell, 2009). The research instrument of the study was pre-tested before the full research so that the researcher could know if the instrument would assist to acquire the data needed to meet the aims and objectives of the study. The purpose of pre-testing the research instrument was based on understanding if the questions were clear and not too complex and also to establish whether they will produce the answers which will in the end assist to answer the overall research questions (Cresswell, 2009). The research instrument was pretested during the first semi structured interview with the Employee Health and Wellness Deputy Director. The process of pre-testing the research instrument gave the researcher an understanding of the research questions and the type of responses she will get. The researcher also got an understanding on areas of improvement so as to get the desired results.

3.6. DATA COLLECTION METHOD

De Vos et al. (2011) argue that data collection is an important element when conducting research. "In order to collect data, the researcher should be able to access the data that needs to be collected for the study. Data can be collected from a number of sources including written

documents, records, the internet, surveys or interviews. For the purpose of this study, the interview was utilized as a method of data collection. De Vos et al., (2011) continue to say interviewing is the most important method of data collection in qualitative research. The interviews were used as a basis for data collection comprised of a list of open-ended questions, which covered certain themes that were of relevance to the research topic. The interview was utilized so that the researcher can be able to raise particular themes that evolved naturally during the course of the interview and assisted in answering the research questions. De Vos et al. (2011) argues that challenges that the researcher was faced with when using qualitative research interviewing included establishing rapport in order to gain information from participants, coping with unanticipated problems and rewards of interviewing in the field, recording and managing the large volume of data generated by even relatively brief interviews. The research interviews conducted by the researcher were one-on-one, but in terms of the duration they varied ranging from 30 minutes to one hour-long interview's.

3.7 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data analysis refers to the categorization, ordering and summarizing of data to obtain answers to research questions (Creswell, 2009). De Vos et al. (2011) therefore, argue that data analysis is a period when the researcher analyses theories and makes sense of the data. Qualitative data analysis is the stage of the research process where the researcher will organize the huge amount of data collected into coherent units. The method of data analysis that was applied is thematic data analysis. Creswell (2009) argues that data analysis is a process that follows the following steps:

Step 1- Organize and prepare the data for analysis

The first step comprises of transcribing interviews, typing field notes or sorting and arranging the data into different types depending on the sources of information (Creswell, 2009). The researcher started by transcribing the interviews, sorting and arranging data in accordance with the research questions and aims.

Step 2- Read through all the data

The researcher read through all the data as a way of obtaining a general sense of the information and reflected on its overall meaning. The aim is to get a general idea of what the participants are saying, the tone of the ideas, and the impression of the overall depth, credibility and the use of information (Creswell, 2009). When the researcher was done transcribing she made it a point to obtain a clear understanding of the meaning of data. This was done through writing notes as a way of gathering general thoughts based on the data.

Step 3- Begin a detailed analysis with a coding process.

Coding is a process of organizing the material into chunks before giving meaning to those chunks. The coding process generated description of the setting or people as well as the categories or themes for analysis (Creswell, 2009). The process involves taking data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based in the actual language of the participant (Creswell, 2009).

Before continuing to Step 4, Tesch (1990, pp. 142-145 as cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 251) provides a valuable analysis of the process in eight steps:

l. “Get a sense of the whole. Read all the transcriptions carefully. Perhaps jot down some ideas as they come to mind. The researcher did this by reading carefully through all the data; this gave the researcher background information and when something came to mind the researcher wrote down all her ideas.

2. Pick one document (i.e., one interview)-the most interesting one, the shortest, the one on the top of the pile. One should ask themselves, "What is this about?" Do not think about the substance of the information but its underlying meaning. Write thoughts in the margin. When the researcher was going through the transcripts, she was focused more on what the topic was about and if she was getting the desired answers.

3. When you have completed this task for several participants, make a list of all topics. Cluster together similar topics. Form these topics into columns, perhaps arrayed as major topics, unique topics, and leftovers. When the researcher finished going through the transcripts she made a list of all the topics that came up, the researcher then grouped similar topics and made a list of them

4. Take this list and go back to your data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. Try this preliminary organizing scheme to see if new categories and codes emerge. However the researcher was open for new codes that emerged, also when ideas about the codes came to mind, the researcher wrote them down on her notes.

5. Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories. Look for ways of reducing your total list of categories by grouping topics that relate to each other. Perhaps draw lines between your categories to show interrelationships. In this regard the researcher went through the categories and then tried to find subcategories as a way of organizing data.

6. Make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes. The researcher took into consideration that a certain portion of the data can fit in two or three categories that were identified.

7. Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis. In this regard the researcher placed much emphasis on the content of each category taking into consideration the overall research question and getting rid of irrelevant data.

8. If necessary, recode your existing data. The researcher reorganized the data so that she could have structure for her research report".

Step 4- Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis.

Description involves a detailed rendering of information about people, places, or events in a setting. Researchers can generate codes for this description. This analysis is useful in designing detailed descriptions for case studies, ethnographies, and narrative research projects (Creswell,

2009). Using the coding process assisted to generate a small number of themes or categories, perhaps five to seven categories for a research study. These themes are the ones that appear as major findings in qualitative studies and are often used to create headings in the findings sections of studies (Creswell, 2009). They should display multiple perspectives from individuals and be supported by diverse quotations and specific evidence. Beyond identifying the themes during the coding process, qualitative researchers can do much with themes to build additional layers of complex analysis (Creswell, 2009). For example, researchers interconnect themes into a story line (as in narratives) or develop them into a theoretical model (as in grounded theory). Themes are analyzed for each individual case and across different cases (as in case studies) or shaped into a general description (as in phenomenology). Sophisticated qualitative studies go beyond description and theme identification and into complex theme connections (Creswell, 2009). During the coding process the researcher gave detailed description of the department and the people involved which were managers as well as the themes that emerged for analysis.

Step 5- Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative.

The most popular approach is to use a narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis. This might be a discussion that mentions a chronology of events, the detailed discussion of several themes (complete with subthemes, specific illustrations, multiple perspectives from individuals, and quotations) or a discussion with interconnecting themes (Creswell, 2009). Many qualitative researchers also use visuals, figures, or tables as additions to the discussions. They present a process model (as in grounded theory), advance a drawing of the specific research site (as in ethnography), or convey descriptive information about each participant in a table (as in case studies and ethnographies). The researcher made a table that comprised of the themes and subthemes that emerged in the study, the table allowed the researcher to link the themes to the objectives of the study. During data analysis the researcher used verbatim quotes of participants for verification purposes as a way of showing that the findings were a true reflection of the participant's experiences and perceptions.

Step 6- A final step in data analysis involves making an interpretation or meaning of the data.

Asking, "What were the lessons learned?" captures the essence of this idea (Lincoln & Guba as cited in Creswell, 2009). These lessons could be the researcher's personal interpretation, couched in the understanding that the inquirer brings to the study from her or his own culture, history, and experiences. It could also be a meaning derived from a comparison of the findings with information gleaned from the literature or theories (Creswell, 2009). This suggests that the findings confirm past information or diverge from it. It can also suggest new questions that need to be asked. One way researchers can end a study, Wolcott as cited in Creswell (2009) argues that is to ask further questions. The questioning approach is also used in advocacy and participatory approaches to qualitative research. Moreover, when qualitative researchers use a theoretical lens, they can form interpretations that call for action agendas for reform and change. Thus, interpretation in qualitative research can take many forms, be adapted for different types of designs, and be flexible to convey personal, research based, and action meanings (Creswell, 2009). The researcher gave an analysis of the findings and what it means for the department followed by suggestions that could utilized as a way of managing workplace absenteeism.

3.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

According to Babbie and Mouton (2011) the key principle of good qualitative research is found in the notion of trustworthiness; objectivity of its findings or decisions. The basic issue of trustworthiness is simple: how can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including him or herself) that the findings of an investigation are worth paying attention to or worth taking into account? A qualitative study cannot be considered valid unless it is reliable, a qualitative study cannot be called transferable unless it is credible, and it cannot be considered credible unless it is dependable (Lincoln & Guba, as cited in Babbie & Mouton, 2011).

3.8.1 CREDIBILITY

Credibility means the compatibility between the constructed realities that exist in the minds of the respondents and those that are attributed to them (Babbie amd Mouton, 2011). In addressing credibility, the researcher made an effort to demonstrate that managers have both negative and positive experiences and perceptions when it comes to managing absenteeism and also there is a

great need for the enhancement on existing strategies for effective management of absenteeism within the department.

3.8.2 TRANSFERABILITY

Transferability refers to the extent which the findings can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents (Babbie and Mouton, 2011). To allow transferability, the researcher provided sufficient detail of the context of the research for the reader to be able to understand that the findings cannot be generalized to other government departments because the study focused on experiences so it was specific to certain individuals which in this regard were the experiences and perceptions of managers within the department.

3.8.3 DEPENDABILITY

Dependability is an inquiry that should provide its audience with evidence that if it were to be repeated with the same or similar respondents (subjects) in the same (or a similar) context, its findings would be similar (Lincoln & Guba as cited in Babbie and Mouton, 2011). To ensure dependability if a person wants to repeat the study, they will have enough information from the research report to do so, they can use the same interview schedule and they will obtain similar findings that the study had.

3.8.4 CONFIRMABILITY

Confirmability means the degree to which the findings are the product of the focus of the inquiry and not of the biases of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, as cited in Babbie & Mouton, 2011). To allow confirmability the researcher audio taped the recordings and transcribed the true reflection of the manager's perceptions. Member checking was important in this regard hence the researcher strived to establish rapport with the participants in order to obtain open and honest feedback. During data collection, the researcher summarized information then questioned the participants to seek for clarity.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Researchers need to anticipate the ethical issues that may arise during their studies (Creswell, 2014). Research involves collecting data from people, about people. Writing about these

anticipated ethical issues is required in making an argument for a study as well as being an important topic in the format for proposals (Creswell, 2014). Researchers need to protect their research participants; develop trust with them; promote the integrity of research and guard against misconduct that might reflect on their organizations or institutions and cope with new, challenging problems (Creswell, 2014). The Code of ethics provides guidance, but ethical conduct ultimately depends on an individual researcher. The researcher has a moral and professional obligation to be ethical even when research participants are unaware of or unconcerned about ethics hence many participants are little concerned about protecting their privacy and other rights (Neuman, 2011). Ethical issues in research command increased attention today. The ethical considerations that need to be anticipated are extensive, and they are reflected through the research process. There are ethical issues that are to be addressed in this study since this kind of study is more direct to the participants and sensitive. Agreed-upon standards for research ethics help ensure that the researcher explicitly considers the needs and concerns of the people they study, that appropriate oversight for the conduct of research takes place, and that a basis for trust is established between the researcher and study participants (Patton, 2002). The following research ethics were considered in the study: permission, informed consent, and confidentiality, and anonymity, voluntary participation, avoidance of harm and publications of the findings.

3.9.1 PERMISSION

For the purpose of the study, the researcher obtained formal permission from the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD). The researcher also obtained ethical clearance for the study from the Ethics Committee (non – medical), at the University of Witwatersrand and also from the Faculty of Humanities-Postgraduate Office.

3.9.2 VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation should at all times be voluntary and no one should be forced to participate in a project. Some researchers say that participants should be told what is being studied without giving too many details about the aim of the study (Babbie, 2007). Participants were notified that participation is voluntary; if they felt uncertainty or discomfort they were allowed to withdraw from the study. It was also explained that they will not incur any penalties for non-participation.

3.9.3 INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent implies that all possible or adequate information on the goal of the investigation; the expected duration of the participant's involvement; the procedures which will be followed during the investigation; the possible advantages and disadvantages and dangers to which respondents may be exposed to (Patton, 2002). The researcher provided documents such as informed consent and participant information forms to be read, completed and signed by the participants before the commencing of the interview sessions. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, how confidentiality will be protected, and that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences and that participation is done willingly.

3.9.4 CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality implies that only the researcher and the possibly a few members of his or her staff should be aware of the identity of participants and that staff should also have made commitment with regard to confidentiality (Babbie, 2007). Participants were given assurance of confidentiality. The researcher assured to protect the individual's confidences from other people in the setting and from the general reading public. This was done by making sure that the participants names were not recorded anywhere especially when data was analysed.

3.9.5 ANONYMITY

Babbie (2007) argues that anonymity means that no one, including the researcher, should be able to identify the participant afterwards. Anonymity entails making use of pseudonyms instead of the participant's real names, ensuring that the participants are not identifiable in print (Patton, 2002). In this study the researcher numbers to refer to various participants, for example, "Participant 1".

3.9.6 AVOIDANCE OF HARM

The fundamental ethical rule of social research is that it must bring no harm to participants. Participants can be harmed in a physical and/or emotional manner (Babbie, 2007). Everything we do in life can possibly harm someone and therefore researchers should weigh the risks against

the importance and possible benefits of the specific research project (Babbie, 2007). The researcher has an ethical obligation to protect participants within all possible reasonable limits of physical discomfort that may emerge from the research project. The researcher thoroughly informed the participants on the potential impact the study has, this provided the participants the opportunity to withdraw from the investigation if they wish so. If the participant feels harmed on an emotional manner then they were informed of the arrangement made to the Deputy Director of the Internal Employee Health and Wellness Programme, Mrs Nonhlanhla Bob, who will then link the participant to a counselor if needs be.

3.9.7 PUBLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The findings of the study must be introduced to the reading public in written form otherwise even a highly scientific investigation will mean very little and will not be viewed as research. Report writing means the researcher doing all he/she can to make sure that one's report is as clear as possible and contains all the information necessary for readers to understand what is being written (De Vos et al., 2011). The information is formulated and conveyed clearly and unmistakably to avoid and minimize misappropriation by the participants, the general public and even colleagues. The researcher made it a point that the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development when the study was concluded is provided with the findings, however, based on the findings one will not be able to identify the participants being interviewed and the units they manage hence confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed.

SUMMARY

The chapter provided a depiction of the processes and procedures involved when conducting the research study. A qualitative research design was utilized hence it enabled the researcher to gain an understanding of how absenteeism management is viewed and experienced by line managers. Eleven line managers were purposively sampled. Data was collected using semi structured in-depth interviews that lasted from 30 minutes to an hour hence the schedule provided the researcher with the platform to ask open-response questions, and also exploring the manager's experiences, perceptions and challenges about the management of absenteeism. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis by carefully identifying significant themes that emerged from the informants' experiences and perceptions about managing absenteeism. In the next chapter,

the researcher will provide an in-depth analysis on the themes that emerged and will be linked with the literature reviewed in chapter two of the report.

CHAPTER 4:
DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The management of absenteeism continues to be a challenge for managers and the GDARD is not different from the challenges that are being faced by other organizations. The chapter aims to give an understanding of the following:

- The challenges managers are faced with when managing absenteeism that they have encountered or have undergone
- The dynamics involved, their needs and also the gaps when managing and addressing absenteeism within the department.

By drawing attention to the experiences and challenges that line managers have gone through, it is hoped that they will receive the support needed from management to derive effective strategies on how best to manage absenteeism within the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

4.2 IDENTIFYING DETAILS

Eleven managers formed part of the sample for this research study. These managers supervise a minimum of 3 employees to a maximum of 10.

The study comprised of more Deputy Directors (DDs) than Assistant Directors (ASDs). Most of the female managers were DDs and they were in the age category between 35-45 years. A few male managers were DDs and they also ranged between 36-51 years. The eleven managers were from eleven different units. Acquiring a post into being an ASD or DD it is largely depended in the stream they were in. The researcher learned that it is not about the number of years working in the department but it largely depends on the field the manager is qualified for.

All the managers had adequate managerial experience which comprised of a minimum of two years being a manager in the department. Overall managers gave a good impression in terms of understanding their experiences, perceptions, challenges and also highlighting areas of improvement so that they are able to manage absenteeism effectively in future. This will be discussed in depth in paragraphs to follow.

Table 3: Identifying details of the research participants

DEMOGRAPHICS	CATEGORIES	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Job Title	Deputy Director	8
	Assistant Director	3
Age	25-35 years	2
	36-45years	6
	46-50 years	2
	51 and above	1
Gender	Female	7
	Male	4
Number of years in the department	0-3 years	2
	4-7 years	3
	8-11 years	4
	12 and above	2
Number of years being a manager in the department	0-3 years	2
	4-7 years	5
	8-11 years	2
	12 and above	2
Number of people they supervise	1-4	3
	5-7	3
	8-10	5
	11 and above	0

4.3 PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

The findings were presented underneath objectives of the research which are presented in the table above which comprise of managers experiences and experiences in managing absenteeism within the department, with the emphasis on the challenges they face, their perceptions and also strategies that they utilizing when it comes to managing absenteeism.

THEME	SUB-THEME
1.KNOWLEDGE OF ABSENTEEISM	➢ Absent from their work station ➢ Presenteeism ➢ Controlling absenteeism
2. HOW MANAGERS PERCEIVE THEIR ROLE	➢ Identifying trends and patterns ➢ One-on-one discussion with the employee ➢ Referral to the employee health and wellness program ➢ Leadership style ➢ Communication with employees
3.IMPACT OF ABSENTEEISM	➢ Cost of absenteeism ➢ Employee morale ➢ Impact on productivity
4.CHALLENGES IN MANAGING ABSENTEEISM	➢ The abuse of sick leave ➢ Eight week rule ➢ Fake medical certificates ➢ The policy does not address absenteeism ➢ Not holding employees accountable for attendance ➢ Being absent when leave was not approved ➢ Pay for the number of days worked
5.STRATEGIES BEING UTILIZED	➢ Time book register ➢ Diary ➢ Work Plans
6.TRAINING OF MANAGERS	➢ Basic qualifications ➢ Lack of skills ➢ Raising awareness

Table 4: Research Findings in Thematic order

4.4 THEME 1: KNOWLEDGE OF ABSENTEEISM

4.4.1 Absence from work station

The first question for the participants comprised of describing absenteeism according to their own perspective. Eight out of eleven managers interviewed stated that their definitions of absenteeism comprises of an employee who is not at work because of reasons beyond their control.

Participant 7 "Absenteeism is when an employee is absent because of illness or factors that are beyond their control such as death in the family"

Participant 11 "Absenteeism is when an employee does not report for duty for an unavoidable reason such as family issues such as having a sick child then that makes it impossible for them to attend work"

The participants agreed on the aspect that absenteeism can be described as an employee being absent from their work station without a valid reason. Their understanding of absenteeism is also when an employee is being absent for two hours, arriving late at work, taking longer lunch breaks; that for them is still part of being absent, being physically at work but not being productive.

Participants' description of absenteeism varied between voluntary and involuntary absenteeism. Voluntary absenteeism is avoidable and it can be defined as "missing work for reasons that the employee can control such as leisure activities or searching for a new job" (Garcia-Serrano & Malo, 2009, p. 374). This is to say that voluntary absenteeism is missing work without a valid reason. To define involuntary absenteeism the research uses Nel et al. (2004) which argues that involuntary absenteeism is irregular absenteeism because of reasons that one cannot control comprising of a sickness or family related issues due to valid reasons. This is to say involuntary absenteeism is missing work with a valid reason. The participants went on to say quite a few situations can take place that may require an employee to request time away from work, the request can take place in advance or occur as a spur of a moment which then can be linked back to voluntary absenteeism. As managers they are often willing to approve these types of absences

and they ensure that they do not have any type of negative impact on the attendance record of the employee because the employee would have been absent from work by seeking permission from their manager and also applying for leave.

The challenge is usually the fact that employees absent themselves from work without informing or seeking permission and also without applying for leave. This quandary can be linked to voluntary absenteeism. Of the 11 managers interviewed, 7 agreed on the aspect that employees usually send them messages or emails the morning they decide not to come to work and when they return to work they do not provide valid reasons as to why they were absent.

The study's description of absenteeism comprised of abscondment which can be defined as when an employee does not show up for work for three weeks without informing the manager of the absence or without a valid reason. Desertion can be defined as when the employee has no intention of returning to work (Albertyn, 2015). Managers however did not mention desertion and abscondment in their definition of absenteeism. This demonstrates that managers are handling absenteeism cases without acknowledging if the behaviour is voluntary or involuntary absenteeism, abscondment or desertion cases. Based on the management of absenteeism, 8 managers agreed on the fact that it is critical to manage absenteeism, the remaining 3 did not see it as a critical issue, and they stated that as long as an employee can fill in their leave forms and provide reasons for their absence that should be enough. This shows that managers perceive the management of absenteeism in a different manner hence not all of them do not see the point of managing it

4.4.2 Presenteesim

A theoretical agreement does not exist when it comes to the definition of presenteeism but Johns (2009) defines it as attending work while ill therefore resulting in reduced productivity when employees come to work and they are not fully engaged or perform at lower levels because of ill health (Johns 2009). Presenteeism does not refer to loss of productivity due to employees extending their tea or lunch breaks or pretending to be ill to avoid working, slacking by surfing the internet or emailing friends (Stelzner, 2005). Stelzner (2005) continues to say presenteeism is intertwined with loss of productivity due to real health problems of employees, such as allergies, rheumatoid arthritis, chronic back pain to name a few. These health problems are not severe

hence the employees report for duty but their productivity will be low. It can be argued that presenteeism causes greater loss to an organization than the costs attributed to absenteeism (Johns, 2009).

Presenteeism is a serious concern in the same manner as absenteeism within the department. Employees come to work even though they are not feeling well because they are afraid of the stigma being associated with being sick, they are worried that their sick leave days or annual leave days will be deducted if they do not come. Thus, they come to work sick because they are afraid that they will lose their jobs. So one can argue that presenteeism takes place because of the mistrust between the manager and the employee, in this regard it is important for managers to promote retention of employees even when they are managing absenteeism.

The above line of reasoning can be seen in the following quotes from the managers:

Participant 9 "As a manager you are not only managing work but also people, it is therefore important for me to send the person home if I see that they are sick because the aim is to get work done from that person"

Participant 11 "Also the policy states that if the person works from 8h00-11h00 that is the full day, therefore I need to check the employees condition if they will be able to work until that time so that it does not lead to us deducting from the employees leave days"

When the researcher enquired about the understanding of presenteeism was new to some of the participants who were participating in the study. The researcher had to explain the term to some of them whereas 5 were familiar with the definition provided and examples made but they did not know that it was termed presenteeism. Some of the participants went on to say they had come to work when they were unwell but they were unaware that this was an issue of concern. The managers also had not considered that working long hours where upon the individual is no longer effective would also be considered presenteeism. For this reason the issue can be linked to unawareness of the term presenteeism. Therefore it can also be argued that managers can create a competitive environment within the organization that forces employees to work longer hours and even to come to work when unwell and that the managers may be unaware of the underlying pressure they have placed upon the employees (Johns, 2009).

4.4.3 Controlling absenteeism

Participant's description of management of absenteeism comprised of the following:

Participant 6: "If I'm saying I'm managing absenteeism it means that as a manager I should ensure or make sure that people are doing what they supposed to be doing in terms of their work, people are being productive"

Participant 10: "Basically the first thing is the basic conditions of employment requires a person to be at work for 8 hours in a day which counts 40 hours in a week…now for any other reason either for the 8 hours that you are supposed to be here you can't be able to be here managing that I need to know as a manager or as a supervisor what would make you not to be at work for that 8 hours"

Participants agreed on the aspect that managing absenteeism is important because if they do not manage it then employees would do as they please knowing that there are no repercussions for their behaviour. The definition of management of absenteeism largely alluded to the fact that they need to know reasons why employees are absent and why an employee would take leave so that they are able to control employee absences. Their definitions also included knowing when an employee will arrive late at work or when an employee has to leave work early, but this should be followed with a valid reason. Five participants stated that absenteeism comprises of guiding employees on how to apply for leave, this is to say that the employee(s) must report and arrange for leave before they can actually be away from work. Following that, the manager must recommend the leave before it gets approved unless it is for emergency cases but still the employee must report.

Management of absenteeism can be defined as a method to control absence due to urgency, illness or injury while controlling uninformed, unscheduled or excessive absenteeism (Beira, 2008). Management of absenteeism is a crucial factor that is related to the productivity of the workforce hence every organization gives great importance to the need of managing absenteeism (Beira, 2008). Effective management of absenteeism for a manager comprises of having the balance between providing genuine support and assistance to employees with their personal and health related issues and at the same time taking action against the employee who abuses their discretion (Van Eeden, 2007).

Participants'' description of absenteeism and management of absenteeism revealed that employee absenteeism is a challenge within the department because it happens for numerous reasons. How managers perceive absenteeism has a direct link in terms of how they manage or control it. It is therefore imperative for them to know that the definition of absenteeism is in conjunction with desertion and abscondment, this can assist managers in terms of how they deal with the different cases of absenteeism employee present with.

4.5 THEME 2: HOW MANAGERS PERCEIVE THEIR ROLE

4.5.1 Identifying trends and patterns

The first role that most of the managers stated was identifying trends and patterns of absenteeism. This is to say that their role comprises of confrontation and making the employee aware that their pattern has been identified, resulting in the manager trying to find out the reasons behind the pattern and then monitoring it. Drawing from what managers alluded to, as a result it is important that the manager should not ignore the problem of absenteeism whether it is short or long term absence because if other employees see that a certain employee gets away with excessive absenteeism, their morale can be lowered and this can result in them also adopting the same style of being absent.

The manager is responsible for keeping records of absenteeism, investigating and discussing absenteeism with an employee, agreeing with an employee on action to be taken and taking disciplinary action when necessary (Levy, 2003). When managers are identifying the trends and patterns, it is important that they also identify the type of absences the department is experiencing; they need to distinguish between short and long term absenteeism in order for them to identify the underlying causes that result on an employee's absence becoming a trend or pattern.

4.5.2 One-on-one discussion with the employee

When managers have identified the trends and pattern of absent employees, the next step is having a one-on-one discussion with the employee therefore setting a meeting with the employee is crucial in this regard. The following managers alluded to this point:

Participant 3: "The meeting is all about letting the employee know about the trend that I have noticed, also try to understand what could be causing the employee not to come to work"

Participant 6: "I give the employee a chance to explain themselves…usually after the discussion their behaviour changes but then after six months the same pattern will happen again"

Most of the managers agreed on the fact that when addressing absenteeism, they set up a meeting between themselves and the employee and if necessary also include the supervisor of the employee to discuss the matter. The following are steps which managers follow when addressing absenteeism with the employee:

- Scheduling a meeting with the employee as soon as they notice a trend or they are being informed about the issue.
- Informing the employee about the purpose of the meeting, this is to say that the point is to let both parties communicate and determine the root of the problem then come up with a workable solution.
- Giving the employee a chance to explain- as a manager before they decide on how to deal with the issue, they allow the employee to explain reasons why they have been missing work, at times they also ask for necessary documentation such as a doctor's letter when trying to understand the reasons why the employee has been absent.
- When everything has been discussed, the manager needs to explain any policies or procedures in place that GDARD adheres to in relation to absenteeism and also informing the employee of the consequences should their behaviour of being absent persist.
- Lastly the decision being made by the manager is based on the discussion that both parties had, the manager's management style and their own judgment. However most of the managers argued that they have not had encounters whereby they had to issue out warnings, after the meeting most of the employees are not frequently absent like they used to before.

Falcone (2009) argues that whatever the decision the manager makes they should make written documentation of it, it should be delivered to the employee and human resources of the organization (if applicable) and keep a copy for their own records. If required, the manager may

issue a formal warning to the employee, explaining that future absenteeism will result in more undesirable consequences.

Therefore based on the perceptions from the manager's one-on-one interaction with their employee's; early intervention and on-going management of absenteeism cases is essential in achieving a conducive working environment in the department. For example most of the managers agreed on the fact that they address absenteeism through an early referral to the internal Employee Health and Wellness Program in the department and it assists in minimizing the absence of an employee who is absent because of mental health issues. Therefore, it is recommended that managers should be trained with the skill of identifying early warning signs of common absenteeism problems within the department in assisting them to intervene as early as possible and to speak supportively with employees who are experiencing difficulties.

An interesting notion came up when discussing the role of managers which was favouritism. Three out of eleven participants stated the fact that certain managers do not hold employees accountable for their absence is usually because of favouritism. The very same participants went on to say a fair manager needs to monitor and identify trends and address those issues with employees because if they do not then it negatively impacts on productivity for the reason that the workload will be carried by a few people and also the costs associated with absenteeism will increase. Favouritism was not an issue that the researcher and the participants focused on however managers need to set equal clear attendance expectations for all employees because if there are employees who are favoured more than others then it will become a challenge for managers in terms of how to address absenteeism with their favourite employees.

When an employee has been absent from work be it voluntary or involuntary absenteeism it is important for the manager to have a return to work meeting with the employee as a part of managing absenteeism so that if the manager is unaware of the reasons behind an employee short or long term absenteeism then the manager will become aware. It is good management practice for employees to be seen on their return to work. A brief talk on return to work enables the line manager/supervisor to show interest in the wellbeing of staff whilst authorizing the relevant documentation relating to the period of absence (Yorges, 2016).

Most of the participants stated that when the employee returns to work they usually have a discussion with them and that the aim is to show an interest in the well-being of the employee. As a result they try by all means to make the meeting not be confrontational in any way, but they become fair and firm. Above all they are prepared to listen, show interest and speak to the employee in terms of being easily understood. This is done by explaining the purpose of the discussion and also confirming the reason(s) for the absence; finding out if there are any problems by expressing interest in the employee's wellbeing; checking if all the forms and certificates have been completed and returned; updating the employee on work schedules or projects that might be taking place. However, most the participants agreed on the aspect that if the individual has failed to follow the appropriate procedures when applying for leave or they have not filled in their leave forms then this is brought to their attention.

4.5.3 Referral to the employee health and wellness programme

The management of absenteeism has been solely left as the manager's responsibility. However at some point, the manager will have to refer the troubled employee to ensure that they receive the necessary psychological assistance before the matter goes for corrective discipline (Mogobe, 2011).

Participant 4: "After having a discussion with an employee who is absent depending on the nature of the problem I refer him or her to the EHWP for further assistance"

Participant 8: "I do refer the employee but unfortunately because I am always busy I do not have time to do a follow up on the employee…but their behaviour changes so it works"

Absence management should be a team effort and not the responsibility of only one person. Involving relevant parties in the solution will spread the burden of dealing with the issue (Mogobe, 2011). An Employee Wellness Programme (EHWP) is a worksite-based programme to assist in the identification of problems associated with employees impaired by work-related concerns including, but not limited to: job redesign, restructuring, ergonomic improvements, job training, improving coping skills, job stress management and other work-related concerns which adversely affect employee job performance (Sieberhagen, Pienaar & Els, 2011).

Seven out of the eleven managers stated that they do refer employees to the internal EHWP in the department even though they do not have the time to follow up on the referral and to see if the employee was actually assisted or not. On the other hand it is important for the department to raise more awareness about the programme so that employees can know more about it and the services it offers, this can be done in the form of posters in the department, distribution of flyers, workshops on the program and also training for managers on how to identify and refer a troubled employee. Such awareness can result on an increase on the utilization of the programme and employees can also do self-referral rather than being referred by their managers.

4.5.4 Leadership style

Managers made a strong argument on the fact that at times it can be difficult for them to address employee absenteeism by recognizing that they may have played a role in causing it. Other workplace problems can contribute to absenteeism. Six out of eleven managers were aware that their leadership style can negatively impact on their employees therefore according to them being a good manager means being supportive towards their employees.

Participant 7: "What assists me in not having high absenteeism rates in my unit is the open door policy I have with my employees…they can talk to me about anything and I also try to assist wherever I can"

Participant 10: "As a manager it is important to have a good relationship with your employees but on the other hand you still need to be strict and firm so that the work can get done"

Since research by Kristensen et al. (2006) indicates that there is a close relationship between employee satisfaction and absenteeism, it can also be presumed that there might be a relationship between leadership and absenteeism as well. This type of relationship has been confirmed by Walumba, Wang and Lawler (2004) who argued that there are managers who demonstrate high levels of job commitment and satisfaction resulting in a lesser amount of withdrawal of employees. According to Zhu, Chew and Spangler (2005) there are human resource management practices that can result in a positive effect on employee performance, skills, motivation, knowledge and abilities as a result decreasing absenteeism and the management practice

comprise of leadership style. On the other hand, the research done by Tharenous (2007) revealed that leadership style can reduce absenteeism. This can be achieved when the employee receives support and assistance from their manager; thus result in an environment whereby the employee is likely to come to work. Zhu et al. (2005) established that transformational leaders are managers who take personal interest on their employees and they are equipped with the necessary skills in handling absenteeism and other workplace related challenges. This type of leadership style comprises of being supportive to employees and also setting an example with their own managerial behaviour. Tharenous (2007) continues to say a manager with such a leadership style shows employees that the manager's standards are not unrealistic. It also reveals that the manager is invested in his or her employees and committed in solving their problems. The study went on to reveal that managers who have this style or have a similar approach report less absenteeism than punitive managers (Tharenous, 2007).

Managers were resistant about taking further action against their employees. When they were asked if they would give employees a written warning or report the matter to Labour Relations should they be guilty of misconduct and excessive absenteeism they became defensive and resistant to the idea of taking further action. At times issues relating to absenteeism are escalated to senior managers from HR, when managers are being notified of the fact that they have not followed the correct processes and procedure when dealing with an absenteeism case, they do not change their leadership style of being a supportive manager to being a manager that addresses issues when they arise because such issues are never reported or taken further. Only one manager admitted to giving an employee a written warning because of their excessive absenteeism but the manager still felt bad for doing that. As a way of making it up to the employee they made it a point that they assist the employee with their absenteeism problem and never reported the matter again.

It is advisable that managers play their corrective role when necessary. Most of the managers agreed on the fact that the misuse of sick leave is a challenge for them. This is a challenge because employees use their sick days when they need leave and they do not apply for the appropriate type of leave, therefore as a manager it is their role to identify and pick up those trends and confront the matter when it happens. Based on the answers provided by the participants it would seem that the reason why sick leave is such a huge challenge for them is

because of the fact that they do not hold employees accountable for their absence. Therefore when managers are dealing with human behaviour it is important that they correct it taking into consideration the fact that as managers they need to understand what is happening in the team and also understanding that professionalism and the responsibilities assigned to the members of their team.

4.5.5 Communication with employees

Most of the managers agreed on the aspect that by virtue of being a manager they are automatically given the role of managing absenteeism in their workstation. Therefore their role would comprise of having management meetings with their employees where they discuss issues that are concerning the different units; they also communicate about the issue of absenteeism, the costs and consequences associated with it. Disseminating such information is important for them so that employees can also know what is happening around them and how it affects everyone.

Communication assists in two important tasks in every organization. Firstly it disseminates the information needed by employees to get things done; secondly it builds relationships of trust and commitment. Workplace communication is important to an organization's ability in being productive and ensuring that it operates efficiently (Fritz et al., 2013). Constant and open communication with employees is critical when it comes to understanding absenteeism. Constant interaction is likely to result in discussions based on difficulties that an employee(s) might be having as well as getting an understanding of the level of employee morale (Fritz et al., 2013). It is also important for organizations to raise awareness to employees of their rights and responsibilities regarding leave of absence and the consequences of abusing it.

Based on the various roles that were discussed above, managers have the responsibility of delivering the mandate of the government as an employer. Therefore it is important for them to be vigilant when it comes to managing absenteeism. This is to say that regardless of the leadership style of a manager, they should on a constant basis monitor and evaluate absenteeism with their employees so that they can also be aware of the costs and the impact absenteeism has not only focusing within their team but in the department as a whole. Based on the managers perceptions they are resistant about confronting employees about their level of absenteeism, it is

required that they become honest and share information about absenteeism with their employees so that they can see the consequences of their behaviour.

4.6 THEME 3: IMPACT OF ABSENTEEISM

Most of the managers stated that the importance of managing absenteeism is to encourage and support regular employee attendance. Since they work for government they are called public servants so if a public servant is not at work it means that they are not serving the people that they are supposed to be serving which is the mandate of the government. They went on to say that they are not only managing absenteeism but human behaviour as well. This is to say that they also need to manage delinquent behaviour of employees in relation to absenteeism so that they know that in the department there are rules and regulations which everyone needs to abide to. Managers need to accept that absenteeism is inevitable, it should also be taken into consideration the fact that the impact of absenteeism is not only constrained to just the absent employee. Failure to address absenteeism efficiently and effectively can lead to an impact being felt across the organization and it can cause a multitude of associated problems (Horton, 2016).

4.6.1 Cost of absenteeism

Voluntary absenteeism is expensive and unsettling to organizations hence it incurs both direct and indirect costs. The direct costs comprise of sick pay, lost days, and reduced service provision (Netshidzati, 2012). Indirect costs comprise of managers time to revise work schedules, loss of expertise and experience, training costs for replacement workers, administrative costs to monitor and administer the leave policy, resentment and lowered morale of other employees, turnover and loss in income, and reduced productivity (Netshidzati, 2012). Productivity is lost due to time spent by management on securing replacement employees and/or reassigning the remaining employees. “Additional management effort is required to maintain administrative systems dealing with control measures for absenteeism. There may also be costs associated with the payment of overtime to those tasked to absorb the absent employee’s work and payment for the induction of the replacement employee for that particular post” (Netshidzati, 2012, p. 36).

Managers are aware of the fact that absenteeism is not only costing the department but government as a whole. They stated that as a way of reducing costs associated with absenteeism they are tracking and monitoring absenteeism. However one would find this confusing when taking into consideration their resistance towards changing their management style when faced with issues that require the manager to confront an employee about their level of absenteeism. This then raises a question that one has to think about and to say is the management style of managers a contributing factor towards the escalating costs in government and the department associated with employee absenteeism?

On the other hand it is important that the department improves its leave tracking method to also equip and assist managers with the necessary skills and methods of how to track and monitor absenteeism because failure to do so can result in more costs associated with absenteeism.

4.6.2 Employee morale

Low employee morale was one of the issues that managers kept on talking about. Most of the managers agreed on the aspect that when employees are absent then it negatively impacts on the morale of the remaining employees who have to carry the workload of their absent colleagues. This is best articulated in the by:

Participant 7: "Usually it happens when an employee has to do work for two people, sometimes three because we are understaffed…resulting in them not performing to their optimum ability so absenteeism is a serious problem"

In preventing morale issues, managers need to spend time communicating with their employees. By allowing an open door policy employees can be able to express their concerns and feelings not only in relation to absenteeism issues but they can also speak up about other workplace issues as well. Managers also need to listen to their employees grievances, give recognition to good work so that employees can feel that their work is being appreciated, avoid burnout hence participant 7 largely spoke of being understaffed and how that negatively impacts on the remaining employees therefore resulting in low morale in the unit.

"Absenteeism leads to low employee morale, especially in cases where work designated to absent colleagues has to be done. Morale determines the spirit of a person or group; therefore

low employee morale is likely to have a negative impact on the service provided" (Rosenblatt & Shirom, 2005, p. 209). On the other hand Gill and Smith (2007, p. 35) argue that "low employee morale can be destructive in the organization and lead to dissatisfaction, poor productivity and absenteeism. Poor management could also leave employees feeling undervalued, and this in turn could affect employee morale". It is therefore important for managers to understand the relationship between absenteeism and low employee morale to assist them in addressing the issue with employees, and eventually resolve attendance and morale problems.

Low morale reveals that employees are not fully engaged, they have lost interest in their work or there is job dissatisfaction. When employees present these signs then manager should take appropriate action before the issue escalates even further and cause more problems for the team as a whole.

4.6.3 Impact on productivity

Employees that are absent especially when it's voluntary absenteeism tend to cause disruptions to the normal day to day operations within the department which can cause stress amongst co-workers and also amongst managers themselves. It is often a struggle to get to find employees that will fill in the gap for the absent employee(s) which means that the remaining employees have to fill in the gap and work harder resulting in low and slow productivity. Therefore, the impact of absenteeism is felt directly by the remaining employees, managers and the department as a whole which negatively impacts on the productivity and profitability at GDARD. This shows that managers need to have an understanding of the root causes of absenteeism and make efforts to address them before they negatively impact on productivity. "Absenteeism negatively impacts the productivity of an employee who may be required to perform their duties when tired therefore leading to inefficient service delivery, customer dissatisfaction, and loss of revenue" (Munro, 2007, p. 21). The remaining employees who are at work may have to work overtime, they carry the extra workload as a result of the overtime worked, staff morale may be negatively affected and service delivery compromised. This is alluded by:

Participant 11: "The impact of absenteeism is usually visible for example rather than having employees doing their job during regular work hours, the team must adjust to certain employees not being at their working stations but we manage to pull through"

Participant 11 emphasized the fact that as managers they are aware of the negative impact that absenteeism has on productivity because it also affects their performance targets or the goals they want to achieve as a unit. Since absenteeism is foreseeable they always need to have a plan in terms of what will happen when a certain employee is not at work, how will that affect the remaining colleagues and productivity as well. Therefore it is important that every manager derives a workable plan that they can implement when faced with absenteeism of employees. The manager's responses were in conjunction with the authors argument of the impact absenteeism has on productivity. This then reveals that managers are aware of the impact absenteeism has on the morale of employees, impact on the costs and also on productivity. On the other hand why are they still faced with the same issues hence they know of the consequences associated with absenteeism, one would ask then are they being assertive on their role? Do they hold employees accountable for their absence? Do they monitor and address absence issues with employees? These are some of the questions the researcher had even though some of them have already been discussed in the findings thus far.

4.7 THEME 4: CHALLENGES IN MANAGING ABSENTEEISM

Organizations all over the world are faced with challenges of controlling absenteeism, labour turnover and lateness amongst their employees and these are issues that are most stressful to managers (Johns, 2009). Many attempts have been made to permanently reduce these problems in order to avoid the costs that come with them but unfortunately there seems to be no permanent solutions (Johns, 2009).

4.7.1 The abuse of sick leave

The first challenge identified by the managers was the abuse of sick leave. Most of the managers agreed on the aspect that regardless of the fact that the leave policy does address the processes and procedures involved when applying for sick leave, it is still a major challenge in terms of how they should deal with it. This is because of paid sick leave so they feel that it is within their own right to take the day off without thinking twice.

Participant 9 "Employees feel that sick leave is an entitlement and also when they want to be away from work they do not take any other type of leave but they will use sick leave"

Participant 11 "As public servants we are entitled to 12 days of sick leave per year and 36 days sick leave in a three year cycle but employees still manage to exhaust those days"

However a majority of the managers indicated that there are times when an employee is genuinely sick and they follow the correct procedure in terms of applying for sick leave but there are instances in which they can see that a certain employee is actually making a story about being sick and they were avoiding coming to work.

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) 1997 section 23 state the requirement of a valid sick note.

Proof of incapacity

(1) An employer is not required to pay an employee in terms of section 23 if the employee has been absent from work for more than two consecutive days or on more than two occasions during an eight week period and, on request by the employer, does not produce a medical certificate stating that the employee was unable to work for the duration of the employees absence on account of sickness or injury

(2) The medical certificate must be issued and signed by a medical practitioner or any other person who is certified to diagnose and treat patients and who is certified to diagnose and treat patients and who is registered with a professional council established by an Act of Parliament"

4.7.1.1 Eight week rule

The 8-week rule in government is often overlooked by managers which can result in the misuse of sick leave days by employees. The manager should make it a point that when they notice that an employee is abusing sick leave then they should request a medical certificate and also inform the employee of the trend and pattern that they notice. Such action would actually make the employee think twice the next time they think of misusing their sick leave. On the other hand it can be argued that employees at times abuse sick leave and the actual problem could be another work related issues such as the relationship with the manager or pressure at work (Van Eeden, 2007). Therefore it is crucial that the manager identifies the root cause of the problem in order to address and solve it before it can escalate and become a huge concern.

A provision available to departments is the 8-week rule as contained in Chapter 3, “section 23 (1) of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997 (BCEA). This section stipulates that (a) an employer is not required to pay an employee if the employee has been absent from work for more than two consecutive days or (b) on more than two occasions during an eight-week period and on request by the employer does not produce a medical certificate stating that the employee was unable to work for the duration of the employee's absence on account of sickness or injury” (Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997).

This is to say that if the employee is off more than twice during the 8-week period, then next time the employee is off the manager is entitled to request a sick note (even if it is only one day) and if the sick note is not produced then the employee will not get paid for the day they are absent.

4.7.1.2 Fake medical certificate

Another major issue for managers was the submission of fake medical certificates by employees. This is to say that employees fake their illness when they want to be away from work knowing that they will bring a medical certificate as a way of proving that they were absent due to an illness.

Participant 7 “As a manager you can trace the trend because time and again you get a medical certificate from the same employee using the same doctor, same type of condition”

Manager’s perceptions differed when it came to the issue of fake medical certificates. Six out of eleven managers agreed on the aspect that they do believe that at times employees bring medical certificates that are untrue because the person they might be consulting can be a relative, friend or family doctor that can write anything so that it may seem as though the employee is genuinely sick. The remaining five managers indicated that they are not medical experts, they cannot differentiate between an authentic and fake medical certificate, what matters to them is the capability of the employee to provide reasons for their sickness such as bringing a medical certificate from the doctor then that is proof enough for them.

Manager’s perception on the issue of medical certificates was quite interesting because as participant 7 stated that they can easily trace the trend when the medical certificate is unauthentic

due to reasons such as being diagnosed with the same type of sickness time and again. It is also true that managers are not medical experts; the employee might be genuinely sick and produce the same type of condition from the same doctor resulting in the manager thinking that it is unauthentic. In this regard confronting the employee is still very important to get an understanding of the employee's sickness because maybe the manager can offer a helping hand in reducing the high level of sick leave. On the other hand if the manager has the perception that an employee might be abusing the system, the following paragraph explains what the manager can do in this regard.

There is a general public misunderstanding on the fact that managers are not permitted to contact a medical practitioner to substantiate a medical certificate because of the fact that they could breach doctor-patient confidentiality (Bendix, 2000). However, managers should note that it is well within their rights to contact the doctor should they need to authorize the sick note but that is only if the manager is going to verify the exact information that was provided by the employee (Albertyn, 2015).

As stated above when managers can identify the trend based on the medical certificate then the manager can do a follow up on the matter or conduct an investigation of their own. If the manager suspects that either the medical practitioner or practice number has been forged, According to Johnson et al. (2003, p. 12) "they can do either of the following:

1. Contact the Health Professions Council of South Africa or the Allied Health Professions Council of South Africa to find the healthcare professional or the practice

2. The manager can send out a disguised patient to visit the same practice and test if the alleged practitioner is willing to produce a fake certificate

3. The manager can dismiss the certificate if they find that the medical professional or the practice numbers are not either of the organizations records" (Johnson et al., 2003).

The abuse of sick leave will continue being a challenge for the managers because of their resistance towards confronting an employee or even reporting the matter further if it has become an excessive problem. It is understandable that confronting an employee about their sick leave is not easy. It is the role of the manager to monitor absenteeism and address it when it becomes an

issue. The manager can begin the conversation by keeping an open mind and also being honest about the concerns they might have. They should also take into consideration the fact that the employee is not entitled to divulge their sickness if they do not want to and also that the absenteeism may be due to managerial issues so it is important that the manager is also sensitive when confronting the manager

4.7.2 The policy does not address absenteeism

All of the managers agreed on the fact that the Department does not have an absenteeism policy but the leave policy that is in place is regarded as the absenteeism policy. They also stated that the policy is not specific enough or it does not address absenteeism and the management of it. This is to say that the policy addresses the different types of leaves such as sick leave, maternity leave to name a few resulting in the manager devising their own strategies and dealing with absenteeism the best way they know how. This then becomes a limitation for example with mental health related issues; the policy does not explain how to deal with that or depression.

Participant 1: I think the leave policy has certain limitations in terms of… it is not specific in terms of… it does not guide you in terms of how to manage absenteeism it says nothing about how you manage absenteeism instead they leave policy tell you about the different types of leaves that are available in the department

The managers went on to say the policy does not state how to deal with delinquent behaviour within the system it is not specific, it does not state how they should deal with people that frequently take smoking breaks, who frequently go to the toilet, who arrive late or leave work early. Therefore it becomes a challenge for them as managers in terms of how to manage absenteeism within the department.

4.7.3 Not holding employees accountable for their absence

This challenge can be linked to the manager's role and also their leadership style. When they were asked about the extent of reporting the employee to labour relations within the department, ten of them stated that they have never had issues that needed legal action against an employee and, even those with fake medical certificates they always give them a second chance. Managers are often uncomfortable or unwilling to report on those who have exceeded acceptable levels of

absenteeism. Because of the many pressures already on managers, the consistent implementation of absenteeism policies is not always their top priority (Yorges, 2016).

The researcher had the perception that managers allow employees to get away with their high levels of absence. This may be another reason why there is a high rate of sick leave in the department. Therefore it is important for managers to note that their own leadership style and behaviour can contribute to or reduce absenteeism. They need to set clear and high expectations, hold people accountable so that they can know that their absenteeism has dire consequences because if that is not done then absenteeism will continue being an issue within the department.

4.7.4 Being absent when leave was not approved

This is another challenge that most of the managers agreed on because most of the time employees do not apply for leave of absence in advance but they do it immediately when they want to be absent. The process is that one must apply for leave and it must be approved by the manager; if this process is not followed there is a likely hood that the application will be rejected. Regardless of the outcome of the leave, employees still absent themselves from work and deal with the consequences the day they return to work. This was emphasised in the following interview:

Participant 2: That is a challenge because at times the employee requests to be excused from work the following day or on that day, then with a very good reason the request is refused because the reason offered by the employee for requesting leave is not valid.

Albertyn (2015) argues that if the employee does absent themselves after refusal (provided the refusal is fair and equitable) then it is a very serious offence which could even result in dismissal. The employee can be charged with unauthorized absenteeism, gross insubordination and refusing to obey reasonable and lawful instructions. However, regardless of the case the manager should allow the employee to justify their absence and also hear the employee's side of the story and check all the facts before imposing any disciplinary action against the employee.

4.7.5 Pay for the number of days worked

Managers agreed on the aspect that another challenge that they have is signing off the payroll based on the number of days an employee worked. It becomes a challenge because employees are absent from work without a valid reason yet they expected to be paid a full monthly salary.

Participant 3 "As a public servant we work 8 hours a day…40 hours a week which will count the month we pay you for the services that you have rendered for the number of days that you come to work within the particular month"

Participant 7 "When the payroll is signed by directorate the person responsible is actually confirming that these people on my payroll qualify for their monthly salaries so officials need to be paid for the number of days they worked"

The duty of the employee is to be at work and any contractual obligation states that the employee needs to be at work, be on time, perform their duties, and remain in their workstation for the number of hours as stated in their contract. Therefore if the employee fails to do so then they are in breach of contract. Another reason why this could be a challenge for the managers is because they do not hold employees accountable for their absence and behaviour and also they do not confront issues when they arise. The challenges stated above are an eye opener for the managers to actually change their leadership style when required and also tackle issues immediately when they arise.

When addressing the issue of paid and unpaid leave with employees the manager needs to take the following into consideration. According to the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) "the employee is obligated to be at work and to actually work in order to be compensated. Section 34 of the BCEA states that (1) An employer may not make any deductions from an employee's remuneration unless- (a) subject to subsection (2) the employee in writing agrees to the deduction in respect of a debt specified in the agreement; or (b) the deduction is required or permitted in terms of law, collective agreement, court order or arbitration award" (Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997). However, the section does not mean that employees should receive their full salaries whether or not they were actually at work (Albertyn, 2015). In terms of section 20 (6) of the BCEA an employer must grant the employee at the written request of the employee, annual leave during a period of unpaid leave. That means that if an employee is

absent without leave. This is to say if the employee is absent without leave the manager can reduce his or her annual leave by the days absent without permission (Bendix, 2000). Based on what the section states, if the employee does not have any remaining annual leave days, does that mean they should be paid for the days they were absent or can the manager actually reduce the employee's salary?

Managers are often advised to take action against employees who stay away from work without permission and those that do not submit medical certificates when expected to do so or when they take sick leave. The fact that the employee is not compensated for unauthorized absenteeism is not punitive enough and the employer will be within their right to issue a warning for such an offence (Albertyn, 2015).

4.8 THEME 5: STRATEGIES BEING UTILIZED

Absenteeism has a huge impact in the department and it is the most difficult issue to manage effectively. Therefore it is important to equip managers with the skills, confidence and knowledge on how to manage absenteeism appropriately and proactively in conjunction with the department's policies and legal considerations. Most of the managers indicated that they have not received the necessary training that may assist them on how best to manage absenteeism within the department so there is a desire to actually get the training for effective management of absenteeism.

The Department does not provide strategies that managers can make use of when managing absenteeism; one of the participants indicated that:

Participant 4: Okay I think when we started I had to… I was thrown in the deep end I had to fend for myself you are in a position you being called a manager so I had to devise a strategy for myself because here in the department that there are no method available to assist you in terms of managing absenteeism so as a manager if either what I have done is I have read all I have seen other people do it and I have learnt from my previous manager so it is a matter of saying I have learnt this from somebody else and implementing what I have learnt or what I have seen before.

All of the managers agreed on the aspect that there are no strategies of managing absenteeism within the department; they devise their own strategies in the absence of government strategies. An employee absenteeism tracking tool is an essential element in ensuring that employees and managers carefully monitor vacation time, sick days and personal leave time (or any type of leave of absence). Such a tracking tool should be reviewed and signed each payroll period by both employees and managers to ensure no discrepancies arise (Kasu, 2014). It would be important to derive universal strategies for the department so that all the managers can implement the same strategies for all employees.

4.8.1 Time book register

Participant 3 "The basic thing for me to manage leave is using the time book register in my unit or in this directorate…I control my time book register every day if I had a call that Mr X is not coming for whatever reason I go and mark under register vacation leave obviously because you can't take any other leave than what you have called for…

The manager stated that the time book register assists especially when the employee returns to work then they are obliged to apply for leave hence the manager would have ticked on the day the employee was absent and the reason behind the absence. Managers are usually busy and they can often forget to make note of employees who are absent on a specific day therefore the register as a tool assists a lot because employees know that they need to sign it in the morning when they arrive. After an hour the manager makes it a point to check the register and making people who have not signed to go and sign the register. On the other hand seven managers were not able to mention the type of strategies that they make use of when managing absenteeism; this then raises a concern to say what type of strategies or management tools do they make use of, another concern would be in the absence of strategies do they actually track and monitor employee absenteeism?

Many organizations utilize and keep a register for employees who arrive late and record the time they reported to work. The purpose of doing this is to keep accurate records, more especially of those who arrive late, and also keep records of how the organization deals with employees who arrive late (Squelch, 2000). It is very important that the register is kept in the manager's office instead of the reception area in order to make the strategy a success otherwise the employee

would abuse the strategy (Kasu, 2014). In relation to the usage of the register as a strategy to reduce lateness in the organization, in order to successfully discourage it, organizations must not be in a rush when marking the registers but they should rather keep their registers open for a reasonable time (recommended maximum 30 minutes) for employees to sign after which it will be closed (Hallam and Roaf, as cited in Kasu, 2014). Where employees miss the register within the stipulated time and fail to provide an adequate explanation, it constitutes absenteeism, and thus should be marked absent for that day even though they will and should face disciplinary action (Kasu, 2014). The register is a good tool for the manager because if they control it on a daily basis and they tick and write reasons under an employee's name who is absent, then it would be impossible for the absent employee to sign for the day they were absent because the manager would have highlighted it already

4.8.2 Calendar and diary

The managers stated that a diary or calendar assists them in marking the days an employee was absent. Three managers stated that employees are not aware of this method of tracking absenteeism hence they keep the diary or calendar to themselves. However as mentioned earlier there were managers who do not have strategies that they utilize when tracking absenteeism, this is to say that they rely on employees to come and fill in leave days when they return to work, they also rely on the HR department to notify them of employee absenteeism hence they deal with the application of leaves. Regardless of the fact that managers were not provided with strategies on how to deal with absenteeism, as one of their roles of managing absenteeism they should derive strategies that work best for them because without an effective strategy absenteeism is likely to increase resulting in more unnecessary costs for the department. Therefore it is essential for managers to derive mechanisms that will work best for them even when they were not provided with any. A calendar is a good tool when one wants to track individual absenteeism. When an employee is absent, the manager should highlight the days they were absent. If the employer has been provided with a diagnosis or a symptom (the employer is entitled to ask) and then write in it. It can assist in identifying a pattern and often act as an indicator for a future incapacity (Bagraim, 2013)

4.8.3 Work plans

Two managers stated that they scheduled performance reviews with employees, perhaps once or twice in a year as a way of improving the working environment. On the other hand three managers stated that they have weekly work plans with employees, every Friday they have meetings to check if they have reached the goals that they were targeting for the week. This strategy assists in knowing if and when the employee was productive and also coming to work. If the manager has regular meetings with their subordinates, they can have the opportunity to discuss absenteeism related issues before they become excessive, as well as getting the opportunity to discuss overall work performance. This was well put in the following interviews:

Participant 8: Managing absenteeism I make sure that people have work plans for the week and then at the end of the week we talk about things that we have done for the week that is how I measure the productivity whether they were productive or not so if they spend most of the time out of the office you will see that there certain things that have not been carried out they will be lacking behind on certain aspects

Participant 3: It is important to manage absenteeism because we are outcome based as a department meaning that we check what has been achieved for the financial year and how is it impacting on the receiving department, therefore when an employee is absent we might not be able to deliver what is allocated to us

These three managers went on to say employees submit week plans to them at the end of the week; this assists them in being aware of what employees do for a particular week. In terms of meetings that they attend outside the department they are supposed to bring a report back and at times they are required to bring an attendance register sometimes but not all the time. These work plans assist managers in managing absenteeism; give the manager the opportunity to monitor performance against targets and also addressing any issues of concerns

It can be argued that based on the definitions provided above, managers are the best people placed to manage absenteeism in their area of responsibility and that employees have a responsibility to attend work when they are fit to do so. The definitions reveal that managing absence is not always an easy and straightforward process and that managers treat each case

individually. Absenteeism is inevitable but managers do make sure that they manage it the best way they know how.

4.9 THEME 6: TRAINING FOR MANAGERS

4.9.1 Basic qualification

During the interviews the researcher learned that all of the managers depended on the qualifications they have, five managers stated that currently they are still studying and they also rely on the knowledge that they get on how best they can manage absenteeism. Most of them admitted to the fact that when there are workshops or trainings they do not have the time to attend them so they end up not going or they make it a point that they attend at least one workshop in a year. However the managers stated that regardless of that they do not get any training on how to manage absenteeism. This becomes a contradiction to say managers have the desire to attend trainings but they actually do not make time to go to the trainings provided. This reflects that if nothing is done then nothing will change, absenteeism will continue being an issue within the department.

4.9.2 Lack of skills

Some managers stated that having a conversation with their employees about absenteeism related issues can be uncomfortable and challenging. This is because of the fact that they do not have the necessary skills on how manage absenteeism so it would be important to up skill them with the necessary skills and tools needed as a way of decreasing the absenteeism rate. A very few managers in the public sector are well equipped on how to manage absenteeism. In fact it should be mandatory that every manager (new or old) should get training in managing absenteeism, since absenteeism is an issue that essentially every manager will encounter at one or another stage (Levine, 2008). Equipping managers with the necessary skills to manage this multifaceted matter at times are crucial for the wellbeing of the organization as well as the employees that render services. It is also advisable that managers be trained in Labour Relations issues. This will not only assist them in managing absenteeism, but also any other labour related matter such as discipline etc. (Levine, 2008).

Part of the training program for managers should ensure that they are familiar with the rules and regulations of the organization as well as the important labour laws such as the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCOE). They need to be empowered when it comes to implementing and managing it (Hartman, 2017). For example, sometimes managers are uncertain as to when family responsibility leave can be approved. The BCEA gives clear guidelines which is a valuable tool in managing absenteeism (Hartman, 2017).

4.9.3 Raising awareness

Training and raising awareness should be provided for both managers and employees. All the managers agreed to the fact that these training programmes and workshops should be specifically focused on absenteeism; they should also be designed for employees so that they can become aware of how absenteeism negatively impacts on the department and also understand the reasons why at times managers may be harsh towards them especially in issues relating to absenteeism. Training should also be on raising awareness especially to employees about the internal Employee Health and Wellness Programme so that they can have a better understanding of health in the workplace, including actions they can take themselves. This will also help to reduce the stigmatizing of health conditions like depression, and will facilitate a more open approach to disclosing health conditions. In financially challenging times, training employees to manage their personal finances can be beneficial and staff could also be offered resilience training to help build their personal resources (Hartman, 2017).

SUMMARY

The aim of the study was to explore the experiences of line managers when it comes to managing absenteeism of employees within the GDARD. The focus comprised of the gaps, challenges, what they encounter or undergo and the dynamics involved when managing and addressing absenteeism within the department. The aim of the study was achieved because managers gave in-depth experiences and perceptions in terms of how they manage absenteeism.

They were clear on what absenteeism is but they were unclear on what presenteeism is. A few of them understood the term; others understood the different examples in terms of what it entails so it was actually the first time they heard of the term. They were aware of the importance of managing employee absenteeism and the negative impact it has on employees, the managers

themselves, costs associated with it, productivity and the department as a whole. However regardless of knowing the factors mentioned above, they still need to improve on the different roles they play be it in minimizing or contributing towards absenteeism. Managers need strategies and tools that they can utilize as a department; they also need training to assist them on how to manage absenteeism effectively.

4.10 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study comprised of Bronfenbrenner (1979) ecological systems theory of human development. This was a good model to use when trying to understand the experiences and perceptions of managers when managing absenteeism.

The **microsystem** is the immediate environment in which the person is operating, in this regard the micro systems is the workplace linking to the causes of absenteeism. When microsystems interact, a **mesosystem** is formed and it encompasses the relationship between two or more setting. In this regard the relationship between home and the workplace, the type of relationship the managers have with their employees, co-worker relationship, the different roles of the manager in the management of absenteeism. The **exosystems** is an environment in which the individual is not directly involved but it impact on the individual. This is in relation to how managers address the issue of absenteeism. Managers were resistant when it came to taking further action should there be any misconduct or excessive absenteeism. Since nothing is being done it negatively impact on the remaining employees who have to do work for two people. The **macrosystems** consists of larger societal structures and values that impact on society as a whole. In this regard it was evident that it is important to manage absenteeism because if it is not managed then it negatively impacts on the morale of employees, costs, productivity, the department and government as a whole. The leave policy can also be linked in this regard because it has an impact on how managers address and deal with absenteeism. **Chronosystem** examines over time the influence of environmental changes on an individual's development. If managers can get the strategies, skills and training on how to manage absenteeism then the department is likely to see a decrease in absenteeism costs and more on employee attendance.

The chapter discussed the research findings based on the manager's experiences and perceptions. Highlighting the themes that emerged in the study and linking them back to the objectives of the

study and the application of the theoretical framework. The researcher will provide a summary and recommendations in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Managing absenteeism is a managerial process of producing a culture in the workplace that encourages regular attendance. It does so by setting reasonable expectations for employee attendance, managing their absenteeism, and holding both managers and employees accountable for meeting expectations (Beira, 2008). For any employment relationship to be successful, employees must attend work regularly. While perfect attendance is not a reasonable expectation, it is reasonable that employee absenteeism not exceed average absence rates within the workplace (Beira, 2008). The above statement is in conjunction with the purpose of the study which was to explore the experiences of line managers when it comes to managing absenteeism of employees within the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The focus comprised of the gaps, challenges, what they encounter or undergo and the dynamics involved when managing and addressing absenteeism within the department. The findings and recommendations of the study will be discussed in paragraphs to follow.

5.2 PRIMARY AIM AND SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of the study was to explore the experiences of line managers when it comes to managing absenteeism of employees within the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The focus comprised of the gaps, challenges, what they encounter or undergo and the dynamics involved when managing and addressing absenteeism within the department.

The objectives of the study comprised of:

- **i.** Exploring how managers perceive and experience absenteeism of employees.
- **ii.** Determining the challenges that mangers are faced with and also the benefits of implementing absenteeism management strategies
- **iii.** Indicating the effective roles that managers can make use of when managing absenteeism
- **iv.** Highlighting strategies that may be relevant to managing absenteeism

v. Deriving recommendations on how absenteeism can be managed effectively based on the research findings.

5.3 BRIEF SUMMARY OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was utilized and the study made use of the descriptive case study design also called the intrinsic case study design. The population of the study comprised of eleven line managers within the Gauteng Department of Rural Development and the type of sampling that was utilized was purposively sampling. The method of data collection was semi structured interviews with the research instrumentation being a semi structured in-depth interview schedule. The semi structured interview schedule provided the researcher with the platform to ask open-response questions, and also exploring the manager's experiences and perceptions about the management of absenteeism. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis by carefully identifying significant themes that emerged from the informants' experiences and perceptions about managing absenteeism.

5.4 SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

The findings of the study will be presented under the themes mentioned above

I. Exploring how managers perceive and experience absenteeism of employees

5.4.1 PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF MANAGERS

The findings of the study show that managers have negative perceptions and experiences about absenteeism in the department. The following problems were identified during the course of the study

- Employees are constantly sick and they do not submit medical certificates when they are asked to
- Employees always take time off work whenever they feel like it and they don't make arrangements in advance
- Absenteeism is costing the department so much money in indirect costs such as missed deadlines, low morale and productivity
- Employees come to work late and leave early without asking for approval

This is to say that the managers perceive that employees are always distracting the normal day to day business operations by abusing their leave resulting in more costs for the department. The managers went on to say they want to curb absenteeism and the abuse of leave especially sick leave in the department but at times they are unsure where to start. This suggests that managers have the same perceptions about employee absenteeism. However, managers do not raise major internal issues that might be contributing to the phenomena possibly because these might reflect badly on them. Instead they argued that they try to be as understanding as possible with their employees. They try to be aware of the reasons why employees would be absent and also determine if the problem is widespread or not.

5.4.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF MANAGING ABSENTEEISM

The managers stated that the importance of managing absenteeism is to encourage and support regular employee attendance. Since they work for government they are called public servants so if a public servant is not at work it means that they are not serving the people that they are supposed to be serving into the mandate of the government. It is also important to manage absenteeism because employees get paid based on the number of days that they have worked, therefore it is the managers responsibility to make sure that people are for the services rendered and that the government does not pay people who are constantly away from work. They went on to say that they are not only managing absenteeism but human behaviour as well. This is to say that they also need to manage delinquent behaviour of employees in relation to absenteeism so that they know that in the department there are rules and regulations which everyone needs to abide to. If they do not manage absenteeism then it negatively impacts on the overall impact comprising of employee morale, costs, impact on productivity and the department as a whole.

II. Determining the challenges that managers are faced with and also the benefits of implementing absenteeism management strategies

5.4.3 CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF ABSENTEEISM MANAGEMENT

Managing absenteeism is a challenge on its own for the managers. This is to say that the challenge is developing methods that support attendance and control absenteeism in such a way as not to create mistrust, administrative procedures that are costly and not for them to end up

ignoring absenteeism. The challenge is largely grounded on recording and monitoring of absenteeism because managers are often busy with their own work and they don't have time to follow up on issues when an employee was absent, that on its own could be a contributing factor to the growing rate of absenteeism within the department. The reason why managers could be faced with such challenges is their resistance towards reporting cases that have exceeded the level of absenteeism that is acceptable. Therefore resulting in low employee morale and decreased productivity, this could be based on the fact that employees feel that they are not treated equally hence they will have the perception that those who are absent get away with it

III. Indicating the effective roles that managers can make use of when managing absenteeism

5.4.4 THE ROLE OF THE MANAGER

Managers agreed on the aspect that by the virtue of being a manager they are automatically given that role of managing absenteeism in their workstation. Therefore their roles comprise of the following:

- Identify patterns and trends when it comes to absenteeism. Managers are the first people to be notified when an employee is not coming to work regardless of not being told the real reason behind the employees' absence.
- It is the manager's responsibility to have records of their employees when they are absent. However, some of the managers do not have a strategy for recording or tracking employee absenteeism, they rely on HR when they need detailed records of the number of times a certain employee was absent.
- They went on to say that their role also comprises of conducting one-on-one discussion with an employee as a way of trying to understand from the employee's perspective the root cause of their absence and also deriving strategies on how best to assist the employee with their problem of absenteeism.

They made a strong emphasis on the fact that they make it a point that they encourage full attendance of employees so that absenteeism does not impact negatively on the morale and productivity of each and every employee

IV. Highlighting strategies that may be relevant to managing absenteeism

5.4.5 LACK OF STRATEGIES

The Department does not provide strategies that managers can make use of when managing absenteeism. All of the managers agreed on the aspect that there are no strategies of managing absenteeism within the department; they derive their own strategies in the absence of government strategies. Their strategies comprised of:

- Time book register
- Calendar and diary
- Work plans

However the implementation of the leave policy would be seen as a strategy because it focuses on the different types of leaves that employees are entitled to. On the other hand managers feel that the policy is not specific enough in terms of how they should manage absenteeism; it does not guide them in terms of how to deal with cases if an employee is absent when their leave was not approved, how to deal with an employee who is constantly late and leave work early.

V. Deriving recommendations on how absenteeism can be managed effectively based on the research findings.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.5.1 Establishing a system for tracking absenteeism

The government should derive a tool that should be applied by all managers in assisting them to track and also manage absenteeism. However the department should also derive their own strategies of tracking absenteeism and they should also be trained on how best to implement it. Constant monitoring and evaluation of the strategy should be prerequisite as a way of identifying if the strategy serves its purpose or not.

5.5.1.1 Time book register

There were managers who do not have a tracking method that is in place, which raises a concern in terms of how then do managers manage absenteeism or how do they keep up to date with their employee's absences. In this regard the time book register would be recommended as the tracking method in the department. The time book register will assist in keeping records, particularly of regular latecomers, and to build a history of how the department goes about dealing with late comers.

5.5.2 Developing an absenteeism policy

The policy should define absenteeism and outline consequences for those who break the rules or whose absences become unacceptably disruptive. The GDARD can be the first government department to develop, design and implement an absenteeism policy because the policy that they currently have (leave policy) is not an absenteeism policy, however the leave policy can be used in conjunction with the absenteeism policy for effective management of absenteeism. The attendance policy should also be reviewed with all employees on an annual basis. Once employees are educated about the attendance policy and management keeps accurate records, management then has evidence if an employee is abusing the policy. When this occurs, appropriate disciplinary procedures or corrective actions, as defined by department's policies, should be adhered to. The manager should follow the processes and procedures based on the department's policies such as verbal warning, written warning, suspension, and termination of employment, a detailed recording of the steps taken needs to be available.

5.5.3 Managers role

Managers should play their role more effectively by tackling the problem from head on. They should hold employees accountable for their absence because the implications for ignoring absenteeism management would comprise of a potential decreases in employee morale, productivity and profits within the department. Managers need to be assertive by recognizing that their work plans strategy is ineffective because either way managers do not hold employees accountable for their behaviour so even if they did not meet their targets based on the work plans being submitted nothing would happen. It would be advantageous for the department to clearly write in a form of a document the different roles and responsibilities a manager, employee, and

human resources have to play when it comes to absenteeism. This would assist in raising awareness and the different role players would have a clear understanding of what is expected of them based on the management of absenteeism.

5.5.4 Training initiatives

Managers need to be trained on how to manage absenteeism effectively. This is to say that they should be skilled on how to identify trends, record and monitor absenteeism of employees and also confronting an employee about their level of absence. Training should be divided into three parts comprising of

Training as an initiative to inform managers

- New and emerging issues (the management of absenteeism and other workplace related issues that they are faced with)
- The training should cover the departments policies, practices and procedures
- Available resources that the managers can make use of when managing absenteeism (they don't have to do it alone)
- Available services within the department such as internal Employee Health and Wellness Program or the Gauteng Provincial Government (GPG) Employee Health and Wellness Zinakekele Program Occupational Health and Safety, Human Resources

Training to assist managers

- Managers should be provided with skills on how to confront an employee when there is a trend or pattern of absenteeism
- Managers need to be trained on absenteeism, abscondment, desertion and how to determine and deal with each case differently
- How to handle the abuse of leave and also fake medical certificates
- Recognize & foster workplace behavior that demonstrates respect (such as applying for leave on time or the importance of informing the manager when one is absent)

Training for employees

- Workshops on policies and procedures for both managers and employees on the processes involved when applying for leave
- Interaction, communication, disseminate information on policies about absenteeism (if the absenteeism policy has been designed or is in the process of being developed then employees should be informed about it)

CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to explore the experiences of line managers when it comes to managing absenteeism of employees within GDARD. The focus comprised of the gaps, challenges, what they encounter or undergo and the dynamics involved when managing and addressing absenteeism within the department. The study found that managers have negative perceptions and experiences about the management of absenteeism within the department; they were faced with a lot of challenges that negatively impact on them as managers, employees and the department as a whole. Therefore it is important that managers should have attendance policies in place, effectively communicate policies to employees, adhere to policies and procedures and use absence control strategies consistently. Managers should also play their role effectively and deal with issues when they arise because failure to do so results in them not being able to control the employee's absence level. It can also be concluded that managers be mandated by government to attend trainings so that they can acquire the necessary skills that are needed in terms of managing absenteeism effectively.

The findings of the study will assist the department in knowing the different types of challenges that managers have gone through. The managers will also receive support from senior management based on deriving effective strategies that can be utilized and implemented by all the managers in the department. Through the study I have learned that managing absenteeism related issues when they arise is important because failure to do so can result in multiple problems caused by a single factor and the situation ends up spiraling out of control which is exactly what happened with the management of absenteeism within the department.

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APPENDIX A

APPROVAL FROM THE GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

APPENDIX B

APPROVAL FROM THE WITS FACULTY OF HUMANITIES: POSTGRADUATE OFFICE

APPENDIX C

APPROVAL FROM THE HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SOCIAL WORK)

APPENDIX D



PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION SHEET

Experiences of Managers in Managing Absenteeism: A Case Study of the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Good day

My name is Nokuthula Nkosi. I am a post graduate student registered for the degree Master of Arts in Occupational Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of the requirements for the degree, I am conducting research on the experiences of managers in managing absenteeism. The primary aim of the study is to get an in-depth understanding of manager's perceptions, experiences and challenges that they encounter when managing absenteeism with the emphasis on the role they play in managing absenteeism within the department. By becoming aware of the experiences and challenges that line managers go through, it is hoped that they will receive the support needed from management to derive effective strategies on how best to manage absenteeism within the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) and to play their roles very well hence it comprises of employee wellbeing and reducing absenteeism. I therefore wish to invite you to participate in my study. Your participation is entirely voluntary and refusal to participate will not be held against you in any way. If you agree to take part, I shall arrange to interview you at a time and place that is suitable for you. The interview will last approximately for an hour. You

may withdraw from the study at any time ad you may also refuse to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable with answering.

With your permission, the interview will be tape recorded. No one other than my supervisor will have access to the tape recordings. The tapes and interview schedules will be kept for two years following any publications or for six years if no publications emanate from the study. Please be assured that your name and personal details will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be included in the final research report.

Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the study. We shall answer them to the best of our ability. I may be contacted on my email Nokuthula.Nkosi3@students.wits.ac.za, you may contact my supervisor Ms Laetitia Petersen on tel no: 011 717 4474 and email addresses laetitia.petersen@wits.ac.za or Deputy Director for Internal Employee Health and Wellness Mrs. Nonhlanhla Bob on tel no: 011 240 2662 and email nonhlanhla.bob@gauteng.gov.za. Should you wish to receive a summary of the results of the study; an abstract will be made available on request.

Thank you for taking time to consider participation in the study.

Yours sincerely

_____

Nokuthula Nkosi

Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) Contact Details:

- Chairperson: Jasper.Knight@wits.ac.za
- Administrator: Mrs Lucille Mooragan Tel 011 717 1408 or Lucille.Mooragan@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX E

Consent Form for Participation in the study-

Experiences of Managers in Managing Absenteeism: A Case Study of the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

I hereby consent to participate in the research study. The purpose and procedures of the study have been explained to me. I understand that:

- My participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw from the study without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I may choose not to answer any specific questions asked if I do not wish to do so.
- There are no foreseeable benefits or particular risks associated with participation in this study.
- My identity will be kept strictly confidential, and any information that may identify me, will be removed from the interview transcript.

- A copy of my interview transcript without any identifying information will be stored permanently in a locked cupboard and may be used for future research.

- I understand that my responses will be used in the write up of an honours project and may also be presented in conferences, book chapters, journal articles or books.

Name of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) Contact Details:

- Chairperson: Jasper.Knight@wits.ac.za
- Administrator: Mrs Lucille Mooragan Tel 011 717 1408 or Lucille.Mooragan@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX F



Consent form for Audio-Taping of the interview for the study-

Experiences of Managers in Managing Absenteeism: A Case Study of the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

I hereby consent to tape-recording of the interview.

I understand that:

- The recording will be stored in a secure location (a locked cupboard or password-protected computer) with restricted access to the researcher and the research supervisor.
- The recording will be transcribed and any information that could identify me will be removed.
- When the data analysis and write-up of the research study is complete, the audio-recording of the interview will be kept for two years following any publications or for six years if no publications emanate from the study.
- The transcript with all identifying information directly linked to me removed, will be stored permanently and may be used for future research.
- Direct quotes from my interview, without any information that could identify me may be cited in the research report or other write-ups of the research.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) Contact Details:

- Chairperson: Jasper.Knight@wits.ac.za
- Administrator: Mrs Lucille Mooragan Tel 011 717 1408 or Lucille.Mooragan@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX G

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. **IDENTIFYING DETAILS**

2. Job Title:

Deputy Director
Assistant Director

3. Age:

25-35 years
36- 45 years
46-50
51 and above

4. Gender

Female
Male

5. How long have you been working in the department?

0-3 years
4- 7 years
8-11 years
12 years and above

6. How long have you been a manager in the unit?

0-3 years
4- 7 years
8 years-11years
12 years and above

7. How many people do you supervise?

0-3
4-7
8-11
12 and above

2. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

2.1 Please describe absenteeism and management of absenteeism in your own words?

2.2 Why do you think it is important to manage absenteeism?

2.3 Please clarify your role in managing absenteeism?

2.4 In what way have you addressed absenteeism in your unit?

2.5 What are the challenges you have experienced in implementing the absenteeism policy?

2.5.1 Please give an example of when you found it more challenging?

2.6 Describe what is useful or helpful when it comes to managing absenteeism

2.6.1 Please give an example of when you found it more helpful?

2.7 What work related courses have done that you found more useful in your managerial role?

2.8 What recommendations would you make in order to enhance the policy that is in place for effective management of absenteeism in your department?

APPENDIX H

TRANSCRIPT

I: Interviewer

P: Participant

I: Thank you for agreeing to be part of the research…you will be my first participant Uh my name is Nkosi and I have requested this time to conduct an interview uh as part of my MA in Occupational Social Work. As part of the requirements for the degree I am required to conduct research and my area of interest has been on experinces of managers when it comes to managing absenteeism in the workplace. Before we start the interview uhm…for verification to my supervisor. I do have two consent forms, one is for agreeing to participate in the study and the other is for agreeing for the session to be audio recorded so if you can just look through that then sign for me on behalf of the uhm study. Do you consent for the uhm recording? **P:** Yes **I:** Okay…thank you so much. Uhm I also have a participant information sheet which clarifies the purpose of the study as I have indicated the topic as well as just to assure you that uhm the…the interview it will be kept uhm confidential, the only other person that will have access to my transcripts and the audio recordings is my supervisor, her details are uhm down there, her name is Ms Laeticia Petersen, you can call her should you have any questions for clarity regarding the research. Uhm also just to clarify that the documents…the transcripts and the audio recordings will be kept for a period of at least two years should there be any publication of the study and in the absence of the publication they will be kept for a period of six years on which	

they will then be discarded. Okay… I also wish to state that your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you are under no obligation to continue should you feel uncomfortable by some of the questions that will be posed to you…uh the only other thing that I also wish to state is that uhm the study is conducted purely for purposes of looking at your perceptions about the implementation, the gaps, the challenges that are there also how it can be improved going forward and uh my role right now I'm assuming the role of a researcher and not that of a Transversal uh Employee Health and Wellness uhm you know uhm program, and also that uh once I've transcribed the information I will give you a copy I: Hmm R: Just to verify that everything that is transcribed there is a true reflection of what transpired in this session I: Hmm R: And if you have any inputs that you would like to make then you more than welcome to do so. I: Alright R: Okay…alright. The session should be about an hour however we may just go beyond I mean below that, okay and you are more than welcomed at any point to stop and ask any questions for clarity purposes and so on I: Okay R: Uhm the only other thing that I also want to uhm really reiterate is that uhm you know should you any questions please speak to my supervisor, she is more than willing uhm to answer any of your questions that you have. If you are ready I do have an interview schedule I: Hmm R: Which is divided into two parts, the first part really looks at	

uhm you know, your role in the organization	
I: The first part of the interview is identifying details **P:** Hmm **I: So I would like to know your job title, here I have uhm Deputy Director or Assistant Director** **P:** Deputy Director **I: Age is in the categories we have 25-35; 36-45; 46-50; 51 and above?** **P:** What's the …what's the third one? **I:** Okay the third one **P:** Yes **I: Okay gender is female** **P:** Hmm **I:** So how long have you been working in the department? **P:** Uhm eight years **I: So it falls in the third category…how long have you been the manager in the unit?** **P:** Four years **I:** So it's the second category **P:** Since 2012…jah it's four years **I: How many people do you supervise?** **P:** Five…four sorry	Identifying details
I: Thank you very much now we will move to the actual interview questions…so my first question will be (1) Can you please describe absenteeism and also the management of absenteeism in your words. So I am looking the definitions according to your perspectives on what absenteeism is? And then what is managing absenteeism **P:** Okay…uhm I think eh absenteeism juts from my own perspective is uhm when employees are…do not uhm report for duty eh for whatever reasons that may keep them uh from	Question 1

reporting to their work stations. It's actually staying away from uh duty uhm whether its regards to uhm sickness, family responsibility, uhm you know whatever other challenges that they might have and absenteeism therefore if employees stay away and not come to work then it has an impact on their performance and uhm results in the government because I work for government not meeting uhm the expectant targets because uh you know due to absenteeism and uhm absenteeism also in the context of uh the employer is when uhm the employer pays in monitoring terms the wages, the salaries of employees that are not at work so you see a situation whereby the employer loses out in uhm monetary terms uhm they continue to pay people that are not reporting for duty or are not in their workstations and in terms of managing uhm this is why you also see uhm I work in the unit called Employee Health and Wellness Program, we monitor and evaluate program implementation for the whole province so part of our uhm mandate is that we also track records, we also track risk trends of employees and look at the…the return on investment for the employer with regards to absenteeism so one of our uhm dimensions that we track in terms of employee risks is uhm absenteeism and we are seeing that uhm you know there is a lot of employees that are presenting uhm with…that are not coming to work and that turns to cause the employer you know a lot of money because the…the service delivery mandate is delivered through uhm a workforce that has gaps because some people are not at work when they are supposed to be **I:** Hmm **P:** and then there is also uhm as managers our task is that we need to be uhm vigilant about managing absenteeism because like I said it has a negative effect on the morale of those that are	

at work because their work gets to be doubled because they have to do work that is supposed to be done by others but they are not there at the time and then it also contributes to uhm stress levels of those that are at work and it also you know in somewhat we may look at the issue of absenteeism and presenteeism because uhm much as people may be absent from work for whatever reason whether its sick leave or any other reason, if they should present themselves to work meanwhile they have all these challenges it therefore translates into presenteeism **I:** It does **P:** Which is the worst form, I think this is the worst form of indicator than absenteeism because if the person is not there you know that therefore you know they are not there and not contributing in whatever form but if people that are not well they are at work then it's worse case scenario because uhm you know they not delivering on your mandates as an employer in any case so I think uh the huge challenge is for managers to be able to manage absenteeism in Gauteng we have a…there is a department called e-Gov that has online uh employee self-service uhm applications that has been developed and we uh as employees we are supposed to capture our leave through that system and there are certain departments that don't have the ESS link as yet so the challenge for managers is that if they not tracking and recording the number of absences by their subordinates then the leave gets uhm…it's not accounted for so you may see that whilst we have a huge challenge of absenteeism in the province the status might be uhm even worse because there are departments that are not tracking absences because they don't have ESS but another challenge for managers to track ESS…I mean absenteeism that should the subordinates not have captured or you know brought medical certificates	

to…to the workplace it might even be a challenge for the manager because then they lose track of how many times the employees have been absent from work. Uhm I'm not sure if I should go into this one again uhm in terms of management of absenteeism, we also supposed to follow an eight week rule as the employer in the sense that uhm employees are supposed to according to the Basic Conditions of Employment an employer is…I mean the employee is permitted to be absent from work for a day without submitting a medical certificate but if it's two days then the employee is expected to submit a medical certificate but then there's also the eight week rule uhm principle where in a person is not allowed to repeatedly uhm or let's say within an eight week rule an employee is not permitted to be absent for days in succession you know within a eight week period without…say a person was absent last week Monday with no medical certificate if the person is absent again in the following uh week or within the eight week rule is expected to submit a medical certificate even if they were absent for just one day so there is also that challenge where I don't think managers are really vigilant when it comes to that and therefore hence you see issue of absenteeism just escalating and costing the employer billions of rands because there are people they are just not uhm coming to work and performing their duties and sometimes its delinquency by employees but also I think there is a huge challenge by managers not really enforcing and holding people accountable for the absences that you know they are conducting within the workplace. **I:** Thank you for the in-depth perspective but I understand you also mentioned a lot of challenges that as managers you go through when it comes to managing absenteeism so I think the second question I have you might have answered uhm a bit of it	

I: Based on the definitions that you have just provided as challenges, so why then do you think it's important to manage absenteeism? **P:** Precisely for that because uhm like I said earlier on the…as managers we don't manage absenteeism then we costing the employer money because uh people that don't come to work end up you know being paid full salaries and it's really not fair for the employer or the citizens of the country because we supposed…we are about service delivery if people do not report for duty then it carries…it puts a burden on the few people that come to work…say in a team of ten uhm you know there is constant uhm…three people that are constantly having challenges, they don't come to work uhm sooner or later the burden of the work of the team will be felt by the team members that are here and therefore we are looking at uhm you know people might be feeling there's is favoritism, people might be feeling…there would be negative energy within the team, the morale will go down because you know the team work is carried by a few uh people but also there's a situation whereby if absenteeism is not managed by managers it may lead to you know long absences from work like you find that people might even end up exhausting their uh sick leave and therefore start applying whether its short term or long term incapacity leave which I mean people are entitled to sick leave within you know a three year cycle of 36 days however…that is a right but it's not necessarily uhm that if people abuse that we might encounter challengers in the long run. It is critical for managers to manage absenteeism because also you see that the way in which the wage bill goes up yet you not yielding the expected results of uhm service delivery that is expected by citizens and meanwhile the wage bill continues to escalate we paying uh people that do not	I

report to duty. I think it's also fair that managers track absences because uhm absenteeism on its own uh costs the employer quite a lot of money like I said earlier on and also uhm there is a lot of people out there who are looking for work uh we know that our unemployment statistics are high and we have no point in keeping if a manager is not managing absenteeism then uh that manager runs a risk of you know also colluding with the system that is not functioning if people are allowed to be absent from work and yet continue to enjoy the benefits of people that are at work and are contributing to the betterment of this country, and sometimes managers uhm you find that it's a simple thing of managing a pattern of employees, if a pattern presents itself and you can see a trend as a manager it is well within the managers right in fact it's their responsibility they need to be held accountable to approach the employee and you know determine what might be keeping the employee from work if it's sick leave and…and be able to make the necessary referrals. We have Employee Health and Wellness Program that can assist employees that are presenting with absenteeism trends you know to manage if they are undergoing stress, if they are sick to be referred appropriately and it's also the responsibility of the manager should the trend continue and you know despite whatever intervention the manager has done it is well within the managers right to also move on to the next steps of you know uhm issuing warning letters, verbal warnings, written warnings and ultimately be able to escalate the matter to uh disciplinary, labour relations but I think the processes must follow where the concerned employer must engage with the employee to determine what keeps them from work, and sometimes you find that people uhm are absent due to not just their own personal challenges but you may find that it's the environment that uhm is	

not as conducive for employees. You may find that for example our building on its own sometimes you find that the heater…I mean the air corn is not working sometimes it's the lifts that are not working so we also need to look at environmental issues that may also contribute to people either being sick or uhm sometimes staying away **I:** Hmm **P:** If the lifts are not working it's an impairment for or it's a determent for people that are you know uhm they are overweight for them to climb the stairs, it's a determent for people that are on wheelchairs, disabilities, so there are huge factors that you know might actually contribute to people being absent not just at a personal level so I think as a manager it's critical that we also have an open mind and look at all these other issues and also be able to advise our principals in terms of what are the trends that we are picking up I mean when we do our health risk report for the province we picking up a lot on injury on duty type of uh factors that may you know keep people away from work, we picking up on uhm a whole lot of non-communicable illnesses that people acquire within the workplace so that's why I'm saying it's also critical to look at environmental factors rather than it being just about individuals **I:** I feel like all of your answers answer the next question **P:** (laughs) **I:** that I have (laughs) **P:** (laughs) **I:** But I also feel that I should ask it anyway **P:** Okay	
I: You spoke largely of the different roles and what should managers uhm watch out for **P:** Hmm	

I: But can you then please clarify your own role when it comes to managing absenteeism **P:** Okay…alright. I think my own role is uhm as a manager is first of all ensure that people that are absent from work I am aware of you know their absence for starts, my role as a manager is not only to uhm ensure that people are at work but to try and you know be a champion and lead by example by reporting to duty when I am supposed to, by being uhm doing my work when I'm at work, by being productive, when I'm here and lead by example and also ensure that my team members also know why they are here because that's very critical also uhm be…I think every day inspire people to come to work, to identify with why they are here and to feel like they matter, feel important that you know they are part of a team that this is a chain if one of us are not here then there is a gap, then there is a problem but for people to always you know wake up and want to come to work and ensure that the environment is uhm motivational and…and people know and are proud of what they are doing but also having said that my role as a manager is to keep an open door policy for people to be able to talk to me should they encounter whatever challenges especially when it comes to being absent from work I'm not saying you know as a manager I should pry into people's personal issues but just to be that manager that people can talk to you know about the reasons why they are not coming to work but also being…to also uhm be able to be firm and provide leadership, to have the interest of the employer at heart much as I would have the interest of the employees at heart but also look at the bigger picture and always affirm people and bring them back to say here it's a workplace, we are here to perform XYZ and if you are not coming to work there's a problem you know always have that open door policy but also be	Question 3

firm to say you know these are your trends uhm for absenteeism. I've noticed that you turn to be you know absent from work every Monday or every Friday you know talk to people communication is key in everything that we do in the workplace but also be able to take it back to an employee and say but these are your trends, I have noticed this pattern can we talk about it if you are comfortable what could be the challenge and how as a manager can I be of assistance you know so it's not being punitive but it's also saying this is a workplace we cannot afford to have you absent four Monday's a month you know for three to four Friday's a month it becomes a problem it needs to be acknowledged, it needs to be identified and communicated with an employee and help the employee to be able to you know also take ownership and do something about it but as a manager my role again is should things not uhm approve then I'm also uhm in my role and my capacity also expected to engage the employee of other steps that might be taken whether it's you know warnings, disciplinary measures and ultimately dismissal because I think especially in government we shy away a lot there's uhm a whole lot of red tape and bureaucracy and you find that uhm as a manager you know you also uhm under certain procedures and policies that should take place but you find that for some reason you know the necessary steps that are needed are not followed through and you find that we keep a lot of people that are…for a lack of a better word deadwood in our teams because of whatever bureaucracy and I think ultimately my role would be as a manager speaking now you know with regards to my team and my unit in what I would recommend is maybe if you find that…sometimes you find that people in the wrong…not necessarily in the wrong teams you find that they are not preforming because they don't identify with the work,	

they are somehow demotivated or they don't see themselves contributing in this particular team and they feel they would be better performing elsewhere so I think as a manager it's also important to do that career pathing with your team members know exactly how to motivate people to move from one level to the next, encourage that they study further, encourage that they you know…visualize where they want to see themselves whether it's in a year, three years' time, five years' time so just to keep that path of your team **I:** Hmm **P:** So that you avoid people sitting in one position, not applying for a job or not aspiring to do better because that's what uh kills team spirits and individuals if and that might just ultimately contribute to just being absent from work because they don't see themselves fitting into you know that particular team so this is why I think one of my roles as a manager is to encourage people to look at their career path uhm motivate people to always aspire for more and also in areas where you can see that this person with whatever support that you have given this person is not improving rather recommend for you know reasonable accommodation and maybe in a different team where they may perform uh differently and you know maybe job rotation if that can be permissible in fact we do have a policy that also talks to that and then maybe in that regard you not just policing people but you really are interested in their development and you know hopefully in the long run this reduces the amount of absences that we seeing because with some cases we see it by virtue of being in Wellness, you find that people have been on long term incapacity leave, they are being paid for not coming to work, those people are sick most of them that we've done home visits for but you find that there are those uhm that are in a reasonable	

uh capacity to come to work but they are not coming because no one is monitoring, no one is you know looking out for the interest of the employer to really determine and engage uhm professional expertise to assess this person's you know uhm eh capability to come back to work, you find that the state is losing tons and tons of money and in this regard I would say we literary paying ghost um employees, they are there on the persal paid every month and yet they are not reporting to duty. Some of them are legitimate cases but some of them someone is not doing their job in terms of follow through and as a result the state is losing out.	

(Follow up question)

So what would you say about when it comes to managing absenteeism in your unit those managers who would have their favourite employees what how do you think then that impacts maybe on the whole team in terms of how you monitor it and every individual

I think that is really sad because as a manager I think you are also lack of a better word there the parent of the team the so-called the leader in fact who is supposed to be consistent who is supposed to be objective and treat everyone the same so if there our favourite ISM in the team all it does is that it sends out the wrong message the rest of the team and it kills the morale of the team and therefore you may find that other people in the team will follow suite because then as a manager you not taking a leadership style that is you know I am that is firm and you know acknowledging everyone's everyone's strengths and turning those weaknesses into something positive because that very one or two teen players the realise that they have been favoured then they also tend to you know abuse and over to the absentism so I think it's always safe to treat everyone with consistency the same and apply the same type of fairness with one employee as you would with the next one so I think it's it's very very critical I can't over emphasize that's enough that as a leader you are also put in a position wear your team members will also test you and should they see that you not applying the same rules and Principles then you are headed for trouble

Question 4 is in what ways have you addressed absenteeism in your unit?

In my unit I think I have had... this is confidential right
I had to for the first time I think as a manager in 4 years I've had to give a person a written warning ok before giving a written warning what I've done is I have had to speak to one of the employees looking st their absenteeism trend and I'v had to refer do a format referral to our Zinakekele wellness program and follow up as a referral manager and what are also done is this program what we have also has what we call managerial consultancy because sometimes it's not easy to manage human behaviour because at times it is a difficult task to manage and we don't always get it right much as I'm in the social science discipline but you find that sometimes managing people comes with its own challenges but I think it is critical to manage behaviour you talk to the behaviour of the employee and in whatever interaction with the employee you always emphasize that I am Witnessing this kind of behaviour can we talk about that so that you are not attacking the person and you don't come across as attacking this person and judging them so you only look at what are the underlying issues what is the behaviour saying so I've had to preferred the employee I've had to be assisted with their behaviour to hopefully influence a positive outlook on the work and encourage them to come to work. I've had to unfortunately the referral for some what reason it didn't quiet yield the expected results I've had to write a written warning to an employee and I have been constantly monitoring that and you know that once a person get a second warning that warrants for a disciplinary action and be referred to employee relations so I've had I have found myself unfortunately having to be firm and whatever intervention and support that I have given the situation is just not working out and that becomes so unfair because like I said the burden is felt by other employees you find that others tend to Cheap in and do work for other team members and that's really just confuses roles and then you see really the burden being felt by other employees and there for the stress levels and 4 someone reasons you may also be challenged as a manager that you are not doing your job because here is 1 or 2 employees that are some what benefiting from the fruits of other team members so I think yes I am not saying people won't be sick but they are policies and procedures that speak to that. People can apply for sick leave it's 36 days over a 3 year cycle and within one year a person shouldn't be using more than 12 days a year so as a manager I think we need to be in charge with

our policies and you know implement go out of our way to implement policies because if we do not do that then the whole system just collapses

(N) Then you speak about policies and the next question is on policies

Question 5

What are the challenges you have experienced in implementing the absenteeism policy hands I understand that the department uses the sick leave policy in relation to absenteeism

(P) That policy focuses on in health and incapacity and we have an outsourced service provider that ensures implementation of the policy the service provider is we call it a health risk manager is there is a policy from DPSA who is our employer and that guides how we manage sick leave due to ill health and incapacity then that regulates the absences of employees in the workplace the challenges that we have I thought you find that in most cases we as the employer are supposed to raise awareness that speaks to that policy that everyone should be aware of but you find that most of the cases that are rejected by the health risk manager applying for in health and incapacity leave are because of insufficient evidence insufficient reports that are submitted so you find that even in legitimate cases a person is really sick they are unable to come to work let's say a person who is on in health and incapacity or ill health retirement for that matter is due to mental health because this person is you cannot physically see that there is something wrong with that person they often encounter challenges because their applications Rd client there isn't enough supporting documents in terms of the report that is submitted and then because we do not I mean as a manager all that I have is somebody submitting 2 ill health I mean to the health risk manager their application but I am not aware of what type of documents are being submitted by that employee so I feel that in most cases people are not aware why their applications are not turned down because if people were aware of what is required when you do your application then they will submit relevant information so that it avoids than being toheir applications being rejected so it is lack of awareness that people have around applying for sick leave and the Second Challenge is often at times employee wellness is a program that is supposed to mitigate and assist employees is always at the tail end is always invited when the application has been turned down rather than being involved right from the beginning so you find that employee health and wellness in departments and the health risk manager are running in silos there is no point when

they assist one another when clearly we should be able to synergize and assist in cases where we can even provide expecially cases where they are social workers and psychologist within the program we can be able to do those reports or engage if it's professional occupational therapist that are involved get that report so that there is more and more evidence that is submitted to apply for leave cases but I think also I was speaking just now with the eight week rule principle most employees are not aware of that and hence you find people that are constantly applying for leave on a continuous basis so I think we have a gap in terms of raising awareness and ensuring that people are aware of this so I think what I would recommend is workshops not just managers but also for employees as well so that people know exactly how the policies work even if they are put in strategic places but we don't always no that's for instance it's not everyone that has access to emails to read a poster policy So even if we put them in strategic places how many people actually read that so I think I still believe I'm old school so I still believe interacting goes a long way you know you can achieve so much in a workshop by disseminating information around policies around absentism

(Follow up question)

We are looking at the challenges in implementing the policy so can you give me an example of when you found it to be more challenging even when you are implementing the policy either way it was still challenging?

I think in cases where I think in cases where people would still think that you know there ill health and applying for sick leave is a entitlement that sometimes especially with regards to the 6 day rule that you know people would think I still have 36 days that I haven't utilised for sick leave so I will just apply for sick leave in even when people are not sick I think that is the most popular instance that I can relate to that you find remember that sick leave is not an entitlement you find that people that don't always apply for sick leave by virtue of realising or maybe you find it in situations where I said on an annual basis people can take up to 12 days per year you find that it is a challenge come the six months in the year you find people have taken over 12 days engine for example and they still have June to December what happened and when they are really really sick I think those are the times when it's been very difficult to implement wear people just take sick leave has a sense of entitlement and they take willingly sick leave days and comes a time when there really I desperately Seek and you find that they don't have and this is

where it spills over to applying the policy when they have exhausted That 36 days so you find that still people you know do I don't know whether it is lack of awareness but you find that people have this notion that over and above my annual leave even if I am I am not sick just to give myself a day off and sometimes you find that another challenge is that even with the medical certificates that they submit you can literally see a person who has abused the system you find that they are medical practitioners for whatever reason they will give a person is sick leave not even when they did not deserve it even when they are not sick you can literally track or trace the trend because time and again you get sick notes from the same doctor over the same type of condition that is written there so I think as a manager you need to be mindful and vigilant 2 also track search search medical certificates and Report you note to HR principles you pick this up with also injury on duty I mean we are currently busy with their analysis of there our health restaurants for the province and for some peculiar reasons expecially with educators I'm just making an example with education not that they are there most culprits I'm just looking at the data that I'm busy with you find that in schools there is this injury on duty that is reported of a child and a learner post pushed me and I acquired an injury the swell with this one educator who is forever post by one learner and out of that they get injured it's the same type of reported injury on duty which also raises concerns I'm not saying they are not legitimate but if the same type of injury is reported by the same type of person then there is a problem they're so it's a huge spectrum of you know we need to be mindful as managers expecially when it comes to the absence of employees because they are at times playing the system

If you rightfully take up your role as a manager for the interest of both the employer and the employee and be consistent apply you know the same principles across the board and knowing the police is what would also be useful is when you speak to an employee approach the employee with within the context of the policies and procedures of the employer and in that way you cannot be found to be accused of malpractice or unreasonably I taking an employee if you speak from a context of policies and procedures that govern absences in the workplace

Question 7 is what work related courses have you done that you found more helpful are useful in your managerial role

I think the rules would be around human resource practices around recruitment the importance of recruiting The right people with the right set of skills with the right attitude because you can recruit people based on training on the right skills but if you are having people that don't have the right sense of attitude the right principles to say I am hard worker I am in this because I share in the vision of the organisation I'm here to learn the amazing things that I don't have necessarily as the skills are the qualifications that matter but you can work with changing if a person is willing to change the attitude to work that for me is a plus let alone the skills and whatever else that comes with that I think that course was beneficial for me when I see it in shortlisting and recruitments I always add to the panel that how do we know if this person is the right person for the job what kind of assessment can be used to I listen to you know finding out how this person will be able to work when under pressure if this person is bring on board the right ethics to the job let's look at a situation that test the ethical Uno judgement of this person so for me HRM course was very helpful and I think managers 49 managerial what do they call it managers for non that was conducted by the University of Pretoria and I think also my hair current Masters course that I'm doing adverse right now has really assisted me to look at not just the individual but Health how organisations can really be useful and conducive in terms of supporting employees to look at not only the skills and qualifications but also to what is the right word to elicit unique talents of people you know working and different workplace settings as well as what other Course have I done managers for beginners courses as well as a map course that I did that had a HR element in SA labour relations element in it and a leadership course in it as well as a financial aspect to it then that cause I have so many disciplines and 8 I think that was also one of their useful courses that I have ever done that helped me understand workplace is better a system Utility and what makes a system works in terms of the unique talents that are brought on board by individuals and how we can better and look holistically at people rather than just look at them and people that help us is service delivery and also add people as I said you know that you are on the importance of career pathing and visual employee and looting what did they aspire to Dion what they are doing right now

what are the recommendations that is in place for effective management of absentism within the department

I think I have been I'm looking for accommodation as I was highlighting the processes of challenges I think maybe what I can say it's just one of recommendation with a bad sometimes what places tend to put responsibility on employees but I think equally managers really need to be a countable and then you put in a position as a manager sometimes you find that managers don't really play the part they don't manage they don't become leaders in that you find people in organisations people leave their own lives because of organisations believe they leave because they cannot bear to report to that to that particular person people don't leave organisations they leave managers so I think no matter how many courses we can be taken to as managers if we cannot change in terms of our attitudes and behaviour to what time we meet our team you know no amount of courses that we attend will never make a difference for it starts with individual managers to really look at this letter on how is my managerial my leadership style and if things don't go well in my unit do I stop to look at maybe I have contributed so I think one recommendation with that I hope for whatever reason managers can be taken on a calls like that to really reflect on how we are also contributing two people not performing well 2 people not to people being absent two people sitting the organisation exiting the organisation because of how certain people you know might even abuse the managerial roll their power and you know behind on their subordinates so I think for me Andersons out of this interview and managing absenteeism in organisations starting with you as an individual and looking at my boss for starters what stress ml contributing to my boss if I am underperforming and what stress am I contributing to my team if I am being unreasonable or exerting too much of my power to my team how I can you know better you know by this employee to my boss that is contributing to the success other than always the negative aspect also as a manager how I can contribute positively to my teams work performance without being the police because you will find police in the work place of managers that are just you know make it their mission you know to just bully their subordinates so I think for me posing and reflecting on your contribution as a manager for me would be one of the key lesson

Thank you so much for your time and your answers were very thorough it's like you looked at the questions before because all the time when I was about to ask you a question at the back of my head was like she's already answered it but regardless of that thank you very much for your time and I've also learnt a lot from this interview and through my experience and practice some

of the things that you have been talking about I might have been of observing as well and the things that I've been dreaming about do you have any questions