

Affective Commitment as a Predictor of Absenteeism: Evidence from a U.S. Utility Provider

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Abstract

This study investigates absenteeism within a large U.S. utility provider, where the absence rate exceeded twice the national average. Using a cross-sectional, quantitative design, the research examined relationships between absenteeism and demographic factors (gender, age, tenure) as well as affective commitment. Survey data from 992 employees were analyzed using correlation, regression, and ANOVA. Results revealed that affective commitment was the only significant predictor of absenteeism, with higher commitment linked to approximately 14 fewer absence days annually. Gender, age, and tenure showed no significant relationships. Findings reinforce the central role of affective commitment in reducing absenteeism and highlight implications for HR practice, including the design of engagement programs, leadership training, flexible work options, and ethical HR analytics. By prioritizing strategies that build affective commitment, organizations may shift from short-term attendance policies toward sustainable approaches that enhance workforce reliability and performance.

Keywords: absenteeism, affective commitment, employee engagement, HR analytics, workforce reliability

1. Introduction

Absenteeism is a persistent organizational challenge with implications for productivity, costs, and morale. This study explores the factors influencing absenteeism in a large U.S. utility provider, where the absence rate remained consistently high at 7 percent—more than double the national average. Although prior interventions, such as incentives and strict enforcement policies, yielded only temporary or counterproductive effects, the organization sought a more strategic, evidence-based approach. Specifically, this study examined the relationship between absenteeism and demographic factors (gender, age, tenure) alongside affective commitment, an employee's emotional attachment to the organization. The research contributes to both theory

and practice by identifying the key drivers of absenteeism and offering actionable recommendations for HR leaders.

2. Literature Review

Previous research has linked absenteeism to a range of demographic and attitudinal factors. Age often shows mixed effects, with older workers demonstrating higher reliability but facing greater health-related absences (Ng & Feldman, 2008; Mastekaasa, 2020). Tenure may foster commitment but can also correlate with higher absence due to job security (Markham et al., 2002). Gender differences are often tied to caregiving responsibilities, though organizational policies can mitigate disparities (CIPD, 2023; SHRM, 2023). Affective commitment has emerged as a particularly strong predictor, consistently linked to lower absenteeism and higher engagement (Meyer et al., 2002; Nguyen et al., 2016; Mohd & Othman, 2020). This study extends the literature by examining these relationships in a large private-sector utility provider, emphasizing the relative strength of affective commitment.

Recent international research continues to highlight affective commitment as a central factor in explaining employee attendance across industries and cultural contexts. Kim and Lee (2021) found that higher affective commitment significantly reduced absenteeism among healthcare employees in South Korea. Similar results emerged in Pakistan's banking sector, where engagement and commitment jointly predicted stronger attendance (Saeed & Shah, 2022). In the Saudi public sector, Al-Harbi and Alqahtani (2020) reported that affective commitment explained more variance in absenteeism than demographic factors such as age or gender, while Khan and Rashid (2019) observed comparable effects in Malaysia's manufacturing industry.

A very recent longitudinal study (Morin, Vandenberghe, Lee, & Gillet, 2025) used a person-centered approach to examine how employees' affective commitment to multiple targets within an organization relates to work outcomes across time. The findings reinforce the idea that organizational commitment is not just static but varies in scope and can meaningfully influence behavior across contexts, supporting the present study's focus on affective commitment as a key driver of attendance. Together, these findings reinforce that the relationship between affective commitment and attendance transcends cultural and sectoral boundaries, supporting the present study's emphasis on commitment as a sustainable strategy for reducing absenteeism.

3. Methodology

A cross-sectional, quantitative research design was employed. Data were collected from 992 employees of a large U.S. utility provider. Absenteeism was measured through HR records of days absent within a 12-month period. Affective commitment was assessed using Allen and Meyer's (1990) Affective Commitment Scale, a validated five-item instrument rated on a five-point Likert scale. Demographic data (age, gender, tenure) were also included. Analyses were conducted using correlation, multiple regression, and ANOVA to determine predictors of absenteeism.

4. Results

The descriptive statistics indicated that employees averaged 11.53 days absent annually. Affective commitment averaged 3.73 on a 5-point scale. Correlation analysis revealed a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.49$) between affective commitment and absenteeism. Regression analysis confirmed that affective commitment was the only significant predictor of absenteeism ($B = -14.49$, $p < .001$). ANOVA indicated no significant gender differences in absence rates.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

Variable	Mean	SD
Days Absent	11.53	21.23
Affective Commitment	3.73	1.09
Age	37.66	9.99
Tenure	8.25	6.47

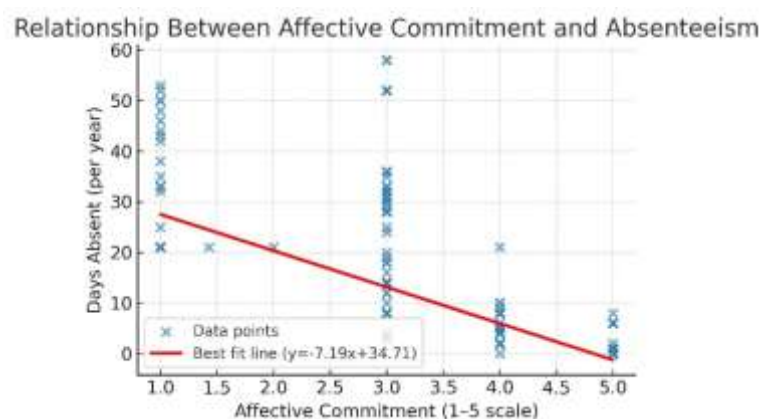


Figure 1. Scatterplot of Affective Commitment and Absenteeism

5. Discussion and Implications

The findings revealed that affective commitment was the only significant predictor of absenteeism. Employees with stronger emotional attachment to the organization were absent approximately 14 fewer days annually. This supports prior research emphasizing the central role of commitment in workplace outcomes (Meyer et al., 2002). In contrast, demographic variables showed no significant effects. These findings suggest that HR strategies should focus less on demographic-based policies and more on cultivating commitment. Practical implications include engagement initiatives, leadership development, mentorship programs, flexible work arrangements, and transparent, ethical use of HR analytics.

6. Limitations and Future Research

This study's cross-sectional design limits causal inference, as observed associations may reflect unmeasured factors or reverse causality. Future research should employ longitudinal or

mixed-methods designs to test the temporal ordering of variables and to explore the mechanisms through which affective commitment influences attendance across teams and over time. Additionally, qualitative research could deepen understanding of employee perspectives on attendance and engagement. Replicating this study across industries and cultural contexts would further assess the generalizability of these findings.

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that affective commitment is the most significant predictor of absenteeism within a large U.S. utility provider, while demographic variables such as age, tenure, and gender showed no meaningful influence. These findings suggest that strategies to reduce absenteeism should prioritize building emotional attachment to the organization rather than relying on demographic-based policies or strict enforcement measures. By fostering commitment through leadership development, recognition programs, flexible work options, and ethical HR analytics, organizations can move toward sustainable improvements in attendance and engagement. Strengthening affective commitment not only reduces absenteeism but also enhances organizational resilience, reliability, and long-term performance.

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