

**EVALUATING HUMAN RESOURCE POLICY IN MANAGING ABSENTEEISM:
A CASE OF THE CITY OF TSHWANE**

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EVALUATING HUMAN RESOURCE POLICY IN MANAGING ABSENTEEISM: A CASE OF THE CITY OF TSHWANE

I declare that this dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



SIGNATURE

29 January 2018

DATE

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Patricia and Dominic Khoabane for guidance and instilling the value of education in me. Also, to my brother Ntai Khoabane and sister-law Mmajane Khoabane who have been an inspiration to me. Sincere gratitude and appreciation extends also to my husband, Galeboe Moletsane. It is through your support and encouragement that I am here today. You helped me realise my academic potential and beyond the inspiration, you walked whole-heartedly and patiently with me during this period. Thank you for your enthusiasm towards my studies.

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- God the father, I raise your name on high, you are awesome.

ABSTRACT

Absenteeism in the workplace is a longstanding challenge practised by employees for various reasons. It persists despite the numerous efforts undertaken to curb it. The City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality is concerned with excessive employee absenteeism. Present research evaluates the City of Tshwane's human resources policy for managing absenteeism. Causes of absenteeism are critically examined, particular attention being paid to the different leave-types that impinge on service delivery within the City of Tshwane.

Within a qualitative research framework, personal semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from staff members of the Leave Capturing Office of the City of Tshwane. The targeted office is responsible for leave management, which includes capturing, recording and encashment of leave. In addition to the questionnaire, the leave management policy as well as sick-leave statistics were brought to bear on this study of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane.

Study findings highlighted factors such as job dissatisfaction, unpleasant working relations, favouritism, low wages, lack of resources, stress at the workplace alongside boredom with routine unchallenging tasks as significant causes of absenteeism. The study also found sick-leave to be the form of reported absence most misused by employees. In general, employees take two days sick leave, which is the maximum an employee can take without requiring a medical certificate. Recommendations include that management should invest in a total process that can control and mitigate absenteeism related risks that may adversely affect operations at the City of Tshwane.

Keywords: *employee absenteeism; sickness absence; workplace absenteeism; absenteeism management; dissatisfaction; disciplinary action; unreported absence; City of Tshwane.*

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CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Absenteeism relates to an individual not being present at a given location where he/she is expected to be in accordance with the contract entered into between such individual and affected organisation (Patton & Johns, 2007:1582). Such absence during pre-scheduled working hours often occurs in order for an employee to meet non-work-related needs (Anderson & Geldenhuys, 2011:4). An absent employee is one who has decided not to perform in accordance with his/her employment contract. While there are other reasons, Drakopoulos and Grimani (2011:3) note that the majority of absences are attributed to sickness or incapacity.

Absenteeism does not apply in instances of annual leave, maternity leave, compassionate leave, or study leave; it is rather associated with misconduct, such as abscondment and unauthorised leave. Consequently, absenteeism has a negative effect, whether directly or indirectly, on an organisation's capacity to function optimally. Clearly absenteeism is a serious problem that impacts on an organisation's capacity to delivery services. Furthermore, absenteeism puts undue pressure on those employees who are at work, it draws attention to the health and safety issues that exist in workplaces, and it certainly also leads to loss of revenue (Munro, 2007:1).

However, not all absences ought to be seen in a negative light. Sometimes, as Kruger (2008:13) argues, employees "trade off" their absence against workload pressure, boredom or artificiality of fixed work schedules. Additionally, absenteeism is a way to adjust to personal labour supply. That is to say, a worker may opt to be absent whenever the benefits of not working are greater than the costs (Bockerman & Ilmakunnas, 2008:521). On the whole, the rate of absenteeism often serves as an indicator of the labour force's unhappiness and discomfort at work (Yende, 2005:16).

Given this complex array of factors relating to absenteeism, this study seeks to evaluate existing human resource policies for managing absenteeism. To this end, the study employs as its case study the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality (hereafter 'the City of Tshwane').

1.2 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

As a concept, absenteeism originated in Great Britain where it was used in connection with employees absconding from work (Viviane, 1962:1). Typically, absenteeism concerns an employee's psychological and physical intention not to attend work or to perform his/her duties as expected. Regardless of the reasons, absence from the workplace implies an employee's non-availability for work when there is work for that employee to do (Eggert, 2004:2). Essentially, an absent employee is unproductive. However, some absence is excusable and can be tolerated, while other reasons for absenteeism are unacceptable.

Whereas absenteeism is a barometer of staff morale, and an indirect measure of employees' health and well-being (Ndhlovu, 2012:10), deliberate workplace absenteeism is a violation of one's contractual obligations (Ndhlovu, 2012:11). Because some absence is reasonable and even expectable, the present study excludes from its purview those instances where the reasons of absenteeism are beyond an employee's control. Examples of such instances of "involuntary absence" (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012:14) include public transport problems, community protests that threaten an employee's safety, family crises, or serious illness. Under circumstances that are beyond an employee's control, the latter is left with no choice but to miss work without incurring the charge of absenteeism.

To reiterate, this study is not concerned with involuntary absenteeism. This is not to say that involuntary absenteeism has no effect on organisational effectiveness. Sadly, the impact of involuntary absenteeism is little understood by both practitioners and researchers (Avey, Patera & West, 2006:46). In addition to it being uncontrollable, practitioners and researchers tend to stop at the acceptability of situational factors beyond employees' immediate control (Duff, Podosky, Biron & Chan, 2015:63). There is a clear need for more research in the field of involuntary absenteeism, a need that the present study regrettably cannot meet. Because of the researcher's limitations, present research perpetuates the intellectual neglect of involuntary absenteeism as a subject of research. Hopefully this researcher will have opportunity at a later stage in life to rectify this unfortunate situation.

Distinguishing between voluntary and involuntary absenteeism is important. An employee's work attendance is largely a function of two critical variables: his/her motivation to attend work on the one hand, and his/her ability to attend work on the other (Steers & Rhodes, 1978:392). As already noted, very little intervention is possible where an employee has been rendered unable to get to work by factors beyond his/her control. This study focuses, therefore, mainly on factors about which something can be done, factors that demotivate employees from either wanting to come to work or staying meaningfully engaged with their work.

Motivation to attend work is influenced by an employee's satisfaction with his/her job situation (Kruger, 2008:13). In simple terms, where there is a lack of sufficient and effective motivation, individuals may choose to stay at home (Gangai, Agrawal & Gupta, 2015:1778). Managerial behaviour, including but not limited to explicit and implicit communication practices, is a key determinant of employee motivation to attend work (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2009:5). According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, individuals become motivated when their needs levels are understood and, consequently, their needs are satisfied (Robbins & Judge, 2012:97).

Voluntary absence thus reflects a conscious choice by an employee not to come to work regardless of being able to do so (Punnett, Greenidge & Ramsey, 2007:2). Typically, such voluntary absence is taken for a short period in order to obviate the need for a medical certificate (Martocchio & Harrison, 1993:264). Unsurprisingly, public service employees tend to use minor illnesses as a shield for delinquent behaviour; they call in sick frequently, even when not sick. For such individuals, their demotivation outweighs both their sense of obligation to the organisation and any consequences that might accrue as a result of their non-attendance. This is a real challenge because absenteeism surely affects profits, competitiveness and service standards (Armstrong, 2001:499) as well as creates increased workload for those employees who do come to work thereby lowering their morale.

Workers, including those in the public sector, who are not particularly interested in their jobs, or those who are actually dissatisfied with their work situations, will display higher absence rates (Metzner & Mann, 1953:468). Conversely, high attendance rates will be observed among employees who enjoy their work and are satisfied with their

supervision as well as with available advancement opportunities at their workplaces. The assertion by Schaufeli, Bakker and van Rhenen (2009:895) that employees' motivation to come to work is basically influenced by satisfactory job demands and availability of resources to perform the job as assigned is on point. Therefore, the responsibility for absenteeism ought to be shared by employees and their employers.

Employees whose job satisfaction and organisational commitment are low tend to be more frequently absent than those who are committed and satisfied (Stansfeld, Head & Ferrie, 1999:22). Satisfied, engaged and committed employees are not likely to report sick, whereas those suffering from job strain (burnout) are unlikely to go to work (Schaufeli, Bakker & van Rhenen, 2009:896). Punnett, Greenidge and Ramsey (2007:2) as well as Martocchio and Harrison (1998:320) also concur that employees with high levels of organisational commitment are unlikely to miss work because that would jeopardize their active membership in the company with which they identify. In other words, loyal and committed employees feel a sense of responsibility to their employer and/or organisation (Punnett, Greenidge & Ramsey, 2007:2).

It follows then that employers have to work on improving employee job satisfaction rather than merely on imposing penalties for disinterest; punishment is just as likely to worsen the situation. For instance, instability within an organisation can dampen the least motivated employees; unfilled posts or fluid departments are examples of instability. Firms, Travaglione and O'Neill (2006:114) highlight that during rapid organisational change, employees with high levels of absenteeism develop withdrawal attitudes and tend to leave the organisation. Unmotivated employees tend to feel frustrated due to unstable conditions at work, that they opt not to partake in any work-related activities. In the long run behaviours such as employee withdrawal and employee turnover become pervasive leading in turn to declines in productivity.

At the same time, according to Staw and Oldham (1978:140), absence can provide coping opportunities outside the workplace, especially when a person holds a job that is incompatible with his/her abilities and preferences. Spending a day at the beach with friends, remaining in bed due to an intestinal flu, or caring for an elderly or young dependent, are all examples of coping mechanisms that result in absenteeism. In such instances, absenteeism can be positive to employees, and is not merely a behavioral

reaction to dissatisfaction (Kristensen, 1991:15). An employee's improved state of mind could be ascertained by analysing his/her productivity levels upon return from the voluntary 'break' (Martocchio & Jimeno, 2003:230).

Nevertheless, there are employees who experience negativity in the workplace but never indulge in absenteeism. Such employees do not require absenteeism as a viable coping mechanism. Other strategies which can help to reduce absence in modifiable instances include health and lost-time data analytics programmes (Harte, Mahieu, Mallett, Norville & VanderWerf, 2011:14). While most employers utilize disciplinary actions to solve the absenteeism problem, others are using the incentive schemes to reduce employee absenteeism (Kocakulah, Kelly, Mitchell & Ruggieri, 2009:81). Hence, for Gaudine and Saks (2001:1), training and global settings, policy changes to increase employees' accountability for their absence, plus scheduling changes to flexi time, are the most effective anti-absenteeism interventions.

According to the survey conducted by Adcorp Employment Index (an agency that deals with employment statistics in South Africa), a total of 3.4 million South Africans missed work owing to sickness during the period 2009 to 2011 (Gilmour, 2012:1). Evidently, one quarter of all workers took the maximum 36 days sick leave allocated for the twelve-month cycle. This resulted in a 397% increase in absenteeism over the decade when job growth was flat at best. Furthermore, since 2000, the South African economy has lost R45.5 billion in real terms due to absenteeism (Gilmour, 2012:1). Financial and emotional strains appear to be responsible for the high rate of absenteeism among South African employees (Johnson, 2012:1).

South Africa experiences high absenteeism rates in the public sector, a trend that is observable in other countries too. Both the Public Service Commission (2012:2) and Statistics South Africa (2017) rate public sector absenteeism at 33.6% in contrast to private sector absenteeism rate of 9.2%. The self-same 2017 Statistics South Africa report attributes public sector absenteeism to poor managerial oversight, lack of administrative controls, outmoded information systems, weak human resource functioning, all in addition to the sector being highly unionized. Clearly the absenteeism challenge for public sector human resource management is quite daunting, and this study hopes to make some contribution towards its mitigation.

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 affords employees those working five days a week 30 days paid sick leave, and those working six days a week 36 days paid sick leave. However, the Act also states that an employee who does not provide services is not entitled to pay. In this way the Act upholds the “no-work-no-pay” principle (Section 22). Furthermore, as the South African Labour Guide (2012:2) intimates, an employee that does not comply with his/her contractual obligations is in breach of contract. Therefore, the public sector absenteeism challenge betrays the well-being of public service employees on the one hand, and the effectiveness of policies on the other.

The City of Tshwane was established on 05 December 2000 after the amalgamation of several municipalities and councils that had previously served Pretoria and its surroundings. A 28 May 2008 proclamation led to the further incorporation of the then Metsweding District Municipality, including Dinokeng-tsa-Taemane (Cullinan) and Kungwini (Bronkhorstpruit) into the borders of City of Tshwane. This incorporation then gave birth to the current City of Tshwane in May 2011 following local government elections. Tshwane is the fourth largest Metropolitan Municipality in South Africa, with a population of more than 2.5 million residents. The City is, among other things, the administrative seat of national government, and hosts quite a number of embassies. Tshwane has proven to be a leader on the African continent by providing affordable industrial sites, various industries, office space, as well as hosting a vast array of African researchers (City of Tshwane, 2012).

However, like other South African municipalities, the City of Tshwane encounters the problem of absenteeism. Absenteeism in turn causes delays in service delivery, increases the burden on other employees, and results in dissatisfied clients. As citizens become more demanding (e.g. in the field of day-care, social security, old-age homes, etc.), absenteeism can only spell distress for those who have to cover for absentees. Municipal employees have to maintain high service standards, especially those who interface directly with citizens and clients. Given these heavy costs of absenteeism, the City of Tshwane regularly distributes leave manuals to guide and remind municipal employees of the various available leave types as well as their leave entitlements. But is this enough?

The municipality's code of conduct on absenteeism states that it is each employee's responsibility to notify his/her supervisor or manager when they intend not to report for work. Employees have to ensure that their leave requests are loaded on the electronic leave system, or at the very least they must be sure to fill out leave forms on their return to work (City of Tshwane, 2003). Leave taken without permission being granted by the relevant supervisor is to be considered unauthorised leave. The City's Leave Capturing Office, a division that deals with leave records, is incorporated under the Human Resources Department, which falls under the Shared Corporate Services.

The Leave Capturing Office controls and monitors all leave taken and approved regardless of the reasons. The section then reports to the Human Resource Department (HRD) on how employees have exercised their leave. In an event where an employee has misused sick-leave days, the HRD communicates with the departmental manager. The departmental manager will call a meeting with the employee concerned in order to ascertain the causes of absenteeism. The manager will then advise the employee about the consequences of excessive absence. If absenteeism persists, counselling is then arranged for such an employee, in order to get to the root of the problem. Counselling can be done by internal or external employee wellness practitioners. Should counselling not yield results, the employee will be issued a written warning against his/her tendency to be absent (City of Tshwane, 2003).

According to the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA, 2017), the policy of determination of leave of absence requires a medical certificate for three or more days' absence, and for every sick leave utilized when the eight-week rule has been transgressed. The City of Tshwane complies with the policy and ensures that sick notes are checked and countersigned by occupational health personnel at the City's Clinic to verify their validity. The sick note's diagnosis must accord with the Clinic's findings, even though doctors often do not disclose their patients' medical conditions. Offending employees are counselled and then closely monitored (City of Tshwane, 2003). That absenteeism persists despite these measures means that competent policies are not the only determining factor. Balancing the company's operational needs with employees' right to absence is vital (Goldberg, 2011:1).

1.3 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

Balance demands that both the employer and the employee know and assert their rights. Absenteeism policies need to be communicated, clarified and agreed upon by all affected parties (Motshudi, 2011:2). Guidance must be provided to employees that are not familiar with the procedures and prescripts of the human resource policy on absenteeism (Public Service Commission, 2012:3). Robbins and Judge (2012:47) found organisations that provide liberal sick leave benefits to be encouraging all the employees, including those who are highly satisfied, to take days off. Where necessary, management needs to ensure that policies are amended to avoid staff feeling bored, demotivated, dissatisfied and stressed out with their employment (Egan, 2011:67). Absence policies do definitely affect the rate of absenteeism.

Hence, provision of on-site child care, elder care, open communication policies and supportive work environments can reduce employee absenteeism and voluntary turnover (Cascio, 2006:60). Further, personal problems add strain on employees, eventually affecting their attendance and participation at work. Employers should thus focus on eliminating factors contributing to employees' absence by being supportive and open. The DPSA developed a policy in order to prevent widespread abuse of sick leave in addition to improving the poor management of incapacity and illness in the public sector. A new leave dispensation thus emerged in tandem with the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (Public Service Commission, 2012:1). The 2013 service delivery charter was created to ensure that public servants adhere to norms and standards so as to achieve higher productivity standards.

These initiatives were preceded by the notion of Batho-Pele principles, which was championed by the DPSA for all public servants to serve the public with humility (DPSA, 2017). Yet, the challenge of absenteeism in the public sector extends even to elected officials. In 2012, the ruling African National Congress called for a review of the policy on absenteeism among parliament members, the nation's very own lawmakers. The new policy would impose a fine on those members who did not attend sessions without valid reasons or due apology. The policy would also regulate the amount of leave taken by members in order to curb abuse (SAPA, 2012).

At the municipal level, the Local Government Municipal System Act 32 of 2000 embraces the intervention of the Collective Bargaining Council that put in place leave conditions and promoted common and uniform leave for employees in the municipalities. A workshop entitled “Attacking Absenteeism” was organised by Streetwise Labour Law’s representatives in May 2012 to address topics such as problems with absenteeism, boosting employee morale, employee communication, introducing an absenteeism prevention program, and discipline and dismissal as a result of absenteeism. The City of Tshwane was represented by a senior official from the Directorate of Occupational Health and Safety Management who made meaningful contributions regarding the City of Tshwane’s experiences in relation to absenteeism.

The City’s representative highlighted the interventions of labour unions at the municipality, abuse of sick leave, unauthorised absence, desertion and abscondment as leading factors. Also, the unit of occupational health and safety struggles to scrutinize the medical reports provided by employees if suspicious, because employees feel that their right to privacy is being violated. The matter is exacerbated by the fact that employees consult external general practitioners instead of the municipality’s very own clinic for employees. So the doctor-patient confidentiality principle presents a serious hurdle to the management of absenteeism.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Excessive unplanned absenteeism has grave financial implications for the public sector as employees receive salaries and benefits without public services being rendered. Delays in provision of public services result, especially in cases where the absent employee has more experience or responsibility in a particular area. Surging backlogs, and overburdened devoted public servants are not healthy are complicated by employee fatigue, frictions among employees, as well as unplanned overtime. Clearly absenteeism is considerably more than mere disruption; it can result in drastic reduction of the quality and quantity of an organisation’s output (Robbins, 2009:24).

Managers who dodge dealing with absence issues, whether because of lack of knowledge or inadequate training on how to manage absence, do not help the situation

(Howard, 2005:35). Leaders often are reluctant to confront subordinates about their absences for fear of discrimination accusations by the workforce, especially where health issues are concerned. They also fear possible confrontation, even workplace bullying. Absenteeism is an irritation for considerate managers who do not want to appear to be forcing employees to come to work (Mason & Griffin, 2003:668). A further constraint on absenteeism management in the public sector is the reality that employees are not required to provide medical certificates in respect of three days or less sick leave (Public Service Commission, 2012:4). Moreover, public service employees enjoy security of tenure, which may be a contributing factor towards absence from work without good reason (Mintrac, 2009:3). In other words, public sector employees know and take advantage of the system's weaknesses.

It is no surprise that the rate of absenteeism is higher within the public sector than in the private sector (Wright & Pandey, 2010:27). Serneels, Lindelow and Lievens (2008:277) attribute this trend to lack of accountability and rare castigation of transgression in the public sector. To that, Rhodes and Steers (1990:34) add poor working environments, low pay, and other dissatisfying aspects of the job. This study's problem is that the main causes of absenteeism are still unclear due to the poor management of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane. In attempting to address the problem, the following questions need to be asked:

- What is the meaning of absenteeism in the workplace?
- Which main causes of absenteeism need to be considered when managing absenteeism at the City of Tshwane?
- What types and patterns of absenteeism are prevalent in the City of Tshwane?
- What are the consequences or effects of absenteeism to the City of Tshwane?
- In what ways can absenteeism be managed at the City of Tshwane?
- What challenges do the City of Tshwane face in managing absenteeism?

1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The overall aim of this study is to evaluate the City of Tshwane's human resource policy for managing absenteeism. What are the measures implemented in enforcing the human resource policy on absenteeism so as to reduce the rate of absence?

The study's objectives are:

- To investigate the meaning of absenteeism in the context of the City of Tshwane.
- To evaluate the causes of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane.
- To establish types and patterns of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane.
- To identify and analyse the consequences or effects of absenteeism to the City of Tshwane.
- To analyse the existing human resource policy relating to the management of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane.
- To identify and analyse challenges relating to the management of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research design concerns the structured plan (Mouton, 2001:55) or roadmap (Kumar, 2014:123) that one follows during one's research journey. The design ought to enable the researcher to find answers to questions as validly, objectively, accurately and economically as possible. For this study, the research approach is qualitative and a case study research strategy is used. Appropriate data collections instruments include interviews, document analysis and perusal of pertinent literature from various sources. The researcher thus combined interviews and documentary analysis, which is both qualitative in nature.

Interviews elicit current, rich, relevant and first-hand data for the research. Conducting an interview is a more natural form of interacting with people; the interviewer gets to know and understand how the interviewee feels and thinks (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015:1). In other words, qualitative interviews provide a means of exploring the

research subjects' own points of view while simultaneously granting these points of view the culturally honoured status of reality (Silverman, 2012:33). Before an interview commences, the interviewer builds rapport by introducing individually to participants the rationale and envisaged benefits of the interview. Participants are also assured of confidentiality. Consent forms get distributed and signed by interviewees who have acceded to participation in the research. No one gets forced to be part of a research study. Participation is completely voluntary and dependant on the suitability and availability of individuals.

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were scheduled in order to give participants unconstrained opportunities to express themselves. During interviews, notes were made of the responses given by participants; these notes were later transcribed into meaningful data. With participants' permission, an audio recorder was also used during interviews. Voice recorders preserve more information than handwritten notes ever could. Interviews thus facilitated the opportunity to examine from the horses' mouths the City of Tshwane's challenges regarding absenteeism.

In this empirical study, data was collected from primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources comprised a literature review of scholarly views on absenteeism. Primary sources entailed interviews with the City of Tshwane's employees in addition to perusal of accessible official documents.

1.6.1 Sample

Staff members from the City's Leave Capturing Office were chosen for the interviews. Data capturers as well as senior human resource officers with three years' experience or more with the municipality were targeted specifically. Data capturers were chosen because they are responsible for capturing employee leave on a daily basis and are therefore in a great position to provide information on absenteeism at the City. This sample thus comprised participants who have immense experience and knowledge regarding issues surrounding absenteeism at the City of Tshwane.

1.6.2 Data Collection Techniques

In order to obtain relevant and appropriate information for the study, the data collection technique of interviews was preferred.

1.6.2.1 Interviews

Interviews may be conducted on a one-on-one basis or with small focus groups (Fox & Bayat, 2007:72). The nature of data required usually determines the form that the interviews take. For this study, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews are considered part of qualitative research if they are in-depth (Fox & Bayat, 2007:100). During such a relaxed social interaction between interviewer and interviewee (Neuman, 2000:275), the respondent can assess the interviewer and so establish whether they are trustworthy. In the same vein, without rigid question schedules (Berg, 2004:80), interviewers have freedom to determine what further questions to ask in order to obtain required information, and interviewees have license to talk about the issue in any way they choose (May, 2011:136).

Since the research sought to investigate how the City of Tshwane manages absenteeism, interviews were conducted with the City's leave officials. These include the functional human resource head, human resource officers, senior administrators and administrators. Discussions revolved around open ended questions like how the current absenteeism policy intervenes in managing absenteeism, as well as on whether the City's absence-management measures serve the intended purpose of reducing the rate of absenteeism.

Open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview setting meant that the researcher used predetermined questions to guide the interviews, but left opportunity for discussion and probing as long as it was deemed beneficial or pertinent to the research. As Welman and Kruger (2001:60) intimate, having control over the responses received is one of the returns of the interview method of data collection. Information provided by participants was recorded, filed safely, and subsequently confidentially used.

1.7 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data interpretation and analysis concerns placing bits of information side by side so as to be able to identify patterns, recognize similarities, and construct meaningful connections (Luton, 2010:139). Put differently, data interpretation and analysis means searching for patterns in recurrent behaviors, objects and bodies of knowledge (Neuman, 2000:426). Once data have been generated, pertinent information gets arranged into themes. Relationships and patterns are collated and scrutinised. Collected data are then categorised and condensed, thereby enabling meanings to emerge from the data.

Document analysis is a key skill in historical interpretation. Beyond a mere summary or description of what happened, it analyses the motivation, intention and purpose of a document within its particular context (Bowen, 2009:3). Documentary evidence comes in all shapes, forms and sizes, ranging from official and private documents to personal letters or memos. These may be used to gain information on a person's point of view on the policy (Grix, 2004:131).

Content analysis was done on documents provided by the City of Tshwane. Said documents included absenteeism registers, collective agreements with labour, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act as it is applied at the City of Tshwane. Sick leave reports for the period 2016 to 2017 were requested from the internal statistician or obtained via the electronic leave system. The study focused on sick leave reports because significant numbers of working days are lost due to sickness absence. Rich and useful data came out of this exploration, as the analysis will show.

1.8 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE STUDY

For Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:142), validity concerns the extent to which the research findings accurately reflect the reality of the situation being investigated. It relates to the appropriateness of choices made in terms of the research strategy and data collection or analysis techniques (Biggam, 2008:100). For instance, measures have to be taken to evade bias, and questions have to be simple, accurate and measure what they seek to measure. Control questions are used in order to expose

contradictory responses. To verify their appropriateness, designed questions were checked by the researcher's supervisor, the functional head of human resource, and deputy directorate of the leave office at the City of Tshwane. To assist the question design process, literature that discusses absenteeism was consulted for the latest findings and developments around absenteeism.

In its turn, reliability is concerned with the credibility of the research findings (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005:145). Research reliability implies that if the same interview questions were asked to different respondents on different occasions, the same answers would be obtained. A coefficient of stability, equivalence of response or internal consistency can determine the reliability of a set of responses (Fox & Bayat, 2007:97). Semi-structured interviews comply with the criteria used for determining reliability, but a complete record has to be kept of the details of each interview, including actual interview transcripts. In addition, sources such as attendance registers, absenteeism policy of the City of Tshwane, official documents made available by the City's custodians, and information gathered from the electronic leave system indicating how leave are taken were used in order to improve the study's validity and reliability.

1.9 TERMINOLOGY

Several key concepts appear repeatedly in this study, and it is proper to define them at this juncture.

Absenteeism means any failure on the part of an employee to report for work when scheduled to do so, regardless of the reason (Wankel, 2009:2). Put differently, absenteeism concerns being away from work during working hours. However, an employee can be absent even though present at work; examples include when an employee attends to personal matters whilst at work and consequently does not deliver as expected by the employer.

Absenteeism policy relates to work attendance rules that regulate the way whereby infringements are handled in the work place (Israelstam, 2013:13). It is essentially a

set of written guidelines by an employer to an employee setting out rules about, for example, times that employees are expected to be at work doing their work.

Absenteeism management involves capturing and tracking of absenteeism as well as pre-empting and mitigating absenteeism in the first place. For instance, when welcoming disabled employees or those returning after extended absences from work, assurance needs to be provided about measures undertaken to ensure a safe working environment (Taylor, 2011:6). Absenteeism cannot be totally stopped, but it can be minimized to acceptable levels through appropriate management.

Employees are permanent or contract workers hired to perform certain tasks for an employer and to render services where they are required. In the City of Tshwane, independent contractors are not regarded as 'employees' (City of Tshwane, 2003).

Employee assistance programs provide professional counselling, medical services, and rehabilitation opportunities to any troubled employees. Further, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 protects employees from excesses of employer power, such as in regard to maximum working hours, overtime, annual and sick leave.

1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

At this juncture it seems appropriate to reiterate the steps that were taken to ensure that this research work adheres to the university's ethical guidelines. Attention to ethical matters ensures that the researcher respects the persons that form part of the research and takes necessary precautions to secure participants' privacy and security (Hofstee, 2011:118). Explicit permission has to be sought from potential participants, the researcher has to explain quite clearly how data will be collected, analysed and disseminated (Grix, 2004:142). Also, the institution where the researcher is enrolled must grant its permission for the research to be undertaken, and permission also has to be sought from the study subjects, in this case the City of Tshwane whose staff members and official documents formed an integral part of the study.

1.10.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent implies that, prior to giving their consent to participate in the study, prospective participants are informed fully about the procedures and risks involved in the research (Fox & Bayat, 2007:148). In addition to explaining the research it is important to state the participants' right to withdraw should they so wish (Devlin 2006:148). In every research, participation has to be voluntary. Participants were also alerted to note-taking as well as the use of an audio recorder during interviews, and permission was sought and obtained from participants to that end.

1.10.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality in research means that private data identifying subjects will not be divulged (Devlin 2006:162). The respondent's right to privacy and the right to refuse to answer certain questions, or to even be interviewed at all was always respected. Since information provided by participants involves sensitive matters about employees, an undertaking was made that names would not be revealed to anyone, which promise was kept. The extent to which identifying information would be safeguarded was meticulously outlined, and participants were assured that what they divulge would never land in wrong hands.

1.10.3 Researcher's Responsibilities

Ethical decisions depend upon the values of the researchers and their communities. Such background informs the negotiations which take place between the researcher, sponsors, research participants and those who control access to the information that the researcher seeks. The degree to which the researcher has control over the research process certainly influences his/her exercise of ethical decisions (May, 2011:61). Participants at the City of Tshwane were made aware that the researcher's responsibility was to conduct and manage interviews. In other words, for instance, the researcher ensured that convenient times are set for each participant. Respect had to be shown to participants, many of whom hold senior positions within the City. Furthermore, it was communicated that the researcher would take note of the body language of participants as they respond to questions during the interviews.

1.11 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study focused on evaluating the City of Tshwane's human resource policy for managing absenteeism. Study findings should offer the following benefits:

- Respondents developing increased appreciation of the importance of the capturing leave on time to prevent backlogs, as well as the need for effective communication of the human resource policy for managing absenteeism.
- Supervisors at the City of Tshwane being encouraged to work on their relationship with their subordinates in the interest of less rebelliousness. This will lead to supervisors improving the quality of their guidance and support to subordinates, e.g. better communication skills.
- City of Tshwane management deriving immense benefit from the recommendations made regarding the importance of effectively managing and implementing an absenteeism management policy plus attendant procedures.
- The researcher publishing at least one article about absenteeism management in an accredited journal, thereby contributing to the scholarly pool of Public Administration. The literature review reveals literature on absenteeism to be very limited.
- Future researchers in the discipline of Public Administration drawing on this study's findings in pursuit of better absenteeism management in public service.

1.12 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

This opening chapter provided a general orientation to the study, which comprised an introduction, background and rationale of the study, motivation, problem statement, aim and objectives, literature review, outline of the chapters, research methodology, validity and reliability of the study, ethical considerations, and definitions of key concepts.

Through extensive literature review, Chapter 2 conceptualizes absenteeism, whilst also clarifying theories of absenteeism management in the public sector. Types, causes and cures of absenteeism are also reviewed, along with a critical look into the role of organisational culture.

Chapter 3 details the study's research design and methodology. Sources that were used to gather data are articulated, as well as the procedures followed when collecting research data. Documents used for the research are also analysed and interpreted.

Chapter 4 outlines the City of Tshwane's organisational structure along with elaboration of how the municipality functions. The City's absenteeism policy is studied, evaluated and compared with absenteeism policies from two other metropolitan municipalities of comparable stature. Emergent absenteeism patterns will also be examined.

Chapter 5 entails analysis, recommendations and conclusions relating to the entire study.

In Chapter 6 the study's findings are synthesized and summarized, followed by conclusions as well as recommendations for consideration by the City of Tshwane.

1.13 SUMMARY

This chapter sought to orient the reader to what the present study is about, as well as to the steps that were taken in undertaking it. Now that the foundation has been laid, it is fitting to turn to the literature review where theories and concepts take centre stage.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter introduced the study by presenting the problem it seeks to investigate. The present chapter searches the literature for theories relating to the causes of absenteeism in the workplace. A definition of absenteeism will be followed by an outline of the theory of the concept, culminating in the ramifications of absenteeism. The following section combs through scholarly literature for an adequate understanding of absenteeism.

2.2 ABSENTEEISM DEFINED

‘What is the meaning of absenteeism in the workplace?’ is the question addressed in this section. Varying definitions of absenteeism have been proffered; depending by and large on work characteristics and organisational layout, various scholars place emphasis on different facets of the problem. For Harrison and Newman (2013:265), for instance, absenteeism is a tendency to miss scheduled work at specified time intervals. In other words, there is apparent planning on the part of the employee vis-à-vis when to be present and when to miss work. Such defiance of social expectation constitutes absenteeism (Martocchio & Harrison, 1993:260; cf. Harrison & Prince, 2003:204).

As social behaviour, employee absenteeism impacts on others, and is subject to normative influences that require a special set of elements such as context and attributions which change based on the characteristics of a particular absence episode such as frequency and duration (Patton, 2011:410). Stress plays an important role in absenteeism, especially when one is unable to cope with an unpleasant or non-conducive working environment, or to successfully tackle imposed job demands (Olivares-Faúndez, Gil-Monte, Mena, Jélvez-Wilke & Figueiredo-Ferraz, 2014:118). In this regard, an employee’s inability to cope plus attendant mental fatigue almost always lead to absenteeism.

Absenteeism is also a function of time spent at work. According to Lechman and Schnabel (2014:371), workers sometimes take time off in order to bring the actual hours worked in line with the hours they consider to be just. Absenteeism from one's workplace may also be seen as a behavioural outcome rather than the behaviour itself (Martocchio & Jimeno, 2003:230). Many different actions can make up an absence, for example, late arrival at work, leaving work premises early, taking extended tea or lunch breaks, attending to private business during working hours, taking extended toilet breaks, feigning illness, and engaging in such other unexplained absences from the workstation or premises all constitute absenteeism (South African Labour Guide, 2012:1). As a symptom of habitual behaviour, absenteeism is often accompanied by the abuse of sick leave (Cucchiella, Gastaldi & Ranieri, 2014:159).

Legitimate absenteeism involves taking a sick day when one is truly sick; such absence is considered to be acceptable and responsible behaviour (Addae & Boies, 2013:404). Some individuals focus so much on work that other spheres of their lives end up suffering. Not only do they sacrifice their health and families in the process, such employees also find it hard to tolerate their colleagues' absence regardless of whether or not it is legitimate (Patton, 2011:405-406; cf. Johns, 2011:521). Neither extreme is to be encouraged; on the one hand, employees ought to be wary of abusing their right to take leave and, on the other, employees ought to be wary of neglecting to take breaks from work in order to give other aspects of life due attention.

Even though absenteeism fundamentally implies non-attendance, it is often characterized as being either voluntary or involuntary. Involuntary absence relates to an absence that is beyond an employee's control, such as certified sickness, bereavement, and/or civil riots. Voluntary absence is associated with unauthorised absence such as desertion, absence without authority (AWOL), and work shirking. Given the foregoing definitions, absenteeism thus concerns repetitive behaviour characterizing an employee who is determined to miss work regardless of the reasons.

2.3 THEORY OF ABSENTEEISM

The most common theory of absenteeism is the notion that absenteeism is caused by employees who are avoiding a delicate or dissatisfying work situation (Obasan, 2011:27). Absence behaviour is then explained in terms of either social exchange or withdrawal.

2.3.1 Social Exchange

Social exchange is associated with the manner in which an employee relates to a supervisor or other co-workers plus the degree to which employees receive support, even when they have a tendency to skip work. Studies suggest that employees reporting less support from their co-workers tend to view absenteeism as a form of behaviour that is inconsistent with the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960:162). Such co-workers are most likely affected by other individuals' absence from work (Johns, 1997:20). Employees who perceive their employers as supportive may be less eager to miss work. When employees get enough support from their co-workers and supervisors, they develop a strong attachment to the organisation. Such employees force themselves to go to work, even when they are unfit, because they are concerned about the repercussions of their non-attendance on the organisation and/or on their colleagues.

Concern for one another indicates that since employees spend hours together, they develop a certain bond, causing employees to behave more like a family in the workplace. Reciprocity therefore means that employees will take turns standing in for one another as need arises. But delinquents take advantage of this bond and do not honour their co-workers' expectations when it is their turn to reciprocate (Bacharach, Bamberger & Biron, 2010:338). Social exchange clearly plays a significant role in building a close working relationship among co-workers who assist one another when there is overwhelming work pressure. On the other hand, employees who do not find the workplace to be a pleasant environment do tend to withdraw from such milieus.

2.3.2 Withdrawal

Withdrawal relates to an employee's act of moving away from the workplace in order to occupy himself or herself with something different. Employees withdraw from the work environment for various reasons, such as an unpleasant working environment, boring tasks, hostile working relations, frustrations, or poor performance (Khan & Nawaz, 2016:6). Such emotionally and physically withdrawn employees tend to abuse the leave system of an organisation.

Withdrawal is thus a unique tendency to withhold one's physical presence, effort or attention from the work situation (Harrison & Newman, 2013:263). This behaviour manifests through being late for work, taking long breaks, missing meetings, wandering around during working hours, and absconding. Early detection of withdrawal in response to work strain is very critical (Darr & Johns, 2008:207). If properly managed, withdrawal can benefit employees by helping them to recharge and feel better equipped for dealing with work stressors. Employees tend to feel better after being away from the workplace for some time. The employer's challenge is to find a balance between the employee's right to leave and the employee's obligation to comply with the leave policy.

2.4 ANTECEDENTS OF ABSENTEEISM

What gives rise to absenteeism? What perpetuates the culture of absenteeism in the workplace? This section addresses the question 'Which main causes of absenteeism need to be considered when managing absenteeism at the City of Tshwane?'. The theory presented in this section is applied in Chapter 5, section 5.4.2 (*Causes of absenteeism*). It would appear that there are several reasons why absenteeism remains a viable option for employees.

2.4.1 Job Dissatisfaction

Job satisfaction is all about how happy an employee is with his/her job. Employee satisfaction is important for an organisation's success. Simply put, employees are far more likely to miss work if they are either dissatisfied with or not committed to the

organisation where they work (Aamodt, 2009:389). People who are unhappy with their jobs and/or working environments have an array of ways to react; frequent or prolonged absences are just one such way (Ybema, Smulders & Bongers, 2010:117).

Dissatisfaction with the job eats at the employee's motivation, and motivation is a major determinant of work attendance (Steers & Rhodes, 1978:394). Boredom, dislike of tasks, conflicts with colleagues, unfavourable pay and biased promotion prospects are just some of the demotivating factors. Absence from work indicates job dissatisfaction (Obasan, 2011:31). But people are not robots. Therefore, sometimes people who really dislike their jobs do not opt for absence if they believe that their presence is vital to the smooth functioning of the organisation (Greenberg & Baron, 2000:177) or their absence will undermine their job security. Often, work is an important means of survival that responsible individuals must never take for granted, regardless of whether or not they are happy at a particular moment in time. In the final analysis, high job satisfaction may not necessarily result in low absenteeism, yet low job satisfaction is always more likely to foster absenteeism (Kristensen, Juhl, Eskildsen, Nielsen, Frederiksen & Bisgaard, 2006:165).

2.4.2 Low Wages

Low wages usually figure prominently among the reasons for job dissatisfaction (Davey & Cummings, 2009:314). Wages, the compensation an employee receives for work done (Robbins, 2009:15), are stipulated upfront by employers in line with every category of responsibility. Employees who feel under appreciated tend to compensate their perceived mishandling by not coming to work and/or not performing the duties assigned to them. Wages are the primary reason people seek and keep work. When wages meet their needs, employees feel motivated to work. When compensation is believed to be administered justly and consistently across the workforce, employees take pride in and ownership of their employing organisation.

Perceived low wages plus an individual's low rank in the wage distribution tend to affect the psychological well-being as well as physical effort that employees put into their work (Brown, Gardner, Oswald & Qian, 2008:220). Minimum wages make it difficult for employers to punish workers who exhibit excessive absenteeism due to

unsatisfactory wages; conversely, premium wages deter absenteeism (Bucila & Simon, 2010:4). That is to say, workplaces that offer a higher level of pay are found to have a significantly lower rate of absence (Pouliakas & Theodoropoulos, 2012:129). Competitive wages can even be interpreted as compensation for long hours and less absenteeism (Pfeifer, 2010:60). Higher wages for those at the bottom of the economic hierarchy improves an organisation's performance, profitability and work quality, as a result such employees have motivation to come to work. After all, relatively higher wages are a status symbol in the workplace. Naturally, as a way either of discouraging absenteeism or of motivating employees, employers can and must adjust their wages accordingly.

2.4.3 Organisational Injustice

Organisational injustice relates to unfairness at work. People who believe that they have been treated unfairly at their workplace experience considerable distress that can result in withdrawal behaviours like absenteeism (De Boer, Bakker, Syroil & Schaufelli, 2002:183). Although injustice can lead to distress, not all injustices automatically function as stressors (Greenberg, 2004:353). A sense of injustice can be obviated through interactional justice where supervisors explain their decisions to subordinates, in addition to treating them with respect and dignity (Tenhiala, Linna, Von Bonsdorff, Pentti, Vantera, Kivimaki & Elovainio, 2013:807; cf. Lee, Kim, Son & Kim, 2015:2)

A person whose energy has been depleted will certainly be prompted, at some point, to take time off in order to recuperate (Chenevert, Jourdain & Cole, 2013:355). Depletion of personal reserves may be experienced as a physical phenomenon, but it is more often psychological and emotional (De Boer, Bakker, Syroil & Schaufelli, 2002:183). Employees that are not treated fairly develop workplace alienation which decreases their motivation and, in the long run, upsets their involvement with work.

In similar vein, employees who feel that they are investing greater amounts of time and effort than their colleagues will engage in withdrawal behaviour (Khalifa & Truong, 2010:136). On the other hand, employees who feel that they are treated fairly at work are usually healthier, which reduces absenteeism (Tenhiala, Linna, von Bonsdorff,

Pentti, Vantera, Kivimaki & Elovainio, 2013:806). Fairness goes hand in hand with reciprocity; these strengthen relations and motivate employees (Cropanzano & Rupp, 2008:64). Contented employees demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviours, and vice versa (Bal, De Lange, Ybema, Jansen & Vander Velde, 2011:6-7).

The bulk of the reviewed literature concurs that organisational injustice impinges on employees' capacity to cope with work demands. In environments where supervisors are not supportive, employees become frustrated and withdraw; they arrive late, leave early, and regularly take time off. Such employees tend ultimately to leave the organisation or to miss work for lengthy periods. Employees who are treated fairly by their leaders come to work even when ill. Disgruntled employees will look for any opportunity to miss work. It stands to reason then that, at least in part, absenteeism is a function of leadership styles encountered at the workplace.

2.4.4 Leadership Styles

Leadership style refers to how leaders engage with subordinates in order to achieve organisational goals. Because they have power to punish, to enforce attendance, as well as to authorise or reject bonuses, leaders play a pivotal role in employee commitment. Accordingly, a leader's management style affects an employee's likelihood to abuse sick leave (Frooman, Mendelson & Murphy, 2012:456). Put differently, supervisor support has an indirect effect on absenteeism (Biron & Bamberger, 2012:903). An employee who receives support from his/her supervisor is less likely to be absent from work, while an unsupported employee will stay away from work. Moreover, under-trained and inexperienced supervisors cause stress to employees, which may lead to absenteeism (Munro, 2007:3). Rather than merely driving employees to perform, the understanding of leadership has changed to involve sharing wisdom with subordinates. Several leadership styles have been identified.

2.4.4.1 Transformational Leaders

Transformational leaders empower employees, according the latter significant authority, responsibility and accountability for their tasks, thereby resulting in increased employee commitment and work satisfaction (Elshout & Scherp, 2013:824). By exposing employees to management roles, transformational leaders encourage

employees to grow careerwise. Such leaders earn immense employee loyalty and no abscondment (Tse & Lam, 2008:2). Recognising the adverse effects of absenteeism, employees are then unlikely to impose the cost of absenteeism on their leader and organisation (Bacharach, Bamberger & Biron, 2010:338). Well-treated employees tend to feel obligated (Wang & Walumbura, 2007:403) and emotionally attached to the organisation (Dasgupta, Suar & Sing, 2014:289).

2.4.4.2 Transactional Leaders

Transactional leaders recognize and reward effort and good performance (Bass, 2008:234). This encourages subordinates to appear committed instead of being truly committed. Oddly, employees under transactional leaders do come to work when they are sick, thereby reserving their leave or sick days for when they are healthy so as to fully enjoy them (Frooman, Mendelson & Murphy, 2012:456). According to Hamidifar (2010:46), transactional leaders are characterised by (i) contingent rewards for good performance, (ii) management by exception (active) where subordinates are monitored and corrected in order to boost performance, and (iii) management by exception (passive) where subordinates receive punishment for obvious performance mistakes. Transactional leaders tend to communicate more often with subordinates about how the job must be done, without necessarily getting the most out of employees.

2.4.4.3 Laissez-faire Leadership

In laissez-faire leadership there is no meaningful relationship between the leader and the followers. As a result, decisions are not made, processes are delayed, responsibilities are ignored, and there is no mutual caring (Hamidifar, 2010:47). Where subordinates are not given direction, they are forced to plan and execute their work as they see fit (Mtimkulu, Naranjee & Karodia, 2014:50). Such employees end up feeling like their superiors do not care about their welfare, especially when they are held accountable for issues that are beyond their pay grade. Moreover, giving subordinates too much freedom causes employees immense psychological distress, thereby depleting their motivation for work (Dasgupta, Suar & Singh, 2014:290).

2.4.5 Employment Contracts

Absenteeism is also affected by the type of contract that an employee has with the organisation. Employment contracts are either temporary or permanent.

2.4.5.1 Temporary Contracts

Employers use temporary contracts to screen employees for suitability for permanent employment (Bradley, Green & Leeves, 2007:336). Temporary contracts are renewable fixed-term contracts, and there is no limit to the number of times that a contract may be renewed. Aria and Thoursie (2005:23) indicate that temporary workers show less absence because they are faced with job uncertainty. In addition, temporary employees run a higher risk of being laid-off and therefore have a stronger incentive to work hard. In a word, job insecurity discourages absenteeism (Ichino & Riphahn, 2005:121). Because of job insecurity, employees on temporary contracts simply have to make a bigger effort and sometimes even work unpaid overtime (Engellendt & Riphahn, 2005:289). Also, temporary employees have lower sick-rates since they work lesser hours and have time to attend to their personal issues and recover (Scoppa & Vuri, 2014: 4).

It has unfortunately been observed that employees who transition from temporary to permanent employment status also acquire a taste for absenteeism (Bradley, Green & Leeves, 2007:335; also Ichino & Riphahn, 2005:10). Therefore, some employers end up keeping workers temporarily employed for longer than is justifiable. In general, shorter working hours seem to reduce absence and the effect is even larger when flexible working arrangements are in place (Lusiyan & Bonato, 2007:476). It behoves both employers and employees to appreciate these dynamics of temporary contracts.

2.4.5.2 Permanent Contracts

Permanent employment is characterised by job security (Restrepo & Salgado, 2013:404) plus a range of benefits, such as higher pay or eligibility for promotion (Bradley, Green & Leeves, 2007:344). Employees on permanent contract are difficult to dismiss for absenteeism (Langenhoff, 2011:16; Garcia, Green & Navarro, 2012:3). As a result, absenteeism may be higher among them (Garcia, Green & Navarro,

2012:9), because job termination is rare and tedious for permanent workers (Virtanen, Kivimäki, Vahtera, Elovainio, Sund, Virtanen & Ferrie, 2006:214). Permanent employees can stay with an organisation for a long time until their service becomes redundant or until their employment becomes a burden on the organisation.

2.4.6 Burnout

Burnout is an indicator of work-related psychological ill-health, which may result from personality characteristics, such as negative affectivity, or from strenuous job demands (Ybema, Smulders & Bongers, 2010:105). This dysfunctional state results from prolonged exposure to chronic stress, and is compounded by tough job demands coupled with a lack of resources (Chenevert & Banville, 2013:353). Yet, in a high commitment work context, employees are aware of the disruptive consequences of repeated absenteeism on project achievement, hence absenteeism will be considered as the last option (Petitta & Vecchione, 2011:114). Absence from work becomes necessary for the sake of the burnt out employee's health. If not properly and timeously managed, the absence required may become quite lengthy.

2.4.7 Job Demands

Job demands are those physical, social or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or psychological effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological or psychological costs (Chen & Yu, 2013:389). Job demands are constituted by factors such as workload, time pressures, role conflicts and difficult environments, all of which can be very stressful (Deery, Walsh & Zatzick, 2014:353). Work overload places unwarranted pressure on employees, which leads to emotional exhaustion. For Babakus, Yavas and Ashill (2009:481), job demands and resources both influence burnout, which has direct or mediating effects on organisational commitment and turnover intentions. Job demands may increase the likelihood of burnout among workers or they may lead to other negative outcomes related to energy depletion (Alarcon, 2011:120).

High job demands almost always lead to high absenteeism, whether certified or not (Devonish, 2013:167). The interaction between high job demands, low control and low support appears to favour medically certified absenteeism (Virtanen, Kivimäki,

Vahtera, Elovainio, Sund, Virtanen & Ferrie, 2006:212). High job demands may make an employee to neglect personal well-being (Deery, Walsh & Zatzick, 2014:354), a situation that, eventually, will contribute to friction in the workplace, affecting work relations between employees.

2.4.8 Workplace Relations

Workplace relations concern the manner in which employees interact with one another at work. Employees with a common goal get attracted to one another easily in order to accomplish the set goal. Workplace conflict is a dreaded phenomenon that can make employees genuinely ill, thus resulting in increased absenteeism (Baer & Oldham, 2006:969). How managers approach conflicts can be an important factor affecting employee attendance and commitment at work (De Reuver & Van Woerkom, 2010:482).

2.4.8.1 Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying refers to the mistreatment of an employee or employees by another employee or employees with an intention to cause harm. Such maltreatment may take the form of threats, humiliation, intimidation or verbal abuse. Bullying occurs especially when an employee is new to an organisation. Bonafide workplace bullying occurs when an individual perceives negative actions directed at him/her from one or more persons continuing over a period of at least six months (Devonish, 2013:168).

Usually, it is difficult for the victim to reveal the perpetrators for fear of further attacks (Zapf & Einarsen, 2011:179). The rule of thumb is that higher job demands contribute to the likelihood of workplace bullying within an organisation. In anticipation of workplace bullying, management must devise intervention strategies to minimize bullying in the organisation, lest the victim finds ways to stay away from work. Bullied employees experience a dialectical tension within the work context (Halbesleben, Whiteman & Crawford, 2014:178), which indicates their desire to secure a meaningful work relationship with their supervisors. Workplace bullying affects an employee's health and attitude towards work, which in turn will lead to increased absenteeism and reduced performance (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012:14).

Employees naturally strive to achieve a balance between connections with supervisors on the one hand, and the attainment of some level of autonomy on the other (Halbesleben, Whiteman & Crawford, 2014:179). When unfavourable relationships exist with the supervisor, an employee will use absenteeism as a way of seeking autonomy. Agervold and Mikkelsen (2004:338) affirm that employees exposed to bullying report more mental fatigue, psychological stress and psychosomatic symptoms when compared to employees who are not exposed to bullying. Clearly then, bullying needs to be actively managed along with other job stressors (Einarsen & Hoel, 2008:30); and the earlier the better.

2.4.8.2 Favouritism

Some individuals appear to be liked by superiors and to always have opportunities created for them (Webster & Beehr, 2013:922). At times it is because of close social or blood ties (Loewe, 2007:19). At other times those who are more efficient and competent in the labour force are the ones favoured by superiors (Ozler, 2011:276). Whatever the reasons for preferring some employees over others, the fact is favouritism almost always leads to tampering with the system due to illegal measures pursued. In other words, the processes, rules and policies will apply to some employees but not to others (Mogobe, 2011:36; Veinhardt & Kuklyte, 2017:209).

Favouritism lowers the morale of unfavoured individuals and is definitely counter-productive within the workplace; it is distressing to be under unprofessional supervisors who practice preferential treatment (Bute, 2011:187). Preferential treatment leads to deviant behavior such as absenteeism, even resignations (Uwannah, 2015:76). Excluded employees develop negative attitudes toward the job and lose confidence, and this impacts the human resource process negatively. Ignorant supervisors need to be trained on even handed supervisory skills (Chauke, 2007:122).

2.4.9 Gender

It is necessary to distinguish between males and females in the workplace because of their biological differences as well as sociocultural expectations. Women tend to have far more strenuous domestic and workplace roles, which predictably lead to higher

absence rates when compared to males (Egans, 2011:35). The two main jobs women have, namely home and career, are equally demanding and also tend to disadvantage women in the workplace since they will not easily ignore their family obligations (Beblo & Ortlieb, 2012:74). These onerous responsibilities cause not only absenteeism but fragility and illness (Robbins, 2009: 62).

Research conducted by Voss, Floderus and Diderichsen (2001:173) indicates that women and men react differently to strain and benefits, even in instances where they hold similar positions. This is in part because of different societal norms regarding female and male employees vis-à-vis absenteeism. Fortunately, rising educational levels among women, along with recent reforms within the labour market, in addition to social policy institutions, have all but eradicated the stereotyping of women employees (Beblo & Ortlieb, 2012:90). For instance, both father and mother are entitled to full parental leave.

These recent developments are significant because, for instance, employers who expect women to be absent from work more often for sickness reasons than men are less likely to hire women (Beblo & Ortlieb, 2012:74). Additionally, because women are more in touch with their psyches, they react quicker to negativity within an organisation. At times, women become absent in order to heal, to calm down from unpleasant situations at the workplace and to avoid confrontations. Another factor that ought not to be ignored is the reality of woman-headed single parent families and the impact that especially younger children have on women's ability to always be at work.

2.4.10 Level of Education

An employee's level of education is one of the contributors to workplace absenteeism. In general terms, workers with lower education levels tend to perform menial operational tasks that demand their permanent presence at work, thus deterring absenteeism (Restrepo & Salgado, 2013:405). Conversely, employees with higher levels of education obtain employment in senior positions where performance is judged by evaluations rather than being present at work. Moreover, lower levels of education lead to higher job insecurity, therefore people with lower level of education

are less likely to be absent (Sierra, 2001:20). The level of education is thus a predictor of workers' values and expectations (Steers, 1978:149).

Educational attainment may well elevate employees' professionalism and consequently enhance their level of responsibility and commitment to attendance. For instance, a perceived over qualification for one's job may lead one to believe that she or he does not need to work with others and should rather be granted more autonomy. When such employees are not given that opportunity to showcase themselves, they will engage in increasing withdrawal behaviours such as absenteeism. Employees with higher education levels are more likely to be absent from work than those with lower levels. Furthermore, the higher the levels of education, the more employees are prone to be ill because of the strain that comes from the responsibility and accountability of their positions.

2.4.11 Medical Condition

Sometimes employees are unable to cope with work as a result of long-term or short-term illness or health impairment. Most absences in organisations are as a result of sick leave, which might either be voluntary or involuntary depending on an employee's attitude. There is no doubt that individual medical conditions such as stress or poor health increase absenteeism (Darr & Johns, 2008:295; cf. Loeppke, Taitel, Haufle, Parry, Kessler & Jinnett, 2009:412). For Marzec, Scibelli and Edington (2015:16), there is not direct relationship between the degree of employee absenteeism and the number of medical conditions. The effect of a medical condition on absenteeism is exacerbated by excessive workload, unpleasant interpersonal relationships, lack of task control, role ambiguity, and unfair management practices (Darr & Johns, 2008:415).

Employees are entitled to sick leave, but misuse of this benefit costs employers dearly (Olsen, 2012:297). It does not help that employers are not entitled to full information on the actual health status of their employees (Lechman & Schnabel, 2014:387). That would not be such a problem if employees did not misreport their sickness (Shi & Skuterud, 2014:379). Apparently, however, absence behaviour is responsive to employees' financial incentives, whereby a dramatic rise in recovery ensues when the

sickness benefit insurance is exhausted (Markussen, Mykletun & Roed, 2010:279; Darr & Johns, 2008:294). Further, whereas medical conditions are expected to deteriorate with age, higher absence rates are noticed among young workers compared to older employees (Markussen, Mykletun & Roed, 2010:283). Therefore, an issue of gender and sickness absence needs to be treated carefully as it creates confusion. The stereotype that only employees with health conditions become absent has thus been dispelled.

2.4.12 Lack of Employee Performance Appraisal

A poorly structured performance system creates problems because it focuses on employee activities rather than on their outputs (Pan & Li, 2006:461). Such a system weakens workers' morale. A fuzzy performance appraisal system confuses and creates stress for employees instead of motivating (Locke & Latham, 2002:707). Appraisal plays a significant role in enhancing employee motivation thereby leading to improved performance. Therefore, it is essential to have a performance system that is not biased but is fair to every individual in the organisation, at the same time cultivating a sense of commitment and reducing levels of turnover and absenteeism (Lai-Wan, 2007:299). Recognising employees by taking into consideration their growth in an organisation makes employees feel valued.

2.4.13 Lack of Promotional Decisions

In addition to appraisal and attendant incentives, job advancement is another important factor in employee behaviour (Lam & Schaubroeck, 2000:67). When the promotion process is not conducted fairly, some employees feel undervalued by the organisation and may withdraw. Emotions arising as a result of promotional decisions can influence work attitudes, resulting in absenteeism and decline in performance among other things. An employee with less likelihood for promotion experiences low self-esteem, while employees who perceive higher chances of promotion tend to have self-esteem and pride in the knowledge that they are core employees (Carmeli, Shalom & Weisberg, 2007:196). Promotion needs to be granted on merit. At the same time, employees need to understand absenteeism will almost surely count against them during the promotion process.

2.4.14 Roles Conflict

Employees perform better when placed in roles they are passionate about. Role conflict is a state whereby an individual is expected to behave in the workplace in a manner that will violate his/her personal values (Brewer & Clippard, 2002:172). When an employee is not properly placed, this might lead to negative attitudes towards the job and work avoidance, which will affect relationships with other co-workers (Gil-Monte, 2012:232; 2005:118).

An individual who finds himself or herself in this state might develop feelings of guilt. Public sector work is taxing, emotionally and in other ways, therefore it requires that employees are rightly matched with their passions and capacities (Olivares-Faúndez, Gil-Monte, Mena, Jélvez-Wilke & Figueiredo-Ferraz, 2014:113). There is definitely a positive correlation between role conflict and burnout, and it often manifests in protracted absenteeism or staff turnover (Petitta & Vecchione, 2011:106). Confusion about one's role is exhausting and energy depleting.

2.5 ABSENCE AND ORGANISATIONAL POLICY

How an organisation deals with the issues of absenteeism gets detailed in its organisational policy (O'Reilly, 2010:961). Absence policy plays a pivotal role in ensuring that employees are aware of their leave entitlements as well as their responsibilities when taking leave. The policy's primary function is to overhaul the absence certification regulations and to encourage firms to make workplace environments more inclusive (Markussen, Mykletun & Roed, 2010:277). Absence control policies are a salient force for work attendance (Rhodes & Steers, 1990:58), but strict and punitive attendance management policies can make employees reluctant to take time off sick even in cases where they are genuinely ill (Deery, Walsh & Zatzick, 2014:355; Baker-McCleary, Greasley, Dale & Griffith, 2013:316).

Both inflexible organisational policies on absence (Roelen & Groothoff, 2010:245) and the threat of disciplinary action for absence (Gosselin, Corneil & Lemyre, 2013:75) can make employees neglect their health, which in many ways is their most important asset. In the process, employees' physical and psychological conditions worsen and

end up costing the organisation a lot more than sick leave might have cost. Also, employees who come to work when sick run the risk of spreading pathogens in the workplace, thereby increasing the number of employees that must ultimately take sick leave. Policies need to be revised and reviewed so that they focus chiefly on building employees' morale and well-being rather than merely enforcing attendance (Egan, 2011:67). Policies ought to be little more than guides and preventive measures to benefit both employers and employees.

2.6 ABSENTEEISM MANAGEMENT

The research question, 'In what ways can absenteeism be managed at the City of Tshwane?', is introduced in this section and addressed in greater detail in section 4.6 (*Managing absenteeism*) of Chapter 4. The theory is consequently applied to the case under study in Chapter 5, section 5.4.5 (*Management of absenteeism*). Absenteeism management refers to measures that an organisation institutes in order to reduce absence (Egan, 2011:8). It is to such measures that the study now turns.

2.6.1 Reliable Record Keeping

It is recommended that employers develop and maintain a detailed absenteeism record system (Kruger, Nel & Joubert, 2013:24). The record system include each employee's demographic details, absence dates, reasons for absence, and any other information that may be deemed useful. Furthermore, the system should be linked to the employers' occupational health records, but do so without compromising confidentiality. It is simply in the employer's interest to design and administer leave in a manner that supports the employee's need for time off and disability coverage on the one hand, and the employers' yearning for a cost-competitive benefit on the other (Harte, Mahieu, Mallett, Norville & VanderWerf, 2011:14). Dependable record keeping will assist the organisation in keeping track of employee absences in order to offer assistance and support to employees who require it. For example, record keeping will enable a supervisor to know when an employee has not taken a leave in a long time. Such an employee will be encouraged to take a leave in the interest of maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

2.6.2 Work-life Balance

Organisations that do not help their employees achieve a work-life balance will find it increasingly difficult to attract and retain the most capable and motivated employees who are less prone to absenteeism (Robbins, 2009:140). Several measures are at employers' disposal in regard to supporting work-life balance among employees. For example, employers can provide childcare services for employees' children (Anderson & Geldenhuys, 2011:26). Facilities such as adequately resourced employer-sponsored childcare will surely render absenteeism unnecessary (Anderson & Geldenhuys, 2011:40). Other measures available to employers include flexible work schedules and shift patterns that fit with social routines outside work (Martocchio & Harrison, 1993:28).

2.6.3 Employer Support

As the supervisor gets to understand the reasons that place an employee in a situation of absence, so too should the supervisors manage the absence tensions (Johns, 2011:485). Unsupportive supervisors manage employees that are more likely to default (Biron & Bamberger, 2012:903). Supportive managers are more likely to get beyond the façade of health problems as a cause for non-attendance and reach real underlying factors which tend to be of a social nature. Employers who care for their workforce would arrange employee assistance programmes to help employees to tackle the problems that prevent employees from being present and productive as expected (Egan, 2011:8). Employers who treat employees with respect and genuine care build positive relationships with employees, relationships in which absenteeism hardly features.

2.6.4 Employee Assistance Programmes

Employee assistance programmes play an important role in reducing absenteeism and enhancing productivity among the workforce (Harte, Mahieu, Mallett, Norville & VanderWerf, 2011:22). Such assistance programmes must of necessity prioritize employee wellness, from the financial to the psychological to the physical (Taylor, 2011:4). Non-work issues that employees bring to work deserve due attention from employers (Kocakulah, Kelly, Mitchell & Ruggieri, 2009:84). Healthier workplaces are

those in which trends impacting absenteeism and health plan costs have been articulated. A wellness programme that prevents illness while promoting a healthy lifestyle can go a long way towards creating an environment of high performance, lowering care costs and reducing absence.

Participation in wellness and financial programmes aids an employee to attain a healthy lifestyle, which in turn reduces absence as well as encourage early return-to-work (Taylor, 2011:6). Among managers, medical costs ought to always come second to the health of the workforce (Harte, Mahieu, Mallett, Norville & VanderWerf, 2011:15). An employee assistance programme is a platform offered to employees who are not coping with work, usually due to problems beyond their control. In such a programme employees are afforded an opportunity to share their problems with professionals who may then give learned advice as well as emotional support. Those employees who are on assistance programmes are closely monitored and admonished to take care of themselves in addition to optimally managing their finances.

2.6.5 Effective Communication

Absenteeism can be reduced through strategic actions focusing on the right company culture and assigning responsibility to the entire team (Cucchiella, Gastaldi & Ranieri, 2014:1165-1166). Strategic actions presuppose effective communication. Employees could be urged to report their intention to be absent well in advance, especially around the holidays. This will afford the employer adequate time to come up with strategies of how work will be done during an employee's absence. At the same time, the supervisor should be exemplary by not missing work. In other words, the supervisor too has to notify subordinates as soon as he/she becomes aware of an impediment to coming to work. Where effective communication exists, the supervisor has no trouble delegating duties so that services progress normally even in his/her absence. Regular communication of lucid absenteeism policies and rules is key.

2.6.6 Clear Policy on Absenteeism

Policy ought to reinforce an organisational culture of attendance, clarity of roles and clarity of processes and procedures (Taylor, 2010:26). Clear and unambiguous policy

needs to be understood and communicated throughout an organisation, and then be applied consistently and fairly. Conversely, without a clear and strong managerial commitment and direction, it is possible to have a culture where absenteeism is accepted as uncontrollable (Taylor, 2010:27). Moreover, managers need to familiarize themselves with the contents of the policy as well as the different types of absences in order not to cause confusion and practice segregation among employees. When employees have not been to work for a long time, a return-to-work interview will need to be conducted as a welcome gesture, and a means of establishing what may be expected from the returning employee going forward.

2.6.7 Return-to-work Policy

Organisations use the return-to-work policy in order to welcome and acclimatise an employee who has been away for a long time due to ill-health. Return-to-work interventions help employees feel valued, while at the same time the employer gets to know how to manage the recuperating employee. A well-crafted return-to-work policy with clear language regarding the transitional return-to-work duty programme can be a true asset to worker productivity (Harte, Mahieu, Mallett, Norville & VanderWerf, 2011:21). A successful return-to-work programme must include clearly defined job description that unpacks the cognitive and physical demands of a job. Careful planning and management of the return-to-work process can make a difference; they reintegrate employees into the workplace, and help employers regain normal productivity levels with limited interruption (Taylor, 2011:8).

Employees and sectors with higher sick leave rates need to be identified by the organisation's occupational health personnel (Taimela, 2013:522), following which the latter may direct their efforts at the provision of proper mechanical care, counselling and modification to mitigate sickness absence or facilitate a meaningful return-to-work situation (Hoefsmit, Houkes & Nijhuis, 2012:463). The Bradford factor is a relevant tool for absence management and is essential for accurately predicting future absence (Alexopoulos, 2015:149). It analyses the sickness absence quality, frequency and duration (Taylor, 2010:20).

2.7 CONSEQUENCES OR EFFECTS OF ABSENTEEISM

The research question ‘What are the consequences or effects of absenteeism to the City of Tshwane?’ is answered in this section and in the relevant follow-up section 5.4.4 (*Consequences or effects of absenteeism*) in Chapter 5.

Besides its high costs (Wright & Pandey, 2010:26), absenteeism impacts both individual and organisational performance. Reduced work quality, overtime and temporary staffing are but some of the costs incurred by employers. Employers incur further costs by paying an employee even when they are not at work as a result of sickness, personal leave and paid holidays (Harte, Mahieu, Mallett, Norville & VanderWerf, 2011:18-19). Absenteeism not only damages the workflow and manpower planning in the workplace, but also reduces production efficiency which affects an organisation’s competitiveness.

Whether deliberate or not, absenteeism bears negative consequences for an organisation due to the costs incurred as a result of non-attendance. Absenteeism patterns need to be attended to when identified; ignoring them allows opportunists to manipulate the system. Although employees use absenteeism in order to run away from an unpleasant working environment and to heal from ill-treatment at work, absenteeism does not eradicate those problems encountered by employees at work. Instead, absenteeism may lead to disciplinary hearings and possible dismissals, bad attendance records, and strained working relations. Ultimately, an organisation’s competitive edge is also compromised by delays in the provision of services occasioned by absenteeism.

2.8 SUMMARY

Absenteeism is an ongoing problem in employment. Various sources have indicated that employers have been trying to fight this propensity among some employees; but due to a lack of reliable systems the rate of absenteeism has continued to rise. Thankfully, there now exist tracking systems that may be linked across various internal departments. In this chapter, absenteeism was defined, and its causes were also explored to understand what is driving an employee to take a decision not to come to

work. Because of absenteeism's crippling cost to organisations, various management intervention strategies for combating the problem were indicated.

The place of sound policy and proper recording procedures in absence management cannot be overstated. Effective communication is essential to ensuring that employees understand their roles and the ramifications of absenteeism to both the employer and the employee. Constant monitoring of absences in the workplace is the responsibility of the manager and supervisor; on the other hand an employee's responsibility is to limit absences that are not legitimate. Employees who are prone to absence have to be identified and interviewed to investigate the real cause of their absence, then appropriate interventions should follow. Absenteeism issues need to be handled delicately and fairly by supervisors and managers, without rushing to corrective action against an employee.

The current study evaluates the effectiveness of the City of Tshwane's absence policy in managing absenteeism and encouraging attendance. An effective policy on absenteeism has to be written in simple language, regularly communicated to employees, and constantly revised. An unclear policy brings confusion to the entire team, thereby affecting compliance. The policy on absence needs to accommodate management level employees who often work from home. Similarly, lower level employees also have to feel incentivised even in absence management processes.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

By means of an in-depth literature review the previous chapter sought to understand absenteeism. Expressly highlighted were conditions around the legitimacy or otherwise of absenteeism, antecedents and consequences of absenteeism, plus the influence of absenteeism policy on monitoring attendance compliance. The chapter also included an overview on the management of absenteeism, emphasis being laid on the keeping of proper records. With the literature review completed, attention now turns to research design and methodology before data analysis and findings are presented.

3.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To evaluate the City of Tshwane's human resource policy for managing absenteeism, the research focused on the causes of absenteeism at the City as well as on its absence management policy. The study's objectives are: (1) to investigate the meaning of absenteeism in the context of the City of Tshwane; (2) to evaluate the causes of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane; (3) to establish types and patterns of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane; (4) to identify and analyse the consequences or effects of absenteeism on the City of Tshwane; (5) to analyse the current human resource policy relating to the management of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane; and (6) to identify and analyse challenges relating to the management of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane. Taken together, these objectives assist in addressing the study's main research problem.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

Various research approaches can be brought to bear on any research study depending on the research problem and objectives as well as the type of data to be collected. So, quantitative research generally produces numerical analysis (Curtis &

Curtis, 2011:6; Hlongwane, 2013:62). Qualitative research on the other hand produces findings by focusing on themes that emerge from people's perspectives and experiences (Martella & Nelson, 1999:258; Paile, 2012:44). Mixed methods research combines qualitative and quantitative methods in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the research project (Schutt, 2016:163).

However, this study adopted a qualitative research method in its quest to understand the causes of absenteeism and how absenteeism is being managed at the City of Tshwane. The qualitative approach facilitated analysis of the participants' opinions and perceptions about the topic under study. The experiences, views and opinions of selected employees were obtained so as to understand workplace absenteeism at the City of Tshwane. The data analysis was done in a descriptive and unbiased manner. Now that the approaches of research have been distinguished, a clear exposition of each approach can be provided.

3.3.1 Qualitative Research Approach

Gomm (2004:7) rightly observes that qualitative research is interested in investigating how people experience the world or how to make sense out of it. Participants' viewpoints plus their experiences and knowledge comprise the data (Brinkmann, 2012:21). Interacting with participants and institutions reveals more than just what they divulge; it affords disclosure of participants' values, rituals, symbols, beliefs and emotions (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996:286). Qualitative research, therefore, tries to understand and describe a phenomenon so that it makes sense in real-world contexts.

Additionally, themes that emerge from participants' stories are important to qualitative researchers (Bernard, 2013:393). These non-quantifiable themes (Franklin 2012:9) are not inimical to numeric data (Gray, 2009:202). The selection process must be informed by the relevant expertise of potential participants, thereby ensuring that selected participants add value to the research. In this instance, the staff of the Leave Capturing Office, the custodian of managing absenteeism at the City of Tshwane, were targeted. The participants' account of how they view a variety of themes relating to

unauthorised absenteeism are taken into consideration. Absence management is thus the research's recurrent theme.

Furthermore, qualitative research tends to adopt an inductive approach in order to explore a selected topic in terms of general classifications and measurements (David & Sutton, 2004:42). The qualitative researcher also has to observe linkages between subjective information from participants and empirical facts like body language (Bernard, 2013:11). The observations must then be collated with the sentiments echoed when answering the interview questions.

Sufficient contact with the study's subjects is irreplaceable (Blaikie, 2010:214). Equally vital are open-ended questions asked in the same sequence in a range of interviews; this assists in maintaining the consistency of the research data (Rajin, 2012:36). While striving to maintain professionalism during interviews, the researcher set aside thirty minutes for each individual interview, scheduled for time slots that best suited concerned participants (David & Sutton, 2004:87).

Qualitative research involves triangulation (Flick, 1998:50), which entails selecting several appropriate research methods and perspectives within a single study (Christensen, Johnson & Turner, 2011:52). Triangulation is often used to indicate that two (or more) methods are used in a study to check the results of one and the same subject. Triangulation thus minimizes error where diverse measures of a phenomenon overlap (Crano, Brewer & Lac, 2015:12).

3.3.2 Quantitative Research Approach

In contrast to the qualitative method, quantitative research describes numerical trends through the process of coding for purposes of testing a hypothesis (Gray, 2009:131). Quantitative research thus uses figures to describe research subjects and measurable sets of variables without providing detailed explanations of the concepts of the research (Gilbert & Stoneman, 2016:82). Representativeness is preferred to detailed descriptions regarding a specific phenomenon (Guthrie, 2010:167).

Quantitative research is composed of experimental and observational research (Perri & Bellany, 2012:70). Experimental research produces results that are objective, valid

and replicable, while an observational research focuses on generating ideas regarding certain behaviours or trends (Gray, 2009:131; Guthrie, 2010:109). All this implies that quantitative research results are not influenced by personal views, but based on measuring a hypothesis. The quantitative research relies on measuring exactly what it is supposed to measure, and then ultimately producing exact results.

Quantitative research thus values precision and loathes ambiguity. For that reason, detailed rules that governs statistical data analysis characterize this method. Given the insistence on statistical precision, quantitative approaches are often used to predict future events (Gilbert & Stoneman, 2016:87; Greenfield, 2002:247). This study's desire to describe in detail the causes and consequences of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane meant that the quantitative approach was not required. Nevertheless, some integration of qualitative and quantitative methods becomes essential in certain instances of the research process.

3.3.3 Mixed Methods Approach

The use of dissimilar sets of instruments to answer research questions that defy simplistic solutions (Williams & Vogt, 2011:249) often necessitates the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Mixed methods are used in order to increase the accuracy of research findings and to increase the researcher's chances of developing new knowledge by investigating many aspects of a phenomena. In such cases, the researcher's preferred method comes first in the code QUAL-QUAN or QUAN-QUAL (Schutt, 2016:164). Mixed methods further dismantle scholarly stereotypes that exaggerate the value of either qualitative or quantitative approaches, thereby inhibiting knowledge and flexibility in research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010:97-98). Mixed methods encourage a responsive and open-minded attitude when addressing issues in research (Plowright, 2011:7). In mixed methods paradigms complement each other in order to obtain a comprehensive data.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The main research questions guiding this study are: 'What are the causes of absenteeism at City of Tshwane?' and 'How does the municipality manage

absenteeism?'. While the first question focuses on factors that encourage absenteeism, the second question looks into the existing human resource policy relating to the management of absenteeism. The question that the present section answers is: 'What were the plans that guided the researcher as she went about the process of generating data?'

A study's research design ought to guide a research project by the setting in which the research is undertaken, the relevant variables to be taken into consideration, and whether or not the researcher controls or manipulates critical features of the situation under study (Crano, Brewer & Lac, 2015:18; Blaikie, 2010:13). Designing a research study involves scientific mapping of a research project through the use of appropriate research methods and instruments. A research design thus entails the total strategy for investigating and connecting the theoretical perspective with the problem through data collection (Madibana, 2010:40).

Case study design was followed in this study. A case study research design conducts empirical research by collecting evidence from a particular instance of a phenomenon under review (Robson, 2011:136). Case study research therefore hardly makes sweeping generalizations; it rather concentrates on the specificity of a situation or organisation (Thomas, 2011:3). For this study, which sought an in-depth understanding of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane, a single case study research design was thus applicable; the focus of the study was City of Tshwane, specifically the Leave Capturing Office.

In social science research, three forms of case studies are classified on the basis of their purpose (Olsen, 2012:83), namely, explanatory case study, cross case studies and descriptive case study. An explanatory case study, as Dale-Olsen (2012:183) explains, provides richness in the way meanings and theories are found and data interpreted. Cross case synthesis involves a number of cases studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon and the population (Thomas, 2011:141). A cross case synthesis demands more effort and a team of researchers, rather than one investigator to guarantee strong results (Yin, 2012:131). Each case is still granted due credit and be appreciated in its rights compared to other cases. A descriptive case study, presents a complete description of a phenomena that was studied (Johns, 2011:8).

Descriptive case studies are the least demanding skills wise (Yin 2012:49). This study is fundamentally descriptive, striving to obtain rich data analysis to validate its findings and recommendations.

Case study research design favours qualitative research instruments, such as interviews and document analysis, due to the intensive and detailed examination of a particular case (Bryman, 2008:53). That is to say, case study research design is ideal when “how” and “why” questions are being asked about contemporary events. In line with these arguments. This study followed the example of Mogobe (2011:43) who applied a case study research design in order to gain an in-depth understanding of how workplace absenteeism is managed in an institution of higher learning by studying the inputs of line-managers.

Three things are critical to case study research design (Kruger & Mitchell, 2005:194). First, the case study should be demarcated; secondly, whichever data collection instruments are being used, the focus should not be on the individual participants but on inductively reaching findings; finally, triangulation should form an integral part of the research design. In pursuit of these characteristics of case study design, this study’s data collection endeavours included semi-structured interviews, audio recordings plus the researcher’s notes. The present study also sought to emulate Boshego (2012:65) who employed a case study design in the research about the management of partial absenteeism and late coming at Tshwane West public secondary schools. Only a few schools were selected out of Tshwane West’s many public secondary schools. The rationale for choosing a case study still demands uniqueness and singleness of a particular case.

3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

A research population comprises a group of participants about whom the research intends to generalize the results of the study (Salkind, 2012:95). Whether it is individuals, events, objects or cases that are of interest to the researcher, whichever population the researcher settles on must have similar characteristics and a common understanding of the issues under investigation (Williams & Vogt, 2011:446). Because

it is often not possible to interrogate the entire population due to its large size or the researcher's lack of resources in addition to time constraints, samples are more frequently selected from the population. Once the population has been defined, a sampling frame must be identified, allowing the researcher to make a choice from different samples that are representative of the entire population (Paile, 2012:45).

Reducing the population to smaller and more manageable units (Greenfield, 2002:186), makes the collection of information easier to rationalize (Bless, Higson-Smit & Sithole, 2013:161). Representative samples facilitate time sensitive and cost effective drawing of detailed information (Gray, 2009:148). For Hlomela (2013:37), it was necessary to exclude only those who are in management positions from the research into the extent of an absenteeism problem at De Aar hospital. Every case is attended by circumstances that guide the researcher in regard to who to include in the sample.

In this research, the population comprises City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality employees. But the municipality consists of a vast number of departments, a manageable and reachable sample was selected from the most applicable section and sub-unit, namely the Human Resource Benefits Unit. Still, the selected unit comprises employees who specialise in different functions at different locations, resulting in the sample being further narrowed down to the Leave Capturing Office. The staff of the Leave Capturing Office had been selected as the sample because of their similar characteristics among the entire population of the Human Resource Benefits Unit. Table 3.1 below illustrates the staff composition of the Leave Capturing Office, within the Human Resource Benefits Unit.

DESIGNATION	NUMBER
Human Resource benefits specialist	1
Senior Human Resource officer	1
Human Resource officers	2
Administration officers	6

Table 3.1: Approved Staff Composition for 2017 for the Leave Capturing Office
(Source: City of Tshwane, 2017a)

As illustrated in Table 3.1, the Leave Capturing Office under the Human Resource Benefits Unit is composed of ten staff members in addition to the functional head located within the Human Resource Management. The Leave Capturing Office is tasked with enforcing human resource policy rules and regulations at the municipality under study. Leave Capturing Office staff are mainly responsible for capturing leave applications from all sections of the City of Tshwane. As a sample, the Leave Capturing Office staff are of reasonable size and possess extensive familiarity with the dynamics surrounding leave use at the City.

3.5.1 Sampling Strategies

Sampling strategies influence the research to take a particular direction. These include the probability sampling and non-probability sampling.

3.5.1.1 Probability Sampling

With probability sampling, there is a reasonable chance that any member of the population will form part of the sampling as determined by the randomness rules (Salkind, 2012:96; Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013:166). Probability sampling affords all potential participants an equal chance of forming part of the study (Motsoeneng, 2011:43). These types of probability sampling are simple random, stratified random, systematic, and cluster sampling (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005:56). Since each member of the population has a chance to represent the entire population, probability sampling thus boasts an immense capacity for representativeness and generalizability (Creswell, 2014:158).

3.5.1.2 Non-probability Sampling

On the other hand, non-probability sampling refers to an informed selection of particular subjects based on the researcher's perceived suitability of the selected cases (May, 2011:100). Non-probability sampling is thus more appropriate and more practical than probability sampling, despite its massive susceptibility to bias (Singleton & Straits, 2005:135). Since not all members of a population have an equal chance of participating in the research, non-probability sampling requires much larger populations than probability sampling (Bernard, 2013:162).

Types of non-probability sampling include purposive sampling, snowball sampling and quota sampling (May, 2011:100). Purposive sampling enables decisive selection of sample (Greenfield, 2002:189). Purposive sampling targets participants who are knowledgeable and familiar with the topic under study (Nkoane, 2015:25). Purposive sampling thus resonated with the present research study. The sample comprised persons with expert judgment on absenteeism.

3.6 INTERVIEWS AS DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

Data collection entails a process of arranging and organising the actual data to be used for a study (Salkind, 2012:155). Christensen, Johnson and Turner (2011:54) emphasize that data collection is a point where a researcher puts his/her ideas together, test the ideas and interact with the participants through interviews to elicit data without being biased. Data collection also entails a thorough document analysis to get an understanding of a particular situation (David & Sutton, 2011:159). Interviews are favoured instruments of data collection as they enable the researcher to achieve intended goals within a short period of time (Guthrie, 2010:118). The only statements an interviewer makes during an interview are prompting questions (Olsen, 2012:34). An interviewer will pose questions, listen, capture responses, and at the same time take note of the interviewee's body language. Permission must be sought from interviewees for the use of audio recording devices as well as handwritten notes. Interview notes must subsequently be translated into meaningful data (Gray, 2009:213; Henn, Weinstein & Foard, 2006:164).

This code of conduct for collecting data was adhered to in this study. A set of pre-planned questions were asked during the interviews. Questions were asked to all the participants in the same sequence so as to maintain consistency. At the same time, notes were taken of participants' views and opinions regarding the phenomenon of absenteeism. In order to maintain privacy, face-to-face interviews were conducted in each participant's own office space. Contents of official documents were referred to during interviews in order to yield valid and reliable qualitative data. Interviews thus enable the gathering of as much data as possible from the views, opinions and experiences of participants. There are three types of interviews, namely, unstructured

interviews, structured interviews and semi-structured interviews (May, 2011:132). Each type will be briefly defined in the following section, although the current research made use of only semi-structured interviews since they are systematic and pre-planned but flexible (Olsen, 2012:34). Refer to Annexure F for an excerpt of an interview transcription of one of the interviews conducted as part of this research.

3.6.1 Types of Interviews

According to Curtis and Curtis (2011:47), an interview is a social and neutral setting for information extraction where the interviewer asks questions to develop knowledge and the interviewee responds by answering. Wengraf (2001:4) stipulates that interviews can either be ritualized, heavily formatted by custom, or they can be more explanatory, uncertain and potentially innovative. It is imperative that information be required about first-hand knowledge of people's perceptions, views and feelings (Salkind, 2012:198), and interviews facilitate this.

Moreover, interviewing increases the researcher's skill, mindset and build a personal rapport with the world being researched (Janesick, 2011:99). However, interviews can have negative effects on participants, especially in instances where sensitive information is required (Dunne, Pryor & Yates, 2005:29). For this reason, information communicated between an interviewer and interviewee should not be revealed to anyone. Also, participants' identities must always be protected. Nevertheless, interviews allow participants to explain issues in their own words, and there is ample freedom to ask questions for clarity or to follow up on unclear statements (Kgaphola, 2010:52).

3.6.1.1 Unstructured Interviews

Unstructured interviews thrive on letting people open up and express themselves in any terms that feel comfortable to them and at their own pace. The researcher thus has minimal control over the responses of the participants (Bernard, 2013:182). This approach is useful when a researcher seeks to dig deeper into a problem by finding alternative ways that might be relevant for the topic (Berg, 1998:61). While informal, unstructured interview can elicit in-depth knowledge (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005:166), especially if the interviewer is experienced. An experienced interviewer will

restrict too wide departures from the research topic (Alvesson, 2011:9). One of the inimitable advantages of unstructured interviewing is its ability to challenge some of the researcher's preconceptions (May, 2011:136).

3.6.1.2 Structured Interviews

In stark contrast to unstructured interviews, structured interviews boast uniformity which enables quick and easy administration and processing (Thomas, 2013:197). There are thus restrictions on the questions to be asked, which facilitates easy identification of themes. This means that research themes of similar meaning can be put together to obtain a substantive data. The interviewer carries a heavier burden of responsibility here than in unstructured interviews (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005:166).

3.6.1.3 Semi-structured Interviews

Sensibly, semi-structured interviews draw on the strengths of both the structured and unstructured questioning techniques (May, 2011:136). Semi-structured interviews seek to obtain description of the world around an interviewee, through interpreting meaning of described phenomena (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015:150). Semi-structured interviews deploy free communication between an interviewer and an interviewee, while questions relevant to the research will be asked following a pre-planned order. In other words, semi-structured interviews allow for maximum flexibility and are often associated with small-scale non-probability sampling and qualitative analysis (Singleton & Straits, 2005:222). Furthermore, themes covered in semi-structured interviews are relatively broad but flexible, providing considerable space for interviewers to bring up what they view as relevant to the deeper exploration of the study question (Alvesson, 2011:53). Semi-structured interviews come into their own in qualitative research approach (Barnard, 2013:182), as they facilitate the acquisition of objective information about probable causes of absenteeism (Kgaphola, 2010:47). Questions asked in semi-structured interviews are directed towards answering the research problem through making the most of the opinions and views of the participants. A semi-structured interview, therefore, is an open discussion that is fairly neatly arranged.

While the researcher has room to probe for more detailed responses, he/she remains in control of the interview process by constructively dismissing irrelevant topics (Gray, 2009:382). Ferrell (2005:17) successfully used semi-structured interviews to explore core issues relating to absenteeism. This study too employed semi-structured interviews to obtain in-depth understanding of the causes of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane as well as how the municipality manages absenteeism. Participants enjoyed the freedom to voice out their concerns with regard to absenteeism while the researcher controlled the interview at all times by asking prepared questions. Probing questions which are related to the topic were asked in order to obtain as much data as possible and to clarify matters immediately in addition to the interviewer being able to detect how participants felt about the topic.

3.6.2 Ensuring Validity and Reliability of Interviews

Validity of an interview, that is, whether an interview attains the truth of a matter under study (Henn, Weinstein & Foard, 2006:176), is established by ensuring that the method investigates what it is supposed to investigate (Olsen, 2012:15). Truth in this connection is constituted through dialogue between interviewer and interviewee when unearthing relations between methods and the phenomena being investigated (Kvale, 1996:238). The interviewers' precise understanding of issues is a critical factor for validity. Reliability refers to the consistency of the study's findings even if the study were to be conducted by a different person (Olsen, 2012:15). For this reason, it is essential that accurate notes are taken during an interview and documented (Greener, 2011:105; Henn, Weinstein & Foard, 2006:177) should a need arise to repeat the study. The researcher anticipates that should this study's interviews be repeated with the same participants, using similar questions, it will yield the same results.

3.7 FRAMEWORK FOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The framework for the interview questions is summarised in Table 3.2. Although the framework informed the contents of the interview questions, the responses were not limited to it and the participants were encouraged to elaborate on their answers.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	RESEARCH OBJECTIVE	RESEARCH QUESTION	SECTION IN LITERATURE REVIEW
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How do you understand workplace absenteeism in the context of City of Tshwane?</i> • <i>How is absenteeism viewed as a worker's strategy to run away from an aversive work conditions?</i> • <i>In which context is absenteeism regarded as a habitual behavior at work?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To investigate the meaning of absenteeism in the context of the City of Tshwane. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the meaning of absenteeism in the workplace? 	<p>Chapter 1</p> <p>Section 1.2 (<i>Background and rationale for the study</i>)</p> <p>Chapter 2:</p> <p>Section 2.2 (<i>Absenteeism defined</i>)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In your opinion, what are the causes of absenteeism?</i> • <i>How do you think management style affects employee attendance?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To evaluate the causes of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which main causes of absenteeism need to be considered when managing absenteeism at the City of Tshwane? 	<p>Chapter 2:</p> <p>Section 2.4: (<i>Antecedents of absenteeism</i>)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What patterns of workplace absenteeism are prevailing at City of Tshwane?</i> • <i>How do the issues such as qualifications and gender influence absenteeism in the workplace?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To establish types and patterns of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types and patterns of absenteeism are prevalent in the City of Tshwane? 	<p>Chapter 4</p> <p>Section 4.5 (<i>Policy guiding absenteeism at City of Tshwane</i>)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In your opinion how does absenteeism affect the municipality?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify and analyse the consequences or effects of absenteeism to the City of Tshwane. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the consequences or effects of absenteeism to the City of Tshwane? 	<p>Chapter 2:</p> <p>Section 2.7 (<i>Consequences or effects of absenteeism</i>)</p>

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	RESEARCH OBJECTIVE	RESEARCH QUESTION	SECTION IN LITERATURE REVIEW
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How does the policy on absenteeism assist in controlling and managing absenteeism?</i> • <i>In your opinion does the policy on absenteeism serves its purposes?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To analyse the existing human resource policy relating to the management of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways can absenteeism be managed at the City of Tshwane? 	<p>Chapter 2: Section 2.6 (<i>Absenteeism management</i>)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are the challenges experienced regarding the management of absenteeism?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify and analyse challenges relating to the management of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What challenges do the City of Tshwane face in managing absenteeism? 	<p>Chapter 1 Section 1.4 (<i>Problem statement and research questions</i>)</p> <p>Chapter 2: Section 2.5 (<i>Influence of organisational policy on absence</i>) Section 2.6 (<i>Absenteeism management</i>)</p>

Table 3.2: Framework for Interviews

The above table highlighted the relationship between the interview questions, research objectives, research questions and the literature review. While the contents of Chapter 2 form the theoretical foundation of the interview questions, specific sections were highlighted for easier referencing.

3.8 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS AS DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

Documents preserve traces of thoughts and actions of people from previous times (Scott, 1990:10). Document analysis thus entails collecting documents, analysing texts and resolving disputes in academic papers (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003:68). Document analysis seeks to determine the attitudes and emotions of the speaker or writer when describing a certain scenario or event. Composed of secondary data and primary data, document analysis is essentially formal, systematic and resembles a well-structured research (Gilbert & Stoneman, 2016:506).

Consequently, the data gathered from document analysis is non-obstructive and examined without personal contact with people (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2010:220; Gray, 2009:502). Prior (2003:21) highlights that document analysis concentrates on the frequency with which words and themes appear in a document. Moreover, documents possess complex accessibility designs in order to protect sensitivity of the information contained in them. Accessibility is a real challenge for users generally speaking (Scott, 1990:14), and so too is knowing which documents to use to elicit rich and relevant study without duplication (Verhoeven, 2011:148).

In this study, only documents that directly address absenteeism were consulted. Organisational documents such as management of absenteeism guidelines, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997, the Bargaining Level Agreement as well as the Collective Agreement in terms of the Bargaining Levels of the City of Tshwane, were used. These documents have always been available on City of Tshwane's intranet to educate and make employees aware about absenteeism. Other documents consulted in this study to supplement the interviews included journals, articles, books, dissertations and theses within Public Administration and other disciplines. Once transcribed, the notes taken during an interview also formed part of the secondary

sources. In addition, adequate official statistics and figures were made available to the researcher by the City of Tshwane (see Figures 5.1 & 5.2 anon).

3.9 ETHICS CLEARANCE

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained in August 2017 prior to data collection from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Department of Public Administration and Management of the University of South Africa (see Annexure A). Ethical considerations, as defined in Chapter 1, concern the moral standards required of anyone conducting a research study. Every researcher must be aware of acceptable norms and values, as well as of behaviours that are unacceptable when conducting research (Mouton, 2001:238). These considerations are necessary for the protection of the participants and the data collected (Swanborn, 2009:57). Furthermore, each participant should be respected by paying attention to what they are saying without prejudice, in addition to letting them ask questions where clarity is required. It matters then how the researcher conducts himself or herself towards the participants and the data (Gray, 2009:68).

People react differently to issues. Therefore it is crucial that the researcher understands the population to be interviewed, in order to avoid sensitive questions that may force participants to withdraw. In addition to compliance with ethical conduct, the researcher has the obligation to communicate any potential ethical problems associated with the study and make suggestions on how to overcome them (Hofstee, 2011:118). Participants must be made aware of any participation risks, if applicable. Moreover, the researcher should not provide false statements and make empty promises to the participants in order to lure them into participating. In a nutshell, a researcher has to be honest about the purpose and process of the research.

In this study, every effort was undertaken to comply with ethical research conduct as endorsed by the University of South Africa. Permission was granted by the City of Tshwane to conduct the research at their premises with their employees (see Annexure B). The City further granted the researcher access to official documents relating to absenteeism. An interview with each participant lasted for about thirty minutes. Before proceeding with an interview, the interviewer ensured that the

participant understood the purpose of the study, the benefits as well as the techniques that would be used to collect data. Participants were also reminded of their inalienable right to withdraw from the study at any time, should they feel that they no longer want to be part of the study. Several ethical principles informed the study.

3.9.1 Avoiding Harm to Participants

Present research required participants to express their views and opinions regarding work-related issues, some which included criticizing their organisation. Participants had to navigate these uncomfortable situations, with assurance that there was no potential for ill-treatment, intimidation and alienation by others. To avoid harm to participants, it is useful to pilot the interview questions (Gilbert & Stoneman, 2016:208). During the pilot, the questions are tested to assess how the pilot group feel and respond when such questions are posed. Piloting the interview questions minimises risk to participants while also assisting the researcher to improve the quality of the questions. Interviewees should never feel cornered by any questions raised (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2010:56). It is therefore important that the questions asked during an interview are kept simple and to the point. Once all these precautions have been taken, informed consent (see Annexure D) can be sought from participants alongside a well-crafted participant information sheet (Annexure C).

3.9.2 Participant Information Sheets and Informed Consent Forms

In social science disciplines, both a participant information sheet and an informed consent form must be prepared and submitted to the participants prior to conducting research. The participant information sheet explains the purpose of the study and highlights the protection of the research subjects and data. It is a platform through which the researcher introduces himself/herself to the participants (Creswell, 2014:96).

Once the participant information sheet has clarified matters vis-à-vis the study, participants may or may not agree to sign informed consent forms. However, consent forms do not imprison participants, the latter are still free to withdraw at any time (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2010). Curtis and Curtis (2011:14) and De Vaus (2001:246) further explain that voluntary consent is the most essential research ethics element as it minimises the risk of harming the participants during data collection. In addition,

Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996:79) emphasize that consent forms need to be signed, since research exposes participants to invasion of privacy. Neuman (2011:135) adds that it is not sufficient to obtain permission from participants, they also need to know exactly what it is that they are participating in order to make informed decisions.

3.9.3 Avoiding Deception

It is critical that participants are informed about the true situation and all possible risks associated with participating in a given research study (Robson, 2011:205). It is therefore the responsibility of the researcher to inform the participants about the purpose of the study as well as the duration of the research. Additionally, falsification of data is a serious transgression of the research code of ethics (Mouton, 2001:152). Where participants are promised rewards in exchange for participation in a study, that promise has to be fulfilled without undue delay.

3.9.4 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Individuals become reluctant to participate in any study because of fear of being ridiculed, dismissed at work or their working relations being negatively affected should it be known that they revealed certain information about an organisation. In these cases, the individual participants usually lack knowledge about the ethical guidelines and principles to be followed. Such participants need to be assured that the information they provided during the study will be kept confidential and not communicated to anyone unrelated to the research process (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013:32). Data collected during a study must further be handled with extreme care and kept under secure conditions. Moreover, confidentiality extends beyond not naming the participants and not providing their identity even when pestered to do so. Confidentiality also implies that the researcher must use codes or numbers as identifiers instead of participants' actual names (Robson, 2011:208).

Anonymity is guaranteed when any trace of participants' identity is thus removed (Swanborn, 2009:342). In fact, anonymity is achieved only when even the researcher cannot link a given response to any particular respondent (Ndhlovu, 2012:37). Despite these measures, the researcher has to refrain from making unrealistic promises with regard to confidentiality, as research results often have to be communicated to the

institution that granted permission. When all the necessary data relating to the research has been gathered, it ought to be collated and interpreted. The following section is thus about data analysis and interpretation.

3.10 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION PROCESS

Data in their raw state do not provide sufficient evidence (Robson, 2011:408). Raw information has to be analysed and interpreted. To this end, similar themes and concepts obtained from different interviews are compared during qualitative data analysis (Gilbert & Stoneman, 2016:292). Qualitative data analysis involves the identification and breaking down of themes and words into segments, thereby providing manageable and meaningful topics, trends, patterns and relationships (Mouton, 2001:108). In order to obtain such relationships, similar concepts have to be collated and their importance underscored. Robson (2011:461) points out that the researcher has to ensure that, after being segmented, data collected is labelled, stored, edited and cleaned up. In this way, the data will be retrievable and understandable for easy analysis both immediately and much later on.

3.11 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the research objectives were used as guide for the researcher to focus on the appropriate methods of collecting data. Explanations why qualitative research approach was adopted have been proffered. The same was done for the study's adoption of the case study research design with a descriptive slant. Though qualitative, several data collection instruments are applied simultaneously. For example, document analysis and interviews were complemented by note-taking, audio recordings and close observation of the participants' physical and psychological reactions towards certain questions.

The above approach enabled the researcher to obtain an in-depth understanding of elements under study and to elicit relevant data. Hundred percent of all the staff of the Leave Capturing Office at the City of Tshwane selected as participants responded. The semi-structured interview technique allowed the participants to communicate freely and at the same time maintaining order during the interviews so that time would

not be wasted on information that would not benefit the study. Participants were thoroughly briefed about the purpose of the study, and were reassured that information provided would not be communicated to any unaffected person. Useful documents were received from the City of Tshwane, from which themes were identified and described to generate meaningful insights.

Every effort was made to adhere to ethical standards, and the researcher assured the participants of their anonymity as well as confidentiality of the information provided. A copy of the final dissertation will be handed to the City of Tshwane to consider the recommendations for possible implementation, and for archiving in their internal study office. Employees might then use it as a reference point in dealing with issues pertaining to absenteeism at the City of Tshwane.

CHAPTER 4: MANAGEMENT OF ABSENTEEISM AT CITY OF TSHWANE METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter highlighted the methodology used in gathering the research data as well as the ethical issues observed to ensure that information is gathered in a responsible manner. Chapter 4 provides a brief overview of the case under study, the City of Tshwane. The legislative framework governing the municipality is described along with the functions, divisions and standards in place at the municipality. The chapter then concludes with a look into the City's absenteeism management policies and procedures.

4.2 CITY OF TSHWANE IN PERSPECTIVE

Given its apartheid history, South Africa is no stranger to unfair discrimination and inequality. The unfortunate heritage of apartheid is entrenched in the social structures and attitudes at the workplaces of most South Africans, regularly causing employee dissatisfaction (Banks, Patel & Moola, 2012:402). The struggle to provide equal opportunities for all since 1994 (Kotze, 2004:25) meant that the divisions typical of the apartheid regime were dismantled. The City of Tshwane nestled in the Gauteng Province, to the north of Johannesburg. The province's 18 176 square km surface area hosts a population of 12,12 million persons.

The historical Sesotho name Gauteng means "place of gold" in acknowledgment of this area's role as South Africa's economic hub, thanks to the discovery of natural minerals. People from various homelands and different countries flocked here to work for their families, eventually making Gauteng their home. The province has sophisticated sectors such as finance, manufacturing, set-up shops and mining. The capital town of the Gauteng province is Johannesburg, while Pretoria as its neighboring city, is the capital of the Republic of South Africa. Below is a map of the Gauteng Province that illustrates the population density of the City of Tshwane.

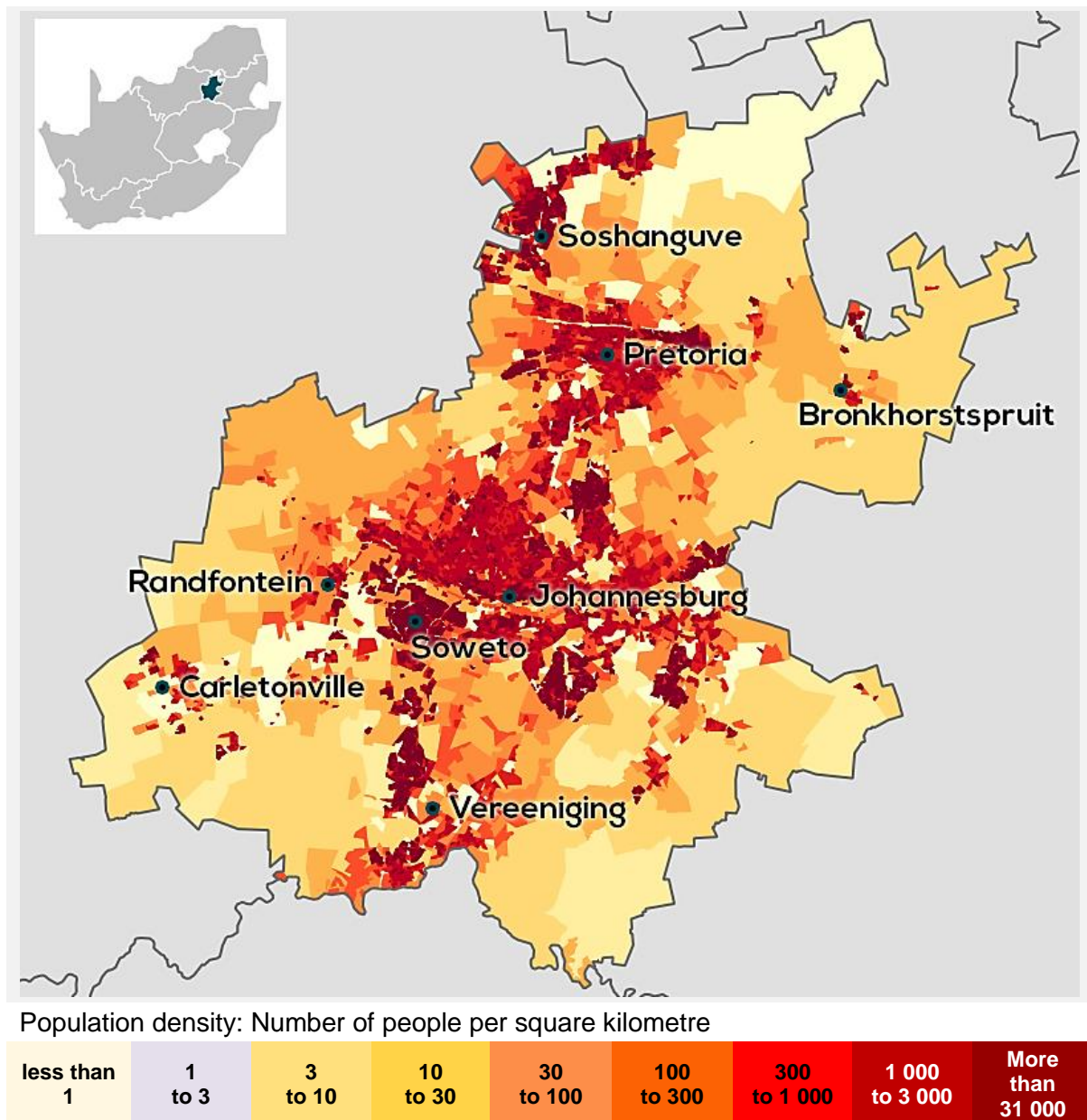


Figure 4.1: Population Density, City of Tshwane (Source: City of Tshwane, 2015a)

4.2.1 Establishment of City of Tshwane

The City of Pretoria was proclaimed the capital city of South Africa in 1855, during the tenure of then President Marthinus Wessels Pretorius, son of Andries Pretorius, leader of the Great Trek. The cabinet (then called *Volksraad*) consisted of 24 members and the most prominent decisions of the country were made in Pretoria (South African History Online, 2017).

The City of Tshwane has evolved from Pretoria, and continues to be the administrative capital of RSA, and the home of many foreign nations' administrative offices. As indicated in Chapter 1, Section 1.2, the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality was established around a number of municipalities that used to fall under Pretoria and some that fell outside of Pretoria. It was formed after the amalgamation of the following authorities:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater Pretoria Metropolitan council • City of council of Pretoria • Town council of Pretoria • Town council of Centurion • Northern Pretoria Metropolitan substructure • Hammanskraal local area committee • Eastern Gauteng services council • Pienaarsrivier transitional representative council • Eastern district council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crocodile River transitional representative council • Western Gauteng service council services • Winterveld transitional representative council • Themba transitional representative council • Mabopane transitional council • Ga-rankuwa transitional representative council and
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Table 4.1: Authorities of City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality

The City of Tshwane has large townships to the North West and the North East regions of the City (City of Tshwane, 2015a). The following map highlights the geographical area of the City of Tshwane:



Figure 4.2: Geographical Area of the City of Tshwane (Source: City of Tshwane, 2015a)

In 2008, a proclamation was made to incorporate the former Metsweding District Municipality, including the Dinokeng tsa Taemane (Cullinan) and Kungwini (Bronkhorspruit) into the borders of the City of Tshwane. In May 2011, the incorporation was effected with the motive being to collate separate areas into one biggest metropolitan municipality in South Africa. The greater area now called *Tshwane*, meaning “we are one” (City of Tshwane, 2015a).

Tshwane hosts most national government departments, as well as the brains of the country, namely, the head offices of the CSIR (Council of Scientific and Industrial Research), the NRF (National Research Foundation), the MRI (Medical Research Institute), the VRI (Veterinary Research Institute), as well as the SABS (South African Bureau of Standards). Prominent institutions like the University of South Africa, University of Pretoria, Tshwane University of Technology, and the Medical University of South Africa also make their home in Tshwane. There are also numerous manufacturing industries and enviable financial institutions. The City simply is Africa's leading city of excellence. The City of Tshwane is a Category A municipality comprising seven regions, 105 wards, and 210 counsellors.

4.3 CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK GOVERNING THE CITY OF TSHWANE

Category A municipalities are also known as metropolitan municipalities. Category B are district municipalities, while Category C municipalities, which are the local municipalities and smallest forms of local government municipalities. The three levels are deemed necessary in order to bridge the services gap between national government and people on the ground. Accordingly, the City of Tshwane is classified by the Municipal Demarcation Board in terms of Section 4 of the Local Government Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998, as a Category A and a Grade 6 municipality. The City of Tshwane earned this ranking because of its economic stability, which rank in turn affords the City global competitive advantage (Breetzke, 2010:447).

The Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA), Act 56 of 2003, monitors the expending of finances within the municipality, the municipality's budget drafting process, and all other relevant fiduciary prudence measures (see Sections 2-4 of MFMA, 2003). Additionally, there exists a mayoral system combined with a ward participatory system in accordance with Section 2(g) of the MFMA, Act 56 of 2003, and the Municipality Act 1 of 2000 (van Rooyen & Pooe, 2016:141). The state adopted a collective system of this nature in order to enhance Public participation and to ensure community involvement in decision-making processes undertaken by the municipality (Provincial Gazette, Gauteng, no. 179, 2015:Section 4). Section 14(2) of the Promotion of Access to Information Act of 2000, provides the right of access to information owned by state to relevant people while also providing protection to such

people (Constitution of South Africa, 1996). It is necessary, however, to move from the national picture to what is actually happening on the ground, where the residents of Tshwane actually interface with government.

4.4 FUNCTIONS, DIVISIONS AND STANDARDS OF CITY OF TSHWANE

The functions of City of Tshwane are highlighted as per the Schedules 4B and 5B of the Constitution of South Africa, as well as the assignments of Section 156(4) of the same constitution. These responsibilities include: Arts, culture and heritage, City development, business licenses or renewals, community libraries, customer relations management, disaster management, electricity, environmental management, fire brigade, health and medical, housing and human settlement, language services, metro police, municipal courts, nature reserve conservation, open space management, outdoor advertising, parks and horticulture, et cetera. As stipulated by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, the role of the municipality is also to regulate by-laws, services and affairs within its area of jurisdiction.

4.4.1 Functions and Divisions

The City of Tshwane is composed of the following different departments, with their associated functions and divisions:

DEPARTMENT	FUNCTIONS	DIVISIONS
Agriculture and environmental management	Ensure that Tshwane residents have access to parks, landscaped public spaces, nature reserves, resorts, swimming pools and attractive burial sites	Agriculture Waste Management Environmental Management
City Planning and Developments	Promotes spatial efficiencies and plays a strategic role of advancing sustainable developments	–
Communication, Marketing and Events	Oversees the overall reputation of the City both in South Africa and globally. Enhances the City's brand as an investment and tourism destination	Strategic communication Strategic management Events management

DEPARTMENT	FUNCTIONS	DIVISIONS
Corporate and Shared Services	Provides corporate and support to all other municipals office	Management and office administration support Leave Capturing Office Tshwane leadership and management academy Corporate fleet management Organisational efficiency improvement
Emergency services	Delivers on legislative mandates delegates to local government Provides a safe and healthy environment to residents	Emergency medical services Disaster management center Support and administration support services
Housing and Human Settlements	Provides low income earners with adequate, safe and affordable accommodation	–
Water and Sanitation	Responsible for bulk water supply, sanitation services and infrastructure, planning and developments	Bulk water and waste water services Planning and development
Health and Social Development	Focuses on creating healthy communities and empowering residents to prosper through holistic development	Health services Operations support Management and administration support unit
Economic Development	Ensures that Tshwane has sustainable economy and provides quality services for the communities Provides growth and opportunities for all	Office of the strategic executive director Trade and investment Facilitation and attraction Executive commitments

Table 4.2: Departments, Functions and Divisions of the City of Tshwane
(Adapted from City of Tshwane, 2015b).

Electricity, finance, water and sanitation, emergency services, metro bus services, metro police and licensing services, housing, healthcare, waste management, and roads and storm water management all fall under the City's competence. Although it covers large area, each responsible division sees to it that services are distributed to the community timeously and efficiently. Hence the municipality cannot tolerate it when

employees do not come to work, as this has huge impact on the manner in which services are delivered. Absenteeism affects the quality of services rendered, thus compromising the city's world class standards (City of Tshwane, 2015b).

Poor quality services could lead to community dissatisfaction, resulting in protests and vandalization of public property. Absenteeism also has a negative impact on other employees who have to take up more work in order to cover up for absent employees. Even employees who have tendency of misusing leave days may be charged for dishonesty or be dismissed for inability to perform.

4.4.1.1 Corporate and Shared Services Department

Human resource operations, strategic and operational staff competency training, individual performance management, and archiving and printing services all are managed by the Corporate and Shared Services Department. It thus falls on this department to provide customer-focused corporate and shared services in a consultative and innovative manner at both strategic and operational levels for the City of Tshwane. Corporate fleet management as well as labour relations also form part of the department's support operations (City of Tshwane, 2015b).

With regard to human resource management, the department is mainly responsible for human resource provision and maintenance. Human resource responsibilities include recruitment, selection, placement, induction, conditions of service, funds and allowances administration, payroll, service termination, and technical records management. In addition, human resource planning and succession planning also form part of these responsibilities. Occupational and employee health, safety and wellness enhancement also need to be attended to.

With regard to this study, the focus is on the operational support services, like human resource strategies and policies, process and system implementation, as well as absenteeism management. It is the Leave Capturing Office, a subsection of the Shared Corporate Services Department, which plays a crucial role in managing absenteeism. Each City of Tshwane department has its own leave office. The office typically has a staff compliment of ten, occupying different designations. As indicated in Table 3.1, the office has one human resource benefit specialist, one senior human resource officer, two human resource officers and six administrators.

Normal duties of the Leave Capturing Office entail receiving leave applications from staff members and capturing them on the system. The office deals with leave applications that are difficult to load on the system, such as those requiring supporting documents. Responsibilities and roles of leave capturing office personnel include:

- Capturing of leave, such as annual, family responsibility, special, sick or study leave
- Dealing with employees' leave enquiries telephonically or face to face office
- Date stamp each leave form, audit leave taken, and ensure validity of leave
- Ensuring that information on leave applications is correct
- Ensuring that the leave policy is adhered to and individuals' leave are recorded
- Deal with encashment and termination of contracts
- Ensure that the supporting documents are attached in case of sick leave and study leave and also to check if leave dates correspond

4.4.2 Service Delivery Standards

Minimum service delivery standards have been put in place to enhance the implementation of the above-mentioned responsibilities. The City strives to improve the municipal services it renders, and to sustain economic growth as Africa's leading capital city. Service delivery standards have improved significantly since the democratic dispensation's inauguration in 1994. As stated in the Integrated Development Planning (IDP), five pre-defined principal drivers for managing quality and to maintain service standards are in place. They include Batho-Pele Principles, Revenue Management, and Outcomes-Based Performance. Rigorous good governance, job creation and poverty eradication must be added to the above. Strict implementation of these measures has elevated the level of services at the City of Tshwane, proudly setting the pace for the other metropolitan municipalities (van Rooyen & Pooe, 2016:141).

Section 25 of the Local Government Municipal System, Act 32 of 2000, stipulates that following elections, each municipality must adopt a single strategic plan. This is meant to foster the development of municipalities in addition to aligning resources and

capacity with identified priorities. Wanton poor levels of service delivery in many regions emanates from dysfunctional and poorly governed municipalities. There is no doubt that absenteeism contributes immensely towards compromised service delivery. Therefore, vigorous implementation of absenteeism policies is a great starting point.

4.5 POLICY GUIDING ABSENTEEISM AT CITY OF TSHWANE

Workplace policy, according to Deery, Walsh and Zatzick (2014:354), relates to any set of rules that apply to an entity and do not infringe any statute. Employers use policies to enforce and guide employees towards reaching predetermined objectives. The City has a policy on absenteeism, which is made available to all employees within the municipality.

The policy is written in simple and clear language. Challenges are encountered in relation to its execution. Articulated within the policy are the responsibilities of both the employer and the employees. The employer has to ensure that employees receive salaries for the hours worked. That responsibility is premised on assurance that employees did in fact come to work, and while at work premises did in fact carry out their responsibilities. It is thus the employees' responsibility to report their absence on time in order to avoid penalties as stipulated in the policy. All parties need to understand their roles, and two-directional feedback given whenever necessary.

Futhermore, the *Desertion and Abscondment Policy* was formulated as an agreement between the Municipality and Labour Unions that represent employees. The policy stipulates that employees need to come to work timeously and not to be absent without authorization. According to this policy, *abscondment* refers to employee absence from work without authorization. An employee who does not come work without permission to stay away is thus considered to have committed a misconduct that is subject to disciplinary processes. *Desertion* applies when an employee stops coming to work with no intention to ever return to his/her employ. Such desertion may lead to the employer unilaterally terminating the employee's contract with the City (City of Tshwane, 2008:3-4). The *Desertion and Abscondment Policy* works hand in hand with the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995, to ensure that collective agreements are followed and unfair punitive measures are not imposed on employees.

Every employee is entitled to the following types of leave: annual leave, sick leave, maternity leave, and family responsibility leave (Labour Relations Act 66, 1995, Sections 19-27):

- **Annual leave:** Agreement is necessary as to when this leave may be taken. In other words the employer may refuse to grant leave during specific periods depending on operational requirements. An employee must be granted at least 21 days' leave per year (Labour Relations Act 66, 1995, Section 20).
- **Sick leave:** Sick leave is calculated over a cycle of three years. During the first 6 months an employee may take 1 day's paid sick leave for every 26 days worked. Thereafter an employee may take the number of days as sick leave equal to the number of days the person would work during a six-week period. A 5-day workweek amounts to 30 days' sick leave per 3-year cycle. Should an employee be off sick for 2 days or longer or twice within an 8-week period, the employer may ask for a medical certificate; should such certificate not be submitted the employer may withhold payment in respect of the days the employee was not at work (Labour Relations Act 66, 1995, Section 22).
- **Maternity leave:** An employee may take four months' unpaid maternity leave. This leave can commence at any time during the four weeks prior to the expected date of delivery or at a date prescribed by a doctor or midwife. An employee may not return to work for a period of at least six weeks after giving birth, unless a doctor or midwife certifies that the employee is fit to resume work (Labour Relations Act 66, 1995, Section 25).
- **Family responsibility leave:** If an employee has been working for the same employer for more than four months and works at least four days a week or more, then the employee may take three days of paid family responsibility leave during each leave cycle. The criteria in terms of which an employee is eligible for this type of leave are: 1) The birth of an employee's child; 2) Illness of an employee's child; and 3) In the event of the death of the employee's (a) Spouse, (b) Partner, (c) Parent, (d) Adoptive parent, (e) Grandfather or grandmother, (f) Child, (g) Adopted child, or (h) Brother or sister (Labour Relations Act 66, 1995, Section 27).

Descriptions of the different types of leave were given to satisfy the research question 'What types and patterns of absenteeism are prevalent in the City of Tshwane?'.

Patterns of absenteeism prevalent in the City of Tshwane are identified in Chapter 5, section 5.4.3.2 (*Patterns of absenteeism*).

4.5.1 Reporting Procedures of Abscondment

The City of Tshwane has a procedure in place for tackling the challenge of employees who abscond. When an employee intends not to come to work, he/she has to report to the direct supervisor on time. It is the employee's responsibility to report on time, as this will assist the supervisor to make necessary arrangements to keep work flowing. In terms of the Collective Agreement of 2008, an employee has within two days report his/her unauthorised absence to the supervisor or next supervisor in line of command.

On the third day of an employee's absence, the supervisor must either call, send a text message, leave a message with an occupant of the employee's residence, or leave a message at the last known address of an employee. Should five days lapse without an employee reporting for work or providing reasonable explanation for not coming to work, the Human Resource Division will instruct that the salary of such an employee be placed in suspension. If nothing comes up within the sixth day, the supervisor need to write a letter requiring that an employee come back to work, also stating the date, time, place and the person that an employee has to report to, the consequences of not reporting should also be highlighted. When an employee does not come to work he/she is not upholding the employment contract and is therefore in breach of that contract (Collective Agreement, 2008).

4.5.2 Reporting Procedures on Desertion

Another form of misconduct that employees tend to commit is desertion. With desertion an employee just disappears for an unknown period. There are various reasons leading an employee to desert. Sometimes this happens because an employee has secured another job (Collective Agreement, 2008). The City of Tshwane regards desertion as a serious offense and an unprofessional way of leaving the organisation.

In case of desertion, according to the Collective Agreement (2008), the supervisor writes a letter to the employee concerned, requesting him/her to furnish reasons for the unannounced disappearance. When five days have lapsed without any response from the employee concerned, the relevant human resource division shall in writing

inform the employee of the termination of his/her contract due to non-compliance. The letter of termination shall be sent to the employee's representative.

Should the employee decide to come back, the reasons for deserting will be reviewed, and if they are found to be acceptable, the salary will be reinstated from the applicable date and leave approved. If the reasons are not valid, an employee will have to face a disciplinary hearing. Desertion is an offense that goes on to the employee's permanent record. Whilst one cannot plan to be sick, some employees become truly sick while others do manage to plan their 'illnesses' to coincide with their other interests (Collective Agreement, 2008).

4.5.3 Reporting Procedures for Sick Leave

Unsurprisingly, sick leave has been pin-pointed as one of the reasons for regular employee absenteeism at the City of Tshwane. Sick leave may either be planned or unplanned. Planned sick leave occurs when an employee consults a doctor merely in order to get days for rest or to go someplace. This is the most problematic form of absenteeism, because the employer is often unable to prove whether or not there was legitimate illness. With unplanned sick leave, an employee is honestly not fit for work.

When taking sick leave, the employee's supervisor must be informed as soon as possible, preferably on the first day of illness. If illness incapacitates the employee for more than two days, a supporting document in the form of a valid medical certificate must accompany the sick leave application. On receipt of the paperwork, the supervisor will determine whether the leave application meets the requirements set out in the guidelines. In the event of discrepancies, the Occupational Health office will be contacted for advice. The supervisor will then either accept or reject the leave application based on the advice given. The sick leave form is then forwarded to the Leave Capturing Office, which proceeds either to record approved sick leave on SAP system or record rejected sick leave as vacation leave. An employee whose sick leave is rejected will be informed in writing of the reasons for the rejection (City of Tshwane, 2015a).

4.5.4 Incapacity

In instances where an employee is unable to come to work or perform duties as a result of illness, the supervisor must advise an Occupational Health practitioner.

Incapacity leave will then be arranged in accordance with Schedule 8 of the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995. Depending on the decision of the City's Occupational Health panel, the medical practitioner will then organise a specialist who will determine whether the incapacity may be temporary or permanent (Collective Agreement, 2008).

With temporary incapacity, an employee experiences a temporary unfitness to perform his/her work for only a short time. On the other hand, permanent incapacity applies when an employee is unable to perform his/her current duties, but can be able to perform other duties with appropriate adaptation. In such instances, arrangements may be made such that the employee is given lighter tasks that will not further disadvantage the employee's health condition.

4.6 MANAGING ABSENTEEISM

The City of Tshwane has two systems in place that assist in the managing and recording of absenteeism, one being new while the other is older. In the old system an employee fills in a form indicating their absence days; it is most applicable when coming to employees who are not computer literate, such as general workers. Its drawback, however, is that forms get misplaced at times, leading to inadequate leave records.

The new system, also known as the e-system, pursues a paper-free environment. Its advantage is that documents are easy to trace and can be processed quite quickly. Its disadvantage is that an employee can load leave on the system without notifying the supervisor, thereby creating work relations problems (City of Tshwane, 2012).

Whichever leave management system is used, employers need to encourage a progressive attendance management milieu, which in turn requires a dynamic policy to support those who need help while at the same time challenging those who need to be kept in check.

4.7 SUMMARY

The City of Tshwane is historic, and also the largest South African city. It boasts world class economic attractions and has rightly been dubbed the "the city of excellence".

Legislative frameworks such as the Basic Conditions of Employment and the Municipal Collective Bargaining Agreement make employees aware of their rights to take leave, while also emphasizing proper lines of reporting absence. These informative documents are the chief means for protecting the employer against leave abuse.

An employer has the right not to remunerate an employee who did not render services they are hired to render, as well as to discipline such an employee for misconduct. It is each employee's responsibility therefore to report any intention to become absent in order to avoid such punitive measures, in addition to enabling line managers to make necessary arrangements during such absence.

The City of Tshwane's Leave Capturing Office bears the important role of ensuring that sick leave are managed and captured correctly on the system. This office works hand-in-hand with the Occupational Health office to ascertain the legitimacy of sick leave granted. The office further assists the municipality in identifying trends of absenteeism and in attending to any loopholes in the current system. It is of great importance that the municipality implements the system that will track employee movements, instead of relying on the attendance register where false information may be provided.

CHAPTER 5: DATA INTERPRETATION AND FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed the layout, functions and structure of the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality and explained how absenteeism is managed with reference to the municipality's policies and practices. The aim was to obtain a broader understanding of the absenteeism reporting procedures at the City. Drawing on the previous chapters of the dissertation, the current chapter reports the study's empirical findings in regard to the main causes of absenteeism and to how absenteeism is managed at the City of Tshwane. The study's informants were all permanently employed during the time when semi-structured individual interviews were conducted to gather data for the research. It is their perspectives and experiences on the phenomenon of absenteeism which are foregrounded.

A qualitative research approach was used to evaluate the human resource policy for managing absenteeism at the City of Tshwane. The data collected was connected to research questions and study objectives. This made it easy data into themes, facilitating analysis and interpretation by making use of excerpts from the informants' responses. Graphs and tables are employed to provide further exposition on the data. The following research questions were formulated to address to research problem vis-à-vis the causes and management of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane:

- What is the meaning of absenteeism in the workplace?
- Which main causes of absenteeism need to be considered when managing absenteeism at the City of Tshwane?
- What types and patterns of absenteeism are prevalent in the City of Tshwane?
- What are the consequences or effects of absenteeism to the City of Tshwane?
- In what ways can absenteeism be managed at the City of Tshwane?
- What sort of challenges does the City of Tshwane face in managing absenteeism?

The questions just outlined are drawn directly from the study's objectives, which are:

- To investigate the meaning of absenteeism in the context of the City of Tshwane.
- To evaluate the causes of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane.
- To establish types and patterns of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane.
- To identify and analyse the consequences or effects of absenteeism to the City of Tshwane.
- To analyse the existing human resource policy relating to the management of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane.
- To identify and analyse the challenges relating to the management of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane.

Given the above perspective, attention to the study's findings will come after a word on the participants' profiles.

5.2 PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

With regard to the individual interviews, the same questions were asked to all the participants, and each participant was expected to respond in his/her views and experience. The research required that participants be familiar with the prescripts of absenteeism. Compliance with this requirement was determined by reference to the number of years the participant had been at the Leave Capturing Office. The spreadsheet of interviewees' experience is indicated in Table 5.1.

Experience (tenure) at the Leave Capturing Office of the City of Tshwane	Number of participants
1 to 5 years	3
6 to 10 years	0
11 to 15 years	2
16 to 20 years	0
21 to 25 years	2
26 to 30 years	1
Total participants	8

Table 5.1: Participants' Years of Experience

Rich data was obtained from these custodians of absenteeism management at the City of Tshwane. In this regard, females outnumbered the male participants, since the females dominated the administration career. However, the inputs received from the male informants were equally vibrant.

5.3 EMERGING THEMES

The following themes emerged from the data, and Table 5.2 presents them in close proximity to related research objectives.

Themes	Sub-themes	Research objective
Understanding absenteeism	Reported Unreported	To investigate the meaning of absenteeism in the City of Tshwane
Causes of absenteeism	Job dissatisfaction Unpleasant working relations Favouritism Low wages Lack of resources Exhaustion and stress Boredom	To evaluate the causes of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane.
Types and patterns of absenteeism	Types of absences Patterns of absences	To establish types and patterns of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane.
Consequences or effect of absenteeism	Decreased or loss of productivity Increased work pressure on colleagues Negative financial impact	To identify and analyse the consequences or effects of absenteeism to the City of Tshwane.
Management of absenteeism	Attendance registers Access cards Unpaid leave Medical certificate provision E-leave system	To analyse the existing human resource policy relating to the management of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane.
Challenges of managing absenteeism	Exploitation and misapplication of sick leave Lack of supporting documents Delays in capturing leave Unpaid leave related enquiries Ineffective e-leave system Outdated absence management policies and procedures	To identify and analyse challenges relating to the management of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane.

Table 5.2: Themes and Sub-themes

5.4 DATA INTERPRETATION AND FINDINGS OF QUALITATIVE DATA: INTERVIEWS

As already stated above (Section 3.9: *Document analysis as data collection instrument*), document analysis is a systematic way of organising ideas and recording them in an orderly manner (Gilbert & Stoneman, 2016:506). The value of written sources may not be underrated (Gray, 2009:502). Official documents of the City of Tshwane assisted the process of interpreting the participants' views and experiences. Consequently, this study acknowledged the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997, specifically the responsibilities of co-workers in a workplace. It also paid attention to leave entitlements and the execution thereof as well as the provisions of Level of Agreement in terms of the Bargaining Levels of the City of Tshwane, plus the absenteeism management policy of the City of Tshwane.

In this section, the participants' understanding of absenteeism is elaborated on as a prelude to the expatiation of the different types of absences and causes of absenteeism. Also dealt with are the consequences or effects of absenteeism, followed by the City's management of absenteeism. The subdivision is then concluded with the challenges of managing absenteeism experienced at the City of Tshwane.

5.4.1 Understanding of Absenteeism

As stated in Chapter 2, section 2.2 (*Absenteeism defined*), absenteeism generally refers to an employee's tendency to miss work schedules at specified intervals (Harrison & Newman, 2013:265). To test the subjects' understanding of absenteeism against the mentioned definition, the question "*How do you understand workplace absenteeism in the context of City of Tshwane?*" was asked.

The following excerpts from the transcripts reflect that the participants' indeed perceived absenteeism as a tendency to miss work:

"Absenteeism is when someone abuses leave entitlements."

"Absenteeism means being away from working area, either being sick, on study leave, vacation or family responsibility."

This is not surprising since absence management is these interviewees' job description. In addition, "being away from working area, either being sick" is also in

line with the definition provided by Cuccheila, Gastaldi and Ranieri (2014:159) that absenteeism is an employee's habit of being away from work on specific days, justified by provision of a medical certificate. In brief, all the participants concurred that absenteeism means that an employee is not at work to perform the duties assigned to him/her. In this way, all the participants confirmed that they are sufficiently knowledgeable to answer further absenteeism-related questions. Moreover, the participants' responses confirmed their understanding that absenteeism can generally be divided as reported and unreported absence.

5.4.1.1 Reported absenteeism

The response from one of the participants "*Employees report that they will not come to work*" indicated that an employee may not be at work in order to attend to personal issues. It may be inferred that the participants understand an employee's prior arrangements not to come to work as compliant with the official definition of absenteeism. It is interesting to note that none of the participants indicated that reported absence may be regarded as non-compliance, when an employee has exhausted his/her leave days – leading to unpaid leave. It is equally intriguing that the participants' responses did not reflect another definition of absenteeism also provided in Chapter 2, section 2.2, namely, that an employee's late arrival at work, leaving early, taking extended tea or lunch breaks, attending to private business during working hours, taking extended toilet breaks, feigned illness and other unexplained absences from the workstation or premises, are also considered as absenteeism (Labour Guide, 2012:1).

5.4.1.2 Unreported Absenteeism

When an employee's absence is not reported prior to the actual absence from office, supervisors are forced to assign responsibilities to other staff members on short notice. The re-allocation of responsibilities and assignments to other staff becomes problematic when the supervisors are unaware of the duration of the unplanned leave (Wright & Pandey, 2010:27). Other side-effects of unreported absenteeism are addressed in Chapter 2, section 2.7 (*Consequences or effects of absenteeism*). The following excerpts confirmed the participants' agreement with these untoward consequences of absenteeism:

“Absenteeism means when an employee is not at work without notifying the supervisor.”

“Absenteeism is when employees do not come to work without reporting or taking unlawful leave.”

“Absenteeism means being away from work without the supervisor knowing of one’s whereabouts or, simply, absconding.”

Since employees’ inability to report to work may be voluntary or involuntary, the interviewees confirmed that employees often voluntarily decide to “*disappear from work in order to recharge from work pressure or negative forces looming around the work place*”. This implies that unplanned and unreported absenteeism occurs at the City of Tshwane without the reporting thereof to the supervisors or management. Nielsen and Einansen (2012:14) confirmed that unauthorised leave is constituted whenever the whereabouts of an employee are not known. While an employee’s failure to report absence from work may not always be intentional. It nevertheless appears as though intentional, since failure to report is predominant. Most often, an employee plans unreported absence if he/she is not happy about circumstances at work, being denied leave, being prevented to access his/her workplace due to industrial actions, or to avoid negative influences or circumstances at the office.

To further define the concept of absenteeism, the interview concentrated on the question “*In which context is absenteeism regarded as a habitual behavior at work?*”. The question is supported by the literature review and it anticipated to obtain a broader view on the phenomena. The participants expressed different views as follows:

“Sick leave become a habit as employees tend to abuse it even when they are not sick.”

“Employees using sick leave for vacation. If an employee is at work on particular week, there is a possibility that the following week an employee might not come.”

“Employees plays around their sick leave days in order to save their vacation leave.”

Cucchiella, Gastaldi and Ranieri (2014:159) shared the same sentiments as the participants by expressing absenteeism as employees’ habitual behavior of being absent, justified by provision of a medical certificate. Whenever some employees feel

like not going to work, they pretend as if they are sick so that they will be given a medical certificate. Illness is faked so employees can attend to their personal matters or simply to save their vacation leave days. This behavior easily grows into a habit.

In light of the statement by Lechman and Schnabel (2014:371) that absenteeism is often a worker's strategy perpetuated to bring actual hours in line with desired hours, the question "*How is absenteeism viewed as a worker's strategy to run away from an aversive work conditions?*" was added to the list of questions. The question was included to verify whether absenteeism is generally regarded more as an entitlement, regardless of its adverse consequences. It is important to note that during the interviews, not all the participants were willing to answer the question and indicated that they did not quite understand what is required of them. Since the researcher realised the topic under study was sensitive, the participants were allowed not to respond to answers they were not free to talk about. Only few participants provided the following answers:

"Employees claim that they do not come to work because an employer fails them by not providing tools to work."

"Employees abuse sick leave as they claim that it is their entitlement."

Employees tend to be away from work for days without alerting or notifying the supervisor or other co-workers. When such behavior occurs, the supervisor will notify the manager, who will liaise with the Human Resource Department. Several attempts will be made to remind an employee to report to work on a specific day, this will be done by calling and writing a letter. If an employee does not report within the stipulated period, corrective action such as disciplinary hearing or salary deduction will be instated. This shows a good gesture from the municipality, of giving an employee a chance to come to work so that they could state his/her story. The return-to work counselling sessions are also arranged in order to try to understand the actual reasons for absence.

In conclusion, therefore, the research goal of investigating the meaning of absenteeism in the context of the City of Tshwane was fully answered by the responses of the participants to the interview questions: (1) "*How do you understand workplace absenteeism in the context of City of Tshwane?*"; (2) "*In which context is*

absenteeism regarded as a habitual behavior at work?”; and (3) “How is absenteeism viewed as a worker’s strategy to run away from an aversive work conditions?”.

5.4.2 Causes of Absenteeism

The research envisaged, among other objective such as; to investigate the main causes of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane as the case under study. For this reason, the interview question “*In your opinion, what are the causes of absenteeism?*” was asked. Seven main causes (themes) have been identified by the participants, as depicted in Figure 5.1. The most prominent causes mentioned, are unpleasant working relations and exhaustion or stress.

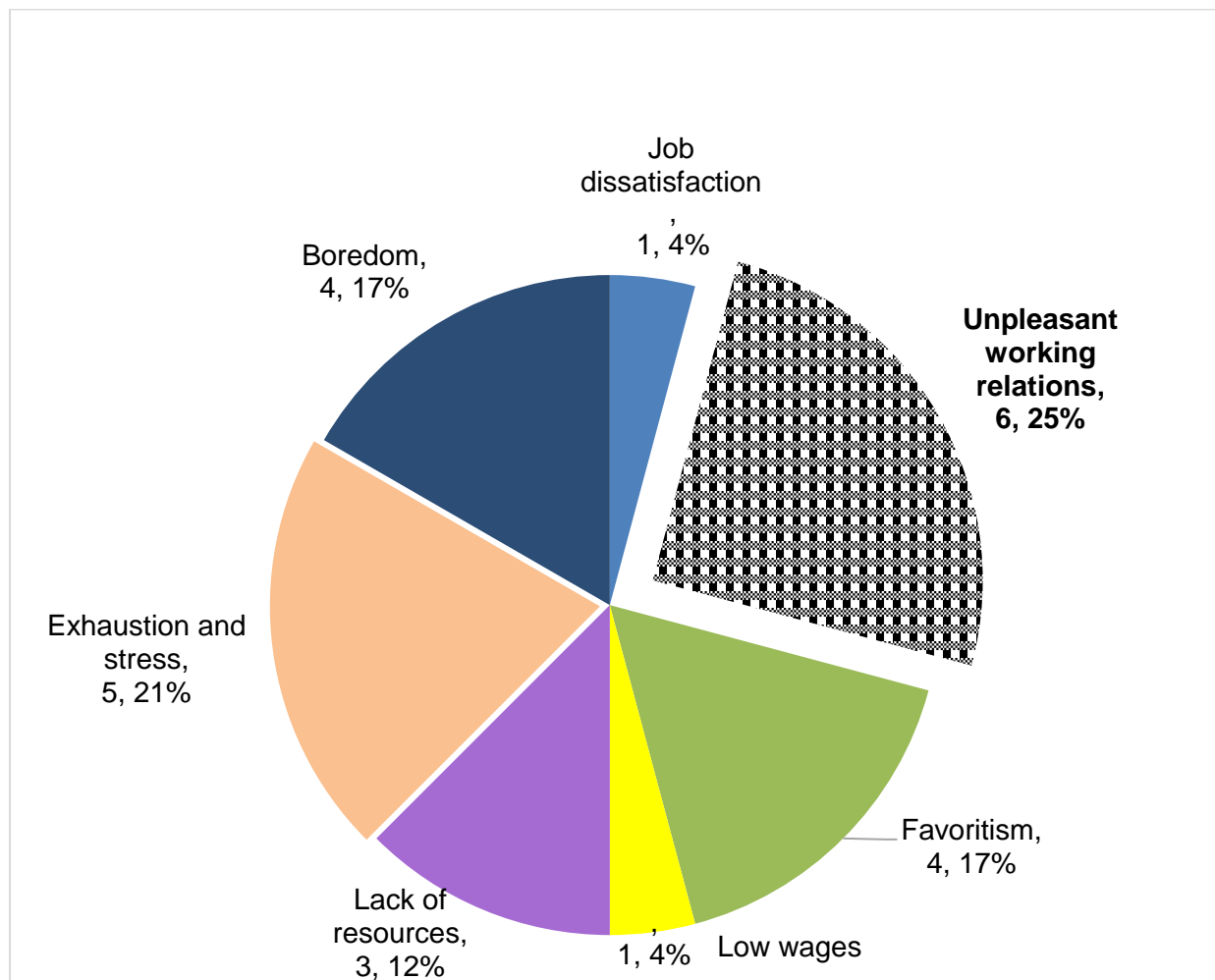


Figure 5.1: Main Causes of Absenteeism

Based on the above Figure 5.1, the following main causes were identified by the participants, namely, (1) Job dissatisfaction (one responses, 4% of sample); (2)

Unpleasant working relations (six responses, 25% of sample); (3) Favouritism (four responses, 17% of sample); (4) Low wages (one responses, 4% of sample); (5) Lack of resources (three responses, 12% of sample); (6) Exhaustion and stress (five responses, 21% of sample); and (7) Boredom (four responses, 17% of sample). Note that one participants could have provided more than one cause of absenteeism. Each cause is discussed below.

5.4.2.1 Job Dissatisfaction

Participants echoed the following statements with regard to the causes of absenteeism:

“Absenteeism happens as a result of workplace conflicts between employees and supervisors. Alcoholism leads to employee absenteeism.”

As seen from the literature review, section 2.4.1 (*Job dissatisfaction*), employees who are not satisfied with their job or working environments have an array of ways to react. They either resort to prolonged or frequent absence. When the workforce is not happy about what is happening in an organisation, this might lead to them becoming absent often or withdrawing. This affects an organisation’s reputation and competitiveness, ultimately lowering the morale of other employees and affecting service delivery levels. An employee’s satisfaction at work is thus an important tool for an organisation’s success and reduction for absences (Obasan, 2011:31). Against this background and based on the interviewees’ responses, it is concluded that job dissatisfaction indeed plays a role in regular absenteeism at the City of Tshwane. Nonetheless, employee dissatisfaction may result from unsavoury employee interactions.

5.4.2.2 Unpleasant Working Relations

It was described in Chapter 2, section 2.4.8 (*Workplace relations*), that the manner in which employees relate in a working environment, directly contributes to employees either loving or hating going to work. Workplace conflicts are the dread disease that might make an employee genuinely ill. When conflicts arise in workplace other employees fail to be submissive, as they want to prove a point to their counterparts. The following responses provided indeed confirm that the employees of the City of Tshwane become absent due to unpleasant relationships with their supervisors:

“Employees are not happy, more especially due to unpleasant relationships with supervisors. Also, due to lack of resources and low morale.”

“Supervisors have negative personality and not listening to employees.”

“Lack of supervision and no interaction with employees except when there is a query.”

“Lack of team work and good supervision.”

It was added that *“even when an employee performs his/her duties diligently, the supervisor will find a tiny mistake in order to punish the subordinate”*. The relationship between employees and their supervisors were pointed out during the interviews as a serious cause for concern. Hence, it was necessary to also seek an understanding of how management style affect employee absenteeism the City of Tshwane, by asking the question *“How do you think management style affects employee attendance?”*. The following responses were received:

“Unreasonable expectations from manager such as requesting a report during knock off time lead to absenteeism.”

“Managers pin down employees about petty things even when an employee is performing his/her job. An employee being given a different task even while still busy with another one. That employee will then be absent the next day.”

As indicated in Chapter 2, section 2.4.4 (*Leadership style*), Frooman, Mendelson and Murphy (2012:46) see a clear link between the abuse of leave by subordinates and oppressive leadership styles by managers. Based on the responses from the participants, it seems that some managers at the City of Tshwane tend not to have good relations with their subordinates, perhaps due to a lack of supervisory skills and people management skills. It became clear during the interviews that, when a manager does not communicate issues appropriately to his/her subordinates, the latter tend to become rebellious, and then to take leave from the office as an escape from unpleasant working relations.

At the same time, and although some feel that they do not want to be involved much in the affairs of employees, it is still the responsibility of managers and supervisors to monitor employees' work attendance on a daily basis. Moreover, they need to understand individuals' attitudes and what is bothering them in the workplace.

Supervisors need to provide proper support to employees as required, as well as to engage employee wellness practitioners for further assistance if an employee is unable to cope. Supervisors need to manage absence tensions in ways that will encourage attendance (Johns, 2011:485). Supervisors must seek to understand the reasons behind employee behaviour. Any personal information divulged by an employee should be kept as confidential. Trust and a healthy working relationship need to be maintained between supervisor and subordinates, since both parties spend many hours together at work. Equally, employees have the right to be treated with respect and to have their effort appreciated. Employees who feel valued will be at work on time on stipulated days in order to perform their tasks as allocated.

5.4.2.3 Favouritism

In Chapter 2, section 2.4.8.2 (*Favouritism*), favouritism in the workplace was noted to bring division and hatred among employees. Leaders find it difficult to punish the employees that they favour; instead they shield them. It is imperative that leaders and their subordinates work together and understand one another in order to achieve a common goal. Research participants have shown their unhappiness with favouritism at the workplace:

“Employees take leave because of difficult leaders and there is favouritism as work is not shared equally among colleagues.”

“Absenteeism is caused by unhappiness of employees. It is also happening because of unequal treatment and favouritism at work.”

“There is favouritism. When employees exercise their rights, they are being victimized and not knowing what is right or wrong since leaders are bossy.”

There is some evidence then that favouritism exists at the City of Tshwane, and that it indeed contributes to employees being absent from work.

5.4.2.4 Low Wages

The ultimate goal of going to work is to earn a living. A decent salary motivates employees to come to work. But even when employees receive low salaries they are obliged to be at work, irrespective of what they earn (Pfeifer, 2010:60). It was confirmed in Chapter 2, section 2.4.2 (*Low wages*), that low income is definitely a

factor when employees do not come to work (Davey & Cummings, 2009:314). However, only one of this study's participants iterated low wages as affecting employees' attendance.

"Employees do not come to work because of low wages."

5.4.2.5 Lack of Resources

It was hinted in Chapter 1, section 1.2 (*Background and rationale for the study*), that employees' motivation to come to work is influenced by satisfactory job demands plus the availability of resources to perform assigned work. Resources may entail things such as equipment, stationery and staff complement (Schaufeli, Bakker & van Rhenen, 2009:895). The participants gave the following responses pertaining to resources:

"Absenteeism is caused by lack of resources, boredom and redundancy of duties."

"Employees at the regions do not have tools to do work, and it is not their problem when such are not provided."

"Employees are unable to work on SAP, when payroll is in process and they opt not to come to work."

It was thus confirmed that employees' tendency not to come to work is influenced by not having enough resources to perform their duties or to submit leave applications in advance.

5.4.2.6 Exhaustion and Stress

As mentioned in Chapter 2, section 2.4.6 (*Burnout*), burnout is a persistent dysfunctional state that results from prolonged exhaustion and stress. Employees experience burnout regularly as a result of demanding jobs. Exhaustion causes an employee not to be productive and that may be a health hazard, especially when working with dangerous machinery (Chenevert & Banville, 2013:353). The participants echoed the following statements in this connection:

"Employees like dodging work as a result of stressful working conditions."

"Employees become exhausted and tired, more especially those working shifts."

“Absenteeism is caused by employees’ unhappiness, a working environment that is not conducive, too much pressure, exhaustion and lack of adequate staff complement.”

Interviewees also made reference to instances where *“exhaustion influences an employee to make mistakes”, “employees are often overwhelmed by the work influx”* and *“employees tend not to be functional as they get stressed out”*. It may be concluded that City of Tshwane employees resort to absenteeism in order to recover, when they are stressed out, as was also advanced by Ybema, Smulders and Bongers (2010:105).

5.4.2.7 Boredom

As stated in Chapter 2, section 2.4.1 (*Job dissatisfaction*), dissatisfaction or boredom with a job may lower an employee’s motivation. Employees get bored when doing same job time over and again, despite the fact that some routine tasks require expertise in a particular field (Steers & Rhodes, 1978:394). The following excerpts are examples of the participants’ responses relating to boredom:

“Employees get bored doing repetitive work time and again. Absenteeism is also caused by the fact that during payroll processing employees are unable to work on SAP (System Application Program) as it will be closed, meaning there will be no work for them. Instead employees will either take leave or attend to their personal matters whilst at work.”

“Employees get bored doing same job for a long time.”

“Employees get bored.”

During the data analysis, the researcher observed that the participants provided short sentences without elaborating further or suggesting on what could be done to solve the problems. It is apparent, however, that the employees tend to struggle when they have performed a particular task for a long time without being shifted to something different. In many cases, bored employees can be seen *“by arriving late at work, not coming or idling during working hours”*. It is recommended that the City of Tshwane invests in an official enquiry about how a rotational process could help alleviate boredom amongst its employees.

5.4.3 Types of Absences and Patterns of Absenteeism

The various types of absences and patterns of absenteeism are addressed in this sub-section.

5.4.3.1 Types of Absences

As indicated in Chapter 4, section 4.5 (*Policy guiding absenteeism at City of Tshwane*), the different types of leave that an employee is entitled to are annual leave, sick leave, maternity leave and family responsibility leave. Furthermore, absenteeism is not attributed to maternity leave, study leave, compassionate leave and annual leave since an employee makes prior arrangements in these instances. Additionally, the City of Tshwane grants its employees who own a house within the Metropolitan district an additional day leave as a benefit for working for the Metropolitan Municipality (City of Tshwane, 2008:3-4). It will soon become clear that sick-leave was identified as the most prevalent type absence at the municipality. Employees often manipulate the provision by feigning sickness for two days because they do not have to provide a medical certificate when they are sick for one or two days.

5.4.3.2 Patterns of Absenteeism

In order to reach the objective of establishing the types and patterns of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane during the period 2016 to 2017, the following question was asked during interviews: *“What patterns of workplace absenteeism are prevailing at City of Tshwane?”*. Participants responded as follows:

“Employees use sick-leave for vacation and also mix vacation leave with sick-leave in order to extend their days away.”

“Lot of sick leave are taken to stay at home.”

“Employees tend to misuse sick leave with knowledge that they are entitled to 80 days in a 3 years cycle. There is also a provision of “sick half”, which applies when employees have exhausted their sick days. It allows employees to take 4 hours vacation together with 4 hours sick leave to get one day of sick leave.”

“Sick leave taken even when not sick, others use it for vacations.”

Based on the listed responses, it is clear that employees tend to ‘play around’ creatively with their sick and annual leave days.

With regard to specific patterns or trends of absenteeism, the interview question “*How do issues such as qualifications and gender influence absenteeism in the workplace?*” was also raised. Based on the responses received, it was established that factors such as qualification and gender do not have any significant influence on patterns or trends of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane. Participants confirmed that the same absence rate applies to males and females. Essentially, they declared, “*an employee’s qualifications do not affect his/her absenteeism patterns*”.

City of Tshwane’s annual absence statistics for the period 2016 to 2017 confirm the responses by participants with regard to patterns of absenteeism. Figure 5.2 displays sick leave absence for all City employees for the period January to December 2016.

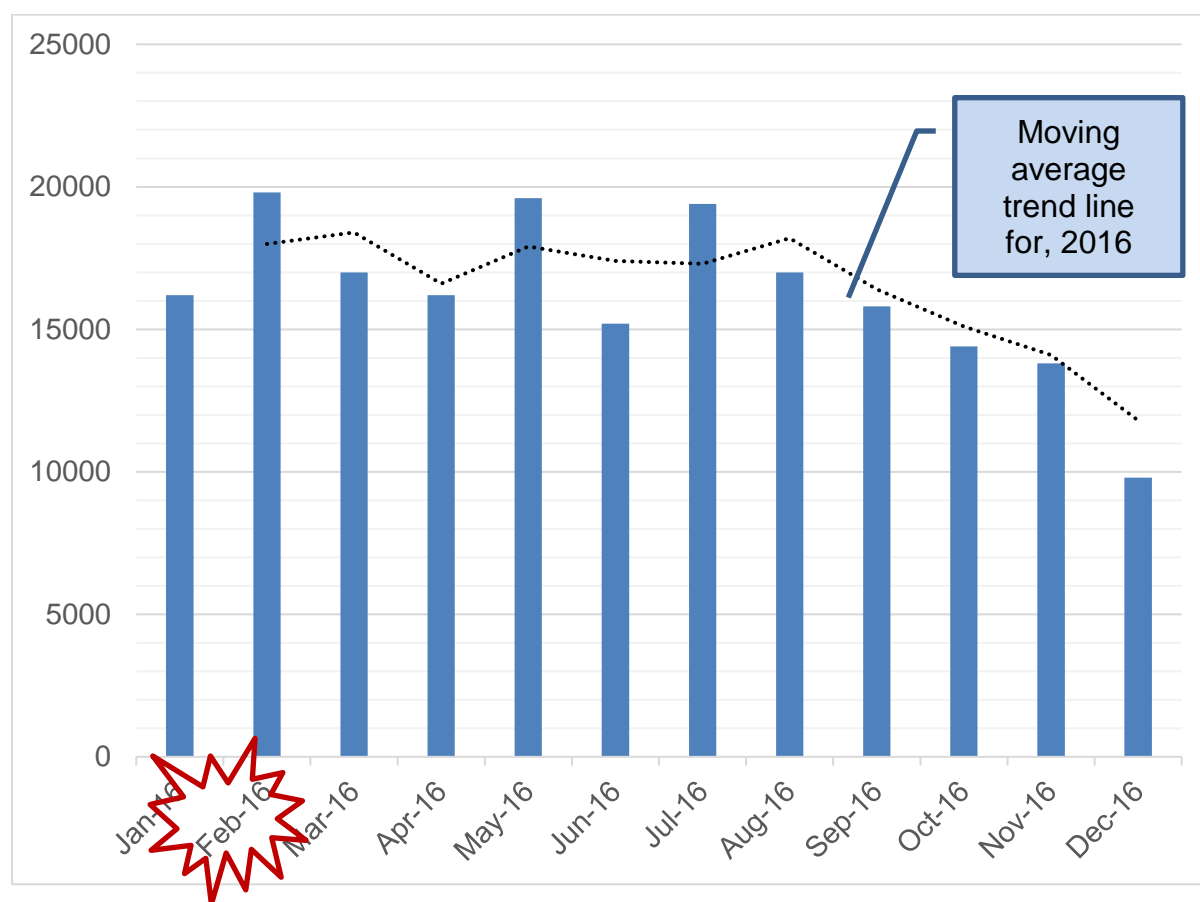


Figure 5.2: Sick-leave Absence: January to December 2016 (Source: City of Tshwane, 2017b:1)

The above figure illustrates that December had the lowest number of sickness related absences. The reason might be that December has several public holidays and employees take annual leave to extend their holidays, or employees may avoid taking

sick leave during December as their intention will be clear. Although it becomes difficult to determine when the sick-leave absence is genuine, the municipality has a clinic to verify validity of sickness. It is also reflected that February had the highest number of absenteeism followed by May and July. Based on the supporting documents, it is evident that the majority of the sick leave recorded during May and July was due to influenza and flu. An interesting fact is that August and March had the same levels of absenteeism. It is common knowledge that employees take leave during March in preparation for Easter holiday and extend their leave with sick-leave. Again, and as in the cases of May and July, the supporting documents confirmed that the majority of the sick leave recorded during August was due to influenza. With regard to the rest of the trend line for 2016, a downward trend is clearly visible from August to December.

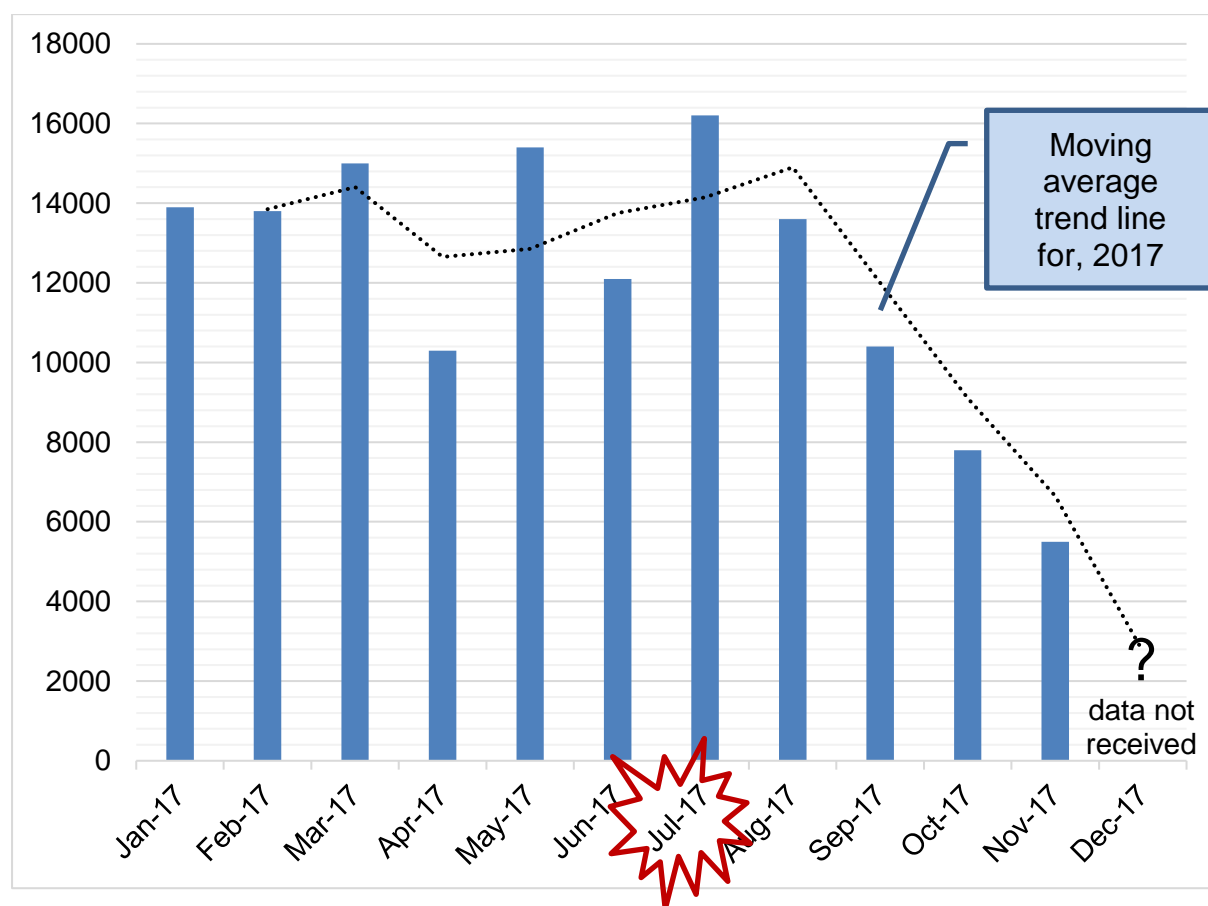


Figure 5.3: Sick-leave Absence: January to December 2017 (Source: City of Tshwane, 2017b:2)

Figure 5.3 reflects sick leave absence for all City employees for the period January to December 2017. In 2017, sickness absence spikes in July, followed by May, then March. It was found that employees take more sick leave in July mainly because of

unfavorable weather conditions. With regard to the trend line for 2017, a downward trend is also visible from August to November, as in the case of 2016. Records for December 2017 were not available since the researcher obtained the statistics in November 2017. Given these trends, what are absenteeism's actual costs to the City?

5.4.4 Consequences or Effects of Absenteeism

As stated in Chapter 2, section 2.7 (*Consequences or effects of absenteeism*), absenteeism has a tremendous negative impact on both the employers and employees. Habitual absenteeism is a problem that requires attention as soon as it is discovered. To fully identify and analyse the consequences or effects of absenteeism to the City of Tshwane, the interview question “*In your opinion how does absenteeism affect the municipality?*” was put to interviewees.

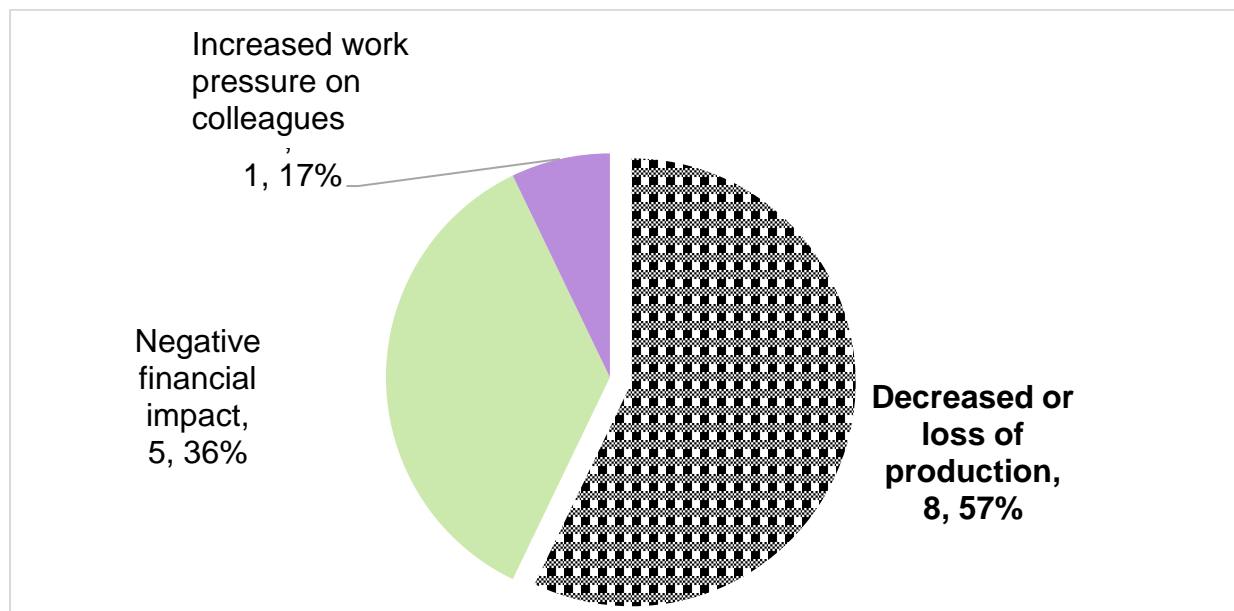


Figure 5.4: Consequences or Effects of Absenteeism

Based on Figure 5.4, the following main consequences were identified by the participants as effective ramifications of absenteeism on the City. They are (1) Decreased or loss of productivity (eight responses, 57% of sample), (2) Increased work pressure on colleagues (one response, 7% of sample), and (3) Negative financial impact (five responses, 36% of sample). Note that one participants could have provided more than one consequence of absenteeism. The responses of the participants are elaborated on in more detail presently.

5.4.4.1 Decreased or Loss of Productivity

Participants reiterated that employee absenteeism affects services and production in the following ways:

“If an employee is absent work will suffer.”

“Work suffers as a result of an employee not being at work and this creates backlogs.”

“When an employee is not at work no one will attend to his/her work.”

“Services suffer because of absenteeism.”

“Absenteeism affects service delivery and delays of work within the office.”

“Absenteeism leads to reduced production as work piles up.”

“If an employee is not at work no one will attend to his/her work, especially when they specialize on the job, and services are compromised.”

“An employee’s work remains behind.”

When analysing the responses, it became clear that absenteeism not only damages workflow and person-power planning, it also reduces production. Participants and thus employees are aware that absenteeism negatively affects their day to day routine by delaying service delivery. It was also found that all the participants reiterated that when an employee is not at work, there will be backlogs that could have been avoided. Consequently, absenteeism affects the City’s chances of being competitive over other metropolitan municipalities in South Africa as well as globally.

5.4.4.2 Increased Work Pressure on Colleagues

Harte, Mahieu, Mallett, Norville and VanderWerf (2011:18-19) stated that employees who do not come to work as expected, negatively affect other employees in the sense that their co-workers have to perform their tasks in addition to their existing responsibilities. During personal interviews, only one participant highlighted this point. The response is as follows:

“Absenteeism put pressure on other colleagues as they will have to cover up for an employee who is not at work.”

It may be concluded that absence of an employee does indeed increase other employees' workloads. In addition, employees who are at work run the risk of suffering from burnout and exhaustion due to increased work pressure. More absences result in the long run. Work-place frictions also may spring up as a result.

5.4.4.3 Negative Financial Impact

In addition to frustrated co-workers, absenteeism means that the employer has to pay an employee for work not done (Harte, Mahieu, Mallett, Norville & VanderWerf, 2011:18). Employers thus incur enormous costs. The following responses which emerged during the interviews concur:

"Absenteeism has financial implications because when employees are not at work it will mean that an employer has to pay them."

"Absenteeism has financial implication since the municipality loses money."

"Absenteeism leads to an employee being paid without performing their duties."

When considering these responses, it is clear that the employees are aware of the financial loss an employer suffers as a result of unsanctioned absence. However, the same employees tend to become aggressive when punitive measures are enforced in response to truancy. The following excerpts from the participants indicate how employees are affected by their absence;

"If an employee does not have leave credits, it will lead to unpaid leave."

"Unreported absence leads to unpaid leave."

It was this confirmed by the participants that the City of Tshwane does discipline employees for not reporting their absences and for taking leave even when they have exhausted their leave days. It is however, unfair for employees to expect to be paid under such circumstances, as stipulated in the *Desertion and Abscondment policy*. The responses from the participants further suggested that employees ignore to take note of the conditions of absence as stipulated on the absenteeism policy (City of Tshwane, 2008:4-5).

5.4.5 Management of Absenteeism

In regard to the research objective relating to analysing current human resource policies for managing absenteeism at the City of Tshwane, the interview question *“How does the policy on absenteeism assist in controlling and managing absenteeism?”* was asked.

A participant confirmed that *“The City of Tshwane in collaboration with the unions made a collective agreement that employees need to report to work as expected and inform their immediate supervisor of their absence.”* He added that an agreement of this nature was reached to maintain discipline among staff members and to ensure that services are rendered on time to the residents. It was also highlighted during the interviews that should an employee fail to come to work without reporting, disciplinary measures need to be instituted against employees for non-compliance. Another participant said that the Collective Agreement does not *“prevent an employee taking leave, but encourages that such be done appropriately.”* In this regard, it is concluded that the union acts as a mediator to ensure that unfair labour practices are not imposed on the employees.

Another participants stated that the City of Tshwane’s absenteeism management policy and the Level of Agreement in terms of Bargaining Levels are used concurrently to address the employees’ absences. She added that the purpose of the Level of Agreement is to highlight parameters set between the union and the employer pertaining absenteeism. Yet another participant confirmed that the information in the sources is aligned with the prescripts of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997. In effect, all the participants confirmed that the Level of Agreement plays a significant role, as it guides supervisors on appropriately dealing with issues of abscondment. It is consequently resolved that policies and procedures are in place to prevent employees from manipulating the system by being absent without authorization. Unfortunately, no physical documentary evidence was available to support the effective and efficient implementation of these policies.

Responses to the question *“In what ways can absenteeism be managed at the City of Tshwane?”* and complemented the absenteeism management systems identified in Chapter 4, section 4.6 (*Managing absenteeism*). Participants provided different views of how absenteeism is managed at the City of Tshwane, in the process confirming that

the management of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane truly relies on the availability of reliable systems. The following are some of their responses:

“Absenteeism is managed through the use of attendance registers, access cards indicating times. This system is not connected to payroll, and is not effective as a biometric system in which a fingerprint is used to detect attendance.”

“Attendance registers are completed daily by employees. Supervisor have to do head counts and allow each individual to sign in and out on the attendance register.”

Record-keeping is a good way of tracking absence. Kruger, Nel & Joubert (2013:24) insist that employers need to develop and maintain a detailed record-keeping system, indicating dates and reasons of absences next to individuals' names. Such a system could be manual or involve the use of access cards which trace employees' movements in and out of the premises as well as the times concerned. Even when a supervisor is not around, another appropriately authorised employee might be assigned the task of being in-charge of the register. The above participants' responses affirm the vital link between theory and practice in public administration.

Regrettably, none of the participants elaborated on the need to use access cards to monitor and track absenteeism at their workplace. Perhaps the biometric system may be implemented in order to trace employees' movements in and out of the premises of the municipality. This system functions effectively unlike the clocking system, because it involves the scanning an employee's finger. The biometric system may work effectively, especially when tracking absences of employees at the regions.

Still under the theme of the management of absenteeism, two of the participants raised the following views with regard to remedial actions in cases of unauthorised leave:

“The absenteeism management policy reduces absenteeism as it guides employees on the manner in which leave have to be taken. It also states that an employee has to comply by reporting their absence to the supervisor. The policy shows that an employee cannot take leave when they have exhausted their leave days as that will lead to unpaid absence.”

“In cases of sick leave, employees are taken to the municipality clinic for assessment and social workers are involved in cases of mental health.”

The principle of unpaid leave hits hard on an employee's pocket, as stated in Chapter 2, section 2.5 (*An influence of an organisational policy on absence*). When an employee thinks of not going to work, what come first will be deductions that will be enacted. If done consistently, unpaid leave can be effective in reducing absenteeism. Employees regard their employers as being unfair when they impose unpaid on them, not considering the costs incurred as a result of their absence. Conversely, implementing wellness programmes in the workplace allows employees to maintain a healthy lifestyle and thus reduces sickness-related absenteeism (Harte, Mahieu, Mallett, Norville & VanderWerf, 2011:22).

A question whether the absenteeism policy serves its purpose was also asked during the interviews in order to evaluate current policy of managing absenteeism at the City of Tshwane. To the question, *"In your opinion does the policy on absenteeism serve its purposes?"*, participants responded in the following manner:

"Absenteeism policy reduces employee absence since employees cannot take leave as they want. Moreover, the supervisor has to be informed, and if the supervisor declines, an employee cannot take a leave."

"There is a penalty of unpaid for employees not reporting their absence."

"An employee has to take leave as per the leave days appearing on the system and leave days should not be exceeded."

"When an employee is not at work, proof of special leave has to be submitted in accordance to leave taken."

The participants also indicated that absenteeism is communicated through internal communiques, circulars, e-mails and meetings are held when there is an alarming rise of absenteeism. It was thus established that the City of Tshwane's absenteeism policy plays an important role in managing absenteeism as it guides employees on the leave types and conditions. Clear and unambiguous and effective communication between a supervisor and an employee is indispensable when it comes to absence management (Cucchiella, Gastaldi & Ranieri, 2014:1166). In addition to the absenteeism policy being communicated at regular intervals, it must also be applied fairly and with consistency across the spectrum of employees. As in many other aspects of life, prevention of absenteeism is better than curative attempts.

5.4.6 Challenges of Managing Absenteeism

The research question “What challenges do the City of Tshwane face in managing absenteeism?” is fully answered in this section. Interviewees, all of whom came from the Leave Capturing Office, confirmed that various challenges interfere with their duties, despite the fact that the office has a capability of performing their duties smoothly in close collaboration with various operational departments’ supervisors. These supervisors monitor the manner in which leave are taken so they can plan and accommodate work flow within their sections. So what are the challenges experienced regarding the management of absenteeism?

“Dishonesty of employees, fearing that money will be deducted from their salaries.”

“Employees take leave even when they have exhausted their leave days, resulting in unpaid leave, and not attaching supporting documents.”

“Employees come to leave office to enquire about money deductions and demand the office to answer.”

“Employees aggressively enquire about their unpaid leave, whereas the Leave Capturing Office has no answer to that since instructions for deductions come from supervisors at their respective sections.”

“Employees do not comply and come to complain about the deductions at the leave office, also management as the regions are not doing their work, as they do not account on absenteeism.”

“The newly implemented e-leave system does not update leave properly, as a result cause delays on approval of leave.”

“Workload is more with implementation of e-leave system, as it has hiccups since employees are unable to attach documents.”

“Leave are not properly recorded and this causes the leave office to keep on changing the information.”

“There are loopholes in the policy as a result of the amalgamation.”

A significant majority of the participants mentioned that they are constantly dealing with queries of unpaid leave. Importantly, they also confirmed that there are “*always delays in capturing new leave on time*”, and that these delays eventually lead to

backlogs. These responses thus confirmed that challenges and problems exist which prevent the Leave Capturing Office from performing its work efficiently.

Furthermore, it was revealed that supervisors from other sections do not submit leave forms of their subordinates on time for processing. This causes delays when leave have to be approved. Supervisors in some sections fail to account for individuals absences because of their improper recording system. In other instances, leave forms are sent to the Leave Capturing Office bearing incorrect information. Then the forms have to be rejected causing another delay. It was revealed that when leave are not processed on time, blame will always be laid at the Leave Capturing Office's door.

In addition to the above hassles, supervisors sometimes reject leave without consulting with the subordinates. In an event where an unpaid leave is imposed, individual employees then flock to the Leave Capturing Office accusing its staff of deducting their money without consent. Further, beside miscommunication regarding individuals' leave, the Leave Capturing Office claimed that the newly implemented system for loading leave causes unnecessary delays. This happens because employees are not yet familiar with it and so make mistakes that prompt the Leave Capturing Office to reject their applications.

On the other hand, employees are unable to attach additional documents on the system, which also leads to delays of approvals. Employees who lack computer literacy prefer to use the old system (filling in of forms) instead struggling with the electronic leave system. Although the old system has been seen as a drawback since documents maybe misplaced before reaching the Leave Capturing Office or other challenges that the electronic system was meant to address, through reducing manual paperwork and easier tracking of individuals' leave records.

It is clear that problems and challenges exist with regard to absenteeism management at the City of Tshwane. These challenges do hinder the Leave Capturing Office from assiduously attending to absenteeism through preventative measures such as employee conscientization for instance.

5.5 SUMMARY

This chapter presented the findings derived from the data gathered through personal interviews conducted by the researcher with eight staff members from the Leave Capturing Office. As clearly indicated, these participants were selected because they play significant roles in the administration and management of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane. The information gathered through the interviews served as a yardstick against which the main causes of absenteeism could be identified so that recommendations could be made for even more effective absenteeism management at the City of Tshwane.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this concluding chapter, a synthesis of the chapters of the dissertation, relevant conclusions based on the findings presented in Chapter 5, as well as recommendations to the City of Tshwane are presented to confirm whether the overall aim of the study, namely, to evaluate human resource policy in managing absenteeism at the City of Tshwane was indeed reached. The chapter also concedes the limitations of the present study and so makes recommendations for further research.

6.2 SYNTHESIS OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 provided the general introduction of the study. It sought to provide context of the study by explicating the background, rationale and motivation thereof. The problem statement, aims and objectives of the research and terminology were likewise discussed. Also introduced were thoughts around the method of data collection, the sampling methods, data analysis and interpretation, demarcation of the study, and the ethical consideration, which were explained in detail in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2 paid attention to the definition of absenteeism, theoretical perspectives around it, as well as considerations apropos its legitimacy. The antecedents of absenteeism, influence of absenteeism plus management of absenteeism were iterated. Different authors' definitions of absenteeism and their implications were heeded.

Chapter 3 described the study's overall design and research methods. The design and methods adopted were informed by current research objectives. Consequently, research approaches, research design, population, sampling procedures, data collection techniques, ethical considerations as well as data analysis and interpretation were discussed.

Chapter 4 provided the organisational structure of City of Tshwane, the management of absenteeism at the municipality, in addition to the City's operations plus reporting structures.

Chapter 5 synthesized the research. The manner in which data was drawn and recorded has been presented. The study was guided by the objectives, the problem statement and the reviewed literature in collecting feasible data. In the end, themes and sub-themes emerged from the data. The research also made use of documents provided at City of Tshwane to compliment the data obtained from primary sources.

Chapter 6 is composed mainly of a summary of the conclusions on the one hand, and recommendations to the City of Tshwane on the other.

6.3 CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are based on the findings that are presented in the previous chapter. Conclusions are grouped per the research objectives listed in Chapter 1, section 1.5 (*Aim and objectives of the research*).

6.3.1 Objective 1: To Investigate the Meaning of Absenteeism in the Context of the City of Tshwane

It is important that the employer should understand absence reasons before taking any action against employee behavior. The City of Tshwane's Leave Capturing Office staff members defined absenteeism in various ways, although the meaning was the same. The meaning provided is that when an individual does not show up for work when required to do so, that constitutes absenteeism. Not showing up for work when expected implies that the employees are not adhering to both the terms of absenteeism management policy and the employment contract.

It also emerged that not all departments within the municipality know about managing leave. This means that enormous work is needed to educate the workforce about absenteeism. At the same time, employees are aware that absenteeism is an unacceptable behavior and a breach of contract, but they continue to conduct themselves in this unfortunate manner. From the participants' responses it was established that employees at the City of Tshwane tend to report sick while actually not sick; they do this in order to achieve non-work-related goals during work hours.

6.3.2 Objective 2: To Evaluate the Causes of Absenteeism at the City of Tshwane

The following main causes of absenteeism were identified by the participants: (1) Job dissatisfaction; (2) Unpleasant working relations; (3) Favouritism; (4) Low wages; (5) Lack of resources; (6) Exhaustion and stress; and (7) Boredom. Unpleasant working relations, exhaustion and stress comprise the most prominent causes cited.

During the interviews, it became evident that employees who are most likely to stay away from work are ones who are not satisfied with their job demands, with the workplace environment, or are underperforming. For them the solution will be to withdraw or be away from work. In particular, when employees are bored at work they find it hard to be productive. Not all unhappy individuals stay away from work, some still come to work because they cannot afford to have their salaries docked. Such employees can be discerned through unproductiveness and loitering during office hours. Job satisfaction thus deserves serious attention at the City of Tshwane.

Some supervisors neglect their duties of managing absence, as a result their subordinates are able to abuse the system. Supervisors also have the responsibility of ensuring that absences are properly recorded. Also, supervisors have to ensure that relations between them and their subordinates are cordial and professional (Dasgupta, Suar & Singh, 2014:289). Employees develop emotional attachment with an organisation when they are satisfied with their line managers' leadership. Such employees actually do look forward to being at work. On the other hand, intensely poor working relations with supervisors frustrate employees more than demanding or boring work itself.

The research further revealed that favouritism is present at City of Tshwane. Favouritism is a factor for absenteeism in two ways. First, favoured workers are allowed by their supervisors to misuse leave. Secondly, and as a consequence, bitterness develops among unfavoured employees, some of whom will stay away from work in rebellion against unfair discrimination. When working conditions are not welcoming for an employee, absenteeism increases almost without fail.

That low wages affect employees' commitment to work is not surprising; remuneration is the main reason why people seek employment. It was also confirmed that when

employees are not furnished with adequate resources to perform their jobs, they then opt to be away instead of doing nothing at their work stations. Such employees may return to work refreshed once conditions improve, thereby ensuring above average performance. It behoves managers to be cognizant of this possibility too, because boring routines are as counterproductive as improper placement of employees is (Gil-Monte, 2012:232). Correct alignment of employee responsibilities with their skills and interests is as important as promotion which brings about growth of challenging responsibilities.

6.3.3 Objective 3: To Establish Types and Patterns of Absenteeism at the City of Tshwane

The different types of leave to which the City's employees are entitled are annual leave, sick leave, maternity leave, and family responsibility leave. However, sick-leave was identified as the most prevalent absence at the municipality. Employees often manipulate the provision by feigning sickness for two days which is the maximum number of day they can be absent without having to provide a medical certificate. Some employees use these two days to relax at home or to attend to personal matters.

Figure 6.1 compares the sick leave absenteeism pattern for January to December 2016 with that of January to December 2017. Sickness graphs for both 2016 and 2017 confirm that employees take sick leave often. The month that is associated with high peaks is July, which falls under winter season when being up and about is not pleasant. Very little seems possible for remedying this trend because it is easier in winter for employees to get medical certificates in support of their non-attendance. The downward trend in the number of sick leave days taken between the months of August and December is intriguing and requires further investigation. It is possibly related to the year coming to an end and thus the need to wrap things up in order to enjoy the holidays.

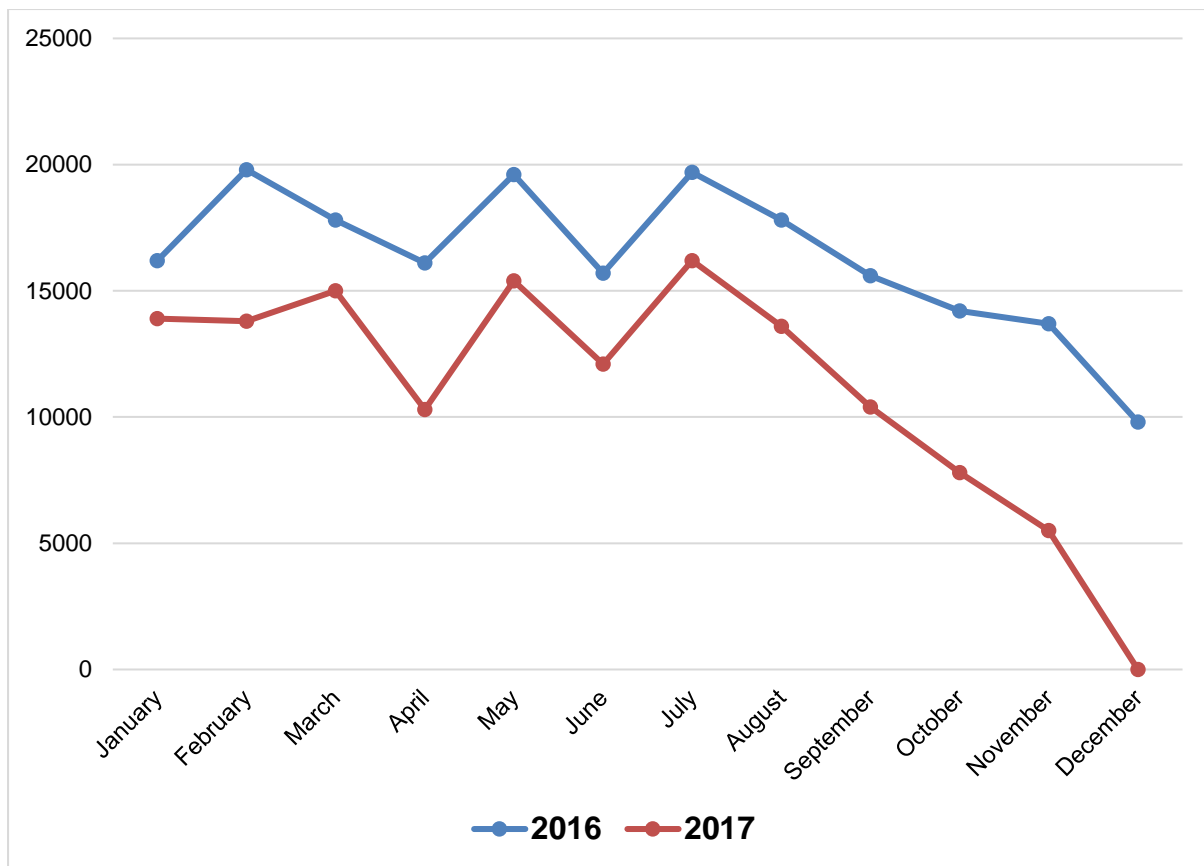


Figure 6.1: Absenteeism Patterns: Jan to Dec 2016 and Jan to Dec 2017 (Source: City of Tshwane, 2017b:1-2)

6.3.4 Objective 4: To Identify and Analyse the Consequences or Effects of Absenteeism to the City of Tshwane

Absenteeism has a massively negative impact on both the City of Tshwane and the employees. As such, habitual absenteeism is a problem that requires to be addressed as soon as it is discovered. The following main consequences were identified by the participants: (1) Decreased or loss of productivity; (2) Increased work pressure on colleagues; and (3) Negative financial impact.

When an employee is not at work there will be backlogs that lead to queries and delays which could have been avoided. Furthermore, the absence of an employee bears negative consequences on others who have to cover for him/her. While employees are aware of the financial loss the employer as a consequence of absence, the same employees tend to be aggressive when punitive measures are instituted in response to their waywardness.

6.3.5 Objective 5: To Analyse the Existing Human Resource Policy Relating to the Management of Absenteeism at the City of Tshwane

Taylor (2010:27) indicated that clear and unambiguous absenteeism policy prevents confusion among co-workers regarding dealing with absences. Absenteeism management policy is perceived as a tool to improve attendance and to address recurring patterns of non-attendance. The City of Tshwane's absenteeism management policy is ably complemented by the Collective Agreement to guide with administration and management of the employees' absences.

Both reported and unreported absence are encountered at the City of Tshwane. Reported absence arises when the supervisor approves or rejects it based on stated reasons. Reported absence includes annual leave, family responsibility leave, maternity leave, study leave, and water and lights leave. Because employees make prior arrangements that they will be away for a specific period, reported leave does not pose serious problems to the municipality. Unreported leave is a different matter altogether, especially when employees misuse sick-leave benefits.

6.3.6 Objective 6: To identify and Analyse Challenges Relating to the Management of Absenteeism at the City of Tshwane

In summary, the following challenges were identified:

- The exploitation and misapplication of sick leave days by employees in order to stock-up their annual leave days.
- Applications for leave often lacking supporting documents.
- Delays in capturing leave days occur resulting in backlogs.
- The Leave Capturing Office continuously dealing with unpaid leave related enquiries from employees.
- The e-leave system does not adequately update leave days. Supporting documents still have to be verified manually.
- The absenteeism management policies and procedures do not ensure consistency in the application processes and the various types of leave available.

Where action is not taken against delinquent employees, emulation is likely to occur and so exacerbate the problem.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the above conclusions, the following recommendations are humbly submitted to relevant parties.

6.4.1 Causes of Absenteeism

It is recommended that the City of Tshwane launches an unbiased enquiry into the following main causes of absenteeism: job dissatisfaction, unpleasant working relations, favouritism, low wages, lack of resources, stress at the workplace, and boredom with routine tasks. Consequently, the human resource policy in managing absenteeism should be adapted to specifically cater for the most prominent causes of absenteeism, namely, unpleasant working relations and exhaustion or stress.

6.4.2 Types and Patterns of Absenteeism

Absenteeism management is mainly the responsibility of managers alongside the human resource department. Given the identified trends of absenteeism, more needs to be done to reduce its spread. Absenteeism can only be minimised if individuals change their attitudes about their workplace. To reduce sick leave, it is recommended that the City of Tshwane invests in employee wellness programmes during the months preceding July. Such wellness programmes should focus on work, stress and personal health.

6.4.3 Consequences or Effects of Absenteeism

The main consequences of absenteeism were identified as loss of productivity, increased work pressure on colleagues, and negative financial impact on both employer and employees. Absenteeism thus negatively affects workflow and planning at the office. It is subsequently recommended that methods for improved planning to prevent delays in production and service delivery be investigated by the City of Tshwane. Awareness campaigns focusing on the negative financial impact of absenteeism on the City and on its employees should also be launched.

6.4.4 Human Resource Policy Relating to the Management of Absenteeism

The City's absenteeism policy needs to be clear and unambiguous so as to be understood and adhered to by employees. Absenteeism management can be improved by reviewing ways to improve the e-leave system and processes. It is recommended that management invests in a total process to identify, assess, control and mitigate absenteeism-related risks that may affect operations adversely at the City.

Also, managers need to monitor workforce compliance with the policy as prescribed. Even with the municipality resulting from amalgamations, managers have to ensure that only one policy applies consistently and to all within municipality. This will assist in proper monitoring of leave and preventing unwarranted absences.

It is also recommended that the City of Tshwane do away with what is called 'sick half', since employees' abuse the benefit. This is provided when an employee has exhausted their sick leave days. Meaning four hours will be deducted from vacation leave and four hours from sick leave to add up to one full sick day.

6.4.5 Challenges Relating to the Management of Absenteeism

It is recommended that management invests in a total process to assess, control and mitigate the identified challenges in the following ways:

- Drastically reduce or limit the number of annual leave days that may be stocked-up to lessen the abuse of the available number of sick leave days as substitute for annual leave.
- Enforce a change from sick leave to annual leave in cases where applications for leave lack supporting documents.
- Applications for leave should be captured within a specified period, for example two days after receiving the application, to prevent any backlogs.
- Supervisors ought to be first point of enquiry about unpaid leave. Only when supervisors are unable to explain the reason for unpaid leave can the employee concerned be referred to the Leave Capturing Office for response to enquiries.
- The e-leave system be upgraded to an effective system for administering and managing leave. For instance, the e-leave system could be programmed to alert the Leave Capturing Office where supporting documents are not attached.

- Absence management policies and procedures be revisited to ensure consistency in their application and updating of the available types of leave.
- Employees identified as frequently leave takers be included in employee assistance programmes already being offered by the City of Tshwane.

6.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Since the current study is confined only to the City of Tshwane municipality, the causes of absenteeism encountered by the municipality cannot be generalised. The recommendations included in this chapter are thus primarily only applicable to the City of Tshwane. Adjustments may have to be made in cases where there is a desire to apply this study's findings in other spheres.

6.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Due to the identified two prominent causes of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane, namely, unpleasant working relations and exhaustion or stress, further research on work-life balance, employer support to employees, and the advantages of employee assistance programmes, is recommended to enhance absenteeism management at the City.

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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

 UNISA university of south africa	
DEPARTMENT: PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE	
Date: 8 August 2017	<div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; padding-bottom: 5px;">Ref #: PAM/2017/015 (Moletsane)</div> <div style="padding-bottom: 5px;">Name of applicant: Ms MI Moletsane</div> <div style="padding-bottom: 5px;">Student #: 47289996</div>
Dear Ms Moletsane	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Decision: Ethics Clearance Approval</div>	
<hr/> <p>Name: Ms MI Moletsane, Mphakhoa@webmail.co.za, tel: 072 834-0492 [Supervisor: Ms C Alers, 012 429-6286, alersc@unisa.ac.za]</p> <p>Research project: Evaluating human resource policy in managing absenteeism: case of City of Tshwane Qualification: MAdmin</p> <hr/>	
<p>Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Department: Public Administration and Management: Research Ethics Review Committee, for the above mentioned research. Final approval is granted for the duration of the project.</p> <p>The decision will be tabled at the next College RERC meeting for notification/ratification.</p> <hr/>	
<p>For full approval: The application was expedited and reviewed in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics by the RERC on 31 July 2017. The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics.2) Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, as well as changes in the methodology, should be communicated in writing to this Ethics Review Committee. An amended application could be requested if there are substantial changes from the existing proposal, especially if those changes affect any of the study-related risks for the research participants.3) The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study.	
<p>Kind regards</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;"> Prof Mike van Heerden Chairperson: Research Ethics Review Committee vheerm@unisa.ac.za</div>	<div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;"> Prof MT Mogale Executive Dean: CEMS</div>
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: flex-end;"><div style="text-align: center;"></div><div style="text-align: right; font-size: small;"><p>University of South Africa Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150 www.unisa.ac.za</p></div></div>	

ANNEXURE B: PERMISSION FROM THE CITY OF TSHWANE TO CONDUCT THE RESEARCH



Office of the Deputy City Manager Governance and Support Services

20th Floor Isivuno House | 143 Lillian Ngoyi Street | Pretoria | 0001
PO Box 440 | Pretoria | 0001
Tel: 012 358 6251/4869 | Fax: 086 2148421
Email: EransBos@tshwane.gov.za | www.tshwane.gov.za | www.facebook.com/CityOfTshwane

My ref:	Research Permission	Tel:	012 358 2000
Contact person:	Zukiswa Ncunzana	Email:	Zukiswanc@tshwane.gov.za
Section/Unit:	Integrated Research	Date:	28 September 2016

Re: Ms Mphacha innocentia Moletsane
14547 Angelica Street Extension 16,
Glenridge, Soweto
Johannesburg 1819

Dear Ms. Moletsane

RE: Approval to Conduct Research within the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality

I have the pleasure to inform you that your request to conduct research on the topic ***"Evaluating human resource policy in managing absenteeism: Case at City of Tshwane"*** has been reviewed and permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality.

It is noted that your research aims to evaluate human resource policy in managing absenteeism at the City of Tshwane. In addition, please be informed that as a researcher you are required to sign the Confidentiality Agreement Form with the City prior data collection. Research and Innovation Department will be facilitating the whole process; therefore communication should be directed to this department.

Once you complete your research in the City, you will be requested to present your findings and submit the final report/ a copy of your dissertation.

Yours faithfully

Frans Boshelo (Mr)
Deputy City Manager
Governance and Support Service

31/09/2016
Date



ANNEXURE C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

02/02, 2017

**Title: Evaluating human resource policy in managing absenteeism:
Case City of Tshwane**

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Ms Mphacha Innocentia Moletsane and I am doing research under the supervision of Ms C Alers, a lecturer in the Department of Public Administration and Management, studying towards a Master's degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled: *Evaluating human resource policy in managing absenteeism: City of Tshwane*.

WHAT ARE THE AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY?

The overall aim of the study is to evaluate human resource policy in managing absenteeism at the City of Tshwane. Certain measures have to be implemented in order to encourage employees to be at work during working hours and to do what they are supposed to do. The human resource policy will act as guideline to enforce attendance.

The objectives supporting these aims are to:

- To investigate the meaning of absenteeism in the context of the City of Tshwane
- To analyse the existing human resource policy relating to the management of absenteeism
- To critically evaluate the processes and types of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane
- To identify and analyse the challenges relating to the management of absenteeism as experienced at the City of Tshwane

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

The researcher applied for permission to conduct research with the City of Tshwane; such permission has been granted. The targeted population is the staff members working under human resource department. A sample will be drawn from this section, the reason being they will be able to provide challenges that they encounter when employees are absent, and on the other hand narrate about the causes of absenteeism at the municipality.

The targeted number will be, 15 members. The research envisages to take limited number for easy and manageable extraction of data. The sample will consist of the senior human resource officers, the officers, administrators and data capturers. The managers' input will be required depending on their willingness to participate.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The participation of a researcher is to ensure that quality and relevant data is collected. Data will be collected by means of interviews and using available documents relating to absenteeism that will be provided by the municipality. The researcher will ensure that participants understand all the details relating to participation. Consent forms will be distributed through e-mail, using the Leave Capturing mail list. When a response to participate has been received, the researcher will then arrange for interviews.

Semi-structured interviews will last between 30-45 minutes. You will be requested to define absenteeism the way you understand it, elaborate on the causes of absenteeism and how absenteeism can be effectively reduced or minimised.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participating. Participants have a right to withdraw from the study at any time, if they feel that they no longer want to be part of the study. No one will be forced to participate in the study. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

Each individual in an organisation is responsible for ensuring that they comply with the policy of absenteeism at the City of Tshwane. The study will educate and equip you with adequate understanding of the challenges employers face regarding absenteeism. The manner in which absenteeism impacts on you and other employees will be highlighted so as to make you aware of its consequences. Taking part in the study will enlighten you about the negative impact of absenteeism and, after being part of the study, you will learn how crucial attendance and compliance is to the municipality.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

I do not anticipate any undue risks for Unisa, the City of Tshwane or the individual participants from participation in the study. The privacy of all the participants will be protected by removing identifying information in the dissemination of the findings of this study.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

You have all the right to insist that your name should not be noted down. Participants will remain anonymous throughout the study in order to protect research subjects. Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the statistician, transcriber and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to the researcher working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

Your anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and conference proceedings. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report. Please keep in mind that it is sometimes impossible to make an absolute guarantee of confidentiality or anonymity, e.g. when interviews are used as a data collection method. But the researcher will make sure that no names are mentioned. Instead, data provided will be linked to an individual by using alphabetical letters.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password-protected computer. After five years, hard copies will be shredded and electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any payment or reward, financial or otherwise. The study will not incur undue costs to you.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Department of Public Administration and Management, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher and a signed confidentiality clause provided by the City of Tshwane.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Ms Moletsane on 072 834-0492, or via email at mphakhoa@webmail.co.za.

The dissertation will be available at the Unisa library (Muckleneuk campus). A copy of the dissertation will also be submitted to the City of Tshwane Municipality, who may store it on their system to be accessed by staff members.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research is conducted, you may contact my supervisor, Ms Alers on 012 429-6286 or via email at alersc@unisa.ac.za. Alternatively, contact the research ethics chairperson of the Department of Public Administration and Management, Unisa, Professor M van Heerden, at 012 429-6749 or via email at yheerm@unisa.ac.za.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Yours sincerely

Mphacha Innocentia Moletsane (Mrs)

ANNEXURE D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH

Research Title:

Evaluating human resource policy in managing absenteeism: City of Tshwane

I, (participant name & surname), confirm that the person asking for my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

- I have read and understood the study as explained in the participant information sheet.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty.
- I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a dissertation.
- I agree to be interviewed.

Participant's name and surname

Date

Signature

Mrs Mphacha Innocentia
Moletsane

Researcher's name and surname

Date

Signature

Witness name and surname

Date

Signature

ANNEXURE E: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. This interview is based on research about the human resource policy in managing absenteeism at the City of Tshwane.
2. You have been invited to participate in this study because of your extensive experience of the topic.
3. You are kindly requested to respond to the interview questions as honestly and completely as possible.
4. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes.
5. Participation is anonymous: You are not requested to disclose your identity. Your privacy will be respected.
6. No one will be able to connect you to the responses you provide.
7. The information collected from you will be treated with strict confidentiality and used for research purposes only.
8. You have the right to withdraw your participation at any time. Hence, your participation is considered voluntarily.
9. You will not receive any payment or reward, financial or otherwise, and the study will not incur undue costs to you.
10. The survey data will be stored in a locked cupboard and the data in a computer which will be protected by a password. The data will be destroyed when it is no longer of functional value (after five years).
11. A copy of the dissertation will be available in the library at the Muckleneuk Ridge Campus of the University of South Africa (Unisa), Pretoria.
12. The interview comprises questions that you need to elaborate on in detail. There is no right or wrong answer.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	
1	How do you understand workplace absenteeism in the context of City of Tshwane?
2	How is absenteeism viewed as a worker's strategy to run away from aversive work conditions?
3	In which context is absenteeism regarded as a habitual behavior at work?
4	In your opinion, what are the causes of absenteeism?
5	How do you think management styles affect employee attendance?
6	What patterns of workplace absenteeism are prevailing at the City of Tshwane?
7	How do issues such as qualifications and gender influence absenteeism in the workplace?
8	In your opinion how does absenteeism affect the municipality?
9	How does the policy on absenteeism assist in controlling and managing absenteeism?
10	In your opinion does the policy on absenteeism serve its purposes?
11	What are the challenges experienced regarding the management of absenteeism?

Thank you for your participation and your effort towards making this study a success.

ANNEXURE F: EXCERPT OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

INTERVIEW SESSION EVALUATING HUMAN RESOUCES POLICY IN MANAGING ABSENTEEISM: CITY OF TSHWANE

INTERVIEWER : MPHACHA MOLETSANE

INTERVIEWEE : RESPONDENT 7

...

R7: Meaning when you take ... [intervenes]

I: In your opinion what is absenteeism?

R7: It's when you don't come to work. It's either you report or you don't report. Sometimes when people don't report then it's abscondment. So when you report normally you report before ten to your supervisor.

I: Also known as abscondment you said.

R7: I'm saying if you don't report.

I: If you don't report.

R7: It's an abscondment. When your supervisor doesn't know where you are. Or they normally say maybe you went AWOL. They don't know.

I: Your whereabouts, AWOL, yes. The next question, in your opinion how does absenteeism affect the municipality?

R7: It does because sometimes let's say maybe in your department you work alone. Then you're not at work. Then your duties will, nobody will do your responsibilities. Because normally in the municipality most of the time you specialise. Let's say you specialise in leave and in leave section as well you have, you are allocated departments or regions. So if you specialise with region 5 and region 6 then you are responsible for those regions. So if you're not there nobody will do your duties. Then it will affect the employee in terms of maybe they want to encash, they want to sell their leave days. They want to pay water and lights and so you can't even do those duties if you're not at work.

I: At work.

R7: Ja. And another thing is that let's say maybe you take leave né and you don't have leave credits like leave days. That means it's unpaid leave. Then if it's...

I: It will leave to unpaid.

R7: Ja, it will lead to unpaid leave.

I: But how is it affecting the municipality?

R7: It does in terms of, you know say to be productive. Let's say for, if you work in essential services and then you don't go to work and you don't even report that means if you are allocated maybe to go and help maybe with water or electricity in that department they know that who is responsible to work in that section. So nobody knows that you're not at work. That means people will suffer in terms of service delivery. So it will be negative for the municipality because people will report those things to councillors, councillors to the mayor.

I: Okay, thank you so much. What patterns of workplace absenteeism are most common at City of Tshwane?

R7: The patterns is sick leave, ja.

I: Sick leave.

R7: Sick leave without ... [intervenes]

I: How are they doing it?

R7: Let me say maybe Monday to, Monday and I mean Friday and Monday and

sometimes it's during pay day. Ja, from pay day people go AWOL and even on like next month it's our bonus month so we know that come January we get a pile of unpaid leave because people will go thinking that, you know what, [inaudible 00.06.15].

I: Okay, thank you. Next one, in which context is absenteeism regarded as habitual? In which context is it regarded as a habit?

R7: How do I put it?

I: But you understand it as a habit?

R7: I do, ja. Like it's a habit.

I: Ja, it tends to be a habit. More than maybe something that you can say, no, you just came and went or...

R7: That's why I'm saying normally the people would rather leave their vacation days because they know that vacation days normally you can also sell it né. So the leave that they normally like use it's sick leave. Ja. Because it's a period, it's three years, you know mos hey and then it's 80 plus one, I think it's a quarter. We add it on that cycle. Then it will be 106. So normally people they know that, you know what, within this period I will use this so it's like it's a habit. I'll play with it.

I: Ja, ja.

R7: Like save my vacation. And then sometimes you get – you know your employees. Even if you don't work with them like [vernacular] already us we know that, I know that Mahlangu, there's no way he can finish the whole month without coming to work.

I: Ja, that's true.

R7: And I know I'll get the sick note. So they know how to cover themselves. Because then for the municipality, the municipality employees, it's not easy to say, you know what, this is fake or what. I mean if there's a doctor's certificate it's valid. You're not a doctor. Then you have to implement it. But then you can see this is a habit. You can see. Okay, this one it was two months back or if you check the record you'd see that, okay, last month they were sick with maybe two weeks after again, ja. And then even with the sick without because it's a eight weeks period né like you have to take two days within that eight weeks so normally they will use that eight and two days. Then they know that okay, I won't. Maybe after two weeks, I mean two months again then I'll go and use that.

I: All right. In your opinion what are the main causes of absenteeism at City of Tshwane?

R7: You know for people who are working outside like essential services I would say maybe long hours like you work maybe mostly with overtime. Let me say with metro police né because with metro police normally we get a lot of sick leave né. It's long hours because they are shift workers.

I: Long hours. Is it overtime?

R7: It's overtime. And shift workers, it goes back to that issue that you were saying that you find that maybe you work eight hours né and then other employee maybe after, before ten you get a message that says I'm not coming to work. Then you have to replace, ja. Or maybe there's a crisis maybe for metro police. Guys, you have to go and assist. There's a strike or

...

I: Okay, let's go to the other one. How is absenteeism managed at City of Tshwane?

R7: How do we manage that actually? Do we really know how to manage? Remember there are departments. There are regions né. I think we use the timesheet to check with the ... [intervenes]

I: Timesheet.

R7: Ja. And there's a clock system as well that they use in other departments, not on – oh let me say ... [intervenes]

I: Clock system?

R7: It's a clock system. Like [inaudible 00.16.42] which has, ja, they can do a printout where they can check if I was in or not and then for – there's another system. I think they say it's AB or AB, I think so for the [inaudible] the workers they use that clock system. So that clock system shows that for this month so and so didn't work and then that's where we'll deduct the unpaid.

I: How is the absenteeism, how is the policy of managing absenteeism serving

...

I: Okay. The last one it's what are the roles and responsibilities of the leave capturing office?

R7: Our roles is that we make sure that whatever we capture on the system it's valid and fact and the leave form, like maybe let me make an example. If it's sick leave we make sure that we check the supporting documents that they are valid. They go hand in hand with the dates on the system to check as well if you qualify for that leave on the system. And to check and another thing that we capture in time if the thing it was submitted to us in time. Then we must make sure that we process those leaves. But in terms of follow-ups with the employees that's the support. No, because we've got HR support as well. This is head office. We've got HR support but they normally ... [intervenes]

I: The regions.

R7: Ja, the regions. They compile all the forms and everything and they send that to us.

I: And they also send in ... [intervenes]

R7: Everything is sent to us. This is central. And HR support they are the one responsible for department and regions and the posts. Ja.

I: Oh, so the HR support, what do they do? They only collect the forms. Then bring it to central.

R7: Submit, yes.

I: Which is right here.

R7: Ja, the only leave type that they capture on the system it's vacation leave. It's their responsibility. Ja.

I: So with you guys you capture ... [intervenes]

R7: We capture all the leave type except vacation leave.

I: Oh except vacation leave.

R7: Ja.

I: Oh okay. Okay. Thank you so much for your time and your input was so highly valuable.

R7: All right.

I: So as soon as I'm done then my dissertation will be available on the internet.

R7: Okay.

I: And even at Unisa library so that you can be able to view.

R7: Oh, ja, and see our inputs.

I: Thank you so much.

R7: Okay.

[End of interview]