



# **An Exploratory Study of Presenteeism in Private Sector Organisations Operating in Ireland**

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**By**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In previous years it was understood that attending work equated to performance. However, it seems that health related loss of productivity, social networking and carrying out other business in work can be traced equally to employees attending work as well as workers choosing not to. Presenteeism in the workplace is a very broad term however it seems to be more prevalent than absenteeism.

Presenteeism is a complex phenomenon to conceptualise and measure, mainly due to its intangible and indirect nature. An analysis of data from a representative sample of HR practitioners in private sector organisations enables the author to paint an exclusive picture of presenteeism, not only to the impacts of health disorders but also to other causes, prevalence and awareness of presenteeism, line managers understanding, HRs role the challenges and issues that they are currently facing as a result of this phenomena. Results provide an enhanced understanding of presenteeism and stress the role that managers and HR should be taking in order to reduce this phenomena. Presenteeism was perceived by HR managers to be very low with minimal consideration of the need to introduce presenteeism surveys in order to measure the real impact presenteeism is having on the organisation. As the author looked more in-depth into the findings it was very obvious that presenteeism is an underlining issue that HR managers are failing to look at due to their lack of knowledge in that area. It is not measured there are no policies in place but it was still seen by HR managers as more costly compared to absenteeism.

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To my class, I have made some lifelong friends and I am so happy I had the privilege to share all these memories with.

## ETHICAL DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is wholly my own work except where I have made explicit reference to the work of others. I have read the *Project Key Instructions and Guidelines* and hereby declare that this dissertation is in line with these requirements. I have discussed, agreed and complied with whatever confidentiality or anonymity terms of reference were deemed appropriate by those participating in the research and dealt appropriately with any other ethical matters arising.

I have uploaded the entire dissertation as one file to Turnitin® in Moodle®, examined my ‘Originality Report’ by viewing the detail behind the overall ‘Similarity Index’, and have addressed any matches that exceed 3% when quotations and bibliography are excluded. I have made every effort to minimise my overall ‘Similarity Index’ score and the number of matches occurring.

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Carol Tompkins

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Date

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**GLOSSARY**

HRM            Human Resource Management

STOICS       Sick through often inbox checking

B              Billion

CIPD          Chartered Institute of personal development

EAP           Employee Assistant Programmes

## **Chapter 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a general overview of the research area for study and outlines the rationale for undertaking the dissertation. The area of study is set out by the research question; what is the level of presenteeism in organisations and what impact and challenges are Human Resource Managers/Practitioners (HRM) facing as a result. This chapter will describe in detail the prospect of this study being a valuable contribution not only to companies involved but to other companies that are currently dealing with this problem of presenteeism. The structure to this paper and the limitations of the study will also be outlined.

### **1.2 Research topic**

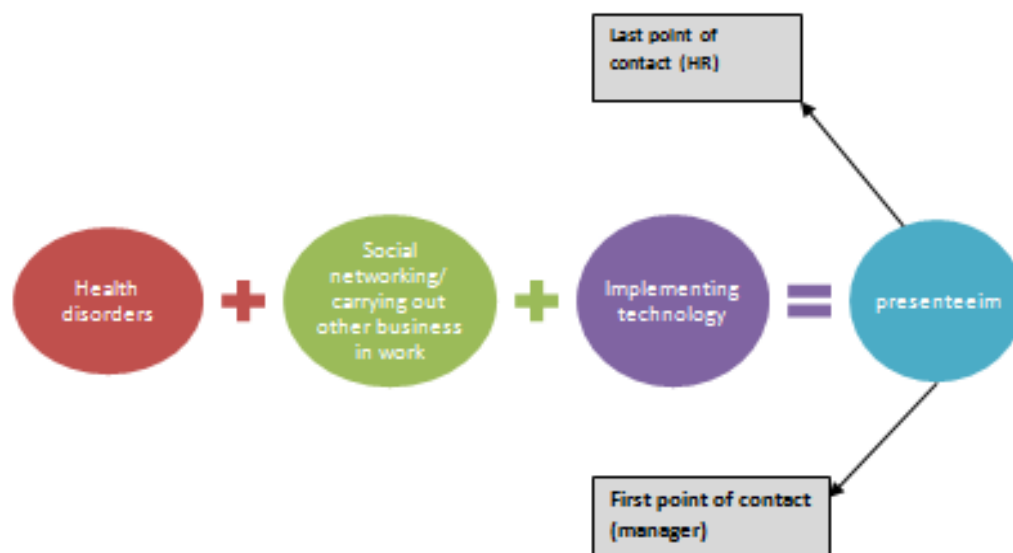
The purpose of this research study is to investigate and examine the level of presenteeism in the workplaces and the impact and challenges HR practitioners are facing with a reduced workload. According to Demerouti *et al.*, (2009) presenteeism can lead to emotional exhaustion and employee burnout. Shamansky (2002, p.5) is one of the most influential authors in this area and has defined presenteeism as a time “when people are physically present in the workplace but are functionally absent”. Thereby a small amount of employees work at their highest level of capacity all the time. Some employees attend work with a cold or headache, the concept of presenteeism refers to this problem. Most days a considerable amount of employees are physically present at work but they are not being productive. Another seminal writer in this area is Hemp, (2004, p.2) who stated that presenteeism refers to productivity loss resulting from real health problems. The principal of carrying out research on presenteeism is the assumption that employees do not take their jobs lightly, that most of them need and want to continue working if they can. Therefore, when employees are sick they try to work out ways to carry on regardless of their symptoms. It is important to understand that generally presenteeism is not about pretending to be sick or trying to get a day off work it is more so coming to work sick (Hemp, 2004). In recent years presenteeism refers to employees who perform non-work related activities such as a personal business for part of the workday (D’Abate and Eddy, 2007). The author plans to look at all the key areas

related to presenteeism such as the reasons, impacts and solutions. It is for this reason that the author is keeping these particular research objectives in mind;

- To examine the prevalence of presenteeism in private sector organisations operating in Ireland
- To explore, if any, the reasons for presenteeism
- To establish, if any, the HR practices and mechanisms in place to resolve presenteeism

### 1.3 Rationale for the study

The underlying aim of the research is to contribute to the body of existing literature that is available in the area of presenteeism. After thorough research of this topic, the author believed that there was a deprivation of research concerning how HR managers deal with presenteeism and what mechanisms they have in place to reduce presenteeism. Although a HR manager's role is to support employees, they are usually the last point of contact as shown in figure 1.1 below. Therefore, this in itself is a challenge for HR practitioners.



**Figure 1.1. Presenteeism Framework- authors thought process**

The author would therefore like to determine the first point of contact in an organisation, when an employee has a problem, and what understanding and education this first point of contact has in regards to presenteeism.

The author believes that there is a real need to bridge this gap and aims to close it in the literature by interviewing HR managers from different sectors to get the most efficient result possible. According to Asyssa *et al.*, (2009, p.375) “presenteeism is still a relatively new area compared with other workplace outcomes” and as a result it is necessary for researchers to explore the area in more detail. The intended result being to find data that is linked to the accepted definition companies use and the accepted measurement tools used to explore whether different industries or job classifications measure and define presenteeism in the same way. The author proposes to examine private sector organisations alone as her research illustrated that calling in sick within the public sector was different to the private sector due to the stricter rules and regulations within that region. Thus, it is also important to try to understand the causes of presenteeism in order to reduce this phenomenon. The author acknowledges that this is a serious problem that companies are facing and brings outstanding challenges. Therefore the author would like to determine HRs awareness of this problem.

#### **1.4 Structure of the dissertation**

The research chapters are structured as follows:

##### **Chapter 1**

Chapter one gives a brief introduction to the area of study. This chapter emphasises the research question, aims and objectives of the topic being studied.

##### **Chapter 2**

Chapter two is comprised of the review of literature. This chapter identifies the shift from the phenomenon absenteeism to the recent phenomenon presenteeism and specifies the difference. It also identifies the costs, productivity loss, gender, and mechanisms associated with presenteeism.

##### **Chapter 3**

Chapter three identifies the different research methods available and specifies the chosen method for this study while outlining the author’s explanation for this choice.



## Chapter 4

Chapter four outlines the key findings from the primary research. The main findings are presented in chronological order to the research objectives.

## Chapter 5

Chapter five identifies and links the research findings to the literature that is available in chapter two. This allows the author to discuss the similarities between both the literature and the findings.

## Chapter 6

Chapter six allows the author draw conclusions to the findings and to make relevant recommendations to companies, HR practitioners, colleagues and future research

### **1.5 Limitations of the study**

The author has identified certain limitations to this study. Firstly, the author is conscious about the available timeframe and so feels that the depth of the research is restricted. Secondly, there is a limitation to the sample size due mainly to the sensitivity of the research topic. Thirdly, the author would like to carry out interviews and questionnaires on employees and line managers but is unable to get access due to the timeframe and the nature of the research topic. As the research study progresses additional limitations will be identified in chapter three.

### **1.6 Chapter conclusion**

This chapter has given a brief insight into the purpose and objectives of the study, the content, structure and the benefits of undertaking this research topic. The following chapter will provide an insight into the development of the research objectives which brought shape to the entire study by discussing an inclusive literature review.

## **Chapter 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to review relevant academic literature which includes reference to theory, empirical research and the basis from which the research question and objectives are subsequently derived.

### **2.2 Presenteeism defined**

Currently employees have been defined as a nation of STOICS “sick through often inbox checking” who are neither fully off work nor fully working but often doing something in between (Churchard, 2012). The term used to define this is presenteeism. According to Williams (2013), there is no universally agreed definition for presenteeism. The reason for this is because presenteeism is “harder, to identify, define and measure”. Therefore, various academics and researchers have defined presenteeism distinctively. Firstly, presenteeism is often associated with a hangover, resulting in an increase of accidents in work. Interestingly, Ireland measures alcohol and drug addiction in the workplace through absenteeism rather than presenteeism. With this in mind, almost 70% of problem drinkers in Ireland are presently working full time. To reduce this percentage, countries such as Belgium, Denmark and Sweden operate a pioneering program to identify an addiction situation. When countries alcohol consumption is lower than Ireland they identify presenteeism as a major undocumented cost to the economy (Mcbride, 2013).

Alternatively, Johns (2010, p.519) defines presenteeism as “attending work while ill”. In comparison, Shamansky (2002) defines presenteeism as a situation where employees have come to work while being functionally absent. Similarly, Cooper (1996, p. 15) defines presenteeism as “being at work when you should be at home, either because you are ill or because you are working such long hours that you are no longer effective”. Cavelery *et al.*, (2007, p. 306) declared that employees “attend work at times when a sickness absence is justified and perform the work under sub-optimal conditions”. Employees then transmit their illness to others, taking longer to recover, making costly mistakes and affecting the organisations reputation (CIPD, 2013). The American Heritage Dictionary of the English language defines presenteeism as arriving at work despite ill health, injury, anxiety and so

forth, resulting in reduced productivity. In comparison to these definitions, table 2.1 below summarises 9 other definitions of presenteeism.

**Table 2.1. Presenteeism defined**

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a. Attending work, as opposed to being absent (Smith, 1970)
b. Exhibiting excellent attendance (Canfield & Soash, 1955; Stolz, 1993)
c. Working elevated hours, thus putting in “face time,” even when unfit (Simpson, 1998; Worrall et al., 2000)
d. Being reluctant to work part time rather than full time (Sheridan, 2004)
e. Being unhealthy but exhibiting no sickness absenteeism (Kivimäki et al., 2005)
f. Going to work despite feeling unhealthy (Aronsson et al., 2000; Dew et al., 2005)
g. Going to work despite feeling unhealthy or experiencing other events that might normally compel absence (e.g., child care problems) (Evans, 2004; Johansson & Lundberg, 2004)
h. Reduced productivity at work due to health problems (Turpin et al., 2004)
i. Reduced productivity at work due to health problems or other events that distract one from full productivity (e.g., office politics) (Hummer, Sherman, & Quinn, 2002; Whitehouse, 2005)

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Source: Johns (2010)

It is evident from table 2.1 above that the A and B definitions are describing presenteeism as a good behaviour that involves excellent attendance at work. C-E defines presenteeism as compulsive because the person is so obsessed with working that they are imposing unnecessary pressure upon themselves. Employees feel obliged to come to work. Conversely, the presenteeism definition from F and G principally concentrates on one's health as employees are attending work feeling unhealthy and unwell. Definition H and I represent productivity and it illustrates the fact that when employees attend work, productivity levels cannot be as high as if the person was healthy. In contrast to the definitions outlined above, In contrast Moqbel *et al.*, (2013) defines presenteeism completely different. Moqbel *et al.*, (2013) believed that presenteeism was defined by using social networking sites while at work. Social networking was perceived as a distraction, in comparison to being ill. In this study the author outlines a research debate that concerns academic and business professionals regarding the issue of social networking and presenteeism. A number of business professionals were concerned that social networking sites were a waste of time while others believed that it encouraged improvements in work performance. Gilbreath and Karimi (2012) assert that a wider definition and focus of presenteeism is needed. They emphasise that researchers of presenteeism need to outline precisely what aspect of presenteeism they are dealing with (e.g. presenteeism due to health difficulties, or, a member of staff, though at work, is not entirely engaged due to problems at home or dissatisfaction because they are

‘carrying’ other employees). The author proposes to explore all the definitions highlighted above to determine the prevalence and type of presenteeism that private sector organisations are currently faced with.

### **2.3 Evolution of Presenteeism**

Although it is still unclear as to the definition of presenteeism, the evolution of presenteeism is apparent. According to Houdmont (2012), what contributed to an established the phenomena of presenteeism was the evaluation of health intervention from efficacy and safety to include economic impact. According to Johns (2010), it was the study of Adelman *et al.*, (1996) in his clinical trial that illustrated the scientific responsiveness of what has to become one of the versions of measuring presenteeism is the reduced productivity when ill. In Adelman *et al.*, (1996) trial, the consequences of a migraine drug on productivity levels was examined. Furthermore, the resulting productivity decrement was combined with productivity loss and due to absenteeism the treatment group was shown to exhibit less productivity deficit. Aronsson, Gustafsson and Dallner (2000), published an article reporting that many respondents answered affirmatively to the following question, “Has it happened over the previous 12 months that you have gone to work despite feeling that you really should have taken sick leave because of your state of health?”. This affirmative response was labelled ‘presenteeism’. Additionally, the fact that people reported “going present” when they suffered from health problems established presenteeism as a phenomenon of interest. Moreover when downsizing, layoffs and restructuring was occurring, job security prompted people to attend work (Vahtera *et al.*, 2004). Some of the illnesses were thought to be provoked by stress emanating from employment insecurity. A key contribution was the idea that presenteeism and associated productivity loss implicated contextual factors and personal factors beyond health. It was also evident from Vahtera *et al.*, (2004), study that the evolution of presenteeism is costly to organisations.

### **2.4 Reasons/ causes behind presenteeism**

According to Ashby and Mahdon (2010), the main factors causing presenteeism are personal financial difficulties, work-related stress and perceived pressure to attend work which has come from either managers or colleagues. As employees fear job loss and reprimands for excessive time off, they are more inclined to come to work when ill (Performance Management, 2014). During the height of the swine flu, surprisingly, 71% of American

workers were more inclined to go to work because they feared job loss or did not want to miss a deadline at work (Gurchieck, 2009). According to MacGregor *et al.*, (2008), the principal reason for coming to work while sick was because employees knew they had no back-up for the work that they were responsible for and coming to work ill was a better option. Another cause of presenteeism is organisations that were expecting redundancy's in the coming six months were more likely to report an increase in mental health problems and people struggling to work ill (CIPD, 2013). Additionally, 50% of Irish people are expected to experience mental health issues at least once in their lifetime and by 2020 mental health issues will be more predominate than cardiovascular disease. Presenteeism contributes to 21% of mental health issues (WHO, 2013). An additional cause of presenteeism is also people who are deprived of sleep. This is not acceptable if the organisation wants to fulfil their responsibilities such as duty of care and development of employees over the long term (CIPD, 2012). Buckingham (2012), refers to presenteeism and poor sleepers as the "walking dead". Additionally, the culture and particularly the companies approach to wellbeing can affect the level of presenteeism. An example of this is when, employees attend work and feel disengaged, poorly treated with little control over their job. Therefore, it is the responsibility of HR to ensure that presenteeism is under control (Buckingham, 2012). A further cause of presenteeism, according to Lack (2011), is organisational restructuring which is linked with increasing presenteeism because restructuring causes "competitive presenteeism". Competitive presenteeism is where employees and managers are competing over who stays in work the longest. Also, some employees feel managers or colleagues think less of them if they stay at home when sick and this encourages them to come to work while ill (Weingberg, 2007). Interestingly, Ricci *et al.*, (2005), found that overweight workers fell into the presenteeism category and were more likely to report their limitations to the amount of work they could do than normal weight workers. According to Knani (2013) the increase in the phenomenon of presenteeism is caused from a change in working conditions, especially from the increase in new technology. Additionally, the increase in technology in the past three decades has put pressure on companies and has generated new demands which have impacted on an employee's well-being. Furthermore, implementing new technology in any company can affect employee's physical and mental health.

According to Dew *et al.*, (2005) presenteeism is a rational decision that individuals implement when they are ill and the factors that promote presenteeism vary across workplaces and occupational groups. Consequently, in a study conducted by Collins and Cartwright (2012), private sector organisations had higher levels of job satisfaction and lower

level of presenteeism than public sector organisations. The reason for this is because losing pay is an important role in encouraging people towards presenteeism. This study highlighted the importance of both the work environment and personal motivations on presenteeism behaviour. For example, some employees are motivated to come into work while sick. This is illustrated throughout Grinyer and Singleton's (2000), study concerning teamwork which instilled an obligation on fellow team members to come to work while sick, in contrast to taking sick leave.

#### **2.4.1 Different types of presenteeism**

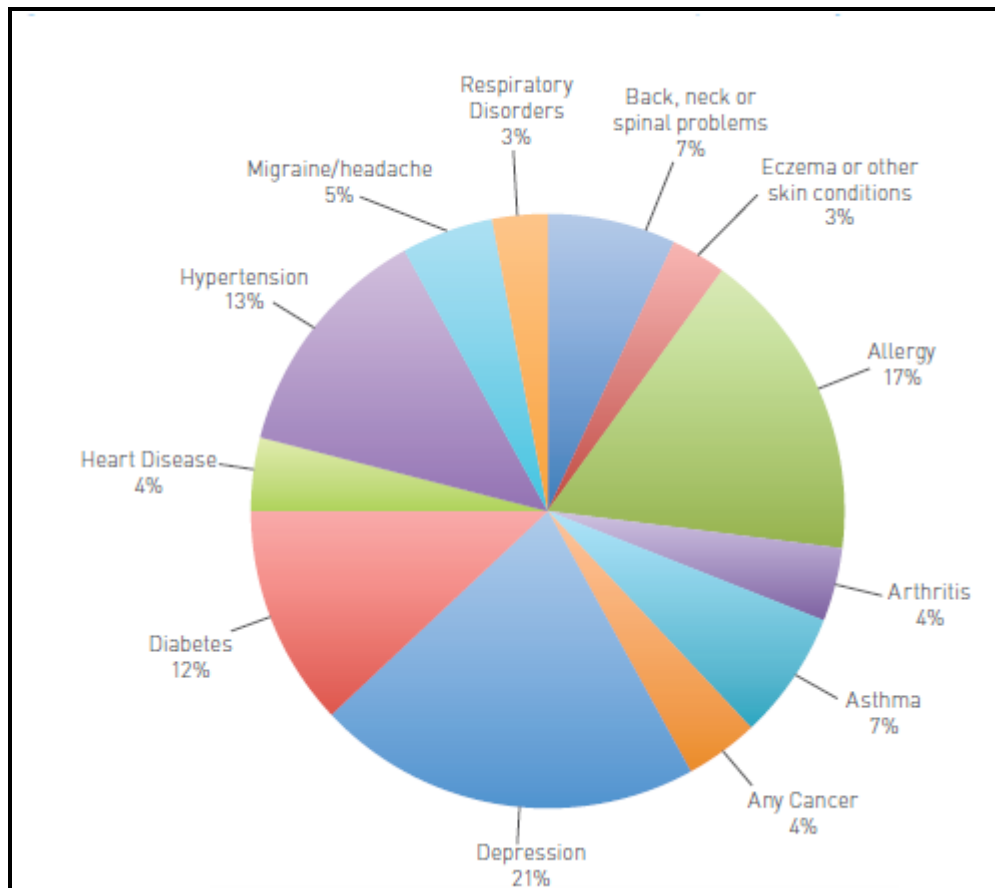
According to Schultz *et al.*, (2009), there are two types of presenteeism, acute illness such as a cold or flu and chronic illness such as arthritis and crones disease. In contrast, the Medibank (2007) report identified and examined four different types of presenteeism to be: unhealthy lifestyles, workers with illnesses going to work, allergies, asthma, poor work-life balance and high levels of job-related stress. Depending on which type of presenteeism, the factors of each are illustrated. Presenteeism in relation to acute conditions is driven by stress, employee health, work life balance and conflict. In a Swedish study, individuals reported conflicting demands at work and those who could not determine their pace of work showed higher presenteeism. Consequently, this study did find that highly educated and older employees were less likely to experience presenteeism (Schultz *et al.*, 2009). In the MacGregor *et al.*, (2008) study, it discovered that obtaining a chronic condition was more strongly associated with absenteeism than with presenteeism while seeking and using professional psychological support was more strongly associated with presenteeism than with absenteeism.

### **2.5 Productivity Loss to Presenteeism**

According to Riegel, (2003) employers believe that employees have to work harder than ever and this has become the norm for over half of the workforce. Two thirds of employees are working longer hours than they are paid for. According to Stevens (2011), Irish workers put in some of the longest hours in Europe with only Austria and Greeks spending more time in the office. According to Merrill *et al.*, (2012), it is these individuals who come to work and perform below the level they are normally at because of pressure, health problems and personal issues. Additionally, this study has concluded that presenteeism in the workplace accounts for 70%, in contrast to absenteeism which accounts for 23%. Furthermore,

presenteeism does not only negatively affect the productivity of a worker but also affects the co-workers who may obtain poorer than normal performance because of distraction or the spread of illness (Merrill *et al.*, 2012). According to Hemp (2004), conditions such as migraine resulted in 4.9% to 7.6% productivity loss. According to Murphy and Doherty (2011), it is not constantly perceived as a negative to work long hours and to maintain the presenteeism culture because when taking on a role at a higher level in the company, long hours and presenteeism are part of the job. According to Ashby and Mahdon (2010), sickness presence not only affects productivity but may well contribute to increased sickness and absence later because attendance while ill can exacerbate an employee's condition. In this study 45% of respondents reported at least one day of sickness presence whereas 18% reported at least one day of sickness absence. Additionally, sickness presence has a much more negative impact on overall job performance than absenteeism and those employees who were pressured to attend work felt their work performance was negatively affected (Mahon, 2010).





**Figure 2.1. Medical conditions associated with presenteeism**

Source: Medibank (2011)

In contrast, the Medibank report (2011) above in figure 2.1 shows the main contributors to productivity loss caused by presenteeism as depression (21%), allergies (17%), hypertension (13%) and diabetes (12%). Furthermore, the report established that while managers usually deal with physical symptoms of illness rather promptly, mental health issues were not tackled as fast. According to a study conducted by Benfield group and the American college of occupational and environmental medicine only 14% of firms are researching and dealing with presenteeism and presenteeism has 7.5 times greater productivity loss than absenteeism (Mental health works, 2013).

Promoting the wellbeing of employees “can yield bottom line benefits for the organisation in the form of improved productivity and presenteeism”. The costs associated with poor wellbeing are becoming better understood. Recently, companies believe it extends further than direct costs such as those arising from presenteeism (CIPD, 2012, p.3).

## 2.6 Concealed Costs of Presenteeism

In 2010, the annual cost of presenteeism in the United States (US) was \$180 billion (B), in contrast to absenteeism which amounted to \$118B (Weaver, 2010). According to Hemp (2004), the annual cost of presenteeism was \$150B in the US. Moreover, it is estimated that the costs associated with presenteeism is 203 times greater than annual health care expenses (Merrill *et al.*, 2012). In comparison, Ashby and Mahdon (2010), believe that the accepted assumption among private and public sectors is that absenteeism is a bigger problem than presenteeism. The reason for this is because absenteeism is more clearly visible and measurable than presenteeism. In this study a survey was carried out on 510 employees who were aged between 24-66 years (69% surveyed were women). This survey found that ‘sickness presence’ (where an employee attends work while ill) may account for up to 50% more working time lost than absenteeism. Only half of those who reported an increase in presenteeism had taken steps to discourage it (CIPD, 2013). Therefore, employees going to work sick cost businesses up to €15 Billion per year (Churchard, 2012).

According to Medibank (2011, p.11), presenteeism costs were made up of direct costs faced by employers due to the “on-the-job productivity losses caused by presenteeism; the indirect costs to the Australian economy arising from lower labour productivity levels evolving from presenteeism; and the indirect costs to the economy originating in other secondary factors”. Additionally from 2005–2006 the cost of presenteeism was \$25.7B, almost four times that of absenteeism. The study also found that in 2009–2010 the cost of presenteeism to the economy was \$34.1B. Therefore, 6.5 working days of productivity were lost per employee annually as a result of presenteeism. These results compare to a 2.7% decline in 2010 GDP. According to Schultz *et al.*, (2009, p. 327), presenteeism is often measured by calculating the cost associated with reduced work output, the errors on the job and failure to meet company production standards. Consequently, there is no agreement on the appropriate method of calculation, even though the current method studies convert “the percentage decrement in productivity into a number of hours per week that an average individual is unproductive”.

According to Pauly *et al.*, (2008, p. 480) “you can only manage what you measure and presenteeism measurement cannot be readily implemented because it cannot be managed”. Although it is difficult to measure presenteeism, in a study conducted by Burton *et al.*, (1999), Burton uniquely gathered objective productivity measures of telephone customer

service operators and compared them to health risk appraisal data. Although presenteeism is costing companies thousands an additional loss to employers is also productivity.

Consequently, other underlying causes and other ways that illustrated how employees were costing employers in the loss of products was conducting personal business at work. In comparison, a survey conducted by Cigna (2008), found that approximately seven days of presenteeism per employee during the month was due to the employee being functionally present at work but focusing on personal business. This productivity loss and cost has made employers aware of the most prominent gender associated to presenteeism.

## **2.7 Gender and Presenteeism**

Research conducted by Merrill *et al.*, (2012), emphasised the fact that presenteeism was greatest for women aged 30-49 who were separated/divorced/widowed and for those who obtained a college degree. However, according to people management (2014,) it is younger low paid workers, under 24 years of age, who earn less than £20,000 whom are more likely to engage in presenteeism. Additionally, Women were more likely than men to say they would struggle into work because of the economic crisis. According to Bockerman and Laukkanen (2009), full time work has an effect on presenteeism and this affect concentrates solely on women and not men. The prevalence of the sickness presenteeism for women is 11%, in contrast to men as it is 7%. Perhaps presenteeism is higher for women working full time because women obtain a higher degree of control over their work, in contrast to women who work part-time. Alternatively, the pressure for women to work while sick is higher than the correspondent pressure for men (Aronsson and Gustafsson, 2005). According to Edington and Schultz (2007), presenteeism in the form of back pain and high blood pressure affected almost 12% of female employees and 10% of male employees. Women engage in part-time, short-term and flexi hours whereas men are more concerned with organisational initiatives and as a result they work longer hours (McKeen and Bujaki, 1998). In comparison, Simpson (1998), outlined that men generally work more hours than women and men are more likely to engage in presenteeism than women. Additionally, women are more concerned with intrinsic rewards than promotion or salary increases than men (Marshall, 1984). In a study conducted by Savery and Luk (2000, p.310), it was reported that women worked less hours than men. In addition, “68% of employees were happy with their workload but 9% desired more hours”. Furthermore 66% of workers were delighted with having excessive hours of work while 22% who worked these excessive hours desired less. When both the employees who were happy

with their hours and those that wanted fewer hours were asked if these excessive hours lead to illness or accidents, the results surprisingly indicated that there was no considerable difference. As stated above, females tend to be associated with presenteeism more than men. It is the responsibility of HR to implement practices that help reduce these numbers highlighted above.

## **2.8 Human Resource Managements role and HR practices**

According to Wright (1992), the HR role has become more complex due to multiple changes in the business environment such as globalisation and technology. Wright (1992) believes that the HR role should include analytical, creative and diagnostic characteristics. These analytical and diagnostic roles should then be used to form the HR strategy which in turn will comply with the organisational strategy. According to Pickles *et al.*, (1999), the role of HR should be more strategic than operative and the function of HRM should comply with the strategic needs of the organisation. According to Bhardwaj (2013, pg. 2232), HRM is “the process of managing people in the form of a collective relationship between management and employees”. Additionally, when employees decide to resign it is the responsibility of HR to discuss with the client the reasons for their resignation. HR also meets with employees to discuss grievances that arise; it is the responsibility of HR to understand their problem and their side of the story. HR has to intervene in various situations to ensure the organisation runs smoothly. HR also develops policies and practices that reflect the organisations beliefs, principles and the management relationship. These policies and practices help HR deal with any issues or problems that arise. HR practices shape employees performance and attitudes because they influence the company’s outcomes and results. These HR practices include “recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, remuneration systems, occupational health and safety, industrial relations and HR information systems” (Bhardwaj, 2013).

In contrast, figure 2.2 below (Mathis & Jackson (2008)) illustrates that HR activities include strategic HR management, equal employment opportunities, labour and employee relations, risk management, talent management, total rewards and staffing. It is evident from the diagram below that presenteeism falls into the HR activity of staffing, risk management and worker protection.



**Figure 2.2. HR activities**

Source: Mathis & Jackson (2008, p.7)

It is also the responsibility of HR to ensure managers understand how to implement the organisations policies and practices in a fair manner and examine trends towards presenteeism. Managers have a vital role to play in presenteeism as they generally are the first point of contact. HR can further outline managers understanding of the presenteeism concept and educate them about presenteeism. Often companies focus on absence and have absence management policies in place to collect information on absenteeism. As a result they often overlook the hidden cost in lost output productivity. This focus on absenteeism leads to an organisation having a lack of presenteeism policies in place (CIPD, 2014). Therefore, employers are at risk of underestimating or missing the impact of presenteeism because they focus on absence (Churchard, 2010).

A wellbeing strategy should be in place to cover both sickness absence and presenteeism (CIPD, 2012). This may require HR improving how the organisation collects information on presenteeism, for example building in questions on presenteeism in existing surveys or creating a presenteeism survey (CIPD, 2012). It is important that HR starts improving the company's policies and surveys by firstly evaluating the line managers understanding of presenteeism as they are generally the first point of contact.

## **2.9 Managers understanding of presenteeism from a HR practitioners perspective**

According to the surveys from office teams, it was found that 45% of 522 workers in the USA said that they frequently go to work when they are sick, in contrast to 17% of the senior executives who believed that employees did so (Society for Human Resource Management, 2013). According to Cocker *et al.*, (2012), management misunderstand both the concept and terms of presenteeism. The study also found that management had a lack of knowledge in the area of presenteeism which resulted in management failing to provide employees with answers to their problems. Management also lacked the experience due to the current problems of presenteeism. This left management with the inability to apply questions and scenarios to their employees. According to Pauly *et al.*, (2008), managers are conscious that illnesses have the ability to affect the workers performance. Therefore, managers are now more accepting to cost effective treatments that will reduce or even prevent these illnesses. Managers are also mindful that certain illnesses are linked to certain jobs and firms which imply that intervention strategies may be cost effective to some and not others. Furthermore, some managers appear to misunderstand the total cost of presenteeism on the company. As managers are generally unaware of presenteeism, HR need to have mechanisms in place to resolve and reduce presenteeism.

## **2.10 Mechanisms to support presenteeism**

According to Grinyer and Singleton, (2000), policies and procedures that are specifically designed to support management and reduce sick leave may have had the unintended consequence of increasing it, thereby creating incentives to take more time off. It was evident from their study that the increase monitoring of short term sickness has led to employees taking long term sickness when ill. The reason for this is because; if you are out of work sick for 3 days you could be called into the office to be given a verbal warning even if the reasons are genuine (Grinyer and Singleton, 2000). There is recognition that attending work despite feeling unwell may be increasing due to inflexible absence policies impacting on genuine cases of short term sickness absence (Muir *et al.*, 2008). To lower workplace presenteeism it will require employees to obtain realistic expectations of workers and help workers prioritise and provide sufficient technological support. Consequently, managers need to have financial planning services and health promotion interventions that are aimed at improving mental health and contribute to reducing presenteeism (Merrill *et al.*, 2012). According to Juniper (2012), the first step of presenteeism is to carry out a well being programme. This enables

employers to get an informed view of the situation in the workplace through an evaluation of well being levels and through an assessment that asks individuals to indicate their current well being status. This provides HR with valuable data on the size of the problem, for example, where it is occurring and how it links to specific health and workplace issues. According to Chatterji and Tilley (2002), if presenteeism is costlier than absenteeism, the policies and programs designed to reduce absenteeism could result in a net loss, if they reduce absenteeism at the cost of increasing presenteeism. Alternatively, presenteeism may be on the rise because employees are substituting sickness presence for sickness absence.

According to MacGregor *et al.*, (2008), life events are not work-related and they are beyond the control of an employer. This suggests that there may be limits to the reach of effective wellness programmes. According to Cocker *et al.*, (2012), when management lack experience with presenteeism some managers question employees to determine their symptoms. Additionally, managers construct supplementary interviews to establish from employees the capabilities of their managers and the accuracy of the group production interview. Hemp (2004, p.7) asserts that addressing the “problem after people are on the job by offering them treatment may be more effective than trying to pre-empt it before they are hired”. Additionally, Hemp believes that frequently employees hesitate when they are asked to take part in a survey concerning presenteeism. To overcome this, employees are offered small incentives. In Hems (2004), study it was found that the strongest incentive was that employees felt from management that the company cared about their wellbeing and this was evident through the wellness and employee assistant programs that were in place. According to Pauly *et al.*, (2008, p.483) a “go home strategy” should be used in companies to “retain better quality workers and reduce quality adjusted labour costs”. In a study conducted by Gilbreath and Karimi (2012), they investigated the role of manager’s behaviour in relation to employee’s presenteeism levels and stress. In particular, the results revealed both negative and positive supervisor behaviour to be associated with employees’ job-stress-related presenteeism. The results from the study demonstrated a positive relationship between job stress and presenteeism. A negative behaviour involved having the strongest associations with employee job-stress-related presenteeism. The positive supervisor behaviours included supervisors helping employees to keep their work in perspective by having a work life balance. It was evident from the study that there is a need for supervisors to support employee’s behaviours and productivity levels.

Adequate training and ongoing support to those responsible for managing absence is essential if it is managed effectively and consistently across the organisation as attendance will be encouraged and presenteeism will be discouraged (CIPD, 2013). Research by Grosselin *et al.*, (2013), states that issues associated with presenteeism are harder to remember rather than absenteeism for both an employee and employer.

## **2.11 Chapter summary**

It is evident from the literature that there is no universally agreed definition for presenteeism. It has been agreed by researchers that presenteeism has replaced the phenomena absenteeism as presenteeism is more costly. Additionally, there is no agreed measurement of presenteeism but companies calculate presenteeism productivity loss generally by calculating the cost associated with reduced work output, the errors on the job and failure to meet company production standards. Additionally, presenteeism is more prevalent in females than male employees. The reasons for presenteeism range from employees being responsible and following through with agreements. Some employees feel pressured due to fear of job loss and because HR practices force employees to attend or it may result in disciplinary procedures. It is clear that managers do not understand the extent of presenteeism however, HRM's try to put various programmes in place such as employee assistant and wellness programmes to help reduce presenteeism.



**Chapter 3**  
**METHODOLOGY**

## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this section is to outline and present an overview of the authors proposed research objectives and the proposed methodology that is to be used to test the three objectives. The area of study is set out by the research question; what is the level of presenteeism in organisations and what impact and challenges are Human Resource practitioners facing as a result. The author proceeds to discuss the research design, collection methods and its justification, the sample selection, proposed pilot testing, operational agreements and limitations of the study. The author intends to carry out qualitative research through semi structured interviews and base it on an exploratory study.

### **3.2 Research objectives and question**

According to Thomas and Hodges (2010, p.39) research objectives “indicate in more detail the specific research topics or issues the project plans to investigate building on the main theme stated in the research aim”. The research objectives are like a road map directing the project. Three core objectives for this study are used to guide the author as these are the central points of the project.

#### *Objective One*

- To examine the prevalence of presenteeism in private sector organisations operating in Ireland

#### *Objective two*

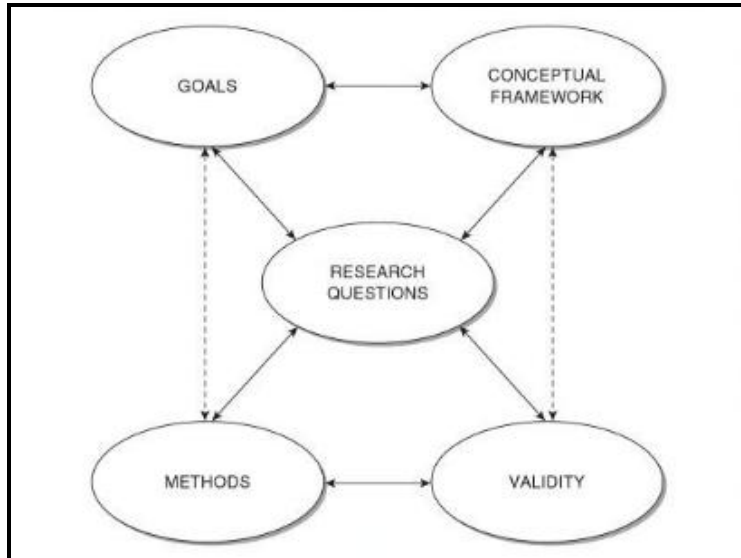
- To explore, if any the reasons for presenteeism

#### *Objective three*

- To establish, if any, the HR practices and mechanisms in place to resolve presenteeism.

### 3.3 Research design

According to Hennick *et al.*, (2011), when the study is completed the author should be capable of answering the research question. A reasonable research question is dependent on variables such as access to data, researcher's skills, resources available and timeframe (Collins and Hussey, 2009). It is evident from figure 3.1 below that the starting point or controlling piece of the research design question is the focal point of the design.



**Figure 3.1. Interactive model of research design**

Source: Maxwell (2013)

The research question connects directly to all of the other components. Therefore, the research question should have a clear relationship to the goals and be informed by current theory and knowledge. The methods must enable the author to answer the research question. The research question needs to take into account the feasibility of the methods, the seriousness of validity and the ability to deal with these threats depending on the questions, methods and conceptual framework. The connections among different components are like a rubber band as they stretch and bend to some extent but beyond a particular point and under certain stresses they will break (Maxwell, 2013).

According to Ghauri and Gronhang (2005), there are three different classifications of research design; exploratory, causal and descriptive. This is in contrast to Sekaran and Bougie (2010) who believe hypotheses along with exploratory and descriptive are different types of research designs. Exploratory research “is used to make preliminary investigations

into unknown areas, they employ an open, flexible and inductive approach”. Causal research is where the “main emphasis is on determining a cause and effect relationship”. This allows the author to identify whether a relationship exists, its nature and which variable is causing certain behaviours (Shingh, 2007, p.66). Descriptive research “aims to describe phenomena either through narrative type descriptions, classification or measuring relationships” (Blanche *et al.*, 2006, p.44). Furthermore, hypothesis testing is used when researchers are trying to forecast company results or to “explain the variance in the dependent variable” (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010 p. 108). The author proposes to utilise the exploratory research in this study as it is necessary to capture the feelings and reactions of HR practitioners.

### **3.4 Research methodology**

According to Kumar (2008) there are two different types of research methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative.

#### **3.4.1 Qualitative and quantitative differences**

As can be seen in the table 3.1 below the quantitative data has an additional research enquiry compared to the qualitative approach. Similarities can be seen as these approaches can engage in interviews and observations and both methods are for exploratory and descriptive studies. The data, cost and sample sizes are however quite the opposite. According to Cottrell and McKenzie (2011) quantitative research requires researchers to be independent and they are educational researchers who decide what to study whereas qualitative researchers rely on the views of participants. Both methods answer different questions. Generally quantitative research takes less time to complete than qualitative.

**Table 3.1. Differences between quantitative and qualitative research**

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Quantitative Research</i>	<i>Qualitative Research</i>
<b>Research Enquiry</b>	Exploratory, descriptive and causal	Exploratory and descriptive
<b>Nature of questions and responses</b>	Who, what, when, where, why, how many? Relatively superficial and rational responses Measurement, testing and validation	What, when, where, why? Below the surface and emotional responses Understanding, exploration and idea generation
<b>Sample Size</b>	Relatively large	Relatively small
<b>Data Collection</b>	Not very flexible Interviews and observation Standardised More closed questions	Flexible Interviews and observation Less standardised More open ended questions
<b>Data</b>	Numbers, percentages, means Less detail or depth Nomothetic description Context poor High reliability, low validity Statistical inference possible	Word, pictures Detailed and in depth Ideographic description Context rich High validity, low reliability Statistical inference not possible
<b>Cost</b>	Relatively low cost per respondent but relatively high project cost	Relatively high cost per respondent but relatively low project cost

Source: McGiven (2003, p.46)

### 3.5 Rational for selecting a qualitative approach

The author chose to use the qualitative approach as by nature this is very much exploratory where the author does not know what to expect or to define a problem. Additionally, this method is “typically used for providing an in-depth understanding of the research issues that embraces the perspective of the study population and the context in which they live”. (Hennink *et al.*, 2011). This method is also useful for exploring the latest topics or understanding complex and sensitive issues and is also suitable for addressing “why” and “how” questions. This research is about immersing oneself in a scene and trying to make sense of it” and is an excellent method for studying contexts that you are personally curious about but had never before had a valid reason for. This method “can uncover salient issues and may lead to close and trusting relationship” (Tracey, 2013). According to Fielding and Schreier (2001), the qualitative research approach outlines the research findings through words and conclusions rather than figures. Qualitative research is a very common research

method used for an exploratory study which the author is undertaking (Given, 2006). Therefore, this method would allow the author to gather more in depth data through face to face interviews for the study. The author felt that this approach would suit the nature of the study more so than the quantitative approach as it would allow the author to explore nuances related to the problem at hand (Muijis, 2004, p. 5).

The reason the author did not choose the quantitative approach is because this method “cannot address the full range of problems and human behaviours” (Taylor, 2005, p.91) . Additionally, this method yields numerical data which is evaluated using descriptive means and is used to test the hypothesis and determine if significant relationships or differences exist (Charles and Abbas, 2009). According to Dobrovolny and Fuentes (2008), the quantitative research approach entails describing activities and other variables using figures and generally involves analysing a specific large sample size which is not appropriate for this study.

### **3.6 Sources of research**

In this study both primary and secondary data collection methods were used. According to Gratton and Jones (2010, p.8) “primary research refers to the research that has involved the collection of original data specific to a particular research project”. Secondary research is research by using sources of data that is already available.

#### **3.6.1 Primary qualitative data collection**

The primary data used in this dissertation will be an interview. According to King and Horrocks, (2010) interviewing is the most commonly used method of data collection generally because it is an everyday occurrence where people speak face to face. Therefore, researchers tend to be very comfortable with this approach.

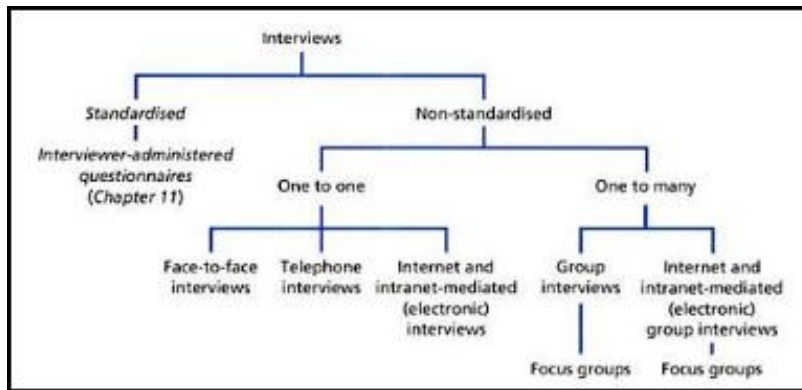
#### **3.6.2 Secondary qualitative data collection**

Secondary data has been carried out in the literature review chapter above. This method has been used to collect and assess data in correlation to the research objectives and question. The secondary data that has been used came from various sources such as academic databases (ABI inform, Academic source complete, Science Direct, Emerald, Jstor and internet reports).

### 3.6.3 Types of interviews

According to Bryman and Bell (2011), qualitative interviewing when compared to quantitative has a greater interest in the interviewee's opinion and perspective. Furthermore, qualitative interviewers encourage interviewees to go off on tangents as this gives greater depth of information. Qualitative compared to quantitative is more flexible as it allows the interviewer to ask additional questions depending on the answers given.

According to Lodico *et al.*, (2010,) there are three major types of interviewing, structured, unstructured and semi structured interviewing. Structured interviewing also known as standardised interviewing involves asking the same question to all participants who take part in the study. The purpose of this interviewing is to give the "same interviewee the same context questioning" (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Unstructured interviewing is a "freewheeling exchange and may shift from one subject to another". The aim of this interview is to discover unidentified areas as questions do not follow any layout (Lehman and Dufrene, 2008, p.514). Semi- structured interviewing involves having a "number of questions prepared in advance" but questions do not follow a specific layout. This method tends to be more difficult as most questions are unstructured and depend on the answers of the interviewee (Wengraf, 2001 p. 5). According to Saunder *et al.*, (2009, p.321) there are two distinct types of interviews as seen in figure 3.2 below, standardised and non-standardised. Standardised interviews are generally used to collect data "which will then be the subject of quantitative analysis" e.g. surveys and questionnaires. Alternatively, non standardised interviews are commonly used to collect information which is usually analysed qualitatively e.g. case study's. As seen in figure 3.2 researchers can choose either one to one interviews through face to face, telephone or virtual or they can choose one to many interviews through focus groups and video interviews. The researcher's choice will depend on both the area of study and the most effective and efficient means to gather in-depth information. The author proposes to carry out semi structured face to face interviews as this method is very flexible. The author has pre-set questions but is also free to add more depending on the interviewee's answers.



**Figure 3.2. Forms of Interviews**

Source: Saunders et al., (2009, p.321)

### 3.6.4 Advantages and disadvantages of structured interviews

According to Hersen (2011, p.125), the advantage of structured interviews is that they tend to increase the reliability of the assessment and they identify analytical criteria thoroughly and precisely. The disadvantage of structured interviews is that they are “limited because they cannot cover all topic areas”. Structured interviews can help interviewees overcome any confusion and misinterpretations of words or questions that may arise during the interview. However, structured interviews tend to be extremely expensive due to travelling costs and time consuming due to the hours that are asked of the interviewer (Bless, 2006). As this area of study is quite sensitive some participants may need further probing. Therefore this method does not seem appropriate for this study.

### 3.6.5 Advantages and disadvantages of unstructured interviews

The advantage of unstructured interviews is that participants have a greater opportunity to speak freely and develop a trusting relationship with the interviewer. The disadvantage of unstructured interviews is that the interviewee tends to avoid addressing the key issues “of interest to the research” (Hartas, 2010, p.230). Additionally, Klenke (2008), asserts that unstructured interviews can handle more complex issues than structured interviews. This method allows for greater depth into delicate data where the interviewer can probe issues and clarify any information given. The disadvantage is that only a small amount of accurate information is provided. This leaves the interviewee with limited information to make comparisons with other interviewees. The author needs to have a small amount of structure in order to answer the research question and focus on the key issues. This method is more like a



conversation where the author could be redirected and end up coming away with no information that is of value.

### **3.6.6 Advantages and disadvantages of semi structured interviews**

According to Cramb and Purcell (2001) the advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they are flexible and responsive. However, the disadvantage is that the interviewer has to be skilful in dealing with the data and analysis as this tends to be extremely difficult. Klenke (2008) asserts that semi structured interviews are an exceptional method because they focus purely on the issues that are central to the research questions. Furthermore, Bless *et al.*, (2006, p.119) believes that semi structured interviews are beneficial to researcher who carry out exploratory studies because they eliminate unnecessary questions and the “reformulation of ambiguous ones”. The disadvantage is however, if the interviewer is not competent this can lead to several biases. The author has resolved this problem by carrying out a pilot study with three HR colleagues.

### **3.7 Justification for selecting a semi structured approach**

The author proposes to carry out a qualitative research through semi structured interviews and base it on an exploratory study as this allows the author to use probing and open ended questions to gather more in-depth information. Also the author believes that this method will obtain more detail and the information may tend to be richer than if the research was done through quantitative research (Mack and Woodson, 2005). The author chose semi-structured interviews as they have the potential to uncover and generate a detailed understanding of the participant’s experiences relating to a particular research issue (Rapley 2004). Semi structured interviews allow for “social encounters where speakers collaborate in producing retrospective accounts of their past actions, feelings and thoughts” (Rapley 2004 p.16). This method is particularly relevant to this study as given the phenomena investigated such a choice of research method is entirely appropriate. This approach offers some degree of flexibility in the interviewing process as it allows the author to explore issues that arise during the course of the interview. Semi-Structured interviews have the “ability to follow emotional rather than rational pathways of thought” (Wilkinson *et al.*, 2004 p.42). This may make the resulting data more valuable. Being cognisant of these factors the author chose to utilise the semi structured interview format. The interview format can be seen in appendix E.

### 3.8 Data Analysis

The data obtained from the interviews will be broken into three main areas relating to the research aims/ objectives. The interviews will be taped and answers will be grouped depending on their similarities and differences. According to Boeije (2010), data analysis comprises of sectioning the data and reconstructing it with the intention of transforming the results into findings. This involves the author reading, evaluating, examining, writing, coding and discovering links between the relevant sections in order to draw some findings and conclusions. The author is very mindful of the sensitivity and confidentiality of the content of the interviews. Silverman (2011) believed that incorporating any “ums” or “ers” that occurred in the response was important in order to preserve the full content of what is said. The author intends to proof read the transcripts three times before conducting the findings chapter. The data collection process can be seen in appendix F.

### 3.9 Sample Selection criteria

The population chosen will have knowledge and experience in relation to this study. The research is to be conducted on Human Resource practitioners in the private sector. Those that participate in the study will be identified by letters A, B, C and D for confidentiality reasons only if requested by the interviewee. The organisations that have been chosen can be seen in the table 3.2 below. The information provided is limited due to the companies preferences. The author chose a various range of industries in order to to get an insight into the different perspectives on presenteeism. The industries range from the dairy to the manufacturing, pharmaceutical, hospitality and call centre industry.

**Table 3.2. Sample selection**

Company	Profile	Respondent	Position
<b>Brooklodge Hotel</b>	Luxurious country house hotel situated in Macreddin Village There Strawberry Tree Restaurant, Ireland’s only certified Organic Restaurant and Leinster Restaurant of the Year 2010. par 72 Macreddin Golf Club designed by Irish Ryder Cup Hero Paul McGinley. They brew and serve there very own beers.	A	HR Manager
<b>Company X</b>	Founded in 1994, multinational organisation,	B	HR director

	located in 5 markets, 1500 employees		
<b>Eistec</b>	Set up in 2010 by 3 contact centre professionals. Outsourced contact centre providing tailored solutions.	C	HR manager
<b>Dawn Meats</b>	Sales and marketing offices positioned throughout Europe	D	HR manager
<b>Boston Scientific</b>	Founded in 1979. Employs 23,000 people around the globe in 40 countries. Leading innovator of medical solutions that improve the health of patients around the world	E	Senior HR business partner
<b>Company Y</b>	Founded in 1909. World leader in beauty and the largest cosmetic and beauty company. Present in 130 countries on 5 continents. 68,900 employees in 130 countries worldwide.	F	HR manager
<b>Whitfield Clinic</b>	Opened in 2006. A private hospital that provides elective surgery in most major specialities as well as diagnostic imaging, radiotherapy and physiotherapy. Partner with UPMC which allows the company define cancer care to patients across the south east.	G	HR manager
<b>Company Z</b>	A multinational company that employs over 5000 people across 32 countries	H	HR manager

### 3.10 Pilot Testing

According to the centre for evaluation and research (2011), pilot testing means finding out if your research method such as interviews or surveys will work and the only way to do this is carry out the method on a few participants first. This ensures that everyone in the sample population understands the questions in exactly the same way. The author has carried out three sample tests because the area of study is very sensitive therefore pilot testing has made the author aware that some questions asked made some people feel uncomfortable. A pilot test was carried out with three master students in the class. All participants analysed and

critiqued the questions. The author made relevant changes and drafted the new set of questions.

### **3.11 Operational agreements**

The author has secured interviews with HR managers/directors in eight companies. The author has approached all organisations through email, face to face meetings and HR colleagues in January 2014. All interviews were agreed then by email at this time as seen in appendix C. The author then contacted each participant by email in May 2014 to confirm their willingness to be interviewed and to arrange a time, date and location to meet as seen in appendix F. All interviews were carried out in the participant's organisation. Shortly after each interview the author emailed the transcript to all participants to check the transcribed narrative (Robson, 2002) as seen in the interview schedule in appendix F. Some of the practitioners made modifications and reflective notes that contributed to the findings.

### **3.12 Ethical considerations**

According to Penslar (1994, p. 4), "research like professions, has its own peculiar demands and in addition to a certain amount of crossover, specific disciplines face specific problems in research ethics". The author ensures that any participant will not be a source of information in the study unless they give consent. All participants will be treated with the highest respect, discretion and confidentiality. All data collected will be stored in a safe and secure area that only the author has access to. The only individuals to have access to the information will be the author, supervisor and the external examiner.

### **3.13 Validity and reliability of semi-structured interviews**

While signifying a somewhat less structured research approach designed for generating qualitative data the author considered both the validity and reliability issues. Thornhill (2003), suggests that validity for the semi structured interviews is "the extent to which the researcher gains access to the participants knowledge and experience" and has the ability to infer a meaning that the participant intended from the language that is used by the person.

Bias during the interview process may also present a threat to the reliability of the semi-structured interview.

As standardisation is intrinsically lacking in semi structured interviews there is scope for concerns to assure reliability in terms of attaining similar results (Sarantakos, 2005). Therefore, if this study was to be carried out again the results should be similar. The author intends to read the questions to other HR colleagues to ensure that there is no bias or leading questions.

### **3.14 Limitations of the study**

There are limitations to using the qualitative method as the author focuses on a specific phenomenon such as presenteeism, the broader perspectives could be lost. The qualitative questions answered by respondents are interpreted by the authors understanding. The qualitative approach can be limited by accuracy and honesty of the answers. There is also a limit to the accuracy and honesty of information from the respondents as this is a very sensitive area this is seen as the main limitation of the study. Additionally, there is a time limit to the project. There is also management bias as companies portray their company in a positive light. Another limitation is the size of the study as a range of industries are used in the study the author cannot compare each industry as there is only one industry per participant.

### **3.15 Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to develop an appreciation of the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings associated with this research. The author proposes to conduct qualitative research through interviews with Human Resource practitioners in several organisations. This method was chosen because interviews allow the author to consume in-depth knowledge of presenteeism from the participant's point of view. The author has taken into account the limitations and ethical considerations of the study. Therefore, chapter 6 progresses to present the findings arising from the primary research.

## **Chapter 4**

### **PRIMARY RESEARCH FINDINGS**

## Chapter 4. Primary Research Findings

### 4.1. Introduction

The following chapter presents the semi structured interviews deployed during the execution of this study on private sector HR practitioners. The findings are structured around the three objectives that are clearly highlighted below. Furthermore, in order to preserve the anonymity of the practitioners who did not want to be named, all identity information has been removed. This chapter will not discuss the results but highlight their value to the dissertation. The interview schedule below gives some information on the times and dates the interviews took place.

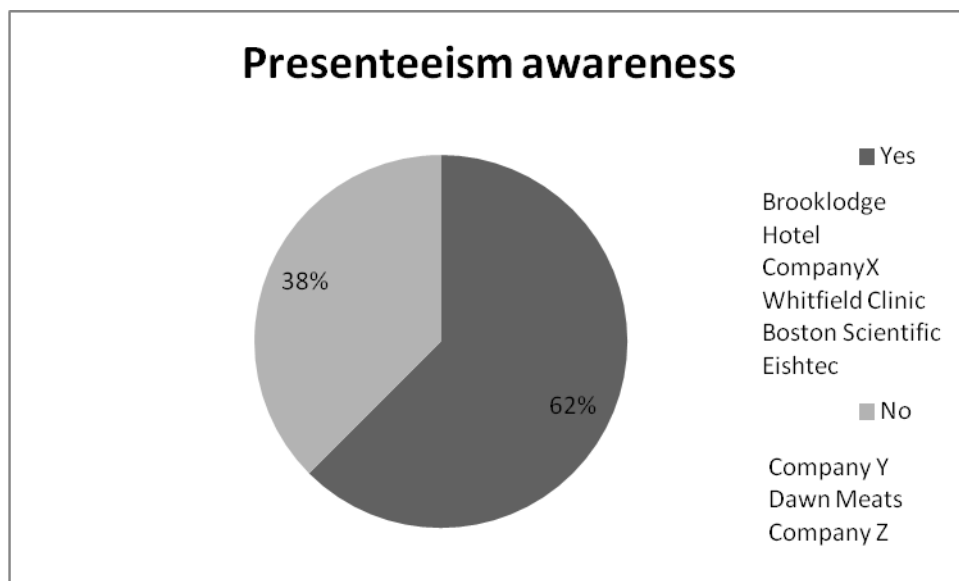
**Table 4.1 Interview schedule**

Respondent	Company	Role	Interview date	Time	Duration of interview
A	Dawn Meats	Group HR manager	23/05/14	10:00am	28mins 38 sec
B	Company X	HR director	27/05/14	4:00pm	20mins 6 sec
C	Whitfield Clinic	HR manager	09/07/14	12:00am	20mins 32 sec
D	Eishtec	HR manager	10/07/14	11:15am	27mins 5sec
E	Boston Scientific	Senior HR business partner	10/07/14	10:00am	22mins 11 sec
F	Company Y	HR officer	12/07/14	11:00am	20mins 6 sec
G	Brooklodge Hotel	HR manager	18/07/14	10:30am	25mins 25 sec
H	Company Z	HR manager	19/07/14	9:00am	35mins 76 sec

## 4.2 Findings in relation to Objective 1: To examine the prevalence of presenteeism in private sector organisations operating in Ireland

### 4.2.1 How aware are companies of the term “Presenteeism”

As seen in figure 4.1 below it is evident that 62% of companies are aware of the term presenteeism due to personal research and CIPD updates. However, company X was the only organisation that talked about presenteeism to employees.



**Figure 4.1. Practitioner’s awareness of presenteeism**

Company Y stated “no I wasn’t aware of the term before you emailed me, since then, I did look it up and I am aware of what the word is”.

### 4.2.2 Presenteeism defined

All companies defined presenteeism as an employee coming to work and being unable to contribute productively either because they were “*hungover, sick, drive to succeed, trying to put a more positive spin on absenteeism as absenteeism has a more negative prone, or they are spending time on the computer on facebook*”. Boston Scientifics HR manager stated “*I would come to work with my arm hanging off because at least then I would have tried to come into work and people have seen that I am not fit*”.



### 4.2.3 Presenteeism and its occurrence

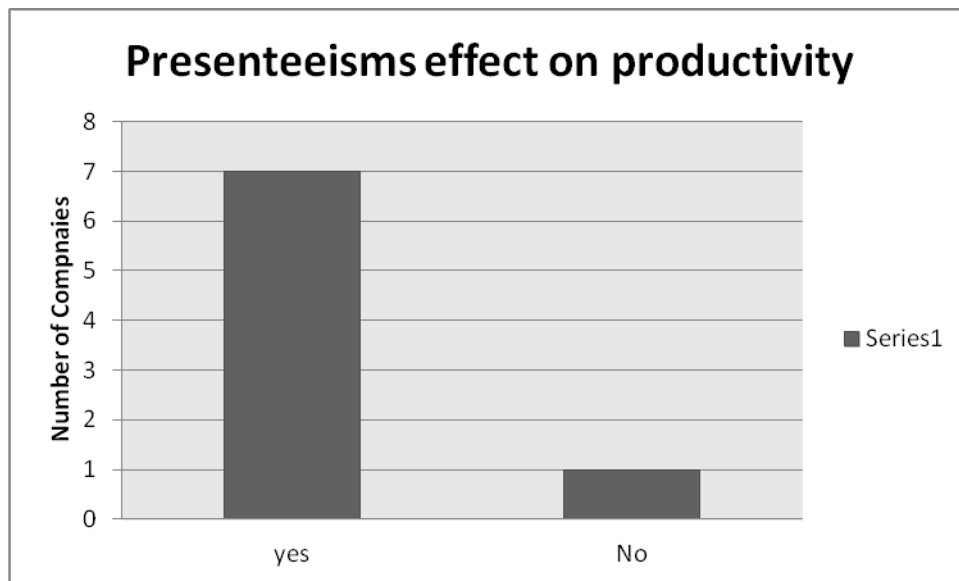
All eight companies felt that presenteeism takes place in the organisation and referred to it as occurring “*more in the indirect areas*” which would be the back office area as opposed to the production area and only at a “*small percent*”. Dawn meats HR manager and company Z believes “*it occurs in every company and that it cannot be avoided*”. When asked how long has presenteeism occurred in the company all expect for Company Y stated that “*it has occurred since day 1 and since the company opened*”. Company Y felt that if she “*was aware of presenteeism it would be stopped*”. Dawn meats assured the author that people “*would not be aware of it being called presenteeism*”.

### 4.2.4 Why presenteeism now

All eight companies believe that presenteeism is occurring now more than ever due to a “*busy lifestyle, individual families and their work ethic, higher standard of work life balance, social responsibility, and economic recession*”. Both Eishtec and Whitfield Clinic believe that “*it’s always been there it’s just not being labelled or recognised*”. Company Z, Y and Dawn meats were unsure of where the phenomena have come from. Interestingly the Brooklodge Hotels HR manager felt that “*its individual, even when you were in school as a child there were kids that would come in and do the full year and never missed a day and yet you knew some of the days they were sick*”.

### 4.2.5 Productivity loss to presenteeism

As seen in Figure 4.2 below seven out of eight companies believe productivity is effected by presenteeism. When asked if the HR manager felt that the employee’s productivity remained the same during presenteeism, the companies that answered “no” felt that “*people may get a double dip and be out for longer, staff morale would be effected and the company would be at a financial loss*”.



**Figure 4.2. Productivity and its effect on presenteeism**

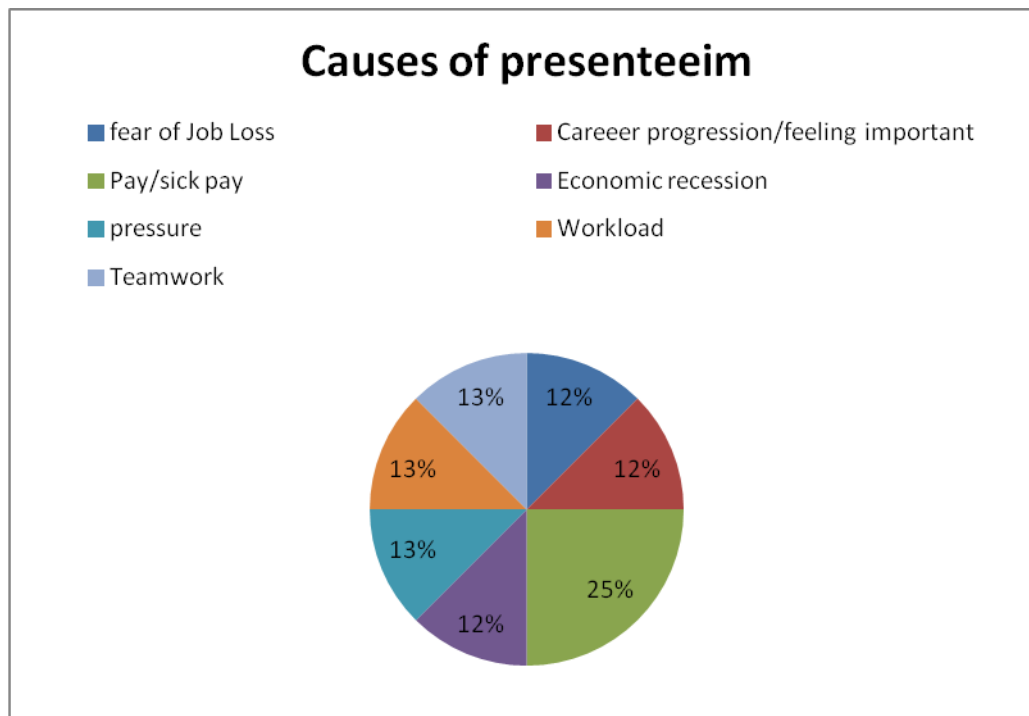
### **4.3 Findings in relation to Objective 2: To explore, if any the reasons for presenteeism**

#### **4.3.1 Sick pay policy in companies and productivity**

Four out of the eight HR managers reported that they have a sick pay policy in place, the remaining rely on social welfare. The managers were each asked if having no sick pay policy would encourage presenteeism the HR managers replied yes “*we monitor that carefully but*” people “*would financially have to come to work*”. Those that have a sick pay policy in place also believed that “*if they run out employees would have to come into work sick*”. One HR manager went so far to suggest that “*having no sick pay in place ensures employees will be at work because they will not be paid for being sick at home*”.

#### **4.3.2 Main Reasons for presenteeism**

The author chose to show the reasons cited for presenteeism as a pie chart for the ease of interpretation.



**Figure 4.3. Causes of presenteeism**

It can be clearly seen that the most prevalent cause is sick pay/ pay followed by teamwork, workload and pressure. Additionally, when asked if presenteeism was linked to any medical conditions six companies out of the eight answered “no”. The remaining two managers cited presenteeism is linked “*with mental conditions rather than physical such as depression, irritable bowel, chrones disease and coeliacs*”. Additionally the participants mentioned “*some people worry about doctor certs*”.

#### **4.3.3 Presenteeism and its association with facebook or carrying out other business in work**

Seven out of eight companies replied “no” when asked if presenteeism was associated with Facebook or carrying out other business in work. The Brooklodge Hotel further elaborated by stating “*it’s an interesting concept, very interesting, you got me thinking when I read that question*”. Company Y stated that “*because of the line of work and its marketing focus Facebook maybe used for work as employees have a work Facebook account*”, to be perfectly honest they don’t have the time and if they did their manager would know because we have an open office, we trust our employees they don’t have the time.”

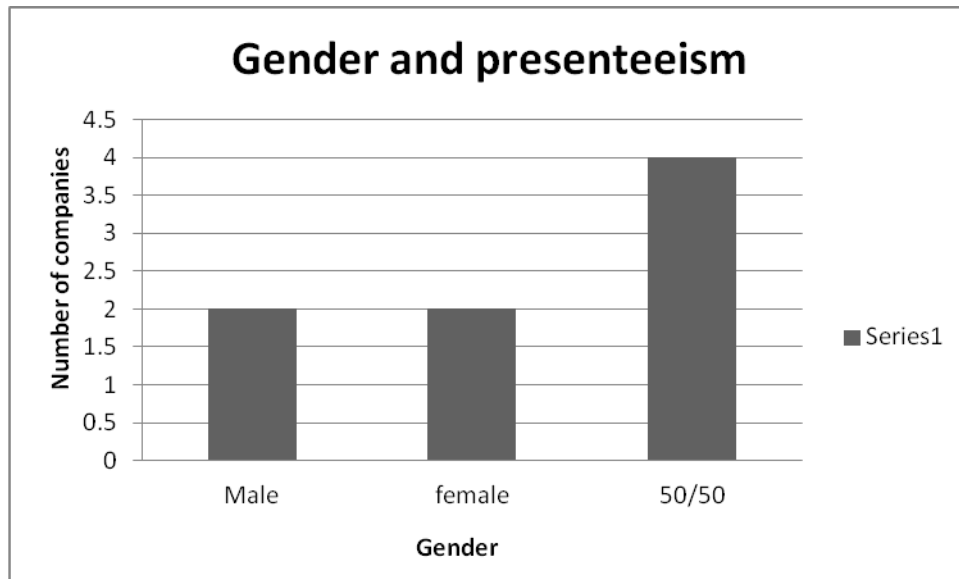
When each manager was asked if competitive presenteeism occurred, five out of eight companies stated “yes”. Company Y stated *“it’s more so if you’re getting more work done than say I am”*. The manager further stated that *“it would be a personal rather than a professional issue”*. Boston Scientific and Whitfield Clinic believe *“it’s only a small percentage”* and Eishtec and company X believe *“it’s more so at a higher level”*. Company X further elaborated by saying you *“feel you should come into work or you wouldn’t be good enough to be the next director, it depends what’s expected of you”*.

When asked if implementing new technology would cause presenteeism four companies answered “yes “. The remaining companies stated *“if it was to make things more efficient then yes if technology was brought in to make things easier then there would be ten more roles on top of that one but it would only make one part easier”*. Company Z stated *“that people would feel that they could come into work and there would probably be more physical and mental health problems because of the pressure to use the technology right”*. Eishtec believes that it *“may help some companies but not theirs”*.

#### **4.3.4 Do employees feel they have to come to work when sick**

Dawn meats stated *“I would hope so you give a person a contract of employment to do a job for you, everyone accepts and commits there’s an obligation to fulfil your contract”*. Company X felt in *“some areas they might for example if their bosses have been in and sick, also for other reasons if they broke their leg they might think someone might think something’s wrong so they come to work and also if sick pay runs out”*. Whitfield Clinic believes it is because of the economic crisis *“we have tried to offset that with 3 days unpaid sick leave, if we feel people are in sick we would say it to them and rather than deduct those 3 days all together in a payroll we spread the cost of that over a period of time to try help their situation”*. The Brooklodge hotel felt that *“in the induction day we would tell people if you get sick there is no issue with sick leave just ring in advance and the shift will be covered, I don’t feel the pressure is from us and I would hope that people do not feel pressured by their manager either to come to work sick”*.

#### 4.3.5 Gender and presenteeism



**Figure 4.4. Presenteeism and Gender**

As seen from figure 4.4 above four companies believe the gender for presenteeism is 50-50, two companies believe it is more male dominated with the remaining two company's female orientated.

When asked what age group presenteeism would occur the answers ranged from “*women aged in their 40s or 50s because younger workers would not necessarily have that work culture and older workers are used to more pressure , multitasking and being responsible. I definitely would see it here women would struggle on and men would say there sick*”. Other HR managers felt “*it would be women significantly aged 30 plus*”. In contrast, Dawn meats believed it “*is men 35-40 years and the age group depends more so on the nature of the work there doing, people work right up to retirement age no reason why people can't fulfil their aspirations*”. Whitfield Clinic believed the age group would be “*between 22-35 years of age*”. However, company Y believed that “*defining it by age or sex would be putting people into a box and I don't think that's fair. I don't necessarily think you can say it's one type of person or another.*”

### 4.3.6 Cost/measurement of presenteeism

All companies asserted that presenteeism was not measured in the companies but absenteeism was. In relation to the costs of presenteeism all companies stated below in table 4.1.

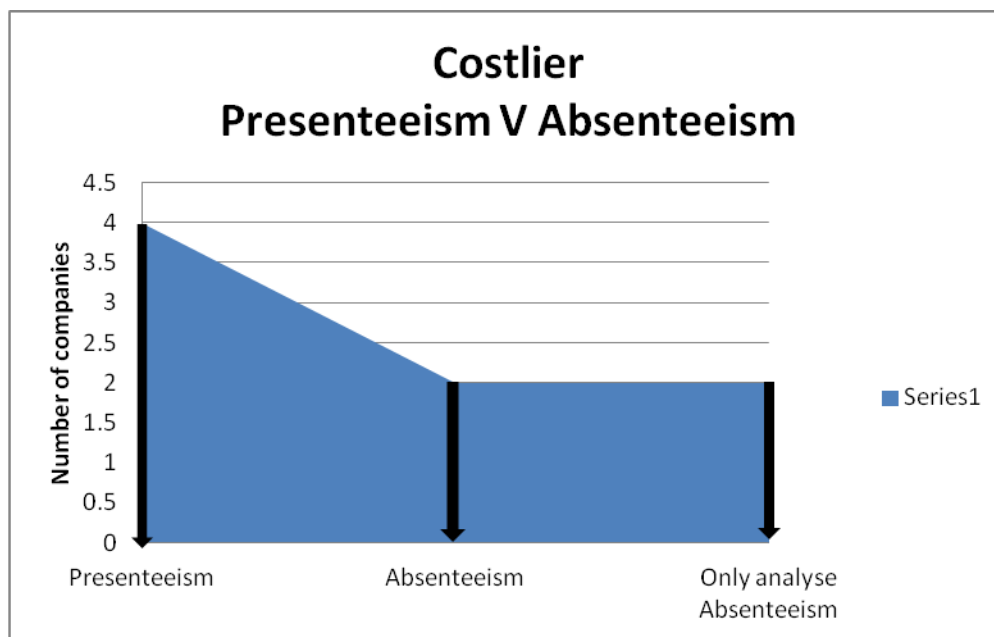
**Table 4.1. HR practitioners view on the cost of presenteeism**

<b>Brooklodge Hotel</b>	<i>I am not sure to be honest</i>
<b>Eishtec</b>	<i>Not much cost, it's not measured but not much</i>
<b>Company Y</b>	<i>Don't measure it</i>
<b>Company X</b>	<i>I would honestly say we don't have a figure on it as I said its more in the back office. There are 167 in the back office and 1,400 in production. It's not as costly as the overall plant. I mean in terms of people it might be easier for me to say probably 2-3 people only a small percent. Its whether or not they pass on what they have, cold or flu.</i>
<b>Company Z</b>	<i>I could not say as we do not measure the cost.</i>
<b>Boston Scientific</b>	<i>I don't think there is I don't think there is an issue here at all</i>
<b>Whitfield Clinic</b>	<i>You see if it's not carefully managed it can be costly, if somebody is underperforming efficiently in their role and we have to cover that with additional staff that is an added cost. If this happens the team leader would have to go to their next line manager to identify why they need an additional cover there so the cost would be very carefully managed here.</i>
<b>Dawn Meats</b>	<i>The author had to explain at this question what presenteeism was. The HR manager in Dawn meats replied by saying sorry in our industry that's a broad statement your going to have to narrow that down a small bit. We don't want people coming to work who are sick. Equally we are a food manufacturer so we are dealing with a product. We don't want people coming to work sick we would have issues with contamination and health and safety.</i>

When asked how much loss the company would incur the majority of companies stated *it could be seen as almost abusing someone expecting them to be an appropriate culture and this would increase in accident costs and productivity loss*". The Brooklodge hotel asserts *quiet confidentially that its specific people, characters that you will know they will be in*".

Company Z *feels it is between 20-25 percent I would imagine it is very high from what I can see in my department*".

When the companies were asked which would be costlier presenteeism or absenteeism it is seen in figure 4.5 below that four companies answered presenteeism, two companies absenteeism and two companies stating that they only analyse absenteeism. The general consensus from companies is that *"your first reaction to that question is absenteeism but really when you think about it a greater cost is presenteeism"*.

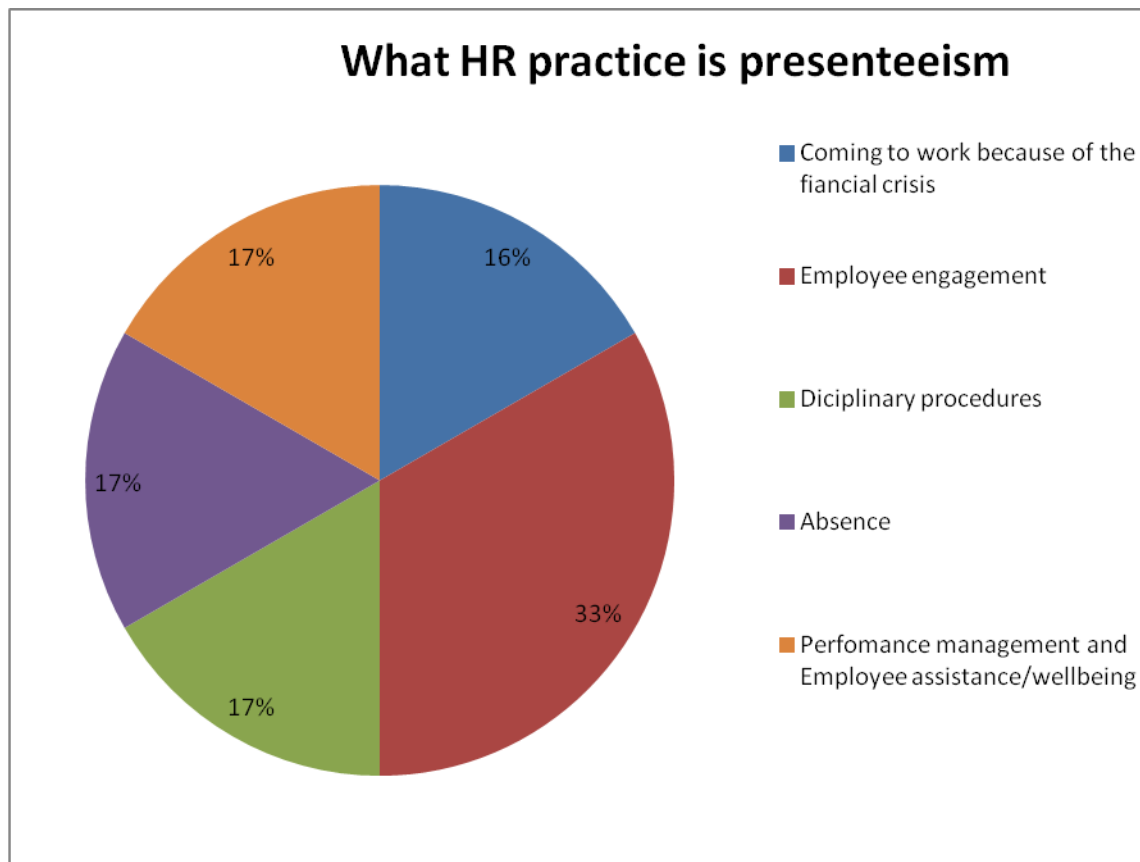


**Figure 4.5. HR practitioner's view on cost in terms of absenteeism and presenteeism**

#### **4.4 Findings in relation to Objective 3: To establish if any, the HR practices and mechanisms in place to resolve presenteeism**

##### **4.4.1 Which HR practice is presenteeism?**

It is evident from the table 4.2 below that the most prevalent HR practice associated with presenteeism is "employee engagement". Both Company Z and the Brooklodge Hotel felt that *presenteeism was not* associated with any HR practice.

**Table 4.2. HR practice relevant to presenteeism**

It was after this question that all companies were asked which HR practices are most affected by presenteeism. Some companies replied *staffing, employment opportunities and development if employees come to work sick, training and risk management, employee assistant programs and health and wellness would be an issue, if people are told to go home and they won't, culture and appraising performance*. Boston scientific, the Brooklodge Hotel, Dawn Meats and Company Y believes *“that no HR practices are affected by presenteeism”*.

#### **4.4.2 Procedures involved in dealing with presenteeism?**

Four companies researched had no formal or informal procedures in place. Two companies have formal procedures involving steps such as *“employees sending in doctor certs after four days, the supervisor talking to the senior managers and see if the person is fit to work. If*



*somebody said to me I'm not fit to be here I know I came and made the effort its more at a strategic level with the directors".*

All respondents referred to informal practices as *"the line manager or director documenting it at a one to one meeting with the supervisor, an informal chat with the manager and if the manager's notice that someone is unwell they will ask you to go home"*. Dawn meats asserted that there are only formal procedures for dealing with people that do not attend work. At one of their sites *it has an attendance bonus pay which is €15 a week*. When asked what are the steps involved with dealing with presenteeism the HR managers replied *"we don't call it presenteeism but we deal with absenteeism, we know the good and the not so good attenders"*. Eishtec and Company Z stated that there are *"no procedures in place only that if a person comes into work sick they are sent home"*. When asked how can HR practitioners reduce presenteeism the answers from each company can be seen in table 4.3 below.

**Table 4.3. How can HR practitioner's reduce presenteeism**

Whitfield Clinic	<i>I just think by carefully monitoring it, I don't think we could lower it much more here; I just think the awareness has to be raised with the team leaders and managers to keep their focus on it. Those that work on the ground because there would be months that go by that I wouldn't see employees.</i>
Eishtec	<i>Ensure everyone is engaged and happy to be at work.</i>
Dawn Meats	<i>Improve areas people are working in, healthy eating and healthy lifestyle.</i>
Company X	<i>We are not going to put a policy in place for it, its more to ensure managers and supervisors have the confidence and close link with people and people have the ability to feel like they could say to their manager that they don't feel well, and you would have to keep a close eye on it to ensure its not duvet days either.</i>
Boston Scientific	<i>I don't see an issue with it here that could be me coming in with blinkers on. We have an occupational nurse on site.</i>
Brooklodge Hotel	<i>Basic pay, basic pay for a certain number of people. It is something that has gotten bigger since social welfare has increased from 3 days to 6 days.</i>
Company Y	<i>By continually following the legal stand point of your not legally allowed to be in work and continuing to communicate it to managers and employees, ensuring employees have the confidence and encouragement to say there sick, if they're sick there sick nothing can be done. Therefore continuing that ethos and communication.</i>

Company Z	<i>I think you have to be very careful because if we reduce presenteeism this could increase absenteeism and vice versa. Careful management and maybe encouraging people to be open by having regular meetings with staff may help.</i>
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#### 4.4.3 Mechanisms to deal with presenteeism

All respondents referred to mechanisms that deal with presenteeism as employee assistant program councillors that they “refer people to through the occupational health department”, EAPs “for employees and families, if anyone ever shows any sign of worry or distress we communicate healthy eating in the canteen, wellbeing week every year, gym membership, family and employee health insurance, newsletter with tips for healthy eating, circuits around the company that people walk on their break, outsourced financial services, mental health programmes and schedule of events for the year”. For example Boston Scientific purchased eleven spinning bikes with 5 spinning classes a week. Additionally, Company X have purchased pedometers for employees in the company where the employee pays €1 for a pedometer, 100s of employees have signed up as part of the competition. The Brooklodge Hotel is the only company that has no programme in place to deal with presenteeism. The HR manager answered “no” also when asked do they engage in any EAP, health promotion, mental health or financial services. Company Y “refer to Medmark who work with occupational experts that we would go to for any health issues to get some medical advice”.

#### 4.4.4 Employee presenteeism surveys

When asked if the company issues employees presenteeism surveys all eight companies answered “no”. All HR managers were then asked if they would consider implementing a presenteeism survey, again all managers stated “no” with the exception of only two stating the surveys “are a way of raising awareness”, it would be easy to put a question on employee engagement surveys if we felt it was an issue”. One of the managers applied certain conditions for implementing surveys which is “if employees were in the company for the past 5 years and their performance was on target”.

Those companies that answered no also stated:

*You could bring out a survey for absolutely every part of HR. We bring out a survey every year on everything in HR except presenteeism. Presenteeism is something we wouldn't want to get information on, we already know that it shouldn't be done we don't want to highlight it."*

Company Y

*"We do an engagement survey it's very clear by the results where we are. 95-98% of people are happy to give feedback"*

Boston Scientific

When asked if they would offer an incentive for carrying out the survey all companies stated "no". The general consensus was that employees "are happy to fill out surveys".

#### 4.4.5 Employees and presenteeism

All companies stated "no" when asked if they use any positive terms when talking to employees about presenteeism because HR managers *"don't talk much to employees about presenteeism"*. Whitfield clinic stated that *"after this survey it would certainly have brought it to my attention and it would be something we would refer to in our induction day. It would be something we could also bring into health& safety and welfare at work"*.

#### 4.4.6 HR managers role with presenteeism

All eight HR manager's role with regards to presenteeism can be seen below in table 4.4.

**Table 4.4. HR manager's role in relation to presenteeism**

<b>Dawn Meats</b>	<i>My role is to ensure we have best practices among sites. I wouldn't have the hands on role of dealing with it on site, I would have the hands on role of having a policy to deal with it and roll it out to every site.</i>
<b>Company Y</b>	<i>If a manger comes to me and tells me about a sickness I would deal with it then</i>
<b>Company Z</b>	<i>I could raise awareness and educate managers, leaders etc about the</i>

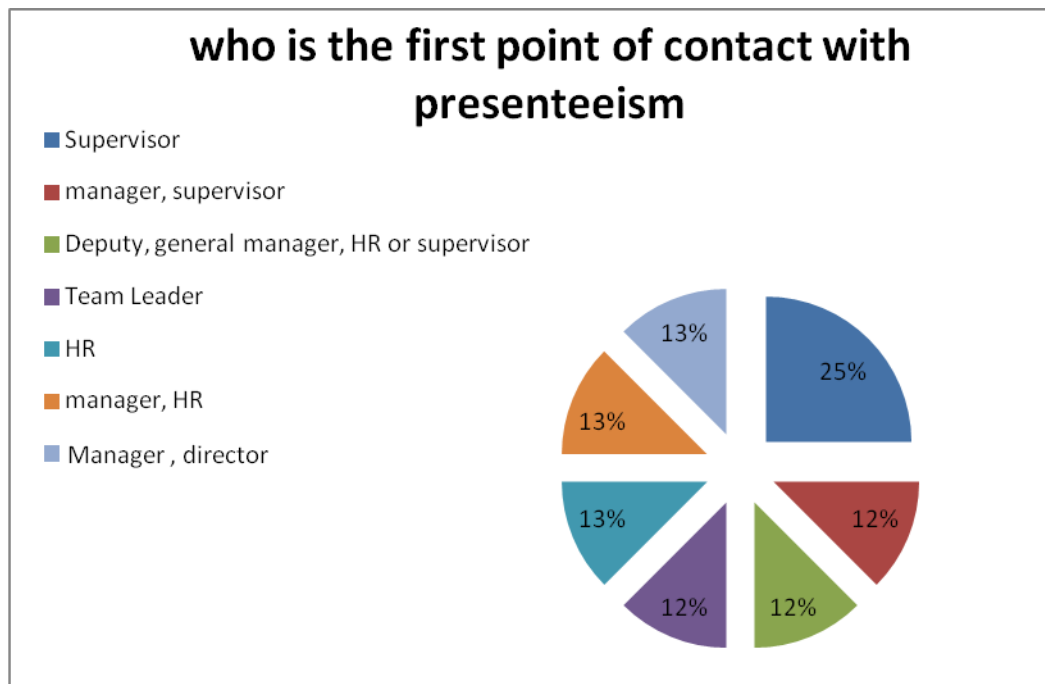
	<i>term presenteeism and any other new concepts.</i>
<b>Eishtec</b>	<i>If a problem comes to me I can deal with it effectively,</i>
<b>Whitfield Clinic</b>	<i>I can deal with it if managers feel I need to step in.</i>
<b>Brooklodge Hotel</b>	<i>If I feel they have a bad bug I would send them home</i>
<b>Company X</b>	<i>Really my role is to remove it. I will say a part from that strategic direction that it is not good for the business. Through my leadership and throughout say groups with managers when we do the workshop that kind of stuff my role would be to highlight and educate people why it is not good for the business and the individual. I rely on the managers and generalist and all that and HR to follow through.</i>
<b>Boston Scientific</b>	<i>I would reduce and remove it really.</i>

When HR managers were asked how they became educated about presenteeism or if they attended courses or speeches on it most companies stated they were “*only educated by themselves, CIPD events and people management articles*”. All eight companies asserted they never attended any courses or speeches.

Company Y “*became educated about it by looking it up before the interview. She would be educated on how to manage it yes but that word no*”.

Whitfield Clinic believes “*there is a need to educate other managers and team leaders. I know by certainly looking at this survey it has raised my awareness of it as well. In my HR training I was educated about it. I have researched it over the years as well*”.

When asked who the first point of contact the figure 4.6 below specifies exactly what companies said.



**Figure 4.6. Employees first point of contact in the company**

It can clearly be seen from the results that supervisors are the first point of contact.

#### 4.4.7 Managers role

When HR managers were asked if they think line managers are aware of the term presenteeism all eight stated “no, *not at all, not in the term or the theory or philosophy, or the label*”. Some HR managers felt that managers “*are aware if someone comes in sick and they aren’t fit for work. Leaders have responsibilities in managing performance and the welfare and health and safety of the staff*”. Boston Scientific felt that “*if presenteeism was brought up in a sentence they would say what do you mean by that. It’s not something that’s very big on the radar, it’s something that’s after happening*”.

When asked if the HR manager had anything they wanted to add to the interview only three companies added the following:

*“Presenteeism is tiny. The culture is everyone gets a laptop from the support type of view. Everyone goes home at half 4 and it’s great that way and I have to say there seems to be a brilliant work life balance. With all the support people are over performing”*

Boston Scientific

*“When you are in a very open environment like ours communication is key when you’re sick your sick. It’s a lot more difficult in the civil service than the private sector”.*

Company Y

*“As a HR director we have a responsibility to make sure we set the standard for the company. It is unhealthy for everyone if people come into work not well. The employee relationship is a long term one so you shouldn’t take a short term view, you should try support people through sickness. You need to be aware and show an interest in people’s health and wellbeing.”*

Company X

## **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the findings deployed during the semi structured interviews of HR practitioners. In doing so, it has focused on the objectives integral to the implementation process, individual and organisation impacts and differences in experiences based on their work role. Chapter seven addresses the interpretation of the findings and their meaning in the context of the literature review.

### **Summary of findings**

- The term presenteeism was new to three HR managers.
- One HR manager asserted they would attend work with *their arm hanging off* to prove that they are unfit to work.
- The main reason for presenteeism was pay/sick pay followed by fear of job loss, drive to succeed for career progression, feeling important, pressure due to lack of trust.
- The first point of contact when employees need assistance or feel unwell is the supervisor.
- The majority of employees have employee assistant programs, doctor on site and wellness programmes in place.
- Line managers are not aware of the term presenteeism or educated on it.
- HR have only come aware of the term due to personal research.
- Seven out of eight managers believe productivity is very much affected by presenteeism.

- None of the company's measure presenteeism but the majority of them do believe it is more costly than absenteeism.

## **Chapter 5**

### **DISCUSSION**



## **Chapter 5. Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to examine, in depth, the findings outlined in the previous chapter. The author will analyse existing knowledge and research of presenteeism from a HR perspective within the private sector and compare it to the literature review to determine whether it supports or contradicts their view. In this chapter the author has linked some headings together from the findings chapter.

### **5.2 Discussion in relation to objective one: To examine the prevalence of presenteeism in private sector organisations operating in Ireland**

#### **5.2.1 Presenteeism defined and how aware are companies of the term “Presenteeism”?**

According to the literature there is no universally agreed definition of presenteeism (Williams, 2013). However, McBride (2013) associated presenteeism with a hangover, Johns (2010) defined it as attending work while ill, Cooper (1996, p.15) defined it as working long hours that you are no longer effective, CIPD (2013) defined it as transmitting their illness to others taking longer to recover while Moqbel *et al.*, (2013) defined it as using networking sites at work. It appears that the literature is correct as all the companies who took part in the primary research supported these statements. After analysing and combining the individual answers given by HR managers presenteeism is defined *as being functionally unable, therefore, attending work at all cost either because of a hangover, sickness, drive to succeed and spending time on social networking sites*. Gilbreath and Karimi (2012) assert that a wider definition of presenteeism is needed. The author agrees as the broadness of the term makes the understanding of presenteeism difficult as the term presenteeism was new to three of the HR managers who participated. This being said their unawareness does not mean they lack knowledge or understanding of the phenomena. A common element protruding in the primary research is that HR managers are aware of the meaning behind presenteeism but not the label. Those that were aware of the term researched it themselves and received CIPD updates. It appears from this that either all HR managers are not CIPD members or they do not research HR issues consistently.

The literature asserts that some people are virtually obsessed with working that they are imposing unnecessary pressure amongst themselves (Johns 2010). This is evident when the Boston Scientific HR manager stated that she “*would come to work with her arm hanging off because at least then people would see that she is unfit to work*”. One could postulate that if the HR manager whom is a senior figure that employees confide in when there is a problem at work feels they have to attend work while ill this may offset a certain culture in the company. Therefore, employees may feel pressured to participate in presenteeism as the manager may not view the illness as genuine until the manager informs them that they are unfit to work. This suggests that the expectation of the organisation now measure commitment by attendance rather than quality of work or length of service. Further research needs to be conducted in order to outline precisely what aspect of presenteeism they are dealing with as presenteeism can also be defined as not being entirely engaged due to problems at home or because your carrying other employees at work (Gilbreath and Karimi, 2012). The researcher would have to further question who qualifies as being unfit to work because the symptoms are not always evident.

### **5.2.2 Why presenteeism now and its occurrence**

All participating organisations felt that presenteeism occurred in their company. The majority of organisations felt that it has occurred since “*day 1 and has always been in the company but not labelled*”. When participants were asked why presenteeism now the Brooklodge HR manager felt that “*its individual, even when you were in school as a child there were kids that would come in and do the full year and never miss a day and yet you knew some of the days they were sick..*”. Interestingly the literature did not define presenteeism in such a way. The concept is very relatable and true. This suggests that presenteeism may be individual behaviours and certain characters. The remaining respondents reiterated what the literature states; *busy lifestyle, individual families and their work ethic, higher standard of work life balance and social responsibility*.

### **5.2.3 Productivity loss to presenteeism**

The Medibank (2011), asserts that the main contributors to productivity loss are depression, allergies, hypertension and diabetes. This negatively correlates to the participants as none of the interviewees mentioned any of these contributors. Seven out of the eight participants deemed presenteeism to be associated with productivity loss. The literature to date claims that

presenteeism causes productivity loss because employees feel they have to work harder than ever. Dawn meats HR manager agreed with this and stated “*you give a person a contract of employment to do a job for you, everyone accepts and commits there’s an obligation to fulfil your contract*”. The Brooklodge hotel hopes *people do not feel the pressure from managers to come in when sick* “.The literature asserts that people may feel they have to maintain the presenteeism culture if they want to take on a role at a higher level in the company (Doherty, 2010). Two out of the eight companies agreed this *would occur if people want to be the next director* etc. These findings confirm that some people may feel they have to come to work when they have presenteeism symptoms. Therefore, results of presenteeism unmanaged suggest productivity loss.

### **5.3 Findings in relation to Objective 2: To explore, if any the reasons for presenteeism**

#### **5.3.1 Causes of presenteeism/sick pay policy**

What was of particular interest was that the sick pay scheme was the main driver for attendance at work while ill for the companies that had a policy in place and those that did not. The majority of HR managers felt the reason for this is because employees feel they have to attend work because after three days on sick pay they would receive a verbal warning with eventual dismissal. One would suggest that in order to reduce presenteeism this policy needs to be adjusted. This finding differs to the research of Ashby and Mahdon (2010), that cite the main cause of presenteeism to be personal financial difficulties. One manager did, however, mention the economic recession which could be linked to financial difficulties. The literature did state factors which promote presenteeism vary across workplaces and occupational groups (Dew *et al.*, 2005). This may be the reason why there were seven different factors mentioned by the interviewees. Mahdon (2010), states other causes to be work-related stress and perceived pressure to attend work which came from either managers or colleagues, whereas Gurchieck, (2009), believes fear of job loss is one cause of presenteeism and McPherson (2012) believes employees attend work due to a fear of missing job opportunities. Only one of these factors “work related stress” was not mentioned by any company in this study. Additionally, one of the HR practitioner’s primary concern was not wanting to let their team down. Grinyer and Singletons (2000), was in agreement with this statement.

Collins and Cartwright (2012) assert private sector organisations have higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of presenteeism. There seems to be an agreement throughout that presenteeism in all eight companies is low. Additionally, the culture and particularly the companies approach to wellbeing can affect the level of presenteeism (Buckingham, 2012). All eight companies do not measure presenteeism therefore it is very hard to determine the actual level. The author can only rely on the interview questions. However, it can be subsequently assumed that overall losing pay is an important role in encouraging people towards presenteeism.

Schultz *et al.*, (2009), states there are two types of presenteeism acute illness and chronic conditions. All HR managers except two deal with chronic conditions such as *mental conditions, depression, irritable bowel, chrons disease and coeliac*. The remaining deal with acute illness such as the flu and hangovers. Medibank (2011) state that the top two conditions /causes of presenteeism are depression 21% and allergy 17%. Therefore, the research and findings are in agreement.

Moqbel *et al.*, (2013) and Prater and Smith (2011), assert that presenteeism such as social networking and conducting personal business is a distraction when working. The findings of the research contradict this statement as seven out of eight companies disagreed. One manager believed this was *a very interesting concept* that made her rethink. This suggests that presenteeism is only seen as an illness when it is a very broad definition.

There seems to be a consistent belief between both the companies involved in the study and the literature that competitive presenteeism occurs in companies. This may indicate that employees are under pressure from colleagues to come into work in order to be promoted. One manager believes this is a *“personal rather than a professional problem”*. This negatively correlates with the literature as Weingberg (2007) cites colleagues or managers might think less of them if they do not stay at work. One would assume this is a professional problem. Knani (2013) cited that a change in working conditions such as implementing new technology would encourage presenteeism. There seems to be a divide between the literature and the findings as four companies stated “no” and the remaining “yes”. Therefore, *“it would depend on how efficient the technology is”*.

### 5.3.2 Gender and presenteeism

Merill *et al.*, (2012), asserted presenteeism was greatest for women aged between 30-39 years. The findings of the research are divided, two companies believe male, two female and the remaining four companies believe the gender is 50/50. Those that did mention women stated 30 plus and 40-50 years of age. This suggests that the age group may depend on the nature of the company rather than being a part of the private sector. Bockerman and Laukkanen (2009), cite presenteeism is higher for women because they obtain a higher degree of control over their work. The HR managers were in agreement with this as they believed women would “*struggle on if they’re sick*” and that they exert more pressure and responsibility compared to men. Whitfield Clinic stated presenteeism would be prevalent between 22-35 year old workers whereas Company Y stated younger employees would not have the work culture of older workers. The literature agrees with Whitfield Clinic as younger workers under 24 years of age earning less than £20,000 were more likely to engage in presenteeism.

### 5.3.3 Cost/measurement of presenteeism

The literature claims that there is no agreement on the appropriate method of calculating presenteeism because you can only manage what you measure. Each organisation stated that they do not measure presenteeism but gave educated guesses such as *2-3 people per 167 people*. Therefore, it could be suggested from these results that “presenteeism measurement cannot be implemented because it cannot be managed” (Pauly *et al.*, 2008, p. 480). However, four out of eight companies believed presenteeism is costlier than absenteeism with two stating absenteeism and the remaining two unsure. This finding differs to the research of Ashby and Mahon (2010) who believe that the assumption among private sectors is that absenteeism is a bigger problem. The results would suggest otherwise.

## **5.4 Discussion in relation to Objective 3: To establish if any, the HR practices and mechanisms in place to resolve presenteeism**

### **5.4.1 HR practices and presenteeism**

It is evident from the literature that presenteeism falls into the category of staffing, risk management and work protection (Mathis and Jackson, 2008). The literature is in disagreement with the findings. The findings cite HR practices to be presenteeism as employee engagement, disciplinary action, performance management, financial crisis and absence. This is in partial agreement with Bhardwaj (2013), who stated performance management as a HR practice. The negative link between the findings and literature would suggest that maybe employers have underestimated or missed the impact of presenteeism because of their focus on absence (Churchard, 2010). It was only when each HR practitioner was asked which HR practices were affected by presenteeism that the companies stated *staffing, employment opportunities and development if employees come to work sick, training and risk management, employee assistant programs and health and wellness would be an issue, if people are told to go home and they won't, culture and appraising performance*. These are in agreement with the literature stated above. One could assume that it is only when presenteeism is a problem in the company that it falls into this category and that before this it is only an employee engagement problem.

### **5.4.2 HR managers/line managers role with presenteeism**

According to the CIPD (2014) a HR manager's role is to ensure line managers are educated and understand the concept presenteeism. Therefore, training managers and providing ongoing support is important if the company wants to discourage presenteeism (CIPD, 2013). Additionally this may involve HR putting policies and procedures in place. However, Grinyer and Singleton (2000), believe that incorporating policies and procedures could have the unintended consequence of increasing it; thereby employees have opted for long term sickness due to disciplinary action after 3 days sickness. The findings state that HRs role is to *"ensure we have best practices, raise awareness and educate managers, remove presenteeism, deal with effectively and send people home"*. Interestingly the literature only stated to educate managers and raise awareness. In relation to educating managers all eight

HR managers believed that managers would not understand the term but they would understand the meaning behind presenteeism and that they would not be educated or attend meetings on it. This would suggest from the above findings that HR have taken on a more predominate role in dealing with presenteeism themselves but there still needs to be more done. The literature believes that HR needs to start improving the company policies by firstly evaluating the line managers understanding of presenteeism as they are the first point of contact (CIPD, 2014). The first point of contact was very different for most companies in the study as it ranged from the supervisor to the line manager, team leader or HR. One would suggest that if managers lack knowledge they will fail to provide employees with answers to their problems. Some managers seem to misunderstand the total cost of presenteeism to an organisation (Pauley *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, one would have to question how qualified is managers and supervisors to deal with employees problems if HR have already stated the managers are not educated on topics such as presenteeism. When HR was asked if they would consider implementing presenteeism surveys only two companies stated “yes”. All eight companies have at present no presenteeism survey in place. The literature claims that collecting information through surveys would help build HRs understanding of how prevalent presenteeism is. The CIPD (2012), believe they should be brought into existing surveys. Two managers are in agreement with this statement. Hemp (2004), believes the strongest incentive for taking part in a survey is that employees feel the company cares about their wellbeing. All managers stated employees are happy to take part in surveys but they would not offer any incentives. This suggests that it may be only some companies that need to offer incentives.

#### **5.4.3 Procedures/ mechanisms in place to reduce presenteeism**

Managers believed that because of the economic crisis some ways to reduce presenteeism are to “*pay sick pay, basic pay, raise awareness and provide information on presenteeism at induction days*”. The literature however states that awareness, identification and education are key in order to reduce the phenomena. This would suggest that managers are looking for cost effective treatments to reduce presenteeism (Pauley *et al.*, 2008). All eight companies had some mechanisms in place to reduce presenteeism such as “*EAP, wellbeing programmes, fringe benefits such as family health insurance, doctors on site and financial services*”. It appears that the findings are correct as all the organisations who took part in the primary research supported this statement. Mac Gregor *et al.*, (2008,) asserts there are limits to the

reach of effective well being programmes when dealing with life event issues. This would suggest that some companies need to increase the support mechanisms for employees.



## **Chapter 6**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

## **Chapter 6. Conclusions and Recommendation**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the most significant issues emerging from the study. The findings will be constructed to the research objectives which have being devised in the discussion chapter. Following this, the author will identify analyse and interpret whether the literature supports or contradicts the findings. Finally, limitations, relevance of the study and recommendations will be provided for further researchers.

### **6.2 Relationship of findings to the research question and objectives**

The research question for this study is; what is the level of presenteeism in organisations and what impact and challenges are Human Resource Managers/practitioners (HRM) facing as a result.

In answering this research question the author must first answer each objective;

- To examine the prevalence of presenteeism in private sector organisations operating in Ireland
- To explore, if any the reasons for presenteeism
- To establish, if any, the HR practices and mechanisms in place to resolve presenteeism

Three out of eight companies did not display any awareness of the term presenteeism. However they did exhibit some understanding and knowledge of the meaning behind the phenomena. With this said the prevalence of presenteeism in the eight private sector companies was very low. The literature from Cathright (2012) cited that private sector organisations have low levels of presenteeism. The reasons behind presenteeism however differed from the literature as the main cause/ reason for presenteeism in the findings was sick pay/pay. According to Ashby and Mahdon (2005), the main reason are personal financial difficulties, work related stress and perceived pressure. The reason for this disagreement maybe because some companies did not have a sick pay scheme in place which encourages employees to attend work and for those companies that did have it place the first three days

were not paid. The literature cited by Grinyer and Singleton (2000) is in agreement with this study, if employees are out of work three days sick they could be called into the office and given a disciplinary warning. This encourages employees to attend work while sick. Additionally, the majority of HR managers believed competitive presenteeism was high. In relation to HR practices in place to resolve presenteeism all managers cited the main HR practice as employee engagement followed by disciplinary action, performance management, financial crisis and absence. However it is evident from the literature that presenteeism falls into the category of staffing, risk management and work protection (Mathis and Jackson, 2008). It was only when each HR practitioner was asked which HR practices were affected by presenteeism that the companies agreed with Mathis and Jackson (2008), *staffing, employment opportunities and development if employees come to work sick, training and risk management, employee assistant programs and health and wellness, culture and appraising performance*. All employees believe that reducing presenteeism involves raising awareness and educating workers. As supervisors and managers are the first point of contact to employees it was an interesting finding that they were not educated about presenteeism attended speeches or ever heard of the word presenteeism. Crocker *et al.*, (2012), believes managers will fail to provide employees with answers to their problems.

Additionally other mechanisms to resolve presenteeism ranged from EAP programmes, fringe benefits, wellness programmes, newsletters, occupational nurse on site and financial services. All were in agreement with the literature. However the literature did not mention fringe benefits. All eight managers do not have a presenteeism survey in place even though four out of the six companies said presenteeism was more costly than absenteeism. Juniper (2012) believes HR needs a survey in place to determine the size of the problem in the company. Interestingly, all of the eight companies did not measure presenteeism either. "You can only manage what you measure and presenteeism measurement cannot be readily implemented because it cannot be managed" (Pauly *et al.*, 2008, p. 480). The majority of managers also said that they would not bring out or add a presenteeism question to surveys.

In answering the research question the author has found that the results confirm the level of presenteeism in these private sector companies is low. However, HR is faced with major challenges associated with presenteeism because it is a workplace health issue that is not going away. Firstly, the major challenge for HR is that they are unsure of the real level of presenteeism because it is not measured nor managed. The author believes that HR are not educated enough as all HR managers did understand the term presenteeism and only knew

about the topic from personal research. This knowledge should be passed down the organisation so that the first point of contact, which are managers, understand the phenomena. Secondly, HR is only aware of presenteeism as one definition which is “coming to work sick”. This definition is a lot broader and it is only through this interview conducted with that author that they became aware of the remaining definitions. HR needs to recognise the new forms of presenteeism raise awareness and proactively do something about it. Employers need to act now to reduce its impact and create a healthier, happier and more productive workplace.

### **6.3 Limitations of the study**

The study is based on one perspective within one sector i.e. private sector therefore the findings are restricted to that perspective and do not include a general manager or employee viewpoint. The results may also be conventional as Grosselin *et al.*, (2013), indicates that the levels of presenteeism discussed may not be an accurate measurement as it is more difficult to remember presenteeism incidents than absenteeism. Therefore, the results may be more widespread than indicated in the responses by HR practitioners. As the author only focused on the private sector there is no room for comparison to the public sector. As the research only focuses on eight companies as presenteeism is only prevalent in a small number of employees therefore the study needs to be of a larger size to determine the real number of employees affected. The HR manager is limited in the amount of information as line managers and supervisors are the first point of contact. There is a limit to the amount of time the research has to be conducted therefore this puts pressure on the study in terms of the amount of organisations that can be used. There is also a limit to the word count as the author felt that a lot of the information had to be condensed down which meant a lot of the personal information was lost especially in the findings chapter.

### **6.4 Relevance of the Research**

The phenomena presenteeism has been considerably less researched than its counterpart absenteeism in particular from a managerial or employee perspective. In finding out the HR practitioners perception of presenteeism where knowingly aware of the phenomena or not has added to the existing knowledge and ongoing research of presenteeism in order to aid

companies to develop and improve existing tools in the training and education of their managers. This would then influence the manager's style and their knowledge in order to reduce presenteeism within an organisation. The results overall could be an important supplement to how presenteeism may be reduced in private sector organisations.

### **6.5 Recommendations for future research**

As a result of researching this phenomena it would be of benefit to further develop this research by looking at;

- The perceptions of presenteeism across different departments in the organisation. To determine if that is the case across different departments such as marketing or the financial department.
- A larger mix of junior, middle, senior managers within both the private and public sector to test if face time decreases with tenure.
- To determine the employees perspective to establish the gap between the employee and managerial perspective.
- To issue presenteeism surveys among organisations to determine the real level of presenteeism.
- To establish presenteeism measurement in order for companies to calculate the cost of presenteeism.

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## **APPENDICES**

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## **APPENDIX A**

## **Appendix A: Personal reflection**

### **Key learning?**

My dissertation journey has been outside my expectations. When I chose my research topic I was told by a HR lecture that I would not get companies to partake in the study due to the sensitivity of the topic. Due to my perfectionist nature, I wanted to prove her wrong and so I emailed participants straight away. I then became immersed in this dissertation, it became an exercise that required all of the knowledge, skills and information I have obtained over the past 5 years, in order to develop a good dissertation. This dissertation has given me the opportunity to facilitate new learning, experience and develop my personal and professional skills through constant researching, meetings with my supervisor and by highlighting areas in my study that require adjustments. This has been a long journey but I am delighted that I was given the opportunity to do another dissertation this year. I was also given the opportunity to learn about a new area of interest and focus my study on HR practitioners. Although I had completed a dissertation last year I felt that this year I learned even more. I focused more on attention to detail, I managed my time better and I asked myself “why” after every section I wrote. Therefore, I went through each section with a fine toothcomb. As I chose my own topic I was then able to set my own weekly targets and learn more about the chosen area I studied. I felt my interest in the study grew and grew the more I researched and learned. I had to discover and learn from my mistakes, this made me understand what worked well and what did not. I learned how to work with stress also as times the dissertation got hectic. I therefore learned and developed a strategy to cope with this pressure. I also learned that there is no point in ringing my friends and everyone else in my phonebook moaning about how much work I have to do and how hard it is at times. I therefore treated the thesis like any exam and sat there for a few hours writing as much as I could. Finally, I learned when to take breaks and when nothing was going working that I had to get away from the computer. Therefore, this dissertation really made me become more aware of my learning style and habits. I also learned to prioritize the secondary data connected to the research question as there was a vast amount of research available it was not possible to include all. I have developed self-control, experienced core scientific research methods such as Nvivo to see if I should use it in my dissertation. Finally, I learned to use criticism and feedback constructively during the dissertation process.

**What you would do differently?**

If I was to complete this dissertation again I would look at getting my participants later in the study as I emailed some respondents in January who initially agreed and once I emailed to interview them in May they pulled out. Also I would start setting out my document headers and footers at the start as I think this would save a lot of time, especially towards the end. Additionally, I would look at conducting the study in the public sector as well to try and form a comparison against the sectors. I would also look at creating a bigger sample size that includes both employees and managers in order to get a bigger perspective on the phenomenon presenteeism. I did not start thinking, writing and researching straight away which I should have. If I was to redo this process again I would do exactly that.

**How will this learning contribute in the future?**

The strategies that I learned this year doing my dissertation are more than likely going to be the same ones I use when I am working. Also keeping to a strict schedule and meeting targets is something I will have to do in the future therefore it is very beneficial that I was given the opportunity to set my own schedule now. I had the opportunity to make mistakes now and learn from them. Throughout the dissertation I analysed data and information, I set up meeting and arranged times, I discovered a gap in the literature, I drew conclusions, recommendation and future research. This is all applicable to working life as in businesses around the world every day they are analysing the marketplace and financial figures concluding and recommending to managers what needs to be done in order to survive in the future. I felt that the secondary research skills that I gained throughout this research project will contribute to my career progression in the future. Additionally, applying this secondary research skill and having the mindset to analyse the secondary data will benefit me greatly towards my professional career. The complete dissertation is about a variety of choices and with choices comes responsibility for your own actions. Therefore, this has helped contribute to my future career progression because I know think before I act.

## **APPENDIX B**

**Appendix B: Human Resource Management interview questions**

1. Could you tell me about your role and responsibilities in the company?
2. What's a typical day/week like in your job?
3. Are you aware of the term 'presenteeism', have you heard it used, in what context?
4. How would you defined presenteeism
5. Does presenteeism occur in this company?
6. If no: if presenteeism was to occur how you would deal with it?
7. What is your role in dealing with presenteeism?
8. How long has presenteeism occurred in the company?
9. Are there any formal procedures for identifying/dealing with it? If so, what are they?  
Are there any informal procedures?
10. Could you go through the steps involved in dealing with presenteeism?
11. Do you measure how costly is presenteeism?
12. When compared to absenteeism which is costlier? Does your company analyse this?
13. Is productivity affected by presenteeism?
14. How much loss approx would your company be at? what are the downsides of  
presenteeism for your company?
15. How could you reduce presenteeism?
16. Where did these phenomena come from? Why presenteeism now?
17. Would you say men or women are more prone to presenteeism and why?
18. What age group is more affected?
19. Would you associate presenteeism with any medical condition? If so what?
20. Would you associate internet usage such as Facebook or carrying out other business in  
work presenteeism?
21. What are the main factors of presenteeism in the company?
22. Does competitive presenteeism occur in your organisation?
23. Would you say implementing new technology would cause or has caused presenteeism?
24. Do you think employees feel they have to come to work when sick why do you think this  
is?
25. Out of all the HR practices your company entails which category does presenteeism fall  
into?

26. Are any HR practices affected by presenteeism?
27. Do you think managers are aware of presenteeism?
28. Are HR and managers educated about presenteeism?
29. How did you come to be educated about presenteeism?
30. Did you attend any courses or speeches?
31. What is the sickness policy in your company on presenteeism?
32. Do you think that this may encourage presenteeism?
33. How could you or have you lowered presenteeism?
34. How do you measure presenteeism?
35. Does the company engage in any financial services, health promotion, mental health or employee assistant programmes?
36. Has the company ever issued employee presenteeism surveys?
37. Would you consider this? Do you think this would help?
38. Would you offer employee incentives for carrying out this survey?
39. What is management's role in relation to employee's presenteeism levels?
40. Who is the first point of contact when people have a problem such as presenteeism?
41. Are any HR practices affected by presenteeism?
42. Do you use any positive terms when talking to employees about presenteeism?
43. Is there anything you would like to add?



## **APPENDIX C**

**Appendix C: Email /Principal consent form**



Email: [caroltomp@campus.ie](mailto:caroltomp@campus.ie)

Contact: 087 XXXXXXXX

Dear XXXX,

I am currently completing a Masters in Human Resource Management at Waterford Institute of Technology and, as part of this programme, a dissertation must be completed. The purpose of this study is to understand the causes of presenteeism on employees in the workplace and to understand how exactly HR managers deal with presenteeism and any other challenges that this phenomenon may bring.

I would be very grateful if you would agree to participate in the study as I feel your company can bring a lot to this research.

Should you agree to participate, the primary research would conduct of an interview with yourself. This primary research would be conducted between May and June. If you have any queries or questions do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached at the contact detail below. Thank you for your time.

Kind Regards,  
Carol Tompkins

***Waterford Institute of technology master student with Business and HR***

Dear interviewee,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the research project, you have a number of options;

- Your participation is entirely voluntary.
- You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time.
- You are free to withdraw from the interview at any stage.

The contents of the interview will be kept strictly confidential. Extracts from this interview will be included as part of the final research report. Any tape recording will be destroyed after transcription.

**Once the interview has finished you will be sent the transcript as soon as possible in order to make changes if you wish. Once you have returned the transcript via email any changes you make will be added to the project and then the author can proceed with the rest of the study.**

I would be grateful if you would sign this form and return it to indicate that you have read the contents.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ (Print) \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Please tick the following:**

I wish to name the company in the research project ☐

I wish to keep the company name anonymous ☐

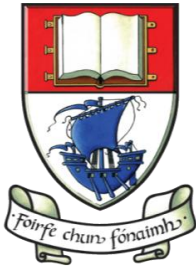
**Carol Tompkins**

**Masters in Business with Human Resource Management in *Waterford Institute of Technology***

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ [caroltomp@campus.ie](mailto:caroltomp@campus.ie)

## **APPENDIX D**

**Appendix D: Thank you letter sent to participants**



*Private and confidential*

*To be opened by the following address:*

**Mobile: 087 XXXXXXXX**

**Email: caroltomp@campus.ie**

**Name XXX**

**Address XXX**

**Re: Confidential Interview presenteeism in the workplace**

**Dear XXX**

I am writing to thank you for your contribution in the interview process. I very much appreciate and value your involvement and your willingness to disclose such in-depth knowledge and understanding on the related topic above. I understand that you have taken the time out of your hectic schedule to participate in the interview and your input will help create a greater understanding of the phenomenon presenteeism. Thank you again for participating in the process it is greatly appreciated.

With Sincere Thanks

Carol Tompkins

*Masters student at Waterford Institute of Technology*

## **APPENDIX E**

**Appendix E: Loose interview format**

**Table E.1. Interview format**

<b>Off –tape</b>  Explain interview process	Confidentiality issues, informal chat
<b>On-Tape</b>  Introductory explanation	Explaining the process, how many questions?
Interview questions covering all three objectives	Semi structured approach
<b>Off-Tape</b>  Ending	Do they want to be identified as part of the research?  Explaining to participants that the transcripts will be typed and sent to them.
Returned transcript from participants	Changes will be made. Notes and comments added.
Thank you email sent	

Adapted from Mason (2006)

## **APPENDIX F**



## **Appendix F: Data collection procedures**

### **Step One**

January 2014

Emailed designed and sent out to 30 HR practitioners through LinkedIn and networking in the college.

### **Step two**

January 2014

Interviews scheduled from June-July

### **Step Three**

Pilot testing to be completed by the end of May

### **Data Collection**

Interviews are to be taped, transcribed, written and analysed.

### **Semi structured questions**

March 2014

The questions have being designed by the author which involved conducting questions that were in line with the objectives and research questions.

### **Interview cancelations**

May 2014

Two interviewees cancelled due to work commitments. The author tried to convince the participants to carry out a telephone interview instead. Both failed to reply via email.

### **Completion of interviews**

May-July 2014

**Interviewee A** interviewed 23/05/14 resent and updated 08/06/14

**Interviewee B** Interviewed 27/05/14 resent and updated 23/06/14

**Interviewee C** Interviewed 09/07/14 resent and updated 21/07/14

**Interviewee D** interviewed 10/07/14 resent and updated 12/07/14

**Interviewee E** interviewed 10/07/14 resent and updated 19/07/14

**Interviewee F** interviewed 12/07/14 resent and updated 14/07/14

**Interviewee G** interviewed 18/07/14 resent and updated 24/07/14

**Interviewee F** interviewed 19/07/14 resent and updated 22/07/14

**Data Analysis**

All data was analysed, coded, commented upon and compared.

**Interviewee thank you letters**

Thank you letters were sent to all participants for their time and knowledge given.

***Findings***

Author proceeded to the findings chapter.