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Managing Post-Holiday Absenteeism in Pakistan: Evidence from a Sequential Exploratory Mixed-Methods Study of Workforce Management Strategies

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Abstract

Employee absenteeism can disrupt operational continuity, particularly when absence becomes concentrated after prolonged public and religious holidays. This study examined seven workforce management strategies—Proactive Scheduling, Incentives to Workers, Clear Policies, Careful Worker Selection, Backup Strategies, Cross-Training, and Strong Follow-Up—in managing post-holiday absenteeism in Pakistan. A sequential exploratory mixed-methods design was employed. Semi-structured interviews with eight organizational informants from textile, automotive, and human resource management contexts identified key workforce-management practices and informed the quantitative instrument. Quantitative data from 161 employees and managers in manufacturing, logistics, and retail organizations were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The measurement model demonstrated acceptable reliability and convergent validity (Cronbach's $\alpha = .671-.825$; composite reliability = .820–.886; AVE = .591–.675). The structural model explained 35% of the variance in operational impact ($R^2 = .35$). Strong Follow-Up was the only significant predictor ($\beta = .249$, $p = .011$), whereas the remaining six strategies were non-significant. The findings indicate that organizational preparedness alone may not adequately address concentrated post-holiday absenteeism. Timely managerial follow-up, attendance monitoring, communication, and return-to-work coordination may be particularly important for maintaining operational continuity. The study provides context-specific evidence from Pakistan and highlights the value of integrating structural workforce planning with active managerial intervention.

Keywords: employee attendance; mixed methods; Pakistan; PLS-SEM; post-holiday absenteeism; Strong Follow-Up; workforce management; workforce productivity.

Introduction

Employee absenteeism remains a persistent organizational challenge because the absence of workers can create a direct mismatch between planned and actual labor availability. In labor-intensive and highly interdependent work systems, even relatively limited levels of absence can interrupt workflow, increase overtime requirements, reduce operational efficiency, and impose additional costs on organizations (Johns, 2008; Miraglia & Johns, 2021). Absenteeism therefore extends beyond an individual attendance

issue and can become a systemic organizational problem affecting productivity, service quality, employee workload, and financial performance.

The consequences of absenteeism are particularly consequential where work processes depend upon physical presence, coordination, specialized skills, and time-sensitive activities. Organizations may respond to employee absence by redistributing tasks, increasing overtime, employing temporary workers, or delaying production and service activities. Such responses may preserve operations temporarily but can increase labor costs, place additional pressure on attending employees, and compromise quality and timeliness (Hemp, 2004; Kocakulah et al., 2018). The operational consequences can become more severe when absenteeism is concentrated rather than randomly distributed across time.

Temporal concentration is particularly relevant around public holidays. Research on absenteeism has traditionally examined health-related, attitudinal, motivational, and organizational antecedents, but absence behavior may also reflect specific temporal and social contexts (Harrison & Martocchio, 1998; Johns, 2010; Miraglia & Johns, 2021). Long holidays can alter employees' routines, travel patterns, family responsibilities, and psychological transition between work and non-work domains. Recovery from work can be beneficial, but returning to work after an extended period may also involve changes in motivation and work engagement (Kühnel et al., 2016; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015).

This issue is particularly important in Pakistan. Religious and public holidays such as Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha are embedded within broader family, social, and cultural practices. Employees may travel substantial distances, fulfil family obligations, or encounter transportation difficulties. Consequently, the officially announced holiday period does not necessarily represent the complete period during which workforce availability is affected. The thesis underpinning the present article identifies post-holiday absenteeism as a relatively underexplored organizational phenomenon in Pakistan and emphasizes its relevance to manufacturing, logistics, and retail environments.

The problem is not simply whether employees are absent. Rather, the organizational question is **how firms can maintain operational continuity when absenteeism becomes predictable, concentrated, and culturally patterned**. Conventional attendance policies may specify when employees are expected to return, while organizations may also rely on incentives, workforce scheduling, employee selection, cross-training, and contingency staffing. However, the relative effectiveness of these strategies in the immediate post-holiday period remains unclear.

The present study addresses this gap by examining seven workforce management strategies: Proactive Scheduling, Incentives to Workers, Clear Policies, Careful Worker Selection, Backup Strategies, Cross-Training, and Strong Follow-Up. These strategies represent different points of intervention. Some operate before the holiday through planning and staffing; others attempt to influence attendance behavior through incentives and formal policies; and others enhance organizational resilience through workforce flexibility and contingency arrangements. Strong Follow-Up, in contrast, operates close to the attendance event through monitoring, communication, return-to-work procedures, and managerial intervention.

The study adopts a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design in which qualitative organizational experience informs the development and testing of a quantitative model. This approach is particularly suitable because post-holiday absenteeism is simultaneously a behavioral, managerial, operational, and

cultural phenomenon. The qualitative phase captures organizational realities that may not be evident through standardized survey measures, while the quantitative phase evaluates the relative contribution of identified strategies across a larger sample. The thesis explicitly developed the survey instrument from the qualitative themes and subsequently tested the structural relationships through PLS-SEM.

Accordingly, this study asks a central question: **Which workforce management strategies are most consequential for managing the operational impact of post-holiday absenteeism in Pakistani organizations?**

Literature Review

Absenteeism is commonly understood as failure to attend scheduled work when attendance is expected, excluding formally authorized absence (Johns, 2008, 2010). Conventional measures include frequency of absence and time lost, each capturing a different dimension of attendance behavior (Gosselin et al., 2013). However, the timing of absence matters because an identical amount of time lost can produce very different organizational consequences depending on when it occurs.

Post-holiday absenteeism represents a particularly important temporal pattern. When several employees fail to return simultaneously after a prolonged holiday, the organization may experience a sudden reduction in workforce capacity. Such clustering can generate production bottlenecks, delivery delays, overtime expenditure, service disruption, and workload redistribution. The thesis conceptualizes this phenomenon as distinct from general absenteeism because it is concentrated around predictable calendar events and is shaped by social, cultural, and logistical conditions.

The phenomenon is particularly relevant in Pakistan because religious holidays frequently involve travel and family commitments. Consequently, workforce planning cannot assume that all employees will return uniformly on the officially designated resumption date. The literature therefore suggests the need to combine workforce planning with behavioral and managerial mechanisms rather than treating absenteeism as merely an administrative problem.

Workforce planning seeks to align labor supply with organizational demand while anticipating fluctuations and disruptions (Bechet, 2008). Proactive scheduling can therefore be expected to reduce operational vulnerability by adjusting shifts, allocating tasks in advance, identifying critical positions, and planning for likely absences.

Strategic scheduling is particularly valuable when absenteeism is foreseeable. Organizations can use historical attendance patterns to identify high-risk periods, redistribute workloads, adjust production schedules, and establish alternative arrangements (Shen et al., 2014). Nevertheless, planning has an important limitation: it manages the **consequences of expected absence**, but may not necessarily change employees' decisions to return to work.

This distinction is important for interpreting the present study. Proactive Scheduling may contribute to organizational resilience without necessarily producing a statistically detectable direct relationship with post-holiday operational impact.

Incentives represent another frequently used attendance-management mechanism. Financial bonuses, recognition, and non-monetary rewards may theoretically encourage employees to return promptly after holidays. However, incentive effects are not necessarily linear or universally positive. Gneezy et al. (2011) demonstrate that incentives can sometimes alter how individuals interpret a behavior, transforming an organizational expectation into a transactional exchange.

The thesis similarly recognizes that monetary incentives may have limited effectiveness where absence is shaped by social obligations, cultural expectations, or intrinsic attitudes toward work. The present study therefore treats incentives as an empirically testable mechanism rather than assuming that financial motivation automatically improves attendance.

Formal attendance policies provide employees with information concerning expectations, reporting requirements, leave authorization, and consequences. Clear policies may therefore reduce ambiguity and establish organizational norms. However, policy existence is not equivalent to policy effectiveness. Where formal rules are inconsistently enforced, employees may interpret them as symbolic rather than binding. The Pakistani context may further complicate implementation because formal attendance requirements coexist with family, religious, and social obligations. Thus, policies may require active managerial reinforcement to influence behavior.

Careful Worker Selection attempts to reduce attendance risk by identifying employees who demonstrate reliability and organizational commitment. Cross-Training and Backup Strategies operate differently: rather than preventing absence, they increase the organization's capacity to absorb it.

Cross-training creates workforce flexibility by enabling employees to perform multiple roles, while contingency staffing can provide temporary replacement capacity (Hollenbeck et al., 2011; Noe et al., 2017). Such practices are theoretically valuable for resilience, but their effects may be indirect. Cross-training, for example, may reduce the operational consequences of absence without reducing the occurrence of absence itself.

Similarly, backup staffing may prevent a disruption from becoming catastrophic, yet the immediate impact may depend on the availability, competence, and familiarity of replacement workers.

Strong Follow-Up differs conceptually from the other strategies because it operates directly around employee attendance behavior. It includes monitoring attendance, communicating with absent employees, confirming expected return dates, conducting return-to-work interactions, and maintaining managerial involvement.

Research on attendance interventions indicates that feedback and active organizational involvement can influence absence behavior (Gaudine & Saks, 2001; Tarro et al., 2020). Follow-up can also communicate organizational expectations while allowing managers to distinguish unavoidable absence from voluntary extension of leave.

Theoretically, this mechanism is consistent with attendance process models emphasizing the interaction between individual decisions and organizational conditions (Steers & Rhodes, 1978). It also reflects the broader proposition that managerial behavior can be more influential when it is immediate, visible, and relational than when organizational practices exist only as formal structures.

The existing literature provides extensive knowledge about general absenteeism but comparatively limited evidence concerning **post-holiday absenteeism as a temporally concentrated and culturally situated phenomenon in Pakistan**. The thesis identifies three interconnected gaps: limited attention to post-holiday absence as a distinct phenomenon, limited contextual evidence from South Asian and Muslim-majority settings, and limited examination of how organizational strategies affect the immediate operational consequences of concentrated absence.

The present study therefore conceptualizes seven workforce management strategies as organizational mechanisms for managing post-holiday operational impact. The qualitative phase explores how these

practices function in real organizations, while the quantitative phase tests their direct relationships with operational impact.

The theoretical expectation is that stronger workforce management practices should be associated with reduced operational disruption following prolonged holidays.

Method

Research Design

A sequential exploratory mixed-methods design (QUAL → QUAN) was employed. The qualitative phase explored managerial experiences and organizational practices surrounding post-holiday absenteeism. These findings informed the conceptualization and operationalization of the quantitative variables. The quantitative phase subsequently examined the relationships among the seven workforce management strategies and post-holiday operational impact using PLS-SEM.

The design was appropriate because the phenomenon involves both contextual organizational processes and measurable relationships among constructs.

Qualitative Phase

Eight key informants were selected from textile manufacturing, automotive manufacturing, and human resource management contexts. The participants included three textile operational heads, three automotive production-planning heads, and two HR managers. Their organizational experience ranged from six to twelve years, and the organizations represented varied workforce sizes.

Semi-structured interviews were analyzed thematically using NVivo 12 and the six-phase approach of Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis identified seven workforce management practices: Proactive Scheduling, Incentives to Workers, Clear Policies, Careful Worker Selection, Backup Strategies, Cross-Training, and Strong Follow-Up.

Workforce productivity emerged as a multidimensional outcome encompassing production continuity, quality maintenance, employee morale and burnout, cost implications, organizational culture and engagement, and holiday-specific challenges.

Quantitative Phase

The quantitative population comprised employees and managerial personnel working in manufacturing, logistics, and retail organizations in Pakistan. A total of **161 respondents** participated. The sample exceeded the minimum requirement indicated by the 10-times rule for the seven structural paths leading to the endogenous construct.

The demographic composition included 112 males (69.6%) and 49 females (30.4%). The largest age group was 31–40 years (39.1%). Participants represented manufacturing (35.4%), logistics (30.4%), and retail (34.2%), while 42.2% were operational staff, 31.7% supervisors, and 26.1% managers. More than 72% had at least five years of work experience.

A structured Likert-type questionnaire was developed from the qualitative findings. The instrument assessed the seven workforce management strategies and post-holiday operational impact. Quantitative analysis was conducted using PLS-SEM, including assessment of measurement-model reliability and validity and structural-model relationships.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review process. Participants were informed of the study purpose and their voluntary participation rights. Written informed consent was obtained

for interviews, while survey participation constituted implied consent. Participant and organizational identities were anonymized and confidential data-handling procedures were followed.

Results

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative analysis demonstrated that post-holiday absenteeism is a multidimensional workforce-management issue shaped by both organizational preparedness and managerial intervention. Seven interrelated workforce-management strategies emerged from the interviews: Proactive Scheduling, Incentives to Workers, Clear Policies, Careful Worker Selection, Backup Strategies, Cross-Training, and Strong Follow-Up. These themes subsequently informed the development of the quantitative model.

Proactive Scheduling was identified by seven of the eight participants and reflected advance planning of staffing levels, work schedules, workloads, and anticipated employee absences. Participants emphasized the importance of anticipating workforce shortages before the holiday ends so that critical tasks and staffing requirements can be reorganized in advance. Incentives to Workers, identified by six participants, encompassed both financial and non-financial mechanisms intended to encourage timely return and attendance. However, participants' accounts indicated that incentives operate within a broader motivational and social context rather than functioning as an independent solution. Clear Policies, identified by all eight participants, emphasized explicit attendance expectations, leave procedures, reporting requirements, and consistent communication and enforcement.

Careful Worker Selection, identified by six participants, focused on recruiting and retaining employees perceived as dependable and responsible, suggesting that attendance reliability may be considered as part of workforce quality. Backup Strategies, identified by seven participants, involved contingency arrangements designed to maintain operations when expected staff members failed to return. Cross-Training, also identified by seven participants, was viewed as a means of developing workforce flexibility by enabling employees to perform multiple roles and temporarily cover for absent colleagues. These strategies primarily reflected organizational resilience: rather than eliminating absenteeism, they increase the organization's capacity to absorb its consequences.

Strong Follow-Up emerged as the most consistently identified managerial practice, with all eight participants emphasizing its importance. Participants described follow-up in terms of attendance monitoring, direct communication with absent employees, confirmation of expected return dates, and managerial involvement in return-to-work processes. Unlike the more structural strategies, Strong Follow-Up operates close to the actual attendance event and therefore provides managers with an opportunity to respond to emerging absence in real time.

The qualitative analysis further demonstrated that the consequences of post-holiday absenteeism extend beyond simple workforce shortages. Production continuity was emphasized by seven participants, reflecting concerns regarding workflow interruptions and delays. Quality maintenance was identified by six participants, particularly where reduced staffing could increase workload or disrupt established processes. Employee morale and burnout emerged from seven interviews, indicating that absent employees may increase pressure on those who remain at work. Cost implications were identified by all eight participants and included the potential consequences of overtime, replacement staffing, and operational inefficiencies. In addition, six participants discussed organizational culture and engagement,

while seven highlighted holiday-specific challenges, particularly those associated with travel, family obligations, and the distinctive social context surrounding extended holidays.

Overall, the qualitative findings indicate that post-holiday absenteeism should be understood not simply as an attendance deficit but as a workforce-capacity and operational-continuity problem. The findings also provide an important conceptual distinction: scheduling, backup staffing, and cross-training primarily strengthen organizational preparedness, whereas Strong Follow-Up directly engages with attendance behavior as it occurs. This qualitative evidence provided the empirical basis for testing the seven strategies and their relationships with operational impact in the subsequent quantitative phase.

Measurement Model

The measurement model demonstrated acceptable internal consistency and convergent validity. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .671 to .825, composite reliability ranged from .820 to .886, and AVE values ranged from .591 to .675.

Construct	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability	AVE
Proactive Scheduling	.825	.886	.660
Incentives to Workers	.757	.862	.675
Clear Policies	.768	.852	.591
Careful Worker Selection	.671	.820	.605
Backup Strategies	.776	.857	.601
Cross-Training	.784	.861	.609
Strong Follow-Up	.678	.827	.616

All AVE values exceeded .50, supporting convergent validity. The thesis also reports that VIF values were below 5, indicating no problematic multicollinearity among the predictors.

Structural Model

The structural model revealed substantial differences between the seven hypothesized predictors.

Hypothesized Path	β	p	95% CI	Decision
Proactive Scheduling → Impact	-.017	.876	[-.239, .173]	Not supported
Incentives → Impact	-.016	.873	[-.230, .176]	Not supported
Clear Policies → Impact	.165	.152	[-.061, .390]	Not supported
Careful Worker Selection → Impact	.119	.266	[-.107, .312]	Not supported
Backup Strategies → Impact	.160	.258	[-.115, .423]	Not supported
Cross-Training → Impact	.091	.482	[-.143, .359]	Not supported
Strong Follow-Up → Impact	.249	.011	[-.051, .423]	Supported

Strong Follow-Up was the only statistically significant predictor of operational impact, with $\beta = .249$ and $p = .011$. The remaining six strategies did not demonstrate statistically significant direct effects.

The model explained **35% of the variance** in the endogenous Impact construct ($R^2 = .35$), representing moderate explanatory power.

Discussion

The central finding of this study is that Strong Follow-Up was the only workforce management strategy demonstrating a statistically significant direct relationship with post-holiday operational impact. This

finding is important because it differentiates between organizational practices that create preparedness and those that directly influence the immediate management of attendance behavior.

The qualitative findings initially indicated that all seven strategies were practically relevant. Managers described scheduling, incentives, policies, selection, contingency staffing, cross-training, and follow-up as components of attendance management. However, the quantitative results showed that practical relevance does not necessarily translate into a statistically significant direct effect. This distinction provides one of the most important contributions of the study.

Strong Follow-Up may be effective because it operates closest to the behavioral event. Proactive scheduling and contingency planning occur before the holiday, whereas follow-up operates when attendance behavior becomes observable. Managers can contact employees, confirm expected return dates, identify reasons for absence, communicate expectations, and intervene before a temporary absence becomes a prolonged operational disruption.

This interpretation is consistent with research emphasizing feedback and active managerial intervention in attendance behavior (Gaudine & Saks, 2001; Tarro et al., 2020). The finding also complements attendance process models in which employee attendance emerges from interactions among individual, organizational, and situational factors (Steers & Rhodes, 1978).

The non-significant effect of Proactive Scheduling deserves careful interpretation. It should not be concluded that scheduling is unimportant. The qualitative findings clearly demonstrated its practical relevance, with seven of eight participants identifying it as an important practice. Rather, the quantitative result suggests that scheduling alone may not directly alter the operational consequences of absenteeism. Its contribution may instead occur through preparedness and resilience.

The same logic applies to Backup Strategies and Cross-Training. Both mechanisms increase organizational capacity to absorb absence. Cross-trained employees can cover multiple functions, while contingency arrangements can provide replacement capacity. Yet neither necessarily prevents employees from being absent. Their principal function may therefore be to buffer the consequences of absence rather than to modify the attendance behavior itself.

Clear Policies also failed to demonstrate a statistically significant direct effect. This finding supports the distinction between having a policy and implementing it. Formal rules can communicate organizational expectations, but their influence depends on consistency, perceived fairness, managerial enforcement, and employee acceptance. In environments where social and family expectations around holidays are strong, written policy may have limited influence unless it is reinforced through interpersonal management.

The non-significant relationship for Incentives is similarly noteworthy. Organizations may assume that employees can be encouraged to return promptly through financial rewards, but attendance behavior is not necessarily reducible to economic calculation. The literature suggests that incentives can sometimes produce unintended effects or weaken intrinsic interpretations of organizational expectations (Gneezy et al., 2011). The current finding therefore supports a more cautious view of financial incentives as an attendance-management strategy.

Careful Worker Selection was also non-significant. This result suggests that selecting reliable employees at recruitment cannot fully protect organizations from context-specific attendance behavior. Even employees with strong attendance histories may respond differently during extended holidays because

family responsibilities, travel, and social obligations introduce situational factors that are not necessarily captured during recruitment.

Taken together, the findings suggest that post-holiday absenteeism should be understood as a multi-stage organizational problem. Structural practices such as scheduling, selection, cross-training, and backup staffing establish organizational capacity. Policies establish expectations. Incentives attempt to influence motivation. Strong Follow-Up operates at the point where organizational expectations encounter actual attendance behavior.

The moderate R^2 of .35 further indicates that workforce management strategies explain a meaningful but incomplete proportion of operational impact. Approximately 65% of variance remains attributable to factors outside the model. These may include organizational commitment, job satisfaction, perceived fairness, family-work pressures, transportation constraints, leadership style, organizational culture, workload, employee wellbeing, and characteristics of specific industries.

The qualitative findings reinforce this interpretation. Participants described absenteeism as affecting not only production continuity but also quality, morale, burnout, costs, organizational culture, engagement, and holiday-specific challenges. Therefore, the operational impact of post-holiday absenteeism is broader than attendance rates alone.

The Pakistani context provides an additional interpretive layer. In a setting where holidays can involve substantial family and religious commitments, rigid attendance systems may not be sufficient. Relational managerial practices may have particular value because they combine organizational accountability with direct communication. This does not mean that formal policies should be abandoned. Rather, the findings support an integrated approach in which policies and workforce planning provide the organizational infrastructure while follow-up provides the active behavioral mechanism.

Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to absenteeism research by emphasizing temporal and contextual specificity. Rather than treating absenteeism as a generalized organizational behavior, the study focuses on a predictable period during which absence may become concentrated.

Second, the findings distinguish between preparedness mechanisms and behavioral-control mechanisms. Proactive scheduling, cross-training, and backup strategies may enhance resilience without necessarily changing attendance behavior. Strong Follow-Up, by contrast, operates through immediate managerial interaction.

Third, the findings extend the application of attendance-management perspectives to a Pakistani organizational setting. Existing absenteeism research has disproportionately emerged from Western contexts, whereas the present study provides empirical evidence from manufacturing, logistics, and retail organizations in Pakistan.

Finally, the findings suggest that future models should examine indirect mechanisms. The thesis itself identifies potential mediators and moderators such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, perceived fairness, and psychological safety.

Practical Implications

Organizations should institutionalize structured, supportive, and consistent post-holiday follow-up through timely employee contact, return-date confirmation, clear attendance expectations, and fair return-to-work procedures. Follow-up should emphasize accountability, communication, and fairness

rather than punitive surveillance, while scheduling, cross-training, backup staffing, clear policies, and careful selection should remain complementary workforce-management practices.

Limitations and Future Research

The study has several limitations. Its cross-sectional design limits causal inference, while the sample of 161 respondents from manufacturing, logistics, and retail organizations may restrict generalizability across Pakistan. The reliance on perceptual measures also limits objective assessment of absenteeism and operational outcomes. In addition, future research should clarify the direction and coding of the operational-impact construct to ensure consistent interpretation of the findings.

Future studies should employ longitudinal or experimental designs, incorporate objective attendance and performance indicators, and examine organizations across diverse sectors and regions. Such research could also directly evaluate whether structured post-holiday follow-up reduces absenteeism and associated operational disruption.

Conclusion

Post-holiday absenteeism represents a distinctive workforce-management challenge in which attendance becomes concentrated precisely when organizations are attempting to restore normal operations. Using a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, this study examined seven workforce management strategies in Pakistani organizations. While the qualitative findings identified proactive scheduling, incentives, clear policies, careful selection, backup staffing, cross-training, and strong follow-up as relevant practices, quantitative results showed that only Strong Follow-Up significantly predicted operational impact ($\beta = .249$, $p = .011$), with the model explaining 35% of the variance. These findings suggest that planning, policies, incentives, cross-training, and contingency arrangements primarily provide organizational preparedness and resilience, whereas timely and consistent follow-up may more directly support attendance management and operational continuity. Overall, effective post-holiday absenteeism management requires not only preparing for workforce shortages but also actively managing attendance through structured, relational, and timely managerial intervention, particularly within Pakistan's socially and culturally significant holiday context.

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