Perceptions of Organizational Ethics as Predictors of Work Absence: A Test of Alternative Absence Measures

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ABSTRACT. The study examined the distinction between two traditional work absence measures: frequency, reflecting voluntary absence, and duration, reflecting non-voluntary absence. The two measures were compared in a test of the relationship between work absence and employees' perceptions of organizational ethics. Questionnaires and archive data were collected from 1,016 teachers in Israel. Organizational ethics was represented by three variables: ethical climate (caring and formal), organizational justice (distributive and procedural), and teacher's tendency to misbehave. Results showed that four ethical constructs (caring climate, formal climate, tendency to misbehave, and procedural justice) were related to absence frequency, while only one (caring climate) was related to absence duration. The findings add to previous research on the distinction between voluntary and involuntary absence measures, and the superior sensitivity of frequency over duration as a measure of voluntary absence. In practice, the results may encourage principals and managers to create ethical workplaces to minimize absence frequency.

KEY WORDS: ethical climate, organizational justice, tendency to misbehave, work absence

Introduction, rationale, and purpose

Defined as "the lack of physical presence at a behavior setting when and where one is expected to be" (Harrison and Price, 2003, p. 204), workers' absence is obviously one of the major problems of human resource management. While absenteeism has received considerable attention in private sector organizations, teacher absence has been studied relatively little. The dearth of research on its causes is unfortunate because of the possible effects of teacher absence. Teacher absence reduces student motivation to attend school and thus may increase student absenteeism (Ehrenberg et al., 1989; Imants and Van Zoelen, 1995). Interruptions in the continuity of the students' instruction contribute to lower achievement (Woods and Montagno, 1997). Concomitant problems of absenteeism are teacher resistance to change or input, negativity, and low motivation (Scott and Wimbush, 1991). Financially, teacher absence can easily translate into direct costs to school management. Rosenblatt and Shirom (2003) estimated net annual expenditure on substitute teachers at public-sector elementary and middle schools in Israel at $14,285,714 (for a teacher population of about 60,000).

Teacher absence may occur for several reasons: a teacher is ill and unable to work; is unavailable for work due to a commitment that cannot be scheduled for any other time than school hours (e.g., doctor appointment); prefers to be somewhere else, taking a paid "vacation" day when no health problem exits (Ehrenberg et al., 1989). These reasons can be broadly categorized into two general approaches to the individual's decision to be absent: those under the teacher's control (voluntary) and those not under the teacher's control (involuntary) (Chadwick-Jones et al., 1971; Steel, 2003).

Whatever the reasons, numerous studies have sought a link between work absence and work perceptions. Despite relatively low correlations (Sagie, 1998; Steel, 2003) studies generally show that work absence is predicted by job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Sagie, 1998), employees' perceptions of the social context of their work (Martocchio and Jimeno, 2003) and employees'

perceptions of their managers (principals') supportive leadership style (Imants and Van Zoelen, 1995; Scott-Norton, 1998).

The purpose of this study is to learn whether employees' perceptions of organizational ethics will predict work absence, and to explore the distinction between two absence measures: frequency, reflecting voluntary absence, and duration, reflecting non-voluntary absence (Koslowsky et al., 1997; Sagie, 1998).

Because absence includes a deviance component (Ehrenberg et al., 1989; Imants and Van Zoelen, 1995; Johns, 1997; Woods and Montagno, 1997), organizational ethics seems to be particularly relevant to the study of work absence. In schools, organizational ethics carries added significance. Schools tend to provide their students with a precise set of guiding moral values which accompany them to maturity and affect their subsequent ethical perceptions as employees. Since we expect schools to increase students' knowledge and improve their thinking skills, but also to develop ethical awareness and sensitivity, the focus on teachers' perceptions of school ethics is of particular importance.

We proceed to introduce the concept of teachers' perceptions of school ethics through the constructs of ethical climate, organizational justice, and tendency to misbehave, and their interrelationship. We then describe the two approaches to work absence (voluntary and involuntary) and their respective measures, and examine their differential relationships with teachers' perceptions of school ethics.

Theoretical background and literature review

Teachers' perceptions of school ethics

The last decade has witnessed a drive to understand the nature of organizations through employees' ethical perceptions. Research has demonstrated that ethical perceptions are a significant factor related, among other things, to productivity and satisfaction in organizational members (Cohen, 1995; Malloy and Agarwal, 2003). In this study, we will examine how teachers' perceptions of school ethics are related to an important indicator of teacher productivity: work absence.

While previous research tended to focus on isolated selected aspects of ethics perceptions, this study deals with a spectrum of such aspects, taking into account their interrelationship. The three ethical perceptions investigated in the present study are ethical climate, organizational justice, and tendency to misbehave. These were selected because of pervasive research interest in them in recent years, and because each represents a different aspect of organizational ethics.

Ethical climate represents teachers' perceptions about organizational norms regarding behavior and decisions that bear ethical content (Victor and Cullen, 1988). As such it may be viewed as one aspect of the more general notion of organizational climate. While organizational climate reflects shared perceptions that help employees to comprehend work processes and their organizational surroundings (Ashkanasy et al., 2000), ethical climate represents employees' perceptions of work processes that carry ethical meaning (Cullen et al., 2003). In schools, ethical climate may have a significant role in the manner in which teachers behave and may influence student ethics (Misco, 2004).

Victor and Cullen (1988) have proposed a two-dimensional model of ethical climate. One dimension represents three basic ethical approaches: egoism (maximizing self-interest), benevolence (maximizing joint interests), and principle (adherence to ethical principles). The second dimension represents levels of analysis: individual, local, and cosmopolitan. The intersection of these two dimensions produces nine potential ethical climates (for example, Egoism at the individual level produces a climate of self-interest, egoism at the local level produces a climate of company profit, etc.). In a factor analysis performed by these authors, the nine climate types were collapsed into five: (1) caring; (2) instrumental; (3) rules; (4) law-and-code; and (5) independence. This classification (or variations thereof) was used in numerous studies that tested the original theory of Victor and Cullen (e.g., Appelbaum et al., 2005; Kelly and Dorsch, 1991; Peterson, 2002; Upchurch and Ruhland, 1996; Vardi, 2001; Wimbush and Shepard, 1994). A study conducted by Rosenblatt and Peled (2002) tested these five dimensions of ethical climate in Israeli schools. They identified two conspicuous climate types: *caring* and *formal* (the latter included both *rules* and *law-and-code* climate types). The two

climates (caring and formal) emerged as the most powerful and valid predictors of school outcomes. Because of their relevance to the Israeli educational system, we will adopt Rosenblatt and Peled's (2002) constructs in our study.

Caring climate is characterized by the employees' genuine interest in each other's welfare inside and outside the organization. *At work, caring climate reflects concern for all organizational stakeholders affected by their decisions*. A caring climate is particularly relevant in professional, service, or public organizations, where the value of caring is intrinsic to the type of work and relationships with clients, and permeates other facets of organizational life. A typical example is the educational institution, where training and education are often provided with caring, support, and nurturing.

A formal climate emphasizes organizational rules and professional codes, and encourages respect for them. In such a climate employees are expected to follow the rules of the organization and adhere to the codes and regulations of their profession. It is through ethical rules that everyone in the organization learns how to behave, which values are held in high esteem, and which behaviors are rewarded (Appelbaum et al., 2005). Because *a formal ethical climate is based on fair resource distribution and transparent procedures,* it is perceived as protecting employees from abusive treatment by management and others. This type of climate is characteristic of educational systems in the public sector, which tend to be bureaucratic in their adherence to a firm set of rules.

The second aspect of school ethics is *organizational justice*, a term used to describe equity in the workplace (Greenberg, 1995), including how employees' perceptions of equity are determined and how these perceptions influence other outcomes. Organizational justice research has focused on several specific issues, two of which will be investigated in this study: One is distributive justice, which refers to *fairness of the outcomes an employee receives*. When allocated organizational outcomes, employees use principles, such as equity (Adams, 1965) or equality to judge their fairness.

The second type of organizational justice is procedural justice, which describes fairness of the *procedures* used to determine those outcomes (Pillai et al., 2001). Employees will perceive work procedures as fair if they feel they have control over *the process of*

implementing and administering organizational decisions pertaining to them. Whether the focus is on distributive or on procedural justice, studies show that employees expect fairness in the workplace (Greenberg, 1995), and their perceptions of such fairness affect their work attitudes and behaviors; accordingly, perceptions of organizational justice have predictive role regarding employees' outcomes at work.

The third aspect of school ethics is *tendency to misbehave*, which represents teachers' perceptions of acceptability of engaging in misbehaviors at work (e.g., voluntary lateness; voluntary absence). Misbehavior is defined as *a voluntary act of violating organizational norms, core societal values, and standards of proper conduct* (Vardi and Wiener, 1996). As such, misbehavior may also be measured in terms of employee perception, namely the degree to which employees view their workplace as characterized by work misbehavior. In organizational behavior literature work, misbehavior has also been called ''workplace deviance'' (Diefendorff and Mehta, 2007), ''counterproductive behavior'' (Bechtoldt et al., 2007), and ''non-compliant behavior'' (Puffer, 1987). Largely, organizational misbehavior taps a wide range of work-related types of misconduct that are presumably perpetrated by the organization members. These misconduct behaviors are defined as such judging by organizational core work norms (Vardi, 2001). The present study will focus on misbehavior in regard to work absence.

The three concepts are closely interrelated. Both caring climate and procedural justice focus on human and social interactions among organizational members. Formal climate is related to both distributive and procedural justice, as all three concepts center on employees' rights and on the structure and procedures of rules and regulations. Gilligan (1982) saw the ethics of care and justice as interrelated, both revolving around responsibility and social relationships, and both taking morality as the means to resolve interpersonal conflicts. Tendency to misbehave is closely (and inversely) related to all other ethical constructs, because it constitutes total violation of them all (see Robinson and Greenberg, 1998 and Rousseau, 1995 for the relationship of tendency to misbehave to perceptions of justice). Although some of the values included in the employees' perceptions of organizational ethics presented here may be potentially in conflict (e.g., caring versus equality-

based distributive justice), the competing values model (Quinn, 1988) tells us that tension between conflicting values is functional and may contribute to organizational effectiveness; it lends some credence to our integrative approach to the ethics concepts presented here, and their presumed consistent relationship with employees' absence.

Next we prepare the ground for our argument about the relationship between employees' perceptions of organizational ethics and their voluntary and involuntary absence.

Voluntary versus involuntary measures of absence

Traditionally, absence literature has shown consensus on the distinction between voluntary and involuntary measures of absence (Dalton and Mesch, 1991; Farrell and Stamm, 1988; Hackett and Guion, 1985; Sagie, 1998; Scott and Taylor, 1985; Steel, 2003). Obviously, this classification focuses on the volitional content of absence. The intention of partitioning absences into these two broad categories was to explain a greater proportion of criterion variance (Harrison, 2002), and produce ''purified'' measures, in order to improve predictability and stability (Steel, 2003).

Voluntary absence refers to missing work for reasons under the employees' control, such as taking time off for leisure activities or to search for new job options. This type of absence is of major concern to management in its efforts to contain and reduce work absence. Voluntary absence is normally measured by its frequency, such as the number of absence episodes or spells, and the duration of each absence event is disregarded. Researchers agree that episodic absence is an indicator of negative work perceptions. A high score on absence frequency would typically reflect multiple short-period absences ('skip days'), indicating a desire to stay away from work.

Involuntary absence is missing work for reasons beyond the employee's control, such as sickness or family events (mourning, marriage). Involuntary absence is typically measured by time lost: an absence spell of 20 days is counted higher than a spell of 2 days; with the frequency measure each of the two is scored equally as one absence episode.

Theoretical roots of the two approaches to absence characterization and measurement can be found in Johns' (1997) thorough review of the absence literature. Voluntary absence may be best explained by models focusing on psychological attitudes. Attitudes, such as job dissatisfaction and low organizational commitment are likely to lead to tendencies to withdraw from work while not actually quitting (Sagie, 1998). Other behavioral models that may explain voluntary absence are the stress model and the conflict model. The stress model refers to a perception of failure to cope with job tension and anxiety. Dwyer and Ganster (1991) and Karasek (1979) maintained that high job demands and low control are predicted to produce work stress, which in turn lead to work absence. The conflict model focuses on employer–employee relationships. It posits that absence represents individual or collective manifestation of conflict-triggered resentment to comply with the employer's work rules (Johns, 1997).

In contrast to theories explaining voluntary absence, theories explaining involuntary absence are rooted not in employees' perceptions but in personal background factors. The demographic model posits that background variables, such as family responsibilities (VandenHeuvel, 1997), age and tenure (Martocchio, 1989; Rosenblatt and Shirom, 2005), work role, or ethnic background (Rosenblatt and Shirom, 2006) strongly predict absence behavior. The medical model also helps in understanding involuntary absence: smoking and drinking, physical illness, psychological disorder, and pain – all predict the tendency to be involuntarily absent from work (Johns, 1997).

The distinction between the two types of absence triggered studies that processed absence by the two different measures noted above: frequency and time lost (Farrell and Stamm, 1988; Hackett and Guion, 1985; Hammer and Landau, 1981; Sagie, 1998). Both measures are chronometric, namely refer to time sensitivity to the conceptualization of absenteeism (Steel, 2003). Because of the non-normal nature of most absence measures, which tend to skew ''to the right'', researchers have tried to determine what is the most reliable and stable measure. Steel (2003) argued that a major problem with the attempt to distinguish between the two types of work absence is that the different measures of absence are not parallel, causing difficulty in determining measure stability. The question

remaining is whether the source of difficulty is the fact that each of the two measures applies to a different set of predictors.

Moreover, researchers' agreement about the voluntary/involuntary distinction is not unanimous, and has been presented as artificial and misleading (e.g., Farrell and Stamm, 1988). Hackett et al. (1989) argued that the definition of volition in absence is subject to attribution bias. Absence being normally considered a negative behavior, employees may attribute it to factors beyond their control (e.g., illness) rather than to factors within their control (e.g., not getting up in the morning). In another study Hackett (1989) reported that both frequency (voluntary absence) and duration (involuntary absence) were positively but weakly related to work and job satisfaction. The author claimed that the strength of the relationship of absence to attitudes was only minimally related to whether a frequency or a duration measure was used.

Table I features results of several studies on teacher absence. These studies show that while teacher absence can be clearly predicted by background and attitudinal data, no conclusive results showing the superiority of either of the two absence measures can be indicated.

One way to compare the two absence measures is to use work perceptions that are expected to be closely related to absence, such as perceptions of organizational ethics. We expect that the relationship between such perceptions and work absence will be more conspicuous in the case of voluntary absences than involuntary. As mentioned above, when teachers have negative perceptions of organizational ethics in their schools, they may respond by voluntarily staying away from undesirable working conditions and relationships. We investigate these contentions using teachers' perceptions of the three aspects of organizational ethics studied: ethical climate, organizational justice, and work misbehavior, and outline the rationale for our hypotheses on the relationship of each to teachers' work absence.

Ethical climate and absenteeism

The theoretical rationale for the relationship between ethical climate and absenteeism is rooted in literature focused on the link between organizational ethics and volitional employee behavior. Organizational ethics reflects the moral distinction between good and bad employee conduct. When the organizational climate conveys negative norms, employees will correspondingly tend to manifest and justify behavior that reflects such norms. Conversely, when organizational climate focuses on high morality, employees may respond by refraining from deviant behavior, such as voluntary absences (Hutchison et al., 1986). Wimbush and Shepard (1994), followed by Peterson (2002), argued that an unethical organizational climate fosters negative organizational outcomes, including absenteeism. A caring ethical climate is reflected in collegial and supportive relations among school staff. A perceived positive caring climate is likely to increase teachers' commitment (especially emotional commitment) to organizational goals (Cullen et al., 2003), which in turn reduces their absenteeism levels (Cohen, 2000). Peterson's results (2002) clearly demonstrated that perceptions of organizational climate characterized by caring for employees were negatively related to absenteeism. Hence, a caring climate may be expected to relate to voluntary absence and not to involuntary absence.

A formal ethical climate, which emphasizes the importance of organizational rules and procedures, may also be associated with teacher absence. When teachers perceive that school principals are more intently concerned with rules and regulations they will engage less in deviant behavior, such as voluntary absence, to avoid disciplinary consequences. Moreover, ethical rules and norms are means of organizational socialization. Teachers learn how to behave by apprehending which values are held in high esteem and are rewarded, and which are punished (Appelbaum et al., 2005). Vardi (2001), who studied absenteeism together with a wide range of work-related types of misconduct, found that a formal ethical climate was associated with misconduct. Hence it can be expected that formal ethical climate will similarly relate to teacher's voluntary (but not involuntary) work absence.

This leads to the first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Teachers' perceptions of ethical climate (caring/formal) will be negatively related to absence frequency (but not to absence duration).

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TABLE I

Summary – major organizational psychology studies using absence measures in schools

	Focus of the study	Data source	Absence measures	Notable findings
Bowers (2001)	Review: conceptualization, measures, costs and relationships of teacher absence with student attendance and school performance	District records	Duration	1. Measures of frequency and duration were both problematic 2. Teachers' sickness was related to ill-health retirement 3. Reduced teacher absence led to less student absence
Ehrenberg et al. (1989)	1. Effect of policy provisions on teacher absence 2. Effect of teacher absence on student attendance and performance	Records (survey of school superintendents)	Duration	1. More provision led to higher usage of leave days 2. Teacher absence was not associated with student attendance
Imants and Van Zoelen (1995)	Relationship of teachers' absence to school climate and teaching efficacy	School records	Duration	1. School climate (collegial relations and directive leadership) was inversely related to teacher absence 2. Teaching efficacy was not related to absence
Rosenblatt and Shirom (2005, 2006)	Individual and school background determinants of teacher absence	District records	Frequency	Age, education, supervisory position, promotion, prior absence, ethnic sector (Jewish, Arab) predict later absence
Scott and McClellan (1990)	Gender differences in absence patterns	School records	1. Frequency 2. Duration	1. Duration, but not frequency, was higher for women than men 2. Age and attitude to pay exhibited gender differences
Scott and Wimbush (1991)	Factors determining teacher's absence	School records	1. Frequency 2. Duration	1. Frequency was a stronger predictor than duration 2. Absence was determined by distance from work, gender (women), job involvement, job satisfaction and work centrality
Woods and Montagno (1997)	Effect of teachers' absence on student achievements	School records	(Not specified)	Students with record of low-absence showed higher grades

Frequency: number of absence episodes; Duration: number of days lost because of absence.

Organizational justice and absenteeism

Organizational justice is deeply rooted in equity theory (Adams, 1965; Greenberg, 1995). Studies on organizational justice show consistently that employees expect organizational decisions to be fair, and that they engage in negative reactions to the organization, when they believe that they are subject to unjust decisions or outcomes (Greenberg, 1990, 1995; Moorman, 1991). From this perspective, absenteeism is one of the means available to restore an inequitable employment relationship. Traditional equity theory, rooted in cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), has postulated that the presence of inequity creates an unpleasant emotional state. This tension is supposed to be the motive for a person to reduce inequity and the associated negative feelings. As a result, employees may perceive time away from work as instrumental in decreasing their investments and in attaining other more valued non-work outcomes simultaneously (Hackett et al., 1989).

The notion of psychological contract may provide a theoretical framework for understanding the presumed relationships between teachers' perceptions of organizational justice and work absence. A psychological contract refers to an ''individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement'' (Rousseau, 1989, p. 125). It is a fundamental element in employees' employment-related beliefs and experiences (Morrison and Robinson, 1997). From the employee's perspective, a psychological contract is breached when the employee perceives that one or more of the employer's obligations are unfulfilled (Dabos and Rousseau, 2004; Kickul, 2001; Pate et al., 2003; Rousseau, 1995). Emotional theory suggests that people become frustrated and angry when they perceive some demeaning offense against themselves, and anger is associated with an action (Lazarus, 1991; Lester et al., 2002). Therefore, individuals may respond to violations of psychological contracts with anger, resulting in work violations of their own. Teachers who experience injustice treatment in school may see this as a breach of the psychological contract and react with anger that can turn into negative behavior, such as work absence (Konovsky and Pugh, 1994; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994).

Although distributive and procedural unfairness are considerably related (Organ and Ryan, 1995), we assume that each has a unique relationship to absenteeism, which may be explained by withdrawal process. In regard to distributive justice, teachers will perceive poor justice in their school when they experience a negative balance between their contributions to the school and the rewards they receive (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Van Yperen et al., 1996). In this case teachers will reduce their efforts to align their inputs with organizational rewards. Teachers will also be more frequently absent from work than employees who do not perceive this kind of injustice. Consistent with this argument, studies have shown that employees who felt relatively disadvantaged in terms of reward distribution were more frequently absent than those who perceived distributive justice at work (De Boer et al., 2002; Geurts et al., 1999).

Although less empirical research has been conducted on procedural justice and absenteeism, similar relationships between the two concepts are expected. Employees may assess low level of procedural justice in the workplace as a violation of their psychological contract and consequently express their opposition by increasing their voluntary absence. Partial support for this contention might be found in Gellatly (1995), who showed that interactional justice (a form of procedural justice) indirectly (through organizational commitment) affected absence frequency. This leads to the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Teachers' perceptions of organizational justice (procedural/distributive) will be negatively related to absence frequency (but not to absence duration).

Tendency to misbehave and absenteeism

Tendency to misbehave may be triggered by negative emotions, feelings of frustration, and job dissatisfaction; these are major affective forces that enhance people's intentions to engage in misbehavior, such as work absence (Spector, 1997). Of the different types of organizational misbehavior, work absence may be classified as misbehavior that primarily intends to benefit the self (Type S), while victimizing the employing firm or its members (Vardi and Weitz, 2004). Work absence at school may benefit the absent teacher in the short run, but

it disrupts the work of colleagues and the teaching flow for students. Unjustified work absence is one of the most prevalent "production misbehaviors" (Hanisch and Hulin, 1991; Sagie, 1998; Vardi and Weitz, 2004).

Personal and organizational values play a critical role in the understanding of organizational misbehavior. Vardi (2001) showed that misbehavior reported by employees and managers was related to organizational climate, particularly its rules and caring dimensions. Tendency to misbehave is also related to work attitudes, such as autonomy, professional identity, and job satisfaction (Vardi and Weitz, 2003). It follows that when employees perceive their workplace as characterized by unethical misbehavior based on their own perceptions of work norms, they may also exhibit unethical behavior, such as frequent absence.

This leads to the third hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Teachers' perceptions of tendency to misbehave will be positively related to absence frequency (but not to absence duration).

Method

Study population and sample[1]

The study population consisted of teachers in the largest technological high school network in Israel. Participants were 1,016 teachers (response rate of 67.7%) from 35 schools. The average number of teachers at each school was 54.74 (SD = 25.54). The sample included all teachers who had worked at their jobs more than one year, so that respondents had time to develop perceptions toward their schools. Teachers filled out the questionnaires voluntarily during their free hours on school premises. The questionnaires were collected at the schools by research assistants, not sent by mail.

The sample breakdown consisted of 68% women. The average age of the participants was 43.19 years (SD = 9.42). Average school tenure was 12.60 years (SD = 8.48) and average job tenure was 17.90 years (SD = 9.39); 86.1% of the teachers had tenure and the others were engaged through temporary contracts. The average number of teachers' children younger than 18 was 1.36 (SD = 1.31). The

majority of teachers (53.7%) had a Bachelor's degree and 35.7% had a Master's degree; the rest had technical rather than academic degrees. These background characteristics are typical of Israeli high-school teachers (see also Somech, 2005), indicating that respondents closely represented the Israeli teacher population. In addition, correlation analyses between key background data of our respondents (seniority and position scope) and those reported by school records in the focal educational network resulted in $r = 0.64$ and $r = 0.63$ respectively, adding further credibility to the study sample.

Methodological approach to absenteeism measurement

We measured teachers' absence by means of self-report, where teachers reported on their absences in the preceding 5 months (see below). True, self-report measures are not ideal, mainly because they are subject to a social desirability bias (Beretvas et al., 2002; Crowne and Marlowe, 1964; Scott and McClellan, 1990). Due to the stigma that often goes with work absence, employees may be concerned that their absence data indicate poor effectiveness or misconduct. Therefore the wording itself may prejudice answers (Schuman and Presser, 1981), leading to underreporting as compared with records-based measures (Johns, 1994).

Nevertheless, we decided to take the self-report approach for the following reasons: First, according to Johns (2003) self-report absence data has a high correlation with record-based measures ($r = 0.64$ in Johns, 2003). Second, self-reports of absenteeism have provided valid information about respondents' psychology, despite the underreporting and limited convergent validity, in particular meeting researchers' genuine interest in subjects' perceptions (Johns, 2003; Xie and Johns, 2000). Third, the desire to maintain respondents' anonymity: the use of record-based data requires that subjects identify themselves, whereas organizational management may, consistent with organizational culture, resist providing records-based data and permit access on the condition of subject anonymity (Dalton and Mesch, 1991; Johns, 1994). This is the case in the present study.

To investigate the credibility of our self-report data we compared our individual-based data, averaged by

schools, with school records, which held only duration measures. Average duration of absence in the self-report data was $M_{self-report} = 11.91$ (S.E. $= 4.30$) while in the school records it was $M_{school-record} = 12.28$ (S.E. $= 5.54$). Both paired *t*-test ($t(34) = 0.43$, $p = 0.67$) and Pitman's test of equality of variances of correlated variables ($r = 0.29$, $p = 0.11$) were found non-significant. Skewness coefficients for the self-report and the school–record data were 0.57 and 0.43, respectively, and kurtosis coefficients for the two data sources were -0.24 and -0.41, showing no substantial difference by size and direction. Therefore, we concluded that the self-report data could be used.

Finally, our data collection approach, in which absence data were measured retroactively, was based on the assumption that teacher absence rates are relatively stable. Indeed, prior absenteeism has proved a strong predictor of future absenteeism (Baguma, 2001; Farrell and Stamm, 1988; Ones et al., 2003; Rosenblatt and Shirom, 2005). Even when situations are far different, temporal stability of absenteeism persists.

We tested the assumption that teacher absence rates are relatively stable by looking at the absence rates of our teacher population over the foregoing five years. Data for this test were based on teachers' reports from past records of the 35 schools participating in the study. Between 1999 and 2004 the average absence rate per school was 0.09% with standard variation of 0.004, showing that absence fluctuation was minimal.

Study variables and measures

Teachers' absence
Teachers were asked to complete a self-report questionnaire on absenteeism in the preceding 5-month period. We chose this length of time to obtain a valid picture of teacher absences because it equals half a school year (one semester) in Israel, and because it is reasonable to expect that teachers are able to recall their absences during this period (Johns, 1994). Extending the time frame of the self-report would increase reliability, but at the same time jeopardize validity and accuracy because of potential memory uncertainty or systematic bias, or both.

Teachers were asked, "How many workdays did you miss in each of the last 5 months?" We further asked teachers to report each absence incident separately.

For example: Absence incidents in October:

Incident 1. Number of absence days: _____
Incident 2. Number of absence days: _____
Incident 3. Number of absence days: _____

(repeated for each month).

Calendars were provided to help refresh respondents' memory. Absenteeism was measured by (1) frequency of incidents of absences (number of absence incidents over 5 months) and by (2) duration of absence (total number of absence days over 5 months).

Ethical climate
This variable tapped into teachers' perceptions of how other members of their respective schools make decisions requiring ethical judgments. A factor analysis (principal components, varimax rotation) based on Victor and Cullen's (1988) original 27-item measure yielded six factors, the first two of which represented the two factors selected for the present study. These factors were (a) "formal" climate, defined as a climate of compliance with professional and social codes and with school's rules and regulations (9 items, $a = 0.87$, 15.68% explained variance). A sample item is "Everyone is expected to stick to school rules and procedures." (b) "Caring" climate, defined as a climate of concern for the welfare of all school members (6 items, $a = 0.86$, 15.87% explained variance). A sample item is "In this school, people look out for each other's good." A similar factor structure was found by Rosenblatt and Peled (2002) in a study on Israeli teachers. All the other factors were found to be negligible (6.85–9.61% explained variance). Response options for all dimensions ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

Organizational justice
A factor analysis (principal components, varimax rotation) based on Moorman's (1991) 21-item measure yielded three factors, the first two of which represented the variables selected for the present study. These factors were distributive justice and

procedural justice. Distributive justice represents the fairness of different school outcomes, including salary levels, workload, and schedule (5 items, $a = 0.88$, 20.33% of explained variance). A sample item is "I am fairly paid or rewarded considering my job responsibilities." Procedural justice represents the degree to which job decisions were based on an equitable process, including features, such as accurate and unbiased information, a voice for teachers in school matters, and an appeals process (12 items, $a = 0.94$, 37.08% of explained variance). A sample item is "My principal requests clarifications or additional information about decisions." A third dimension in Moorman's (1991) instrument, interactional justice, which measures the degree to which teachers feel that their needs are taken into consideration in organizational decision making, did not constitute a separate factor and was included in the procedural justice dimension by the factorial structure.

Tendency to misbehave

A 17-item measure containing behavioral descriptions was derived from previous work by Fimbel and Burstein (1990), Robinson and Bennett (1995), and Vardi (2001). Teachers were asked to rate their level of acceptance of a wide range of work-related types of misconduct, such as lateness without permission or absence without true justification. Using a Likert-type scale, answers ranged from "totally unacceptable" to "totally acceptable." In the present study the reliability of the scale was $a = 0.93$. Factor analysis (principal components, varimax rotation) yielded two important factors for this research, of which one dealt with absence (2 items, $a = 0.74$, 8.19% of explained variance). We adopted this factor for the present study. A sample item that represents tendency to misbehave is "Missing work without a reasonable justification."

Data analysis

Due to the hierarchical nature of the data (teachers nested within schools) a multi-level approach was adopted (Bryk and Raudenbush, 1992). Theoretical work has suggested that absenteeism might be susceptible to social influence and thus also be relevant as a group-level phenomenon (Johns and Nicholson, 1982; Xie and Johns, 2000). Evidence from a methodologically diverse range of research studies has clearly established the role of social influence on absenteeism (Johns, 1997). Although individual differences influence the extent to which employees are absent, absenteeism occurs within the guidelines and norms developed by particular culture, so the social dynamics of work setting are thought to influence individual absenteeism (Martocchio, 1994; Mathieu and Kohler, 1990; Xie and Johns, 2000). Therefore, the usual assumption of independence of all observations was not applicable. The GENMOD procedure of SAS was applied. This procedure makes it possible to fit regression models for variables which are not necessarily normally distributed, and also to account for the intracorrelation within schools. All variables entered into the model were on the individual level while considering the group effect, and no aggregation was included. A similar approach was used in a recent study on teacher absence in Israel (Rosenblatt and Shirom, 2006).

Results

Descriptive statistics for the study variables at the individual level of analysis are featured in Table II. Although correlation levels between teachers' perceptions of school ethics and absence measures were found low (not exceeding $r = 0.08$, except caring climate), correlation analysis showed that teachers' perceptions of school ethics tended to be more significantly related to absence frequency than to absence duration. As expected, the measures of frequency and duration were highly interrelated ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$).

Multi-level regression analyses were performed in two phases to test for the study hypotheses. The first phase consisted of pairwise regression analyses, where both measures of absence were separately regressed against each of the independent variables (Table III). The second phase consisted of multiple regression analysis, where all independent variables were entered into the regression model in the same model (Table IV). Based on results featured in these tables we tested the study hypotheses, by the three ethical aspects of teachers' perceptions examined in this study.

TABLE II

Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability coefficients (Individual level) ($n = 1,016$)

	MD	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Frequency of absence	1.24	1.18							
2 Duration of absence	2.57	3.66	0.651★★						
3 Caring climate	3.29	0.73	−0.105★★	−0.078★	(0.67)				
4 Formal climate	3.88	0.60	−0.045★	−0.054	0.543★★	(0.87)			
5 Procedural justice	3.67	0.77	−0.074★	−0.050	0.714★★	0.513★★	(0.94)		
6 Distributive justice	2.79	0.89	−0.005	0.004	0.445★★	0.233★★	0.452★★	(0.87)	
7 Tendency to misbehave (absence)	1.45	0.64	0.067★	0.036	−0.081★	−0.152★★	−0.152★★	−0.011	(0.74)

★$p < 0.05$, ★★$p < 0.01$.

TABLE III

Summary of pairwise regression results relating to absence measures ($n = 1,016$)

Variable	Absence frequency			Absence duration		
	B	SE	Effect size	B	SE	Effect size
Caring climate	−0.1505★	0.076	−0.0931	−0.1414★★	0.045	−0.0282
Formal climate	−0.0923★	0.045	−0.0469	−0.1404	0.083	−0.0230
Procedural justice	−0.0925★	0.046	−0.0603	−0.1102	0.074	−0.0231
Distributive justice	−0.0009	0.044	−0.0006	0.0049	0.048	−0.0116
Tendency to misbehave (absence)	0.1026★	0.042	0.0556	0.089	0.066	0.0155

The GENMOD procedure of SAS.
★$p < 0.05$, ★★$p < 0.01$, ★★★$p < 0.001$.

TABLE IV

Last step of multiple regression relating to absence measures ($n = 1,016$)

	Absence frequency			Absence duration		
	B	SE	Effect size	B	SE	Effect size
Constant	0.6069★	0.2642		1.2342★★	0.4378	
Caring climate	−0.1592★★	0.0678	0.09884	0.1149	0.1149	0.0229
Formal climate	−0.0102	0.0688	−0.0051	0.0936	0.0936	0.0153
Distributive justice	0.0370	0.0467	0.0279	0.0591	0.0466	0.0143
Procedural justice	0.0172	0.0650	0.0535	0.0316	0.1106	0.0066
Tendency to misbehave (absence)	0.1825★★	0.0689	0.0989	0.0583	0.0904	0.0102

The GENMOD procedure of SAS.
★$p < 0.05$, ★★$p < 0.01$.

Ethical climate and absence

Hypothesis 1 stated that teachers' perceptions of ethical climate (caring and formal) would be negatively related to absence frequency (and not duration). Pairwise regression results showed that both caring and formal climates were significantly related to absence frequency ($B = -0.15$, $B = -0.09$

respectively, $p < 0.05$). Caring climate was also related to absence duration ($B = -0.14$, $p < 0.01$). In the multi-variable model the relationship involving formal climate did not appear and caring climate was found related only to absence frequency. Hypothesis 1, then, was partially supported in regard to both climate variables, while caring climate showed as a stronger predictor than formal climate.

Organizational justice and absence

Hypothesis 2 stated that teachers' perceptions of organizational justice (distributive and procedural) would be negatively related to absence frequency (and not duration). Results of the pairwise analyses showed that only procedural justice was significantly ($B = -0.09$, $p < 0.05$) related to absence frequency. This relationship failed to appear in the multiple-regression analysis which may be explained by the fact that procedural justice has nothing to add to the explanation of absence frequency beyond the other variables-caring climate and tendency to misbehave (absence). Note that the correlation between procedural justice and caring climate was very high ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that the explained variance of caring climate must account for some of the meaning captured in the notion of procedural justice (fairness, consideration of people involved). Considering these results, hypothesis 2 was partially supported in regard to procedural justice, and unsupported in regard to distributive justice.

Tendency to misbehave and absence

Hypothesis 3 stated that teachers' perceptions of tendency to misbehave (absence) would be positively related to absence frequency (and not duration). The pairwise and the multiple regression analyses both showed that tendency to misbehave (absence) was related to frequency (the higher the tendency to misbehave, the lower the absence) and not to duration. Hypothesis 3 was accordingly fully supported.

In general, the argument advanced in this article, that teachers' perceptions of school ethics would be related to voluntary and not to involuntary absence, was modestly supported. From the correlations and pairwise analyses, most teachers' perceptions of organizational ethics (formal climate, procedural

justice, tendency to misbehave) were moderately related only to absence frequency and not to absence duration. Only caring climate had a low relationship to both measures. From the multiple regression analysis, two school-ethics variables – caring ethical climate and tendency to misbehave (absence) – had a low relationship to absence frequency and not to duration, as expected. In both analyses (pairwise, multiple), the effect sizes, which measure the strength of the statistical relationships (Cohen, 1988), were moderate.

Discussion

The main goal of this study was to find whether teachers' perceptions of school ethics would be more closely related to absence frequency than duration, assuming that teachers' ethics perceptions led to voluntary absence. To test these arguments we hypothesized that teacher's perceptions of school ethics would be more closely related to absence frequency than duration, assuming that work perceptions led to voluntary, not involuntary absence. We used a battery of several indicators of teachers' perceptions of school ethics to test our hypotheses. The rationale was that if more variables indicate that teachers' perceptions of school ethics were found to relate more closely to absence frequency than to absence duration, this may provide support for the theoretical contention that the two absence types (voluntary and involuntary) differ, and that frequency is a better measure of voluntary absence than duration.

A look at the pattern of results unveiled in this study may attest to some promise in the proposed model, but only moderately. All teachers' perceptions of organizational ethics (except distributive justice) were significantly related to absence frequency (correlations, pairwise regressions). However, these variables have a low relationship to absence frequency, in keeping with the study's rationale. Thus this conclusion provides only limited support for previous studies reporting consistently that absence spells were a more reliable measure of work attitudes perceptions than time-lost measures (Melamed et al., 1995; Westman and Etzion, 2001).

The finding that shows teachers' perceptions of caring climate was related to absence is in accord with similar results in previous studies (Bowers,

2001; Imants and Van Zoelen, 1995; Scott-Norton, 1998), where the strong effect of the value of caring was highlighted. Comparatively little has been written about the direct relationship of formal climate with absence. Other researchers of ethical climate have suggested that different types of climate have different organizational effects (Victor and Cullen, 1988; Peterson, 2002). Using the psychological contract framework, teachers apparently respond to caring climate with reciprocal ethical behavior (refraining from absence) much more than they respond to formal climate (rules and regulations), because of the greater importance attached to caring than to formal ethical climate. At the same time, caring climate was less sensitive than the other ethical variables to the distinction between the two measures of absence.

Our results hardly supported the theory on a presumed relationship between perceptions of organizational justice and absence (Buunk and Janssen, 1992; Rutte and Messick, 1995). The reason may lie in the unique structure of the Israeli educational system, which is heavily regulated by the government and characterized by rigid salary and benefits (Oplatka, 2004). Israeli teachers may see their working conditions as independent of their behaviors at work. Therefore, their perceptions of distributive justice were found entirely unrelated to absence, while their perceptions of procedural justice were related to it only weakly.

Previous studies showed that the association between work perceptions and absenteeism is not very strong (Randall, 1990; Sagie, 1998) and that voluntary or involuntary distinction may be misleading (e.g., Farrell and Stamm, 1988; Hackett, 1989; Hackett et al., 1989). Following on from this, the relationships found in the present study may contribute to future studies aimed at finding further ways to reduce the blurring of the measures for investigating relationships between employees' perceptions of organizational ethics and their voluntary and involuntary absence.

Limitations of the study and directions for future research

One limitation of the study's methodology is its 5-month time span of absence reports. Time span may be associated with random error and systematic bias. Increasing the time frame of the self-report would increase reliability, but would run the risk of compromising validity and accuracy due to memory decrement. We advise future studies to compare systematically different time schedules of absence self-reports. Also, a time series approach should be used, where teachers report on their absence record more than once. This approach may not only prevent problems of memory lapses but also be more sensitive to dynamic effects of ethical climate over time.

The present study covered only teachers. Ethics probably carries a unique meaning in schools, being educational institutions with high expectations of an ethical environment. Still, because ethical dimensions are a central issue in any organization, future research should attempt to replicate the framework of this study to permit generalizations to a broader segment of the public and private sectors. Business organizations may find that their employees' reaction to ethics in organizational policy and climate is no less prominent than that in public organizations, but for other reasons. For example, Aziz (2004) showed that Machiavellianism in two retail stores paved the way to work absence, making employees less hesitant about this behavior. Whether the ethics–absence relationship in business differs from that in public organizations is a question worthy of further research.

Another promising line of inquiry may be to search for mediation effects. Shapira-Lishchinsky and Rosenblatt (2008) showed that ethical climate was related to work absence through the (full) mediation of organizational commitment. Gellatly (1995) showed that organizational commitment mediated the relationship between absence frequency and interactional justice. Mediation effect of these or other variables may further explain the relationships unveiled in this study between organizational ethics and absence behaviors.

Finally, as absenteeism is only one component of a withdrawal syndrome (Koslowsky and Krausz, 2002), future studies need to test the model of the present study on other withdrawal symptoms, such as lateness and intent to leave. Studies showed that lateness and intent to leave were moderately related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Koslowsky et al., 1997; Lee and Mitchell, 1994).

The ethical background of withdrawal symptoms other than absenteeism has scarcely been researched.

Conclusion

Comparison of two measures of the same concept is undoubtedly a difficult endeavor. Use of unparallel measures is bound to cause obstacles in measurement stability (Steel, 2003). Though not conclusive enough, our results provide some evidence to support the use of an absence frequency index as a reflection of voluntary absence, and an absence duration index as a reflection of involuntary absence with regard to teachers' perceptions about organizational ethics. However, we argue that although the relationships were found to be only moderate, this still demonstrates a tendency that teachers' perceptions of ethics relate more closely to absence frequency than to absence duration. Thus, the effects unveiled in this study may encourage principals (or possibly other managers) to develop positive perceptions of an ethical environment. This may increase employees' positive perceptions of a caring climate, characterized by supportive relations between colleagues and which may reduce employees' perceptions of acceptability regarding the tendency to misbehave. In this way, managers may reduce the voluntary absence phenomenon.

Acknowledgment

Note

[1]   The present study is part of a larger research project on teacher withdrawal syndrome and school ethics.

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