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Controlling Absenteeism: A National Study of Union and Non-Union Differences

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Union presence has a complex effect on absenteeism, a study finds

Controlling absenteeism: Union and nonunion differences

Steve Markham and Dow Scott

Although absenteeism has been at its lowest level in several decades, the current economic recovery foreshadows an increase in absenteeism as the fear of job loss lessens among employees. This growth in absenteeism will represent a substantial cost to business (see Steers & Rhodes, 1978). In anticipation of this problem, managers should again turn their attention to this concern.

One of the traditional "barriers" to the implementation of new employee programs and policies has been unions. Despite the belief that union presence is thought to be associated with high levels of absenteeism, comparatively little research has examined the relationship of unions and absenteeism. Because of the importance of the labor movement in the American economy and the common managerial belief that unions increase labor costs by restricting management's flexibility, this research examines unions' effects on absenteeism and attendance control methods.

The literature

Based on their considerable efforts

to maintain a union-free status, managers apparently agree that important differences exist between unionized and nonunionized organizations, and that the latter is definitely preferable. These differences are often referred to in books (usually in terms of how to remain union-free) and in management seminars. One of the underlying concerns is a difference articulated by Beavers (1976) in the *ASPA Handbook of Personnel and Industrial Relations*:

Nonunion organizations are quite different from unionized organizations, in which—despite euphemistic statements to the contrary—the relationship between employees and management may be that of adversaries. (Beavers, 1976: 7/55)

Based on these assumed differences, Foulkes (1980) conducted a study that compared personnel policies and practices of large nonunion companies to those of large union companies in the United States. Foulkes reported that personnel policies are substantially different in unionized and nonunionized organizations in

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terms of employment security, promotion, personnel development activities and feedback/complaint procedures. Freeman and Medoff (1979; 1981) examined the question of union effects by conducting an exhaustive review of the empirical literature that examined this controversy. They concluded that collective bargaining has significant impacts on wage rates and personnel policies. Organizations with unions seem to have more rules and more rigidity in the scheduling of hours.

Although a consensus seems to exist among managers concerning the adverse impact of collective bargaining, conflicting theories and mixed empirical results have cast doubt on the accuracy of this belief with respect to absenteeism. On one hand, Freeman (1976) suggests that because unions focus attention on workplace problems and encourage expression of discontent, unionized employees will say that they are more dissatisfied with their jobs than nonunionized employees. To the extent that job satisfaction is linked to absenteeism (see Porter and Steers, 1973), organizations with unions might be expected to have higher absenteeism rates. Henle (1974) also hypothesizes that absenteeism is higher in unionized and governmental organizations because unions are more likely to obtain extensive paid-absence programs from management. Leigh (1981) examined both wage effects and sick leave benefit effects on absence due to illness for union and nonunion employees. His recursive model showed that sick leave benefits resulted in higher absence rates among union members despite the monopoly wage.

Alternatively, Stoikov and Raimon (1968) argued that the more effective systems of industrial jurisprudence associated with

unions results in greater employee job satisfaction. If the integrity of the grievance system is maintained—and this is dependent on *bona fide* trade union representation—Stoikov and Raimon expect job satisfaction to be higher among unionized employees. Thus, if the Porter and Steers (1973) argument is correct, the presence of a union should result in lower absenteeism.

A third alternative provided by Allen (1981b) suggests that the presence of a union does not have a uniform effect on absenteeism. Allen (1981b) contends that absenteeism is the result of an employee's labor/leisure decision after taking into account the constraints imposed by the employer and by peer pressure. Absenteeism is higher where the union negotiates a paid absence program, provides more job security by reducing management's ability to discipline employees and bargains for linking pay increases to seniority rather than performance. However, Allen (1981b) also notes that the presence of a union might be associated with a lower absenteeism rate because employees with good absence records do not want to support chronic absentees, and the union exerts pressure to weed them out. Thus, the general effect of unions on absenteeism is ambiguous, and depends on the union's relationship with management. Allen's research (1981a; 1981b) reflects this ambiguity. In the first study he found higher absenteeism to be associated with unions, but did not find that relationship in the second study.

In addition to conflicting theories and research, the literature on unions and absenteeism seems to have overlooked a very important moderating variable, i.e., the effect of right-to-work laws. As an attempt to curb the power of unions, Sec-

tion 14(b) of the Taft-Hartley Act (1947) was passed to allow states to enact legislation prohibiting compulsory union membership as a condition of employment. Since the passage of this act, 20 states have enacted such legislation. The major investments which employers and unions have made in contesting right-to-work laws attest to the belief that this legislation has a significant impact on the power of unions. The basic managerial argument for these laws is that existence of right-to-work laws disrupts the monopoly power of the union to coerce (at minimum) financial support and (in practice) membership. To the extent that its recruiting power is limited, the union is forced to attract members by other means. Thus, in right-to-work states, management expects that union relations will be more cooperative and less antagonistic than in states without right-to-work laws.

However, research has also produced mixed findings with respect to this belief. Even though Lumsden and Petersen (1975) found that states with right-to-work laws had a significantly smaller percentage of their work force unionized, they attributed the difference to the tastes and preferences of the labor forces in these areas. As a result, they concluded that the battle over state right-to-work laws is symbolic rather than substantive. A.T. Kearney, Inc. also found that the success of unions in winning representation elections was not influenced by right-to-work laws (Current Developments, 1981). In contrast, Moore and Newman (1975) found that union membership was slightly lower in states with right-to-work legislation. Wessels (1981) reported that the effects of right-to-work laws appeared to have little, if any, effect on union membership, union problems or wages. However, he did

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find a significant positive relationship with job satisfaction for non-union workers.

Methodology

To determine if the commonly held management assumption that unionized organizations have more problems with absenteeism than nonunion firms, five research questions were investigated:

1. Is the presence of a union associated with higher absenteeism rates?

2. Are there major differences between union and nonunion organizations in their approaches to controlling absenteeism?

3. Do union organizations have more formally developed attendance control policies than non-union organizations?

4. Is the presence of a union associated with a paid absence program?

5. Do differences between right-to-work states and non-right-to-work states affect the influence that union presence has on absence rates and absenteeism control policies?

Five thousand personnel managers from across the United States were drawn from the rolls of the American Society for Personnel Administration. The sample was drawn randomly with respect to size, industry and union representation. The return rate was approximately 20 percent ($N = 959$), of which 62 percent were nonunion and 38 percent were union. A complete discussion of the sample demographics can be found in Scott & Markham (1982).

A four page mail-out survey asked respondents to indicate which of 34 methods of attendance control programs they used. (These methods are listed in Figure 1.) The survey asked for demographic information about the organization,

including the absence rate. (Thus, the level of analysis for this project is autonomous plants or divisions, not individual employees.)

For each method of control listed in the survey, respondents were asked first if their companies or agencies currently used this technique. If they replied affirmatively, an additional piece of information was requested: How effective has this method been in controlling absenteeism? Four choices were provided for rating the effectiveness of a method: (1) not effective at all; (2) marginally ineffective, the benefits just below the costs; (3) marginally effective, the benefits barely worth the costs; and (4) definitely effective, successful.

Results

Question 1. Union/nonunion differences in absenteeism rates. In response to the first research question, "Is the presence of a union associated with higher absenteeism rates?", average absence rates for union and nonunion firms were compared. The average absenteeism rate for the nonunion firms was 4.2 percent (s.d. = 3.9), and union firms had an average absenteeism rate of 4.5 percent (s.d. = 3.5). Given sampling fluctuations, there is no statistically significant difference between these two rates. It appears, therefore, that the presence of a union is not associated with higher absenteeism rates in this sample.

Question 2. Differences in control methods. The second research question asks if there are major differences between union and non-union organizations in the methods used to control absenteeism. In the first column of Figure 1, the 34 absenteeism control methods are ranked by their frequency of use in nonunion settings. The rated effectiveness of each technique is listed in the second column. The third

column repeats the frequency information for organizations that have unions. The fourth column shows the rated effectiveness for unionized organizations. When comparing the frequency of program use for union and nonunion organizations, a difference of 12 percent or more between the two columns of frequency data for nonunion and union sites is significant at $p < .001$ if a test for differences between independent proportions is applied. (See Glass and Stanley [1970] for computational details.)

Overall, there is a high degree of similarity between the percentages of union and nonunion firms that use each control method. This is especially true for the first four methods listed. For example, the most frequently used method for both groups is "employee call-in to give notice of absence" which is used by 99 percent of the organizations in both categories.

Of the 34 methods listed in Figure 1, the frequencies of use of nine techniques differs by more than 12 percent. These nine programs can be subdivided into two categories: Those used more frequently by union firms and those used more frequently by nonunion firms.

The programs which are used more frequently by union firms include the following: (1) requiring a written doctor's excuse for illness and accidents (71 percent of the nonunion firms require this, as opposed to 89 percent of the union firms); (2) analysis of daily attendance information at least monthly (used by 50 percent of nonunion firms and 68 percent of union firms); (3) improvements of safety on the job (used by 48 percent of nonunion firms and 70 percent of union firms); (4) wiping clean a problem employee's record by subsequent good attendance (used



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by 41 percent of nonunion firms and 55 percent of union firms); (5) supervisory training in attendance control (used by 34 percent of

nonunion firms and 48 percent of union firms); (6) formal work safety training programs (used by 34 percent of nonunion firms and 55 per-

cent of union firms); and (7) substance abuse programs (used by 22 percent of nonunion firms and 37 percent of union firms).

Figure 1
ABSENCE CONTROL METHODS AND THEIR FREQUENCY OF USE IN NONUNION VS. UNION ORGANIZATIONS*

Method of Control	Nonunion		Union	
	Percent Use	Effectiveness	Percent Use	Effectiveness
1. Employee call-in to give notice of absence	99%	3.35	99%	3.33
2. Termination based on excessive absenteeism	95	3.5	97	3.43
3. Progressive discipline for excessive absenteeism	87	3.43	97	3.43
4. Identification and discipline of employees abusing attendance policies	86	3.36	92	3.44
5. Inclusion of absenteeism rate on employee job performance appraisal	77	3.23	47	3.11
6. A consistently applied attendance policy	77	3.44	83	3.50
7. A clearly written attendance policy	76	3.31	77	3.38
8. Require written doctor's excuse for illness/accidents	71	3.04	89	3.08
9. A component on attendance in a formal employee orientation program for new hire	70	3.09	73	3.04
10. Daily attendance records maintained by supervisors	69	3.33	66	3.28
11. Screen recruits' past attendance records before making a selection decision	67	3.17	66	3.14
12. Analysis of daily attendance information at least monthly	50	3.36	68	3.41
13. Improvements of safety on the job	48	3.13	70	3.13
14. Peer pressure encouraged by requiring peers to fill in for absent employee	46	2.69	38	2.48
15. Daily attendance records maintained by personnel department	43	3.29	55	3.45
16. Wiping clean a problem employee's record by subsequent good attendance.	41	3.18	55	3.08
17. Supervisory training in attendance control	34	3.19	48	3.10
18. Formal work safety training program	34	3.15	55	3.18
19. Employee interviewed after absence	33	3.32	39	3.18
20. Flexible work schedules	26	3.29	12	3.10
21. Public recognition of employee good attendance	23	3.09	28	3.11
22. Substance abuse program	22	3.07	37	2.90
23. Employee bonus for perfect attendance	18	3.01	10	2.83
24. Inclusion of work unit absenteeism on supervisor's performance appraisal	18	3.21	17	3.05
25. Spot visitation or phone call to check at employee residence	17	2.98	29	3.01
26. Job enrichment/enlargement/rotation implemented to reduce absenteeism	15	3.14	7	2.92
27. Education programs in health/diet/home safety	14	2.83	12	2.79
28. Allow employees to build a paid "absence bank" to be cashed in or added to next year's vacation time	12	3.35	7	3.08
29. Perfect/good attendance banquet and award ceremony	9	3.19	9	3.19
30. Attendance lottery or poker system (random reward)	<1	2.60	2	2.88
31. Chart biorhythms for accident-prone days	<1	2.33	1	2.67
32. Operation of day care for employees' dependent	<1	3.5	<1	2.00
33. Letter to spouse indicating lost earnings of employee due to absenteeism	<1	3.0	<1	2.00
34. The absenteeism control policy has been negotiated in the union contract (applies only to unions)	NA	NA	32	2.98

*Note: Sample consisted of 367 union and 592 nonunion organizations.

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Those programs used more frequently by nonunion firms include the following: (1) inclusions of absenteeism rates on employee job

performance appraisal (used by 77 percent of nonunion firms and 47 percent of union firms); and (2) flexible work schedules (used by 26

percent of nonunion firms and 12 percent of union firms).

Neither nonunion nor union firms

Figure 2
ABSENCE CONTROL METHODS AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS* (Percent)

Method of Control	Nonunion		Union	
	Nonusers	Users	Nonusers	Users
1. Employee call-in to give notice of absence	6.7%	4.2%	8.3%	4.5%
2. Termination based on excessive absenteeism	4.0	4.2	5.0	4.5
3. Progressive discipline for excessive absenteeism	4.6	4.1	5.8	4.5
4. Identification and discipline of employees abusing attendance policies	4.7	4.1	4.8	4.5**
5. Inclusion of absenteeism rate on employee job performance appraisal	4.1	4.2	4.7	4.3
6. A consistently applied attendance policy	4.9	4.0 **	4.7	4.5
7. A clearly written attendance policy	3.8	4.3	4.8	4.4
8. Require written doctor's excuse for illness/accidents	4.0	4.3	3.8	4.6
9. A component on attendance in a formal employee orientation program for new hire	4.2	4.2	4.8	4.4
10. Daily attendance records maintained by supervisors	3.6	4.4 **	4.1	4.7
11. Screen recruits' past attendance records before making a selection decision	4.7	4.0 **	4.6	4.4
12. Analysis of daily attendance information at least monthly	4.5	4.0	5.1	4.3 **
13. Improvements of safety on the job	4.0	4.3	4.7	4.4
14. Peer pressure encouraged by requiring peers to fill in for absent employee	4.4	4.0	4.1	5.1 **
15. Daily attendance records maintained by personnel department	4.6	3.8 **	4.6	4.4
16. Wiping clean a problem employee's record by subsequent good attendance	4.3	4.1	4.4	4.6
17. Supervisory training in attendance control	4.2	4.1	4.6	4.4
18. Formal work safety training program	4.1	4.3	4.4	4.6
19. Employee interviewed after absence	4.3	4.0	4.6	4.4
20. Flexible work schedules	4.1	4.5	4.5	4.5
21. Public recognition of employee good attendance	4.6	3.1 **	4.6	4.3
22. Substance abuse program	4.4	3.6 **	4.4	4.7
23. Employee bonus for perfect attendance	4.3	3.7	4.4	5.2
24. Inclusion of work unit absenteeism on supervisor's performance appraisal	4.2	4.3	4.6	4.1
25. Spot visitation or phone call to check at employee residence	4.2	4.4	4.6	4.3
26. Job enrichment/enlargement/rotation implemented to reduce absenteeism	4.2	4.3	4.6	3.8
27. Education programs in health/diet/home safety	4.2	4.0	4.6	3.8
28. Allow employees to build a paid "absence bank" to be cashed in or added to next year's vacation time	4.2	4.3	4.5	4.0
29. Perfect/good attendance banquet and award ceremony	4.3	3.2 **	4.5	4.6
30. Attendance lottery or poker system (random reward)	4.2	4.7	4.5	4.9
31. Chart biorhythms for accident-prone days	4.2	7.6	4.5	3.8
32. Operation of day care for employees' dependent	4.2	3.6	4.5	none
33. Letter to spouse indicating lost earnings of employee due to absenteeism	4.2	1.8	4.5	none
34. The absenteeism control policy has been negotiated in the union contract (applies only to unions)	NA	NA	4.3	5.0 **

* Note: Sample consisted of 367 union and 592 nonunion organizations.

** p .10

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seem to be innovators with respect to new types of absence control programs. As opposed to the high levels of use reported by both union and nonunion sites for traditional programs such as employee call-in, termination and progressive discipline, newer methods which have been praised in personnel literature are used very infrequently. Examples of these programs which are used in less than two percent of either type of firm include operation of a day care center, use of random/lottery reward systems, and charting biorhythms.

In light of the increasing economic pressure for higher productivity, one might expect that attendance control would be a high management priority. One item from Figure 1 indicates the amount of concern that management has given to the problem of absenteeism in union sites. Item 34, which applies only to unionized firms, asks if the absenteeism control policy has been negotiated into the union contract. Thirty-eight percent of the firms reported that absenteeism control was subject to negotiation. Although arbitrators typically find that management has the right to unilaterally establish attendance control policies and programs (*T. Whyte v. Aro, Inc.*, 47 LA 1065; *Abex Corp. vs. Wagner*, 52 LA 484), this item could be of much greater importance in future labor contracts given the competitive pressures of the 1980s.

Another way of looking at the second research question is to compare the actual absenteeism rates between users and nonusers of a specific program for both union and nonunion organizations. This information is provided in Figure 2. The data suggest a dramatic difference in the actual effectiveness of the various control methods for

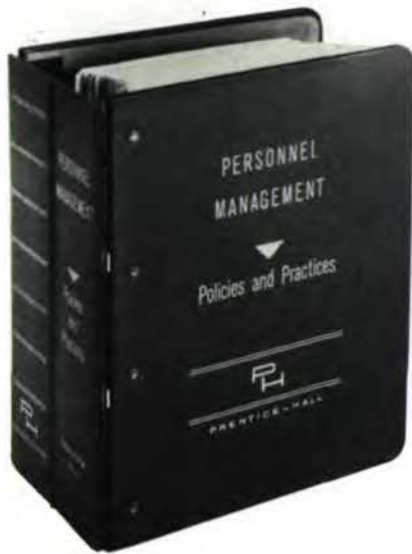
union versus nonunion organizations. For example, there is only one method (monthly analysis of attendance data) that, when used by organizations with unions, results in significantly lower absenteeism. In fact, in examining Columns 3 and 4, there are two methods (requiring peers to fill in for absent employees and the negotiations of attendance policies in the union contract) that have a paradoxical effect. That is, companies reporting the use of these methods actually have higher rates of absenteeism.

The situation for the nonunion companies, however, is very different. In Columns 2 and 3, there are six methods that, when used, are associated with significantly lower levels of absenteeism. These six include: (1) a consistently applied policy; (2) screening of recruits' past attendance records; (3) daily attendance records maintained by the personnel department; (4) public recognition of employee good attendance; (5) substance abuse programs; and (6) perfect/good attendance banquets. There was one method of attendance control that had an opposite effect: Significantly higher rates of absenteeism are associated with supervisors having responsibility for maintaining the daily attendance records. On the whole, it appears that the presence of a union has an important effect on whether or not various attendance control methods are effective in reducing absenteeism.

Question 3. Differences in program formality. If unions see their role as protecting the interests of their members, one method of accomplishing this purpose is through more rational, formalistic employee relations. One indication of more formalistic employee relations could be the choice and number of attendance control policies.

In order to investigate this question, an index of absenteeism control methods-in-use was constructed from the 34 methods listed in Figure 2. Each method was considered to be an example of a formal attendance control program. A composite score for each firm was computed by totaling the number of programs that were currently being used by a respondent. Organizations which did not have a union had significantly fewer control techniques (13.8) than organizations which did (average = 15.2 control techniques). This indicates a more formal approach to the attendance problem in unionized firms. Supporting this conclusion was the fact that a high percentage of union firms were able to report their absenteeism rates (78 percent) compared to nonunion firms (64 percent). Despite the fact that union sites had a greater number of control programs on average, the actual number of programs was not significantly correlated with absence rate ($r = -.05$; n.s.)

In a *post-hoc* analysis of Question 3, these data were reexamined by categorizing major absence control methods as either positive reward approaches or negative disciplinary approaches. The reward approach included the following: A paid absence bank (Item 28), flexible work schedules (Item 20), monetary bonus for perfect attendance (Item 23), a good attendance record banquet (Item 29), public recognition of employees with good attendance records (Item 21) and job enrichment or enlargement (Item 26). The disciplinary techniques included progressive discipline programs (Item 3), a consistently applied policy (Item 6), a clearly written policy (Item 7), an explanation to new hires of absenteeism policies in the orientation program (Item 9), the identification and discipline of abusers (Item 4)



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and monthly analysis of daily attendance information (Item 12). Two scales, Reward Methods and Discipline Methods, were created by totaling the number of each that an organization used. Union firms have a great number of disciplinary control methods than nonunion firms (F ratio = 23.5, $p < .0001$); whereas the reverse was true for the reward techniques. Nonunion organizations had a significantly higher number of reward methods than union organizations (F ratio = 21.5, $p < .0001$).

Interestingly, firms with unions which have negotiated an attendance policy have a more formal program than union firms that have not negotiated their policy. The correlation between the number of

programs used by a unionized firm and whether or not attendance policy is part of the union contract negotiations is $r = .20$ ($p < .0002$).

Question 4: Differences in hourly paid-absence programs. Paid absence programs have received special attention in the literature because such programs make absences less costly to employees, thus increasing their propensity to be absent (Allen, 1981b; Leigh, 1981). Furthermore, a paid absence program makes individual incidents of absenteeism more costly to the organization. Thus, the fourth research question asks if the presence of a union is associated with a paid hourly absence program. The data for this question are displayed in Figure 3.

Of the 375 nonunion organizations in this sample that reported their absenteeism rates, 63 percent had a paid absence program for hourly workers. Only 32 percent of the 235 union firms had a paid absence program for hourly employees. Apparently the presence of a union does not guarantee that a paid-absence program will exist in a firm. In fact, management seems to be more likely to give employees a paid absence program if a union does not exist.

The bottom half of Figure 3 indicates that significant differences in absenteeism rates do *not* exist between union and nonunion firms, between firms with and without an hourly paid-absence program and between firms with a combination

Figure 3

THE EFFECT OF UNION PRESENCE ON A PAID ABSENCE PROGRAM

Dependent Variable = absence rate

Paid Absence Program For Hourlies

No

Yes

Union
Presence

No

140 firms
4.0 percent

235 firms
4.2 percent

4.2
percent

Yes

195 firms
4.3 percent

90 firms
4.9 percent

4.5
percent

4.2
percent

4.4
percent

TWO-WAY ANOVA RESULTS FOR THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE ABSENTEEISM RATE

Source of Variance	df	F value	p
Overall Model	3	1.10	.35
Union	1	1.49	.22
Paid Absence Program	1	1.46	.23
Interaction	1	.34	.56
Error	656		

Note: Each components' F has been calculated holding constant all other sources of variance.



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of the two conditions. It does *not* appear that the presence of a paid-absence program has an appreciable effect on the absence rates of the firms reported in this sample.

Question 5: The effects of right-to-work laws. One alternative explanation for the lack of positive results presented in Figure 3 might be that all union environments are not the same. One potentially powerful environmental condition for unions may be the right-to-work laws.

In Figure 4, this sample has been dichotomized into those organizations that have state right-to-work laws and those that do not. The left half of the table shows that the absence rate for the 465 organizations in states without right-to-work laws was 4.34 percent. The absence rates for organizations with and without unions and for organizations with and without paid absence programs for hourly workers are shown along with the corresponding statistical test. The difference between union and non-union absence rates is significantly different (4.64 percent and 4.04 percent, respectively). This difference corresponds to the traditional managerial belief about the effects of unions on absenteeism. However, differences between absenteeism rates of union and nonunion organizations located in states that do have right-to-work laws are *not* significantly different. (See the right side of Figure 4.)

It appears that right-to-work laws are an important condition in understanding the relationship of union presence and absenteeism. In states with right-to-work laws, evidence supporting managers' beliefs linking unions with higher rates of absence could not be found. When organizations from right-to-work states were removed from the rest of the sample, the ex-

pected negative relationship between union presence and a high absence rate was revealed. Thus, apparently conflicting results in the literature with respect to the question of union presence and absence (e.g., Allen, 1981a; 1981b) might be resolved by holding constant the effects of conditions found in states that have right-to-work laws.

To further illustrate the effect of right-to-work legislation, note that the organizations in states without such laws (see Figure 4) which had both a union and a paid-absence program had the *highest* average absence rate (5.14 percent) in the matrix. This result fits the common management expectation about the detrimental effects of unions and paid-absence programs on absenteeism. This compares with the same type of organization (i.e., union presence with paid absence program) in the right-to-work states that had the *lowest* average absence rate (3.71 percent) in the matrix.

Conclusions

The common management assumption that the presence of a union is necessarily associated with higher absenteeism was not supported by our initial results. However, the presence of unions in general did have an important consequence on the effectiveness of specific control policies. Quite simply, only one of the 34 programs in union sites resulted in a significantly lower absence rate when used. In non-union sites, six of the 34 programs were associated with lower absenteeism.

When differences between right-to-work states and non-right-to-work states were examined, the effect of unions on absence rates was markedly different. In right-to-work states, there was no statistically significant difference between union and nonunion absence rates. In

states without right-to-work legislation, there was a marked difference between union and nonunion firms' absence rates. These data suggest that the right-to-work laws might be a significant environmental condition for understanding the influence of unions on absenteeism. These data also suggest an alternative explanation for the previous ambiguous findings in the literature with respect to unions and absenteeism rates.

Henle's (1974) contention that unionized organizations would be more likely to have a paid absence program received no support from these data. In fact, there was a negative relationship between the presence of a union and the presence of a paid absence program for hourly workers. Stoikov and Raimon's (1968) argument that a union might increase employee satisfaction, thereby reducing absenteeism, did not appear to be supported either. Allen's (1981b) prediction that unions may influence absenteeism in both directions, thus masking the effect of unions on absenteeism, was not contradicted; however, the moderating effects of the conditions in states that have right-to-work laws seem to constitute a more potent variable for explaining any differential union effects on absenteeism rates.

The evidence presented here does show that there are some differences between union and non-union organizations in the policies and programs used to control absenteeism. For example, union firms are more likely to have safety programs, absenteeism data on record and programs for wiping clean an employee's past absence record. They also have a greater number of formal programs for absence control and more discipline-oriented techniques such as

documenting absences with a doctor's note. Nonunion organizations appear to have more flexibility in scheduling, as evidenced by the higher proportion of sites that have flexi-time and reward-oriented programs. Finally, the presence of a union was not associated with a greater likelihood of having a paid-

absence program; rather, a negative relationship existed.

In summary, it appears that unions have an important effect on absenteeism, although the relationship is neither as simple nor as straightforward as proposed in the literatures. □

Editor's Note: This article is based on a study funded by the ASPA Foundation. The initial results of that study by Scott and Markham appeared in "Absence control methods: A survey of practices and results" (June 1982). This article resulted from many requests received by the authors to reformat the data

Figure 4
ANALYSIS OF RIGHT-TO-WORK LAWS ON UNION VS. NONUNION ABSENCE POLICIES AND RATES
 Organizations in states *Without* Right-to-Work Laws

N = 678 (465 in analysis)
 Absences Rate = 4.34 percent

Paid Absence Program For Hourlies

No Yes

Union Presence	No	Yes	
	No	3.93 percent	
Yes	4.36 percent	5.14 percent	4.64 percent
	4.20 percent	4.43 percent	

Two-way ANOVA Results for the Dependent Variable: Absence Rate

Source of Variance	df	F value	p
Overall Model	3	1.88	.13
Union	1	4.47	.03
Paid Absence	1	1.78	.18
Interaction	1	.79	.37
Error	461		

Organizations in states *With* Right-to-Work Laws

N = 290 (195 in analysis)
 Absence Rate = 4.30 percent

Paid Absence Program For Hourlies

No Yes

Union Presence	No	Yes	
	No	4.16 percent	
Yes	4.26 percent	3.71 percent	4.14 percent
	4.21 percent	4.43 percent	

Two-way ANOVA Results for the Dependent Variable: Absence Rate

Source of Variance	df	F value	p
Overall Model	3	.22	.88
Union	1	.28	.60
Paid Absence	1	.01	.92
Interaction	1	.44	.51
Error	191		

in a union/nonunion analysis.

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