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Bedrijfskenmerken en ziekteverzuim in de jaren zestig en tachtig : een vergelijkende studie

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This doctoral dissertation deals with sickness absenteeism in three different ways. First, theoretical models and trends are reviewed (chapter 2). Second, a replication of a study by Philipsen (1969), carried out in 1964/65 with nineteen organizational variables in 83 Dutch industrial firms is described. The replication was done in 1980/81 with the same variables in 85 industrial organizations. The purpose of this replication is to find out to what extent both analyses lead to the same or different results. Information on the research samples, methods, variables used and results are given in chapters 3, 5 and 6. Chapter 4 discusses levels of analysis, since results in this study are based on characteristics of organizations, rather than on traits of individual employees. The third part of this book (chapter 7) is an extension of the above-mentioned replication. In this analysis thirteen new variables, important for the years 1980/81, are added to the eleven most reliable and valid variables from the replication analysis. The purpose of this follow-up analysis is to find out what the main variables are that explain differences in absenteeism between the 85 industrial firms in 1980/81. Finally, chapter 8 recapitulates and discusses the main results of this dissertation.

The above mentioned three parts will be summarized below. As far as theoretical models and trends are concerned, it is ascertained that research on absenteeism in the fifties and sixties has followed very simple theoretical lines. In the beginning (often in later periods too) absenteeism simply has been viewed as an effect of job dissatisfaction, lack of work or job involvement, lack of work motivation, etc. These concepts all indicate something of the relationship between the employee and his or her work situation or work organization. It is concluded that these concepts may explain differences in absenteeism between employees, but mostly to a limited extent.
Further, some more general organizational theories, which have been used to explain absenteeism in industry are presented. None of these theories were constructed with the aim of explaining absenteeism, although this dependent variable very often is in-

in research with these theories. Here exchange theory, equity theory, expectancy theory, role theories, leadership theories and task-related theories are discussed.
The first three theories are process theories, while the last three are more content-directed. It is not clear, because of lack of enough empirical support, which of the three process theories explain absenteeism best. On the other hand, there is empirical evidence that role problems, leadership and task characteristics all are important for explaining differences in absenteeism between employees or organizations.
In the fifties and sixties in the US and Great Britain some first attempts were undertaken to construct models especially directed to explain absence in industry. In these theories the relation between the employee and his organization was usually seen as an exchange-relation. Within this context some authors are interested in the 'socialization' of the individual into the organization. New in these models is, that different forces are distinguished in relation to absence behaviour: positive and negative sanctions on the individual making him or her staying with the organization, forces on the individual that compel him or her to be absent (health, family, transport), and also individual orientations of employees, which make them susceptible to the above-mentioned forces.
Finally, some more comprehensive Dutch and Anglo-Saxon models to explain absenteeism are presented. Concepts as job satisfaction or attachment to work, positive and negative sanctions, the non-work situation, personal characteristics and individual values are all included in some form in these models. On the other hand, there exists far more interest in Dutch models for health and health problems than in Anglo-Saxon models. The cyclical character of absence has only been emphasized by Steers and Rhodes (1978). It is concluded that these models show an increasing convergence as far as possible factors determining absence behaviour are concerned.

The empirical part of this dissertation is based on one of the more comprehensive theories (Philipsen, 1969). This author tested his theory with 19 variables, collected in 83 Dutch firms in 1964/65. These plants (for the greater part from the metal, food processing, textile and chemical industry) provided work for be-

tween 120 and 960 employees, and were spread over all the regions of The Netherlands.
This study was replicated in 1980/81 with the same nineteen variables, which were collected in 85 industrial organizations. These plants were somewhat larger than the original plants, but spread almost in the same way over the Dutch regions and the branches of industry as in the 1964/65-study.
The absence measures used are the same as in 1964/65: the mean frequency per employee, the average duration per spell and thirdly the absence rate (days absent per 100 days), which is the product of frequency and duration per spell.
Two conclusions may be mentioned. First, by way of factor analysis, it is established that four of the five factors Philipsen (1969) found in his material, are also found in 1980/81. These factors are: the extent to which the production process is routinized, the extent to which the firm is able to recruit personnel easily, the degree of urbanization of the environment of the firm and the degree to which the firm is traditionally or modernly organized.
Second, as far as the absence rate is concerned it is concluded that fourteen variables do not differ significantly in their relations with the absence rate over both periods. Of these fourteen variables nine can be identified as absence-inducing forces (the mean partial correlation in parentheses):

- a low degree of routinization of the production process (r = .14)
- hindrance of physical working conditions (r = .23)
- a low degree of autonomy of the firm (r = .17)
- a high degree of flatness of the organizational structure (r = .18)
- authoritarian leadership (r = .19)
- unfavourable sickness benefits (r = .21)
- a low own risk for the firm itself as far as its absence level is concerned, together with absence control done by an outside-agency (r = .37)
- many employees with short tenure (r = .19)
- a high degree of urbanization of the environment (r = .16)

The other five variables may be considered as having no relation with the absence rate of the firms (the mean partial correlation in parentheses):

- the labour-intensity of the firm (r = .06)
- unrest in the production process (r = .04)
- delegation of responsibility to non-managerial employees (r = -.05)
- the degree of development of the personnel-department (r = -.04)
- professional personnel-guidance (r = .10)

The remaining five variables show inconsistent relationships with the absence rate over the two periods under study. These are:

- percentage shift workers per firm (r = .02 and .31)
- skill level of the production work (r = -.05 and -.37)
- personnel number of the firm (r = -.26 and .20)
- unfavourable reputation of the firm (r = .05 and .36)
- mean age of the production personnel (r = .29 and -.25)

With respect to the other two dependent variables (absence frequency and average duration per spell), the same comparative analyses are carried out.

All in all, it is concluded that 74 percent of the nineteen original partial relations with the absence rate can be confirmed in the replication analysis. For absence frequency this confirmation-percentage is 63 and for average duration per spell it is 74.

The nineteen variables together explain 61 percent of the variance in the absence rate in the 1980/81-study. This percentage was 48 in the 1964/65-study. Both high percentages imply that the variables chosen for the studies may be considered as very relevant for explaining differences in absence rates of industrial organizations.

The third part of the dissertation deals with a follow-up analysis. Therefore eleven variables of the replication study are retained and thirteen new variables are added.

Of the thirteen variables added five turn out to be important for explaining the differences in the absence rates between the firms:

- high percentage of foreign employees (β = .36)
- number of contacts between management, the personnel department and the insurance doctor about absent workers (β = .19)
- unrest in the production process (a new version of the earlier variable) (β = .17)

- unfavourable financial-economic position of the firm (β = .13)
- low degree of guidance and care for the personnel (β = .12)

The 24 variables in this follow-up analysis are factor-analyzed and it turns out that they may be grouped into seven factors. Of these seven factors the following four are significantly associated with the absence rate of the firms:

- unfavourable financial-economical position of the firm (r = .45)
- unfavourable quality of work and inter-personal relations (r = .37)
- high degree of automatization of the production process (r = .18)
- a traditional rather than a modern way of organization (r = .17)

The relations of the four factors - and especially of the first two - with the absence rate may be considered as the main results of the whole study.

For the variables within these four factors causal models are constructed and tested with the help of the statistical technique LISREL.

The results of the replication as well as the follow-up analysis are discussed in the light of Philipsen's absence theory. The general conclusion is that the concepts in his theory (absence necessity, instrumental and social attachment of the employee to the work situation, social and economical absence control, attention for the individual absent employee) all may be considered as relevant for explaining differences in absence frequency and absence duration between organizations. In addition, it may be concluded that the attachment variables are less important for absence frequency than was hypothesized by Philipsen. The same is true for the variables under the concept attention for the individual absent employee in relation to absence duration. Finally, it is concluded that attachment to the work situation is not only of importance for explaining absence frequency - as Philipsen hypothesized - but also for explaining absence duration.

Since information is available on nineteen variables from the 1964/65- as well as the 1980/81-study, it is possible to uncover the developments which took place in Dutch industry between these two points in time.

In this way, it is ascertained that quality of work and human relations have been improved, that personnel-work has been professionalized and that the organizations have become taller and have gone working more in shift systems.
In addition, economical problems may be the background of the higher degree of unrest in the production departments in 1980/81 in comparison with 1964/65.