

The influence of perceived organizational support and organizational commitment on absenteeism in the local public sector

L'influence du soutien organisationnel perçu et de l'implication organisationnelle sur l'absentéisme dans la fonction publique territoriale

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ABSTRACT

Our study examines the influence of perceived organizational support and organizational commitment on the absenteeism among public local employees. Research results show that organizational support is a protective factor against absenteeism while calculated organizational commitment is a risk factor for absenteeism. We find that public local employees' absenteeism is the result of their disaffection towards their organization. This research highlights the fact that perceived organizational support is a potential lever in the fight against absenteeism

and draws public managers' attention to the counter-productive effects of financial incentive practices on absenteeism. It shows the need, in order to fight effectively against absenteeism, to move towards ethical management practices favoring a supportive working environment in which local public employees can become committed.

Key-words

Absenteeism; Perceived organizational support; Organizational commitment; Territorial public sector

RÉSUMÉ

Notre étude s'interroge sur l'influence du soutien organisationnel perçu et de l'implication organisationnelle sur l'absentéisme des agents territoriaux. Les résultats de la recherche montrent que le soutien organisationnel est un facteur prévenant l'absentéisme tandis que l'implication organisationnelle calculée est un facteur de risque de l'absentéisme. Notre travail suggère que l'absentéisme des agents territoriaux est le résultat de leur désaffection envers leur organisation. Cette

recherche met en évidence le fait que le soutien organisationnel perçu est un levier potentiel de la lutte contre l'absentéisme et attire l'attention des managers publics sur les effets contre-productifs des pratiques d'incitations financières sur l'absentéisme. Elle montre la nécessité, pour lutter efficacement contre l'absentéisme, d'aller vers des pratiques de management éthique favorisant un environnement de travail soutenant dans lequel les agents territoriaux peuvent s'impliquer.

Mots-clés

Absentéisme ; Soutien organisationnel perçu ; Implication organisationnelle ; Fonction publique territoriale

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INTRODUCTION

The 1980s became the scene of a transformation of public organizations that is still underway (Emery & Giaque, 2005). Echoing modernizing reforms of the public sector, these transformations have impacted local communities that now have to face up to new issues, new problematics and managerial practices resulting in a modified organizational landscape. Exigency, effectiveness, efficiency, performance and adaptability are their daily companions in a context where resources have grown scarcer and their competencies have broadened (Bartoli, 2006). On the impulse of this unstable, constrained and intricate context, territorial authorities now have to modernize their functioning, their internal organization and management techniques (Laoukili, 2009), in order to at once meet the challenges of keeping public action under budgetary control, of quality and of public service continuity.

Owing to such a dynamic of innovation, both organizational and managerial, territorial officials seem to be losing their bearings in the workplace. Among indicators of the increasing degradation of territorial officials' well-being are confusion about the values and purposes of the civil service, uncertain professional prospects, worsening work conditions, lack of recognition from senior management, unclear operating rules and internal procedures, lower management quality, rising tiredness and work losing its meaning¹.

The media coverage of rising territorial civil service absenteeism figures² only confirms territorial officials' growing workplace discomfort. But absenteeism is a major human resource management (HRM) issue, first of all because such behavior is perceived as counterproductive, as opposed to corporate citizenship behavior, adversely affecting the organization's overall effectiveness (Spector & Fox, 2002; Dalal, 2005). Then, the link between HRM and organizational effectiveness is an indirect one as it goes through attitudes and behaviors that enhance individual performance (Delery, 1998). Indeed, HRM practices impact workplace attitudes and behaviors that are conducive to improvement -or degradation- of individual performance (Edgar & Geare, 2005).

In view of this context our research focuses on the effects on absenteeism of two factors that are contingent on human resource commitment and loyalty-enhancing practices, and responds to the following question: what is the influence of perceived organizational support and organizational commitment on absenteeism in the territorial civil service. In order to answer this question, we will first present the theoretical framework of our research, which means to distinguish between absenteeism and absence. In the second place, we will make clear what empirical approach we used to test our research hypotheses. Lastly, we will discuss the outcomes of our research and make proposals for further research.

¹ Baromètre *Bien-être au travail 2014: le malaise croissant des territoriaux*: [URL: <https://www.lagazettedescommunes.com/dossiers/barometre-bien-etre-au-travail-2014-le-malaise-croissant-des-territoriaux>];

Enquête *Bien-être au travail 2015: dans les collectivités locales rien ne va plus*: [URL: <https://www.lagazettedescommunes.com/dossiers/enquete-bien-etre-au-travail-2015-dans-les-collectivites-locales-rien-ne-va-plus>];

Baromètre *Bien-être au travail dans la FTP 2016: coup de fatigue chez les territoriaux*: [URL: <https://www.lagazettedescommunes.com/dossiers/barometre-bien-etre-au-travail-dans-la-ftp-2016-coup-de-fatigue-chez-les-territoriaux>].

² Sofaxis (2016), "Panorama des absences au travail pour raisons de santé dans les collectivités territoriales en 2015"; ADRH GCL (2017), "Résultats du benchmark absentéisme 2015".

1. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Absenteeism is worthy of interest, as much to practitioners as to researchers, owing to the costs and dysfunctions it imposes on organizations. That is evidenced by the last 40 years' research on this phenomenon (Johns, 2003). In that sense, empirical studies have attempted not only to define absenteeism, but also to understand the determinants and consequences of such behavior (Harrison & Martocchio, 1998).

1.1. Absenteeism: definition and theoretical models

Absenteeism is characterized as “*an individual's physical non-presence at a given place and time when they are expected to be there*” (Harrison et Price, 2003: 204). According to that definition, broadly acknowledged by academic works, there are two elements to absenteeism: an individual's being absent from their workstation and not meeting social expectations. The latter element permits to distinguish between absenteeism and absence. As a matter of fact, absenteeism is marked by chronic, repetitive, voluntary, habitual and systematic lack of attendance at work (Huver, 2013). More precisely, it is understood as absence from the workplace due to sickness, outside of maternity leave³. On the opposite, absenteeism is qualified as a punctual and normal event of working life associated with regulatory holidays (paid leave, educational leave, maternal leave, etc.: Whitston et Edwards, 1990). Therefore, a high level of absence does not necessarily mean an absenteeism issue. That is how Whitston and Edwards (1990) remind us of the distinction between absenteeism and absence, although many researches do not make it, which entails significant deviations as much as to the understanding, conceptualization and operationalization of absenteeism (Johns, 2003; Sagie, 1998).

In economic models absenteeism is indeed dealt with through maximizing the usefulness of working time. In that sense it is viewed as a rational and individual choice between one's working and leisure time. Absenteeism is then perceived, regardless of any

consideration for the individual's health condition, as the result of a personal choice based on one's desire to work less in order to preserve some leisure capital. Financial incentives and penalties thus appear as the only solution required to restore asymmetric information between the employer and their workers as to the efforts the latter consent to put in their work, in order to keep them from missing work for their good pleasure (Shapiro et Stiglitz, 1984). To follow on from these works, Barmby *et al.* (1994) state that the parameter of workers' health conditions may weigh on the usefulness function: a sick employee will grant more importance to leisure time and will therefore tend to be absent from work. However, as specified by Coles and Treble (1993), an employee may be absent from work legitimately without reckoning with working time usefulness. Along with that logic Barmby *et al.* (1994) distinguish between two levels of workers' health conditions: one level where the employee is unable to work for health reasons and another where they are absent from work regardless of their health condition.

That distinction echoes the conceptualization established in the individual and psychosocial approaches of absenteeism. The individual approach is founded on Steers and Rhodes's theoretical model (1978). They characterize work attendance as the ability and motivation to attend work. On the contrary, absenteeism would, on the one hand, mean that one is unable to attend work for proven health problems and on the other, the lack of work motivation linked, for example, to low job satisfaction or work satisfaction in general, or to low organizational commitment.

These two dimensions of absenteeism, ability and motivation to attend, can also be found in the psychosocial approach of absenteeism, more precisely in the work and resource requirement model (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001a et b), which allows one to account for the emergence of absenteeism through two processes. The first one is a health weakening and deterioration process affecting one's ability to attend, characterized by persistent work requirements that undermine available work resources and lead to professional burnout as well as to behavior affecting work such as design to quit one's job or absenteeism. The second one is a stimulating process that influences one into attending, in which available work resources counterbalance the negative effect

³ ADRH GCT (2016), *L'absentéisme dans les collectivités territoriales: mesures et pratiques*, Dossier de Presse.

of work requirements and bring about organizational commitment along with behavior boosting individual performance (Bakker et Demerouti, 2007). Schaufeli et Bakker (2004) then consider that the latter amounts to a workplace demotivation process which helps one understand workplace disengagement and withdrawal behaviors through the absence of work resources.

All these models, theoretical and empirical, support the distinction between voluntary absences (the decision not to attend: demotivation process) and involuntary absences (inability to attend: health weakening and degradation process). In that perspective, absenteeism can either be viewed as an indicator of workplace health linked with the workplace health degradation process or as a social indicator linked with the workplace demotivation process (Chevalier & Goldberg, 1992). In the latter case, absenteeism is perceived as a withdrawal behavior (*Withdrawal Model*: Hanisch et Hulin, 1991) related to work organization and condition alterations over the past decades (Johns, 1997; 2001). In that sense, absenteeism would be the effect of negative attachment, disaffection with one's organization (Hanisch & Hulin, 1991). It is thus described as "a renouncement to commit oneself to attending work assiduously" (Bouville, 2009: p.7), an escape from or a way out of the negative aspects of work (Chadwick-Jones et al., 1982; Shapira-Lishchinsky & Rosenblatt, 2009), explained by attitudinal aspects (insatisfaction, lack of commitment: Gellatly, 1995) and reflecting organizational dysfunction (Weiss, 1979; Giraud, 1987; Martocchio & Jimeno, 2003). Thus, a lack of support, a low level of perceived equity or commitment, or even the degradation of social relations are factors conducive to higher levels of absenteeism (Eriksen et al., 2004; Josephson et al., 2008). Our research comes within the scope of this predominant paradigm of the *Withdrawal Model*, like management sciences research on absenteeism (Johns et Nicholson, 1982).

1.2. Absenteeism, perceived organizational support and organizational commitment: research hypotheses

Over the last two decades empirical studies have focused their attention on the determinants of workplace absenteeism. In their meta-analysis Harrison et Martocchio (1998) have showed that workplace

absenteeism can be predicted by one's personality (anxiety, emotional instability, aggressiveness, hostility, etc.), demographic data (age, gender, length of service, qualification, etc.), workplace attitudes or behaviors (satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors), social context (culture of absence, job market, social environment, work requirements and resources, etc.) or even job characteristics (decision latitude, task variety, responsibility, etc.). Owing to the great number of predicting variables and their potential interaction, absenteeism appears as a complex phenomenon which is difficult to study. In this study we especially focus on two determinants of absenteeism: the first one, linked with social context, namely perceived organizational support (POS), the second related to workplace attitude, namely organizational commitment (OC).

POS expresses an employee's assessment of the organization's degree of commitment to them (Eisenberger et al., 1986). It is defined as "the way the employee thinks their organization takes account of their efforts, values their personal commitment and contributes to their workplace well-being through human resource decisions and policies that foster the quality of their work environment" (Paillé, 2007: p.350). Designed to better apprehend human behaviors in an organizational context, and more precisely to understand the reasons why an employee commits themselves emotionally to their organization, POS originates in the theory of social exchange (Blau, 1964). In that perspective, behaviors and attitudes favorable to individual performance are explained by the various exchange relationships taking place within these organizations. On this basis, the reciprocity standard is key to the POS concept: only once the employee has assessed what they have received from their organization do they feel or not under an obligation to adopt a number of effective attitudes and behaviors (Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2004). Here the exchange relation is considered in view of the resources granted by the organization to its employees, both material (work condition, appropriate information and instructions, training, compensation, career, etc.) and non-material (ability to listen, support, quality leader-member exchanges, acknowledgement of one's contribution and concern for employee well-being). In this vein, the more an employee perceives that their organization contributes significantly to their workplace quality of life, by offering them resources they value for

the sake of their well-being as much as to help them achieve their work, the more willing they will in turn be to help it by adopting effective organizational attitudes and behaviors favorable to organizational performance.

POS would then prompt employees to feel a moral obligation to the organization that results in a desire for reciprocity (Organ *et al.*, 2006). Among the direct consequences of POS is the development of a trusting relationship between the employees and the organization, which helps generate work performance, work satisfaction, organizational commitment, and reduce voluntary departure, intention to quit one's organization (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2001; Rhoades *et al.*, 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) and absenteeism (Cunningham et MacGregor, 2000, Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). In that sense, Eisenberger *et al.* (1990) show that POS would as much decrease extended leave-equated by literature to involuntary absence since it may reflect a serious condition (Chadwick-Jones *et al.*, 1982)-as frequent absence-equated by literature to voluntary absence that may reflect a workplace demotivation process. The lack of empirical studies probing the link between POS and absenteeism requires more significant investigations in this matter. In view of the theoretical developments we have provided, the following hypotheses may be proposed:

- H1: POS linked negatively with absenteeism;
- H1.a: POS reduces the likelihood of voluntary absenteeism;
- H1.b: POS reduces the likelihood of involuntary absenteeism.

Contrary to POS, organizational commitment (OC) expresses an employee's degree of commitment to their organization. Allen and Meyer's model (1990) thus identifies three components of OC: affective, normative and continuance. Affective organizational commitment (AOC) reflects an employee's desire to stay part of the organization. It expresses an employee's identification with and emotional attachment to their organization. Normative organizational commitment (NOC) reflects an employee's duty to remain a member of their organization. It expresses an employee's moral obligation to stay part of their

organization. Lastly, continuance organizational commitment (COC) reflects an employee's obligation to stay part of the organization. This form of commitment develops when an employee realizes the costs of leaving the organization or when their job opportunities, within or outside the organization, are limited. In that perspective, COC is perceived as a negative component of OC (Woods *et al.*, 2012).

For Hanisch et Hulin (1991), absenteeism would reflect "invisible" attitudes in relation to work, such as dissatisfaction or a low level of OC. Several models thus suggest that high OC would result in low absenteeism (Brooke & Price, 1989; Steers & Rhodes, 1978; Gellatly, 1995; Rosse & Miller, 1984). More specifically, OC would be linked with voluntary absence, indicating a workplace demotivation process, more than with involuntary absence related to a health degradation process: an employee highly committed to their organization is only very seldom supposed to be absent intentionally (Sagie, 1998). However, former researches have only provided mixed results as to these hypotheses (Hackett, 1989; Mayer & Schoorman, 1992; Randall, 1990; Harrison *et al.*, 2006; Mathieu et Zajac, 1990). Thus, Falkenburg & Schnys (2007) do not establish a direct relationship between OC, through the study of its three components, and frequent absenteeism. AOC yet appears as a relevant predictor of absenteeism in several researches (Mathieu et Zajac, 1990). More precisely, the authors show that AOC is linked significantly and negatively with voluntary absenteeism (Burton *et al.*, 2002; Meyer *et al.*, 1993, 2002) or to frequent absenteeism (Somers, 1995; Woods *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, Allen et Meyer (1996) specify that AOC more strongly relates significantly and negatively to voluntary absenteeism than to involuntary absenteeism. Relationships between NOC and absenteeism are more mixed. While some empirical studies have established significant negative links between NOC and voluntary absenteeism (Burton *et al.*, 2002; Meyer, 1997; Hackett *et al.*, 1994), or frequent absenteeism (Woods *et al.*, 2012), other authors have found no relationship between the two constructs (Somers, 1995). As a rule, no significant relationship has been found between COC and absenteeism (Allen et Meyer, 1996; Meyer *et al.*, 1993; Somers, 1995). Woods *et al.* (2012) proved an exception in showing that COC was linked positively with frequent absenteeism. The reason why these outcomes vary is twofold. On the one hand, this is due

to the fact that absenteeism was poorly assessed (and *a fortiori* poorly conceptualized) as the specific methods used to measure absenteeism (frequency vs duration, voluntary vs involuntary absence) may have influenced its relationship with OC (Falkenburg & Schnys, 2007). The other reason is that the three components were not taken into consideration, when Meyer et Allen (1991) pointed out that each of these components might have independent effects on one particular behavior. Hence the need to study the impact of the three components of OC on absenteeism.

In view of those theoretical developments, we consider that employees that are highly committed to their organization due to emotional attachment or a feeling of moral obligation, would be less likely not to attend as they would feel greater motivation to meet their organization's objectives and expectations. That leads us to determine the following assumptions:

- H2. AOC is linked negatively with absenteeism;
- H2.a. AOC reduces the likelihood of voluntary absenteeism;
- H2.b. AOC reduces the likelihood of involuntary absenteeism.
- H3. NOC is linked negatively with absenteeism;
- H3.a. NOC reduces the likelihood of voluntary absenteeism;
- H3.b. NOC reduces the likelihood of involuntary absenteeism.

Like Woods *et al.* (2012), we deem that it is more difficult for people with continuance organizational commitment to quit their organization because of the perceived costs incurred by their leave or the paucity of job opportunities. They will therefore more likely be subject to absenteeism. Hence the following assumptions:

- H4. COC is linked positively with absenteeism;
- H4.a. COC increases the likelihood of voluntary absenteeism;
- H4.b. COC increases the likelihood of involuntary absenteeism.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Data gathering and samples

Data was gathered in November 2017 in the framework of wider research on the analysis of territorial officials' professional situations in France through a questionnaire hosted online. Further to data cleansing, our sample is now made up of 924 respondents, among whom 37.8% of men against 62.2% of women. Around 15.8% of respondents are under the age of 35, 30% are between the ages of 35 and 44 and 54.2% are over 45 years old. Respondents with a civil servant status account for 88.9% of our sample against 11.1% of non-tenured staff. 90.6% of them say that they work full-time and 57.9% work in the administrative sector. 66% of the respondents work in one community while 17.9% work in an agglomeration community. Lastly a majority of respondents work in large communities: 61% in communities of at least 50,000 inhabitants and 16.5% in communities of 20,000 to 49,999 inhabitants.

2.2. Measures and procedures

Here we will present the measures of our independent variables and those of our dependent variable in a differentiated way, absenteeism having been subject to specific procedures.

2.2.1. Independent variables

OC has been measured thanks to the reduced version of the Allen et Meyer (1996) scale, proposed in French by Belghiti-Mahut et Briole (2004). Composed of 18 items (6 items for each component), it permits to better discriminate between the 3 components of OC and satisfactory psychometric properties (Alpha de Cronbach = 0.84). POS is measured by the short version of the Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) scale, proposed by Quenneville, Bentein et Simard (2010), which comprises 5 items (Alpha de Cronbach = 0.91). These two variables have been measured through a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "totally disagree" to 5 = "totally agree".

After checking the quality of the raw data, items with an unsatisfactory factor contribution or poor

representation quality have been removed one by one (*loading* < 0.50). The relevance and assignment of each of the study's construct's statements have been probed through an Exploratory Factor Analysis (extraction method: PCA, rotation method: Varimax). Following those preliminary analyses, the POS scale was reduced to 4 items (*example: my community really cares about my well-being*). The three-component OC scale was confirmed by EFA, reduced to 10 items: 4 for measuring AOC (*example: I feel I fully belong to this community*), 4 items for measuring NOC (*example: I would not leave this community because I feel I owe to the people who work here*) and 2 items for measuring COC (*example: I do not think I have enough alternative opportunities to leave the community*). For the latter, the two retained items relate to limited employment opportunity. The confirmatory factor analysis reveals a very good internal consistency of constructs resulting from the cleansing phase (see table 2 showing each construct's Cronbach alphas in brackets). Finally, having tested the collinearity of the study's variables, as presented in table 3, we can conclude that there is no risk of multicollinearity.

2.2.2. Dependable variable

In academic research absenteeism is measured based on two measures: frequency and absence duration (Steel, 2003). Frequency expresses absence occurrences over a determined period of time, whatever the ground for absence. Duration expresses waste of time, in days or hours, during an employee's absence, whatever the ground for absence (Bouville, 2009). More specifically, frequency is equated with an indirect measure of voluntary absenteeism while absence duration is perceived as an indirect measure of involuntary absenteeism (Sagie, 1998; Chadwick-Jones *et al.*, 1982). As Harrison et Martocchio (1998) point out, most academic research focuses on voluntary absence and leave aside involuntary absence linked with health issues. That results in an erroneous and non-exhaustive understanding of the phenomenon of absenteeism (Brooke, 1986). Moreover, the two measures of absenteeism do not take account of the grounds for absence. That perpetuates the conceptual confusion between absence and absenteeism,

and leads one to assess the voluntary or involuntary character of absenteeism based more on a value judgment than on a reliable analysis of the grounds for absenteeism (Alexanderson, 1998; Brooke & Price, 1989; Johns, 2003; Nicholson, 1977). It is therefore necessary to take into consideration the grounds for absence, on top of the combination of the two measures of frequency and absence duration (Sagie, 1998; Smulders, 1980), to distinguish between the voluntary or involuntary character of absenteeism.

Considering such criticisms, the definition of absenteeism retained in this study (as a reminder, workplace absence due to sickness, regardless of maternity leave) and following authors' recommendations, we have chosen to measure absenteeism through three indicators: frequency, duration and grounds for absence. More specifically:

- Absence frequency (FREQ) counts the number of sickness absence episodes, regardless of maternity leave, over a target period spanning the past 12 months. 5 response types were proposed to respondents (1. No leave; 2. One leave; 3. 2/3 leaves; 4. 4/5 leaves; 5. 6 leaves and more);
- Absence duration (DUR) counts the number of hours of sickness absence, regardless of maternity leave, over a target period spanning the past 12 months. 5 response types were proposed to respondents (1. 0 day; 2. 1/7 days; 3. 8/15 days; 4. 16/29 days; 5. 30 days and more);
- Respondents were also asked about the main ground for the declared absences (GROUND). According to ADRH GCT⁴'s recommendations, 5 response types were proposed to respondents (1. Ordinary sickness; 2. Work/commuting/service-incurred accident; 3. Occupational sickness; 4. Long-term/serious sickness; 5. Long-term periods of absence).

Assumptions 1, 2 and 3 of our study have been tested based on a global measure of absenteeism (GLO_ABS), combining the two indicators of frequency and absence duration. In order to test the sub-assumptions of our study and involve consideration of the grounds for absenteeism, two qualitative variables

4 ADRH GCT (2016), *L'absentéisme dans les collectivités territoriales: mesures et pratiques*, Dossier de Presse.

“ABS” Measure			Measure “ABS_TYP”	
Num. exp.	Condition exp.	Interpretation	Type of absence	Num. exp.
1	If $FREQ = 1$ & $DUR = 1$	Respondents state that they <u>have not been absent</u> → null absenteeism (NULL_ABS)	Null absenteeism (NUL_ABS)	1
2	If $(FREQ \geq 3)$ & $(DUR \geq 2)$ & $(GROUND = 1)$	Respondents declare <u>high-frequency</u> absences (≥ 2 leaves) of <u>at least one day on grounds of ordinary sickness</u> → voluntary absenteeism (VOL_ABS): high frequency associated with short absences expresses voluntary absenteeism (Chadwick-Jones <i>et al.</i> , 1982). We believe that frequent long-lasting absences, revealing of a cumulative type of absenteeism (Bouville, 2009), an appetite for the regular use of absences for ordinary sickness equally reflect a negative attachment to the organization	Attitudinal absenteeism (ATT_ABS)	2
2	If $(FREQ = 2)$ & $(DUR = 2)$ & $(GROUND = 1)$	Respondents declare short (1/7 days) <u>low-frequency</u> (1 leave) absences <u>on grounds of ordinary sickness</u> → voluntary absenteeism (VOL_ABS): Use of absences for ordinary sickness on grounds other than sickness (transport issues, prolonged weekend) or on grounds of sickness that does not imperatively require absence (cold, headache: Dumas, 2005). This classification differs from the next	Punctual absenteeism (PUN_ABS)	3
3	If $(FREQ = 2)$ & $(DUR \geq 3)$ & $(GROUND = 1)$	Respondents declare <u>low-frequency</u> (1 leave), yet <u>long-lasting</u> (≥ 8 days) absences <u>on grounds of ordinary sickness</u> → involuntary absenteeism (INV_ABS): with long-lasting absences on grounds of ordinary sickness that can be proven by established health issues, contrary to short absences on grounds of ordinary sickness (see above)	Sickness Absenteeism (SIC_ABS)	4
3	If $(FREQ \geq 2)$ & $(DUR \geq 2)$ & $(GROUND \geq 2)$	Respondents declare at least one leave of one day minimum on grounds of either <u>work accident, occupational sickness, long-term/serious sickness</u> or <u>long-term periods of absence</u> → involuntary absenteeism (INV_ABS) due to proven health issues	Medical Absenteeism (MED_ABS)	5

Table 1 – Modalities for the establishment of qualitative measures of absenteeism

of absenteeism have also been established. The first qualitative variable (ABS) allows us to distinguish between null, voluntary and involuntary absenteeism. The modalities for the establishment of this variable are explained in table 1. Besides, as Bouville (2009) remarks, voluntary and involuntary absenteeism may conceal several patterns of absenteeism that can be affected differently by specific determinants. Based on this reflection and on Van Thiele *et al.* (2006)'s recommendations that researchers work out new measuring indicators of absenteeism to better discern its patterns, the second qualitative variable of absenteeism, called absenteeism typology (ABS_TYP), determines 5 patterns of absenteeism arising from the first variable of absenteeism (ABS) that we established: null, attitudinal, punctual, sickness and medical absenteeism. This second variable – whose modalities for establishment are also explained in table 1 – has been built according to the same conditional expressions as variable “ABS”, based on the typology proposed by Bouville (2009), albeit modified to take account of grounds for absenteeism. Data on absenteeism was obtained on the basis of self-declaration. This method is viewed as a suitable measure of absenteeism since authors show moderate correlations between self-declaration and data collection methods based on the organization’s sources (Johns, 1994; Sagie, 1998).

3. RESEARCH OUTCOMES

We will present our outcomes by distinguishing between the analysis of global absenteeism and that of the various types of absenteeism involved in this study.

3.1. Outcomes relating to global absenteeism

Descriptive statistics and correlations between study variables can be found in table 2. First and foremost, special attention should be paid to the analysis of the descriptive statistics of the study independent variables. As a matter of fact, the arithmetic average values show a level of organizational, affective and continuance commitment superior to the theoretical average value, which amounts to 3 for a Likert 5-point scale. Conversely the POS and NOC average values are inferior to the theoretical average. That could mislead us into concluding, on the one hand, that respondents would globally be committed to their organization in an affective and continuance manner, and on the other, that they would not acknowledge the presence of organizational support and that they would not globally be committed normatively to their organization. Indeed, if we compare each variable’s arithmetic average values to their mean values, measures which are not as much affected by extreme values, we can notice that the arithmetic average values of POS, AOC and NOC are inferior to their mean values. Hence the following conclusions: overall territorial officials would have a rather low POS perception as well as a moderate level of affective and normative organization commitment. However, they globally show continuance organizational commitment.

Variables	Average	DS	1	2	3	4	5
1. GLO_ABS	1,70	,904	(,827)				
2. POS	2,86	,974	-,146**	(,920)			
3. AOC	3,36	,803	-,083*	,359**	(,738)		
4. COC	3,13	1,051	,130**	-,285**	-,147**	(,836)	
5. NOC	2,45	,791	-,034	,319**	,379**	-,127**	(,736)

N = 781, for any incomplete observation **p < 0.01 *p < 0.05

Table 2 – Descriptive statistics and correlations between variables

Significant negative relationships appear between absenteeism and, respectively, POS and AOC. Thus, the more people perceive organizational support provided to them or the more affectively they are committed to their organization, the less they will tend to manifest absenteeism (H1 and H2 validated). Absenteeism and COC are significantly and positively correlated (H4 validated): the more calculated people’s commitment to their organization, the more likely they are to be subject to absenteeism. No significant relationship has been found between absenteeism and NOC (H3 not validated). The outcomes of multiple regression (table 3) confirms the meaning of previously established correlations. Nevertheless, they highlight that POS and COC appear as relevant predictive variables of absenteeism in the territorial civil service.

Yet the first relationships highlighted between the study variables should be probed further. Indeed, correlation and multiple regression analyses concern the global measure of absenteeism (Somers, 1995), which can affect the specific impact of the determinants of our study on the various phenomena of absenteeism. In order to isolate the effects specific to our explanatory variables on the various types of absenteeism determined in our study, we have used multinomial logistic regression to pursue the analysis of our data (main effect method). The latter permits to characterize the relationships between a dependent (qualitative) variable and several independent variables, in showing how the latter variables may or may not influence the occurrence of the former. Since relationships between the variables arising from multinomial logistic regression are not meant to demonstrate causal relations, we will use such terms as “influence” or “association” to designate these relationships.

3.2. Outcomes relating to various types of absenteeism

Our sample shows a relative balance between the number of non-absent (53%) and absent (47%) employees. Among absent staff punctual absenteeism is the most significant (23.7%), followed by medical (9.2%), attitudinal (8.5%) absenteeism and that due to sickness (5.6%). In order to study the effects of each of our study variables, we have performed a multinomial regression analysis, first in the reference framework of null absenteeism (tables 4 and 5), and then in that of involuntary absenteeism, more precisely medical absenteeism (tables 6 et 7).

No association has been found between AOC and involuntary absenteeism (H2b invalidated) or null absenteeism. However, when null absenteeism is taken as a reference framework, outcomes underline that AOC appears as a protective factor for voluntary absenteeism in reducing the likelihood of its occurrence. Nonetheless, this association is not confirmed when involuntary absenteeism is taken as a reference framework. In addition to the fact that no association has been found between AOC and our study’s two types of voluntary absenteeism, those outcomes are a sign that AOC would have more of a moderating effect between voluntary absenteeism and organizational determinants undermining workplace motivation. As a result, assumption H2a is only partially validated.

Similarly, no association has been found between NOC and null, voluntary and involuntary absenteeism, respectively. Yet, our outcomes show that NOC would, on the one hand, be a risk factor for a specific form of voluntary absenteeism, that is attitudinal

Variables ^a	Bêta	Sig.	Collinearity stat.	
			Tolerance	VIF
POS	-,114	,004	,783	1,277
AOC	-,038	,333	,792	1,263
COC	,095	,010	,916	1,092
NOC	,029	,464	,817	1,224

^a Dependent variable: GLO_ABS

Table 3 – Outcome from multiple linear regression

absenteeism, and on the other hand, a protective factor for a specific form of involuntary absenteeism, namely sickness absenteeism.

NOC would thus increase the likelihood of attitudinal absenteeism occurring and would reduce the likelihood of sickness absenteeism occurring. These outcomes suggest that NOC would play more of a moderating role between absenteeism and organizational or individual determinants, undermining motivation

as much as ability to attend work. Consequently, assumptions H3a and H3b are invalidated.

We have found a significant negative association between POS and involuntary absenteeism. POS would be a protective factor for involuntary absenteeism in reducing the latter's likelihood of occurring, more specifically the probability of medical-type absenteeism (H1b validated). Furthermore, the outcomes show that POS would increase the probability of null

ABS ^a	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% CC for Exp (B)		
				Lower bound	Upper bound	
VOL_ABS	POS	-,041	,672	,960	,795	1,160
	AOC	-,242	,036	,785	,626	,984
	COC	,111	,175	1,118	,952	1,313
	NOC	,113	,328	1,120	,893	1,404
INV_ABS	POS	-,395	,002	,674	,527	,862
	AOC	-,009	,951	,991	,739	1,329
	COC	,311	,005	1,364	1,097	1,696
	NOC	,068	,653	1,071	,795	1,441

^a Reference framework: NULL_ABS N = 754 for any incomplete observation

Table 4 – Outcomes from multinomial logistic regression – "ABS" variable – Null absenteeism as a reference framework

TYP ^a _ABS	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% CC pour Exp(B)		
				Lower bound	Upper bound	
ATT_ABS	Avg._POS	-,094	,553	,910	,667	1,242
	Avg._AOC	-,338	,072	,713	,494	1,030
	Avg._COC	,181	,186	1,199	,916	1,568
	Avg._NOC	,389	,035	1,476	1,028	2,119
PUN_ABS	Avg._POS	-,021	,843	,979	,794	1,207
	Avg._AOC	-,208	,101	,812	,633	1,042
	Avg._COC	,088	,332	1,092	,914	1,303
	Avg._NOC	,012	,926	1,012	,786	1,304
SIC_ABS	Avg._POS	-,272	,147	,762	,528	1,100
	Avg._AOC	,108	,632	1,114	,716	1,733
	Avg._COC	,127	,430	1,135	,829	1,555
	Avg._NOC	-,296	,220	,744	,463	1,194
MED_ABS	Avg._POS	-,464	,002	,629	,466	,849
	Avg._AOC	-,080	,654	,923	,649	1,312
	Avg._COC	,431	,002	1,540	1,172	2,022
	Avg._NOC	,275	,126	1,316	,926	1,871

^a Reference framework: NULL_ABS N = 754 for any incomplete observation

Table 5 – "ABS_TYP" variable – Null absenteeism as a reference framework

absenteeism as well as voluntary absenteeism occurring, more specifically the likelihood of a punctual type of absenteeism (H1a not validated). However, when we examine the strength of associations between these variables, we can notice that if individuals could choose between null absenteeism and a punctual type of voluntary absenteeism, POS would favor the

probability of null absenteeism occurring more than that of a punctual type of voluntary absenteeism.

Eventually, the outcomes show COC positively influences involuntary absenteeism. COC appears as a risk factor for involuntary absenteeism in increasing the latter's likelihood of occurring, more specifically of medical-type absenteeism (H4b validated). On

ABS ^a	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% CC for Exp(B)		
				Lower bound	Upper bound	
NULL_ABS	Avg._POS	,395	,002	1,484	1,160	1,899
	Avg._AOC	,009	,951	1,009	,753	1,353
	Avg._COC	-,311	,005	,733	,590	,911
	Avg._NOC	-,068	,653	,934	,694	1,257
VOL_ABS	Avg._POS	,354	,008	1,425	1,096	1,851
	Avg._AOC	-,233	,141	,792	,581	1,080
	Avg._COC	-,199	,090	,819	,651	1,032
	Avg._NOC	,045	,780	1,046	,764	1,431

^a Reference framework: INV_ABS N = 754 for any incomplete observation

Table 6 – Outcomes from multinomial logistic regression – "ABS" measure – Involuntary absenteeism as a reference framework

TYP ^a _ABS	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% CC for Exp(B)		
				Lower bound	Upper bound	
NULL_ABS	Avg._POS	,464	,002	1,591	1,178	2,147
	Avg._AOC	,080	,654	1,084	,762	1,541
	Avg._COC	-,431	,002	,650	,495	,853
	Avg._NOC	-,275	,126	,760	,535	1,080
ATT_ABS	Avg._POS	,370	,067	1,448	,975	2,152
	Avg._AOC	-,258	,276	,773	,486	1,228
	Avg._COC	-,250	,165	,779	,547	1,109
	Avg._NOC	,115	,623	1,121	,710	1,771
PUN_ABS	Avg._POS	,443	,008	1,557	1,125	2,156
	Avg._AOC	-,128	,509	,880	,602	1,287
	Avg._COC	-,344	,021	,709	,529	,950
	Avg._NOC	-,263	,178	,769	,525	1,127
SIC_ABS	Avg._POS	,192	,394	1,212	,779	1,887
	Avg._AOC	,188	,482	1,207	,714	2,041
	Avg._COC	-,305	,126	,737	,499	1,090
	Avg._NOC	-,571	,043	,565	,325	,981

^a Reference framework: ABS_MED N = 754 for any incomplete observation

Table 7 – Outcomes from multinomial logistic regression – "ABS_TYP" measure – Medical absenteeism as a reference framework

the opposite, COC would reduce the likelihood of null absenteeism as much as that of voluntary absenteeism, more specifically of a punctual type of absenteeism (H4a not validated). When we examine the strength of associations between these variables, we can see that if individuals could choose between null absenteeism and a punctual type of voluntary absenteeism, COC would reduce the probability of a punctual type of voluntary absenteeism more than that of null absenteeism.

4. DISCUSSION

Although many researches have looked into the causes of absenteeism, no empirical study has yet dealt with this phenomenon in the local public sector. In bridging this gap this research is our first contribution to literature.

More specifically, from a methodological viewpoint our research significantly stresses the need for more robust analyses of absenteeism based on multinomial logistic regression in order to study the specific impact of each determinant on the various types of absenteeism and better apprehend this phenomenon (Steel, 2003; Harrison & Martocchio, 1998). Innovative managerial practices could then be implemented on a territorial scale to mitigate growing absenteeism, some of whose determinants are of an organizational nature and intrinsically linked with HRM, as our study has showed. Indeed, our study demonstrates that the two predictive variables of absenteeism are POS and COC in the specific context of the territorial civil service.

4.1. *Perceived organizational support: a potential lever for the fight against absenteeism*

In accordance with previous works (Cunningham et MacGregor, 2000; Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986), POS has a significant negative relationship with absenteeism: the more a territorial agent believes that their community contributes to the quality of their work environment, that it cares about their well-being and values their efforts by providing them with valuable material and immaterial resources, the less counterproductive

behaviors, such as absenteeism, they demonstrate. These outcomes thus improve research by bringing empirical support to the few studies that probe the relationship between POS and absenteeism. More specifically, it confirms Eisenberger *et al.* (1990)'s works by establishing that POS would reduce the likelihood of medical-type involuntary absenteeism. They provide a significant theoretical contribution in stressing that POS would increase the probability of null absenteeism at the expense of punctual-voluntary absenteeism. POS therefore appears as a work resource for want of which withdrawal behaviors can be impacted (Demourouti & al., 2001a). For one thing, it could fight against punctual absenteeism qualified by Gallois (2009: 21) as “*disorganizing absenteeism*” owing to the microdysfunctions it causes in the organization: non-replacement of absent people due to their short absence, heavier workload for non-absent people, challenging of public service continuity and quality. In that sense, POS appears as a resource that maintains motivation to attend work (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003; Wayne *et al.*, 2002). On the other hand, it permits to combat medical absenteeism and thus appears as a resource protective of the health deterioration process in the workplace, which also maintains ability to attend work.

Punctual and medical absenteeism being our sample's two prevailing types of absenteeism, immediately following null absenteeism, POS then becomes a challenge rather than a necessity for territorial collectivities. In that sense, several authors suggest that workers' perception of their organizations' commitment to them is contingent upon proximity managers' HRM practices (Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Rhodes & Eisenberger, 2002). Through their particular position in the work process, the latter are in a better position to provide help, whether tangible or not, to their teams so that they may cope with workplace difficulties (Georges *et al.*, 1993). On this basis, the quality of interactions between the proximity manager and their teams would contribute to workers' perception of their organization's support (Wayne *et al.*, 2002).

In the context of unprecedented change confronting territorial communities and in the face of territorial officials' growing unease and absenteeism, our outcomes bring a significant managerial contribution in showing that POS can act as a potential lever for the fight against absenteeism in the territorial civil

service. From a practical viewpoint, they point at the need to rethink relational management in the context of territorial change: the need for managerial sense-making to provide officials with the means to understand change and lift uncertainties and resistance to change, for management based on valorizing the benefits of change rather than stressing its constraints, for management consistency by offering officials the necessary means to adjust to change through effective HR tools and schemes; the need for participative management to enhance the quality of manager-subordinate exchanges so as to inspire relational dynamics driven by confidence rather than mistrust (Chomienne & Pupion, 2009; Bartoli & Chomienne, 2007; Mahe de Boislandelle & Brute de Remur, 2009). In this vein, future researches would gain from studying the combined effects of POS, organizational support and “leader-member” relational quality on absenteeism in the territorial public context.

4.2. Risks of continuance organizational commitment for absenteeism

The outcomes of our research also establish a significant positive relationship between COC and absenteeism. They increase existing research as no link between the two constructs has ever been found (Allen & Meyer, 1996; Somers, 1995, except for the works of Woods *et al.* (2012)). Our research outcomes support the authors’: the more committed one is to one’s organization in a continuance way, due to the perceived costs associated with one’s departure from the organization or limited job opportunities, the more inclined one will be to be absent. As a matter of fact, someone with a COC can only stay in their organization. They will then use absenteeism as a withdrawal solution helping them put up with the obligation to remain in their organization (Woods *et al.*, 2012). Here our outcomes bring a significant theoretical contribution in establishing that COC would reduce the likelihood of a punctual type of voluntary absenteeism occurring and would increase the probability of a medical type of involuntary absenteeism.

Our measuring scale for COC comprising only items relating to absence of job opportunities, these results would suggest that limited job opportunities in the territorial civil service would act as a deterrent of

voluntary absenteeism (Scoopa, 2010). Indeed, the existence of a career system, on one side, makes competitive exams a necessary condition to access the civil service, and on the other, offers opportunities for internal vertical mobility or advancement to a higher grade that are limited and dependent on examination of territorial officials’ behaviors. In that sense, contract agents, like civil servants, are less prone to be absent intentionally so as to reduce the risk of dismissal or the likelihood of penalties in terms of career development. Those might urge them to opt for workplace presenteeism; for example, a worker would decide to go to work although their health condition, whether physical or mental, would require a sickness leave (Johns, 2010). In other words, presenteeism amounts to “*renouncing days of absence due to sickness*” (Huver, 2013). In the long term this type of behavior would result in individuals’ effective health deterioration (Johns, 2010), so that people who are committed in a continuance way would indeed likelier be subject to medical-type involuntary absenteeism.

In this vein, generalizing performance-based compensation founded on merit in the territorial civil service or salary adjustment mechanisms such as financial incentives to attend or penalties for absence would have a counterproductive effect on territorial officials’ absenteeism (Sagie, 1998; Falkenburg & Schyns, 2007). Thus, they would reinforce their COC and its adverse impact on absenteeism by contributing to absenteeism linked with agents’ health deterioration, on the one hand, and by causing negative workplace attitudes based on opportunistic judgments, on the other. That could but reduce the emergence of positive attitudes linked with emotional attachment and loyalty to one’s organization, which are yet necessary to combat absenteeism. Those observations encourage future research to investigate relationships between COC, presenteeism, HRM practices and absenteeism, in order to support the outcomes and reflections of this study. Moreover, they suggest that in the fight against absenteeism the territorial civil service would gain from implementing ethical HRM practice that puts the premium on creating a rewarding and positive work environment, in which territorial officials would feel that they are supported by their organization and could commit themselves in an affective and normative way (Woods *et al.*, 2012; Bartoli *et al.*, 2011; Emery *et al.*, 2012).

4.3. Absenteeism: evidence of territorial officials' disaffection with their workplace?

This reflection is supported by the fact that despite a significant negative relationship between AOC and absenteeism, the former does not appear to be a relevant predictor of this phenomenon in the territorial civil service, nor does NOC. The latter result could be accounted for by the outcomes of multinomial logistic regression, which have led us to assume, like several authors (Somers, 1995; Falkenburg & Schyns, 2007), that these two components of OC could play a moderating role between organizational determinants and absenteeism. Future research should follow this direction.

However, our research brings a significant theoretical contribution regarding the links between NOC and absenteeism, there being few empirical data available on the relationship between NOC and absenteeism. As a matter of fact, counter-intuitively and contrary to former research stressing a significant negative relationship between NOC and voluntary absenteeism (Burton *et al.*, 2002; Meyer, 1997; Hackett *et al.*, 1994), our research outcomes prove that people who are committed normatively to their organization would likelier demonstrate attitudinal voluntary absenteeism. As NOC reflects workers' moral obligation towards their organization, these outcomes could be explained by the territorial public context.

Indeed, in a changing context people who are committed to their organization expect it to provide help, support and protection in return for their commitment (Huver, 2013). Following such reasoning, someone with a degraded NOC and perception of organizational support and of their work environment would view their organization's moral obligations to them negatively. That would undermine the psychological contract according to which the worker and their organization have mutual expectations and obligations (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998). In this vein, people who are committed normatively to their organization could voluntarily use absenteeism as a withdrawal solution to counterbalance their employer's breach of moral obligations (Huver, 2013).

On the one hand, these outcomes encourage future researchers to investigate the moderating effect of

NOC on the relationship between POS and absenteeism. On the other hand, in line with the conclusions drawn from the analysis of our study's descriptive statistics, they suggest that territorial officials' absenteeism could be the sign that AOC and NOC are running out of steam in the territorial civil service, to the advantage of continuance commitment conducive to absenteeism.

Added on to the fact that voluntary absenteeism is more significant than involuntary absenteeism in our sample, the research outcomes suggest that absenteeism in the territorial civil service could be evidence of territorial officials' "disaffection" with their workplace and of the emergence of *calculated absenteeism* (Johns et Nicholson, 1982). From a practical viewpoint, they stress the need to renew efforts to "provide a link" in the daily management of territorial officials, an action inherent to human resource management, (Thévenet & Vachette, 1992; Thévenet, 2009), while warning local public managers against the negative effects of retributive practices used by policies against absenteeism. Future research should examine more closely the reasons why territorial officials show less attachment, moral obligation and reciprocity to their organization. That would further enhance the understanding of how POS and OC influence absenteeism in the territorial civil service.

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