

LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTIONS OF SUBORDINATE ABSENTEEISM

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(ABSTRACT)

The present research examined whether the attributions a supervisor makes in response to subordinate absenteeism are influenced by a subordinate's prior absence history, the nature of the subordinate's excuse, and the outcomes of the absence episode. In addition, this study investigated the effects these absence variables have on supervisors' selection of both appropriate absence labels (excused vs. unexcused), and the type of disciplinary action taken. 160 psychology students and 85 MBA candidates from a large Southeastern university were given a scenario describing a hypothetical absence episode, and completed a questionnaire pertaining to the dependent measures above. Results of multivariate analyses of variance conducted on measures of attributions, absence labels, and disciplinary actions supported the hypotheses that (a) prior absence histories based on a high frequency of absences and subordinate excuses for absences due to visiting friends will result in more internal

attributions, unexcused absence labels, and more severe forms of disciplinary action taken by the supervisor; while (b) prior absence histories based on a low frequency of absences and subordinate excuses due to a child's accident will result in external attributions, excused absence labels, and less severe forms of disciplinary action. The consequences of absenteeism did not have an effect on subjects' attributions, and only marginally influenced subjects' absence labels and sanction decisions. Results of regression analyses also supported the hypotheses that the type of attribution a supervisor makes will directly influence the chosen absence label, and the absence label will, in turn, influence the type of disciplinary action taken. Implications of the study's findings for future absence research are discussed.

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# Leadership Attributions of Subordinate Absenteeism

## Introduction

Research in the area of absenteeism has been concerned predominantly with various antecedents of absence behavior (cf. Fitzgibbons & Moch, 1980; Porter & Steers, 1973; Steers & Rhodes, 1978; Johns, 1978). The majority of studies on absenteeism have examined absence behavior as a function of such individual characteristics as age/tenure (Muchinsky, 1977; Chadwick- Jones, Nicholson, & Brown, 1982), job satisfaction (Chadwick-Jones et al., 1982; Waters & Roach, 1971; Scott & Taylor, 1985; Fitzgibbons & Moch, 1980; Nicholson, Brown, & Chadwick-Jones, 1976), organizational commitment (Steers, 1977; Smith, 1977), and prior absence histories (Breugh, 1981; Keller, 1983). While a great number of studies in the absence literature have focused attention upon such "predictor" variables, fewer studies have directed their research efforts towards the consequences of absenteeism (exceptions include Morgan & Herman, 1976; Burke & Wilcox, 1972).

One important outcome of absence behavior is the evaluation of the absence made by the supervisor and his or her subsequent response. Such evaluations determine partially the supervisor's response to subordinate absence (Johns & Nicholson, 1982). Absences labeled as excused/involuntary, or due to factors outside of the absent worker should lead to a different response than absences viewed as unexcused/voluntary, or due to factors within the worker (e.g., low motivation). Along these lines, Green and Mitchell (1979) have proposed a model of leader attributions and subsequent responses to poor performing subordinates. More

specifically, the supervisor first determines what "caused" a subordinate's performance at work (e.g., the supervisor makes an attribution), and then uses this causal attribution to aid in the selection of an appropriate disciplinary action (Green & Mitchell, 1979).

In the present study, the assumptions of the Green and Mitchell (1979) model of leader attributions are applied to subordinate absence behavior. The effects of three characteristics of the absence event (prior history, nature of the offered excuse, and consequences of the absence) on three outcomes are investigated. These outcomes are (1) attributed locus of behavior (internal vs. external), (2) whether or not absence is excused, and (3) the supervisor's choice of punitive responses. Thus, the purpose of this research is to discuss the consequences or outcomes of subordinate absenteeism as expressed in the form of attributions, labels, and behavioral responses made by a supervisor.

Initially, it is presumed that whether a supervisor considers a worker's absence to be voluntary or involuntary will affect the leader's attributions, labels, and responses made to the particular absence episode. Thus, a brief discussion of the factors said to influence the distinction between voluntary and involuntary absenteeism is to follow.

#### Literature Review

##### Absence Categorization: A review

Steers and Rhodes (1978) formulated a process model of attendance behavior based on the assumption that attendance is directly influenced by two primary factors: attendance motivation and ability to come to work. In general, attendance motivation represents an employee's voluntary ef-

forts to attend work. Moreover, such "voluntary" attendance is assumed to be influenced by an employee's affective responses to the job situation (e.g., satisfaction) and various internal and external pressures to attend (e.g., Organizational commitment and incentives). Job satisfaction is a function of such variables as job scope, job level, role stress, work group size, leader style, co-worker relations, and opportunities for advancement. Involuntary absenteeism is presumed to be affected by one's ability to come to work. In turn, the ability to attend work is situationally constrained by illness and accidents, family responsibilities, and transportation problems.

Steers and Rhodes (1978) posit that variables affecting an employee's ability to attend work constitute those instances where absenteeism may be considered involuntary, and thus ought to be excused by the supervisor. According to these investigators, much research in the area of absenteeism has failed to consider (and partial out) involuntary absenteeism in the study of voluntary absenteeism. Steers and Rhodes (1978) assert that:

"If we are serious about studying absenteeism, a clear distinction must be made between voluntary and involuntary attendance behavior, and both must be necessarily accounted for in model-building efforts" (p.400).

The merit of Steers and Rhodes' (1978) proposed model of employee attendance lies within their distinctions between voluntary and involuntary absenteeism. As previously stated, Steers and Rhodes' (1978) primary determinant of "voluntary" attendance is the subordinate's attendance motivation. In turn, attendance motivation is directly affected by the worker's satisfaction with the job and various internal and external pressures to attend. On the other hand, involuntary absenteeism

is said to be influenced by one's ability to attend (Steers & Rhodes, 1978). This division of absenteeism into voluntary and involuntary components is important for understanding managerial attributions because, managers also often translate a subordinate's absence event into either voluntary or involuntary categories.

This distinction is quite relevant to the research at hand because the attributions, labels, and behavioral responses a supervisor makes in reaction to subordinate absenteeism is predicted to be a function of the nature of the absence event. In other words, differential leadership attributions and responses will result from the leader's perception of the voluntary nature of a particular absence event. This latter notion of absence perceptions can be viewed as arising from the division of absenteeism into voluntary/ involuntary components. Further, such (non)motivational distinctions are partially determined by how one measures absenteeism. That is, managers and researchers alike, come to view absences as voluntary or involuntary by referring to certain absence indices. Thus, this necessary separation of absenteeism into voluntary and involuntary components leads to the subsequent discussion of absence measures, and their effect upon this voluntary/involuntary distinction.

Central to research presented in this paper is the distinction between voluntary and involuntary absenteeism. Hammer and Landau (1981) and Steers and Rhodes (1978) claim that voluntary absences are a function of the worker's motivation to attend. Involuntary absence results from the inability rather than the unwillingness to come to work. Thus, it is initially assumed that voluntary absences (as perceived by the supervisor) will likely be considered unexcused while involuntary absences will

likely be excused. Furthermore, such differential absence labels should result in differential responses to subordinate absenteeism.

The evidence seen in the absenteeism literature regarding the above two types of absenteeism is derived from the measurement and validation of absenteeism in various organizations. It appears that the three predominant (but not necessarily the only) indices of absenteeism--frequency, short-term or attitudinal, and time-lost--have been used to make the voluntary/involuntary distinction (cf. Huse & Taylor, 1962; Chadwick-Jones et al., 1971; 1982; Nicholson et al., 1976).

In general, the frequency index (FI), which measures the total number of times absent in a year (regardless of duration), and the short-term index (or attitudinal index; STI or AI), which measures the frequency of 1-and 2-day absences in a year, is presumed to be primarily associated with voluntary absences (Chadwick-Jones et al., 1982). On the other hand, the time-lost index (TLI), which measures the total number of working days lost in a year for any reason other than leave, is assumed to measure long-term sickness absences which are theoretically involuntary in nature (Chadwick-Jones et al., 1982).

Using these differences in measures, some researchers have examined antecedents and correlates of different types of absenteeism. Generally, these studies reflect the motivation/ability distinction between voluntary and involuntary absenteeism. For example, Chadwick-Jones, Nicholson, and Brown (1982) conducted a massive investigation of 6,411 employees in six industries comprising a total of 21 organizations. They found that blue-collar workers had higher rates of long duration absences and fewer short-term absences (as indicated by much higher levels of time-lost over frequency or short-term measures). However, white-collar



workers (e.g., employees of banks and hospitals) had higher rates of short-term absences.

Further, Chadwick-Jones et al. (1982) also propose that an employee's choice to come to work is more likely to play a role in absenteeism when the absence period is brief than when it is of a longer duration. They assert that:

"The length of any particular absence bears a strong relationship to the chosen/unchosen distinction. Absences that are "unchosen" tend to be caused by serious illness that result in longer-term absences: illness that remove the potential operation of choice is unlikely to be brief " (Chadwick-Jones et al., 1982, p.56).

Behrend (1974), who conducted a one year study of absenteeism at an automotive manufacturing plant, reported that of all workdays comprising the time-lost total, 70 percent were due to certificated sickness; but when the absences were computed by frequencies of absences, it was found that 77 percent of total absences were uncertificated. Thus, Behrend concluded that the analysis by frequency "reduces the sickness bias and thus produces a better picture of the incidence of attitudinal factors in absenteeism..."(p.8).

Huse and Taylor (1962) devised a measure of absenteeism which they named the Attitudinal index. Renamed the Short-term Index by Chadwick-Jones et al. (1982), this measure specifically includes only those absences of one or two days duration. Frogatt (1970a; 1970b) argued that these brief absences are "essentially voluntary", and provided evidence which demonstrated that one-day absences correlated with lateness and with the number of two-day absences, but never with longer-term sickness (over three days' duration). Two-day absences, on the other hand, not only correlated with the number of one-day absences but also with longer-term

sickness. This finding seemed to reveal a pattern whereby one-day absences were more voluntary, whereas two-day absences had a greater sickness component (Chadwick-Jones et al., 1982).

Further support for the notion that motivational biases are often inherent in certain absence measures is provided by Chadwick-Jones et al. (1982). In a field setting, these investigators showed that the short-term index correlated very highly with another attitudinal index, namely, the "worst day index" (Argyle, Gardner, & Cioffi, 1958). Specifically, by measuring the difference between the total absence rate on the "worst" (highest) and "best" (lowest) days of the week, the WDI also assumes that if absences vary cyclically, a demonstration of voluntary absenteeism may be in effect. The authors concluded that such an intercorrelation between the STI and WDI confirms a pattern of "chosen" (e.g., voluntary) absences, with the WDI confirming the deliberate, systematic nature of such absences.

In summary, these studies offer evidence suggesting that voluntary absenteeism, as measured by frequency and short-term indices, is based on motivational antecedents while involuntary absence, measured by time-lost, is a function of ability to attend work. Other researchers, however, have questioned the preciseness of these distinctions (Hammer & Landau, 1981; Clegg, 1983; Smulders, 1980). For example, the medical notion of physical incapacity, considering an incapacitating disease as outside the realm of choice behavior, is questionable because certain illnesses are psychosomatic and minor accidents may be "chosen", especially in terms of their timing, as a means of withdrawal (Hill & Trist, 1955; 1962). Furthermore, in the case of illness, persons may decide that their physical state is such that they cannot attend work, and subse-

quently they seek a medical certificate to legitimize their decision (Chadwick-Jones et al., 1982).

Hammer and Landau (1981) state that the obvious problem with a direct translation of frequency of absence into voluntary withdrawal and of time-lost into involuntary absenteeism is that a frequency index will undoubtedly contain a number of involuntary absences, and a time-lost index will be contaminated by voluntary withdrawal. In addition, these investigators assert that some "voluntary" absences are necessary (e.g., when the psychological strain of work is unbearable, and an otherwise perfectly healthy person stays home in self-defense), while other "involuntary" absences are unnecessary (e.g., when workers at their discretion define a slight cold as an illness and stay home), respectively. Therefore, Hammer and Landau (1981) conclude that short-term absences can take any of four forms: (a) unnecessary voluntary withdrawal, (b) necessary voluntary withdrawal, (c) unnecessary involuntary withdrawal, and (d) necessary involuntary withdrawal. Thus, these additional types of absence events make the alleged link between short-term absences and voluntary withdrawal problematic.

Smulders (1980) also questions the assumption that sickness absences are fully beyond the control of the individual. He claims that along with the severity of illness, external factors--such as attitudes and opinions of medical advisors, and sickness benefits from the job situation, determine whether or not an employee delays or initiates and continues playing the sick role.

Similarly, Chadwick-Jones et al. (1982) argue that not all short-term absences are chosen, nor are all long-term absences unchosen. In certain circumstances brief, unavoidable spells of sickness may occur--

during, for example, an influenza epidemic. Conversely, some long-term absences spells may result from choice, where (as mentioned above) a formal certificate of illness has been obtained spuriously.

Johns and Nicholson (1982) continue this argument, stating that qualitative absence indices are frequently unreliable (Ilgen, 1977; Latham & Purcell, 1975), culture-bound, and arbitrary (Smulders, 1980). In addition, Johns and Nicholson (1982) assert that absence labels (e.g., unexcused/excused, voluntary/involuntary), and even more objective absence criteria such as frequency and time-lost, impute motives and/or "smuggle in" causal attributions, thereby making the voluntary/involuntary distinction a perceptual phenomena.

Chadwick-Jones et al. (1982) and Smulders (1980) emphasize the importance of the long-term/short-term distinction of absenteeism for measurement purposes. This study attempts to expand on this notion by proposing that as leaders, managers also process absence cues (e.g., long-term or short-term absences) in order to assess the voluntary/involuntary nature of subordinate absenteeism (cf. Johns & Nicholson, 1982). However, it is also predicted that leadership attributions mediate this chain of information processing. This will be elaborated on later in the paper. Thus, the supervisor's notion of subordinate controllability and intentionality may reveal more about the causal dynamics of absenteeism than mere voluntary/involuntary distinctions.

To summarize, while Chadwick-Jones et al. (1982) provide convincing arguments for a voluntary/involuntary distinction, based on frequency versus time-lost, the works of Hammer and Landau (1981), Smulders (1980), and Johns and Nicholson (1982) point to the arbitrariness of such distinctions based on absence measures. The view of the present study is that

such distinctions between absences are heavily influenced by the leader's perception of the absence behavior. This perception is partially distorted by the frequency with which a subordinate fails to attend work. Previous research mentioned above lends support for the notion that frequency indices of absenteeism reveal characteristic patterns of motivational absences. Furthermore, motivational absences necessarily imply a choice or decision to be made on behalf of the subordinate not to attend work. It is proposed that this leadership perception of subordinate absenteeism as one involving a voluntary decision to attend leads the supervisor to distinguish between the causes for a subordinate's absence. Whether an absence event is viewed as involuntary (and hence unexcused) or voluntary (and hence excused) may depend upon the causal explanation, or attribution, a manager affixes to the behavior. Therefore, a discussion of attribution theory and its relationship to the field of absenteeism is to follow. Special emphasis will be placed on the role of the supervisor's causal understanding of subordinate behavior, namely absenteeism.

#### Attribution Theory: An Overview

Jones and Davis' (1965) theory of correspondent inferences attempts to explain a perceiver's inferences about what another individual is trying to do by performing a given action (Shaw & Costanzo, 1982). Jones and McGillis (1976) claim that correspondent inference theory is mainly concerned with the "perception of personal attributes". In the same vein, Shaw and Costanzo (1982) point out that this theory of attribution deals much more with dispositional inferences rather than attributions to circumstances of one's environment. Specifically, Jones and McGillis (1976)

posit that "people who are not constrained physically or socially will attempt to achieve desirable consequences by their behavior. Therefore, when the actor has behavioral freedom, we should be able to infer his intentions from the consequences or effects of his behavior" (p.390). This theorem assumes that the actor had the knowledge and abilities such that the outcomes in question would result from his behavior. Thus, knowledge and ability are preconditions for the attribution of intention. If both knowledge of consequences and ability to produce them are in effect, intentions are attributed to the behavior of the actor and are then used to infer stable dispositions (Shaw & Costanzo, 1982).

The theory of correspondent inferences becomes much more complicated by the fact that a given act invariably has multiple consequences (Jones & McGillis, 1976). Furthermore, behavioral freedom implies that the actor has a number of alternatives to select from when behaving. Here, common effects are the chosen and foregone effects of one's alternatives which are the same. Since these effects do not provide a discriminating reason for choice, common effects are generally regarded as uninformative. However, noncommon effects --those effects produced by actions which would not have occurred if the actor had chosen any other alternative action--provide the information necessary to infer intentions of an actor's behavior (Shaw & Costanzo, 1982). Jones and McGillis (1976) claim that a dispositional inference is correspondent to the extent that an act and the disposition are similarly described by the inference. Jones and McGillis define a correspondent inference in the following manner: "Given an attribute-effect linkage which is offered to explain why an act occurred, correspondence refers to the degree of information gained regarding the probability or strength of the attribute" (p.391). Thus, the

attribution of a disposition or trait on the basis of a given action implies that the action departs from one's prior expectations concerning people in general or this particular actor. Lastly, Shaw and Costanzo (1982) briefly summarized two important aspects of the inference process.

First, multiple effects are not equally desirable for the actor. Jones and Davis (1965) used valences ranging from -1 to +1 to describe the desirability of multiple effects. Specifically, "the probability of any given effect being the actor's goal varies directly with the assumed desirability of the effect and inversely with the number of other positive effects produced by the action. The attribution of intention reflects some combination of assumed desirability and number of noncommon effects" (Shaw & Costanzo, 1982, p.236).

The attachment of personal significance to the effects identified as the actor's goal is the second crucial part of the inference process. Since desirable outcomes are directly related to the choice of extreme actions, an inference from an action to a disposition is an inverse function of the number of noncommon effects of the action and the perceived desirability of these effects (Shaw & Costanzo, 1982). That is, correspondence of inference is greatest when the number of noncommon effects is low, and their valence (e.g., desirability) of these effects is low (Jones & McGillis, 1976).

The other predominant theory of attribution has been proposed by Kelley (1967; 1971; 1973). Kelley's theory differs from that of Jones and Davis (1965) and Jones and McGillis (1976) in that the former focuses more on external attributions while the latter are more concerned with dispositional inferences. Kelley (1967), in Jones and McGillis (1976), claims that in his theory the individual is concerned about the validity

of an attribution regarding the environment. Here, one applies several criteria (to be discussed below) in order to rule out effects of behavior due to one's internal motivations. On the other hand, correspondent inference theory seeks to explain behavior by looking for person-caused effects while ruling out environmentally-determined causes of behavior.

Kelley (1967), in Shaw and Costanzo (1982), defined attribution as "the process of perceiving the dispositional properties of entities in the environment" (p.242). Thus, dispositional properties can either lead to internal attributions (to the self) or external attributions (to the environment). Kelley (1967) also proposed four criteria for the determination of causal attributions. Distinctiveness refers to whether the person responds differentially to different entities. Thus, in cases of high distinctiveness, one would tend to respond uniquely to the given entity (Jones & McGillis, 1976). Consensus involves whether or not the same response is produced by other people in the presence of the given entity. Here, high consensus is evidenced when the entity produces the same effect on the majority of the people (Shaw & Costanzo, 1982). Consistency can take two forms: consistency over time and consistency over modalities (Kelley, 1967). Consistency over time refers to whether one responds similarly to the entity regardless of when the entity is experienced. Consistency over modality represents the extent to which one responds similarly to an entity regardless of the type of situation in which the entity is presented (Jones & McGillis, 1976). High consistencies are evidenced when the behavior of the target person does not change over time or across situations (Shaw & Costanzo, 1982). Finally, Kelley (1973) summarizes these criteria for validating attributions by asserting that internal attributions reflect low distinctiveness, low consensus,



and high consistency; external attributions occur when all three criteria are high.

Kelley (1973) posits that the three criteria for allocating causality-- distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus--suggest a means of indexing an individual's level of information regarding his environment. Here, Kelley makes use of statistics to draw an analogy between his model and the ANOVA cube. Specifically, distinctiveness is the between factor while consistency and consensus are the within factors. The greater the between-entity response variation, the more any response to a single entity is determined by that entity; consistency and consensus index the stability of the distinct entity effects. The size of the resulting F-ratio is directly proportional to the degree of perceived entity causation in attribution (Shaw & Costanzo, 1982).

Lastly, Kelley (1971) recognized that when making causal inferences, persons do not have the sufficient amount of information or time necessary to incorporate the three criteria of consistency, consensus, and distinctiveness. In these instances, persons are required to select between multiple causes of behavior in order to arrive at the most plausible cause. The covariation principle states that an effect that occurs in the presence of one entity and not others is presumed to be caused by that entity (Jones & McGillis, 1976). The discounting principle assumes that "the role of a given cause in producing a given effect is discounted if other plausible causes are also present" (Kelley, 1973, p.113). Finally, the augmentation principle states that, "if for a given effect, both a plausible inhibitory and a plausible facilitative cause are present, the role of the facilitative cause will be judged greater than if it alone were presented as a plausible cause of the effect" (Kelley, 1971, p.12).

In other words, the augmentation principle refers to the idea that when there are known constraints or risks involved in taking an action, the action taken is more likely to be attributed to the actor than if such constraints were absent (kelley, 1973).

### Attribution Research in Applied Settings

#### Overview

While attribution theory has been applied to the analysis of various forms of organizational behavior, including leadership (Calder, 1977), performance (Mitchell, Green, & Wood, 1981), and turnover (Steers & Mowday, 1981), very little if any research of this kind has been directed at the phenomenon of absenteeism. Johns and Nicholson (1982) posit that attributional research in the area of absence behavior is necessary because absence is a particularly public behavior, and since absenteeism is often viewed as a significant behavior by both actors and observers, it seems likely to provoke attributed explanations. In many instances, absence is a behavior that demands explanation or justification (Johns & Nicholson, 1982).

To begin, the two predominant theories of attribution, Jones and Davis' (1965) theory of correspondent inference and Kelley's (1972) theory of external attributions, can be used to guide the theoretical framework behind applied attribution research. Johns and Nicholson (1982) claim these theories are complementary, because Kelley's (1972) theory involves the temporal and contextual cues that precede a given absence episode, whereas Jones and Davis' (1965) theory involves cues derived from the consequences of the episode. Thus, perceptions of consistency, con-

sensus, and distinctiveness of absenteeism could be measured (Kelley, 1972), and the perceived work and nonwork consequences of absence episodes could be obtained (Jones & Davis, 1965).

Initial research concerning the relationship between attribution theory and leadership can be seen in the work of Calder (1977) who proposed an attribution theory of leadership. However, since Calder's theory focuses explicitly on the attributions subordinates make when trying to infer leadership qualities of others, rather than on the attributions a leader himself makes in response to subordinate behavior, his model is not particularly relevant to the present investigation. Of particular interest is the notion that the leader, and not the subordinate, makes attributions in response to various forms of subordinate behavior (e.g., performance and absenteeism). Therefore, the approaches taken by Green and Mitchell (1979), and Mitchell, Green, and Wood (1981), will provide the background for the present study.

#### Green and Mitchell Attributional Model

Before proceeding, it is necessary to explain the various functions of leadership attributions, and how attribution theory can be used as a vehicle for describing and understanding the causes of leader behavior. First, several theorists have suggested that leaders try to determine what causes a member's behavior before choosing a means of influence to try to change that behavior (Banks, 1976; McGregor, 1960; Kipinis, 1972;). Secondly, an information processing approach views leaders as "scientists" operating in an uncertain, dynamic environment, seeking informational cues as to causal relationships, and acting on those causal perceptions (Green & Mitchell, 1979). Finally, an attributional approach

to leader-member interactions may provide an important cognitive/perceptual component to leadership theorizing which other major theoretical positions do not address (e.g., Fiedler, 1967; House, 1971; Graen, 1976).

Green and Mitchell (1979), in discussing the attributional processes in leader-member interactions posit that:

"The leader is viewed essentially as an information processor. The naive causal attributions of the leader serve as mediators between the stimulus behavior of the subordinates and the behavior of the leader. Placed in an uncertain environment which is to be "managed", the leader seeks informational cues about what is happening and why. From these cues attempts are made to construct causal explanations to guide the leader's behavior and enhance his or her feelings of effectance (White, 1959) and sense of being in control (Kelley, 1972a). Although this process is common to all social interactions, it is especially relevant for leaders and members in a goal-oriented context where the leaders outcomes are dependent to some extent upon the subordinate's behavior" (Berscheid et al., 1979; in Green & Mitchell, 1979, p.430-431).

Green and Mitchell (1979) proposed a model of how supervisors process and respond to information regarding the cause for a subordinate's poor performance. The model specifies a two-step process whereby the supervisor first tries to figure out what caused the subordinate's behavior (e.g., the supervisor makes a causal attribution), and then uses this causal attribution to aid in the selection of an appropriate disciplinary action (Green & Mitchell, 1979). Thus, the model can be stated as follows: member behavior-->leader attribution-->leader behavior.

Green and Mitchell (1979) claim that the behavior of the subordinate (e.g., performance, absenteeism, working overtime) serves as a stimulus event, which, in turn, prompts the leader to collect information which will facilitate a causal understanding of the event. After the leader processes such informational "cues" an attribution is made regarding the

cause of the member's behavior. From this causal attribution, the leader shapes his or her behavior in a manner which reflects the leader's naive understanding of what caused the member's behavior. Thus, this model of leadership attributions was formulated with the explicit notion that its assumptions and principles can be readily applied to a number of organizational behaviors. However, Green and Mitchell's model has only been tested with respect to subordinate poor performance and not with regards to employee absence in organizational settings. Therefore, the present investigation will adopt the assumptions of Green and Mitchell's attributional model of leadership with respect to subordinate absence.

Green and Mitchell's attributional model of leadership can be traced back to the works of Kelley (1967; 1972). Kelley's theory of attribution provides the "informational cues" which an observer (e.g., a leader) will employ when making causal attributions. Thus, these cues provide the leader with the information necessary to prompt a causal understanding of subordinate behavior (e.g., absence). Given ample time, the leader will examine three different aspects of subordinate behavior: distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus. While Green and Mitchell (1979) define these cues in terms of poor performance, one can also use these concepts with respect to absenteeism. For example, Johns and Nicholson (1982) suggest that leaders are more likely to regard a subordinate's absence as reflecting dispositional qualities (e.g., ascribe an internal attribution) when (a) absence is exhibited steadily on the current job (high consistency), (b) when co-workers are seldom absent (low consensus), and (c) when the person is known to have exhibited high absence on prior jobs (low distinctiveness). Conversely, leaders will more likely engage in making

external attributions for subordinate absence when a member's absence reflects low consistency, high consensus, and high distinctiveness.

Feldman (1981) examined the consequences of an act as a bias in causal attributions. In particular, "hedonic relevance" is the notion that actions having affective consequences for the observer are perceived as more dispositional than other actions (Jones & Davis, 1965). Also there is a tendency to see people as more responsible for acts with serious as opposed to trivial consequences. Along these lines, Mitchell and Wood (1980) extended the original attribution theory of Green and Mitchell by adding behavioral consequences as another variable which is posited to affect leader attributions. Specifically, Mitchell and Wood suggest that the more severe the outcomes of subordinate behavior, the more likely a leader will be to make internal attributions and respond in a punitive and personal way towards the subordinate. Thus, the more severe the outcome of a member's absence (e.g., where failure to attend results in a missed deadline for an important project), the greater the likelihood the supervisor will make internal attributions and respond in a punitive and personal manner towards the subordinate.

It should also be mentioned that, as observers, supervisors are prone to commit the fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977). Originally expressed as the actor-observer difference by Jones and Nisbett (1972), this principle simply states that observers are more likely to attribute an actor's behavior to dispositions than to the environment. Jones (1979) explains this phenomenon as resulting from the notion that the actor and the behavior act form a natural cognitive unit for the observer and that this actor-act unit forms the basis for dispositional error (Mitchell & Kalb, 1981). This "error" prompted Mitchell and Wood (1980) to suggest

that, in general, supervisors will see poor performance on the part of their subordinates as more internally-caused than externally-caused.

Along these lines, Johns and Nicholson (1982) assert that organizational observers (e.g., supervisors) may be especially likely to overemphasize dispositional motives for absence to the actor because observers are often unaware of mitigating off-the-job circumstances that precede an absence event. Furthermore, these authors claim that supervisors are more apt to make internal attributions regarding subordinate absence because such attributions enable the superior to discount his or her own role in provoking or preventing absence (Johns & Nicholson, 1982). Thus, when all other things are held constant, an internal attribution for subordinates' absence is more likely than an external attribution.

The last link in the Green and Mitchell model is that causal attributions are directly related to (leader) responses. That is, the supervisor's attributions regarding subordinate behavior guide the supervisor's subsequent actions. Here, Mitchell and Wood (1980) claim that when an internal attribution is made, the leader will direct his or her response towards the subordinate in an attempt to change the subordinate's behavior via feedback, punishment, or training. When an external attribution is made, the leader will direct his or her response to changing the subordinate's situation. Since company policies are directed at changing the subordinate (usually through punishment), Mitchell, Green, and Wood (1981) concluded that internal attributions will more likely lead to adherence to organizational policy than external attributions.

Evidence in support of the Green and Mitchell (1979) model of leadership attributions has generally been favorable (cf. Mitchell, Green, &

Wood, 1981; Mitchell & Wood, 1980; Wood, 1980; Mitchell & Kalb, 1981). For example, Mitchell and Wood (1980) presented supervisors with six different scenarios of a subordinate's poor performance. Based on consistency, distinctiveness, and consensus, these vignettes varied according to work history (good work history, no work history, and poor work history), as well as two levels of outcome severity (severe, not severe). Results confirmed the hypothesis that a poor work history led to more internal attributions for poor performance than external attributions. In addition, a more serious outcome resulted in a higher rating for the subordinate as a possible cause of poor performance. It is important to note that Mitchell and Wood (1980) found that work history was far more potent as an explanation for variance in the overall internal attribution than the seriousness of the outcome.

Green and Liden (1979) conducted a similar experiment to that of Mitchell and Wood (1980), but in this case the investigators manipulated the cause of a subordinate's poor performance (internal vs. external), as well as the company policy for dealing with such incidents (mild penalty vs. severe penalty). Results supported the Green and Mitchell model in that the supervisor was seen as focusing his or her response more on the subordinate in the internal condition than in the external condition. Also, the supervisor's response was more punitive in the internal condition than in the external condition (cf. Mitchell & Wood, 1979). Lastly, results demonstrated that a supervisor was more likely to enforce company policy in the internal condition than in the external condition.

Wood (1980) conducted a study similar to those presented above, but added another condition which related to a subordinate's account for his or her poor performance. In this design, Wood manipulated information in



his scenarios which either included or did not include a subordinate's apology for poor performance, and included or did not include a subordinate's recognition of responsibility. Results confirmed the hypotheses that when a subordinate apologizes or denies responsibility (gives an external attribution), the supervisor is less likely to be severe or personally punitive than when there is not apology (Mitchell et al., 1981).

Fischhoff (1975a; 1975b) found that, given the same set of circumstances, knowledge of an outcome will increase people's estimates that the outcome will recur, and increases people's recollection of their original estimate of the outcome occurrence. Expanding on these findings, Mitchell and Kalb (1981) demonstrated that supervisors who were given outcome knowledge about a poorly performing subordinate, particularly in the case of negative outcomes, (a) rated the outcome as more probable, (b) saw the subordinate as more responsible for the behavior, and (c) made more internal attributions for the behavior than those with no outcome knowledge. Furthermore, more internal attributions were made when the outcome was present than when it was absent, regardless of the outcome valence (Mitchell & Kalb, 1981).

In a study by Sgro, Dobbins, and Smith (1983) supervisors (in this case coaches) were given hypothetical scenarios in which the investigators manipulated the causal attribution of a subordinate's (player's) curfew violation. Results demonstrated that supervisors were more likely to adhere to personal policy, which penalized such subordinate behavior, when they were internally-caused than when they were externally-caused. Moreover, coaches were more intense and focused their disciplinary actions toward the player when the cause for the infraction was internal

than external (Sgro et al. , 1983). Lastly, externally-caused infractions did not require as stringent an adherence to policy as internally caused infractions. These findings seem particularly relevant to the present investigation, because curfew violations can be viewed as a unique form of absenteeism.

Dobbins, Russell, and Doody (1985) presented students who served as leaders with a vignette describing an incident of poor worker performance. Within their scenario the researchers manipulated the subordinate's likableness, causal attribution of his or her performance, and the consequences of performance (either mild or severe). Results showed that supervisors were: (a) less inclined to punish and more inclined to support a likable subordinate than a dislikable subordinate; (b) more inclined to punish and direct his or her response to the subordinate when the cause was internal rather than external; and (c) more inclined to punish when the consequences of poor performance were severe rather than mild (1985).

Finally, Burger (1981) conducted a meta-analysis of 22 studies concerned with motivational distortion in the attribution of responsibility for an accident. The results of his meta-analysis suggest a statistically significant but weak tendency to attribute more responsibility to an accident perpetrator for a severe than for a mild accident (cf. Walster, 1966). However, Burger (1981) claims that internal attributions made in response to severe accidents (as opposed to mild accidents) is moderated by the degree to which the observer is personally and/or situationally similar to the accident perpetrator (cf. Shaver, 1970b). Thus, the outcome severity/attribution relationship is not necessarily a direct one.

To summarize, Mitchell and Wood (1980), Burger (1981), Mitchell and Kalb (1981) and Dobbins et al. (1985) all provide empirical support for hypothesized relationships between outcome severity and causal attributions. To reiterate, severe consequences more often lead to internal attributions than external attributions. Therefore, the present research will manipulate the outcome of a subordinate's absence episode in order to determine whether leaders will respond similarly to a different form of organizational behavior.

Wood (1980) found that supervisors were less likely to severely punish a subordinate who claimed responsibility for his or her poor performance. Along these lines, the present study will assess the influence a subordinate's excuse has on leadership attributions of subordinate absence. Here, the nature of a subordinate's excuse may imply a degree of responsibility assumed by the worker for his or her absence. Excuses connoting responsibility towards the absentee should lead to more internal attributions, while excuses favoring situational or environmental causes should lead to more external attributions.

Lastly, Mitchell and his colleagues have readily demonstrated the differential effect of subordinates' prior work history on leadership attributions of poor performance. With regards to absenteeism, Breugh (1981) conducted an investigation examining the relationships between prior absenteeism and attitudinal factors (job satisfaction, job involvement, and supervisory satisfaction) with future absenteeism. Using hierarchical multiple regression analyses, Breugh reported that past absenteeism (as measured by time-lost, frequency, and supervisory ratings) was a better predictor of 1977 absenteeism than the three work attitudes. Keller (1983) also used hierarchical multiple regression to

demonstrate that, while prior absenteeism, group cohesiveness, and internal health locus of control added significantly unique variance to the prediction of future absenteeism, tenure, marital status, self-esteem, and sex did not. Thus, a subordinate's prior absence history appears to be related to the prediction of future absenteeism. Therefore, the present investigation will also measure the extent to which a worker's frequency of prior absences influences supervisors' causal attributions.

The present investigation will differ from those of Mitchell and his colleagues in that this study will focus on how causal attributions directly affect whether a supervisor labels an absence episode as excused or unexcused. This label will subsequently have an effect on the response a leader takes toward the absentee. Absence labels will therefore mediate the chain between causal attributions and leader responses. Moreover, the implications of this study are relevant to absence measurement and categorization while previous research deals more with performance appraisal.

Furthermore, the present research will attempt to shift attention from an intraindividual approach to studying absenteeism to a more social/psychological perspective--namely, the social influences of absenteeism. Specifically, the leader's perceptions of subordinate absence cannot be seen as isolated events. Rather, the leader infers the causes of his or her subordinate's absences in order to improve his or her causal understanding as to why subordinates fail to attend work. Moreover, supervisors who have a causal understanding of subordinate absence can use such explanations to guide their own behavior and subsequently enhance their own feelings of effectance (White, 1959), and sense of well-being (Kelley, 1972).

## Hypotheses

The present study will examine the effects a subordinate's prior absence history (e.g., high frequency versus low frequency of past absence) has on supervisors' causal attributions, assignment of excused versus unexcused absence labels, and selection of disciplinary actions. Also, the nature of the excuse a subordinate gives for failing to attend (e.g., went to visit some friends vs. a subordinate's child having a serious accident) and the severity of consequences resulting from the absence will be used as an independent variables. Thus, from the previous assumptions and findings presented in the absence and attribution literatures, several hypotheses can be derived and tested.

Results of the studies mentioned above (cf. Mitchell & Green, 1979; Mitchell et al., 1981; Wood, 1980) lead to the first set of hypotheses which consider the effects of prior absence histories on leadership attributions, absence labels, and choice of disciplinary action. Specifically, a history of a low versus high frequency of absence is predicted to yield differential attributions, absence labels, and imposed penalties.

It should be mentioned that a primary aspect of this proposal concerns the relationship between leadership attributions and the distinction between excused and unexcused absences. Implicit in this paper is the assumption that internal attributions of subordinate absenteeism are related to unexcused absences, while external attributions are related to excused absences. In general, when observers (e.g., managers) assign causal attributions to dispositions of an actor (e.g., a subordinate), the observer perceives that the actor has had some control over

his or her behavior. Conversely, attributions to the actor's environment indicate observer's perceptions of uncontrollability in the actor's behavior. With regards to absenteeism, this study proposes that attributions of absence lead directly to the assignment of absence labels. Therefore, the subordinate's perceived locus of control also affects decisions by leaders either to excuse or not excuse employee absenteeism. That is, the leader makes a causal inference in order to get a better idea of how to label an event. This relationship is unique to the study of absenteeism because absence labels are a necessary step in the process of leader behavior. Thus, causal attributions influence absence labels, which in turn, influence the behavioral response a leader makes toward the worker.

Therefore, taken individually, infrequent or excused absence histories should lead to external attributions, "excused" absence labels, and less disciplinary action taken by the supervisor, while frequent or unexcused absence histories should lead to internal attributions, "unexcused" labels, and more disciplinary action. The hypotheses are as follows:

- H1: Prior absence history will influence attributions of absence behavior to internal or external factors. More specifically,
- (a) Prior histories of frequent absences will more likely lead to internal attributions, and
  - (b) Prior histories of infrequent absences will more likely lead to external attributions.

The second set of hypotheses concerns the effect of the reason given for an absence on the type of attribution, absence label, and disciplinary action taken by the supervisor. More specifically, when the excuse given is "I went to visit some friends", the absence should be considered as

voluntary. Conversely, when the subordinate claims that his or her "child had a serious accident and he or she had to rush the child to the hospital", the absence should be considered as involuntary.

The first excuse, "I went to visit some friends", was chosen to represent an explicit case of an absence due to events seemingly within one's control. It is believed that this manipulation will likely be perceived by supervisors as one in which the worker voluntarily decided not to attend work.

Conversely, the second excuse, "my child had a serious accident and I had to rush him to the hospital," was chosen to represent an explicit case of an absence due to events beyond one's control. It is believed that this manipulation will likely be perceived by supervisors as one in which the subordinate had no control over such circumstances. Thus, the next set of hypotheses are as follows:

- H2: Subordinate reasons given for an absence event will influence attributions of absence behavior to internal or external factors. More specifically,
- (a) Excuses given in which the subordinate claimed to have visited some friends will lead to internal attributions, while,
  - (b) Excuses describing a serious accident to a subordinate's child whereby the worker had to rush the child to the hospital will more likely lead to external attributions.

The third set of hypotheses considers the relationship between the consequences or outcomes of an absence event (e.g., mild vs. severe) and the type of attribution, absence label, and disciplinary action taken by the supervisor. As stated earlier, Mitchell and Kalb (1981) found that negatively valenced outcomes were more likely to lead to internal attri-

butions than external attributions. Thus, the next set of hypotheses are as follows:

- H3: Severity of consequences resulting from the absence event will influence attributions of absence behavior to internal and external causes. More specifically,
- (a) Absence episodes resulting in severe consequences will more likely lead to internal attributions, and
  - (b) Absence episodes resulting in nonserious consequences will more likely lead to external attributions.

It is also proposed that the consequences of a subordinate's absence may serve to moderate the relationship between the excuse given and the subsequent attribution and absence label provided by the supervisor. Mitchell and Kalb (1981) claim that outcome knowledge may influence the supervisor's judgment about responsibility for the action. These authors posit that the occurrence of an outcome may lead the supervisor to believe that the subordinate should have known the outcome would happen, and the supervisor would therefore see the subordinate as responsible for the behavior and the outcome (cf. Fischhoff, 1977; Fischhoff & Beyth, 1975; Slovic & Fischhoff, 1977). Furthermore, Mitchell and Kalb (1981) proposed that this process should be more readily observable when the consequence of the absence is severe, because previous research has shown that the more negative outcomes of an event, the more responsibility is attributed to the perpetrator of the event (cf. Arkkelin, Oakely, & Mynatt, 1979; Chaikin & Darley, 1973). Mitchell and Kalb (1981) empirically supported this hypothesis in a hospital setting with graduate student nurses acting as supervisors. Thus, the principle of "hedonic relevance", discussed above, may also affect the degree to which a supervisor considers a subordinate's excuse as inside or outside one's locus of control. Here, the excuse given connotes a degree of responsibility assumed by the subordi-



nate for his absence behavior. In turn, this locus of causality should lead to an absence label which corresponds to the nature of the causal attribution. Lastly, Kelley's (1971) discounting principle can be invoked to explain supervisors who give less credence to the reason given for one's absence and place more emphasis on the consequences of the absence. As previously stated, the discounting principle refers to situations involving multiple causes whereby an individual rejects the role of a given cause on a given effect when other plausible causes are in evidence. For example, supervisors may give less weight to the excuse a subordinate gives for being absent (e.g., an emergency hospital visit) when his or her absence results in a missed deadline for an important project than when the absence leads to no serious consequences. In this case, the outcomes of the absence serve to prompt the supervisor to "discount" the role of the excuse given in relation to the absence episode. Along these lines, a corollary to hypothesis three may be formulated:

- C1: Severity of consequences resulting from the absence event will influence the degree to which the subordinate's excuse affects attributions to internal and external causes. More specifically,
- (a) Severe consequences may lead supervisors to discount the reason given by a subordinate and give more internal attributions to subordinate absence.
  - (b) As a result, absences with severe consequences will more likely lead to internal attributions for absences accompanied by legitimate excuses than when absences result in nonserious consequences.

The fourth set of hypotheses deals with the link between locus of causality and assignment of absence labels. It is suggested that the attribution a leader makes in response to subordinate absence directly

affects the label a supervisor places on the absence event. Thus, the hypotheses are as follows:

- H4: Locus of attribution will affect whether an absence event is excused or unexcused. More specifically,
- (a) Leaders who make internal attributions for absence events will likely label such absences as "unexcused", and
  - (b) Leaders who make external attributions for absence events will likely label such absences as "excused".

One additional possibility is that severe consequences may affect the absence label such that prior attributions are given less importance as a direct antecedent. When absence outcomes are severe, supervisors may choose not to excuse the absence even when the attribution is to external circumstances. Therefore, a second research corollary may be stated as follows:

- C2: Severe consequences may moderate the relationship between locus of causality and absence label such that absences are unexcused despite the attributional label.

The final set of hypotheses concerns the relationship between absences labels and leader responses. It is suggested that the particular punitive action taken by a supervisor in response to subordinate absence is directly affected by the label affixed to the absence event. Thus,

- H5: Severity of chosen sanctions will be influenced by whether or not the absence event is excused or unexcused. More specifically,
- (a) Unexcused absences will more likely lead to more severe forms of disciplinary action, and
  - (b) Excused absences will more likely lead to less severe forms of disciplinary action.

In conjunction with the above hypotheses, further exploratory analyses will consider the effects of each independent variable upon absence label and punitive responses.

## Method

### Overview

The present investigation involved the use of eight different hypothetical scenarios describing various absence episodes. Information contained within the scenarios was derived partially from the works of Mitchell and his colleagues as well as Chadwick-Jones et al. (1982). Subjects were to read the scenarios, make causal attributions, assign absence labels, and indicate how they would respond to some of these absence episodes. Information about subordinates' absence history, nature of excuse, and the consequences of the absence event was manipulated within the cases to create differential experimental conditions.

Subjects were provided with scenarios which are considered to be representative of actual absence events. Work histories, consequences, and excuses were selected on the basis of presumed managerial familiarity.

### Subjects and Design

Two separate samples were chosen for the present investigation. Sample 1 consisted of 160 undergraduate college students enrolled in various psychology at Virginia Tech. These subjects participated in the study in order to earn additional course credits. Sample 2 consisted of 85 MBA candidates from the same university who participated on a volunteer basis. Approximately 50% of these students have been or are currently

employed in business/managerial settings. Both groups of subjects were told that they are going to be placed in a situation in which they are to act as if they were the manager of a large group of employees in an established organization. All students were administered, a packet containing a cover letter describing the purpose of the study, instructions, a scenario describing a unique, hypothetical absence event, and a questionnaire containing the dependent measures. Thus, each subject will receive only one scenario. Lastly, MBA candidates were chosen as subjects in addition to psychology students because of four reasons: (a) the relative ease in surveying this sample, (b) the fact that about 50% of these students have had prior job experience in the business field, (c) the majority of these students are currently being trained to become managers, and (d) post-hoc comparisons were made between the samples.

The overall design of the study is a 2 x 2 x 2 between-groups factorial involving the variables of prior absence history (frequent vs. infrequent) , nature of subordinates' excuse (visited friends vs. a subordinate's child having a serious accident), and the consequences of the absence episode (mild vs. severe).

### Materials

Each subject received one of 8 possible scenarios (see Appendix A). The subjects received their particular vignette via a random assignment. Each of the 8 different scenarios contained a different combination of the independent variables (prior absence history, nature of excuse, and consequences of absence) so that all 8 possibilities were equally distributed amongst the sample. For example, one scenario contained an absence incident involving a worker with a history of frequent, absences

who gave as his or her reason for not attending, "I went to visit some friends" and who's absence resulted in a missed deadline for a due project. Thus, the 7 remaining scenarios contained different arrangements of the prior history, excuse, and outcome variables.

### Manipulations

The history, excuse, and outcome variables were manipulated in the scenario. The manipulation of the "history" variable was that the worker either was absent an average of twice a month (bad history) or twice in the last year (good history), The "excuse" variable was manipulated so that the worker either gave as an excuse "I went to visit some friends" or "My child had a serious accident and I had to rush him to the hospital." Finally, the manipulation of the "consequence" variable was that the worker's absence either resulted in no serious disruption of the normal work routine (mild outcome), or the worker's absence resulted in a missed deadline for a due project (severe outcome). An example of the instructions and a scenario employed in this study can be seen below. (In this case, an internal attribution and unexcused absence label is predicted.)

For this study, we would like to place yourself in the role of a manager at a large manufacturing plant. Please read the scenario on the following page and treat it as an absence report for one of your subordinates. The company's absenteeism policy requires that you the manager make the decision about whether or not an employee's absence is to be excused or unexcused. The company recognizes that from time to time employees encounter circumstances that may result in their being absent or tardy. The company does not wish to penalize an individual employee for excusable absence or lateness and will do so only when such practices become unfair, unreasonable, or excessive. Also, required disciplinary action is left to the discretion

of the manager. After reading the scenario, you are to complete the attached questionnaire.

Yesterday, one of your employees was absent from work. This employee has been absent an average of two times a month for the past year. After asking why the employee was not at work, you were told by the employee that I went to visit some friends. This particular absence happened to result in a missed deadline for a project which was due on the unattended work day.

### Manipulation Assessment

Manipulation checks for the cause conditions consisted of three questions that were each measured on a nine point scale. These questions inquired: (a) the extent to which the subordinate is perceived to be frequently or infrequently absent; (b) the extent to which the subordinate's absence reflected a voluntary or involuntary choice to attend work; and (c) the extent to which the absence episode is perceived to have serious consequences for the organization.

### Dependent Measures

For the measurement of leadership attributions in response to subordinate absenteeism four summary questions were asked that inquired the degree to which the respondent perceives the given absence as being within or beyond the subordinate's control. For example, one summary question asked, "To what extent do you feel the subordinate's absence was something that reflected an aspect of him or her or reflected an aspect of the situation?" Participants responded on a 1 to 9 Likert type scale. Coefficient alpha for these four questions was .88 for the Psychology student sample and .84 for the MBA sample. In addition, a fifth attribution question required subjects to indicate whether the worker's absence re-

flected an aspect of him or her or reflected an aspect of the worker's situation. For this question, subjects responded according to a forced-choice format.

Supervisors were also asked how they would label such absence events (excused vs. unexcused). This inquiry required another three summary questions asking the extent to which the respondent perceives the absence event as legitimate or illegitimate and excused or unexcused. For example, one question inquired, "Indicate whether you as a manager would choose to excuse or not excuse this absence event?" Supervisors responded on an "excused" to "unexcused" nine-point scale. Coefficient alpha for these three questions was .95 for the Psychology student sample and .93 for the MBA sample.

Before the packets were to be completed, the supervisor made his or her decision as to whether and what type of action taken in response to the absence episode. Specifically, subjects were asked the degree to which they deem a given punitive measure as "appropriate" or not for the given absence event. Each punitive action was in the form of a question with a 1 to 9 Likert-type scale. Specifically, supervisors were asked the extent to which the actions below are appropriate or not to take in response to the subordinate absence: (a) Taking no action against the subordinate; (b) decreasing the subordinate's pay; (c) adding a written reprimand to the subordinate's file; (d) counseling the subordinate about attendance regulations; (e) verbally reprimanding the subordinate; (f) termination from the organization; (g) further monitoring the situation; (h) giving a written and/or verbal warning that a future absence will result in a suspension, without pay, for the number of days the subordinate fails to attend; and (i) a suspension, without pay, for

the number of days the subordinate fails to attend. (All questionnaire items are shown in Appendix A).

## Results

### Manipulation Effectiveness: Psychology Student Sample

Table 1 indicates the mean responses on manipulation check items for both the psychology student sample and the MBA sample. Table 2 summarizes the F values from the analyses of variance completed on these items. In order to assess the effectiveness of the excuse manipulation, a three-way analysis of variance was conducted on the "perceived choice" item. This analysis indicated a significant main effect for the reason given by the subordinate,  $F(1, 152)=143.63$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2=.487$ ). Subjects who were told that the subordinate was absent because he or she went to visit some friends perceived this absence to be more voluntary ( $\bar{x}=7.46$ ) than when the absence was due to an emergency hospital visit for the subordinate's child ( $\bar{x}=3.26$ ). This analysis also yielded a significant history x reason interaction,  $F(1, 152)=4.28$ ,  $p < .05$  ( $\eta^2=.011$ ). Post hoc Tukey tests revealed that visits to friends were still perceived to be significantly more voluntary than emergency hospital visits for both frequent and infrequent absence histories. However, post hoc analysis suggests that when the absence was due to an emergency hospital visit, it was perceived as more involuntary under low prior absence frequency than under high absence frequency. This difference did not emerge for absences due to visits to friends (see table 3).



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 Insert Tables 1, 2, and 3 about here  
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A three-way ANOVA completed on perceived frequency of prior absenteeism indicated a significant main effect for manipulated absence history,  $F(1, 152)=112.19$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2=.409$ ). Workers with a good absence history were perceived to be less frequently absent ( $\bar{x}=2.76$ ) than workers with a poor absence history ( $\bar{x}=5.79$ ). This analysis also yielded a significant history x reason interaction,  $F(1, 152)=5.59$ ,  $p < .05$  ( $\eta^2=.017$ ). Post hoc analysis indicated that subordinate's with a poor absence history were still perceived to be more frequently absent than subordinate's with a good absence history for both voluntary and involuntary absence reasons. However, post hoc Tukey tests showed that the combination of frequent absences and an emergency hospital visit was perceived as reflecting a greater number of prior absences than the combination of frequent absences and visits to friends. Also, when the subordinate was said to have had a frequent history of prior absenteeism, emergency hospital visits actually resulted in significantly greater perceptions of absence frequency than visits to friends. This pattern of results was not evident when the manipulated absence history was infrequent (see table 4).

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 Insert Table 4 about here  
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The analysis performed on perceived seriousness of the absence event indicated a significant main effect for manipulated consequences,  $F(1,$

152)=357.32,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2=.685$ ). Absences which resulted in a missed deadline were perceived to be much more serious for the organization ( $\bar{x}=7.33$ ) than absences which resulted in no disruption of the normal work routine ( $\bar{x}=3.28$ ). The analysis also yielded a significant main effect for the subordinate's absence excuse,  $F(1, 152)=20.71$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2=.036$ ). Visits to friends led subjects to perceive absences as more serious to the organization ( $\bar{x}=5.79$ ) than when the absence was due to an emergency hospital visit for the subordinate's child ( $\bar{x}=4.81$ ).

The analysis on perceived consequences also indicated a significant history x reason interaction,  $F(1, 152)=7.20$ ,  $p < .01$  ( $\eta^2=.011$ ). Post hoc Tukey tests showed that when the workers had a history of frequent absences, absences both to visits to friends and a hospital were seen as equally severe in consequences. However, when prior absences were infrequent, absences due to hospital visits were perceived to be less severe than absences due to visits to friends (see table 5).

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 Insert Table 5 about here  
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#### Manipulation Effectiveness: MBA Students

The analysis completed on the perceptions of absence choice yielded a significant main effect for manipulated absence reason,  $F(1, 77)=39.90$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2=.318$ ). As with the previous sample, absences due to emergency hospital visits were perceived as more involuntary ( $\bar{x}=3.85$ ) than absences due to visits to friends ( $\bar{x}=7.14$ ). No other significant effects were indicated by the analysis.

The analysis performed on perceived absence frequency indicated a significant main effect for manipulated absence history,  $F(1, 77)=45.80$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2=.340$ ). Subordinates indicated as having a good absence history were perceived to be less frequently absent ( $\bar{x}=3.24$ ) than workers having a poor absence history ( $\bar{x}=6.22$ ). The analysis also yielded a significant history x reason interaction,  $F(1, 77)=6.05$ ,  $p < .05$  ( $\eta^2=.038$ ). Post hoc tests revealed the same pattern of results as those reported for the psychology student sample (see table 6).

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 Insert Table 6 about here  
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The manipulation of consequences significantly influenced subjects' perceptions of consequences,  $F(1, 77)=43.29$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2=.260$ ). As expected, absences which resulted in a missed deadline were perceived to be significantly more serious to the organization ( $\bar{x}=6.60$ ) than absences which resulted in no disruption of the normal work routine ( $\bar{x}=4.28$ ). Also, significant main effects were reported for the manipulated absence reason,  $F(1, 77)=17.03$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2=.098$ ) and for absence history,  $F(1, 77)=4.20$ ,  $p < .05$  ( $\eta^2=.020$ ). Subjects who were told that the worker was absent because he or she went to visit some friends perceived the absence to be serious to the organization ( $\bar{x}=6.16$ ) than when the absence was due to an emergency hospital visit for the subordinate's child ( $\bar{x}=4.71$ ). Further, subjects who were told that the subordinate had a poor absence history perceived the absence to be more serious to the organization ( $\bar{x}=5.73$ ) than when the subordinate had a good absence history ( $\bar{x}=5.22$ ).

This analysis also indicated a significant history x consequence interaction,  $F(1, 152) = 14.51, p < .001$  ( $\eta^2 = .083$ ). Post hoc Tukey tests revealed that when prior absences were frequent, there were no significant differences between consequence conditions. However, under conditions of infrequent absence, mild consequences were perceived as less serious than severe consequences. Therefore, the manipulation of absence severity was apparently successful only for one level of absence history (see table 7).

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 Insert Table 7 about here  
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#### Summary: Manipulation Effectiveness

Overall, analyses performed on the manipulation effectiveness items indicated that each manipulation was successful. In each case, significant main effects were reported for the manipulated variable of interest. However, significant main effects were found for the absence reason on the consequence manipulation for both samples, and several weak but statistically significant interactions were observed. In addition, the history x consequence interaction reported for the consequence manipulation in the MBA sample indicates that history also affects perceptions of consequences such that frequent absence histories led subjects to ignore or fail to perceive the manipulated differences in absence severity. Therefore, results of the consequence manipulation, for the MBA sample, should be interpreted with caution.

Locus of Cause: Psychology Students

Five questions were used to examine the effects of the three independent variables on subjects' attributions for subordinate absenteeism. Because Pearson product correlations among the five dependent measures indicated highly significant relationships, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) procedure was employed. The Pearson correlations for these five questions ranged from .50 to .83, and all were significant at  $p < .0001$  (see table 8).

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 Insert Table 8 about here  
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The MANOVA examined the relation between the independent variables to a linear composite of the five attribution questions. The MANOVA on locus of causality yielded a significant main effect for the subordinate's prior absence history (Wilk's lambda=.799;  $F(5, 148)=7.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Follow-up univariate tests showed that, for the subordinate's absence history, all five attribution questions resulted in significant main effects (Mean responses and F values are illustrated in tables 9 and 10). In support of hypothesis 1, these analyses revealed that when the subordinate had a frequent prior absence history, subjects were significantly more likely to make internal attributions for the absence episode, than when the subordinate had an infrequent absence history. For example, examination of the mean responses (see table 9) indicates that when the subordinate had a frequent absence history, subjects were more likely to report that the absence reflected an aspect of the subordinate as opposed

to the subordinate's situation ( $\bar{x}=5.99$ ) than when the subordinate had an infrequent absence history ( $\bar{x}=4.54$ ).

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 Insert Tables 9 and 10 about here  
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The multivariate analysis of variance yielded a significant main effect for the reason given by the subordinate (Wilk's lambda=.433;  $F(5,148)=38.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Follow-up univariate tests revealed that the absence reason had a significant main effect on each of the individual absence measures (see table 10). In support of hypothesis 2, examination of mean responses (see table 9) indicated that when the absence was reportedly due to the emergency hospital visit, subjects rated a subordinate's personal characteristics as less causal ( $\bar{x}=4.55$ ) than when the absence reason involved visiting some friends ( $\bar{x}=6.76$ ). Similar findings were reported for the remaining locus of cause measures.

The multivariate analysis of variance performed on the attribution data, however, revealed no effect for locus of cause for consequences of the absence (Wilk's lambda=.972;  $F(5, 148)=.846$ ,  $p =ns$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 3 was not supported. Moreover, these results failed to reveal a significant reason x consequence interaction thereby providing no support for corollary 1. Severe consequences did not lead to internal attributions despite involuntary absence reasons. Also, no interaction effects were found for the three independent variables on either the attribution composite nor on the individual attribution measures.

Locus of Cause: MBA Students

Table 11 indicates the interitem correlations for the attribution measures. The multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) performed on the attribution data for the MBA candidates yielded a very similar pattern of results to those found for sample 1. In support of hypotheses 1 and 2, the MANOVA on the attribution composite resulted in significant main effect for absence history (Wilk's lambda=.831;  $F(5, 73)=2.96$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and for absence reason (Wilk's lambda=.419;  $F(5, 73)=20.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Likewise, no main effect or interactions for consequences of the absence were found (Wilk's lambda=.973),  $F(5, 73)=.402$ ,  $p = ns$ . Thus, hypothesis three was not supported. Also, since a significant reason x consequence interaction was not found, corollary 1 received no support in this analysis.

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 Insert Table 11 about here  
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Follow-up univariate tests on the effect of absence history on the attribution measures resulted in four of the five questions having significant main effects (Mean responses and F values are summarized in tables 12 and 13). Mean responses indicate that the absence of workers with frequent absence histories was more likely to be attributed to internal factors, while the the absence of workers with infrequent absence histories was more likely to be attributed to external factors (see table 12). For example, subjects were more likely to report that an absence reflected an aspect of the worker himself, as opposed to the worker's situation,

when the worker had a frequent history of absenteeism ( $\bar{x}=5.43$ ) than when the worker had an infrequent history of absenteeism ( $\bar{x}=4.18$ ).

Follow-up univariate tests for the absence reason on the attribution measures indicated, again, that all five questions had significant main effects (see table 13). Examination of the means for these measures shows that when the offered excuse involved visiting some friends, subjects perceived the subordinate's absence to reflect an aspect of the absentee ( $\bar{x}=5.86$ ); conversely, subjects were more likely to perceive a subordinate's absence as reflecting an aspect of the situation when the absence was due to the emergency hospital visit ( $\bar{x}=3.59$ ). Similar findings were reported for the remaining locus of cause measures (see table 12).

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 Insert Tables 12 and 13 about here  
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The multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) performed on the attribution composite for sample 2 yielded no significant interactions.

Summary: Locus of Cause

In support of hypotheses 1 and 2, the analyses performed on the attribution measures in both samples indicated significant main effects for absence history and absence reason for both samples. However, in neither sample was there a significant effect of consequences on subjects' causal attributions. Also, multivariate analyses of variance indicated no significant interactions. These results suggest that a subordinate's absence excuse and absence history are more influential than the



consequences of absence in determining the locus of cause for subordinate absenteeism.

Judgments of Absence Legitimacy: Psychology Students

While no specific effects of each manipulation on the absence labels were hypothesized, exploratory MANOVAS were completed on these data. Three questions comprised the absence label composite. One question inquired the degree to which the subject, as a manager, felt the absence event was acceptable. A second question asked whether the subject would choose to excuse or not excuse the absence event. Finally, a third question inquired the extent to which the subject felt the absence was legitimate or not legitimate. The Pearson product correlations among these items are shown in table 8.

The multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) performed on the absence label data yielded significant main effects for all three independent variables. No significant interactions were found. First, a significant main effect was found for the consequences of the absence on the absence label composite (Wilk's lambda=.944;  $F(3, 150)=2.96$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Follow-up univariate tests on the individual items revealed that severity of consequences had significant main effects on two of the three measures. Specifically, subjects were significantly more likely to accept a subordinate's absence when the absence resulted in no disruption of the normal work routine ( $\bar{x}=5.36$ ) than when the absence resulted in a missed deadline for an important project ( $\bar{x}=4.60$ ),  $F(1, 152)=7.56$ ,  $p < .01$  ( $\eta^2=.015$ ). Likewise, subjects were significantly more likely to excuse an absence when the consequences were mild ( $\bar{x}=5.61$ ) than when the consequences were severe ( $\bar{x}=5.00$ ),  $F(1, 77)=4.12$ ,  $p < .05$  ( $\eta^2=.008$ ).

The analysis completed on perceived absence legitimacy indicated nonsignificant effects. (Means and F values for these measures are illustrated in tables 9 and 10).

Second, a significant main effect was found for the absence reason (Wilk's lambda=.267;  $F(3, 150)=137.31$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). Examination of the follow-up univariate tests indicated that the reason given by the subordinate had significant main effects for all three label measures. Absences accompanied by reasons in which the subordinate rushed his or her sick child to the hospital were perceived to be more legitimate, more acceptable, and more likely to be excused than absences in which the subordinate claimed to have visited some friends (see tables 9 and 10).

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) performed on the absence label composite yielded a significant main effect for absence history (Wilk's lambda=.868;  $F(3, 150)=7.61$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Follow-up univariate tests showed that the subordinate's absence history had a significant main effect on all three of the absence label items (see table 10). Subjects were more likely to perceive an absence to be legitimate and acceptable when the subordinate had an infrequent absence history than when the worker had a history of frequent absenteeism. Likewise, subjects were more likely to excuse absences in which the worker had an infrequent history of absenteeism ( $\bar{x}=5.96$ ) than when the worker had a frequent history of absenteeism ( $\bar{x}=4.65$ ).

#### Judgments of Absence Legitimacy: MBA Students

The interitem correlations for the measures of absence judgments are shown in table 11. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) conducted on the absence label composite yielded significant main effects for all

three independent variables. However, unlike sample 1, three significant interactions were found. First, a significant main effect was found for the consequence variable on the absence label composite (Wilk's  $\lambda = .830$ ;  $F(3, 75) = 5.13$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Follow-up univariate tests, however, indicated that only the acceptance item was significant,  $F(1, 77) = 11.26$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2 = .040$ ). Subjects were significantly more likely to accept a subordinate's absence when the absence resulted in no disruption of the normal work routine ( $\bar{x} = 5.09$ ) than when the absence resulted in a missed deadline for an important project ( $\bar{x} = 4.02$ ). No main effects were found for consequences on either the legitimacy nor the excuse items (see tables 12 and 13 for means and F values).

Second, a significant main effect was found for the absence reason (Wilk's  $\lambda = .315$ ;  $F(3, 75) = 54.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Follow-up univariate tests indicated that the reason given by the subordinate had significant main effects for all three label items (see table 13). Absences in which the subordinate claimed to have rushed his or her sick child to the hospital were perceived to be more legitimate, more acceptable, and more likely to be excused than absences accompanied by reasons in which the subordinate said to have visited some friends (see table 12 for means).

The MANOVA also indicated a significant main effect for absence history (Wilk's  $\lambda = .773$ ;  $F(3, 75) = 7.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Follow-up univariate tests indicated that the subordinate's absence history had a significant main effect on all three absence label measures (see table 13). Subjects were more likely to perceive an absence to be legitimate, and acceptable when the subordinate had an infrequent absence history than when the subordinate had a frequent absence history. Also, subjects were more likely to excuse subordinates with infrequent absence histories

( $\bar{x}$ =5.71) than subordinates with frequent absence histories ( $\bar{x}$ =4.45;  $F(1, 77)$ =11.02,  $p < .005$  ( $\eta^2$ =.054)).

The multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) performed on the absence label composite also yielded three significant interactions. First, a significant reason x consequence interaction was found (Wilk's lambda=.879;  $F(3, 75)$ =3.42,  $p < .05$ ). Follow-up univariate tests on the individual absence label items indicated a significant reason x consequence interaction only for the legitimacy measure,  $F(1, 77)$ =6.34,  $p < .015$  ( $\eta^2$ =.024). Post hoc Tukey tests revealed that consequences of absence had a differential effect on perceived absence legitimacy depending on the absence reason. Specifically, when the absence reason involved an emergency hospital visit, mild consequences led to significantly more "legitimate" absence labels than severe consequences. This finding did not emerge for visits to friends (see table 14).

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 Insert Table 14 about here  
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Second, a significant history x consequence interaction was found (Wilk's lambda=.879;  $F(3, 75)$ =3.43,  $p < .05$ ). However, examination of the follow-up univariate tests indicated no significant interactions for each of the individual items.

Finally, the MANOVA performed on the absence label composite yielded a significant history x reason interaction (Wilk's lambda=.815;  $F(3, 75)$ =5.67,  $p < .001$ ). Follow-up univariate tests revealed significant interactions for the legitimacy item,  $F(1, 77)$ =4.91,  $p < .05$  ( $\eta^2$ =.017) as well as the acceptance item,  $F(1, 77)$ =14.56,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2$ =.052). Post

hoc tests showed that emergency hospital visits led to significantly more "illegitimate" absence labels when the subordinate had a frequent prior absence history than when the subordinate had an infrequent absence history. This difference did not emerge for absences due to visits to friends. Post hoc tests performed on the acceptance item revealed the same pattern of results as found for the legitimacy item (see table 15). The three-way interaction effect on the absence label composite was not significant.

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 Insert Table 15 about here  
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Summary: Judgments of Absence Legitimacy

Overall, the analyses performed on the absence label measures indicated significant main effects for all three independent variables. For both samples, absence reason and absence history significantly influenced subjects' decisions to legitimize, accept, and excuse instances of subordinate absenteeism. However, consequences only influenced the degree to which subjects in both samples were willing to accept the subordinate's absence. While the psychology students considered consequences to be a significant factor in their decisions to excuse absences, neither sample considered consequences to be a significant variable in their decisions to legitimize subordinate absenteeism. Therefore, it can be concluded that differences in absence history and absence reason significantly influenced subjects' judgments of absence legitimacy. Consequences only partially influenced subjects' judgments of absence legitimacy. Fur-

thermore, MANOVAS performed for the MBA sample revealed several weak, but statistically significant interactions. These results suggest that absence reason moderates the relationships between absence history and consequences and judgments of absence legitimacy. No such interactions were found for the Psychology student sample.

#### Sanction Decisions: Psychology Students

While no specific effects for manipulations were hypothesized, exploratory analyses were also completed on sanction decisions. Nine questions were used to form the punitive response composite. Specifically, subjects rated how appropriate each of nine possible punitive actions (e.g., sanctions) would be in response to the particular absence episode. The interitem correlations are shown in table 16. These nine items were analyzed using a principal components factor analysis with a varimax rotation. This analysis revealed a two factor solution. The factor loadings for the nine items are presented in table 17. Five dependent variables made up factor 1. These measures included: "take no action", "counsel the subordinate about attendance regulations", "further monitor the subordinate's situation", and "give warnings of impending suspensions for future absences", and "verbal reprimands." This factor was labeled "warnings". Three measures comprised the second factor: "decrease the subordinate's pay", "terminate the subordinate", and "suspend the subordinate for future absences". This factor was labeled "severe punishments". The "written reprimand" sanction was not included in either of the punishment composites because it had similar loadings for both factors. Both composites were formed by summing the individual item responses and then dividing the total by the number of items. A

multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) performed on the punitive actions composites yielded significant main effects for all independent variables as well as two significant interaction effects.

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 Insert tables 16 and 17 about here  
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First, the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) performed on the response composite yielded two significant interaction effects. First, a significant reason x consequence interaction was found (Wilk's  $\lambda = .932$ ;  $F(2, 151) = 5.46$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Follow-up univariate tests indicated a significant interaction only for the severe punishment factor,  $F(1, 152) = 10.22$ ,  $p < .01$  ( $\eta^2 = .038$ ; see table 18 for means and table 19 for F values). Post hoc Tukey tests showed that visits to friends resulted in significantly higher levels of harsher punishments when the consequences of the absence were severe than when the consequences were mild. This difference was not evident for emergency hospital visits (see table 20).

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 Insert Tables 18, 19 and 20 about here  
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Second, the MANOVA also indicated a significant history x reason interaction (Wilk's  $\lambda = .824$ ;  $F(2, 151) = 16.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Follow-up analyses of variance (ANOVAS) were then performed on the warnings factor and on the severe response factor. Results showed a significant history x reason interaction only for the warning factor,  $F(1, 152) = 24.03$ ,  $p <$

.001 ( $\eta^2=.069$ ). The history x reason term for the severe response factor was not significant,  $F(1, 152)=1.01$ ,  $p=ns$ . Post hoc tests revealed that the combination of emergency hospital visits and infrequent absence histories yielded significantly fewer "mild" sanctions meted out than any other combination of absence reason and absence history (see table 21).

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 Insert Table 21 about here  
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A significant main effect was found for consequences on the mild and severe responses. (Wilk's lambda=.923;  $F(2, 151)=6.32$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Separate analyses of variance (ANOVAS) were also conducted on the warning and severe punishment composites. Results indicated a significant main effect for consequences only on the severe punishment composite,  $F(1, 152)=12.69$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2=.047$ ). Subjects were significantly more likely to administer harsher forms of punitive action when the absence consequences were severe ( $\bar{x}=2.57$ ) than when the consequences of the absence consequences were mild ( $\bar{x}=1.92$ ). The effect of consequences on the mild punishment factor was not significant,  $F(1, 152)=1.40$ ,  $p=ns$  (see table 19).

The multivariate analysis of variance performed on the punitive response composite also resulted in a significant main effect for the absence reason (Wilk's lambda=.712;  $F(2, 151)=30.60$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). Results of the follow-up univariate tests suggest that the reason given by the absentee had a large impact on both warnings and severe punitive responses,  $F(1, 152)=48.23$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2=.145$ ) and  $F(1, 152)=35.81$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2=.141$ ), respectively. Examination of mean responses indicated



that an absence due to a visit to friends resulted in higher levels of mild and severe punitive responses than absences due to the hospital visit (see table 18 for means). However, the aforementioned history x reason interaction suggests that absence history moderates the relationship between absence reason and the administration of warnings. Specifically, infrequent absence histories led to significantly more warnings when the absence reason involved visits to friends than when the absence reason involved an emergency hospital visit. This finding was not evident for frequent absence histories. Thus, the main effect for absence reason on warnings was only evident at one level of absence history.

The multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) performed on the punitive response composite also yielded a significant main effect for absence history (Wilk's lambda=.597;  $F(2, 151)=50.89$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Separate ANOVAS performed on the factors of warnings and severe punishments showed significant main effects for both averaged forms of punitive responses. Results showed that subjects were significantly more likely to use both warnings and severe punishments for subordinates with frequent absence histories than for subordinates with infrequent absence histories,  $F(1, 152)=97.47$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2=.327$ ) and  $F(1, 152)=33.12$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2=.130$ ), respectively (see table 18 for means). However, the above mentioned history x reason interaction indicates that emergency hospital visits led to significantly more warnings when the subordinate had a frequent prior history of absenteeism than an infrequent prior history of absenteeism. This difference did not emerge for visits to friends. Thus, the main effect for absence history on warnings was only evident at one level of absence reason.

### Sanction Decisions: MBA Students

Interitem correlations for the punitive response items are shown in table 22. As with the Psychology sample, a principal components factor analysis with a varimax rotation was completed on the nine sanction items. Again, this analysis revealed a two factor solution. The factor loadings for the nine items are presented in table 23. For the MBA students, four dependent variables made up the "warnings" composite: "take no action", "further monitor the subordinate's situation", "counsel the subordinate about attendance regulations", and "verbal reprimands." Only two measures made up the "severe punishments": "terminate the subordinate", and "suspend the subordinate for future absences."

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) yielded three significant interaction effects. First, a significant three-way interaction was found, (Wilk's  $\lambda = .896$ ;  $F(2, 76) = 4.38$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Follow-up univariate tests indicated a significant three-way interaction only for the severe response factor,  $F(1, 77) = 6.42$ ,  $p < .05$  ( $\eta^2 = .011$ ). Results of a simple effects analysis revealed that, when the reason given involved visits to friends, a significant history x consequence interaction was evidenced,  $F(1, 40) = 10.50$ ,  $p < .01$  ( $\eta^2 = .166$ ). Further post hoc analysis indicated that for visits to friends, the combination of frequent absence histories and mild consequences led to significantly higher levels of severe punishments than any other combination. That is, when the subordinate had a frequent absence history, mild consequences actually led to more punishments than severe consequences. However, when the absence reason involved emergency hospital visits, the history x consequence interaction was not significant (see figure 1).

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 Insert Tables 22 and 23 about here  
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 Insert Figure 1 about here  
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Second, a significant history x reason interaction was found, (Wilk's lambda=.827;  $F(2, 76)=7.95$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Separate ANOVAS were performed on the warning factor and the severe punishment factor. In accordance with the findings for the individual response items, these results showed only a significant history x reason effect for the warning factor,  $F(1, 77)=16.10$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2=.107$ ). Post hoc Tukey tests revealed that the combination of emergency hospital visits and infrequent absence histories led to significantly fewer warnings than any other combination (see table 24).

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 Insert Table 24 about here  
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Third, the MANOVA performed on the response composites resulted in a significant reason x consequence interaction only for the warning factor, (Wilk's lambda=.921;  $F(2, 76)=3.22$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Examination of the follow-up univariate tests indicated a significant interaction effect only for warnings,  $F(1, 77)=4.77$ ,  $p < .05$  ( $\eta^2=.027$ ). Post hoc tests suggest that mild consequences resulted in significantly higher levels of severe punishments when the subordinate had visited some friends than

when the subordinate made an emergency hospital visit. This difference did not emerge for severe consequences (see table 25).

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 Insert Table 25 about here  
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A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) performed on the punitive actions composite yielded no main effect for consequences on the punitive measures composite. However, a significant main effect for absence reason on sanction decisions was found. (Wilk's lambda=.794;  $F(2, 76)=9.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Examination of the separate analyses of variance (ANOVAS) for the warning factor and the severe punitive factor indicated that subjects were more likely to administer both warnings and severe sanctions to subordinates who visited friends than to those who rushed their sick child to the hospital,  $F(1, 77)=15.22$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2 = .103$ ) and  $F(1, 77)=5.91$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2 = .038$ ), respectively (see table 18 for means). However, the aforementioned history x reason interaction indicates that infrequent absence histories led to significantly more warnings when the absence reason involved visits to friends than when the reason involved an emergency hospital visit. This finding was not evident for frequent absence histories. Thus, the main effect of absence reason on warnings was only evident under one level of absence history.

The MANOVA on the punitive response composite yielded a significant main effect for the subordinate's absence history on the punitive measures composite (Wilk's lambda=.684;  $F(2, 76)=17.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Examination of the separate ANOVAS for the warnings and severe punitive factors indicated that subjects were more likely to administer warnings and severe

punishments to subordinates with a frequent history of absenteeism than to subordinates with an infrequent history of absenteeism,  $F(1, 77)=26.80$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2=.182$ ) and  $F(1, 77)=10.79$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $\eta^2=.088$ ), respectively (see table 18 for means). However, the above mentioned history x reason interaction suggests that absence history moderates the relationship between absence reason and warnings. Specifically, emergency hospital visits led to significantly more warnings when the subordinate had a frequent absence history than when the subordinate had an infrequent absence history. This difference did not emerge for visits to friends. Thus, the main effect of absence history on warnings was only evident for one level of absence reason.

Summary: Sanction Decisions

Overall, analyses performed on the punitive response measures indicated that, for both samples, absence history and absence reason significantly affected subjects' sanctions decisions. However, consequences affected sanctions made only by Psychology students but not those made by MBA students. In addition, a significant history x reason interaction was reported for both samples, and several other significant interactions were observed. Briefly, for both samples, absence reason influenced the degree to which subjects administered warnings only when the subordinate had an infrequent absence history. Generally, absence history moderated the relationship between absence reason and sanction decisions and absence reason moderated the relationship between consequences and sanction decisions.

### Effects of Consequences on Absence Label

A moderated regression analysis was completed to examine corrolary 2, that severe consequences may moderate the relationship between locus of cause and absence label. To test for this interaction, absence label and locus of cause were each regressed on severe consequences. Then, the absence label, locus of cause product term was regressed on severe consequences. Results from both samples indicated no support for this hypothesis.

### Tests of Hypotheses 4 and 5: Psychology Student Sample

In order to examine hypothesis 4, Pearson correlations were computed between locus of cause and absence lables. Results show that the locus of cause composite was significantly correlated with the absence label,  $r = .811$ ,  $p < .0001$ . Subjects were significantly more likely to excuse absences which had been perceived to be externally-caused. Conversely, internally-caused absences were typically not excused.

In addition to the above analyses, simple regressions were performed in order to isolate the relationship between locus and label. This analysis allows us to examine the effect subjects' attributions have on subsequent absence labels, independent of absence history, absence reason, and consequences. In order to test for this relationship, absence label was first regressed on all three independent variables. Then, absence label was regressed on the independent variables alone. This analysis revealed a significant beta weight of .559,  $t(4, 155) = 8.32$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $r^2 = .090$ ). These findings indicate that 9 % of the unique variance found in subjects' labels of subordinate absence can be solely accounted

for by their causal attributions. Therefore, these results support hypothesis 4 that internally-caused absences will more likely lead to unexcused absence labels, and externally-caused absences will lead to excused labels. It can thus be concluded that subjects' causal attributions had a direct effect on their decisions whether or not to excuse subordinate absences.

In order to examine hypothesis 5, Pearson product correlations were calculated between the absence label and the two punishment factors. Results of this analysis indicated significant correlations between absence label and the warnings factor,  $r = .541$ ,  $p < .0001$ , and between absence label and the severe punishment factor,  $r = .532$ ,  $p < .0001$ . These findings reveal that unexcused absences were significantly related to administrations of warnings and severe punishments, while excused absences were more closely associated with fewer administrations of warnings and severe punishments. In addition, simple regressions were performed in order to isolate the relationship between absence label and punitive responses. This relationship was tested by first regressing punishments on labels, attributions, and the three independent variables. Then, the punishment composites were regressed on only attributions and the independent variables. These analyses revealed that absence label was only significantly related to the warning factor,  $b = .179$ ,  $t(5,154) = 2.71$ ,  $p < .01$  ( $r^2 = .021$ ). Thus, only 2 % of the unique variance found in subjects' sanction decisions can be solely accounted for by their absence labels. The beta weight for the relationship between absence label and the severe punishment factor was not significant. These results indicate that, when the effects of the independent variables and locus of cause were removed, absence label did not overwhelmingly influence

subjects' sanction decisions. This was especially true for the administration of severe punishments. Hypothesis 5 was therefore partially supported. Subjects who did not excuse subordinate absences were significantly more likely to administer only warnings than when absences were excused.

#### Tests of Hypotheses 4 and 5: MBA Sample

The Pearson correlation between locus of cause and absence label was significant,  $r = .798$ ,  $p < .0001$ . This result indicates that internal attributions more often led to unexcused absence labels while external attributions were significantly more likely to lead to excused labels. In addition, the regression analysis performed on the data indicated a significant relationship between attribution and label  $b = .591$ ,  $t(4,80) = 6.26$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $r^2 = .109$ ). Thus, hypothesis 4 was again supported. Absences attributed externally were significantly more likely to be "excused" than absences attributed internally. Further, these results are in accord with those reported for the psychology student sample thereby providing even stronger support for the attribution --> label linkage.

Results of the correlational analyses between absence label and the mild and severe punishment factors indicated that label was significantly related to both factors,  $r = .578$ ,  $p < .0001$  and  $r = .477$ ,  $p < .0001$ , respectively. For these subjects, unexcused absences led to significantly fewer warnings or severe sanctions meted out, and excused absences led to significantly more administrations of both mild and severe punishments. Moreover, regression analyses revealed significant regression weights for absence label on both warnings and severe punishment factors.



For the warning factor,  $b = .310$ ,  $t(5, 79) = 3.27$ ,  $p < .01$  ( $r^2 = .074$ ). For the severe punishment factor,  $b = .322$ ,  $t(5, 79) = 2.34$ ,  $p < .05$  ( $r^2 = .041$ ). The proportion of unique variance on sanction decisions attributable to absence labels are evidently stronger for the MBA sample. Contrary to the psychology students, these results provide support for the direct effect of absence label on punitive responses. Overall, it appears that when the effects of history, reason, and consequences, and locus are removed, absence labels have a greater effect on the administration of warnings than on severe punishments. Thus, for the MBA sample, hypothesis 5 was supported. Subjects who did not excuse subordinate absences were significantly more likely to administer higher levels of warnings and severe sanctions than when absences were excused.

## Discussion

### Hypotheses

The results of the present investigation provided clear support for hypotheses 1 and 2. No support was found for hypothesis 3. Also, the results of this study provided complete support for hypothesis 4 and partial support for hypothesis 5. However, the evidence reported above provided no support for either corollary 1 nor corollary 2. Each of these hypotheses will be discussed below.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that prior histories of frequent absences would more likely lead to internal attributions and infrequent absence histories would result in external attributions. Complete support was found in both samples for this hypothesis. These results suggest that subjects were likely to attribute subordinate absences to personal

characteristics or perceive such absences as internally-motivated when the subordinate had a history of chronic absenteeism. This is because the latest instance of subordinate absenteeism was perceived as consistent with the worker's past history of absenteeism. On the other hand, when a worker had a history of infrequent absenteeism, subjects were likely to attribute absences to situational factors which were beyond the worker's control. Since an isolated absence episode is not consistent with a good absence history, internal attributions are less likely to be made. McArthur (1972; in Shaw & Costanzo, 1982) showed that attributions to circumstances beyond one's control were more likely to be made in low consistency conditions. Furthermore, Mitchell and Wood (1980) reported that instances of poor performance involving low consistency led supervisors to make fewer internal attributions than external attributions. Thus, infrequent absence histories may have led subjects to believe that a subsequent absence event is out of character for that employee, and therefore, not internally-motivated. Therefore, behavior which is consistent with prior absence behavior will lead to internal attributions.

Exploratory analyses indicated that a chronic absence history will lead subjects to view a subsequent absence as more unexcusable than when the worker was infrequently absent. These findings suggest that history of prior events may act as a cue not only for causal locus but also for managerial decisions to excuse or not excuse the absence.

Likewise, absence history influences decisions regarding appropriate types and levels of sanctions. For both samples, subjects administered more forms of both warnings and severe sanctions when the subordinate had a history of frequent absenteeism. These results suggest that subjects took into account the worker's prior absence history before administering

a punitive action. This finding shows that certain antecedent factors, such as absence history, are important cues for managerial decisions as to whether and what type of action should be taken towards the absent subordinate. Therefore, researchers ought to incorporate past performance (e.g., prior absence history) into their models of absenteeism in order to more fully understand what factors influence differential responses to subordinate absenteeism.

Hypothesis 2, which stated that absences due to visits to friends will lead to internal attributions while absences due to an emergency hospital visit will lead to external attributions was also supported. The perceived voluntary nature of a subordinate's absence is directly related to the degree to which the absence event is perceived to be internally- or externally-caused. Voluntary absences were likely to be attributed to internal factors within the person's control. Conversely, absences which were involuntary were likely to be perceived as caused by factors beyond the subordinate's control. This is because the reason given by the subordinate connotes a degree of control involved in the absence. Voluntary absences lead observers to perceive that the subordinate intended to miss work. Involuntary absences, on the other hand, are perceived as instances of absenteeism in which the subordinate had no premeditated notion of taking the day off. Subjects' attributions are thus a direct result of the degree to which they believe the subordinate to have intended to be absent.

It was also shown that voluntary absences were more likely to be excused than involuntary absences. Briefly, these findings suggest that absence reasons also influence judgments of absence legitimacy. The findings of the present investigation imply that different absence labels

will be dependent upon the degree to which an absence episode is perceived to be voluntary in nature.

The two significant interaction effects found for judgments of absence legitimacy both indicate that absence history and absence severity moderate the effects of absence reason on absence labels. Specifically, these results suggest that frequent absence histories led subjects to discount a subordinate's absence reason when deciding to excuse or unexcuse an absence event. Whether or not an absence is categorized as excused or unexcused depends obviously on the reason given. This is not surprising. What is interesting though is that the effects of reason on excuse decisions is moderated both by consequences and by prior history. These relationships imply that the specific factors involved in subordinate absenteeism are not perceived in an isolated manner. Rather, the decision whether or not to excuse absences is a complex one in which joint differences in absence severity and absence history influence the perception of absence reason. Subordinates' with poor absence histories led subjects to devalue the employee's absence reason. This implies that a worker's prior history of behaviors (e.g., absenteeism) influences the degree to which one's intentions are causally related to an absence episode.

Exploratory analyses indicated that absence reason influenced sanction decisions. For both samples, voluntary absences resulted in significantly more sanctions than involuntary absences. These findings suggest that subjects considered the reason given by the absent subordinate before administering disciplinary action. In this case, the intentions of the subordinate were considered relevant for the decision as to how to act towards him or her. Absences in which the subordinate in-

tended to miss work were treated more harshly than absences which were beyond the subordinate's control. Thus, the degree to which the subordinate was perceived to be intentionally absent influenced attributions, absence labels, and sanction decisions. Therefore, when formulating models of absenteeism, researchers should more often consider how supervisors infer the intentions of those subordinates who fail to attend work. It appears that the perception of intent is a critical factor in the decisions taken in response to subordinate absenteeism. As was the case with absence history, most organizational control policies include provision for the absence reason when managers must decide what form of punitive action to take. Thus, these results support the notion that managers take into consideration the offered excuse before making any sanction decisions.

Hypothesis 3, which stated that absences resulting in severe consequences to the organization will lead to internal attributions while nonserious consequences should result in external attributions, was not supported. This finding is not consistent with the results of prior investigations (e.g., Mitchell & Wood, 1981; Dobbins et al., 1985). In addition, corollary 1, which stated that severe consequences may lead supervisors to discount the reason given and attribute an absence more internally, was not supported. Two reasons are offered to explain these findings.

First, the principle of "hedonic relevance" (Jones & Davis, 1965) may explain the lack of support received for hypothesis 3. As mentioned above, absences that have affective consequences for the manager should be perceived as more dispositional than other absences. In the present study, the students may not have felt any hedonic relevance in response

to absences with severe outcomes. That is, since the subjects were not actually managers, a missed deadline for a due project may not have had any affective consequences for them. Thus, subjects would not attribute absences differentially based on the consequence information provided in the scenarios. This attributional explanation appears to be the most plausible in explaining the findings reported for hypothesis 3 and corollary 1.

Second, the results of hypothesis 3 may not have been in accord with those found in prior investigations (e.g., Mitchell & Wood, 1980; Mitchell et al., 1981) because the consequence manipulation used in this study may not have been perceived as intense as in other studies. For example, Mitchell and Wood (1980) manipulated the consequences of poor nursing performance such that a mild outcome resulted in a patient's "mild discomfort" while a severe outcome led to a "cardiac arrest." It is apparent that a "missed deadline for an important project" is not as severe as a cardiac arrest, and thus, may not have been perceived as a very intense example of a severe consequence. While no direct comparison can be made between these two manipulations, the obvious difference between their magnitudes of severity is one possible explanation for these conflicting findings.

While consequences had no effect on subjects' attributions, consequences did influence the chosen absence label for the psychology and MBA student samples. These results indicate that consequences do influence judgments of absence legitimacy despite the lack of influence on locus of cause. Such findings imply that the consequences of an absence are perceived to be more important or relevant to the labeling process than to the attribution process.

It was also shown that the consequences of an absence episode had an effect on the degree to which subjects administered "severe" forms of punishments. However, this result was true only for the psychology sample, and only for severe punishments. The effect of consequences on warnings was not significant. These results, therefore, are difficult to generalize beyond the psychology student sample. It is best to conclude that consequences do not directly influence sanction decisions. This is proposed for two specific reasons.

First, the MBA students were selected to provide a sample of subjects which had some degree of managerial experience. Thus, it was hoped that the decisions made by these students would more closely resemble the decisions made by actual managers. Second, consequences failed to influence subjects' causal attributions in both samples. Therefore, it cannot be said that subjects in the psychology sample perceived the consequences of absenteeism in a completely different manner than subjects in the MBA sample.

Hypothesis 4, which claimed that the locus of cause will influence whether an absence episode is excused or unexcused, was clearly supported. In both samples, internal attributions led to more unexcused labels while external attributions led to more excused labels. This finding is, in part, the focus of the present investigation.

The decision to excuse or not excuse an absence event was found to partially result from the attributed cause of the absence. This finding implies that subjects sought to infer the locus of causality for a given absence before assigning a label to that absence. The absence literature has devoted little attention to the factors which determine whether or

not an absence will be excused, particularly perceptual/cognitive factors. This issue will be further discussed below.

Hypothesis 5, that the severity of chosen sanctions will be influenced by whether or not the absence is excused or unexcused, was completely supported in the MBA sample and partially supported in the psychology sample. For the MBA students, unexcused absences led to significantly more administrations of both warnings and severe forms of punishment. However, for the psychology students, unexcused absences led to only more administrations of warnings. Briefly, it is proposed that the psychology students meted out only warnings because these students lacked any business/managerial experience in dealing with such actions. This lack of experience in such powerful positions may have inhibited extreme responses from these subjects. The MBA's, on the other hand, may have employed their previous experience and knowledge to respond according to what they believed to be appropriate managerial action(s). Therefore, the MBA students were equally likely to administer both warnings and severe sanctions depending on the nature of the given absence.

This finding, that absence labels led subjects to take punitive actions toward subordinates who failed to attend work, is the other focus of the present study. Specifically, it was proposed that the label ascribed to an absence event would lead to the administration of punitive responses. For the most part, this was confirmed. This finding revealed that subjects made the distinction between excused and unexcused absences prior to taking disciplinary action towards the subordinate. Such a distinction may have made it easier for the subjects in the present study to decide how to respond to subordinate absenteeism. In turn, this la-



belonging process is purported to alleviate some of the confusion inherent in basing sanction decisions on mere frequency or duration indices. Quantitative measures of absence are perhaps confounded by the qualitative nature of an absence. Therefore, it is recommended that researchers studying absenteeism include a specific excused/unexcused distinction between various absences instead of merely relying on "objective" measures.

#### A Model of Leadership Responses to Subordinate Absenteeism

The results of the present investigation suggest a general model of subordinate absenteeism. Based on the above findings, and those of Green and Mitchell and their colleagues, it can be concluded that absence history and absence reason initially led to inferences of the causal nature of the subordinate's absence. In turn, this attribution led subjects to distinguish whether the absence was excused or unexcused. Finally, the type of label ascribed to an absence event influenced the decision to administer certain forms of organizational sanctions to the subordinate. The model presented here differs from the predicted model in only one respect--consequences of absenteeism had no effect on subjects' causal attributions. Future research may involve testing this model by examining the effects of these antecedent variables, and perhaps others (e.g., organizational policy and leadership style), on subjects' attributions, absence labels, and sanction decisions in various other settings. In addition, the use of different manipulations, or preferably, "real employees" instead of "paper people", might serve to enhance the generalizability of these findings. At the present time, this model is exploratory in nature and is in need of further experimentation.

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Insert Figure 2 about here  
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### Implications for the Absence Literature

The distinction between excused and unexcused absenteeism is of central concern to the present investigation. It was previously mentioned that absence indices such as frequency and time-lost measures are insufficient determinants of excused and unexcused absenteeism. It was proposed, and now evidenced, that the causal attributions an observer (e.g., manager) makes in response to subordinate absence guide his or her labeling of that absence. This distinction is important for two general reasons.

The first reason for this distinction is based on a social/psychological view of absenteeism (cf. Chadwick-Jones et al., 1982; Johns & Nicholson, 1982). This notion of absence measurement focuses on the perceptions of the supervisor when attempting to categorize employee attendance. Rather than assuming that objective absence criteria are completely nonjudgmental, the position taken here is that supervisors look to see what factors caused a subordinate to miss work, and then label the absence accordingly. The present findings support the notion that certain attributional processes of observers serve to mediate the distinction between excused and unexcused absenteeism. Of central importance to the absence literature is the recognition that the measurement of absenteeism is purported to be somewhat judgmental, in that supervisors rely on their subjective perceptions of what they believe represents excused and unexcused absences. Thus, a social/psychological

perspective of absenteeism, based on leadership attributions, tends to shift the emphasis of absence measurement from a "hard" (e.g., nonjudgmental) criteria to a "soft" (e.g., judgmental) criteria.

In light of the above argument, it is suggested that researchers in the area of absenteeism place greater emphasis on the leader's cognitive/perceptual processes. This is recommended because the distinction between excused and unexcused absenteeism was found to be largely a function of the attributed causes of subordinate absence. Although such causal attributions are not directly observable, these cognitive processes may be the precursors of many important decisions. It is proposed that because leaders continually make attributions of cause in response to subordinate behavior (e.g., performance, absenteeism, and turnover), researchers should incorporate a cognitive/perceptual component into their models of absenteeism.

Second, all absences are not of the same nature. Some absences are uncontrollable (e.g., involuntary) while others are controllable (e.g., voluntary). It may be that, in order for organizations to increase their fiscal and judicious responsibilities, a distinction between the two forms of absenteeism be made. Many organizations do not make such distinctions. Here, organizations may decrease the number of "good" employees lost to unnecessary firings, and also increase the satisfaction of employees who are not unduly treated for unavoidable instances of absenteeism. This argument is mainly concerned with the findings of hypothesis 5, that the distinction between excused and unexcused absenteeism influences the meting out of organizational sanctions. Using causal information to determine the voluntary nature of subordinate ab-

senteism should result in clearer distinctions between those absentees who deserve punishment and those who do not.

#### A Comparison of the Two Samples

The results of this study strongly support the proposition that a supervisor's attributions toward subordinate absenteeism will influence the chosen absence label, and in turn, will affect subsequent responses. However, the effects of absence history, absence reason, and particularly, consequences on subjects' attributions, labels, and responses was not identical for both samples. Specifically, while the psychology students perceived consequences to influence chosen absence labels and punitive responses, the MBA students did not. In addition, the MBA students more often perceived absence reason to moderate the relationships between history, consequences and chosen absence labels. These differences may suggest that the processes involved in judging absence legitimacy and administering sanctions for the MBA students may not be the same as those for the psychology students.

It is evident that the introductory psychology students gave credence to the consequences of absenteeism when choosing absence labels and making sanction decisions. The MBA students only perceived such consequences to have an effect on absence labels. Thus, a consequence bias was more apparent for the psychology student sample. This difference between samples may imply that the psychology students responded more exclusively to the information included within the scenario than the MBA's. That is, in light of the highly novel information contained within the scenarios, these subjects may have used a different decision scheme than the MBA's. In a business sense, a naive sample of subjects (e.g.,

introductory psychology students) may have employed a more fundamental strategy in response to the provided task. The lack of experience in dealing with absenteeism from a manager's perspective may have led these subjects to solely consider the information included in the scenarios. Since no previous managerial experiences were recalled absence severity was given a greater amount of credence by the psychology students than the MBA students in their absence decisions.

In addition to the information contained in the scenario, the MBA students may have considered their past business/managerial experiences when deciding what to do in response to the absentee. That is, the MBA students may have used a more developed decision scheme than the psychology students. In particular, the MBA's may have developed, and subsequently employed, their own "implicit theories" of what factors are involved in subordinate absenteeism. The psychology students, on the other hand, may have not had enough exposure in such situations to develop a firm implicit theory of subordinate absenteeism. Previous literature has discussed implicit theories of leadership (e.g., Phillips, 1984; Foti, Fraser, & Lord, 1982) and performance (e.g., Nathan & Alexander, 1985; Feldman, 1981). However, these "theories" are presumably held by subordinates; I am proposing that leaders, too, have preconceived notions of how subordinates (should) behave. The claim being made here is that, unlike the psychology students, the MBA students have presumably enough experience in dealing with actual business situations (e.g., absenteeism) that they have developed their own conceptualizations of what constitutes an excused or unexcused absence. Also, their implicit theories aid them in the administration of sanctions towards the subordinates. The findings of the present study show that the consequences of absenteeism was not a

major factor in the implicit theories of the MBA students. Instead, absence history and absence reason were sufficient information for making causal attributions and meting out organizational sanctions.

The use of better developed implicit absence theories by the MBA's is suggested to be the major difference between the decision processes of the two samples. These preconceived notions regarding subordinate absenteeism are thought to serve as a short-cut or heuristic categorization process (cf. Phillips & Lord, 1982; Foti et al., 1982). Implicit theories are more apt to be used by persons when novel information is perceived to be consistent with or "prototypical" of prior beliefs. It is proposed that the MBA's used this heuristic because the information provided in the absence report was, in part, prototypical of the factors believed to be involved in subordinate absenteeism. In particular, these prototypical factors involved absence history and absence reason. However, absence severity was not considered to be a relevant factor for making causal inferences, and delivering organizational sanctions. If the psychology students had any preconceived absence notions, such conceptualizations would most likely have involved absenteeism from the subordinate's perspective. However, the contention here is that the psychology students relied solely on the provided absence information. On the other hand, the implicit theories employed by the MBA's were most likely to involve a supervisor's point-of-view--one in which absence consequences is deemed relatively unimportant.

Another difference between the two samples pertains to the moderating effects of absence reason on the relationships between absence history, severity and absence labels. Specifically, more significant interactions were found for judgments of absence legitimacy in the MBA

sample than in the psychology sample. Moreover, two significant interactions were also discovered for locus of cause in the MBA sample. These findings suggest that the MBA students more likely considered absence history (and in one instance, absence severity) relative to absence reasons. MBA students reported that absence history only had an effect on chosen absence labels when the reason given was involuntary. The MBA's discounted the subordinate's absence history when the absence was voluntary. Thus, more so than the psychology students, the MBA's considered absence history to be dependent upon absence reason when choosing how to label an absence episode. It appears that, as managers, the MBA's did not deal with each precipitating factor in a vacuum, rather, these subjects took into account the significance of one variable (history) in relation to another variable (reason). The psychology students may not have responded this way because of their limited business experience. Without such exposure, it seems less likely that these subjects would recognize the interrelationships between absence history and absence reason. Rather, these subjects probably dealt with the provided information in the same manner in which it was presented, as independent pieces of data.

A final point should be made regarding the above issue. It is hoped that the results of this study be generalizable to real-world managers of intact organizations. The discrepancies between the two samples noted above may appear to cast doubt on such external validity. However, it is believed that the present findings do not pose a threat to the generalizability of this study for two reasons. First, from a social/psychological perspective, the process involved in making causal inferences from the provided information was generally consistent across

subjects. This attribution process is proposed to be constant for observers as a whole. No differences in the process of making causal attributions should be evidenced between the laboratory and the field.

Second, the relationships between locus of cause and absence label, and between label and responses were also consistent between samples. Since two completely different subject populations agreed on a chain of attributions to labels to responses, it is proposed that such a sequence of events is likely to occur in real-world organizations. Thus, these results, which are of optimal importance for a study of this nature, appear to be generalizable beyond subjects and setting.

#### Future Considerations

While the present study sought to examine the effects of several relevant absence variables on supervisor's attributions, labels, and responses, an important factor was omitted in the manipulations. Although a brief description was provided, the organization's absence policy was not a manipulated variable in the present investigation. It is obvious that an organization's control policy has a profound effect on the manager's decision to excuse and punish subordinate's for absenteeism. It is suggested that subjects in the present study invoked their own control policies in dealing with their absent employees. In general, most absence policies place the greatest amounts of emphasis on absence history and absence reason. That is, subordinates are dealt with according to whether they have exceeded their allowances of excusable absences, and to whether their reasons for failing to attend are excusable or not.

In the present study, subjects, particularly the MBA students, used the provided absence history and absence reason to determine how to label



absences and punish absentees. In most organizations, the absence policy mediates the effects of history and reason on absence label and the delegation of sanctions. It would be interesting to see how supervisors process absence history and absence reason information given different organizational control policies. Future research in this area seems particularly relevant to organizations concerned with controlling absenteeism.

### Summary and Conclusions

To summarize, the present study aimed to shed more light on the processes involved in supervisor's responses to subordinate absenteeism. A model proposed by Green and Mitchell (1979) was expanded to incorporate the mediating effects of chosen absence labels between leadership attributions and subsequent responses. Two important findings came about from the present investigation. First, for two distinct subject populations, a process model of attributions --> labels --> responses was evidenced. Subjects clearly used causal inferences to guide their distinctions between excused and unexcused absenteeism, and then based their sanction decisions on such labels.

Second, and particularly relevant to the absence literature, the distinction between excused and unexcused absences was shown to influence the manner in which a supervisor responds to subordinate absenteeism. It thus concluded that organizational control policies and managers consider these two forms of absenteeism when deciding how to respond to employees who fail to attend work.

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Table 1

Means for Manipulation Effectiveness Items:

Psychology Student Sample & MBA Sample

Dep Var	Prior Absence History							
	Frequent Absences				Infrequent Absences			
	Mild conseq.		Severe conseq.		Mild conseq.		Severe conseq.	
	vol. absence	invol. absence	vol. absence	invol. absence	vol. absence	invol. absence	vol. absence	invol. absence
Psy	(n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)
abs reas	7.35	3.95	7.05	3.50	7.65	2.95	7.80	2.65
abs hist	5.20	6.40	5.50	6.05	3.00	2.55	3.00	2.50
abs sev	3.85	3.15	7.50	7.40	3.80	2.30	8.00	6.40
MBA	(n=11)	(n=10)	(n=9)	(n=10)	(n=11)	(n=10)	(n=13)	(n=11)
abs reas	7.18	4.40	7.00	4.60	7.73	2.80	7.08	3.64
abs hist	5.64	7.10	5.56	6.60	4.09	2.30	3.31	3.27
abs sev	5.64	4.90	6.67	5.80	4.45	2.00	7.69	6.00

Table 2

F values for Manipulation Effectiveness ItemsPsychology Student Sample & MBA Sample

Dep. Var. df	Source of Variance							within grp. mean square <sup>1</sup>
	Reason (A) 1	Hist (B) 1	Conseq. (C) 1	AxB 1	AxC 1	BxC 1	AxBxC 1	
Sample:								
Psych (N=160)								
absence reason	143.63a	.33	.41	4.28c	.18	.18	.05	4.91
absence history	.49	112.19a	.01	5.59c	.38	.00	.28	3.26
absence severity	20.71a	2.67	357.32a	7.20b	.34	.22	.67	1.84
MBA (N=85)								
absence reason	39.90a	.82	.01	2.21	.76	.01	.27	6.05
absence history	.15	45.80a	.05	6.05c	.58	.19	1.52	4.08
absence severity	17.03a	4.20c	43.29a	3.33	.21	14.51b	.54	2.56

a p &lt; .001

b p &lt; .01

c p &lt; .05

1 df=152 for psychology sample and df=77 for MBA sample

Table 3

Cell Means for History x Reason Interaction on Manipulated AbsenceReason: Psychology Student Sample

## ABSENCE HISTORY

		Frequent	Infrequent
ABSENCE REASON	Voluntary	7.20 a	7.73 a
	Involuntary	3.73 b	2.80 c

Note: Cell means with noncommon subscripts are significantly different  
at  $p < .05$ ;  $df=156$

Table 4

Cell Means for History x Reason Interaction on Manipulated AbsenceHistory: Psychology Student Sample

## ABSENCE HISTORY

		Frequent	Infrequent
ABSENCE REASON	Voluntary	5.35 b	3.00 c
	Involuntary	6.30 a	2.50 c

Note: Cell means with noncommon subscripts are significantly different  
at  $p < .05$ ;  $df=156$



Table 5

Cell Means for History x Reason Interaction on Manipulated  
Consequences: Psychology Student Sample

## ABSENCE HISTORY

		Frequent	Infrequent
ABSENCE REASON	Voluntary	5.70 a	5.90 a
	Involuntary	5.30 a	4.35 b

Note: Cell means with noncommon subscripts are significantly different  
 at  $p < .05$ ;  $df=156$

Table 6

Cell Means for History x Reason Interaction on Manipulated AbsenceHistory: MBA Student Sample

## ABSENCE HISTORY

		Frequent	Infrequent
ABSENCE REASON	Voluntary	5.60 b	3.67 c
	Involuntary	6.85 a	2.80 c

Note: Cell means with noncommon subscripts are significantly different  
at  $p < .05$ ;  $df=81$

Table 7

Cell Means for History x Consequence Interaction on Manipulated Consequences: MBA Student Sample

		ABSENCE HISTORY	
		Frequent	Infrequent
CONSEQUENCES	Mild	5.30 a	3.30 b
	Severe	6.20 a	6.90 a

Note: Cell means with noncommon subscripts are significantly different at  $p < .05$ ;  $df=81$

Table 8

Interitem Correlations for Attribution and Absence Label MeasuresPsychology Student Sample

	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	L1	L2	L3
A1	1.00	.829	.810	.604	.648	-.707	-.715	-.727
A2		1.00	.777	.643	.625	-.733	-.750	-.727
A3			1.00	.532	.609	-.696	-.667	-.711
A4				1.00	.496	-.668	-.675	-.653
A5					1.00	-.555	-.497	-.489
L1						1.00	.871	.829
L2							1.00	.888
L3								1.00

note: All correlations were significant at the .0001 level

note: A1=the absence reflected an aspect of the worker or of  
the workers situation

A2=absence was inside the worker or outside of the worker

A3=absence was internal or external

A4=absence involved circumstances beyond the workers control

A5=absence involved personal factors within the workers control

L1=whether the absence was legitimate

L2=whether the absence was acceptable

L3=whether the absence was excusable

Table 9

Means for Attributions and Absence LabelsPsychology Student Sample

dep var	Prior Absence History							
	Frequent Absences				Infrequent Absences			
	Mild conseq.		Severe conseq.		Mild conseq.		Severe conseq.	
	vol. absence	invol. absence	vol. absence	invol. absence	vol. absence	invol. absence	vol. absence	invol. absence
(n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)	
<b>ATTRIBUTIONS</b>								
A1	7.90	4.05	7.70	4.30	6.15	3.25	6.30	2.45
A2	7.60	3.80	7.55	4.45	5.75	2.85	6.05	2.10
A3	1.00	.250	.950	.300	.750	.250	.800	.050
A4	6.45	3.45	6.90	4.30	5.50	2.80	5.75	2.30
A5	7.25	5.70	7.15	4.95	6.20	4.45	6.45	3.10
<b>ABSENCE LABEL</b>								
L1	2.25	6.75	2.25	7.20	3.60	8.30	2.45	8.20
L2	2.60	6.95	2.15	6.10	3.90	8.00	2.50	7.65
L3	2.60	7.30	2.25	6.45	4.60	7.95	3.30	8.00

note: A1=the absence reflected an aspect of the worker or as opposed to the workers situation

A2=absence was inside the worker instead of outside of the worker

A3=absence was internal rather than external

A4=absence involved circumstances beyond the workers control

A5=absence involved personal factors within the workers control

L1=whether the absence was legitimate

L2=whether the absence was acceptable

L3=whether the absence was excusable

Table 10

F Values for Attributions and Absence LabelsPsychology Student Sample

Dep. Var. df	Source of Variance							
	Reason (A) 1	Hist (B) 1	Conseq (C) 1	AxB 1	BxC 1	AxC 1	AxBxC 1	within grp. mean square <sup>1</sup>
ATTRIBUTIONS								
A1	107.85a	18.51a	.199	.138	.270	.138	1.08	4.54
A2	137.91a	32.26a	.016	.002	.804	.089	2.23	3.43
A3	129.86a	7.81c	.416	.416	.416	.416	2.27	0.14
A4	82.48a	13.47b	.659	.181	1.44	.073	.79	4.18
A5	47.37a	14.23b	2.30	1.10	.037	3.06	.54	4.13
ABSENCE LABEL								
Legit	396.43a	16.83b	.641	1.00	2.89	2.25	.360	2.50
Accept	250.38a	14.68b	7.56c	3.07	.164	.343	1.71	3.08
Excuse	197.19a	18.92a	4.12c	.496	.002	.496	2.35	3.64

N=160

1 df=152

a p &lt; .001

b p &lt; .01

c p &lt; .05

note: A1=the absence reflected an aspect of the worker or of the workers situation

A2=absence was inside the worker or outside of the worker

A3=absence was internal or external

A4=absence involved circumstances beyond the workers control

A5=absence involved personal factors within the workers control

Table 11

Interitem Correlations for Attribution and Absence Label MeasuresMBA Student Sample

	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	L1	L2	L3
A1	1.00	.624	.664	.432	.497	-.554	-.539	-.507
A2		1.00	.733	.610	.721	-.691	-.782	-.791
A3			1.00	.515	.619	-.670	-.662	-.708
A4				1.00	.535	-.526	-.608	-.572
A5					1.00	-.533	-.602	-.634
L1						1.00	.782	.730
L2							1.00	.882
L3								1.00

note: All correlations were significant at the .0001 level

note: A1=the absence reflected an aspect of the worker or of  
the workers situation

A2=absence was inside the worker or outside of the worker

A3=absence was internal or external

A4=absence involved circumstances beyond the workers control

A5=absence involved personal factors within the workers control

L1=whether the absence was legitimate

L2=whether the absence was acceptable

L3=whether the absence was excusable

Table 12

Means for Attributions and Absence LabelsMBA Student Sample

Dep Var (n=11)	Prior Absence History							
	Frequent Absences				Infrequent Absences			
	Mild conseq.		Severe conseq.		Mild conseq.		Severe conseq.	
	vol. absence	invol. absence	vol. absence	invol. absence	vol. absence	invol. absence	vol. absence	invol. absence
	(n=10)	(n=9)	(n=10)	(n=11)	(n=10)	(n=13)	(n=11)	
ATTRIBUTIONS								
A1	6.55	4.30	5.44	5.30	5.64	1.90	5.77	2.91
A2	7.18	4.40	6.33	5.20	6.27	2.70	6.92	2.82
A3	1.00	.300	.780	.400	.910	.000	.850	.090
A4	6.00	3.10	5.78	4.50	5.09	2.20	5.69	2.45
A5	7.27	5.30	6.78	5.50	7.18	4.10	7.23	4.73
ABSENCE LABEL								
L1	2.64	6.60	2.56	5.20	2.55	8.90	4.00	7.73
L2	2.73	5.80	2.56	4.60	3.55	8.70	2.00	7.09
L3	2.64	7.00	3.00	5.20	3.45	8.70	3.54	7.82

note: A1=the absence reflected an aspect of the worker as opposed to the workers situation  
 A2=absence was inside the worker rather than outside of the worker  
 A3=absence was internal instead of external  
 A4=absence involved circumstances beyond the workers control  
 A5=absence involved personal factors within the workers control

L1=whether the absence was legitimate  
 L2=whether the absence was acceptable  
 L3=whether the absence was excusable



Table 13

F Values for Attributions and Absence LabelsMBA Student Sample

Dep. Var. df	Source of Variance							AxBxC within grp. mean square <sup>1</sup>
	Reason (A) 1	Hist (B) 1	Conseq (C) 1	AxB 1	BxC 1	AxC 1	AxBxC 1	
ATTRIBUTIONS								
A1	22.72a	8.13c	.305	4.98c	.435	2.49	.422	4.67
A2	55.64a	8.02c	.215	5.86c	.276	.516	1.97	3.18
A3	79.56a	4.22c	.094	3.64	.239	2.40	.300	0.12
A4	33.50a	4.90c	1.30	1.20	.033	.513	1.22	4.17
A5	23.85a	.792	.044	1.67	.288	.495	.004	4.30
ABSENCE LABEL								
Legit	113.42a	15.56b	.586	4.91c	1.27	6.34c	.697	3.23
Accept	129.73a	17.57b	11.26b	14.46b	1.75	.656	.511	2.39
Excuse	88.56a	11.02b	1.71	3.00	.140	3.35	.491	3.84

N=85

1 df=77

a p &lt; .001

b p &lt; .01

c p &lt; .05

note: A1 =the absence reflected an aspect of the worker or  
of the workers situation

A2=absence was inside the worker or outside of the worker

A3=absence was internal or external

A4=absence involved circumstances beyond the workers control

A5=absence involved personal factors within the workers control

Table 14

Cell Means for Reason x Consequence Interaction on Absence Label  
(Legitimacy Item): MBA Student Sample

		ABSENCE REASON	
		Voluntary	Involuntary
CONSEQUENCES	Mild	2.60 c	7.75 a
	Severe	3.41 c	6.52 b

note: Cell means with noncommon subscripts are significantly different  
 at  $p < .05$ ;  $df=81$

Table 15

Cell Means for History x Reason Interaction on Absence Label(Acceptance Item): MBA Student Sample

## ABSENCE HISTORY

	Frequent	Infrequent
Voluntary	2.65 a	2.70 a
ABSENCE REASON		
Involuntary	5.20 b	7.90 c

note: Cell means with noncommon subscripts are significantly different  
at  $p < .05$ ;  $df=81$

Table 16

Interitem Correlations for Sanction DecisionsPsychology Student Sample

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9
S1	1.00	-.345**	-.612**	-.650**	-.322**	-.686**	-.520**	-.584**	-.392**
S2		1.00	.387**	.325**	.454**	.389**	.245*	.414**	.325**
S3			1.00	.634**	.589**	.770**	.468**	.604**	.528**
S4				1.00	.345**	.717**	.605**	.659**	.399**
S5					1.00	.404**	.218*	.369**	.437**
S6						1.00	.557**	.645**	.452**
S7							1.00	.605**	.358**
S8								1.00	.599**
S9									1.00

\*\* p &lt;.001

\* p &lt;.01

note: S1=take no action

S2=decrease the subordinates pay

S3=add a written reprimand to the workers file

S4=counsel the worker about attendance regulations

S5=terminate the subordinate

S6=verbally reprimand the subordinate

S7=further monitor the workers situation

S8=give a warning that future absences will lead to a suspension

S9=a suspension without pay

Table 17

Factor Loadings for Sanction DecisionsPsychology Student Sample

	Factor 1 Mild punishments	Factor 2 Severe punishments
S1	-0.77765 *	-0.24448
S2	0.16734	0.74274 *
S3	0.66505	0.52149
S4	0.83676 *	0.21883
S5	0.14060	0.84355 *
S6	0.79839 *	0.35631
S7	0.80595 *	0.04272
S8	0.74347 *	0.38390
S9	0.40842	0.58427 *

note: S1=take no action

S2=decrease the subordinates pay

S3=add a written reprimand to the workers file

S4=counsel the worker about attendance regulations

S5=terminate the subordinate

S6=verbally reprimand the subordinate

S7=further monitor the workers situation

S8=give a warning that future absences will lead to a suspension

S9=a suspension without pay

Table 18

Means for Sanction DecisionsPsychology and MBA Student Samples

Dependent Variable	Prior Absence History							
	Frequent Absences				Infrequent Absences			
	Mild conseq.		Severe conseq.		Mild conseq.		Severe conseq.	
	vol. absence	invol. absence	vol. absence	invol. absence	vol. absence	invol. absence	vol. absence	invol. absence
SANCTION								
Psy (n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)	(n=20)
mp1	.47	6.02	6.48	6.25	5.42	3.76	5.91	3.79
sp1	2.70	2.02	4.11	2.25	1.65	1.32	2.70	1.22
MBA (n=11)	(n=10)	(n=9)	(n=10)	(n=11)	(n=10)	(n=13)	(n=11)	
mp2	6.45	6.30	6.44	6.65	6.48	3.83	5.88	4.89
sp2	4.54	2.40	2.06	2.70	1.77	1.20	2.73	1.41

note: mp1=mean of the warnings (S1 + S4 + S6 + S7 + S8)/5  
 sp1=mean of the severe sanctions (S2 + S5 + S9)/3  
 mp2=mean of the mild sanctions (S1 + S4 + S6 + S7)/4  
 sp2=mean of the severe sanctions (S5 + S9)/2

Table 19

F Values for Sanction DecisionsPsychology and MBA Student Samples

Dep. Var. df	Source of Variance							AxBxC within grp. mean square
	Reason (A) 1	Hist (B) 1	Conseq (C) 1	AxB 1	BxC 1	AxC 1	AxBxC 1	
SANCTIONS								
Psychology								
Warnings	48.23a	97.47a	1.40	23.30a	.195	.148	1.12	1.03
Severe pun	35.81a	33.12a	12.69b	1.01	.920	10.22b	.00	1.33
MBA								
Warnings	15.22a	26.80a	.770	16.10b	.020	4.77c	1.97	1.19
Severe pun	5.91c	10.79a	.054	.080	5.78c	2.14	6.42c	2.56

N=160 for Psychology sample and N=85 for MBA sample  
 1 df=152 for Psychology sample and df=77 for MBA sample  
 a  $p < .001$   
 b  $p < .01$   
 c  $p < .05$

Table 20

Cell Means for Reason x Consequence Interaction on Severe Punishments  
Psychology Student Sample

		ABSENCE REASON	
		Voluntary	Involuntary
Mild			
		2.91 b	2.08 a
CONSEQUENCES			
Severe			
		4.14 c	2.16 a

note: Cell means with noncommon subscripts are significantly different  
 at  $p < .05$ ;  $df=156$



Table 21

Cell Means for History x Reason Interaction on Warning Factor  
Psychology Student Sample

## ABSENCE HISTORY

	Frequent	Infrequent
Voluntary	6.50 a	5.70 a
ABSENCE REASON		
Involuntary	6.20 a	3.80 b

note: Cell means with noncommon subscripts are significantly different  
 at  $p < .05$ ;  $df=156$

Table 22

Correlations for Sanction DecisionsMBA Student Sample

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9
S1	1.00	-.306*	-.663**	-.653**	-.396**	-.716**	-.531**	-.498**	-.306*
S2		1.00	.219*	.220*	.185	.307*	.213*	.379**	.204
S3			1.00	.540**	.552**	.596**	.512**	.578**	.497**
S4				1.00	.237*	.653**	.695**	.503**	.293**
S5					1.00	.426**	.115	.316**	.555**
S6						1.00	.528**	.422**	.306*
S7							1.00	.417**	.208
S8								1.00	.643**
S9									1.00

\*\* p &lt;.001

\* p &lt;.05

note: S1=take no action

S2=decrease the subordinates pay

S3=add a written reprimand to the workers file

S4=counsel the worker about attendance regulations

S5=terminate the subordinate

S6=verbally reprimand the subordinate

S7=further monitor the workers situation

S8=give a warning that future absences will lead to a suspension

S9=a suspension without pay

Table 23

Factor Loadings for Sanction DecisionsMBA Student Sample

	Factor 1 Mild punishments	Factor 2 Severe punishments
S1	-0.77643 *	-0.34491
S2	0.29571	0.31486
S3	0.58648	0.59945
S4	0.86578 *	0.16373
S5	0.10216	0.80618 *
S6	0.76185 *	0.32611
S7	0.84786 *	0.02872
S8	0.44882	0.63842
S9	0.09733	0.86915 *

note: S1=take no action

S2=decrease the subordinates pay

S3=add a written reprimand to the workers file

S4=counsel the worker about attendance regulations

S5=terminate the subordinate

S6=verbally reprimand the subordinate

S7=further monitor the workers situation

S8=give a warning that future absences will lead to a suspension

S9=a suspension without pay

Table 24

Cell Means for History x Reason Interaction on Warning FactorMBA Student Sample

## ABSENCE HISTORY

	Frequent	Infrequent
Voluntary	6.32 a	6.03 a
ABSENCE REASON		
Involuntary	6.03 a	3.90 b

note: Cell means with noncommon subscripts are significantly different  
at  $p < .05$ ;  $df=81$

Table 25

Cell Means for Reason x Consequence Interaction on Warning FactorMBA Student Sample

		ABSENCE REASON	
		Voluntary	Involuntary
CONSEQUENCES	Mild	6.37 a	5.94 a
	Severe	4.64 b	5.24 a

note: Cell means with noncommon subscripts are significantly different  
at  $p < .05$ ;  $df=81$

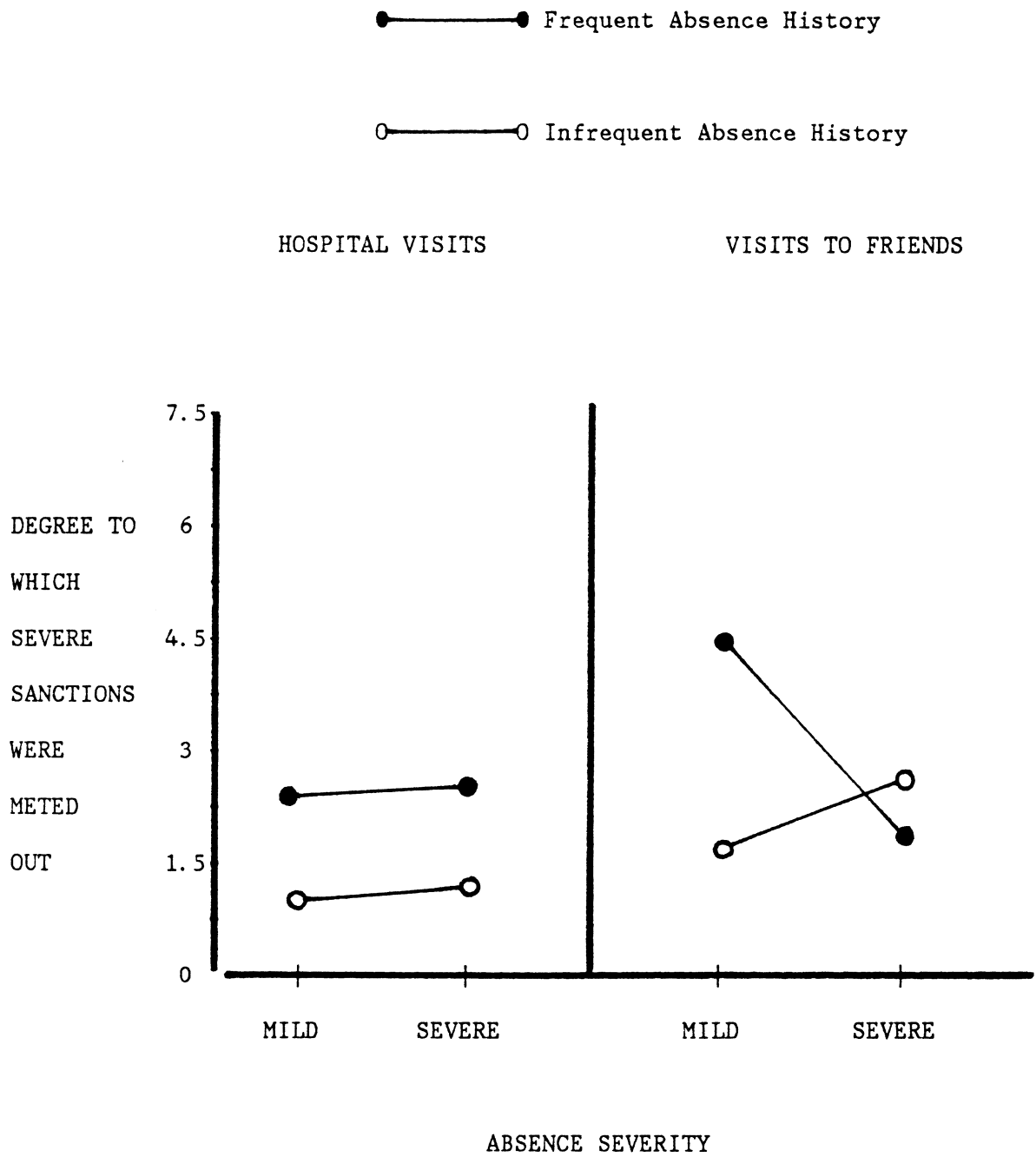


Figure 1.  
 History x Reason x Consequence Interaction on Severe Punishment  
 Factor (MBA Student Sample).

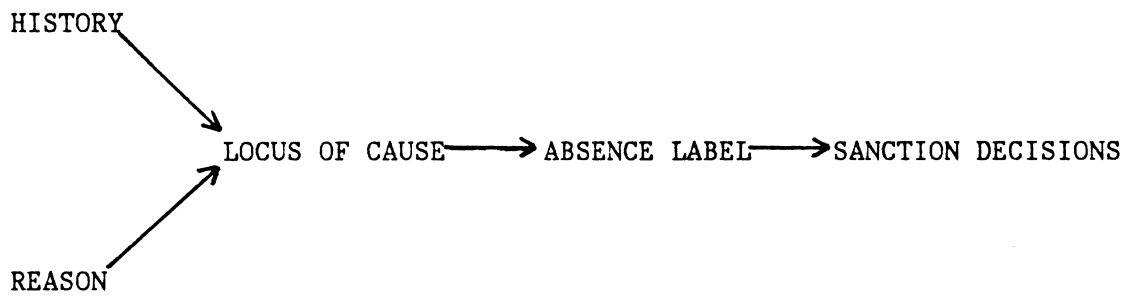


Figure 2.

A Model of Leadership Responses to Subordinate Absenteeism

Appendix A

Instructions. Now that you have read the scenario, please answer the following questions. As a manager, think about the cause which may explain the subordinate's absence. The items below ask your impressions or opinions about this cause. Circle the number which best represents your feelings concerning the cause of the subordinate's absence.

- (1) Indicate the extent you feel that the reason given by the subordinate for the absence was legitimate, or not legitimate?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
legitimate				not quite sure				not legitimate

- (2) Indicate whether you believe the subordinate's absence reflected a voluntary or involuntary choice to attend work?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
voluntary				not quite sure				involuntary

- (3) To what extent do you feel the subordinate's absence was something that:

Reflected an aspect of him or her	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Reflected an aspect of the situation
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	--



(4) Indicate whether you feel the worker is frequently or infrequently absent.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
very frequent			average frequency			very infrequent		

(5) To what extent do you feel the subordinate's absence was caused by personal characteristics such as his or her personality, attitudes, abilities, motivation, or other internal factors?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
very little			moderately			very much		

(6) How serious do you feel the absence episode was for the organization involved?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all serious			moderately serious			very serious		

(7) To what extent do you feel the cause of the subordinate's absence was:

outside of him or her	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	inside of him or her
--------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------------------

(8) In general, how important do you feel that circumstances outside of the worker's control were possible causes for his or her absence?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
extremely important					extremely unimportant			

(9) Indicate the degree to which you felt the absence event was acceptable to you as manager.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
acceptable			not quite sure			unacceptable		

(10) Indicate whether you as a manager would choose to excuse or not excuse this absence event.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
excuse			not quite sure			not excuse		

(11) Indicate whether you think the worker's absence reflected an aspect of him or her or reflected an aspect of the worker's situation

please check one

-----	-----
reflected an aspect	reflected an aspect
of him or her	of the situation

Instructions: Presented below are a list of actions that you could take toward the subordinate. Rate how appropriate you feel each of these actions are. More than one item may be rated as having the same appropriateness.

(12) Take no action toward the subordinate

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not appropriate			moderately appropriate			very appropriate		

(13) Decrease the subordinate's pay

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not appropriate			moderately appropriate			very appropriate		

(14) Add a written reprimand to the subordinate's file

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not appropriate			moderately appropriate			very appropriate		

(16) Counsel the subordinate about attendance regulations

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not appropriate			moderately appropriate			very appropriate		

(17) Terminate the subordinate

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not appropriate			moderately appropriate			very appropriate		

(17) Verbally reprimand the subordinate

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not appropriate			moderately appropriate			very appropriate		

(18) Further monitor the situation

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not appropriate			moderately appropriate			very appropriate		

(19) A written and/or verbal warning that a future absence will result in a suspension, without pay, for the number of days the subordinate fails to attend

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not appropriate			moderately appropriate			very appropriate		

(20) A suspension, without pay, for the number of days the subordinate failed to attend

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not appropriate			moderately appropriate			very appropriate		

Instructions:

For this study, we would like you to place yourself in the role of a manager at a large manufacturing plant. Please read the scenario on the following page and treat it as an absence report for one of your subordinates. The company's absenteeism policy requires that you the manager make the decision about whether or not an employee's absence is to be excused or unexcused. The company recognizes that from time to time employees encounter circumstances that may result in their being absent or tardy. The company does not wish to penalize an individual employee for excusable absence or lateness and will do so only when such practices become unfair, unreasonable, or excessive. Also, required disciplinary action is left to the discretion of the manager. After reading the scenario, you are to complete the attached questionnaire.

Please read the following scenario carefully, and then answer the questions on the following pages. If you have any questions please feel free to ask the experimenter.

Scenario # 1

Yesterday, one of your employees was absent from work. This employee has been absent an average of two times a month for the past year. After asking why the employee was not at work, you were told by the employee that he went to visit some friends. Because this employee was not at work a deadline for an important project was not met.

Scenario # 2

Yesterday, one of your employees was absent from work. This employee has been absent an average of two times a month for the past year. After asking why the employee was not at work, you were told by the employee that he went to visit some friends. However, this particular absence resulted in no serious disruption of the normal work routine.

Scenario # 3

Yesterday, one of your employees was absent from work. This employee has been absent an average of two times a month for the past year. After asking why the employee was not at work, you were told that the employee's child had a serious accident and that the employee had to rush the child to the hospital. Because this employee was not at work, a deadline for an important project was not met.

## Sceanrio # 4

Yesterday, one of your employees was absent from work. This employee has been absent an average of two times a month for the past year. After asking why the employee was not at work, you were told that the employee's child had a serious accident and that the employee had to rush the child to the hospital. However, this particular absence happened to result in no serious disruption of the normal work routine.

## Scenario # 5

Yesterday, one of your employees was absent from work. This employee has been absent two times in the past year. After asking why the employee was not at work, you were by the employee that he went to visit some friends. However, this particular absence happened to result in no serious disruption of the normal work routine.

## Scenario # 6

Yesterday, one of your employees was absent from work. This employee has been absent two times in the past year. After asking why the employee was not at work, you were told by the employee that he went to visit some friends. Because this employee was not at work, a deadline for an important project was not met.



## Scenario # 7

Yesterday, one of your employees was absent form work. This employee has been absent two times in the past year. After asking why the employee was not at work, you were told that the employee's child had a serious accident and that the employee had to rush the child to the hospital. Because this employee was not at work, a deadline for an important project was not met.

## Scenario # 8

Yesterday, one of your employees was absent from work. This employee has been absent two times in the past year. After asking why the employee was not at work, you were told that the employee's child had a serious accident and that the employee had to rush the child to the hospital. However, this particular absence happened to result in no serious disruption of the normal work routine.

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM

TO ALL RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS:

This experiment is being conducted under the supervision of Steven E. Walker; it is an investigation of the extent to which managers infer the causes of subordinate absenteeism. Below are listed some of the items of information that you should know when deciding to participate in this study.

- (1) No psychological or physical harm is expected to result from your participation in the experiment.
- (2) The experiment requires less than one half hour of your time. Your cooperation in completing this questionnaire is greatly appreciated.
- (3) Your agreement to participate should be voluntary and thus can be withdrawn at any time by you without penalty.
- (4) All information gathered from your responses is intended for research purposes only. Therefore, your responses will remain completely confidential.
- (5) This research project has been approved by the Human Subjects Committee of the Psychology department. Any questions you have can be answered by contacting one of the individuals listed below:

Dr. S.J. Zaccaro (x7916): Human Subjects Committee

S.E. Walker: (home: 951-0713)

- (6) There is a copy of this consent form available if you should wish to retain a copy for your personal records, BUT PLEASE FILL OUT THE COPY THAT IS ATTACHED TO THE SURVEY FOR OUR RECORDS.

If you consent voluntarily and with an understanding of the conditions outlined above to participate in the experiment, please sign your name below. Thank you very much for your assistance.

signature\_\_\_\_\_

Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

ID #: \_\_\_\_\_

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