

On the meanings of presenteeism: A conceptual and theoretical extension

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we explore the meanings of presenteeism and extend the literature on presenteeism to its full conceptual potential. In addition to the value loss usually associated with presenteeism, we explore potential value gain in terms of creativity and innovation. We offer a theoretical model of presenteeism that separates negative presenteeism from positive presenteeism accounting for value loss and value gain respectively. We suggest in a sequential fashion that goals and expectations influence one's psychological contract, which on evaluation determines person-organization fit. Assessment of fit influences the nature of one's motivation at work. Social and task characteristics of the job moderate this relationship. When the motivation is extrinsic and is exacerbated by individual and organizational constraints, there is potential for negative presenteeism leading to value loss. On the other hand, when the motivation is intrinsic and is facilitated by social and task characteristics of the job, it can lead to two things: one, the individual is job involved leading to traditional value gain; two, the individual is work engaged and becomes creative adding to innovative value gain. Our broad purpose here is to provide a theoretical push to expand managerial optic about presenteeism from one of control to one of value.

Key words: Presenteeism; Theory; Model; Control; Value

## On the meanings of presenteeism: A conceptual and theoretical extension

Absence and presence are two important spheres of an individual's work life in an organization. Though absence does not take place at work, it still affects work. However, being present at work and not working has elicited interest among organizational scholars (Ruhle, Breitsohl, Aboagye, Baba, Biron, Correia Leal, Dietz, Ferreira, Gerich, Johns, Karanika-Murray, Lohaus, Løkke, Lopes, Martinez, Miraglia, Muschalla, Poethke, Sarwat, Schade, Steidelmüller, Vinberg, Whysall, & Yang, 2019). The notion of presenteeism, over a period of six decades has changed focus from value gain (Canfield & Soash, 1955) to one of value loss (Johns, 2010; Lohaus & Habermann, 2019). Our focus is on value capture.

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Insert Figure 1 here

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While there is no consensus over its definition or measurement (Cooper & Lu, 2016; D'Abate & Eddy, 2007; Wan, Downey, & Stough, 2014), the empirical emphasis has always been on value or productivity loss (Lohaus & Habermann, 2019; Miraglia & Johns, 2016). Earlier definitions of presenteeism focused on one's presence at work and the attendant gain to productivity (Canfield & Soash, 1955). Subsequently, it was viewed as staying at work beyond what is required as demonstration of organizational commitment (Cooper, 1996), physically present but functionally absent (Middaugh, 2006), being at work but doing things that are not work related, also known as nonwork presenteeism (D'Abate & Eddy, 2007; Wan, Downey, & Stough, 2014) and finally coming to work while ill (Johns, 2010), also known as sickness presenteeism (D'Abate & Eddy, 2007). While there is little theoretical probity on the meanings of

presenteeism, much of the empirical research to date focused on sickness presenteeism and the attendant productivity loss (Lohaus & Habermann, 2019; Maraglia & Johns, 2016; Ruhle et al., 2019).

Presenteeism i.e. coming to work while ill has been viewed as a serious issue causing organizations millions in terms of productivity loss (Johns, 2008). However, contemporary scholars have raised some serious concerns regarding our understanding of presenteeism (Cooper & Lu, 2016; Lohaus & Habermann, 2019; Karanika-Murray & Biron, 2020). As such it seems that presenteeism is nothing more than another self-report measure of productivity loss, thus conflating the cause and the effect (Johns, 2010; 2012). Besides, studies defining presenteeism as coming to work while ill and exploring its relationship with self-reported productivity are more prone to problems of common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Since such studies question the respondent about their health status and then productivity loss due to health, there is a possibility that the respondents can naturally feel that their health is a cause of their low productivity (Johns, 2012). This suggests that understanding presenteeism strictly in terms of health and productivity loss narrows the scope of presenteeism to one aspect only – productivity loss due to health (Ruhle et al., 2019).

These concerns suggest that the focus of the literature on presenteeism has emphasized understanding one effect, productivity loss through the cause, namely the act of presenteeism and there is little in the literature on delineating the cause and the mechanism through which presenteeism takes place. Further, although there is research available on the correlates of presenteeism and its impact on productivity loss (Miraglia & Johns, 2016), there is very little attention given to uncovering the theoretical potential of presenteeism (Johns, 2012). We are aware of only one attempt to build a theory around the act of presenteeism by Cooper and Lu

(2016) who used social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989) as the theoretical base for their occupational health-relevant hypotheses explaining presenteeism in organizations. The focus of their theory is the self-regulation process by which individuals associate meanings with different situations and regulate their behavior - coming to work while ill - in return for certain performance outcomes. Their theory is driven by the triadic reciprocal determinism mechanism (Bandura, 1989). Self-efficacy and outcome expectations form individuals' intentions and goals motivate them to engage in acts of presenteeism, towards eventual performance attainment (Cooper & Lu, 2016). However, this optic focuses on a narrower understanding of presenteeism and concentrates simply on why individuals come to work while ill.

Once we can explicate the mechanism through which presenteeism unfolds, we will also be able to understand how to extract value from it. In their seminal work on “the meanings of absence in organizations”, Gary Johns, explained the different meanings of absence in organizations, and it started a whole new wave of inquiry on absence research (Johns & Nicholson 1982). The research on presenteeism also calls for looking at new frames of references for research and theory building. Presenteeism can have different meanings for people in different circumstances (Kaiser, 2018). Once individuals enter a regular employment contract, they are expected to achieve organizational goals in exchange for rewards (Johns & Nicholson 1982). The emphasis is on achieving organizational goals regardless of whether one is ill or well. Health can be a reason for the non-achievement of goals, but this is rather a myopic view of presenteeism explored in a narrow organizational context. People at work are distracted for many reasons other than health related and are not able to achieve task-related goals (Ruhle et al., 2019). It does not necessarily imply that they cannot be creative, or that they cannot add value. They can indeed be productive in non-traditional ways. In fact, taking short breaks from the task at hand

can indeed re-vitalise our energies and improve overall productivity with the emphasis being on 'short' (Coker, 2009).

We believe it is time that we explore broader meanings of presenteeism, which we define as being at work, not doing what you are supposed to do, but doing something else, a variation of being physically present but functionally absent (Middaugh, 2006). We also want to see how it can be channelled towards value creation for the individual and the organization. The 'not doing' and 'doing something else' part of our definition essentially distinguishes the negative and positive aspects of presenteeism and focuses on whether it is contributing to value loss or value creation. Our work is an attempt to answer the call for a more comprehensive view of presenteeism (Lohaus & Habermann, 2019; Ruhle et al., 2019). By understanding the different meanings of presenteeism, we can better explore the mechanism by which presenteeism manifests itself in organizations and its impact on value loss and value creation.

### **The meanings of presenteeism**

As mentioned earlier, presenteeism has been defined in different ways by various research scholars (Canfield & Soash, 1955; D'Abate and Eddy, 2007; Cooper & Lu, 2016; Gilbreth & Karimi, 2012; Middaugh, 2006). Yet, the recent literature on presenteeism has been dominated by Gary Johns' definition of "coming to work while ill" (2010) and most empirical studies have employed this definition of presenteeism. However, this definition does not provide for construct breadth and satiety and is confined to just one aspect of why an individual may not fully engage in work leading to productivity loss (Ruhle et al., 2019). The notion of being "physically present at work but functionally absent" (Middaugh, 2006, p. 103) could imply not doing any work, which would be costly for the organization. Other researchers like Gilbreth and Karimi (2012)

have defined presenteeism as not being able to expend cognitive energies at work due to stress, and again narrowed the range of the meaning of presenteeism by limiting it to one cause, stress. In another stream of research, the term non-work related presenteeism has been defined as being involved in personal activities while at work (Wan, Downey & Stough, 2014). All these definitions essentially carry a negative valence for presenteeism, related to not being able to achieve work related goals due to reason of health, stress, self or various other distractions. While they do extend the meaning of presenteeism, they are still confined to value loss. One can draw a conceptual circle as shown in Figure 2 tightly around the empirical meanings as measured by current instruments, which is what the prevailing conceptualization promotes. But we believe that widening that circle will capture the full potential of presenteeism and give it a more inclusive theoretical space for explaining organizational behavior.

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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It has been a while since behavioural scientists started explaining why people do what they do at work (Deci, 1996). We are re-visiting this question in the context of presenteeism, since presenteeism is a behavior that can lead to an investigation on 1, why people engage in presenteeism at work, 2, what consequences it can have for the individual and the organization, and 3, what managers can do to cope with and derive benefit from it in the broader context for the success of the organization. Our view is that presenteeism can and should be managed to extract value from it. We build our arguments based on the psychological contract theory (PCT) (Rousseau, 1995) and self-determination theory (SDT) of work motivation (Gagne & Deci, 2005) and argue that presenteeism need not always be negative and can indeed be positive

(Karanika-Murray & Biron, 2020; Ruhle et al., 2019). Both these theories take different approaches to explain goal-directed behavior. PCT argues that individuals form certain expectations from their employing organizations in return for certain obligations that drive goal formulation which can be variously general and specific. SDT picks it from there and suggests different types of goals based on innate psychological needs of individuals that lead them to be intrinsically or extrinsically motivated (Deci & Ryan, 2000a). Together with the assumptions of these two theories, we argue that a hierarchy of abstract and concrete goals influence the psychological contract, and a positive evaluation of psychological contract leads to goal alignment, which in turn affects motivation to perform a certain task. The goals are necessary, but it is goal alignment that will activate extrinsic or intrinsic motivation.

The formation of psychological contract is influenced by individual dispositions, work design factors, and the social context in which the work is set up to explain why people behave as they do at work. Ko and Hur (2014) suggest, that when employees feel that their organization is supporting them and helping them fulfill their aspirations, they will reciprocate by helping the organization achieve its goals. We believe that an alignment of goals of both parties is essential for a positive evaluation of the psychological contract (Harrington & Lee, 2015), which in turn will influence individual motivation. SDT suggests that when individuals engage in a task because of their interest, they are intrinsically motivated, and if they are forced to engage in a task at work due to external regulation, then their motivation will be extrinsic. While the employment contract focuses on extrinsic motivation, the psychological contract entrenches intrinsic motivation. Individuals take interest in a task because they see the task as a means of accomplishing their needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Gagne & Deci, 2005). This is dynamic. Good management can strengthen the psychological contract that results in



trust, commitment and satisfaction (Robinson, 1996). Conversely, when the contract is breached, it results in behavior that distracts the individual from meeting obligations that sustains the contract. Goal alignment comes undone and emotional distancing begins (Robinson, 1996).

Work is meaningful and purposeful when we see it as a means of achieving our unmet desires. When desires are unmet, they take the form of thoughts that arise consciously or subconsciously, and the mind starts wandering creating an interruption from the primary task at hand. For an unhealthy person, being healthy is an unmet desire. Attending work while ill will hinder the person's desire of being healthy again resulting in the person not being focused on work, as in the case of negative presenteeism. Similarly, in stress-related presenteeism, stress is an outcome of an unmet desire. For example, the individual might have a desire of high financial incentives at work. When such incentives cannot be achieved, the individual becomes stressed out resulting in negative presenteeism. Similarly, unmet goals brought to work from elsewhere gets the person working on personal tasks in the case of non-work related presenteeism. In instances where individuals desire to remain in their comfort zone but find their work challenging, they would avoid doing what is on hand. This leads them to be being present at work but avoiding it nevertheless, as in the case of goldbricking. This costs the organization in terms of productivity loss. These are examples of the manifestation of negative presenteeism. This is the state-of-the-art of current presenteeism literature.

However, in positive presenteeism, there are instances when the mind of an individual wanders, moving away from its primary task and starts to explore thoughts, memories, and desires in an undisciplined and unintentional way (Smallwood & Schooler, 2006). Research shows that the human mind tends to wander quite extensively and widely in many situations (Mason et al., 2007). By not focusing the mind on the primary task, an individual is transcending from the

current self to a new self, which can provide a platform for new knowledge creation in organizations (Nonaka, 1994). The result can be a new idea, a new product, or even a better way of completing the task at hand. If people engage in routine and repetitive tasks to get their work done, they will not be able to innovate (Nonaka, 1994). Self-transcendence becomes important to be creative at work. This is an example of self-induced positive presenteeism. A manager can deliberately incorporate a built-in time slack and allow employees to let their mind wander for a certain period. The outcomes could be creative ideas and new ways of thinking which are beneficial to both the individual and the organization. The point is that presenteeism need not be just negative. If we see it in terms of value creation for the self and the organization, it becomes a broader construct connoting different meanings. In what follows, we explore how presenteeism develops in organizations.

### **Development of presenteeism**

Three recent papers called for revisiting the concept of presenteeism and offered directions toward further theoretical and empirical development (Karanika-Murray & Biron, 2020; Lohaus and Habermann, 2019; Ruhle et al., 2019). We view presenteeism as an inclusive concept with multiple antecedents and multiple consequences accentuated by multiple pathways. What follows is a systematic development of a model of presenteeism with its multiple antecedents, consequences and pathways.

Individuals enter organizations with goals, aspirations and expectations, which influence the formation of their psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995). A positive evaluation of the psychological contract results in goal alignment of the individuals' purpose and target goals and those of the organization. Depending on the type of goal and the nature of the alignment, an

individual's motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic, which will decide whether presenteeism is positive or negative, which in turn, will determine value creation or loss.

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### **Goals and psychological contract**

The way humans behave is essentially an outcome of the goals they set for themselves. Goals are defined as “internal representations of desired states where states are broadly construed as outcomes, events and processes” (Austin & Vancouver, 1996: 338). We set goals and then attempt to attain these goals because goals give us a sense of agency and we see ourselves as the cause of our own behaviour as a result of decisions and actions (Dijksterhuis & Aarts, 2010).

When Individuals enter organizations, they have certain expectations in the form of pre-set goals acquired over time from experiences, events, friends and family. Their employment contract binds them to help organizations achieve its goals in exchange for a set of rewards. This results in an explicit contract between the individual and the employer. However, this employment relation is also affected by a psychological contract that develops between the individual and the organization (Rousseau, 1995). It comprises of an individual's perception of the mutual obligations that exist in the exchange with the employer and these are sustained through the norm of reciprocity (Rousseau, 1995). Since the contract is psychological, it is more likely to be affected by the individual's goals (see figure 3) that are less concrete, and more amorphous. It is not necessary that Individuals be explicitly aware of these abstract goals.

One's psychological contract is influenced by several factors including aspirations, expectations, obligations and goals. At work, individuals make sense of the information they have considering the goals they hope to achieve (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). They will focus their attention in seeking information from their work environment that are related to these goals. For example, an individual who believes in building relationships would be attentive to information that helps in building collegial relations at work. Similarly, those with high performance goals might seek information on how to perform better on the job. This makes the development of the psychological contract a deliberate goal-oriented process in which individuals seek an array of information to support the psychological contract based on their goals (Shore & Tetrick, 1994). It varies from person to person.

*Proposition 1: Individuals' goals, aspirations, expectations and obligations influence their psychological contracts.*

### **Psychological contract formation and person-organization fit**

Both PCT and SDT highlight the importance of goals in shaping behavior but we argue that more than the goals themselves, goal alignment is necessary for work to be meaningful and purposeful. A related concept to goal alignment here is person-organization fit. Person–Organization (P–O) fit which is defined as: “the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when: (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both” (Kristof, 1996: 4–5). This definition provides multiple conceptualizations of P-O fit. Four common themes used while specifying P-O fit are values of an individual, personality, knowledge, skills and abilities, and goals (Kristof, 1996). Research on P-O fit postulates that individual behaviors are an outcome of an alignment of their personal

goals and values with their immediate job environment (Edwards & Cable, 2009). Once the employee forms the psychological contract based on certain goals and aspirations, subsequent experience leads to goal congruence across the spectrum of expectations and obligations (Rousseau, 1995).

Goal congruence is one important conceptualization of P-O fit theory. Nadler and Tushman (1992) defined congruence as “the degree to which needs, demands, goals and structures of one component are consistent with the needs, demands, goals and structures of another component. Congruence is therefore a measure of how well pairs of components fit together” (p. 51). Individual goals provide a sense of meaning to individuals when they gather cues from their work environment while formulating their psychological contract (Ashford and Cummings, 1983) so it is expected that once formulated the psychological contract will lead to goal congruence.

*Proposition 2: Psychological contract formation will lead to person organization fit in the form of goal congruence.*

### **Psychological contract formation, evaluation and goal congruence**

Psychological contract formation is seen as a goal-oriented process (Shore & Tetrick, 1994) and when the expectations of the contract are in line with the goals of an employee, it will lead to goal alignment. However, individuals tend to evaluate their psychological contracts continuously in terms of its fulfillment or breach. Researchers argue that the fulfillment of the psychological contract can have various impacts on the behavior of people working in organizations, such that over fulfillment results in positive behaviors and under fulfillment of the psychological contract may have negative consequences (Robinson, 19906; Turnley, Bolino, Lester & Bloodgood,

2003). We argue that once formed, then contract fulfillment is a necessary condition for goal congruence.

A psychological contract that is perceived to be fulfilled is positively evaluated by employees and will motivate alignment of their goals with that of the organization (see figure 3). On the other hand, when psychological contract is violated, the employee goals are at variance with that of the organization. In essence, the work environment that provides the necessary ingredients for goal attainment makes individuals feel more in control of their work and consequently allocate personal efforts to activities that benefit their organization (Vancouver and Schmitt, 1991). Conversely, goal incongruence leads to uncertainty about what is expected from both parties (Edwards & Cable, 2009), which can result in the employee deviating from the norms due to strong feeling of psychological contract breach.

*Proposition 3: Psychological contract's evaluation will moderate the relation between psychological contract formation and goal congruence such that positive evaluation will lead to goal congruence and negative evaluation will lead to goal incongruence.*

### **Goal congruence and motivation**

Goal alignment is necessary for the individual because it provides the motivation to act. SDT (Gagne & Deci, 2005) distinguishes between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. When people are autonomously motivated, they engage in a task because they are interested in it (i.e., intrinsic motivation). Controlled motivation consists of external regulation. An individual's motivation is controlled through external rewards and punishments. This distinction between autonomous and controlled motivation leads to our understanding that individuals can be

intrinsically or extrinsically motivated and consequently depict different behaviour while engaging in work related tasks. When external regulation is tight, individuals may experience a misalignment between their personal goals and organizational goals, as their motivation is controlled by and is contingent on external factors. Consequently, the task at hand may seem of little worth and as a result the individual detaches from the task. However, when individual goals are in alignment with organizational goals, people feel autonomously motivated to act and search for better ways of achieving those goals. For individuals to be autonomously motivated or in the case of controlled motivation, it is necessary that individual goals are in congruence with that of the organization.

Goal congruence enhances motivation. The mechanism by which goal congruence leads to intrinsic or extrinsic motivation can be further understood through the process model of intrinsic motivation by (Haradkiewicz & Sansone,1991). According to this model an individual's motivation to engage in a task is a result of purpose goals and target goals. Purpose goals are higher-level goals and target goals are set to help attain the higher-level purpose goals (Haradkiewicz & Elliot,1998). For instance, individuals can have a purpose goal for their work to be meaningful and then would set target goals to make work meaningful. Similarly, for some, financial safety can be the ultimate motive to work and they would set target goals like working extra hours or on multiple projects to achieve this motive. Purpose goals can be seen as overall goals of an individual and target goals are related to the activity at work and can be set by the organization as well. For individuals to be intrinsically (or extrinsically) motivated towards a task there should be congruence between their purpose goals and target goals (Ford, 1992; Sansone & Haradkiewicz, 1996; Haradkiewicz, Barron & Elliot, 1998).

*Proposition 4: when individual higher-level purpose goals and activity-based target goals are in congruence, they can lead to motivation, which can be either intrinsic or extrinsic*

### **Goal Congruence, task characteristics and motivation**

Goals will enhance motivation to work when the goals set by the work environment and the individual's goals brought to work are in congruence (Haradkiewicz & Sansone, 1991). For example, the higher-level goal of an individual can be to be creative at work. To achieve this goal one can join an institution of higher learning, which provides opportunities to enhance creativity and where one can disseminate knowledge through teaching and research. By being able to join a research-based institution, the individual will be highly motivated to work since there is a high level of goal congruence, but the task characteristics will actually decide whether this motivation is controlled or autonomous (see figure 3). People can come to the workplace with either an extrinsic motive or an intrinsic motive to work, depending upon prior experiences and situational factors (Ryan, 1995). This orientation towards motivation can change depending on the task they perform. An individual who was initially intrinsically motivated can become extrinsically motivated when the task is no more interesting (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). The person in the example above was intrinsically motivated initially but can be made to work on an ongoing project where chances of creativity are low. Consequently, despite having goal congruence at the beginning, the individual can lose intrinsic motivation and becomes extrinsically motivated and engage in accomplishment of the task on hand for external rewards like salary, promotion and the like.



Hackman and Oldham (1980) argued that individuals can be motivated to work effectively when their jobs are designed optimally such that the job task is significant, provides for greater skill variety, autonomy and the individual receives feedback. They proposed that internal work motivation can be increased when job tasks have the optimal characteristics for those individuals with high growth needs. Comprehensive reviews on job design (see for example Fried & Ferris, 1987; Humphrey, Nahrgang & Morgeson, 2007) have provided support for the motivational aspects of challenging and autonomous jobs. Their theory of job characteristics highlights the importance of internal motivation and does not distinguish between the different types of motivation. The SDT of work motivation (Gagne & Deci, 2005) however, differentiates between autonomous and controlled motivation where controlled motivation is externally regulated. One moderator of the job characteristics model is high growth need, meaning only individuals in high growth need will be internally motivated when jobs are optimally designed. This does not imply that low growth need individuals are not motivated to work. Their motivation is controlled externally by managers and supervisors. We argued that individuals bring different types of personal goals to work and these goals can lead to intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. However, the task characteristics of the job will moderate this relationship. Morf, Weir, & Davidov (2000) conducted a study on narcissists and provided evidence that these individuals were intrinsically motivated to perform only those tasks on a job, which permitted them to pursue their egocentric goals. In other words, individual's overall goals can be congruent with the organization, but motivation will be determined by how jobs are designed to facilitate the individual in achieving higher-level goals.

*Proposition 5: Task characteristics will moderate the relation between goal congruence and motivation such that high congruence and optimum task design will*

*lead to an individual being autonomously motivated and high congruence and a suboptimal task design will lead to an individual being extrinsically motivated.*

## **Motivation and presenteeism**

So far, we have been setting the stage for the manifestation of presenteeism. In what follows we detail the phenomenon and highlight its organizational consequences. When higher-level purpose goals of an individual are aligned and internalized with activity-based target goals set by the organization, they give rise to intrinsic motivation to achieve them. This achievement is qualitatively different from typical task goal accomplishment. The employee thinks innovatively about the job and the goals. Such thinking goes beyond the specific task at hand and results in innovative improvements, changes in processes and in products. This is what is meant by positive presenteeism. We see presenteeism as behaviour, like performance is a behaviour. Behaviour is something that people engage in which can be observed (Campbell, McCloy & Oppler, 1993). For presenteeism to be positive, an individual has to be intrinsically motivated. Research has indicated that individuals fully participate in a task, which they find more identifiable with the self or in other words, more related to the individual's higher-level purpose goals (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). Individuals can have different levels of motivation and they differ in their orientation towards motivation. Orientation of motivation is related to the why of a particular action and is concerned with the attitude and goal that augment the action (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

SDT (Gagne & Deci, 2005), postulates that intrinsically motivated individuals perform an activity because they find it inherently interesting. Theories on behavior and learning assert that all behaviors are motivated by rewards or psychological drives (Skinner, 1953; Hull, 1943). For

intrinsically motivated individuals the reward lies in the activity itself and such activities also satisfy an individual's psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000a) which SDT (Gagne & Deci, 2005) argues are related to higher-level goals. People who indulge in an activity because they are internally motivated to do it, will manifest high quality learning and creativity (Ryan & Deci, 2000a) as in the case of positive presenteeism.

Positive presenteeism is generally self-induced but it can also be induced by one's immediate supervisor, which we term as leader-induced positive presenteeism. The process model on intrinsic motivation (Haradkiewicz and Sansone, 1991) states that to be intrinsically motivated the purpose goals and the target goals of an individual should be in congruence. Target goals can be set by the individuals themselves but can also be set by their immediate supervisors. When supervisors set specific target goals that allow the individual to enjoy the task at hand or allow greater degrees of freedom to reflect on the task, an individual becomes intrinsically motivated to accomplish the activity more creatively.

That being said, people need not always be intrinsically motivated to perform a certain task. Since they differ in their orientations towards motivation, they can also be extrinsically motivated and the underlying goal or attitude towards the motivation can be due to a separable outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). When individuals are extrinsically motivated to perform a certain task, there is no long-term commitment on the part of the employee toward the task or the organization since the motivation to engage in the task at hand is influenced by supervision, reward and the fear of reprisals. The behaviour is not volitional and is not originating from one's sense of self; rather it is precipitated by external pressure and control (Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Gagne & Deci, 2005). In this case, one is not psychologically engaged with the task though

present at work. This is more like Muddaugh's notion of being physically present at work but functionally absent (2006). This is a form of negative presenteeism.

*Proposition 6: Intrinsic motivation will lead to self-induced or leader-induced positive presenteeism*

*Proposition 7: Externally regulated extrinsic motivation will lead to negative presenteeism*

### **Motivation, Triggers and Presenteeism**

We argued that individual higher-level goals drive the formulation of a positive psychological contract, which leads to goal congruence. Depending on the type of goals individuals have, their motivation can be autonomous or controlled by external regulation. Extrinsic motivation is backed by external factors like salary, promotion or fear of punishment for not performing. An extrinsically motivated individual may not always be fully engaged at work and this situation can be buffered by certain individual and organizational factors. In an attempt to identify the various triggers for sickness related presenteeism, which we define as a kind of negative presenteeism, Johns (2011), used the substitution hypothesis (Caverley, Cunningham & MacGregor, 2007) which states that all factors that reduce absenteeism will promote sickness related presenteeism. In his study, Johns (2011) identified various personal characteristics and work-related factors that could inhibit or hinder sickness-related presenteeism. All such factors act as potential moderators and can exacerbate negative presenteeism, when combined with controlled motivation. In case of negative presenteeism, individuals keep evaluating their behaviour in relation to the external goal, which is contributing towards the motivation to act, and whenever there is goal incongruence namely that behaviour does not help in goal achievement, the

individual will deviate from that particular task. For example, in the case of sickness-related presenteeism, the goal of an individual is to recover from illness, and working on job-related tasks would hinder in achieving this goal. Similarly, job design features, job insecurity, work conflict, inequity and pressures to attend – all such factors interfere with individual's ability to complete work-related tasks which can result in less opportunities for growth and encourage negative presenteeism in the form of stress-related presenteeism (Gilbreath & Karimi, 2012). In a web-based survey of 2371 employees of a provincial government agency, Coutu et al., (2015), used theoretical models in the occupational stress literature and identified various factors e.g. job demands, work-family conflict, emotional labour etc. as leading causes of psychological stress which ultimately led to negative presenteeism.

In SDT, while the authors discussed extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation, they also argued for a third category they called amotivation, which implies having no motivation to act (Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Gagne & Deci, 2005). In the case of goldbricking, individuals find excuses to avoid work since they lack motivation altogether, which is again another form of negative presenteeism.

While most research focuses on factors related to negative presenteeism, we are more interested in the triggers of positive presenteeism at work. An individual's intrinsic motivation is less likely to be affected by the external factors as identified in the occupational stress literature. The driving force behind positive presenteeism is an individual's intrinsic motivation to engage in a certain activity. Ryan and Deci (2000b) argue that though individuals can have inherent intrinsic motivational tendencies, the enhancement of such motivation requires supportive conditions. According to our framework, there are two types of positive presenteeism, self-induced and leader induced. It is known that individuals are intrinsically motivated to perform tasks that are

optimally designed and offer opportunities to interact with other employees or people outside the organization (Barrick, Mount & Li, 2013). Hence, when individuals feel that the activity itself is providing them more autonomy or the autonomy is being bestowed by their leader, they will engage in positive presenteeism.

*Proposition 8: Social and Task characteristics will moderate the relation between autonomous motivation and positive presenteeism such that when activity at work provides individuals with more autonomy, they will exhibit positive presenteeism*

### **Presenteeism and value**

The concept of value creation is central to management theory at both the individual and organizational levels of analysis (Baba, 2016; Lepak, Smith & Taylor, 2007). Many see individual behavior at the heart of value creation in organizations (Felin & Hesterly, 2007). The behavior exhibited by the individual in positive presenteeism is seen as an act of self-transcendence. Self-transcendence is an essential condition for new knowledge creation (Nonaka, 1994). Researchers have argued that knowledge creation is a significant aspect of value creation, the main actor being the individual (Felin & Hesterly, 2007). Conversely, there is ample evidence that negative presenteeism destroys value by contributing to productivity loss (Miraglia & Johns, 2016).

Positive presenteeism however, allows an individual to be more creative at work, since the routine task is seen as just one means of achieving organizational goals, which are in fact in alignment with individual's higher-level goals. This alignment intrinsically motivates the individual who then thinks of task accomplishment more creatively. Intrinsic

motivation is produced when individual behavior at work is volitional as compared to being externally forced through rewards or fear of punishment. In the case of negative presenteeism, behavior is guided by external reasons like health, stress, distractions that lead to the individual showing up at work and not working, since motivation is external and any change in the external circumstance may affect the task at hand.

Amabile (1996), highlights the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in value creation. She states that intrinsically motivated people are able to create more value since their motivation is a result of the enjoyment of the task itself. On the other hand, in extrinsic motivation, individuals perform a task for rewards provided by others like money, financial status, identity etc. Thus, intrinsic motivation induces creativity and extrinsic motivation may not. In a comprehensive commentary on creativity and innovation, Anderson and colleagues include factors such as the role of individual goal orientations as a key ingredient of creativity and innovation (Anderson, Potočnik & Zhou, 2014). We argue, that when people's goal orientations are induced by external factors, they will be extrinsically motivated towards achievement of those goals while people with intrinsic orientations to achieve a certain goal will be intrinsically motivated.

Value is created when individuals make their jobs, tasks, services, and products novel. For example, an individual may create value by developing a new way to perform a task as in positive presenteeism rather than performing the task in the routine way. The organization can use value created from this this new process or task to generate value for the organization (Lepak, Smith & Taylor, 2007).

*Proposition 9: Positive presenteeism will create positive value in the form of new ways of performing the task*

*Proposition 10: Negative presenteeism will lead to value loss, in the form of productivity loss*

To theorize, presenteeism is being physically present at work but not focusing on the task at hand either fully or partially. We see this behavior as multicausal. The value outcome of presenteeism – value loss or value gain or some combination thereof for the organization over time – is contingent upon employee motivation, the characteristics that govern one’s job and the conditions that govern one’s employment in the organization. These, in turn, influence the nature of alignment between individual expectations and organizational goals, and establish the psychological contract between the individual and the organization.

## **Discussion**

Extant research has viewed absenteeism as being absent *from* work and presenteeism as being absent *at* work. Although it is acknowledged that absenteeism can have different meanings to different people in different situations, the meanings of presenteeism in organizations remain largely unexplored. Thus, our first goal in this paper is to explore the different meanings of presenteeism and explain the mechanism by which presenteeism occurs in organization. Without fully understanding this mechanism, we presume that presenteeism destroys value by contributing to productivity loss. We believe that presenteeism is more than coming to work ill and not doing what you are supposed to do; rather it can be showing up for work and not focusing on the routine tasks, but doing something else, which can be of more value for the individual and the organization. We integrated existing theories of work motivation to examine



the link between individuals' behavior at work and their psychological contract, goal alignment, and motivation that results in positive or negative presenteeism (see figure 3).

With growing research on health related presenteeism, we responded to the call for organizational scholars to use their theoretical and methodological skills to look at presenteeism through an organizational behavior lens (Johns, 2011; Ruhle et al., 2019). After the Johns model on presenteeism, we are aware of only one study by Cooper and Lu (2016) that explains presenteeism using social cognitive theory. However, their whole theoretical approach towards the act of presenteeism centers around the basic question of why people come to work while ill (Cooper & Lu, 2016). Our approach is broader. It is about the scope of presenteeism, which is more comprehensive, and derives from earlier discussion on the meanings of presenteeism. Our focus is on how one can extract unique and positive value from presenteeism in terms of creativity and innovation instead of merely focusing on what sick people can achieve by coming to work. We bring in the PCT and SDT to extend the theoretical meaning of presenteeism.

Our second goal in this paper was to propose a framework based on the integration of various theories to explain the behavior of presenteeism. Integrating theories helps in explaining phenomenon more deeply and comprehensively (Mayer & Sparrowe, 2013) and using propositions helps in breaking down theoretical arguments to facilitate understanding (Cornelissen, 2017) – the approach we have taken in this paper.

### **Positive and Negative Presenteeism**

At the start of this article, we provided understandings of presenteeism by different authors who identified and attributed a variety of reasons like, presence, health, stress, and personal interest to the act of presentism. Most of these explanations carried a negative valence for presenteeism and

have been empirically tested within that narrow conceptual space. They are lacking in theoretical scope and a more comprehensive understanding of presenteeism as we have highlighted in Figure 2. Johns (2010; 2011) has in fact suggested that the act of coming to work despite being ill, can also be understood by some as organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB). Miraglia and Johns (2016) have subsequently linked job control, collegial and supervisory support, and optimism through job satisfaction to presenteeism. We believe that there are two sides to the presenteeism coin. By aligning individual and organizational interests, one can elicit organizational commitment and citizenship behaviors, and by encouraging constructive deviance and innovative behaviors, one can gain value from presenteeism. That said, apart from a passing mention in the literature, no deeper understanding has emerged in exploring presenteeism as a possible positive behaviour. The dominant documentation is on value loss resulting from inattention, service withdrawal, time theft and destructive deviance. This is presented in Figure 4.

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Insert Figure 4 here

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The framework developed in Figure 3 starts with goals and aspirations of an individual along with certain expectations and obligations. Understanding the concept of goals as a starting point is necessary since they provide the answer to the “why of a certain behavior”. Individuals enter organizations with different preconceived goals in mind that they have developed over a life span and after entering the employment contract formally they seek information to support the psychological contract in line with their pre-set goals (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). For

example, an individual who enters the organization with a higher-level goal of reaching the upper echelons of management (an achievement goal according to the SDT) for larger financial gains will actively seek spots in the work environment where relationships can be built to achieve this higher-level goal. A lack of such opportunities will lead to a breach of psychological contract, seriously affecting the individuals' motivation level. In this example, the individual's motivation is controlled by financial gains and any individual or organizational factor that hinders achievement of this goal, can have detrimental effects on task accomplishment, thereby creating stress, resulting in stress-related presenteeism, a type of negative presenteeism. On the other hand, there can be individuals who enter the organization, with the goal of progressing thorough creativity and innovation. They seek information cues from their work environment in relation to their higher-level goals and explore how tasks can be accomplished creatively. Such inducements can also come from the leader and resulting in positive presenteeism. These individuals not only add value to themselves, but the organization also captures this value.

We have argued that social and task characteristics will direct whether motivation is extrinsic or intrinsic. Research has highlighted the importance of social and task characteristics of a job by suggesting that they provide context to the meanings an individual attaches to the job (Barrick, Mount and Li, 2013). For example, an individual who is creative may expect the work environment to provide opportunities to interact with others so that knowledge can be shared, a condition which can be facilitated by one's immediate supervisor. In this example, the individual entered the organization with a goal and the work environment was perceived to provide the necessary context for the achievement of the goal. It is likely that any presenteeism in this context will create value for the organization.

Sometimes, people are intrinsically motivated but the task they are performing can decrease their internal motivation and they become fixated with extrinsic motivators or even become amotivated towards task accomplishment. For example, people might join institutions of higher learning for enhancing their research capabilities. They find it quite demotivating when they are typically asked to focus more on teaching courses and engage in administrative tasks, which do not enhance their research potentials. The characteristics of such tasks destroy the intrinsic motivation of the individual, since they are not in congruence with the purpose goals of individuals, which they initially brought to work. This situation can lead to presenteeism that detracts value for the organization.

We also argued that in the context of controlled motivation, people are more prone to fall prey to negative presenteeism since their motivation is influenced by external factors like job stress, their health or other unmet desires brought to work. The involvement in an activity is not because people see the task as a means of achievement of their purpose goals; rather the task has to be completed due to pressing external demands. Any exposure to these factors may result in distraction from the task at hand, and the individual is left adding no value. On the other hand, when individuals perform a task because they believe that task accomplishment will lead to achievement of their broad purpose goals, they become intrinsically motivated and seek different ways to perform the task so that more value can be added. This value created at the individual level then becomes available for organizational advantage. In other words, goal alignment induces positive presenteeism leading to value creation.

## **Future Research**

Future researchers can empirically test the proposed mechanisms delineated in the framework given in figure 3 for a deeper understanding of the different types of presenteeism and the psychological processes that lead to positive or negative presenteeism in organizations.

Presenteeism in this paper is seen as a multi-dimensional construct comprising of positive and negative behaviours, which can have different antecedents and outcomes. The theoretical framework presented in this paper explains presenteeism at the individual level. Future research can apply the framework to other levels in the organizations. For example, when people are working in teams, each of them can have multiple and diverse purpose goals through which their psychological contracts have developed, which can motivate them intrinsically or extrinsically. Research has indicated that employee behaviour is seen as an important outcome of psychological contract fulfillment both in the case of in-role and extra-role behaviour (Turnley, et al., 2003). Some team members may exhibit positive presenteeism and some will engage in negative presenteeism or the combination of which will ultimately affect how value is created by that team.

Similarly, the organizational context in which work is taking place can also have implications for employee motivation and their work behaviour. Though we argue for the moderating effects of task and social characteristic in the development of extrinsic or intrinsic motivation, the organizational culture and work practices valued by the organization at a broader level can impact how people behave in organizations. For instance, in case of negative presenteeism, research has indicated workplaces that promote healthy working cultures, have found fewer instances of individuals being involved in sickness related presenteeism (Chang et al., 2015). Similarly, in case of positive presenteeism, an organization culture that does not promote

creativity or where leaders are more interested in getting work done efficiently rather than effectively or innovatively, may find fewer individuals indulging in positive presenteeism.

### **Practical Implications**

The model presented in figure 3 unpacks the relationship between an individual's purpose goals and psychological contract to create value. As mentioned, whether presenteeism is positive or negative is dependent on the alignment of purpose goals and positive evaluation of the psychological contract, which leads to intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. We do not argue that extrinsic motivation is not good but to create and sustain value, managers need to focus more on motivating their employees intrinsically. The role of the manager here is incredibly important in terms of ensuring goal congruence so that the individual believes that the psychological contract has been fulfilled. This can be done by adjusting the social and task characteristics and creating and promoting an organizational climate where individuals feel that they can achieve their higher-level goals. Such a climate can be created when the leaders encourage their subordinates to experiment with different ways of doing things so that the task accomplishment does not seem like a mundane activity but a fun filled activity where employees have freedom to experiment, learn and unleash their actual potential.

In addition, our model also helps managers reduce negative presenteeism. This can be done in two ways. First by reducing individual and organizational stress as extant research on negative presenteeism highlights. Secondly, by working on the continuum of motivation as identified by SDT, managers can facilitate their subordinates to move from being externally motivated to internally motivated through a process of internalization (Gagne & Deci, 2005). This requires the managers to make the activity intrinsically interesting by re-designing tasks so that the

subordinate feels that the task is instrumental to achieving personal goals. The key is to strengthen employees' psychological contract with the organization through organizational and job design for achievement of higher-level goals.

## **Conclusion**

In this study we explore the meanings of presence and extend the literature on presenteeism to its full conceptual potential. In addition to the value loss due to presenteeism discussed in the literature that we acknowledge, we explore potential value gain due to presenteeism in terms of creativity and innovation. We offer a theoretical model of presenteeism that separates the more conventional negative presenteeism from positive presenteeism, accounting for value loss and value gain respectively. Based on PCT and STD we trace the dynamics of presenteeism in a comprehensive manner. We suggest that higher-level goals influence one's psychological contract formation, which on evaluation determines person-organization fit. Assessment of that fit will influence the nature of one's motivation for work engagement. This assessment and subsequent motivation are likely to be influenced by social and task characteristics of the job. When the motivation is extrinsic and is exacerbated by individual and organizational constraints, there is potential for negative presenteeism. People come to work while sick, or are stressed out, or are simply disengaged because what they have to do is not what they feel like doing. All of this leads to value loss or productivity loss. There is documentation to support these assertions. We probe further as to what happens when the motivation is intrinsic and is facilitated by social and task characteristics of the job. We propose that it can lead to two things: 1, the individual is job involved leading to traditional value gain; 2, the individual is work engaged and becomes creative adding to innovative value gain.

More than three decades ago, Johns and Nicholson (1982) explored the meanings of absence and broadened the scope of extant inquiry into absenteeism with attendant theoretical and practical benefits. We are attempting to do something similar here exploring the meanings of presence. We ask what it means to be present at work, when and why are people present at work, what do they do while at work, and what are the value implications of their presence to the organization. In essence, our mission here is to provide a theoretical nudge to shift and expand managerial optic about presenteeism from one of control to the extraction of value.

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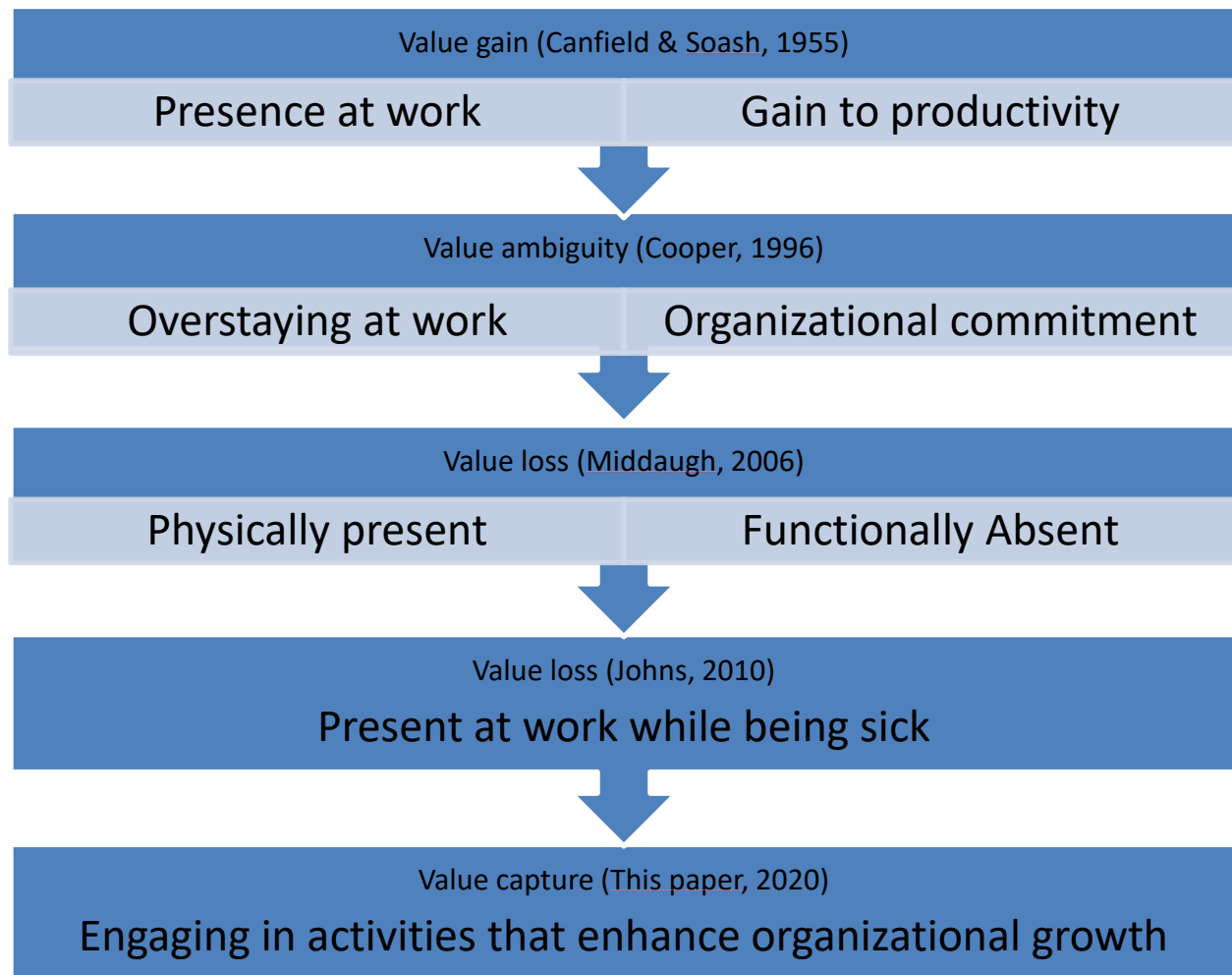


Figure 1 Presenteeism: Concept history



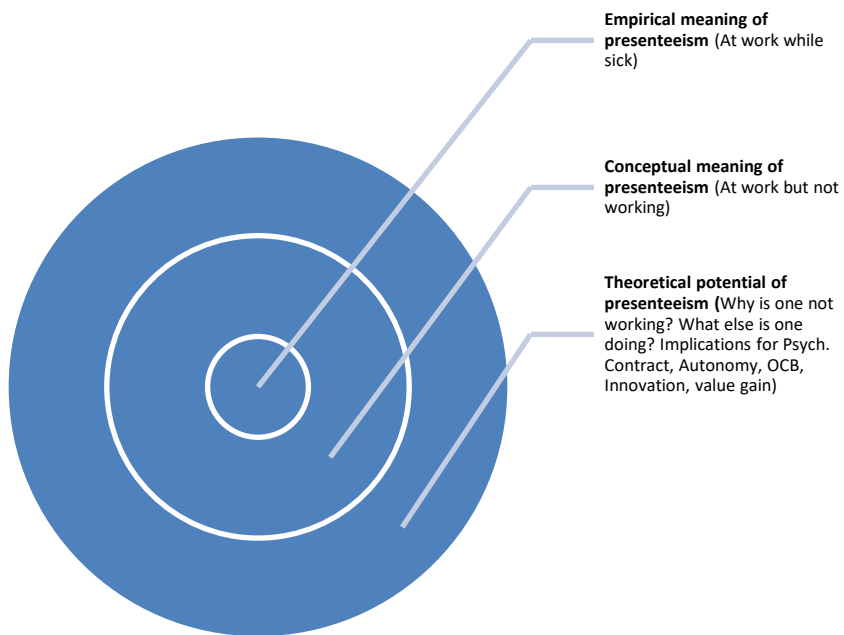


Figure 2 Empirical reality and theoretical potential of presenteeism.

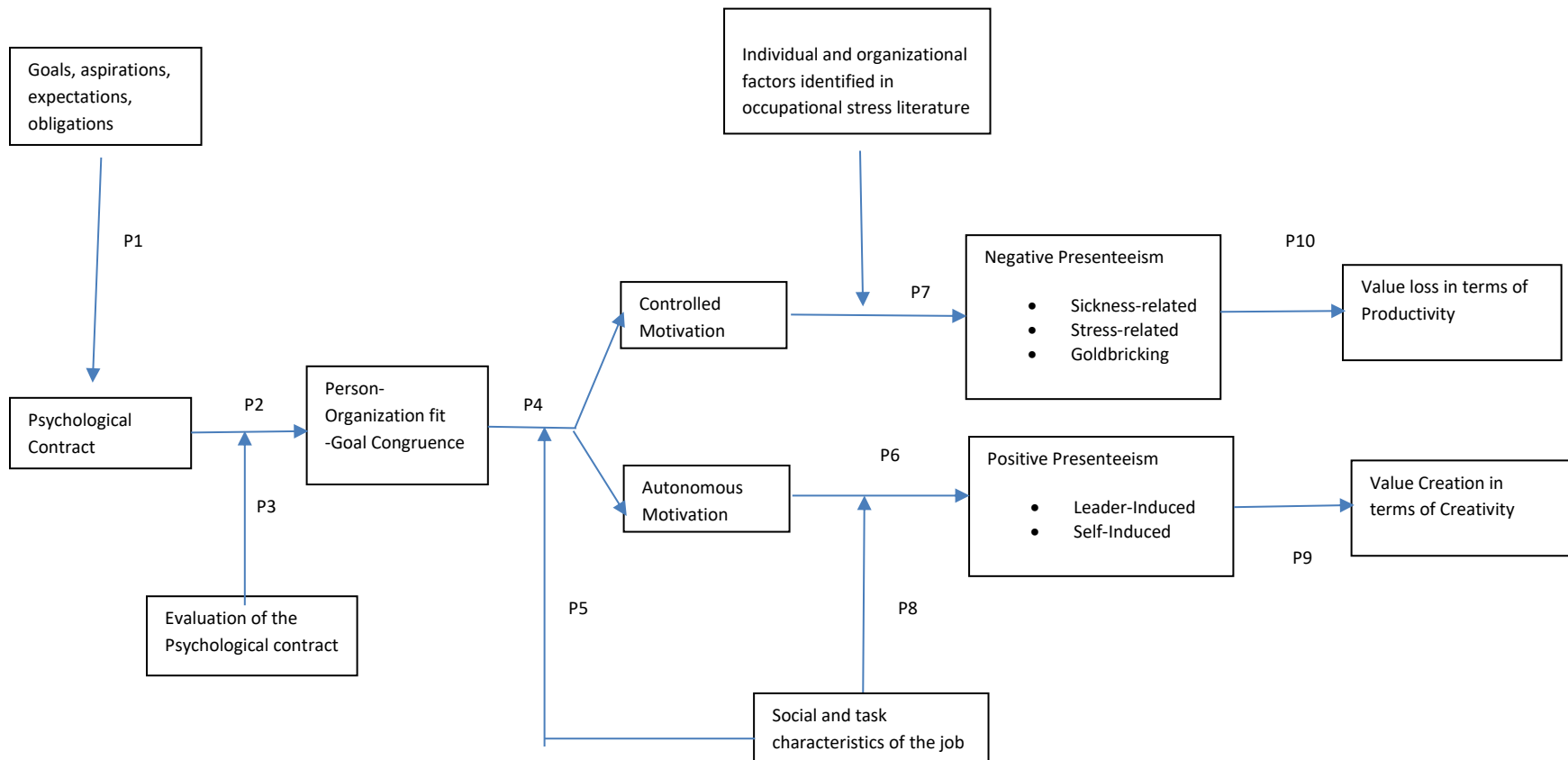


Figure 3 Presenteeism and Value

(P1-P10 refer to propositions in the text)

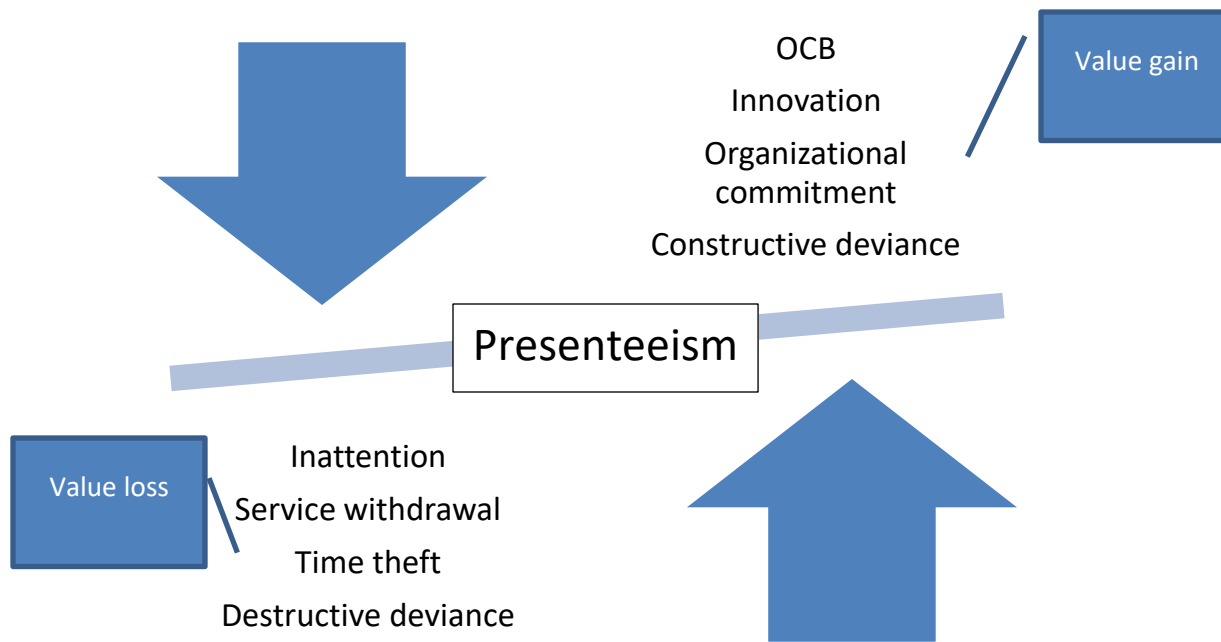


Figure 4 Value gain and value loss in presenteeism