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## Temporary Withdrawal from Work Under Full Employment

The Formation of an Absence Culture\*

### *Introduction*

In the decades of full employment following World War II, industry in several western countries became concerned over the high levels of labor turnover and absence. Sample surveys and exit interviews threw little light on how these high levels came about.

A firm in the steel industry, the Park Gate Iron and Steel Company in Sheffield, asked the Institute to find a new way that would help them to reduce their problem with labor turnover and absence. Our response was to try out a process approach—to follow through a cohort of entrants over a four-year period. The company kept meticulous records so that the fact-gathering part of the inquiry did not present much difficulty. The results, however, showed that there were systematic problems to which there were no easy solutions (Hill and Trist, 1953).

The quantitative aspects of the results generated widespread interest and quite a large academic literature, especially in Scandinavia. The qualitative aspects, however, which involved a number of key psychoanalytic concepts, were totally disregarded. They need attention today as much as then.

Following through entrants from the time of joining to the time of leaving yielded what we called “survival curves”—the proportion at any given time who had not left. Though the slope of these curves varied greatly between different firms, they had a general shape. Over the first few weeks or months there was an explosion of leaving which we called the *induction crisis*. The slope of the curve was very steep. Over the next six months to two years the slope became more gentle; this was called the period of *differential transit* when there was an increase in absenteeism. After this the rate of leaving

\*A shortened and rewritten version of the original—*Human Relations*, 8:121–52, 1955.

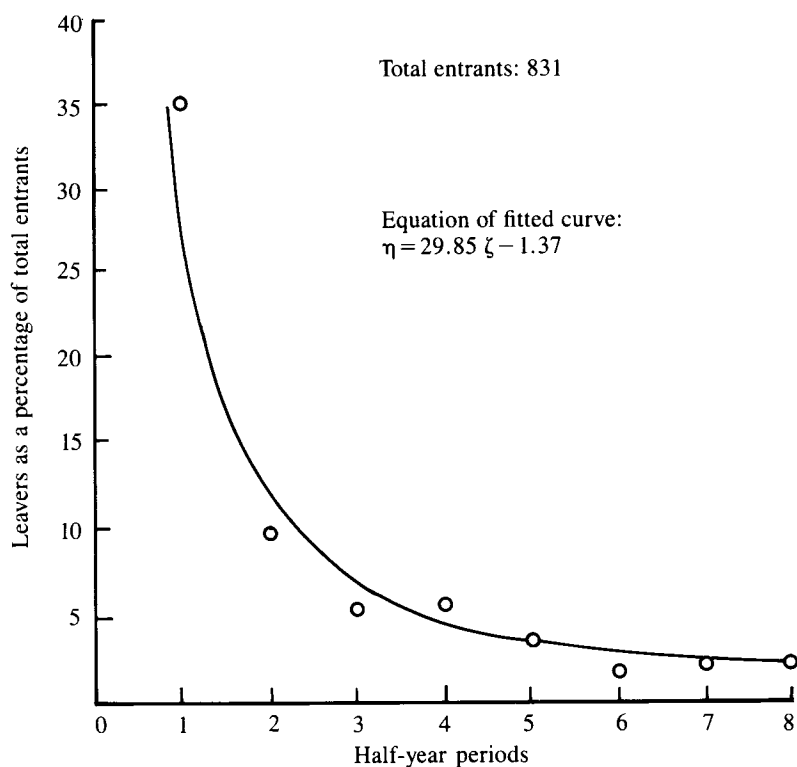


Figure 1. Survival curve (Park Gate)

leveled off in what we called the period of *settled connection* when sickness increased. The survival curve for Park Gate is given in Figure 1.

As contrasted with labor turnover, absences are a "stayer" phenomenon. One of the uses of absence is to provide a means of temporary withdrawal from the stress of continuing in, as distinct from breaking, a work relationship.

The group examined were all subject to the same broad socio-economic conditions during the four years' service studied. Detailed records made it possible to examine the forms of absence for each of the 289 individuals in the stayer group. These forms were classified as absences due to accidents; certified sickness; uncertified sickness; other reasonable explanation; and no reasonable explanation. The data showed the familiar pattern of monthly fluctuations not significantly different from random, superimposed upon seasonal variations which could be allowed for.

The tendency to go absent, by whatever means, produced a positively skewed distribution whose mode and tail indicated the majority who conformed to a social norm and the minority who deviated from it. We then asked: does the tendency to go absent more often than is the custom constitute an unalterable pattern or do certain changes occur as length of service increases? Are there any signs of a capacity on the part of individuals to learn to maintain themselves with less frequent recourse to temporary withdrawal, i.e., to improve their relationship with their employing institution?

With the overall annual absence level varying no more than between 5.5 percent and 6.5 percent of shifts for a working population of over 3,500, there was a sufficient approximation to a broad constancy. The fluctuation in the component forms was no more than might be expected in a complex social situation under real life conditions. Our entrant group comprised roughly a tenth of the working population at any one time.

### *Absences Other Than Accidents*

We shall now examine changes in our stayers group in the level and form of their withdrawal from work during these first four years of service, divided into eight half-yearly periods. Table 1 shows that absences rise from 637 in the first to 775 in the second, from which they fall to 626 in the fifth and then stay at that level for the remaining three.

The survival distribution of entrants to the steel works conforms to the characteristic J-shaped curve. In comparison with other published cases it combines a fairly sharp induction crisis with a comparatively short period of differential transit—the curve tends to flatten out after a period of about two-and-a-half years.

Joining and leaving a firm is a publicly and legally institutionalized process regulated by contract. Knowledge of how to join a firm must exist outside the firm itself otherwise it would normally get no entrants. In going through the process of joining it the entrant acquires knowledge and experience of the means of leaving it. A desire to break the contract can be put into effect simply, and the terms of the contract provide the amount of notice (a week in most cases) that must be given. No barrier of any strength exists, therefore, to prevent painful feelings arising during the entrant's first encounter with the firm from being acted out immediately—by leaving. The characteristically high starting point of the survival curve in the present case bears witness to the extent to which this occurs.

Very different is the picture of temporary withdrawal from work. Absences are not publicly institutionalized acts. They tend to be regulated by internal cultural characteristics of individual firms—by what may be called an *absence*

TABLE I Total Numbers of Absences Sustained per Half-Yearly Period of Service

<i>Half-yearly period of service</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>	<i>5th</i>	<i>6th</i>	<i>7th</i>	<i>8th</i>	<i>Total</i>
Number of absences	637	775	719	667	626	630	618	630	5,302

*culture*. This in the majority of cases is expressed in the pattern of *taking a day off* which accounts for 75 percent of industrial absences. The possibilities of withdrawal by absence are not known by the entrant; they are cultural mechanisms ignorance of which marks out the newcomer. Absorption of these cultural mechanisms is a process taking some time.

Involved is learning to remain a member of an organization while being away from it. One of the reasons for the high rate of leaving in the early period of service is the comparative lack of other means of withdrawal at the entrant's disposal through which to express the intense conflicts that may be experienced (during the induction crisis)—without leading to a breach of the relationship.

#### MEETING THE STRESSES OF "STAYING"

Concern is with the resort to absences by stayers, who, having survived their induction crisis, are prepared to endure—in ways tolerable both to themselves and to the firm—the tensions consequent on continuing with, rather than breaking, their work relationship. One result appears to be the considerably increased level of absence which characterizes the stayers' group during their second and third half years of service. Such stayers have had time to learn the prevailing absence culture to the point where they can operate it more freely. Their need to do so is also greater; for it is just when the role of stayer is fully taken and the person begins genuinely to identify him- or herself with being an employee that the role of leaver becomes less available as a means of alleviating stress. A person starts, therefore, to make more use of the role of absentee which, correspondingly, has become more available. He or she increases the rate of temporary withdrawal—but within limits which are not likely to lead to termination of employment. The firm and the employee have become more valuable to each other. There is a greater investment on both sides in containing stress arising between them within the on-going relationship that has become established.

One would not, however, expect the employee to increase the rate of absence beyond a point. As the relationship between the individual and the employing organization goes on, it needs to "work through" to a position of

relatively stable mutual acceptance. After the wave of leaving associated with induction and the wave of absence associated with differential transit, one would expect a diminution of both as the relationship becomes one of settled connection. The extent to which this was the case at Park Gate may be seen from Table 1. Not only does some kind of equilibrium appear to be reached after two and a half years, but this levelling out of the absence curve coincides with the levelling out of the survival curve as the latter approaches conditions defined in labor turnover terms as those of settled connection.

Overall, the 289 stayers incurred 2,798 absences in their first two years as against 2,504 in their next two years. During the period of differential transit they incurred 1,494 as against 1,248 during the final year of settled connection.

The best available indicator of the degree of disturbance that had to be contained is the difference between the absences (637, 775) for the first and second periods. Similarly, the best indicator of the extent to which the difficulties of continuing with the relationship have later been worked through, is the comparison of the combined absences (1,494) for the first two periods of differential transit with those (1,248) of the last two of settled connection. The first of these changes points to the degree of stress involved in taking the stayer, as distinct from the leaver, role; the second to the degree of success in maintaining it.

#### CHANGES IN THE PREFERRED MODE OF WITHDRAWAL

Within this culture absences may be grouped according to their position on two parallel scales, one sociological and the other psychological. The first is in terms of the degree of sanction received from the employing authority; the second in terms of the degree to which the individual himself accepts responsibility for his actions. Sanctioned absences may be subdivided into those few (able-bodied) absences which are sanctioned prior to the event and the very much larger number of retrospectively sanctioned absences, comprising both certified and uncertified sickness and those able-bodied absences where an acceptable reason is given on return to work. Unsanctioned absences, where either no excuse is given or the excuse is unacceptable, comprise the large group of "no reason" absences. A property of such a scheme is that high or low degrees of sanction and acceptance of responsibility go together.

The expectation arises that an improved relation with the firm would be exhibited by the progressive substitution of more for less sanctioned forms of absence. This would mean that the norms of acceptable conduct were becoming progressively internalized by the entrant. The relative incommunicability of the sanctioning criteria, except through direct experience over a period of time, and the need for such a period to absorb the absence culture, make it

TABLE 2 Numbers of Other Absences Sustained per Half-Yearly Period of Service

Category	<i>Half-yearly period of service</i>								Total
	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>	<i>5th</i>	<i>6th</i>	<i>7th</i>	<i>8th</i>	
No reason (unsanctioned)	371	473	431	363	335	298	275	274	2,820
Certified sickness (sanctioned)	56	77	91	85	75	82	87	105	658
Uncertified sickness (sanctioned)	62	70	72	84	91	116	129	122	746
Permission (sanctioned)	7	30	5	11	13	21	13	19	119
Sufficient reason (sanctioned)	121	106	99	109	96	102	105	97	835
Total sanctioned absences	246	283	267	289	275	321	334	343	2,358

likely that entrants would engage in an active process of trial and error as well as the more passive process of observing others in order to discover the precise nature and limits of the sanctioning criteria. The persistence in specific acts of condemned behavior becomes progressively more condemned as time goes on. While the old hand may acquire certain privileges, some acts that are sanctioned for the newcomer may be condemned for those with longer service. The question arises not only of different levels, but of different forms of absence being variously tolerated according to the phase of a man's relationship with his firm.

In order to test the hypothesis that over the course of time sanctioned absences would be progressively substituted for unsanctioned, the numbers of absences falling within these two broad categories were separated and their incidence in half-yearly periods calculated. The results (Table 2) are in accordance with expectation. Over the course of service unsanctioned forms of absence declined while sanctioned forms rose.

Broadly speaking, the overall increase in sanctioned absence is attributable to a higher rate of sickness in the later periods of service—especially the marked and continuous rise in uncertified sickness.

Sources of absence may be located in other regions of the life-space than that comprised by the person/work relationship. In the main, able-bodied absences of both the prospectively and retrospectively sanctioned types are occasioned by happenings in people's life elsewhere than at work, which can legitimately keep them away from it. These events are interference phenomena deriving from the fact that people have other social roles. There is no reason to

suppose that such absences would either increase or decrease as a person's service progressed; rather that they would balance out. The data support this.

By contrast, the incidence of temporary sickness is closely connected with the person/work relationship. The outstanding fact is the continued rise of uncertified sickness. If the most disturbed periods of differential transit are compared with the least disturbed periods of settled connection, uncertified sickness increases by 77 percent. Even certified sickness increases by 14 percent. At the same time voluntary unsanctioned absenteeism decreases by 35 percent.

The problem of the substitution of sanctioned for unsanctioned absences becomes, therefore, very largely that of understanding how uncertified sickness comes to take the place of no-reason able-bodied absences—how a way of illness becomes preferred to a way of delinquency. If both the illnesses and the delinquencies are of a minor order, they are nevertheless frequent and common indications of everyday stress.

The rise in uncertified sickness could be due to an increase in conscious malingering. A number of circumstances, however, support the view that this was not the case. Considerable efforts were made by the firm to assure themselves of the validity of reasons for absence and an elaborate and clearly defined absence culture had come into existence, the possibility of which rested upon effective investigation and categorization of absences.

#### THE PROGRESSIVE INTERNALIZATION OF STRESS

The fact that uncertified sickness comes to be substituted for no-reason able-bodied absence means that a form of illness has taken over from a form of conduct. This suggests that a psychological component is active in the illnesses in question. No intervening institution or third party, such as a doctor, is involved in their appraisal. Uncertified sickness and no-reason absences belong to the same order in that both are dealt with directly in the relationship between the individual and the firm. They are equivalent in that both belong to the same time scale—that of the "day off"—so that the same amount of withdrawal is obtainable through either form.

Despite their common adherence to the day-off pattern, no-reason absences and uncertified sickness belong, in feeling, to different psychological worlds. In the first a day is taken, while in the second it is lost. In passing from one of these worlds to the other, employees pass from taking it out directly on the firm to taking it out in some measure on themselves, thus exchanging the role of an offender for that of a casualty—however minor in both cases. What was once projected now becomes introjected. A stronger prohibition is at work preventing the open expression of hostility against the firm. The need not to injure the

object has been strengthened. This would only come about, however, so far as the firm had itself come to be perceived as relatively good by the individual.

It may be suggested that tensions in the person/work relationship previously dealt with predominantly by paranoid means and expressed in a mild "conduct disorder," taking the form of voluntary absenteeism, later give rise to reactions rather more depressive in coloring, with the associated symptom formations of minor illness. (The psychoanalytic concepts introduced at this and certain other points in the paper derive from the views of Melanie Klein on the paranoid and depressive positions [Klein, 1948].) The tensions are not completely resolved by this change. Were they so, there would be no need for the minor illnesses. A more complete resolution would depend on an individual facing his own bad feelings to a greater extent than he appears to do. Incompletely accepted by him, but not so easily expressed openly towards the firm, these feelings tend to be denied and split off often in a process of somatic conversion—hence the minor illnesses, which carry, in a covert form, hostilities formerly overt in the relationship.

In effecting this compromise the absence culture must undoubtedly play a part, as much as the personal tendencies of the individual. At Park Gate it was the physical causes of absence that were accepted with least question and the psychological and behavioral that were subject to most scrutiny. No convention existed by which a man, too angry with his foreman to contain himself, might ask to go off shift in order to get command of himself and deal with the situation. Yet his absence next day with a pain or a cold would be sanctioned. A rise in uncertified sickness with length of service is a collusive process taking place between person and firm. There is a tacit understanding that the easiest way of keeping certain awkward feelings out of work relationships is to keep them in an unrecognized (somatized) form. Forces in the firm, therefore, tend to combine with forces in the individual employee to produce the norms governing absence behavior.

The first main step by which the stress of the person/work relationship becomes progressively more internalized is taken as part of the change from an orientation based primarily on the leaver role to one based primarily on the stayer role. That this first change should take place at all implies that paranoid attitudes with their attendant fears, suspicions and hostilities, aroused during the induction crisis, are at least partially modifiable. For the employed individual to begin safely to adopt the stayer role he or she must perceive the employing firm as an object sufficiently good to permit, within certain limits, the projection of bad feelings onto it and the acting out of certain internal bad object-relations in external behavior towards it—without breaking the actual work relationship. Drifters, or floaters, with a history of chronic job change seem incapable of taking this first crucial step—no matter what the objective characteristics of the firm may be. Undoubtedly, in many cases the intensity of

the persecutory anxieties and hostilities in the personality is too great for assumptions of sufficient goodness to be made, even provisionally, either about the firm or about oneself, so that the pain and the risk of testing out the real object cannot be endured within the bounds of a continuing relationship.

However, a firm which tolerates an increased rate of absence on the part of the individual during the period of settling in, even if at that point the employee has recourse largely to unsanctioned means, shows, however implicitly, a true understanding of the real needs and difficulties arising from attempting to make an enduring employee relationship. It shows itself as non-rejecting, as serious and sincere in inducting the employee into a more permanent relationship; as competent, moreover, in the means adopted to bring this about. To the continuing demonstration of such an attitude most individuals tend to respond in kind. People will find it increasingly difficult to maintain as a predominantly bad object an employing authority that treats them with implicit understanding. As this authority comes to be accepted as predominantly good it becomes difficult to go on treating it deliberately and overtly in a hostile, predatory, neglectful, selfish, contemptuous, defiant or irresponsible way (i.e., in terms of the manic defense)—without being arrested by one's own guilt. Therefore, the role of unsanctioned absentee becomes progressively less available just as the role of leaver had done previously. In this way the second main step comes about.

No relationship can become problem-free. Though perceived after a time as better rather than worse, no employing authority can appear to its employees as wholly (ideally) good, nor they to it. As the role of unsanctioned absentee, in addition to that of leaver, becomes relatively unavailable, the stress, bad feeling and hostility inevitably involved in continuing with the work relationship must somehow be dealt with either realistically or neurotically. The exceptionally well-adjusted individual may be able to cope with this situation without recourse to any means of temporary withdrawal. The present study suggests that such individuals are relatively rare. For the more ordinary majority a certain level of absence seems to persist as a needed and permanent feature of a continuing work-relationship.

With the barriers strengthened against both leaving and unsanctioned absence, the field of sanctioned absences represents the only remaining direction in which locomotions expressing the need for temporary withdrawal may legitimately take place. Only sickness, therefore, remains. The suggestion is that recourse is had to some kind of sickness when the individual, no longer able, in virtue of the improved relationship, to project (still persisting) bad feelings onto the firm as freely as was once possible, is nevertheless unable adequately to contend with them at a psychological level internally.

In the stayers' group in our study, the type of sickness increasing as a result of this process is for the most part of the very minor character included in the uncertified category. This increase, though considerable (75 percent), is not of

TABLE 3 Number of Accidents Sustained per Half-Yearly Period of Service

Category	<i>Half-yearly period of service</i>								Total
	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>	<i>5th</i>	<i>6th</i>	<i>7th</i>	<i>8th</i>	
Number of accidents	20	19	21	15	16	11	9	13	124

so high an order as to prevent a fall (16 percent) in the overall level of absence. This suggests that the degree of stress in this group was not particularly great and that the process of coming to terms was well advanced. It cannot be assumed that this would be the case in all circumstances, and even in the data at Park Gate there is a hint that certified sickness (belonging to the longer time scale of a week or more) was on the increase towards the end of the four years under study.

Just as there is a dynamic connectedness between leaving and the phase of induction crisis, and between unsanctioned absence and the phase of differential transit, so would there appear to be a dynamic connectedness between sanctioned absence (in the form of sickness) and the phase of settled connection.

## *Accidents*

### ACCIDENTS IN THE ABSENCE FRAME OF REFERENCE

Accidents, when regarded in terms of sanctioning and responsibility, combine a high degree of sanctioning—so far as the absence is concerned—with a low degree of acceptance of responsibility. For an accident is precisely an event for which the individual does not usually accept responsibility, while absence arising from an accident is probably the most highly sanctioned of all forms of absence from work.

The substitution of sanctioned for unsanctioned absences arose from an improved relation of the entrant with the firm and indicated both a progressive acceptance of responsibility and a progressive internalization of the firm as a good employing authority. This being so, accidents are likely to fall during the course of service despite the highly sanctioned character of the absences to which they give rise. The incidence of accidents during the course of service is consistent with such a postulate (Table 3). In the last four periods there were only 49 accidents as compared with 75 in the first.

For the eight half-yearly periods the correlations between the accident series and the other absence series are shown in Table 4. They confirm the analysis made in terms of the progressive internalization of the stresses. Of the two

TABLE 4 Correlations Between Accident Series and Other Absences Series

<i>Category of other absences</i>	<i>Correlation coefficient</i>	<i>Significance</i>
No reason	+ .850	Significant ( $p < .01$ )
Sufficient reason	+ .286	Not significant
Permission	- .248	Not significant
Certified sickness	- .420	Not significant
Uncertified sickness	- .944	Significant ( $p < .001$ )

significant coefficients the positive association is with no-reason absences—providing further evidence that the occurrence of accidents is connected with a bad relationship with the employing authority. The negative association is with uncertified sickness—suggesting that the tendency to have accidents is not unrelated to difficulties over internalization.

#### ACCIDENT-FREE AND ACCIDENT-SUSTAINING GROUPS

The expectation arises of a differing degree of change occurring among the accident-free and the accident-sustaining groups with regard to other forms of withdrawal, especially those that are unsanctioned. The accident-free group, comprising a larger proportion of conformants to the social norm, sustain a consistently lower level of absences than the accident-sustainers (Figure 2). They have a relatively less severe induction crisis and fewer absences in the second period, and reach a stable level of absences more quickly. Conversely, the accident-sustaining group experience a more severe induction crisis, more absences during the second period and take longer to reach a stable level. Indeed, the curve of absences for these accident-sustainers had not leveled out even after four years' service.

#### PART OF BODY INJURED

As regards the parts of the body subject to work-related injury, the human body may be regarded as comprising three regions: the parts directly in contact with the work performed—hand, foot, head or eye; a connecting region comprising parts once removed from actual contact—wrist, arm, ankle or leg; a central region comprising back, chest, shoulder and abdomen.

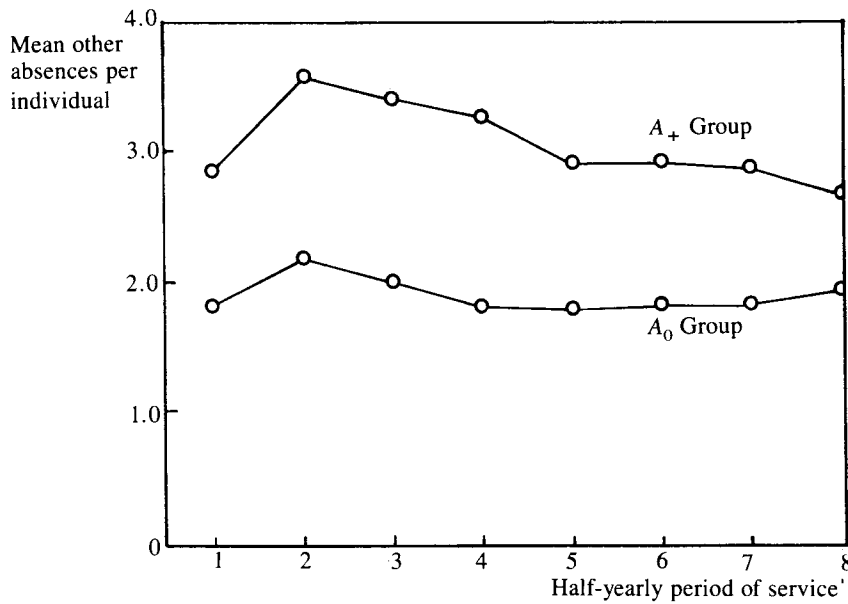


Figure 2. Mean other absences per individual among accident free ( $A_0$ ) and accident-sustaining ( $A_+$ ) groups

Opportunities for injury at work may be expected to occur with greatest frequency in the contact region and it would be mainly in this region that modifications of behavior resulting from an improvement in the person/work relationship should show themselves. Results, reported in Table 5, are in accordance with expectation. Altogether 69 of the accidents resulted in injury to some part of the contact region, 47 in the first two years' service and 22 in the second. The connecting region accounted for 34 accidents equally distributed between the first and second two years, while the central region accounted for only 16—9 in the first two years and 7 in the second.

#### TYPES OF MISHAP

Accidents occurring in the steel works were classified according to common industrial categorization into ten different types of mishap. Four of these accounted for 76 percent of the accidents: handling objects; being hit by falling objects; falls of employees; and stepping on and striking objects. The numbers of accidents in each of the four major classes occurring to the stayers' group in each of the eight half-yearly periods are given in Table 6.

TABLE 5 Part of the Body Injured per Half-Yearly Period of Service

Type of body region	Detail of components	Half-yearly period of service								Total		
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	Period 1-4	Period 5-8	Period 1-8
Contact	Hand	8	3	6	3	2	3	2	2	20	9	29
	Foot	3	6	4	1	3	—	—	1	14	4	18
	Head	3	—	3	2	2	—	1	2	8	5	13
	Eye	1	1	1	2	2	—	2	—	5	4	9
	Total	15	10	14	8	9	3	5	5	47	22	69
Connecting	Wrist	—	1	1	—	3	1	—	—	2	4	6
	Arm	—	—	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	5	7
	Ankle	1	2	2	3	—	3	—	1	8	4	12
	Leg	2	1	1	1	—	1	1	2	5	4	9
	Totals	3	4	5	5	4	6	3	4	17	17	34
Central	Back	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	2	1	3	4
	Shoulder	1	2	—	—	—	—	—	1	3	1	4
	Chest	1	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	3
	Abdomen	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	1
	Misc.	—	1	1	—	1	—	1	—	2	2	4
Totals	2	5	1	1	2	1	1	3	9	7	16	
Multiple injuries	—	—	1	1	1	1	—	1	2	3	5	
Grand total	20	19	21	15	16	11	9	13	75	49	124	

TABLE 6 Types of Mishap per Half-Yearly Period of Service

Class	Half-yearly period of service								Total		
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	Period 1-4	Period 5-8	Period 1-8
Handling objects	4	1	3	1	5	6	2	5	9	18	27
Hit by falling objects	6	6	9	2	2	—	—	—	23	2	25
Falls of employees	3	7	1	3	4	2	1	3	14	10	24
Stepping on or striking objects	3	3	3	5	1	3	1	3	14	8	22
Other	4	2	5	4	4	—	5	2	15	11	26
Total	20	19	21	15	16	11	9	13	75	49	124

Both for the works as a whole and for the 289 four-year survivors, accidents arising from handling objects were the largest group. In comparison with other types they represent those accidents which are most under the control of the person who has them. The employee has an accident from dealing with material that is literally in his own hands.

In contrast to other classes of accidents which show a decline with length of service, accidents due to handling objects not only do not decline but rise. The number occurring in the second two years is double that for the first two years. Concealed within the general decline is a rise in those accidents most under the control of the worker who sustains them. Furthermore, the period in which most accidents due to handling objects occur coincides with the almost complete disappearance of accidents due to being hit by falling objects. The blocking of opportunities in one region may result in more opportunities being taken in another.

The very process of blocking opportunities for accidents occurs not only through such methods as guarding and fool-proofing, in which physical barriers are introduced, but also in regulation and prohibition in which organizational barriers are set up. The effectiveness of such organizational barriers depends on their acceptance by individual employees, which varies with the extent to which the firm is internalized and authority itself accepted. It varies with the extent to which empirical specification of safety regulations can be made. For example, stacking methods may be routinized and laid down explicitly but it may be more difficult to specify how objects should be handled when this depends on skill (i.e., the non-specifiable routines carried inside a person).

Furthermore, the data of Table 6 may be related to the data of Table 5. Apart from handling objects, the accidents represented are essentially *accidents of*

*contact*—with the environment in which the person has come to work. By contrast, accidents arising from handling objects are *accidents of activity*—of the person himself in his environment.

It is consistent with the earlier result that contact accidents exhibit a decrease in the later period. The view is submitted that contact accidents belong psychologically to the world of persecutory phenomena. What, one might ask, could be more persecutory than an environment in which one is hit by falling objects, is made to fall down, or is liable to step on or strike harmful things? In each of these cases the something that happens to the individual comes from outside. The noxious agency is experienced as a force entirely beyond the person's own control, and therefore such accidents cannot possibly be seen as his or her own fault. Blame must lie entirely with the environment, which, of course, is that to which the person has been exposed by the employing authority. The physical environment, however, will not be found so apt, as it were, to "attack" in such ways as the relationship with employing authority improves.

The psychological belongingness of activity accidents, on the other hand, would seem to be with a more depressive mode of feeling. It is not, of course, suggested in relation to accidents, any more than in relation to other absences, that the giving up of the paranoid for the depressive position is complete. They continue to co-exist but a change of emphasis seems to occur as service proceeds. For in these cases some of the badness at least must be regarded by the individual as his or her own, since his or her own faulty activity has certainly contributed to, even if it may not entirely have caused, the accident. The increase in activity accidents that goes along with the decrease in contact accidents is a suggestive parallel to the increase in sanctioned absences that goes along with the decrease in unsanctioned absences. The likelihood is that the one as much as the other reflects some of the difficulties of maintaining the greater degree of internalization demanded by an improved state of the person/work relationship.

### *Conclusions*

The present study has revealed, as regards absence phenomena in general, both a characteristic intractability and certain possibilities of change. The relations people make with their fellows reflect unconsciously the relationships subsisting within their own personalities. Certain characteristics begin to emerge of the individual who has many absences, including perhaps one or more accidents. Such people would seem to lack the ordinary capacity to internalize a good object; to be rather prone to paranoid hostility and apt to disown responsibility for what they do and to remain ignorant of their real motivation. A bad