



Uncovering sick leave factors in a Swedish retail company

A mixed methods study investigating sickness attendance culture.

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Abstract

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Keyword: Sick leaves, HRM, Attendance culture, Demand and Control, Presenteeism and Absenteeism, Working environment, Structure and Organisation

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to contribute to the existing literature by investigating through a deductive approach the causes and consequences of the sick leaves present in a Swedish company operating in the retail industry. In particular, the study will focus on the role played by managerial attitudes toward sick leaves in influencing workplace sickness attendance culture.

Theory: The study revolves around two main theories; the first, developed by Ruhle and Süß (2020), on archetypes of sickness attendance cultures; the second, by Karasek and Theorell (1990), focused on a model called “demand, control and support”.

Method: This thesis is built upon an exploratory mixed-method approach. Initial semi-structured qualitative interviews were performed and the information gathered served as a guideline for the selection of the questions included in a survey issued to the employees of the case organisation. The findings of the qualitative and quantitative study were analysed separately and used to draw the final conclusions.

Result: The obtained results underlined the presence of great differences between how store managers are trained and their attitudes toward sick leaves. Karasek and Theorell (1990), support, demand and control model has demonstrated useful in providing an insight on the degree of decisional power and the psychological demand characterising the roles in the organisation under study and why some employees rather than others have shown stronger signs of the adoption of a presentistic culture. Evidence has been found that suggest a change in the norms and values of the sickness attendance cultures of the organisation under study. The findings underline how the most prevalent form of culture among those presented by Ruhle and Süß (2020), was the health-focused archetype.

Conclusions: From the analysis of the data extracted from the survey, the researchers have been able to find evidence of managerial attitudes producing an impact on the overall sickness attendance cultures. Mover, evidence has been found that suggest a change in the norms and values of the sickness attendance cultures of the organisation under study.

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1. Introduction

This chapter begins by presenting the context and framework in which the study takes place. It proceeds with the problem discussion and purpose statement, finally, it provides information on the case organisation.

1.1 Context and framework: the Swedish sickness insurance system

Sick leave represents a significant issue affecting individuals, organisations, and the overall society (Alexanderson & Farrants, 2022). The study takes place in Sweden, a country in which the welfare state is highly valued, in an economic and socio-political environment which is still recovering from Covid-19 and is affected by the impact of the Russian war in Ukraine. In this context, European countries are trying to find a new equilibrium which will give them economic stability and allow them to adapt to the changes taking place in society.

Covid-19 has been a global humanitarian challenge which has profoundly affected the health and economic system of many countries (ILO, 2023). Covid-19 has changed, probably forever, the perception and meaning of the word “sick”; what before the pandemic was believed to be a normal cold that would quickly go away, in 2020 started to be perceived as an alarm bell for isolation. In Sweden, labour laws provide clear and detailed guidance on sick leaves and how they should be managed (ILO, 2023). Sick leave by definition can be paid or unpaid, throughout the following paper, when talking about sick leaves the researchers will refer only to paid sick leave.

In Sweden, employees must report to their employer their condition of sickness as soon as possible, the sick employee can request up to 7 days of sick leave without the need for a doctor’s certificate, which must be submitted on day 8 to the employer (Försäkringskassan, 2023). The first 14 days of sick leave are under the responsibility of the company and thus the employee only needs to be in contact with their managers at the store. From day 15, the employees also have to report to Försäkringskassan to be able to continue to receive sick pay benefits and have to maintain constant contact with their managers (Försäkringskassan, 2023). Försäkringskassan does not provide a clear definition of what is considered short-term sick leave and what is considered long-term, but Blank and Diderichsen (1995) identify short term sick leaves as those that are between 1 to 7 days; the researchers will rely on this definition throughout the study

when referring to short-term sick leaves. With regard to long-term sick leaves, society seems to widely recognise them as longer than 30 days or four weeks, consequently the researchers will rely on this definition. During the sick leave period, the employer should design a plan that would allow the employee to return to work no later than 30 days from the date on which the leave was requested, moreover, the employer should put effort into adapting the workplace, technical equipment, working hours and work tasks to welcome back the employee as best as possible (Försäkringskassan, 2023). Finally, the employer should keep ongoing contact with the employee during the sick leave.

While Swedish labour laws have not changed during the pandemic, the social restrictions placed on people have disrupted what was perceived as the norm, exponentially increasing remote work and changing people's perception of sick leaves (ILO, 2023). The decline of the pandemic, opposite to what was expected, has not led to the natural decrease of sick leaves. As the number of sick days per employee in Sweden continued to increase in 2022 compared to those recorded during 2021, economists are concerned about how the "new yearly average" will affect businesses across the country (SCB, 2022). Throughout this study, particular attention will be placed on eventual findings which might suggest Covid-19 to have influenced a change in the way in which employees at the case organisation some symptoms as worthy of taking a sick leave absence or not.

1.2 Problem discussion

There are multiple reasons which might influence the decision of employees to request a sick leave; in the last decade, a wide branch of the academic literature has focused on exploring the factors which influence the length and frequency of sick leave requests (Allebeck, & Mastekaasa, 2004). The findings have identified the following factors: health conditions and personal circumstances (Allebeck, & Mastekaasa, 2004), legal regulations (Hansen, 2000; Markussen, 2012), and occupational hazards (Reese, 2008), workload, job demand and support (Karasek & Theorell, 1990), organisational culture, workplace environment, workplace policies and work-life balance (Stringer, 2016). The following research will enrich the discussion on sickness attendance culture, and the impact that job demand, control, support and managerial attitudes toward sick leave produce on it.

Sick leaves represent one of the main reasons for employee absenteeism and they constitute a significant loss of work time, causing implications for firms' productivity as well as households' income (Brown & Sessions, 1996). Absenteeism is defined as the "practice of staying away from work" (The Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). Employee absenteeism is a major issue which companies of all sizes have encountered (Brown & Sessions, 1996). Because absenteeism might cause a reduction in the business' value and in worst cases lead to the discharge of employees, most companies recognise the importance of collecting data on the reasons that lead to this phenomenon and look for strategies to reduce its impact (Miller, 2022). For example, to identify how the loss of value originates and how to reduce it, companies measure the cost of employees and find strategies to optimise the way in which tasks are redistributed across employees when absenteeism occurs (Miller, 2022).

An article from Häggebrink and Lovén (2010), published on the Eurofound website, report how the cost of sick leaves for employers, in Sweden, might exceed the cost of the social security system when considering all elements (such as the cost of hiring and training substitute staff, rehabilitation, sick pay etc). Following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, in Sweden, the number of workers in companies that requested sick leave rose to high numbers. Before the pandemic, an average of 591.000 people received sickness benefits per annum; by 2021 the number had grown to 619.000 (Försäkringskassan, 2020; 2021; 2022), causing negative implications for businesses and society as a whole. The Karolinska Institutet has conducted several projects regarding sickness absence and disability pension in Sweden, the majority of which have specific focus on different life situations. In particular, a project on the economic effects of preventive interventions in the workplace (2022), underlines how mental illnesses and musculoskeletal disorders represent the most common causes of sick leave in Sweden (Karolinska Institutet, 2022).

Opposite to absenteeism is presenteeism, which is defined as the "act of staying longer than usual, or going to work when you are ill" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). Although presenteeism has been explored with a positive view in the past, in the last decade, the negative aspects of presenteeism have started to emerge in the academic literature (Schultz & Edington, 2007). In particular the concept of "contagious presenteeism" has emerged; the concept refers to the impact employees produce on co-workers and customers' health when going to work while having infectious diseases (Pichler & Ziebarth, 2017). These findings are forcing companies to

reconsider their approach and view toward sick leaves (Pichler & Ziebarth, 2017). The negative impact of presenteeism on organisations seem to be harder to measure and estimate but may produce losses which are more significant than those deriving from absenteeism (Schultz & Edington, 2007).

Previous research highlights the importance of individual (such as perceived norms, health status and attitudes), and contextual factors (such as absence policies and replaceability), as determinants for the employee decision to come to work or not (Ruhle & Süß, 2020). Little research has been published exploring the complex interactions between contextual factors and both individual and collective norms, values and attitudes. According to Lapinski and Rimal (2005), collective norms serve as "codes of conduct that either prescribe or proscribe behaviours". An organisation's attendance culture is one example of a collective norm. In particular, results underline how perceived supervisor support and managerial attitudes are relevant for the attendance behaviour (Schein, 2010; Naeem & Khurram, 2020). Ruhle and Süß (2020) define attendance culture as a shared understanding of the legitimacy of absence and presence, as well as the established norms for both (Ruhle & Süß, 2020). Previous studies on presenteeism and absenteeism have explored the two phenomena separately, Ruhle & Süß (2020), claim to have presented the first study which integrates both absenteeism and presenteeism into its definition. This paper aims to contribute to the research on the field of sick leave by applying Ruhle & Süß (2020), archetypes of sickness attendance cultures in the context of the Swedish retail industry, in which the case organisation operates. Moreover, this paper will further explore the relationship between managerial attitudes and the sickness attendance culture of the case organisation.

The retail industry employs millions of workers worldwide, playing a crucial role in the economy (Farrants & Alexanderson, 2022). Of the studies available on sick leaves in Sweden, few have explored the retail industry. Alexanderson and Farrants (2022), have published a study focusing on sick leaves in the Swedish trade and retail industry providing information on which are the main sociodemographic and work-related factors affecting sick leaves with a focus on white-collar workers. Their findings underline how white-collar workers in general seem to have lower sick absences than blue collar, suggesting that in the trade and retail industry, blue-collar workers are subject to factors that increase their likelihood of getting sick (Farrants & Alexanderson, 2022). A report from Försäkringskassan (2022), on social insurance, presents

data which report how women working in grocery stores, in 2022, were taking nearly double the sick leave as their male counterparts. The main cause of the request for sick leaves for women seemed to be linked to psychological factors such as stress or depression (Försäkringskassan, 2022). Although it is widely believed that psychological factors lead to longer sick leaves, two studies, from Handelsrådet (2022), and Karasek (1979) on the impact of control, demand and support have demonstrated psychological factors to not be relevant in affecting the employees' choice to prolong their leaves, but rather socio-economic ones to be important.

1.3 Purpose statement

As previously highlighted, a lack of research is present on sick leaves in the Swedish retail industry. Of the studies available on the field, none seem to have explored the relationship of workplace sickness attendance cultures and managerial attitudes toward sick leaves. The intent of this study is to investigate through a deductive approach the causes and consequences of the sick leaves present in a Swedish company operating in the retail industry. In particular, the study places attention on whether managerial attitudes produce an impact on the attendance culture. The study aims to contribute to the existing literature both theoretically and empirically to the field of human resource management (HRM). Theoretically by applying Ruhle and Süß (2020), archetypes of sickness attendance cultures and Karasek and Theorell (1990), demand, control and support model to analyse sick leaves in the Swedish retail industry. Empirically, by providing insight to HRM practitioners and the managers of the case organisation on the type and consequences of sick leaves. To fulfil the purpose of the study the researchers have defined the following initial research questions:

1. Does management affect sick leave?
2. Which kind of sick leaves are present in the company?
3. Are there any preventive strategies toward sick leave?

In chapter 5 the researchers will present their final research questions and explain how they have been influenced by previous studies and the theoretical framework.

1.4 The case organisation

The research is commissioned with initiative from the retailers of a company in the retail industry which has stores throughout Sweden as well as in the Baltic region. Like many other companies, the retailers have experienced an increase in the request for both short and long-term sick leaves, but unlike other businesses, the level is still above the national average recorded by Statistiska centralbyrån (SCB, 2022). The retailers contacted the University of Gothenburg looking for students that would carry out a research project on their sick leaves, the authors of this dissertation applied for participating and were selected, together with another team performing a similar study. The company has decided to remain anonymous, consequently, it will be named “case organisation” throughout the study. The company’s retail stores are managed and organised through licenced operators whose functions are divided by country and by region. Every store is run by a private entity which can own a single shop or a cluster of them. Every shop is connected to the others through the company’s headquarter which oversees logistics, marketing, joint purchasing and developing the store network. The study will focus on the Swedish division of the company, on some of the stores in the region of Västra Götaland and Halland. According to the official website for the chain, by the end of 2019, in Sweden, the brand had approximately 1.300 stores and employed 50.000 people with more than 30% of leadership positions being covered by women.

2. Earlier Research

The following chapter present a comprehensive review and analysis of existing literatures and earlier researches pertinent to this study.

When poor attendance is not managed properly, absenteeism can become a serious problem for companies and can lead to the discharge of the involved employees. Productivity and the overall well-being of the workforce can decrease, as those that remain have to increase their workload to compensate for the absence of their colleagues (Gomez-Mejia, Balkin & Cardy, 2012). Although this is confirmed by a large portion of the economic literature, a study by Grinza and Rycx (2020), on the impact of sickness absenteeism on firm productivity in Belgium, demonstrates that absenteeism differs in the impact it produces on firms, regardless of workforce and firm characteristics. In particular, the effect variate when coming across three main factors: First, it increases exponentially if the absent employees retain task/specific knowledge, which leads us to the second factor, white-collar workers produce a greater impact if absent than blue-collar workers; third, the consequences of absenteeism are stronger and significant only for small and medium-sized businesses (Grinza & Rycx, 2020, pp. 182-183). Consequently, we can deduce that although absenteeism produces a negative impact on businesses, it is hard to measure as its degree varies from one company to another and greatly depends on the skills and role the employee plays in the company.

A study from Yu, Yen, Barnes and Huang (2019) focuses on the banking industry, where the risk of losing highly skilled personnel represents a danger for the company as finding a replacement would represent a costly and time-consuming process. In the retail industry, in particular, in grocery stores, higher education does not represent an important factor in the selection process, but employee retention still represents a concern. Whether it is for sick leaves, maternity/paternity leaves or due to dismissals, the process of selecting and training a new employee is still costly and time-consuming and should, if possible, be reduced (Yu et al., 2019).

Previous research on talent retention stresses the importance for companies to identify managerial tools as a success factor to positively influence the staff attitude and behaviour and increase workplace satisfaction. Yu et al. (2019), underline how a higher degree of workplace

satisfaction can lead to an increase in a sense of belongingness among the staff and thus represent an incentive to improve the quality of service and the profitability of the company.

Luthia (2022) suggests that companies should adopt a performance management system to help firms retain staff by cataloguing in which direction employee development should go. With a system in place, he writes, it becomes easier to see what employees need to be able to develop their skills and rise within the company (Luthia, 2022). This form of employee assessment would also benefit the company as it would set the basis for the business to transform into a learning organisation and evolve (Luthia, 2022). Deas and Coetzee (2020) study the correlation between the psychological informal contracts existing between managers and their employees and how they affect the degree of concern about their careers. They highlight the importance of good management and work-life balance as the main mechanisms for retaining employees. The study focuses mainly on the personal perception and wants of the employees rather than analysing the industry or companies.

Different studies have focused on the impact that managerial attitudes and behaviour produce on employees' well-being and how it contributes positively or negatively to workplace culture (Naeem & Khurram, 2020). If managers present behaviours which might result in toxic rather than supportive, it can affect employees' retention and their degree of work-life satisfaction. A study presented by Naeem and Khurram (2020), defines the concept of leadership and analyses the differences between toxic vs ethical leadership. Further, the study concludes that the cost for a company to replace a worker can be as high as 2,5 times their annual salary which is another argument that advocates the importance of retaining employees. Gómez-Mejia et al. (2012), underline the important role that managers play in retaining employees starting from right after the selection process, when newly hired should be integrated and welcomed into the working community; they also mentioned how managers should do their best to create a positive environment in which employees feel free to fully express their opinions, and in which workplace engagement and commitment are praised and rewarded (Gómez-Mejia et al., 2012).

Opposite to Naeem and Khurram (2020), a study by Park, McLean and Yang (2021), focuses on the benefits a good manager can bring to a company. They address the importance of having a manager with great coaching skills as they correlate this factor with personal development and the consequent commitment that the employee might develop toward the company and its role in it (Park et al., 2021). Further, they link the idea that the development of personal feelings

between a manager and their employees (such as friendship, brotherhood, sisterhood), might represent a factor in creating a sense of belongingness and thus increase retention. In line with Park et al. (2021), a study by Nguyen, Ning, Alikaj and Tran (2021) examine how managerial behaviour and attitude impact the work-life of the employees and how that correlates with work performance and workplace social dynamics (Nguyen et al., 2021). With this regard, workplace culture and leadership strategies play a key role in defining the policies which shape the work environment and define the rules employees abide by (Alvesson, 2013). Smircich and Morgan (1982), define leadership as “the management of meaning” to refer to the culture-influencing role it plays in shaping, modifying, and influencing other cultural manifestations.

Assessing that a workplace possesses a healthy culture is important when it comes to sick leave, as a toxic workplace can tire or stress employees causing a lack of motivation and increasing the probability of them requesting short-term or long-term sick leaves (Ruhle & Süß, 2020). Employees might even request leaves to rest or avoid the workplace, although they are not actually sick. A strategy that managers often tend to implement when faced with a high level of sick leaves or absences, is to praise and reward employees that are present and “badmouth” those that asked for a leave (Ruhle & Süß, 2020). This behaviour might work initially but lead to the creation of unhealthy workplace sickness attendance culture with the presence of an “us and them” attitude and characterised by a presentistic culture which represents a key factor in determining how people choose to utilise their sick days (Ruhle & Süß, 2020).

3. Theoretical Framework

The following chapter begins with an introduction to workplace culture and the role leadership plays in defining it. Then, an in-depth explanation of the three archetypes of workplace sickness attendance cultures and how those affect the day-to-day functions on a company level will follow. Finally, the demand, control and support model by Karasek and Theorell (1990) is introduced.

Companies which decide to become part of a franchise often face challenges of cultural complexity due to factors such as physical location, differences in organisational structure, and information barriers (Butler & Muskwe, 2023). According to Schein (2010), there are four kinds of culture that can be found when observing a workplace: corporate culture; macro-cultures; subcultures and microcultures. Through the adoption of these cultures, people naturally identify themselves in particular groups that can be overlapping or non-overlapping like managers and shop floor employees (Ullrich, Wieseke, Christ, Schulze & Van Dick, 2007). Managers fall into the subculture which characterises their occupational group, while shop floor employees identify themselves in different microcultures which differ depending on the organisational structure of the company (Schein, 2010). In the case of this study, which is focused on grocery stores, one example of microculture might be the one that forms among employees working in the fresh cheese and meat counter section of the shop.

According to Schein (2010), culture is shaped by what happens “now” and historical events; it represents a “way to maintain the social order” as it is the foundation of the social order we live in and the rules we abide by. Leadership is, for Schein (2010), a factor which influences shape and creates culture as it has the power to influence the behaviours, attitudes, and values of others. In organisations, where workplace culture influences the behaviour of employees, the founders or leaders have the power to impose their vision on others, making evident the linkage between leadership and culture (Schein, 2010). Ruhle and Süß (2020), underline in their study, how previous researches have focused mainly on the importance of individual (such as personality and attitudes about work), and contextual factors (such as perceived supervisor and co-workers support), for promoting attendance behaviours, but have kept the results separate between absentistic and presentistic behaviours. As the researchers are interested in exploring both aspects of workplace culture, Ruhle and Süß (2020), archetypes of sickness attendance cultures, will be used as a reference for the analysis of the results of the study.

3.1 Presenteeism and Absenteeism

To analyse the prevalence of sick leave it is important to know what kind of sickness attendance culture is present in the shops. Ruhle and Süß (2020) have developed three different archetypes of sickness attendance culture that provide insight into the reasons which influence an employee to either work although feeling sick (presenteeism) or exceeding in the request for sick leaves (absenteeism). Presenteeism and absenteeism are both influenced by the archetype (culture) that predominates in the company. In their study, Ruhle and Süß (2020) identify, through participant's perceptions, three archetypes of attendance culture: presentistic, health-focused and individual decision.

Archetype 1: presentistic culture.

In this archetype, people tend to come to work even while sick because of corporate pressure. In this culture, the management as well as co-workers tend to look down on or talk negatively about people who take sick leave or stay home for whatever reason. This culture promotes presenteeism by talking about the negative impact absenteeism would have on the company and how there would be extra work for colleagues while they aren't there. There does not have to be any form of punishment for absenteeism or even reward for presenteeism but to be absent can lead to a harder time in getting promotions or other forms of more prestigious jobs.

Archetype 2: Health-focused culture.

In this archetype, the personal well-being of the staff is of the highest priority and to come in sick can lead to people looking down on the person for being a risk of infecting other staff. Health-focused cultures often have various forms of health-beneficial projects as well to further promote a healthy lifestyle and thus decrease the need for sick leave. In these cultures, it is not unusual for a manager to send someone home if they find out that the person is unwell. This is done without any negative impact on the affected employee.

Archetype 3: Individual decision culture.

This culture is more based on trust for the employee to self-determine if they are well enough to work or not. The management in these cultures trusts that their employees can be responsible and do what is appropriate. Other employees can however have some issues with colleagues

who come in with contagious illnesses, but the culture prevents them from speaking up about it.

A factor that seems to be of the greatest importance when managing absenteeism is the degree of support a supervisor provides to the staff during their daily operations. Biron and Bamberger (2012), have demonstrated in their study “Aversive workplace conditions and absenteeism” that when employees feel a sense of belonging and feel supported by management, a positive impact is produced with regard to the rate at which people take out sick leaves (Biron & Bamberger, 2012:3). The positive impact was taking place even in jobs which were considered dangerous, with the presence of a shared sense of safety when a supportive supervisor was present.

However, Biron and Bamberger (2012) also recognised that some of the supervisors included in the study were able to create a false sense of safety when employees were working while in conditions that were not optimal and in which it would have probably been beneficial for them to request sick leaves (Biron & Bamberger, 2012:4). In conclusion, the authors underline how a present and supportive supervisor can positively impact group culture on a worksite and thus encourage a presentistic culture instead of an absentistic one.

As underlined by Schein (2010), a subculture which is rarely acknowledged refers to the “common experience of a given level within a hierarchy”, which refer to the idea that, as managers and first-line supervisors mentor their substitutes, they will pass to them the assumptions they developed during their years of services, influencing their leadership style. As a consequence, by linking Biron and Bamberger's (2012) study, and Schein (2010), it might be possible to suggest the idea that when managerial figures are supportive, the workplace might be characterised by a virtuous circle, in which the next generation of managers resemble their predecessors being present for employees; while in the opposite case, a vicious circle might be generated. In the latter, leaders are asked to take control of the situation and do their best to influence managers and employees to find strategies to break free from the vicious circle (Schein, 2010).

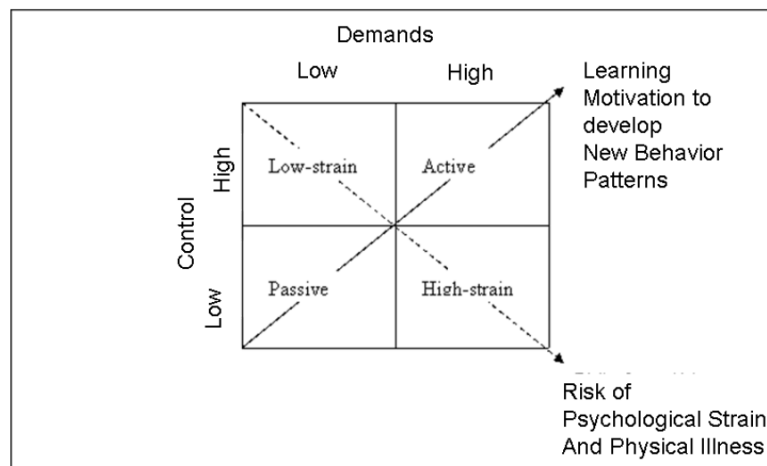
3.2 Demand, control, and support

Karasek and Theorell (1990), developed a model called “demand, control and support” which is used to analyse the balance between the three statuses and how control or support impacts

the demand, and the other way around. A person can normally be under a great deal of demand without negative consequences if the person feels in control of the work before them. These three statuses need to be in balance for a person to be able to fully utilise his/her abilities at the workplace.

According to Figure 1, the managers included in the qualitative study would then result to have an easier psychological strain on their work. because they have a much higher degree of autonomy and can do their work as they see fit. This even though the nature of work would place them further out on psychological demands this would get negated by the high degree of autonomy coming with the position.

Figure 1



Karasek’s model for the description of workplace Job-Demand-Control (Karasek & Theorell, 1990, p.32)

This figure can explain why there are differences in the rate at which employees in different positions within a company call out sick. A job with high control but low demands will be characterised by a workforce with low motivation but still content with their job which will stifle inventions and progress. Instead, a job that rates high in both demands and control will probably nurture a more motivated and progressive workforce. Jobs that instead place in the lower categories lead to either an unmotivated passive workforce or stressed-out workers with the risk of being burned out or other psychological issues (Karasek & Theorell. 1990).

This model represents an ideal foundation for the design of strategies to prevent sick leaves as it can be used to determine where different work tasks are placed in the figure and identify those employees who are currently in the lowest area and need to move to the upper part of the model.

Demand and control is a concept that is not possible to ignore when it comes to analysing a workplace. Regardless of the hierarchical position covered by an employee or the form of employment contract, everyone is subject to a certain degree of demand and control (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). However, the relation between demand and control becomes interesting when placed against a concept such as absenteeism and factors that might influence it are explored. If a workplace is characterised by the presence of a presentistic culture that is enforced and reproduced by managerial attitudes the reason that leads managers to promote this view might not come from an inherent desire to promote presenteeism but rather a reproduction of former managerial attitudes toward sick leaves (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Further, it can have been constructed from a point of demand and control where a manager sees the need for a high level of presenteeism to complete work tasks and reach the set organisational goals. Another driver could have been the fear of not being able to complete work tasks and reach objectives and a more general fear of failure due to absenteeism. originating from the manager's fear of failure due to the presence of absenteeism in the workplace. Demand and control however impact all levels and people at the bottom of a hierarchy get a lot of demands and no control over how to address them (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). This in turn can be a contributing factor as to why blue-collar workers are overrepresented in sick-leave statistics.

5. Research Questions

The following chapter presents the research questions which have guided the researchers through their data collection and data analysis.

The questions have been structured to allow the researchers to dive deep into which are the form and frequency of sick leaves as well as potential factors influencing them. Following the mixed method research questions approach recommended by Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022), the researchers have divided the questions into qualitative and quantitative, formulating a holistic mixed method question which will help the researchers to combine and effectively present their findings in the conclusive chapters. The research questions have been defined by following the criteria provided by Bell et al. (2022), in their book.

5.1 Qualitative research questions

The following research questions were formulated with the aim of investigating the managerial point of view and perceptions on which type of sick leaves are present in the shops and assess the impact they produce on the workforce. Research question 2 instead is aimed at assessing the presence of eventual preventive strategies toward sick leaves and the presence of eventual discrepancies between the shops.

Research question 1:

Which kind of sick leaves are present in the company?

Research question 2:

Are there any preventive strategies toward sick leave set in place?

Research question 3:

What does it mean to the managers of the stores and the employees when people take sick leave?

5.2 Quantitative research hypothesis

The following hypothesis were formulated with the aim of investigating whether managerial attitude influence in any ways the sickness attendance culture. The choice of formulating the

following hypothesis has been driven by the researchers' findings on earlier researches (Schein, 2010; Gómez-Mejia et al., 2012; Alvesson, 2013; Naeem & Khurram, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2021), and the theoretical framework (Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Ruhle & Süß, 2020).

H0: The number of days of sick leave per employee are not impacted by managerial attitude toward sick leave.

H1: The number of days of sick leave per employee are impacted by managerial attitude toward sick leave.

5.3 Mixed method research question

Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022), underline in their book, how, many writers using mixed methods for their researches, fail to present and discuss the findings of their researches together. The following question contributes to provide a broader perspective by combining the information obtained from the semi-structured interviews, the survey and the secondary data collected through the research.

What have we learned about the sickness attendance culture of the case organisation and the factors that influence it?

6. Methodology

This chapter provides information on the methodological consideration of the study. Section 6.1 presents critiques against both qualitative and quantitative methods and then discuss the reasons for which the authors chose to use a mixed-method approach. Section 6.2 and 6.3 then discuss the empirical data collection and data analysis process. Sections 6.4 and 6.5 discuss ethical considerations and argue for the research quality, validity, and reliability. Finally, section 6.6 introduces the main limitation of the study.

To successfully answer the research questions, the study has been constructed following an exploratory sequential mixed method approach, combining a qualitative study with a quantitative one. The decision to carry out first the qualitative study was driven by the need to collect in-depth information about the company and explore its issues with sick leaves. The decision of using a semi-structured method for the qualitative interviews was influenced by the researchers' desire to investigate specific issues while allowing the interviewee and interviewers to explore topics which were related but had not been initially considered. The data collected through the qualitative study served as a guideline for the quantitative study and influenced the decision to include or not certain questions on the questionnaire, which was designed in collaboration with another team from the university. The online questionnaire was issued to all employees of the company. The aim of the survey was to collect information about the factors influencing sick leaves over the past 12 months while also capturing the point of view of employees. The researchers in particular were interested in assessing whether sickness attendance culture and the amount of demand, control and support over the job produce an impact on the days of sick leave. The study followed a deductive approach, aimed at examining the relationship between the selected variables. Once all data had been collected and analysed, the researchers used the question "What have we learned about the sickness attendance culture of the case organisation and the factors that influence it?" to draw the conclusions of the study and provide some recommendations for future research.

In order for both the company and students to assess their needs and goals, a meeting with a representative manager from the Västra Götaland branch of the organisation was arranged before the beginning of the actual study. During the meeting, a pilot interview was planned to take place with a representative of the human resource department of the retailer which first contacted the university. The semi-structured pilot interview was carried out through online

means and was aimed at collecting data about the population of the study and better define the problems the shops were facing with regard to sick leaves, further information and the findings are available in chapter 7, section 7.1. The information collected during the pilot interview, together with the knowledge acquired through earlier research, have been used to define the questions asked during the qualitative study (see Appendix B).

6.1 Mixed method approach

Qualitative and quantitative both represent optimal research methods but also possess some limitations. Critiques have been expressed, in the past, toward the use of a quantitative method, as it has been defined as a “mechanical form of counting” (Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, Towns & Wängnerud, 2017:199). Moreover, quantitative studies have been criticised as they portray only a short time frame, providing what can be considered a superficial view of the events and factors under study, without providing historical information or leaving any room for hypotheses about the future development of an issue (Esaiasson et al. 2017). Opposite to quantitative studies, qualitative studies have been criticised because they are considered to be too subjective, difficult to replicate and might lack transparency on how the researchers have reached certain conclusions as the information reported in the studies are selected by the researchers (Bell et al., 2022).

Given the scope and extent of this research, using a mixed method approach gave the researchers the possibility of collecting an amount and quality of information which would have been difficult to obtain by using only one method, providing a general and inclusive view of the problem. In a mixed method study, the use of semi-structured qualitative interviews can support and facilitate research by providing hypotheses and hunches which can then be tested with the implementation of a quantitative study (Bell et al., 2022). In the following study, the qualitative interviews provide insight into manager’s needs and wants as well as their perceptions with regard to sick leave; the quantitative study instead provides insight into which are the perceptions of employees in general. Both parts of the study include questions which have the scope of providing information into how sick leaves are perceived throughout the shops.

To counter the risks presented at the beginning of the section, the questionnaire will be issued to all employees of the stores included in the study aside top management. Further, to prevent

the “mechanical counting” qualitative interviews will be used as a base for the quantitative questionnaire. To minimise this risk, the shops will provide access to their information on sick leave, to allow the definition of a timeline.

According to Bell et al. (2022), a mixed method is appropriate when there is a connection on abstract levels and a hybrid explanation of complex issues is needed. There are five widely accepted reasons for using a mixed method; this study will rely on triangulation. Triangulation refers to the practice of combining different methods and data from different sources to study the same phenomenon, reducing the limitations or biases which usually emerge from using a single method (Bell et al., 2022).

6.2 Data collection procedures

The overall study involved eleven shops and 1.213 subjects. For the qualitative study, the eleven shops were divided between the two groups of researchers selected by the University of Gothenburg to carry out the project in the case organisation. The survey, instead, was issued to all the shops involved in the project and has been planned and structured in collaboration with the other group of researchers.

6.2.1 Qualitative study

The qualitative study presented in this paper was conducted at five different stores located in different urban areas. While small stores had a population ranging between 30 and 50 employees, the bigger ones had a population ranging between 120 and 149 employees. The study included ten participants covering different managerial positions. The initial contacts in the shops were selected following a purposive sampling approach with the selection criteria of “covering a high managerial position in the shop”; meanwhile the other subjects were selected through a snowball approach.

Due to anonymity requirements, no information about the shop’s locations or the participants can be disclosed, consequently, the participants and the shops have been re-named. Table 1 presents the list of the shops and interviewees’ “code-names” which can help the reader to better follow the reasoning behind the researchers’ statements and the findings of the research.

Table 1. The interviewees'

Shop name	Size of the shop	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
A	Small	Shop Manager	Line manager	
B	Small	Shop Manager	Line manager	
C	Small	Shop Manager		
D	Medium	Shop Manager	Line manager	Employee Manager
E	Medium	Shop Manager	Line manager	

Although the researchers tried to carry out as many interviews as possible face-to-face, the majority of the qualitative interviews were conducted through online means, in particular through the use of GoogleMeet or Microsoft Teams. The use of video interviewing allowed the researchers to have a greater geographical reach and significant savings in terms of time and finance. According to Bell et al. (2022), video interviewing is a method which is more flexible and eliminates the concern for both parties' safety. Critiques to the use of video interviewing instead regard the accessibility to a stable internet connection and technological tools, moreover, people seem to feel more comfortable and open to discussion in a face-to-face meeting rather than online ones (Bell et al., 2022).

The interviews were semi-structured and followed a script including 20 guiding questions (See Appendix B), with the addition of follow-up questions, specifying questions and interpreting questions. All interviews were recorded, after receiving the permission of the interviewee, transcribed with the use of the online “transcriber” service provided by Microsoft and double-checked by the researchers. Although some interviews were held in English, most of the interviewees felt more comfortable with their mother tongue, Swedish. One of the researchers is of Swedish nationality, consequently, although the transcript was translated from Swedish to English with the use of the free translation program “DeepL”; the translations had been double-checked by the researcher to ensure the reliability of the results.

6.2.2 *Quantitative study*

The quantitative study was developed around the results of a survey issued to the whole population of the 11 stores (1.213 subjects in total), aside from the shop managers who were asked not to complete it. The survey has been conducted with the aim of capturing the form and frequency of sick leaves as well as potential factors influencing them. The survey has been planned and structured in collaboration with another team of researchers from the University of Gothenburg performing a similar study on the company. The questionnaire, available in Appendix D, represents a mix of questions which are aimed partially at answering this paper research questions and the other group's research questions.

The quantitative survey included 46 questions, it was written and issued through the use of a software called Qualtrics. At the beginning of the questionnaire, a mix of open-end and multiple-choice questions were asked to address personal factors such as sex, age, income, number of kids under 18 in the family, place of work, role in the company and years of experience in that role. Other multiple-choice questions were then asked in order to investigate how many days of sick leave the employees had taken over the past year, which were the main reasons behind the requests and assess the employees' current health condition. From question 16 until question 46 included, the answers were collected using two main types of Likert-type scales including five levels ranging from 1: "strongly agree" to 5: "strongly disagree" or from 1: "always" to 5: "never". The questions selected were defined by combining the observations from both teams of researchers, the collection and analysis of secondary data (see section 7.2) and the information extracted from the coding of the qualitative interviews.

The questions of the survey have been divided into 10 different sections which focus on different aspects of the job and the working environment and are aimed at providing an overall view of the shops' sickness attendance culture (See Appendix D quantitative questionnaire). In particular, sections number 4 and 5 were aimed at capturing the influence of managerial attitudes and employees' attitudes toward sick leaves, while sections 9 and 10 were aimed at assessing the degree of demand, control and support.

As all employees were proficient in Swedish but not in English, the survey was issued in Swedish. The questions were initially elaborated in the lingua franca employed by the researchers involved in the study: English; and then translated into Swedish through the use of

DeepL. The accuracy of the translation of the program was checked by the two Swedish researchers involved in the project, preceding the publication of the survey.

Sample description

This section presents a description of the sample and the respondents. The answers to the questionnaire were collected between April 2023 and May 2023. The employees were selected through convenience sampling, a form of non-probability sampling method. At the closing date of the survey, the natural sample size had reached 403 members of which 29 resulted as missing answers in SPSS and for this reason were excluded from the computations. Therefore, the sample in the study had to be reduced to 374 subjects compared to the total population to which the survey was issued with a response rate of 31%. According to Field (2018), to be representative, a sample should have a minimum response rate of 30%; consequently, although the sample is on the verge of that limit, it can be considered representative.

As the qualitative study was focused only on five shops, while the quantitative study was issued to additional ones, new shops were introduced and named with the use of the letters W, Y, J, K, X and V. Table 2, presents an overview of the response rate of each shop. The overall contribution of each shop to the overall response rate ranged from 8% to 62%.

Table 2. Respondents per shop

Shop name	Response rate compared to each shop's population (%)
Shop X	37,9
Shop Y	19,9
Shop J	35,7
Shop E	48,9
Shop D	26,3
Shop C	20
Shop W	8

Shop A	28,5
Shop B	61,4
Shop K	38,6
Shop V	33,6
Preferred not to answer	/
Total population (n)	374

Of the overall sample population, 73% identified themselves as women, 25.7% as men and 1.3% preferred to not specify. The age of respondents ranged from 15 years old to 77. For representative purposes, Table 3 in Appendix A, provides a description of the age of respondents divided into three major categories. Statistics regarding age, projected the image of a young workforce, with 39,5% of the respondents being between 15 and 25 years old, 26-43 being 34,8% and 44-77 being 25,7%. Table 3 also presents the division of employees in the different age ranges, by men, women and not specified.

With regard to the number of children, 57,4% of the respondents did not have any children, 37.6 had between one and two children, and 5.1% had between three and five children. Question five of the survey asked for information about monthly income, separating it into four main ranges; 18% of respondents place themselves in the category 0-10.000 SEK, 33% in 11.000 - 20.000, 34,8% in 21.000-30.000 and 14.2% declared to earn 31.000 or more Swedish Krona (SEK) per month.

With regard to their position in the company, employees were asked to answer question 8 (Appendix D), which included the option “free text” to better specify their role in the company; and allowed the respondent to select multiple answers. The largest groups of respondents (304 people), choose roles associated with blue-collar workers such as cashiers, employees working with stocking shelves, in the warehouse, etc. The second largest group (74 respondents) was formed by roles associated with middle management consisting of line managers, customer support, IT, etc. The smallest group (45 respondents) was upper management such as co-owner, head of sales and employee managers. This distribution was “expected” by the researchers since the majority of the workforce work on the shop floor. Being the sample under the study of 374

employees, and the respondents to this question being 423, it's clear that some of them selected multiple choices, in particular, with most shop floor employees selecting at least two roles.

6.3 Data analysis process

The semi-structured interviews were manually coded through the use of twelve major codes of reference (see Appendix C), and minor ones.

The data from the survey were analysed and presented through the use of descriptive statistics, univariate analysis and bivariate analysis. The analysis was performed through the use of SPSS version 28. According to Field (2018), to perform bivariate analysis a dependent variable and relevant independent variables should be selected. The dependent should be chosen depending on what the researchers are interested in examining (Field, 2018); in the case of this study is the number of days of sickness per employee in a year.

The dependent variable, days of sick leaves is a categorical variable which was originally divided into six categories ranging from 0 days of sick leave to 30 or more. While the dependent variable was selected to answer the study hypothesis and research questions, the independent variables were selected by including all those variables that produce an impact on the dependent variable (Field, 2018). To select the independent variables, presented in section 7.4.1, different Pearson correlation tests were performed, the variables were then selected based on the results of these analyses. In section 7.4.2 the independent variables taken initially under consideration were then reduced to include only those that presented a significant level (between $<.001$ and $<.05$).

6.4 Ethical consideration

Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews are not immune from ethical issues (Bell et al., 2022). Through the development of the study, the researchers wondered multiple times how to make the process as ethical as possible.

The researchers have been asked to maintain the information about the company, the respondents and the findings as anonymous as possible. The qualitative interviews, the survey and the pilot interview, consequently, are presented throughout the study in a way that strives to protect the anonymity of the interviewees. With regard to the qualitative interviews, they have been recorded after receiving the consent of the interviewee and presenting the scope of

the research. Access to the recordings and full transcript has been granted only to the researchers and they have been deleted at the end of the study. The respondents' names or personal information are not present in the analysis as the researchers did not ask for them, and stores have been divided into classifications such as: small store and medium size store. Participation was voluntary and the participants were informed on their right to discontinue their participation at any time. Although the external anonymity has been protected as much as possible, the researchers are concerned by the fact that the contacts of the managers in each shop for the interviews we provided by the manager leading the project, consequently the internal anonymity might be compromised.

An important ethical consideration has involved intense discussion regarding the investigation of sick leaves. Is it ethical for the researchers to investigate sick leaves associating them with a negative connotation? Requesting sick leaves is an employee right, and it should be respected. For this reason, the statements on sick leave presented throughout the research are the results of interviewee statements or earlier research findings. Moreover, the research looks at sick leaves from both an employer and employee perspective, providing a comprehensive view on which is the shared opinion on sick leaves throughout the company.

6.5 Research quality, validity and reliability

The mixed methods research approach is relatively new and, although is increasingly in use among researchers, some of them argue that there are epistemological and ontological barriers to its use (Bell et al., 2022). The reliability of the study has been ensured by interviewing people with insight into the issue and collecting the point of view of the overall workforce through the distribution of the survey. To further strengthen the reliability of the study, the survey was also distributed to stores where the authors did not conduct any interviews but that were under the same brand and in the same geographical area. The shops excluded by the initial qualitative study were assigned to another group of researchers and it would have been too much of a strain on the individual stores to be part of two qualitative studies at the same time. Saturation in the qualitative study, occurred after eight interviews but the researcher still conducted two more to strengthen the validity and reliability of the qualitative results.

While the sample obtained through the survey is quite representative in terms of gender and age; the age groups from 50 years old and above are under-represented with the age group from 17 to 25 being the most present. This might point to the presence of biases based on the

argumentation that specific groups of people are more likely to answer these kinds of online questionnaires rather than others, which lead to the possibility of the sample under study not being fully representative (Aneshensel, 2013). Bell et al. (2022), underline how issues with the representativeness of the sample might lead to the presence of biases and issues with generalisability of the results leading to skewed or misleading findings and limiting the researchers ability to draw conclusions. Moreover, the eventual presence of sampling errors may reduce the accuracy of the results (Bell et al., 2022).

6.6. Main limitation

With regard to the qualitative study, a limitation is represented by the fact that only the point of view of shop managers and line managers was included. The other employees' opinions have been explored only through the quantitative survey not giving the possibility to other employees to further motivate the reasons behind their requests for sick leaves. With regard to the quantitative study, the high non-response rate (69%), represent an obstacle for the reliability of the thesis, but the qualitative interviews support the idea that the high non-response rate is not related to the survey or to the nature of the study, but it's rather a chronic issue present across the interviewed shops. When asking about previous research and surveys carried out across the company, all managers had in common issues with low response rate among the staff. In a store, in particular, the manager had promised to send to the researchers the results of an internal survey, but after two months he had replied to a reminder with "*as of today we have had a very low response rate and have been able to collect the full response of only two department of the company*". The literature around non-response rate, suggests that there are a number of strategies that the researchers could rely on in order to reduce its impact. The suggested strategies include the use of personally addressed emails, the use of repeated contact via telephone and email, the use of monetary incentives and the use of face-to-face contact (Scott & Edwards, 2006). The researchers have made use of all presented strategies aside from the monetary incentives due to the limited resources available. The shop managers and the manager leading the project have been contacted multiple times and through multiple channels. Moreover, communication has taken place both in English and Swedish in order to avoid misunderstandings.

Finally, the researchers recognise that although some secondary data have been provided by the shops, most of the information on sick leave in this study is self-reported. Consequently,

concern might arise on whether the participants have reported information truthfully. A study from Lundquist, Ellingses, Gribbe and Johannesson (2009) suggest that people are adverse toward lying about personal information, and that their adversity of lying grows as the lie gets bigger and the benefits from not lying gets stronger. This evidence, together with the fact that both the survey and the semi-structured interviews were anonymous and that the employees do not have evident incentives for lying, reduce the overall risk of respondents not answering truthfully.

7. Empirical Findings

The following chapter presents the empirical findings; section 7.1 introduces the information obtained through the pilot interview; then section 7.2 describes the secondary data that the shops provided to the researchers and the information collected on the company's website. Section 7.3 provides an insight into the results of the semi-structured interviews. Finally, section 7.4 provides a general view on the information collected through the survey, while analysing the data.

7.1 Pilot interview

The pilot interview was conducted with a representative of the HRM department of one of the shops included in the study. To protect the anonymity of the employee, we will call him/her "Pilot 1". At the time of the interview, Pilot 1 had worked in the company for many years in different positions and areas of the store before covering the current role. Throughout the interview Pilot 1 provided us with information on the formal and informal organisational structure of the store, the main professional roles, and the standardised procedure followed when sick leaves occur. Pilot 1 also explained that the stores are owned by different licenced operators, so stores could differ, from one another, in terms of space, roles and organisational structure. Although the retailers independently manage their own shop, they are somehow in contact through a social network that allows them to meet from time to time, discuss the main problems of their stores and collaborate to find solutions. The current study is the product of one of these collaborations.

During the interview Pilot 1 explained how, to handle sick leaves, one strategy used is to have employees trained to cover more than one role in order to make them more interchangeable and also prevent them from suffering from repetitive strain injuries (RSIs).

Pilot 1 explained that, when sick, the employees had to check which department they were scheduled to work at and report to that department manager. If sick for more than one day they had to repeat the same process for every day of leave. The least affected department of this was the check-out as the other departments had to supply it with staff if necessary.

Another aspect which was interesting for the study refers to the moment in which Pilot 1 mentioned the impact of Covid-19 on employees:

“This is the first job for a lot of our workers and they started maybe during the pandemic and they are really the young ones who are 19 to 23, they had been told: You need to stay at home as soon as you are feeling a bit stuffy nose, sore throat or something like that. So, they are home. They call: "I can't come to work; I'm feeling a bit...[...] for them it's totally normal.”

Pilot 1 was referring to the idea that Covid-19 might have changed the way in which employees perceive diseases or sicknesses and the fact that more people have realised how important it is, for the well-being of everyone around you, to stay home if sick. Finally, Pilot 1 underlined the important role that managers play in decreasing the frequency of sick leaves per employee, assessing where the problem lies and trying to accommodate employees' needs.

At the end of the interview, Pilot 1 provided us with some secondary data on the frequency and type of sick leave days recorded over 2022 in the store.

7.2 Secondary data

In this section are listed the secondary data obtained through representatives of the company and data autonomously extracted from their websites and publicly published reports.

7.2.1 Data from the company

With yearly sales of more than 100 billion sek, the brand positions itself as one of the biggest Companies in the retail industry within the Baltic countries. The regions of Västra Götaland and Halland present many shops owned by different licenced operators.

On its public website, the company has a description that presents the steps to become a shop owner, following a short presentation of the collected information.

Licensed operators are largely selected internally within the company, investing in the development of employees in the store and within the group. The requirements for the selection include solid knowledge on the store and experience in the industry, theoretical knowledge and practical experience in business administration, marketing and leadership, interest in the food industry. To help employees to reach these objectives the company provides managerial courses which must be finance by the licenced operators for their employees but benefit from set costs negotiated by the case organisation. The recruitment process is coordinated between several

internal functions and personal liquidity is not considered an important factor influencing the decision.

The mission of the company is to preserve, develop and strengthen the values of the brand. The owners of the shops have access to the use of the brand and benefit from economies of scale through it, but are asked to maintain at all levels, at all times absolute top-level quality both as service providers and employers.

7.2.2 Data from the shops

Most of the shops in which the qualitative interview took place had distributed internal surveys in the months prior and during which the study took place. Following, is a description of the results obtained from the internal surveys and the material provided to the researchers. Most of the shops included in the qualitative study conducted a survey in 2022 focused on the overall workplace satisfaction and assessing the quality of the quality of the work environment. In employees who fell into the range of 16-25 years old, workplace satisfaction reached 69% out of 100%; from 26 years old and older instead workplace satisfaction scored higher than 80% and up to 89% in particular in the range 56-69 years old. The age range 16 to 25 differentiates itself even more when looking at “intention to stay at the job in the coming year”. In this variable, only 31% of the interviewed between 16-25 years old intended to stay, while employees within the range of 26 to 35 years old answered positively in 62% of the cases. From the findings, age seems to be a very important factor as the intention to stay at the store rises with every age group as well as satisfaction with the job (internal survey, 2022).

7.3 Qualitative results

The aim of this section is to analyse the information gathered in the qualitative interviews conducted with the managers of the stores and look for patterns. Significant themes have emerged as a result of the use of codes (see Appendix C), and sub-codes. In order to allow the reader to better understand the viewpoint of the interviewees, quotations are used as examples throughout the chapter.

Organisational structure of the store and work environment

The semi-structured interviews underlined the presence of strong similarities between the shops in terms of organisational structure, with the stores E and D having a more complex structure than the smallest ones. Being the shops grocery stores, the employees have different roles and belong to different departments of the company, in Appendix D, question 8 is possible to find a list of the main roles which were present in the interviewed shops. The list was used as a multiple-choice option in the survey issued to all the employees working in the shops. Although every employee has one specific role, all managers have done similar declarations on how each member of the staff is trained to be able to perform at least two or more jobs. In this way in the event of sick leaves, or emergency they can all help each other out, this seemed to be an extremely important factor in shop A, B and C:

“Most of them work, can work everywhere in the store, but some of them.... It's like, I just want to work in this position. And if they want to do just one thing, it's ok then you can just work there, but everybody needs to learn how to check out people in the cashier. Because we are so little. So everybody needs to know” - Participant 1 (A)

Regarding the work environment, Participant 1 (C), when asked “Is there any changes that you think should be implemented?” stated:

“It's all a battle against budget, budget, budget, budget, staff hours. In a dream world I would like to have more hours that could make it easier for the staff to feel less stressed [...] I think we have a very harmonious and nice workplace, but there is actually a lot of stress” - Participant 1 (C)

Discrepancies were found in the way each shop handled the communication of guidelines and regulations to employees. In particular, with regard to harassment, some of the shops had it in their onboarding programme together with health and safety regulations, while other employees had never received any information about it. In particular, in some cases, managers had the related information in a binder in the office, while others had it freely accessible in their digital portal. Finally, in store A in particular, they were aware of a policy but did not know where to find it:

“We should have a strategy against it but i’m not sure in which binder it is located in” - Participant 1(A)

The reason probably relies on the fact that managers in shops A, B and C had not experienced any issues with harassment or discrimination so far. However, all interviewees stressed the fact that harassment, of any kind, was a zero-tolerance behaviour.

Information on Training of managers and yearly reviews

Most of the interviewed managers had been working in the company for over nine years, aside from two which had been working there for less than five years. All the interviewed managers had been working in different positions before reaching their current one.

“I started a 16 as a summer job in the evenings and weekends. I started as a shopping cart guy [...] I have worked my way up to the position I have today” - Participant 2 (D)

We can deduce that the company relies mainly on the internal growth and development of its employees rather than outsourcing talent. When promoted to their current position, all managers had received some form of training, although some discrepancies were present in the form of training they had received. Some managers had been trained only for two months, shadowing a former manager and learning on the job; other managers had instead attended internal courses and had been trained in collaboration with an external provider. In particular, Managers at shop A and B, mentioned to have taken part, to a project started in 2009 with an external company, aimed at providing leadership training to the managers. Both at shop A and B the researchers had access to the retained material from the courses. The material included different kind of managerial models such as: i) Susan Wheelan’s IMGD Model of Group Development; ii) pyramids models showing a step-to-step guide to improve effectiveness and employee’s well-being; iii) list of do and don’t in terms of behaviour and effective communication with employees; iv) a graph explaining the difference and characteristics of destructive, conventional and developing leadership styles. Participant 1 at store C also reported to have received training from an external provider, but a different one compared to the other stores. This suggests that the quality and type of the training supplied to management is strongly influenced by the decisions of the owners of the shops.

When faced with the question “how often do you have one on one meetings or also general meetings with the employees?” participants at store A and B responded once/twice a year as a formal procedure, and additional ones if needed. The participants also admitted that during the Covid-19 pandemic these meetings had not taken place but had started again in the year after. One manager in particular said:

“Yes, I have that. It's very bad. I wish there had been more time for that in the meantime. They always know where I am. If there is something, they can always come up to me. I'm always available [...] it's not the best way to catch them on the way to the lunchroom or for them to come in to see me, but we sit and look together at lunch and you get to know them so well that I know that if there's anything... but at the same time you should have a really structured appraisal” - Participant 1 (C)

In shop A and B instead, every year, a survey is issued among employees, and in that survey, which is anonymous, employees are asked if they had their yearly meeting or not, so that upper management can easily check if they had been skipped or not.

However, when asked if they, as managers, had their yearly reviews with upper management most of them pointed to a lack in that aspect. Some of them had not been to a review for several years, others had it but in an inconsistent way, and the overall response was that the issue should be reported and addressed. It's possible to deduce that the yearly reviews seem to be implemented at the blue-collar level and department heads but not up to management level.

Types, frequency and consequences of sick leave

While proceeding with the interviews it became clear that the issues present in the company regarding sick leaves were mostly prominent at the blue-collar level. The majority of issues with sick leaves seemed to be referring to short-term sick leaves rather than long term ones, although all shops reported the presence of at least one or two employees on long-term sick leave at the time. The most frequent reasons behind sick leave were migraines, sore throat, stress, flu, stomach ache, cold, physical impairments and Covid-19. In general, all the participants agreed that younger employees were requesting sick leave with a higher frequency than older ones. All managers agreed on the fact that the number of requests goes in waves, is very connected to the change of seasons, but there are some employees that request short-term

sick leave with a higher frequency compared to the rest. One statement from participant 3 (D), in particular, was very strong with regard to young employees and sick leaves:

“And then if I were to emphasise the other part, I think a lot of them lie [...] the symptoms are all over the place: I feel tired, I haven't slept, I have a lot of pain in my stomach, a lot of pain and all that [...] Unfortunately, they are not really aware of what it means for them and for the shop” - Participant 3 (D)

Moreover, in shops A, B and C, due to the small size of the shops, there has been a shared perception of the risk of a disease spreading very easily if employees come to work when sick.

“There's like one sick person or maybe two a week, but then one week there can be 10 because it's a small store, so we're really close together, so if there's a disease going around, a lot of people will have it, I think” - Participant 1 (B)

With regard to the impact of sick leave on managers, all the participants agreed that, in general, it affect them by slowing down or postponing the execution of administrative tasks, as they might be the ones substituting the absent employee if no one else can or have any way to take care of the administrative tasks related to sick leave. Moreover, in shop D and E, the participants underlined how the absence of employees damages the shop's image as the staff cannot find the time to properly take care of the shop.

With regard to the impact on employees, the shared opinion was that absenteeism increases the level of stress, the workload and slows down the productivity of the shop. Managers also agreed on the fact that the impact on the staff increased depending on the amount of employees' sick on the specific day. For shops A, B and C in particular, the absence of more than three employees on the same day, exponentially increases the level of stress among the staff, even if absent people work in different roles. Moreover, most managers had similar statement to the following:

“We have also noticed that it's often the same people calling sick, and the ones who are here, they get annoyed and.... Irritated” - Participant 1 and 2 (A)

Both managers at shop A agreed on the fact that some of the employees haven't been open and honest on the reasons of why they phone in sick, but also agree that might be reasons that are hard to talk about and that it is better not to investigate too much.

Sick leave procedures and prevention strategies

The procedures on sick leaves follow and respect the national labour laws on sick leaves provided by Försäkringskassan and introduced in section 1.1 of this paper. All managers were fully aware of these directions and followed similar procedures on the way in which sick leaves are requested and registered. In shop A and B after five days of sick leave (either taken in one time or multiple times), the managers have a one-on-one meeting with the employee to fill in the administrative forms and to ask questions regarding the type of sickness and on whether there are actions that management can implement to prevent them. Most employees when faced with the list of their sick leaves remain surprised by the amount and in the following months reduce the frequency of their requests for sick leave. In particular, all shops except for C mentioned how to prevent burnout and psychological issues, the shop relies on external psychologists. Participant 1 at shop C said that one of the main strategies they adopt to prevent burnouts and psychological issues is to keep open communication all the time and be available for employees to “knock on their door” and tell them how they feel.

Participant 1 and 2 (A), reported the fact that staff is often subject to the entrance in the store of people with problems of alcoholism or drugs that put employees under conditions of psychological and physical danger. In shop A, B and C, managers agreed on the fact that being the shop small, when an employee's shows signs of psychological distress a form of informal report system arise, in which the condition of that person become an issue of the whole department and employees go to the managers to express their perceptions on the status of that person: “we are observant of each other” said Participant 2 (A). As previously mentioned by Pilot 1, the employees are trained to be able to cover more than one role in the company also as a preventive way against RSIs. Although this might seem a positive preventive strategy, shop D and E were the only ones that had an agreement with a physiotherapist that, once a week, would come to the shops and check on employees and recommend exercises to prevent injuries.

Shop B instead reported the use of a program, in the shop, in which all employees were registered and through which was possible to have a general overview of who was working, who was sick and who was on holiday. Through the use of the program, management could easily see who could be eventually available to fill in for the absence of an employee and instead who should not be called. Surprisingly another shop in the study which belongs to the same owner, did not report the use of the program. Shop B also mentioned that to prevent sick leaves,

management had decided to allow the staff to keep the plastic “barriers” which had been set in the store during Covid-19 pandemic to protect the employees from eventual sick customers.

Shop E and D were the only shops that provide employees with a breakfast buffet every morning, and different kinds of healthy snacks throughout the day, for the price of 10 SEK/day per employee. Participant 1 (E) said:

“We work very actively with the systematic work environment management and work very actively with our work environment policy”.

but participants at shop D seemed to be much more aware of how much still could be done in the shop to prevent sick leaves, in particular long-term ones.

“We have a lot to follow up on employees in terms of their well-being” - Participant 3 (D)

Regarding rehabilitation plans, all managers seemed to be fully aware of the procedure to follow and to collaborate with different external entities to facilitate the rehabilitation of employees in long term sick leaves.

Covid-19 impact on sick leave

Following the pilot interview, the researchers decided to include in the qualitative study the question: *“Do you believe Covid-19 to have changed the way in which you, employees and the company perceive the idea of “sickness”? If yes, how?”*. In the following paragraph are represented a list of statements that confirm the hypothesis that Covid-19 might have changed the way in which people perceive the idea of sickness. In general, in all the shops managers reported an attitude difference between employees hired before the pandemic versus the employees hired during the outbreak, with regard to their approach to sick leave. Employees hired during the pandemic were more likely to call out sick for minor issues such as a sore throat or a runny nose compared to employees hired before.

The reasons that have led to this phenomenon could have been many, missed cultural re-assessment post-pandemic, the presence of lower levels of cohesiveness and reciprocal reliance, the presence of a more individualistic culture and so on. Some factors which could have influenced this phenomenon might also come from country cultural aspects or the impact of isolation and political decisions. Moreover, this seemed to be less present in smaller shops,

where managers had a tendency of using sentences like “*we have learned to help each other out*”, or “*we are a small shop, so we need to rely on each other when in need*” showing, at least at the superficial level more cohesiveness and a more collectively oriented mindset. Because of the many differences between the stores, it is hard to give a uniform answer as to why these differences occur.

Regardless of this, in the majority of the stores, the researchers met statements such as:

“*Many people are still in that mode that you call in sick for every little thing*” - Participant 2 (A)

“*So many people have a bit of a sniffle and it's a bit like that that they stay at home because that's what they've done in recent years*” - Participant 1 (C)

Except from Participants 1 and 2 (A), all the participants had linked this type of behaviour to younger employees. One of the factors that could explain this behaviour is that they had been employed during a time in which absenteeism was a very outspoken norm at the workplace and currently they might experience issues in adapting to an attendance culture which is trying to shift back to pre-pandemic standards.

“*as long as you feel that you have the energy and can handle a work shift and are in good physical shape for it, you're welcome to come, but it can be very challenging as a manager to explain it, because you never want to sound insensitive in a role where you talk about illness or absence. Before, I think it was a little more okay to ask certain questions today, during the pandemic, it was rather like this: yes, but I'm sick. [...] but of course it changed our view of illness in general in all directions.*” - Participant 3 (D)

Absentistic and presentistic aspects

One interesting phenomenon observed by the researchers, regard the differences between sickness attendance culture between stores in close proximity to each other. In particular, stores D and E, which are owned by the same person, had developed a different sickness attendance culture. In the first one, the interviewed managers presented a view on sick leaves which was more inclusive, focused on helping the employees coming back to work as soon as possible and adapting the workplace and shaping the workforce to suit their needs. Participant 1 (D) in

particular found positive the fact that employees would no longer just take a pill when ill and going to work, but would rather call out sick and stay at home.

The interviews at shop E instead were characterised by statements that underlined the presence of a presentistic culture.

“Like I said before, I think they have lowered the requirements for what is a sickness, so what is an illness or what is a condition, getting a little headache might be a condition. I don't really see it as an illness or a sick leave [...] I'm not sure i want the people who takes a lot of sick leave to return to work” - Participant 2 (E)

Moreover, when faced with the question *“Is there anything you could do better to prevent sick leaves, both of them, short and long term?”* they replied with sentences such as:

“Well, you feel that you want to get rid of the people you know who might be sick, because you want to either have the people who work or you don't want to keep the employees who don't take care of themselves and those who are constantly sick [...] maybe we can be a little better at following up after they have had the conversations as well as after the first conversation with others maybe we can be better and follow up check will it be better in a few weeks I also think we do quite a lot with this already” - Participant 2 (E)

Participant 1 (E) did not answer the question directly and instead replied with:

“No, there isn't [...] We follow agreements, collective agreements and follow laws. For example, read very carefully. We have a long-term goal to be the best employer in the world”

The researchers were provided with a lot of material on the shop, its organisational structure and everything that it has been doing to improve employees' well-being. The general perception, from the researchers' point of view is that both Participants 1 and 2 showed signs of a managerial style which is quite controlling.

Like shops D and E, shops A and B, owned by the same person and close in proximity, presented similar, but different sickness attendance cultures; while shop A showed a more presentistic culture, shop B had a more lenient approach to the topic. These small shops managed to build a sense of family with their employees, and all the participants interviewed had been working

on the shop floor, so they in turn had a harder time personally calling in sick when they were aware of what would be the consequences of their absence for their co-workers.

“Employees are like family; they don’t want to call out sick because it creates problems for the co-workers who has to pick up the slack” - Participant 2 (B)

Evidence of the presence of a presentistic culture have been found also in statements from Participant 1 in shop C.

“There are also staff members that I have to slow down, you know, younger people who just want to work and work and work. It does not matter to work 7 days a week for several months there, but then I have to say no, you can't take that shift because you need to rest” - Participant 1 (C)

7.4 Quantitative results

The aim of this section is to analyse the data collected through the survey issued to the population. Section 7.4.1 presents the findings from the analysis of the dependent and independent variables under study. Section 7.4.2 presents different bivariate analysis which dive deeper into the relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

7.4. Descriptive and univariate statistics

Information on sick leaves and on the dependent variable

When asked if they had requested long term sick leaves (question 11, Appendix D), 79,9% of the respondents chose the option “No” while 14,4% chose “yes”. A small percentage (5,6%) of respondents preferred not to specify.

As mentioned in section “6.3 Data analysis process”, the dependent variable was extracted from question 10 appendix D: “How many days in total have you had sick leaves?”. Out of all the respondents, 31% declared to have never taken a day due to sickness in the previous twelve months; 29,1% requested between one to four days of sick leave; 15,8% five to seven days, 13% eight to thirteen; 7,2% fourteen to twenty-nine days and 3,9% more than thirty days. Consequently, the results show that short-term sick leave (between one to seven days), which represent 44,9% of the answers, outnumber medium to long-term sick leave (24,1%). The mean and the median of the variable days of sick leave fall into the range eight to thirteen days, while

the mode is the option 0 days. Standard deviation is 2,06, variance is 4,24 and skewness is 0,22. This translates in option “0” being chosen more often than the others on an individual level, but with still the majority of the respondents having requested sick leaves.

Reasons for sick leave

The variable “reasons for sick leaves” was measured by the question: “which was the main reason for calling in sick?” (question 12, Appendix D). It’s important to consider that it included the option “free text” available for employees to better specify the reasons for asking sick leaves; and the question allowed the respondent to select multiple answers, consequently the researchers cannot ensure that each response corresponds to a different person.

Within the response of the survey, the most common reason for the self-reported sick leaves within the company were cold or migraine with a response rate of 31%. When requesting sick leaves, it’s up to the employee to choose why they called in sick and thus the second most chosen illness was “other” or “unknown” at 21%, then fever followed at 20%. Covid-19 related symptoms still seemed one of the reasons for calling in sick (14%), but only 5% actually tested positive for a Covid-19 test. Physical pain was also very low with only 4% reporting this as a reason to stay at home. Psychological issues only accounted for 1% of the total sick leave reported. Lastly, people working while sick or who called out sick for unrelated issues accounted for 4% of the total (all numbers have been rounded by excess).

Finally, the respondents were asked question 17c: “How often do/did you stay home while having a cold during the last 12 months?” and question 17a “How often do/did you stay home while having a cold before Covid-19?”. With regard to question 17c, most respondents chose the option “rarely” (28,9%), and “sometimes” (25,9%), the third biggest group chose “never” (16%) and 14,2% of the respondents chose “often”. The remaining respondents chose “always” (7,2%) and 7,8% preferred not to answer. The mode of the variable is 2 “rarely” while the mean is 2,6 in between rarely and sometimes. This might suggest that “Cold” as a reason for sick leave is generally used and accepted within the workforce with its majority not excluding the use of it as a reason. Regarding question 17a, 23% of respondents chose the option “never”, 37,7% chose “rarely”, 20,9% chose “sometimes”, 8,1% chose “often” and 3,5% chose “always”. The mean, mode and median all pointed toward “rarely” and the variance was 1,1. The difference in answers between questions 17c and 17a, suggest the presence of a possible

shift on the employees' perception of what is considered an accepted reason to phone in sick and what is not.

It happens that you work when sick

When asked if they had worked when sick (question 14 Appendix D), 15,2% of respondents replied “never”, 36,4% replied “rarely”, 31,8% replied sometimes, 8,8% replied “often” and 2,1% replied “always”. The mean, median and mode all pointed at the answer “rarely” which does not exclude the fact that employees have the habit of coming to work if sick, with the second biggest group choosing the answer “sometimes' ". This information is very important for the respondents because it points toward the presence of a presentistic culture rather than an absentistic one.

Independent variables

Age

The researchers believe the findings of the qualitative analysis to have placed interest in the relationship between the age of respondent and days of sick leaves, for this reason the variable “age of respondents” is analysed in this section and in section 7.3.2. Information about the age of respondents were collected by question 2, presenting a mean of 33,7 a mode of 19, a median of 30 and variance of 199,8. Finally, the age of respondent has a range of 62 and a standard deviation of 14.

Years working with the company

This variable was measured by question 6, Appendix D. The value within this variable ranged from 1 to 55 years, considering that the mean is 8,2 the mode is 1, the median is 4 the variance is 81,6, and the standard deviation 9, it's possible to deduct that most employees have been working in the company between a couple of months and ten years. This is confirmed also by the normal distribution of the variable which is left skewed with most respondents placing themselves in between one year to ten.

Weekly hours of work.

The researchers included the variable “weekly hours of work” (question 7, Appendix D) in the analysis as it has demonstrated to have a strong significance and to investigate which kind of

impact it produces on sick leaves and how strong. Weekly hours of work has a mean of 28,6 a median of 32, a mode of 40 and a standard deviation of 13,4. Although the working hours act (Arbetstidslagen, SFS 1982:673), specifies that employees are allowed to work for a maximum of 48 hours per week (emergency calls included), three respondents stated to work between 50 and 55 hours a week. The normal distribution graph presents a distribution which is mainly right skewed with the majority of respondents being placed between 30 and 40 hours a week and the presence of another peak in between 0 to 10 hours. We can deduce that although the majority of employees 62,3% work between 30 and 40 hours a week, 17% work between 0 and 10 hours a week (part-time jobs).

Presentistic culture

Question 18, 19 and 20 (Appendix D), provide an insight on whether and the extent to which a presentistic culture is present and how does that influence the amount of days of sickness taken by employees. Question 18, presented a mean, median and mode of 3, corresponding to the answer “neither agree nor disagree” with most respondents (34,5%) being uncertain on whether requesting sick leave for a cold was good. The variance of the variable was 2, and the second biggest group of respondents chose the option “agree” (28%), which confirms our previous findings. Question 19, had a mean of 2,9 “disagree” a mode and a median of 3 which corresponded to “neither agree nor disagree” and a variance of 0.982. The responses were normally distributed. Question 20, had a mean of 2,6 a mode of 2, a median of 3 and a variance of 1,03. Consequently, most respondents choose the option “disagree” or “neither agree nor disagree” when asked if coming to work when not feeling well would be good for their colleagues. It is possible to conclude that the information provided presents the image of a workforce which is influenced by some factors that make it difficult to fully side on whether coming to work when sick is good or bad for themselves, but that they realise that coming to work when sick might not be good for their colleagues.

Managerial attitude toward sick leaves

Questions 21 and 22 (Appendix D), were aimed at assessing how the respondents perceive managerial attitude toward sick leaves when they call to notify them of being sick. Both questions had the same mean (3,7), and the same median and mode, 4, which correspond to the fact that the majority of employees agree on managers being perceived as empathetic and

reassuring when calling in sick and in the following days. In question 21 in fact, only 10,5% of respondents chose answers which had a negative connotation, and in question 22 the percentage of these respondents decreased to 6,6%.

Co-workers attitude toward sick leaves

Questions 23 and 24 (Appendix D), are aimed at assessing how the respondents perceived colleagues' attitude toward them requesting sick leaves. Question 23 and 24 have a mean of respectively 4,2 and 3,5 both have median and mode of 4 and respectively variance of 0,6 and 1,2. The majority of respondents agree that their colleagues are welcoming and kind when coming back to work. Both variables are normally distributed but slightly right skewed. Answers to question 24 are more evenly distributed than those of question 23 denoting the fact that some employees (20%) disagree with the previous statement and feel like their co-workers make them feel the “weight” of their absence in the workplace.

Support on the workplace from management and colleagues

Questions 29 and 28 (Appendix D) access relatively the support employees receive from management and colleagues. Answers to question 29, support from management, have a mean of 4,1 a mode and median of 4, and a variance of 0,703. Where answer 4 corresponds to “agree”. Answers to question 28 have a mean, median and mode of 4 but a variance of .528. Very few respondents chose answers with a negative connotation (between 2 to 5% for both answers), consequently the majority of employees agree on the fact that when in need they receive the help they should have from both colleagues and managers, presenting the image of a supportive workplace culture.

Job demand and control

Job control and demand were captured by question 38 to 43 (Appendix D), following, Table 4 presents a brief description of the collected answers.

Table 4. Pace of work and workload distribution

Questions	Mean	Median	Mode	Variance	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither agree or disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)

I rarely have to work very quickly	2,24	2	2	0,878	22,4	43,2	23,9	9,7	0,9
I rarely have to work at a fast pace throughout the day	2,57	2	2	1,215	17,2	37,5	17,8	25,7	1,8
My workload is evenly distributed so that work does not pile up	2,95	3	3	0,991	8,5	23,6	36,3	28,4	3,3
It is rare that I don't have time to complete my work tasks	3,02	3	4	1,163	7,9	27,2	26,6	32	6,3
I do not fall behind on work	3,29	3	4	1,073	4,2	20,2	28,1	37,2	10,3

From the collected answers it's possible to observe how the majority of employees report to be subjected to a fast pace of work throughout the day and more in general, translating into a high level of demand and low levels of control over it. Question 40, distribution of workload presents a normal distribution with the majority of employees being divided to those that believe to be under a great amount of demand, those who do not and those that are not sure. The same effect is present in questions 41 and 42 with a tendency from respondents to choose a bit more often "agree" as an option.

Leadership qualities

Leadership was measured through questions 30 to 34 (see Appendix D). All questions had a median and mode of 4 "agree". Mean ranged between 3 and 4, with questions 30 to 33 having mean 3,6 and question 34 of 3,9. Variance ranged as well from 0,86 (questions, 30,31, 34), to 0,92 (questions 32 and 33). The data confirm the previous findings, with a workplace culture which is supportive and is characterised by a leadership which positively influences the workplace.

7.4.2 Factors influencing the days of sick leaves: bivariate analysis

Of all the variables included in section 7.3.1, only those included in the following analysis demonstrated a level of correlation and significance with the dependent variable which is interesting to explore (p -value $<0,05$). When examining the results, the reader should keep in mind that the dependent variable is ordinal, and for this reason it has less variability and consequently less variance is available to capture the correlation (Field, 2018).

Age of respondents and days of sick leaves. The two variables present a correlation coefficient which is 0.108 and have p -value $<0,01$. Although there is statistical significance, it's relatively weak, but a positive relationship between the two variables is expected, with days of sick leave increasing as age increases.

Table 5. Respondents per age and days of sick leave

Age	Days of sick leave					
	0 (%)	1-4 (%)	5-7 (%)	8-13 (%)	14-29 (%)	30 or more (%)
15-25	13,2	12,3	7	3,4	1,7	1,4
26-43	9,3	10,7	3,9	5,9	3,2	1,1
44-older	8,5	6,1	4,5	3,7	2,3	1,4
Total	31	29,1	15,8	13	7,2	3,9
	100					

Weekly hours of work and days of sickness. As the variable age, weekly hours of work present a positive weak correlation of 0,103 with p -value $<0,05$. Consequently, the variable hours of work probably, positively influences the amount of days of sickness requested. This means that as the number of working hours increases also sick leaves increase but only slightly.

presentistic culture. Question 18 has been re-coded into a different variable inverting the order of answers provided, to match question 19 and 20. In this way, a high correlation between the three variables and the dependent will translate into the presence of a presentistic culture influencing negatively the number of sick leaves (the more presentistic the less sick leaves). All the answers to the questions included in the variable presentistic culture, present a significance

level below 0,05 with question 18 “taking a day of sick leaves when you have a cold is good” having p-value <0,001 and a positive correlation of 0,181. Question 19 and 20 instead presented a negative correlation with respectively -0,146 and -0,123 and a p-value of respectively 0,007 and 0,025.

Attitude toward sick leaves and days of sickness. The variables included in the section managerial attitude toward sick leave and co-workers’ attitude toward sick leave, have been grouped under this heading. The questions have been re-coded to enhance the presence of eventual negative attitudes toward sick leave, in this way, a positive correlation with the dependent variable translates into perceived negative attitudes influencing positively sick leave. Questions 21 and 22 which form the variable managerial attitude toward sick leaves presented a correlation with the dependent variable days of sick leave, of respectively 0,250 and 0,243 with a p-value for both of them of <0,001. Questions 23 and 24, which are part of the variable colleagues' attitude toward sick leaves, present a correlation of 0,151 and 0,285 respectively, with significance <0,01. This positive correlation between the variables suggests that the more negative the attitude toward sick leave, the more the days requested increase.

Support on the workplace and days of sick leaves. Both questions have been re-coded into different variables, inverting the order of answers provided so that a higher score denotes the lack of support from an employee standpoint and high positive correlation with the dependent denote the presence of a relationship between the variables and the level of sick leaves. The variable, which is described by questions 29 and 28 present a correlation of respectively 0,281 and 0,238 with p-value of 0,001.

Job control and demand. Of the questions included in the previous section, under job control and demand, only question 31: My manager is good at planning work; demonstrated p-value <0,05 and a negative correlation when associated with the dependent variable of -0,149. This means that the more management is good at planning work, the less days of sick leaves are requested.

Leadership qualities. Of the questions included in the previous section, under leadership qualities, the only question with p-value<0,05 were question 30: My manager makes sure my colleagues and I have opportunities to develop; and 34: I am treated fairly at my workplace.and correlation respectively -0,153 and -0,138. A negative correlation for both questions, with the

dependent variable, translates in positive leadership qualities reducing the days of sick leaves requested by employees.

Even though the correlations of each independent variable are not strong, the fact that all the correlations are statistically significant with a p-value $<0,05$ means that it is unlikely that these results occurred by chance. Regardless of the strengths of that relationship, managerial and co-workers' attitudes influence sick leaves although the impact is limited; the information collected suggests that we can reject H_0 . In particular, the factors which seem to negatively influence sick leave seem to be age, number of working hours, the eventual presence of a negative managerial and co-workers' attitude toward sick leave, lack of support from management, high levels of job demand and low level of job control.

8. Discussion

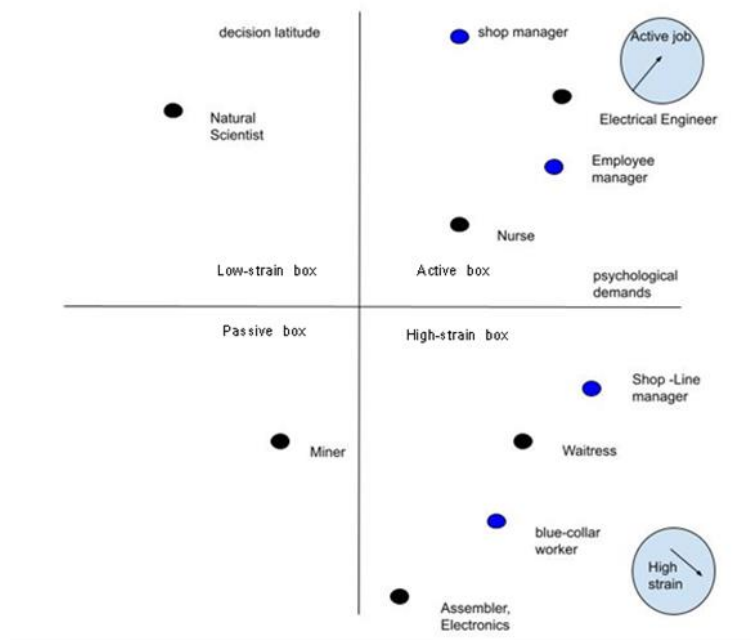
The following chapter discusses the findings of the study by looking at them through the lenses of the theoretical framework and in connection to earlier research.

The aim of this study was to contribute to the existing literature by investigating through a deductive approach the causes and consequences of the sick leave present in the case organisation and more in general the shop's attendance culture. The findings of the study have been analysed through the use of the theoretical framework presented in chapter 3. The framework uses two main models: Karasek and Theorell (1990) model of demand and control; Ruhle and Süß (2020), archetypes of sickness attendance cultures. In particular, attention has been placed throughout all the study on the impact managerial attitude produces on sickness attendance culture. Initial findings underlined the presence of a presentistic culture among management; the positive correlation found between attitude toward sick leave and days of sickness strengthened the idea that managerial attitude partially explains the number of days of sick leave, producing, in this case, a negative impact.

8.1 Demand control and support

The demand and control model developed by Karasek and Theorell (1990), theorise that high demand is not an issue as long as the affected worker/manager is able to exert control over his/her daily work tasks. A recurring factor throughout the qualitative interviews was that the type, structure and division of daily tasks within the stores seemed to be following a standardised form among the shops under study. Based on this standardised division of labour and tasks, the researchers were able to place both managers and employees within Figure 2, in which Karasek and Theorell (1990), classify work based on psychological demands combined with decision latitude.

Figure 2



Practical example of the use of the work-place Job-Demand-Control model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990, p.43) Blue dots represents working categories in our study.

Looking at this model the reader can observe how professionals performing different jobs end up on different axes. The same system can be applied for the employees working in the shops under study. A list of the main roles present in the company is available in Appendix D under question 8. Of the roles which fall under the category “shop-floor employees”, staff working at the cash register or stocking shelves would place fairly high on psychological demands but very low on the decision latitude ending in the high-strain box of Figure 2. This is explained by the fact that these jobs are performed in an environment which is characterised by high demand from customers but also from management as the brand requires the shops to maintain at all times absolute top-levels of quality as service providers. The degree of demand they are pressured by, is strongly subjected by the impact of the number of customers present in the shop and their behaviour. In particular, Shop A, B and C in the semi-structured interviews, underlined how the absence of an employee on the workplace exponentially increase the level of demand and stress among employees, this is because to maintain high levels of service there are some mandatory tasks which have to be carried out on a daily basis (such as checking the quality of the products, refilling the shelves etc...), and the demand to employees to fulfil those tasks is

static, so the less employees are present, the more tasks each of the remaining ones will have to perform.

Store managers and department heads are placed in the same figure but in different boxes as they would score high on both decision latitude and psychological demand axes. The findings of the semi-structured interviews confirmed this hypothesis, as shop managers in particular, demonstrated to possess a great degree of decisional power on how to organise employees and divide work among them, but were also experiencing a high level of psychological demand coming from their superiors, customers, employees and the brand more in general. The data provided by the shops on their organisational structure and those collected through the semi-structured interviews suggest a division of managerial roles into three different groups: office managers (no customer contact), department managers (some customer contact), and line managers (working directly with customers). High levels of demand characterised all roles, but the difference lay in the level of control each manager could exercise on the demand and on the division and organisation of the tasks to perform. Karasek and Theorell (1990) underline how the more a profession involves customer demand, the lower its score would be on control. Given this information the researchers placed the line managers in the High-strain box (Figure 2), which is characterised by risks associated with psychological strain and physical illnesses. The office managers, which have a high degree of control over the tasks they have to perform and those of other employees, were placed in the active box. Further, referring to the Karasek and Theorell model, department managers should be placed in between the active and high-strain boxes. The findings of the semi-structured interviews underline how the department manager's position can shift between the two boxes on a daily basis as their tasks are more dependent on the daily occurrences of the store, than their colleagues which work in the office. In particular, they are sensitive, for example, to the daily amount of sick leave. The stress deriving from not being able to control the work from day to day due to the impact of factors such as sick leave, can lead to the adoption of a more presentistic behaviour from management, though which the employees calling sick are “badmouth” (Ruhle & Süß, 2020). This behaviour can be linked to the fact that most of the managers in this study were very open about their critique against people who frequently requested sick leave and underlined how they have to postpone the performance of some tasks when sick leave arises.

The previous statement is reinforced by the information presented in section 7.3 under the heading Job demand and control, where management recognised the fact that most employees are subject to a great level of demand and a fast paced working environment. The statistics available in section 7.4.1 under the heading “job demand and control” further strengthen the idea that most employees (65,5%), have to work at a fast pace. The workforce seems to be, though heavenly distributed among those that disagree, neither agree nor disagree, on statements regarding how evenly distributed is their work, how able they are to answer demand, and their ability to complete their work tasks within time. This result reinforces the idea that the ability to answer and manage the demand and the level of pressure is correlated to the role of the employees but also to personal factors (Ruhle & Süß, 2020), such as work experience, ability to multitask, time management skills etc... Further, shop floor employees and line managers have a more physical job which exposes them to a more strenuous work environment and can lead to a higher frequency of sick-leaves requests. This hypothesis is confirmed by the information collected during the semi-structured interviews which underline how issues with sick leave are not frequent at managerial levels.

8.2 Presenteeism and Absenteeism

With regard to Ruhle and Süß (2020), archetypes of sickness attendance culture, the data presented in the qualitative results section provide information on the presence of managers which have developed different degrees of absentistic and presentistic cultures in the shops. Information was found on the presence of a shared custom of internally promoting employees rather than outsourcing them, allowing the reproduction of cultures among the workplace and the migration of managerial attitudes toward sick leaves from one manager to his/her successor. The researchers observed how the two most prevalent forms of culture of those presented by Ruhle and Süß (2020), among the shops, was the health-focused archetype. The health-focused culture emerged when managers in the interviews talked about how Covid-19 has made the staff more aware of how their health state might affect others and had changed the pattern of “taking a pill and going to work” to a “calling in sick when feeling bad”. This idea is reinforced by the findings of the survey which underline how employees find it difficult to mark “cold” as a sickness which is not accepted and instead to a certain degree recognise it as a legitimate reason to stay home.

With regard to the archetype of presentistic culture, some shops, more than others, showed signs in their statements of the adoption of a presentistic attitude toward sick leaves. From statements collected from management during the semi-structured interviews transpire the perception that the group that was most inclined to request sick leave for minor issues were younger people who were hired during the pandemic and were trained in an environment characterised by an outspoken absentistic culture. Minor issues in managers' opinion were associated in particular with colds or headaches, which together with migraines and Covid-19 related symptoms have been registered as the most frequent self-reported diseases among the workforce. When analysing the relationship between years of employment and the main reason for sick leaves, 48% of the respondents choosing "cold" as the reason had been hired in between a couple of months and three years before (during or after the pandemic), providing information which reinforces the information provided by management. When exploring the relationship between the answers on questions 17c (Appendix D), and the variable age of respondents, 39% of the total respondents who choose "often", "sometimes" and "always" were in the age group 15 to 25. No relevant information was found instead when exploring the relationship between that age group and the choice "Covid-19 related symptoms" in questions 12 (Appendix D). Schein (2010) mentions in his research how culture is influenced by historical events, building on this statement the researchers suggest the idea that the standards of what is currently accepted in the attendance culture as "sickness" might not have been before the pandemic. The reliability of this idea is strengthened by the statement of participant 3 (D), Participant 1 (C), Participant 2 (A), and the differences found in the answers to questions 17a and 17c.

The third archetype, individual decision culture, was captured by the findings of the survey regarding managerial and co-workers' attitude toward sick leave. Overall, the findings picture a workplace which is characterised by reciprocal trust and an empathetic attitude toward employees calling in sick. This contradicts the presentistic statements of managements, suggesting the possibility that although managers have a certain preferred attendance culture, there are some factors in the environment that restrain them from openly expressing their opinion and statement as done during the semi-structured interviews and to respect instead the employees' decision to stay at home and their ability to evaluate whether their sickness impacts or not their ability to work. The presence of an individual decision culture is also captured by the answers collected on question 23 where employees were not excluding the presence of some employees pressuring and blaming their co-workers for the consequences of their absences, but

management did not mention it, which could suggest that the employees responsible for these behaviours do not openly speak about it.

8.3 Comparison with previous studies

The study results partially support earlier research and add to the academic literature providing further insights into sick leaves in the retail industry.

As stated by Gómez-Mejía et al. (2012), the employees who are left at work when sick leave occur, experience a greater degree of stress compared to the usual and end up in a condition in which less time is available to perform their daily tasks as they have to stop and help covering a different role or support colleagues in need. This is confirmed by the managerial statements collected during the interviews which further develop on the consequence of sick leaves on employees. The findings further strengthen and further develop on the statement of Grinza and Rycx (2020), on the impact of absenteeism on firm productivity. The statements of participants in shops A and C findings of the qualitative interviews confirmed the idea that the consequences of absenteeism are stronger for small sized businesses compared to bigger ones. Moreover, the main impacts of sick leave on employees seem to mainly affect blue collar workers, with an increased demand on them, and an increasing loss of control over the daily work tasks and their fulfilment. Proof of the presence of some negative impact on white collar managers was found but seemed to only consist in the slowdown of tasks fulfilment and search for substitute employees.

A study from Yu et al. (2019), on the importance of retaining employees and the cost of losing them, underlines the important role played by workplace satisfaction in retaining employees. The secondary data provided by the shops present the image of a workplace which is attractive among middle aged and older employees, who score quite high on workplace satisfaction. However, this is missing for the newly employed or younger staff, suggesting that factors which might be attractive in a workplace to an age group might not to another. Two studies, one by Park et al. (2021); and the other by Nguyen et al. (2021), point to the important role management plays in increasing workplace satisfaction by building positive relations with employees. The authors underline in particular how a work environment that is inclusive and supportive, motivates employees and overtime increases workplace satisfaction and productivity. The data collected through the survey present a generally shared opinion by employees on the workplace

being supportive both on managerial and co-workers' sides and the presence of leadership qualities possessed by management which positively influence the workplace creating a culture of reciprocal help and support. Moreover, most of the factors presented in this paper and associated with positive attributes to workplace culture, demonstrated a relationship with days of sick leaves by which the more supportive the workplace the less the days of sick leave.

Finally, when referring to the study presented by Naeem and Khurram (2020), the data collected seem to both support and contradict the researchers statements. In fact, from the semi-structured interviews emerged an image of management being characterised by statements which might produce negative impacts on the attendance culture such as the one by Participant 2 (E). In the data analysis of the survey instead, the workforce passed the general idea that management is present, supportive, empathic and reassuring toward sick leave, which contradicts the findings of the qualitative interviews. This might suggest that although management adopts a more presentistic culture, there are some factors in the environment which pressure them to have a certain attitude toward employees when dealing directly with them, behaving in an absentistic manner when employees phone in sick. As mentioned above, this is in conflict with the theory by Naeem and Khurram (2020) as in this case the presentistic managerial attitudes seem to transform after trespassing the managers' office doors and adopt attitudes and behaviours which positively influence the workplace and are lenient toward the sickness attendance culture.

In conclusion, although the correlation may not be significant, managerial attitudes seemed to produce an impact on the sickness attendance culture. However, it seems that the nature of the job and the sickness culture established by the workforce, produce a greater impact on how people choose to take sick leave. The grounds for this conclusion lie on the findings which suggest that the positions that most frequently call out sick are the ones in the high-strain box of the demand and control figure, 1. However, question 29 and 28 (Appendix D) determines that employees get a good amount of support when needed and that can ease the impact some from the demand and control put on them.

9. Conclusion

The following chapter provides a summary of the conclusions, and discuss the contribution and significance of the research providing recommendation for the case organisation and for future studies.

The purpose of the study was to investigate through a deductive approach the causes and consequences of the sick leaves present in the case organisation through Ruhle and Süß (2020), archetypes of sickness attendance cultures and Karasek and Theorell (1990), demand, control and support model. In particular, exploring the role played by managerial attitudes toward sick leaves in influencing sickness attendance culture.

9.1 Main conclusions

In this section the mixed method research question is used to guide the reader through the main conclusions of the study.

What have we learned about the sickness attendance culture of the case organisation and the factors that influence it?

Through an in-depth analysis of the available literature and the examination of real-world data, several key findings have emerged, shedding light on the complexities surrounding sick leave in this context. One of the significant findings of this study was that the collected data seem to reinforce the idea that a shift has occurred in the past years in the attendance culture of the shops. In particular, the criteria for what is widely acceptable as “sickness” now include “cold” while the employees and the managers’ statements suggest that before the pandemic it was less accepted. During the pandemic, employees were encouraged to stay at home when having symptoms associated to Covid-19 (cold, sore throat, fever), and were forced to become more aware of the negative sides of presenteeism: contagious presenteeism. The findings suggest that the workforce under study is now also more aware of the negative consequences of absenteeism (increased workload, stress etc...). The researchers observed how the workforce of the case organisation seem to be currently divided between those that want to move on and re-establish pre-pandemic norms of sick leaves, and those that instead recognise the advantages coming from the new standards. Participant 3 (D) mentioned how hard it is for management to discuss these topics with employees as it is a sensitive matter and she/he can feel that a change occurred

among the workforce. This statement reinforces the validity of the researchers deductions and is reinforced also by the data collected through the survey (chapter 7.4, section “Reasons for sick leave”).

Another relevant finding concerns the impact of job demand, working hours and managerial support on days of sick leave. The data collected highlight the importance of organisational support and a positive workplace environment to reduce sick leave. These findings add to the existing literature on sick leave providing insight into additional factors which influence sick leave and reinforcing the statement of Schein (2010), on the influence of historical events on culture, in this case attendance culture.

9.2 Contribution and significance of the research

The previous chapter of this thesis has presented earlier research on the field and connected them to the information collected in this study. In this subchapter, the researchers elaborate on the contribution and significance of the research conducted, highlighting the key findings and contributions.

This study makes several significant contributions to the existing literature on the Swedish retail industry and on sick leave. First of all, it adds to the overall knowledge about the factors that produce an impact on the days of sick leave requested, and by examining them in particular in a real-world organisational setting. While previous research on sick leave in Sweden have focused mainly on the healthcare sector and have explored either presenteeism or absenteeism separately; this research provides a more general and broader insight of the attendance culture in the case organisation and on the type of sick leave present in the retail industry. Furthermore, this study contributes to the existing literature further exploring the relationship between managerial attitudes and sick leave. Further, the presence of discrepancies in demand and control both at different managerial levels as well as for blue-collar workers provide more credibility to the demand, control and support model by Karasek and Theorell (1990), strengthening the idea that the degree of control and demand employees have on their jobs, produce an impact on sick leave. Moreover, the findings of the study reinforce the reproductivity of the model of archetypes of culture developed by Ruhle and Süß (2020), expanding the knowledge or its practical applicability. Finally, by utilising a mixed-method

approach, combining qualitative insights from managers and quantitative analysis of sick leave data, the researchers offer a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

The study provides several practical implications for organisations and HRM professionals. Firstly, it provides a framework for HRM and management more in general at the case organisation to identify the factors in the workplace attendance culture which might influence the number of sick leaves requested by employees. Further, HRM professionals and organisations more in general, can use the findings of this study as a base to better locate issues within their own companies and from that implement different work arrangements as a proactive approach to reduce sick leave rates. By fostering a culture which grants employees more control over their schedules and provide more support, organisations can potentially reduce the costs associated with both presenteeism and absenteeism. It's important to note though that these kinds of changes are difficult to implement among shop floor employees in industries such as the retail one, in which the levels of demand employees are subjected to are high and difficult to control (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Moreover, developing on the idea that the perception of "sickness" might have changed among employees after the pandemic, organisations can implement internal research and develop strategies or policies to adapt to this phenomenon. Of the shops under study more than others demonstrated a higher awareness toward the directives of Arbetsmiljölagen (1977), and to work actively with the work environment; with this regard, management should evaluate the reasons behind these discrepancies, provide support to each other and share best practices. Further, the study provides information which might push the case organisation to re-think their internal managerial promotion system and training strategy to prevent issues with replication of attendance culture and managerial attitudes.

Finally, although more information about shop floor employees should be collected, the findings shed light into the organisational issues in the case organisation. In particular, the semi-structured interviews with management have underlined how even shops with common ownership and in local proximity are characterised by the presence of issues with alignment of the training received, knowledge possessed and leadership style implemented. Furthermore, in some shops than others, issues with internal communication, motivation and involvement of employees have been identified.

9.3 Ground for future research

Considering the time constraints and the few resources available for the study, the researchers are aware of the presence of some gaps in the research, which might be interesting to explore in the future. First of all, In the qualitative study the point of view of blue collar workers has not been considered. In depth semi structured interviews with shop floor employees might provide further information on factors influencing sick leaves which have not emerged in this study. The decision of not carrying out follow up interviews was based on the multiple issues encountered throughout the project in reaching the participants and organising meetings with them; considering the limited amount of time available, it was not possible to further expand the research.

Second of all, it would have been interesting to investigate why such a high level of non-response rate has been recorded. As mentioned above, non-response seems to be the norm across the shops, it would have been interesting to further investigate why employees choose to not respond and if non-response rate at such high levels is frequent in blue collar professions. Further as some results pointed to the impact of worklife culture for people who just got their first job it would be interesting to follow up in a few years to see if it was a lasting impression or something temporary.

Furthermore, the collected information on the impact the pandemic has produced on the overall perception of employees on which diseases can be generally accepted as “sickness” and what is not, provide information on the current situation without considering future developments. Future studies should depart from these findings, and investigate the future development of the employees’ perception to observe if the increasing distance from the pandemic years, bring employees closer to pre-pandemic perceptions or stabilise them into the observed ones.

Finally, Ruhle and Süß (2020), write about how management tends to adopt a presentistic culture when faced with a high level of sick leaves or absences. This imply that managerial attitude and the attendance culture is affected by sick leave, but multiple studies (Naeem & Khurram, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2021; Alvesson, 2013), underline the role managers have in defining the policies which shape the work environment and define the rules employees abide by and how their attitudes correlate with work performance and workplace social dynamics, providing the perspective that managerial attitude impact attendance culture and consequently

the request for sick leave. The researchers have not been able to distinguish which cause which in this study. Nevertheless, an empirical study of the relation between managerial attitude and attendance culture is an important first attempt, future research should further explore the topic.

9.4 Final reflections

This study has significantly contributed to the researchers' professional knowledge as HRM professionals. First, by exploring both qualitative and quantitative methods, the researchers have been able to gain more knowledge about the managerial perspectives on sick leaves and the factors that influence them. The study on sick leave in the case organisation has expanded the researchers' professional knowledge on the complex interplay of factors influencing sick leaves but has also equipped them with valuable research skills applicable to their future career. Finally, the use of a mixed method approach has allowed the researchers to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena and make in the future, more informed decisions to drive positive change in organisations.

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Softwares

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Appendix

Appendix A

Tables

Table 3. Information about the age of the sample

Age groups	Frequency	Percentage	Women (%)	Man (%)	Not specified (%)
15 - 25	148	39,5	73,7	24,3	2
26 - 43	130	34,8	73,8	24,7	1,5
44 - 77	96	25,7	70,8	29,2	0
Total population (n)	374	100 (374)	73 (273)	25,7 (96)	1,3 (5)
			100 (374)		

Appendix B, Qualitative questionnaire

Following the questionnaire used for the qualitative study:

A) Introducing questions

1. How long have you worked in the company for?
2. Which is your role in the company?
3. Has it always been this role or have you covered other positions before?
4. Which are, on average, your most frequent tasks?

B) Direct questions about the structure of the company, trainings, policies and regulations

5. Did you receive any form of training when introduced to your new position? If yes, which?
6. Can you tell us a bit about the formal structure of the shop?
7. Which are the main positions?

C) Direct questions about sick leaves, the causes and their impact throughout the shop

8. With regard to sick leaves, which are the main problems the company is currently facing?
9. How do sick leaves affect your job/life?
10. How do you think sick leaves affect your employees?
11. Which do you think might be the main cause of the high level of sick leaves?

D) Indirect questions on possible preventive measures for sick leaves or factors influencing them

12. According to previous studies, most sick leave in the retail industry, are taken due to burn out or other psychological issues, do you have any form of preventive method for these forms of illness? (support function, report function?) Do you identify these as possible main causes of the current problem?
13. In your opinion, what could help to reduce the level of sick leaves?
14. Are there any other changes that you perceive as urgently needed in the shop/company?

E) Indirect questions on managerial strategies, attitudes and company culture

15. Have you or your colleagues, with regard to HR practices, implemented any strategies since the outbreak of Covid-19 to contrast sick leaves?
16. How often do you have individual meetings with your employees?
17. Do you conduct yearly performance reviews? If yes, how?
18. In the event of harassment or disrespect amongst colleagues, do you have any form of safety structure or report system for handling of these kinds of issues?

F) Direct question on the impact of Covid-19 on people's perceptions

19. Do you believe Covid-19 to have changed the way in which you, employees and the company perceive the idea of "sickness"? If yes, how?

Appendix C, Codes

Following, the major codes used in the analysis of the qualitative interviews.

- Organisational structure of the store
- Division of work among the staff
- Training and education of managers
- Work environment information and perception
- Types, Frequencies and Consequences of sick leave
- Sick-leave procedures
- Implemented strategies against sick-leave
- Pandemic's impact
- Contradicting statements, attitudes
- Signs of absenteeism or presenteeism

Appendix D, Quantitative questionnaire

The questionnaire was introduced by a page presenting the study, providing the contacts of the researchers of reference, and answering questions such as:

- *What is the purpose of the study?*
- *Why have I been invited to participate?*
- *What will happen if I participate?*

The introduction was specifying that the questionnaire would be completely anonymous, that any sensitive would not be shared in the published research and that the participants could drop out of the survey whenever they felt like, nothing was mandatory for them to do.

Demographic section

1. Specify your gender

- male,

- female,
- non-binary,
- prefer not to specify

2. Specify your age in a round number

3. In which shop do you work?

- multiple choice answer were provided, with the list of shops and their locations

4. How many children under 18 live in your household?

- 0
- 1-2
- 3-5
- 6 or more

5. Which of these categories describes your personal monthly income?

- 0-10.000 SEK;
- 11.000-20.000 SEK;
- 21.000-30.000 SEK;
- 31.000 SEK and more

Working with the company

6. How many years have you worked at the company? Continuous scale (round number only)

7. On average, how many hours a week do you work? Continuous scale (round numbers only)

8. What is your job role?

- a. Store manager
- b. Sales manager
- c. Area manager
- d. Head of department
- e. Personnel and schedule manager
- f. Customer manager
- g. IT and marketing
- h. Quality control
- i. Safety and education
- j. Employe

k. Other

Sick leave section

In the past 12 months:

9. How many times have you called in sick? (continuous)

10. How many days in total have you had sick leaves?

- 0
- 1-4;
- 5-7;

- 8-13;
- 14-29;
- 30 and more

11. Have you taken a sick leave for longer than 7 days?

- yes
- no

12. Which was the main reason for calling in sick?

(multiple selection available)

1. Cold
2. Fever
3. Covid-19 - tested positive
4. Physical pain
5. Mental health reasons (stress, anxiety, depression, etc...)
6. Unrelated to my health
7. Covid-19 symptoms
8. Other reason _____

13. In general, how would you describe your health:

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Quite good
- Bad

14. It happens that you work when sick

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

Health attitudes and illness perception

15. How often do/did you worry about your health?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Before Covid-19	•	•	•	•	•
Since the outbreak of Covid-19	•	•	•	•	•
During the last 12 months	•	•	•	•	•

16. How often do/did you worry about infecting others?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Before Covid-19	•	•	•	•	•
Since the outbreak of Covid-19	•	•	•	•	•
During the last 12 months	•	•	•	•	•

17. How often do/did you stay home while having a cold?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

Before Covid-19	•	•	•	•	•
Since the outbreak of Covid-19	•	•	•	•	•
During the last 12 months	•	•	•	•	•

Presenteeism culture section and Work attendance section

18. Taking a day of sick leave if you have a cold is good.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

19. Coming to work if you are not feeling well but can still work is good.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

20. Coming to work if you are not feeling well but can still work is good for my colleagues.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree

- Strongly agree

21. When I call my manager to let her/him know that I'm sick she/he is empathetic and reassuring.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

22. When I call my manager during the following days of sick leave she/he is empathetic and reassuring.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

23. When I come back to work after being sick my colleagues are welcoming and kind.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

24. When I come back to work after being sick I don't feel at fault because no one makes me feel the "weight" of my absence.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

25. I feel bad for my co-workers when I call in sick.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Organisational and social work environment section

Social support, capital and community

26. My cooperation with colleagues at your workplace is good

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

27. My cooperation with my manager is good

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree

- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

28. If I need it, I get help and support from my colleagues

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

29. If I need it, I get help and support from my manager

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Leadership quality

30. My manager makes sure my colleagues and I have opportunities to develop

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

31. My manager is good at planning work

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

32. My manager handles conflicts well

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

33. I receive positive attention and appreciation for my work efforts

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

34. I am treated fairly at my workplace

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

- Agree
- Strongly agree

Job commitment

35. I am proud of the type of work that I do

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

36. I am willing to put in a great effort beyond normally expected to help the organisation to be successful

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

37. If given the chance, I would not change my work for something else

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Working conditions section

Work tempo and quantity demands

38. I rarely have to work very quickly

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

39. I rarely have to work at a fast pace throughout the day

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

40. My workload is evenly distributed so that work does not pile up

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

41. It is rare that I don't have time to complete my work tasks

- Strongly disagree

- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

42. I do not fall behind on work

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

43. I can rely on someone else when my workload is too much

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Work adjustment

44. In what way do you mainly adjust your work if you feel out of sorts, have pain, have a cold, or something similar?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

I can do necessary work and postpone the rest ● ● ● ● ●

I can choose among work tasks ● ● ● ● ●

I can get help from workmates ● ● ● ● ●

I can work at a slower pace than usual ● ● ● ● ●

I can take longer breaks ● ● ● ● ●

I can shorten the workday ● ● ● ● ●

I can go home and do the work later ● ● ● ● ●

I can work without being disturbed at the workplace ● ● ● ● ●

I can work from home ● ● ● ● ●