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## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

### A Process Model for Mental Absence of Faculty Members in the Work Workplace Using Grounded Theory Method

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

### Introduction

Faculty members are among the most important pillars and constituent elements of higher education systems worldwide. In addition to educating and developing future generations, they are also responsible for responding to the scientific and research needs of society. In fact, the transformations that have occurred in the structure of societies, along with the shift in the source and origin of power from physical assets to intellectual assets in recent years, have positioned universities as the focal point of the development and advancement of human societies and have expanded the role of these institutions beyond education and research. On the other hand, previous studies have indicated that faculty members are exposed to a wide range of workplace challenges. These challenges may have profound effects on their quality of life as well as on their professional and work-related experiences. One of the negative consequences of poor talent management in organizations is mental absence in the workplace, which can significantly affect the quality of work life of faculty members. Therefore, mental absence among faculty members is an issue that needs to be seriously examined, and the factors contributing to its occurrence should be identified in a precise and scientific manner. However, a review of the empirical literature indicates that, despite researchers' attention to mental absence and its examination among different statistical populations, this issue has not yet been studied among faculty members. Therefore, questions concerning the factors affecting mental absence among faculty members remain unanswered. Why do faculty members experience mental absence in the workplace? What factors can create the grounds for this destructive organizational behavior and influence it? What consequences does mental absence among faculty members entail? Accordingly, the present study was designed to develop a process model of mental absence among faculty members in the workplace using the grounded theory method.

### Methodology

In terms of approach, this study is a qualitative research, and in terms of purpose, it is an applied study with an exploratory nature. It was conducted using the grounded theory method, specifically the systematic approach proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1997). The statistical population consisted of faculty members of Iranian universities. Among them, 23 individuals were selected as experts and included in the sample using purposive snowball sampling. The required data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The sample size, that is, the criterion for determining the adequacy of the interviews, was determined based on the principle of theoretical saturation. In this regard, data saturation was achieved after conducting 19 interviews; however, the interviews were continued to ensure greater confidence, and a total of 23 interviews were conducted. To evaluate the credibility of the analyses, in accordance

with the guidelines provided by scholars, several measures were taken, including achieving theoretical saturation during the data collection process, examining participants' views on the final results, conducting an internal evaluation of the analyses, and using multiple sources of information.

### **Findings**

After each interview was completed, the collected data were analyzed. In this regard, the interview transcripts were carefully reviewed, statements relevant to the purpose of the study were extracted, and they were precisely coded. At this stage, known as first-level open coding, 143 initial codes were identified. Subsequently, the initial codes were reviewed, and concepts were identified by eliminating repetitive codes, merging similar codes, and revising some of the initial codes. At this stage, 77 concepts were identified. Then, by categorizing the final concepts that shared semantic similarities, subcategories were identified. Then, at the axial coding stage, the identified subcategories, along with the concepts related to each category, were classified into the main categories of grounded theory. After completing axial coding, in the selective coding process (the third stage of grounded theory), the relationships among the main categories were established and the paradigmatic model of the study was developed. In this way, After analyzing the data, the factors affecting the mental absence of faculty members were categorized in the form of causal factors (attitudinal factors, skill-performance factors, characteristics of university administrators and characteristics of university organizational culture), contextual factors (university organizational structure, failure of the human resources management system, students, job factors and personal problems) and intervening factors (individual and social inhibiting factors). The findings also indicate that the mental absence of faculty members at the work manifests itself in the form of virtual resignation and neglect of work (wasting time in the work environment). The strategies of this phenomenon were also identified in the form of 2 dimensions (self-willed social isolation and performance measures) and its consequences were identified in 2 levels (individual and organizational).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

In this study, the factors influencing faculty members' mental absence in the workplace were identified across three dimensions: causal conditions, contextual conditions, and intervening conditions. Some of the subcomponents of these factors have also been reported in previous studies related to the research topic; therefore, the findings are consistent with prior research in this respect. However, several factors emerged in the present study that appear to have received little or no attention in the existing literature. Among the causal conditions, these factors include university managers' insufficient recognition of faculty members as valuable human capital, the dominance of seniority-based culture in universities, the prevalence of excessive politicization within university settings, and the spread of grouping and factionalism, manifested in insider-outsider distinctions. Similarly, among the contextual conditions, the role of students as a contextual factor influencing faculty members' mental absence has not been previously examined in the literature. Moreover, the intervening conditions, conceptualized in this study as inhibiting factors, have not been adequately addressed in prior research. This issue represents one of the important points of distinction between the present study and previous studies.

With respect to the core phenomenon, the present study identified several concrete manifestations of faculty members' mental absence in the workplace. These manifestations include being absorbed in personal daydreams during working hours, delayed presence at the university—such as arriving late to classes and formal meetings—failure to conduct courses in accordance with approved syllabi and lesson plans, and allocating class time to peripheral or marginal issues. These manifestations provide a more tangible understanding of how mental absence may appear in the everyday academic work environment. The strategies for reducing faculty members' mental absence in the workplace were classified into two main dimensions: reducing social isolation and implementing performance-oriented actions. A review of the research literature indicates that strategies for mitigating mental absence in academic workplace settings have not been systematically examined in prior studies. Accordingly, this aspect constitutes another distinguishing contribution of the present study. Among the consequences, several outcomes were also identified that appear to be novel in relation to the existing literature. These include an increase in collective cognitive inertia within universities, a decline in universities' income-generating capabilities, the deterioration of universities' employer brand, and the emergence of despair and hopelessness among early-career faculty members and students.

Given that faculty members' mental absence in the workplace has not previously been systematically investigated, the findings of this study may contribute to enriching the theoretical literature and empirical background of the topic, while also improving researchers' understanding of this phenomenon. In addition, the findings can enhance the awareness and insight of managers within the higher education system regarding the antecedents, mechanisms, manifestations, and consequences of faculty members' mental absence. From a practical perspective, the results may provide a useful basis for preventing and managing this phenomenon and for avoiding its negative organizational and individual consequences. Therefore, higher education managers can apply the findings of this research in managerial decision-making and policy-related practices.

Future researchers may also benefit from the research leads generated by this study when designing and conducting further investigations. For instance, future studies may examine how factors such as university organizational culture, university organizational structure, university managers, and other related elements contribute to either the emergence or prevention of faculty members' mental absence. Furthermore, exploring faculty members' lived experiences of mental absence in the workplace may provide a new interpretive perspective for understanding this phenomenon. Future research may also focus on identifying effective strategies and practical solutions for preventing or reducing faculty members' mental absence in academic workplace settings.

#### **KEY WORDS**

Faculty Members, Mental Absence, Mental Absence of Faculty Members, Indifference At Work, Grounded Theory.

