STAFF REPORT
INFORMATION ONLY

TTC Audit Report – Attendance Management – "At Work Program"

Date:	February 19, 2015
To:	TTC Audit Committee
From:	Head of Audit, Joseph L. Kennelly

Summary

This audit was to assess the effectiveness of the "At Work Program" procedures and controls for managing attendance, and to provide recommendations for improving attendance.

The "At Work Program" has procedures and guidelines for the administration and management of employee absences. The intention of the program is to cause a change in the attendance of employees who are taking time off unnecessarily by providing counseling and assistance to improve their attendance, ensuring employees understand the possible repercussions of excessive absenteeism, and also ensuring that employees away from work due to illness, injury or disability receive the appropriate support. Any changes to the "At Work Program" must be made through the union negotiation process during collective bargaining.

Recommendations have been made to provide additional training to work location supervisory staff on the documentation requirements of the "At Work Program", development of standardized internal communication protocols between the Human Resources Department and the TTC work locations, acquisition of the necessary informational system tools to provide more up-to-date attendance information and enhanced monitoring of unusual absence trends and patterns.

Management has committed to taking action in addressing noted areas of concern.

Financial Impact

The recommendation in this report has no financial impact.

Contact

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Attachment

TTC Audit Report - Attendance Management – "At Work Program"

TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION

ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT – "AT WORK PROGRAM"

CORPORATE SERVICES GROUP

HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT
EMPLOYEE RELATIONS SECTION

Covering Period:
January 2012 to June 2013

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Executive Summary

This audit was to assess the effectiveness of the "At Work Program" procedures and controls for managing attendance, and to provide recommendations for improving attendance. A meeting to discuss the findings was held on November 25, 2014, with the Chief Financial and Administrative Officer, and the Chief People Officer.

The "At Work Program" has procedures and guidelines for the administration and management of employee absences. The intention of the program is to cause a change in the attendance of employees who are taking time off unnecessarily by providing counseling and assistance to improve their attendance, ensuring employees understand the possible repercussions of excessive absenteeism, and also ensuring that employees away from work due to illness, injury or disability receive the appropriate support. Any changes to the "At Work Program" must be made through the union negotiation process during collective bargaining.

Efforts have been made by the Human Resources Department to implement changes to improve attendance by the introduction of new training sessions for departmental supervisory staff performing attendance management functions and a more proactive role in managing absenteeism. This audit examined where further opportunities may exist to improve the management of employee absenteeism.

Recommendations have been made to provide additional training to work location supervisory staff on the documentation requirements of the "At Work Program", development of standardized internal communication protocols between the Human Resources Department and the TTC work locations, acquisition of the necessary informational system tools to provide more up-to-date attendance information and enhanced monitoring of unusual absence trends and patterns.

Management has committed to taking action in addressing noted areas of concern.

We wish to express our thanks for the cooperation and assistance from all parties during the course of this audit.

Conclusion

In our opinion, management continues to strive to develop solutions to improve employee attendance. With the Audit recommendations contained in this report, further improvement to the attendance management process is anticipated.

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Head of Audit   Auditor

Background

To provide a safe, efficient and customer-focused transit service, the TTC requires a high standard of attendance from all employees. The "At Work Program" was established to provide a consistent approach in managing the TTC's absenteeism and is administered by the Human Resources Department in the Corporate Services Group. The management of attendance is the responsibility of each TTC department.

The "At Work Program" has procedures and guidelines for the administration and management of employee absences. The intention of the program is to cause a change in the attendance of employees who are taking time off unnecessarily by providing counseling and assistance to improve their attendance, ensuring employees understand the possible repercussions of excessive absenteeism, and also ensuring that employees away from work due to illness, injury or disability receive the appropriate support.

The guidelines, since updated April 1, 2014, require that at the fourth and subsequent incidents of absence within a 12-month period, the supervisor should contact and interview the employee to provide counseling. Subsequent steps provide counseling and allow options for a health assessment referral and steps which may ultimately lead to dismissal. Depending on the circumstances of each case of illness or occupational injury, the supervisor may elect not to counsel the employee when there is no need and may use his or her discretion.

In 2012, the Human Resources Department implemented changes to improve attendance by the introduction of new training sessions for departmental supervisory staff performing attendance management functions and a more proactive role in managing absenteeism.

Audit Scope and Objective

Scope The audit scope included a review of the process and controls of the "At Work Program" which is a key component of the corporate strategy to manage attendance at the TTC.

The review covered the period from January 2012 to June 2013.

The scope did not include other attendance management programs such as the Transitional Work Program and Sick Benefit Association. These programs may be the subject of a future audit review.

Objective To assess the effectiveness of the "At Work Program" procedures and controls for managing attendance, and to provide recommendations for improving attendance.

Audit Methodology

The following audit procedures were performed:

- review of "At Work Program" guidelines and related documentation

- discussions with Human Resources departmental staff regarding processes and procedures

- discussion with divisional work location management regarding controls for managing attendance and following up on exceptions noted

- using the Attendance Management System (AMS) report, review of attendance history for a sample of 152 employees (139 union and 13 non-union) with 8 incidents or 30 days absences in a 12-month period

- review of file documentation noting action taken in response to incidents of absences for the sample selection of employees

Analysis and Recommendations

Finding #1

Absence File Documentation

Objective: To ensure current and complete file documentation of employee absences is maintained.

Analysis: The "At Work Program" guidelines require employee files to contain documentation of the outcome of the counseling interviews, including action plans to achieve the desired outcome. Guidelines, checklists and forms have been developed to assist work location supervisors in conducting and documenting counseling interviews.

Interviews
In the review of the attendance files for the 152 selected samples, Audit discussions indicated that files for 6 employees had counseling interviews, but documentation of the interview was not included in the employee's attendance file.

Employee Work Location Transfers
In several cases documentation regarding attendance history of employees who transferred between departments was not forwarded by the previous work location to the new work location.

The lack of continuity in the management of the employees' absences can result in delays in managing an employee's attendance, especially if the new work location must start the documentation process over again.

Recommendation: Management should ensure that:

- work location supervisory staff responsible for managing attendance are trained and knowledgeable in the documentation requirements of the "At Work Program"

- attendance documentation for employees transferred to a new work location is promptly forwarded to the new work location

Management Response and Action Plan

Currently, the TTC offers to supervisory staff, managing the attendance of employees, several training sessions that are accessible through the Training Department's intranet site. There are pre-selected dates and times that employees can opt to attend. Alternatively, management have and continue to contact the Employee Relations section, Human Resources Department to request training on an adhoc basis for management staff.

On an ongoing basis, we review documents sent to us from our various client groups and provide feedback to regarding content. Also, our documentation templates are reviewed from time to time, updated and distributed, as required.

We will work with clients to ascertain if a mandatory refresher training every two years, to applicable employees, would be appropriate and manageable, as it is our opinion this would provide further opportunity to communicate changes to the program and support, with a view of improving attendance.

With respect to ensuring attendance documentation for employees is transferred to a new work location promptly there are currently two processes in place.

Notification of an employee transfer occurs via a system seniority transfer bid (SSTB) or via documentation sent from the Workforce Analyst – Transportation to management at the work location. It is the job responsibility of the Transportation Division's Office Services Clerk (Stenographer) to transfer an employee's file to the Manager of an employee's new work location, under confidential cover, in advance of a new board period. Accountability for ensuring this process occurs would be with Division Management. There is opportunity in this process, for   management to communicate to the new work location employee names that are under final warning or memoranda of settlement.

The transfer of maintenance employees' files are made when the successful bid notices are distributed to the various work locations. Management or a designated representative is required to review the notices and transfer the employee file to the new work location prior to the employee's transfer date. This process is similar to the SSTB for the transportation work locations. Again, there is opportunity for management to communicate to the new work location employee names that are under final warning or memoranda of settlement.

As a part of SAP introduction, there will be occasion to review the entire issue of employee files. In the intervening period, the above mechanisms, provided they are followed, ought to allow opportunity for adequate information sharing.

Additionally, the Transportation Divisions have implemented a database system that enables the access of employee information via electronic soft copy. Therefore, related employee documents and files are transferred electronically to new work locations on the Friday prior to an employee's transfer date.

Responsibility: Chief People Officer

Completion Date: November 2014

Status: Implemented

Finding #2

Internal Communication Channels

Objective:
To ensure internal communication channels are effective in facilitating the flow of information among the various TTC work locations and other departments.

Analysis:
The management of an employee's attendance is a departmental responsibility. Consequently, internal communications between the Human Resources Department and among other TTC departments is important to the effective management of employee attendance.

Effective communication enables providing advice and direction on problem or excessive absenteeism, managing disabilities through prevention, claims management, rehabilitation and re-employment initiatives.

Where cases have been referred to the Occupational Health and Claims Managements (OHCM) section in the Human Resources Department, Audit discussions found that work location supervisory staff is reluctant to request information as they consider they do not have the authority to request information. While certain information is confidential and cannot be shared, some information and updates can be requested, such as an employee's expected return to normal duties.

In addition, Audit noted that employee absence information relating to the Transitional Work Program (TWP) is not always communicated to the original work location by the hosting location. Although the employee is performing work elsewhere through the Transitional Work Program, the responsibility for managing absenteeism remains with the employee's original work location.

Recommendation:
Management should ensure effective internal communication by:

- developing a standard communication protocol between the Human Resources Department and other TTC work locations areas outlining the type of information that can be shared between the areas

- providing training information sessions on the attendance management process, including the roles and responsibilities of TTC employees and supervisory staff responsible for managing attendance

Management Response and Action Plan

The audit report recommended developing a standard communication protocol between the Human Resources Department and other TTC work locations outlining the type of information that can be shared between the areas.

Given the Employee Relations section restriction to employees' confidential medical information, the responsibility of providing advice and guidance related to absenteeism is shared between the Employee Relations section and the Occupational Health and Claims Management section, Human Resources Department. The OHCM section addresses managing disabilities, claims management, rehabilitation and re-employment initiatives. The OHCM section works with client groups to discuss and review employee absence related issues and job placements for employees with either temporary or permanent medical restrictions. The OHCM staff is receptive to accepting inquiries from work locations and respond accordingly.

There are standard communication tools provided by the OHCM section as detailed below:

- Fitness For Work reports that provide a return to work to regular duties following an absence that is greater than 10 days;
- Gradual Return to Work (GRTW) report provides a schedule outlining an employee's restricted hours of work geared towards "work hardening" as well as physical restrictions, including anticipated timeframe of GRTW; and
- Transitional Work report provides specific details of what the employee's restrictions are and the work location where the TWP will take place, including anticipated timeframe of TWP.

We acknowledge the reluctance of work location supervisory staff to contact OHCM to obtain information as well the gap in transfer of transitional worker program information as referenced in the finding. Currently, we are working with OHCM section to address the misconceptions by work locations that when an employee is on an external TWP assignment (which is defined as an employee performing transitional work outside of his/her regular work location on a temporary basis), there is no longer the requirement to manage the employee's attendance. In recognition of the reluctance and misconceptions, we consult with our client groups regularly and have also worked with both Operations and Service Delivery to develop workshops that will further clarify the attendance management program and roles and responsibilities. The first will be rolled out January 29, 2015. It is our belief this will assist in giving supervisory staff confidence in requesting relevant information. We will also explore other opportunities to communicate this information more broadly as well as ideas to further assist the work locations in managing TWP attendance.

The audit report suggests providing training information sessions on the attendance management process. As previously noted, training is provided to supervisory staff dealing with attendance issues. In order for work locations to better understand the attendance management process and how this process requires interaction between the supervisory and OHCM staff, the OHCM section has agreed to attend Attendance training sessions with the objective to provide clarification of their role as it relates to the At Work Program and attendance management.

Responsibility: Chief People Officer

Completion Date: To Be Determined

Status: Underway

Finding #3

Management Information System

Objective:	To ensure that information systems for managing employee attendance are sufficient to provide complete, accurate and timely management information.
Analysis:	Complete, accurate and current information is necessary to assist work location supervisory staff to identify and address attendance issues.
	The Attendance Management System (AMS) is used to provide information to those responsible for managing employee absenteeism. However, information may take two weeks to be updated. Information reports are not automated to identify unusual absence patterns or possible abuse of the rules, without the need for clerical report summarizations.
	Some work locations have had to develop their own in-house systems that are more suitable in meeting their information needs.
Recommendation:	Management should acquire the resources to obtain an attendance management information system to provide timely management reporting and enhance tracking of absence patterns and trends.

Management Response and Action Plan

The recommendation related to the At Work Program is to acquire an attendance management information system to provide timely management reports and enhance tracking of absence patterns and trends.

We do agree a more up-to-date system would enable more effective and efficient attendance management, and anticipate the current SAP project will provide an opportunity to review this recommendation to ascertain if it will be possible.

The TTC's current attendance management system provides a variety of management reports and absence tracking. Although the system does not reflect real-time absences and there is a two-week lag in updating the system, the work locations possess the ability to communicate with OHCM to obtain specific absence information related to an employee. While more time consuming, it does allow for the information required to manage attendance to be gleaned.

Responsibility: Chief People Officer

Completion Date: To Be Determined

Status: Underway

Summary of Recommendations, Management Responses and Action Plans

Finding #	Recommendation	Agree	Disagree	Management Response	Timeline for Implementation
1.	Management should ensure that: • work location supervisory staff responsible for managing attendance are trained and knowledgeable in the documentation requirements of the "At Work Program" • attendance documentation for employees transferred to a new work location is promptly forwarded to the new work location	Yes		Currently, the TTC offers to supervisory staff, managing the attendance of employees, several training sessions that are accessible through the Training Department's intranet site. There are pre-selected dates and times that employees can opt to attend. Alternatively, management have and continue to contact the Employee Relations section, Human Resources Department to request training on an adhoc basis for management staff. On an ongoing basis, we review documents sent to us from our various client groups and provide feedback to regarding content. Also, our documentation templates are reviewed from time to time, updated and distributed, as required. We will work with clients to ascertain if a mandatory refresher training every two years, to applicable employees, would be appropriate and manageable, as it is our opinion this would provide further opportunity to communicate changes to the program and support, with a view of improving attendance. With respect to ensuring attendance documentation for employees is transferred to a new work location promptly there are currently two processes in place.	November 2014

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				Notification of an employee transfer occurs via a system seniority transfer bid (SSTB) or via documentation sent from the Workforce Analyst – Transportation to management at the work location. It is the job responsibility of the Transportation Division's Office Services Clerk (Stenographer) to transfer an employee's file to the Manager of an employee's new work location, under confidential cover, in advance of a new board period. Accountability for ensuring this process occurs would be with Division Management. There is opportunity in this process, for management to communicate to the new work location employee names that are under final warning or memoranda of settlement. The transfer of maintenance employees' files are made when the successful bid notices are distributed to the various work locations. Management or a designated representative is required to review the notices and transfer the employee file to the new work location prior to the employee's transfer date. This process is similar to the SSTB for the transportation work locations. Again, there is opportunity for management to communicate to the new work location employee names that are under final warning or memoranda of settlement. As a part of SAP introduction, there will be occasion to review the entire issue of employee files. In the intervening period, the above mechanisms, provided they are followed, ought to allow opportunity for adequate information sharing. Additionally, the Transportation Divisions have implemented a database system that enables the access of employee information via electronic soft copy. Therefore, related employee documents and files are	

Finding #	Recommendation	Agree	Disagree	Management Response	Timeline for Implementation
				transferred electronically to new work locations on the Friday prior to an employee's transfer date.	
2.	Management should ensure effective internal communication by: • developing a standard communication protocol between the Human Resources Department and other TTC work locations areas outlining the type of information that can be shared between the areas • providing training information sessions on the attendance management process, including the roles and responsibilities of TTC employees and supervisory staff responsible for managing attendance	Yes		The audit report recommended developing a standard communication protocol between the Human Resources Department and other TTC work locations outlining the type of information that can be shared between the areas. Given the Employee Relations section restriction to employees' confidential medical information, the responsibility of providing advice and guidance related to absenteeism is shared between the Employee Relations section and the Occupational Health and Claims Management (OHCM) section, Human Resources Department. The OHCM section addresses managing disabilities, claims management, rehabilitation and re-employment initiatives. The OHCM section works with client groups to discuss and review employee absence related issues and job placements for employees with either temporary or permanent medical restrictions. The OHCM staff is receptive to accepting inquiries from work locations and respond accordingly. There are standard communication tools provided by the OHCM section as detailed below. • Fitness For Work reports that provide a return to work to regular duties following an absence that is greater than 10 days;	To Be Determined

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3.	Management should acquire the resources to obtain an attendance management information system to provide timely management reporting and enhance tracking of absence patterns and trends.	Yes		The recommendation related to the At Work Program is to acquire an attendance management information system to provide timely management reports and enhance tracking of absence patterns and trends.

We do agree a more up-to-date system would enable more effective and efficient attendance management, and anticipate the current SAP project will provide an opportunity to review this recommendation to ascertain if it will be possible.

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