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from the perspective of social cognitive theory
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DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR ESSAY
Presenteeism as a global phenomenon

Unraveling the psychosocial mechanisms from the perspective of social cognitive theory

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Abstract

Purpose – Presenteeism occurs when people are physically present in the workplace but are functionally absent (Cooper, 1996). With evidence from the developed West, researchers have argued that being excessively present may be even costlier than absenteeism to employers (Burton *et al.*, 2006; Hemp, 2004). However, research on presenteeism in the East is almost non-existent. With the strong Confucius cultural imperative for hard work, the prevailing pressure for working long hours, compounded with the lack of labor welfare protection at the national level and lack of resources at the organizational level in SMEs, the problem of presenteeism in the developing Asian societies may be exacerbated (cf. Bockerman and Laukkanen, 2010), making it a worthy subject for cross-cultural research and subsequent intervention. The purpose of this paper is to situate this problem in a global context, using the Chinese tradition as a cultural exemplar.

Design/methodology/approach – Furthermore, most of the existing studies on presenteeism have overlooked the underlying psychological process of such an act: why do people decide to work while sick? Thus, our second goal in this paper is to outline a conceptual framework that attempts to explain central, dynamic processes and mechanisms through which people ascribe meanings to the situation, make decisions to come to work when ill, and attempt to achieve performance outcomes.

Findings – In formulating this scheme, the authors drew primarily from Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory and tried to adapt, elaborate, and extend those aspects of the general theory that seemed most relevant to the basic personal experiences of presenteeism.

Originality/value – The authors have outlined a social cognitive conceptual framework, to facilitate theory integration in the field of presenteeism research. To systematically examine key mechanisms delineated in the overarching theoretical framework that accounts for the intricate relationships among self-regulation, presenteeism, and performance, the authors were able to bridge social cognitive psychological processes with organizational research on the global phenomenon of presenteeism. The thrust of using theoretical development to lead empirical investigation in this emerging field may also enable better managerial interventions to promote occupational health and employee development.

Keywords Presenteeism, Cultural context, Social cognitive theory

Paper type Conceptual paper

Presenteeism: a global phenomenon with a menace

The work environment has changed dramatically in the wake of the 2008-2009 global economic recession and the financial crisis, giving rise to an ever prevalent phenomenon dubbed "presenteeism." Presenteeism occurs when people are physically present in the

workplace but are functionally absent (Cooper, 1996). Presenteeism could be costly as researchers have found that when employees come to work sick, they often demonstrate lower levels of performance and productivity, feeling more depressed and exhausted (Robertson and Cooper, 2011). Thus in the long term, presenteeism may cause serious problems in employees' physical and mental health (Burton et al., 2006; Hemp, 2004).

Thus far research on presenteeism has been a theoretical (Johns, 2010), and most studies have approached it as merely an overt behavior (Aronsson et al., 2000; Johns, 2010, 2011), overlooking the underlying psychological process of such an act: why do people decide to work while sick? Our goal in this paper is to make a modest first effort at theory integration. In particular, we will outline a conceptual framework that attempts to explain central, dynamic processes and mechanisms through which people ascribe meanings to the situation, make decisions to come to work when ill, and attempt to achieve performance outcomes. In formulating this scheme, we drew primarily from Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory (SCT) in an attempt to adapt, elaborate, and extend those aspects of the general theory that seem most relevant to the basic personal experiences of presenteeism.

Though the significance of presenteeism as a fact of modern day work life has been established with large-scale surveys in the developed economies such as the Scandinavia countries (e.g. Aronsson et al., 2000; Demerouti et al., 2009), there is still no consensus on the exact definition and satisfactory measurement of presenteeism among researchers. Research of presenteeism in non-Western countries is almost non-existent. An academic survey using a national representative sample in Taiwan revealed a striking work week of 48.96 hours (Lu, 2011a, b), while the official figure puts it at a staggering monthly 185.60 hours and on a rising trend (Council of Labor Affairs, 2010). Taiwan is not alone, employees in East Asia on average work longer hours (Taiwan: 41.6; South Korea: 44.2; Japan: 35.4 hrs/wk) than do North Americans (USA: 33.9; Canada: 31.7 hrs/wk) and Europeans (Germany: 34.2; UK: 31.6 hrs/wk) (Directorate-General of Budget, 2012). A relevant question can thus be raised: Do employees in Asian countries commit more presenteeism than people in the West, probably compelled by the social norm of hard work? More importantly perhaps, does presenteeism compounded with long working hours bring more damage to the well-being of East Asian workers than their Western counterparts?

East Asian cultural values: the social sanction to work harder and longer

The Confucius culture which still has a strong hold on societies such as China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and Singapore, has traditionally embraced "hard work" as a virtue, and working long hours is a norm in the so-called "Confucius Circle" societies (Kanai, 2009; Lu, 2011a, b). In recent years, the widespread use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology), e.g., smart phones and on-line messaging, has helped to further create "invisible" working hours when employees are constantly bombarded with instructions and inquires sent through ICT by their employers outside of the official work time and even when employees take sick leaves.

Although what proportion of this long working hour in Asian countries has contributed to the act of presenteeism is unknown, it is reasonable to speculate that under the Confucius cultural imperative of hardwork and perseverance (Lu et al., 2011), employees may be more likely to report to work even when ill, compared to their Western counterparts. Furthermore, as loyalty and reciprocity (bao) are also highly valued virtues in Confucian culture (Lu et al., 2010), employees may push themselves to work when ill to present a good image ("face time"), thus avoiding social disapproval

and securing career prospects. This conjecture is partially confirmed in a recent study with a sample of 307 employees from diverse industries in Taiwan: 83 percent of workers committed "sickness presenteeism" at least once in the past six months (Lin and Lu, 2013).

Social pressure aside, is there any psychological gain for these diligent Asian employees who work 24/7 and through sickness? A recent qualitative study revealed that Taiwanese employees often view work as a means of maintaining and improving the living standards for their families, or as a way of fulfilling their duties and commitments to glorify the family name (Lu *et al.*, 2012). In other words, working long hours and working hard not only represent a deep-rooted cultural value but can also be instrumental in consolidating the value of family as a building block of society. Indeed, reporting to work while clearly ill may also serve a two-fold "pull and push" function: demonstrating deference to some highly cherished cultural virtues, i.e., hard work, loyalty; and securing instrumental gains, such as avoidance of salary loss in the short term, prospects of career advancement in the long term.

As elucidated above, we purport that presenteeism is as relevant a work phenomenon in Asia as in the West; we further expect that presenteeism in Asia may be higher than that in the West due to the additional cultural push (c.f. Bockerman and Laukkanen, 2010). Unfortunately, so far there has been no credible national survey on presenteeism in any Asian countries to compare the phenomenon against Western countries such as the UK (Robertson and Cooper, 2011) or the Scandinavian countries (Aronsson *et al.*, 2000; Demerouti *et al.*, 2009). However, as mentioned above, recently there have been emerging empirical studies conducted on Chinese workers. Using a two-item "Sickness presenteeism scale" (items listed in the Appendix) with a four-point rating scale, researchers reported the scale means of 2.76 and 2.48 for samples of Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese employees working in diverse industries, respectively (Lu *et al.*, 2014). Our latest survey with a large sample of 638 Taiwanese workers puts the scale mean at 2.56. With the average closer to "3" on the rating scale, Chinese employees committed sickness presenteeism between 2 and 5 times in the past six months. In a rare cultural comparative study, the same scale was used to assess sickness presenteeism among Taiwanese and British employees (Lu *et al.*, 2013a). The prevalence of presenteeism was found to be significantly higher among the Taiwanese workers (scale mean of 2.76 vs 2.41), who also suffered greater exhaustion and lower job satisfaction. Thus another purpose of this paper is to highlight the global relevance of presenteeism in the West as well as in the East by drawing upon some of our recent empirical work in a Chinese cultural context, as an exemplar for the wider Asian region deeply influenced by the (Chinese) Confucius cultural tradition.

Presenteeism: the concept and definition

Presenteeism is a relatively new concept for organizational scholars, although it has become an increasingly prevalent phenomenon in today's work world. A definitional consensus is still illusive. As critiqued by Johns (2012), while various definitions of presenteeism all refer to physical presence at work, many have conflated the cause and the effect. For instance, Cooper's (1996) original conception of presenteeism conflates the act of presenteeism (going to work when ill) with its consequences (no longer effective, or any resulting productivity loss). Taking a behavioral approach, separating the "cause" from the "effect" is a prerequisite to studying the phenomenon. In this paper, we focus on "sickness presenteeism," designating the phenomenon of people who despite complaints and ill health that should prompt rest and absence from work,

are still turning up at their jobs (Aronsson *et al.*, 2000). This operationalization of presenteeism as an act *per se* is consistent with the typical definition and focus of the emerging presenteeism literature in the social sciences (Johns, 2010).

However, the majority of the medical field does not take a behavioral view of presenteeism which separates behavior from its consequences, instead, it approaches presenteeism as "lost productive time" (e.g. Collins *et al.*, 2005; Turpin *et al.*, 2004). While the medical field has consistently defined a construct as lost productive time from being unwell, the impact of ill-health on productivity loss may have been exaggerated. Johns (2011) demonstrated that when health status is controlled for, psychosocial (e.g. neuroticism) and organizational factors (e.g. ease of replacement) could account for substantial variances in participants' responses to self-reported presenteeism-related productivity loss. That is, the commonly proclaimed estimates of productivity loss due to working when ill in the literature seem too high (e.g. Robertson and Cooper, 2011), since non-medical sources of variance appear to contaminate these estimates. This fact also highlights the need to broaden the narrow focus on health status to include psychosocial and organizational factors as possible antecedents of the act of presenteeism. Furthermore, the construct of presenteeism in a behavioral approach needs further theoretical development. Cooper's original definition (1996) and Aronsson *et al.*'s (2000) subsequent refinement have both clearly spelt out "what," but failed to explain "why." Most existing studies also overlooked the motivational dynamism that drives presenteeism as a behavioral manifestation. People may report to work when feeling unwell for very different reasons, as recently elucidated in the dual conception of approach/avoidance presenteeism motives (Lu *et al.*, 2013b; details later and items listed in the Appendix). However, more concerted work is needed to explore diverse motives for the act of presenteeism and their motivational roles in the unfolding of a psychological process.

Presenteeism and the consequences
Recent organizational studies have found presenteeism to be negatively related to employees' health (see Johns, 2010, 2011 for reviews). Although due caution needs to be exercised in interpreting cross-sectional data, emerging results from longitudinal studies seem to corroborate the "bad presenteeism" phenomenon. For instance, Demerouti *et al.* (2009) found in a sample of Dutch nurses, that presenteeism increased depersonalization (one aspect of burnout) over time, while emotional exhaustion (another aspect of burnout) had a reciprocal relationship with presenteeism. To explain this reciprocal relationship, the authors suggested that when employees experience exhaustion, they mobilize "compensation strategies," which ultimately increases their exhaustion. Although this longitudinal study is valuable in demonstrating the lasting negative effects of presenteeism on burnout, more evidence is clearly needed to extend such effects to a broader range of health indictors with more diverse occupational groups and cultural settings.

Adopting fixed effects modeling to analyze the longitudinal data collected with a two-wave panel sample of Taiwanese workers, Lu *et al.* (2013b) were able to rule out baseline effects of individual's health, work attitude, job performance, and behavioral tendency of committing the act of presenteeism. Consequently, presenteeism demonstrated a "net impact" across the board on all outcomes except job performance, including mental health, physical health, exhaustion, and job satisfaction. These findings were consistent with what have been found in previous studies conducted in Western societies (e.g. Aronsson *et al.*, 2000; Caverley *et al.*, 2007;

Hansen and Andersen, 2008; Elstad and Vabo, 2008), but with a stronger methodological thrust, and further extended Demerouti *et al.*'s (2009) findings to health and work outcomes. Thus, the possibility that relationships between presenteeism and physical health, mental health, exhaustion, and job satisfaction may be reciprocal, warrants further theoretical and empirical exploration.

The detrimental effects of presenteeism on health can be explained with the recovery theory (Meijman and Mulder, 1998). People need resources to gain a complete recovery from attending to work while ill, including time to rest and detachment from their jobs. Prolonged presenteeism might trigger a downward spiral of worsening health conditions and even stronger pressure to commit presenteeism in the long term. In other words, if employees go to work in spite of physical or psychological morbidity or discomfort, depriving themselves of recovery opportunities, they might suffer more from the accumulating fatigue. Johns (2011) found that presenteeism was negatively associated with overall health. Bergström *et al.* (2009) have also found that presenteeism was a significant risk factor for future sick leaves of more than 30 days, indicative of serious health problems, in two large samples. Continuously attending to work while sick might also cause a piling up of workload due to reduced efficiency, which subsequently increases the likelihood of burnout (Demerouti *et al.*, 2009; Lu *et al.*, 2013b) and diminishing satisfaction (Lu *et al.*, 2013a, b). This reasoning is also consistent with the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which states that demanding characteristics of work result in loss, because they draw on people's resources. When losses occur, people apply resource conservation strategies by investing resources available to them in order to adapt successfully. Therefore, we argue that not only is working while ill demanding, but also presenteeism does not allow for the replenishment of resources needed to overcome the illness state. Overtime, the apparent act of diligence and commitment (sickness presenteeism) turns into a killer for job satisfaction as well as overall well-being. As noted by Baker-McClearn *et al.* (2010) employees who had experienced frequent presenteeism had a tendency to describe their jobs as being stressful and unsatisfying. Attending to work while ill may also hinder the individual's performance due to suboptimal physical/psychological conditions. Economists have attempted to estimate productivity loss with large-scale surveys of employees by quantifying presenteeism into work hours and monetary equivalent (Burton *et al.*, 1999; Levin-Epstein, 2005). However, using a well-established multiple-item measure of job performance, including both task and contextual performance, Lu *et al.* (2013a) failed to find a lasting negative impact of presenteeism on job performance two months later. One possible reason for the absence of a significant long-term impact on performance may be the opportunity of recovering and availability of resources to the individual. When Dew *et al.* (2005) interviewed nurses in focus groups about their experiences of presenteeism, some nurses used a metaphor of "sanctuary" and described their work teams as "family." Those nurses were highly engaged in their jobs and with the help of their "family," they worked through mild sickness, and eventually felt better or ignored discomfort altogether.

Mirroring the protective effect of peer support, Lu *et al.* (2013a) found that supervisory support too had a pan-cultural buffering effect on the relationship between presenteeism and exhaustion for both the Chinese and British employees. A few existing Western studies that examined the role of supervisory support in presenteeism have all viewed it as an antecedent to the act. For instance, Caverley *et al.* (2007) found that supervisory support was related to presenteeism. In a qualitative study in the UK, Baker-McClearn *et al.* (2010) discovered that supervisory

support was pivotal for employees deciding not to come to work when ill. In the West, an understanding supervisor presumably relieves subordinates from fear of leaving a bad impression when taking sick leaves, thus there is no need to use presenteeism as either a career-protecting or a career-promoting tactic. However, factors involved in an employee's decision to turn up to work while ill may be very different for in a Chinese context. As the Chinese culture places much emphasis on hard work and perseverance, even with a sympathetic direct supervisor, employees may still push themselves to work to present a good image to a wider audience, including co-workers, managers of higher levels, and even customers. As such, corroborating what was revealed in Lu *et al.*'s (2013b) study on motivation, sickness presenteeism may be used as either a career-protecting or a career-promoting tactic in the Chinese work context. It is also possible that an understanding supervisor would instill the desire to repay (*bao* as a Chinese virtue) which drives employees to come to work despite illness, as a sign of loyalty.

Models proposed/applied in the existing presenteeism research
As observed by Johns (2010), research on presenteeism has been markedly atheoretical. He went on to propose a dynamic model of presenteeism and absenteeism, construing "presenteeism" and "absenteeism" as two possible deviations from "fully engaged attendance" when a "health event" occurs. Both the "context" (e.g. job demands, job security) and "person" (e.g. work attitudes, personality) factors are assumed to influence the choice of either "presenteeism" or "absenteeism." Johns' flow-chart decision model is by far the most comprehensive account of the act of presenteeism, incorporating verified and assumed personal and organizational contextual factors in the emerging organizational research on the topic. However, without a fundamental theoretical stance to explain the mechanisms linking all the constructs in the model, the health event, personal, and organizational contextual factors are merely treated as antecedents of presenteeism/absenteeism. In other words, the model is a checklist of factors to consider when making a decision to not/come to work when ill, not a theory to explain why/how the decision is made. As such, this model has not inspired much empirical research since.

Other researchers have offered "segmental" models of presenteeism. For instance, Demerouti *et al.* (2009) applied the Job Demand-Resources Model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) in their longitudinal study of Dutch nurses. The JD-R model delineates the dual underlying psychological processes in work contexts, namely, the health impairment process and the motivational process (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Bakker *et al.*, 2003; Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). On the one hand, job demands consume individual resources to meet those requirements which might result in employees' mental and physical deterioration, thus setting in an "impairment process." On the other hand, job resources reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, or stimulate personal growth, learning, and development, thus setting in a "motivational process." The JD-R model was also applied in the Taiwan-Britain cross-cultural study on the buffering effect of supervisory support in sickness presenteeism (Lu *et al.*, 2013a). Though useful in explaining roles of work-related demands and resources in the presenteeism context, the JD-R model lacks the ability to account for individual differences as personal resources are only recently included in the research (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008; Van den Heuvel *et al.*, 2010; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007). In other words, the JD-R model does not have the social cognitive thrust needed to explain the "why and how" in the presenteeism context.

Finally, the majority of existing research in presenteeism has been conducted in public health and epidemiology fields with a focus on the association between presenteeism and health consequences. The detrimental effects of presenteeism on health have been explicitly or implicitly explained with the recovery model (Meijman and Mulder, 1998). As reviewed earlier, the central thesis is that if employees go to work in spite of physical or psychological morbidity or discomfort, depriving themselves of recovery opportunities, they might suffer more from the accumulating tiredness and fatigue. As such, the recovery model has often been used to account for the detrimental effects of presenteeism on well-being and loss productivity (see review by Johns, 2011), namely, the presenteeism-strain linkage. However, this model still cannot answer the "why and how" question of psychological mechanisms.

Theorizing presenteeism: filling gaps using a social cognitive perspective
Social cognitive assumptions and mechanisms of presenteeism
Building on the growing literature of presenteeism, we anchor the basic model within SCT that emphasizes the role of self-referent thinking in guiding human motivation and behavior. We view SCT as providing a useful framework for encompassing diverse influences upon the act of presenteeism. Moreover, the SCT has been applied to a wide array of psychosocial domains (Bandura, 1986, 1997, 2001), thus providing an extensive knowledge base from which occupational health-relevant hypotheses and interventions may be derived.

In this section, we will provide a brief overview of the central aspects of SCT that hold potential for explaining presenteeism behavior. In particular, we note the building block of the complex model of triadic reciprocal causality. We also highlight several personal psychological mechanisms – self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals – that may be used to form the basic model of presenteeism.

Model of triadic reciprocal causality
The basic tenet of SCT is that behavior is controlled by the person through the cognitive processes, and by the environment through external social situations. Specifically, to recognize the mutual, interacting influences between the persons and their behavior and environments, Bandura (1986) advocated the triadic reciprocal determinism among: personal attributes, such as internal cognitive and affective states and physical attributes; external environment factors; and overt behavior (as distinct from internal and physical qualities of the person). In this scheme, external environmental factors, personal attributes, and overt behavior all operate as interlocking mechanisms to affect one another bidirectionally. In other words, we need to take into consideration all three broad range of influencing factors, as well as their mutual, dynamic interrelations to fully understand presenteeism.

While most research acknowledges that presenteeism is jointly determined by people and their environment, they generally examine those influences separately. For example, Aronsson and Gustafsson (2005) found that difficulties in staff replacement, time pressure, insufficient work resources, and poor personal financial situation had impact on sickness presenteeism. Johns (2011) also found that presenteeism days was positively associated with task significance, ease of replacement, and negatively associated with neuroticism, equity, job security, internal health locus of control, and the perceived legitimacy of absence. Other researchers went further to assume that behavioral results from the interaction of person and environment (e.g. Johns, 2010;

Lu *et al.*, 2013b) yield a partially bidirectional account of interaction (cf. Bandura, 1986). That is, behavior is considered as the by-product of P-E transaction, rather than a co-determinant of this transaction. To truly represent the triadic reciprocal causality, behavior must not be divested of its interactive role. Such a representation can only be modeled with longitudinal data with personal attributes, environment factors, and behavior repeatedly measured over time.

Socio cognitive mechanisms
In its analysis of the personal determinants within the triadic causal system, SCT highlights a variety of cognitive, vicarious, self-regulatory, and self-reflective processes (Bandura, 1986). We will emphasize three social cognitive mechanisms that seem particularly relevant to the act of presenteeism: self-efficacy beliefs; outcome expectations; and goal representations.

Self-efficacy
Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as the extent to which people believe they can perform a behavior to gain particular desired outcomes. These beliefs constitute the most central and pervasive mechanism of personal agency (Bandura, 2001). In particular, self-efficacy beliefs are postulated as helping to determine one's choice of activities and environment, as well as one's effort expenditure, persistence, thought patterns, and emotional reactions when confronted with obstacles. The SCT advocates that individuals tend to undertake behaviors that they believe will result in a "better" outcome. Defined as the belief in one's competence to cope with a broad range of stressful or challenging demands, general self-efficacy thus is a very important factor in shaping the meaning that people ascribe to situations (Bandura, 1997).

Introduced into the presenteeism literature by Lu and her associates (2014), self-efficacy was found to relate to the approach motives for committing the act of presenteeism. Approach motives refer to the desire to confront the discomfort of illness in order to abide by one's work values and beliefs of achievement and loyalty to the profession and interested parties. Consiglio *et al.* (2013) also examined the role of self-efficacy in shaping the meaning that people ascribe to situations. They found that job demands and job resources partially mediated the relationship between self-efficacy and burnout, which predicted subsequent sickness presenteeism. It is imperative to construe self-efficacy as a dynamic set of self-beliefs that are specific to particular performance domains to unravel its interactive role with other person, behavior, and contextual factors in the presenteeism processes.

Outcome expectations
Another important component in the SCT is personal beliefs about probable response outcomes, termed outcome expectations. Whereas self-efficacy beliefs are concerned with one's response capabilities (i.e. "can I do this?"), outcome expectations involve the imagined consequences of performing particular behaviors ("if I do this, what will happen?"). SCT suggests that "people act on their judgments on what they can do, as well as on their beliefs about the likely effects of various actions" (Bandura, 1986, p. 231). Bandura (1986) distinguished between several classes of outcome expectations, such as the anticipation of physical (e.g. monetary), social (e.g. approval), and self-evaluative (e.g. self-satisfaction) outcomes, that may affect the act of presenteeism.

When the term "presenteeism" was initially introduced, it is implied that workers commit this act largely because of some macro-level economic factors such as

recession, downsizing, merger, and acquisition (Cooper, 1996). In other words, job insecurity (fear of losing jobs) and lack of job replacement are among the driving forces for the act of presenteeism. Subsequent research has established that certain firm-level work contexts, personal circumstances, and personality traits are correlates of presenteeism (e.g. Aronsson and Gustafsson, 2005; Johns, 2011; Löve *et al.*, 2010). However, the personal account of "why" still needs to be systematically explored, namely, what consequences do people expect for not/coming to work when ill.

To begin to understand people's perceptions of their own circumstances and the work environment, Baker-McClearn *et al.* (2010) conducted interviews in nine organizations and identified two triggering factors of the presenteeism act, which they termed "personal motivations" and "workplace pressures." Personal motivations include work values and beliefs such as "no one else can do the job", "loyalty to own professional image", and "obligation and commitment to colleagues, clients, and organizations". Workplace pressures refer to the organization's attendance policy, management style, and workplace culture. Building on their work, Lu *et al.* (2013b) delineated two distinct underlying motives: approach and avoidance motives. Some employees might choose to attend work while sick because they believe that they should overcome the discomfort to be loyal to their jobs, coworkers, and customers (approach motives); while others might force themselves to work because of the fear of financial loss or the backlash of social disapproval (avoidance motives). The above researchers conceptualized the approach/avoidance motives and verified their phenomenological validity with qualitative interview data, open-ended question responses, and EFA results. This motivational dichotomy roughly corresponds to Baker-McClearn *et al.*'s (2010) categorization of personal motivations/workplace pressures, but is more comprehensive in scope. This first time attempt to conceptualize and measure the motives for presenteeism and to relate them to personality predispositions (self-efficacy and neuroticism) is useful to map out the different psychological mechanisms that trigger the same overt behavioral manifestations of presenteeism. Though the approach/avoidance motives may be related to people's perception of possible behavioral consequences, we still need to understand the role of outcome expectations in relation to self-efficacy beliefs (e.g. are they differentially potent?) in employees' decision to commit the act of presenteeism.

Goals
SCT holds that goals play an important role in the self-regulation of behavior. While events shape people, it is the choices people make that define them. Central to the concept of personal agency, by setting goals, people help to organize and guide their behavior, to sustain their efforts in the absence of external reinforcement even through extreme hardship, and to increase the likelihood that desired outcomes will be attained.

A goal may be defined as the determination to engage in a particular activity or to effect a particular future outcome (Bandura, 1986). Goals operate principally through people's capacity to symbolically represent desired future outcomes (i.e. to exercise forethought) and to react self-evaluatively to their own behavior based on internal standards for performance. Goals achieve their motivating quality by linking self-satisfaction to goal fulfillment and to the enactment of behavior that meets internally set standards. SCT thus posits reciprocal relations among self-efficacy, outcomes expectations, and goal systems (Bandura, 1986).

Goals are ostensibly absent in the existing research on presenteeism. Johns (2010) included "work attitudes" in his list of "person factors," but did not elaborate on the

effecting mechanism. Hansen and Andersen (2008) did find that over-commitment to work is a personal state that can lead to higher levels of sickness presenteeism, hinting at the critical role of personal goals (i.e. work commitment). The achievement goal theory, a SCT of motivation is a useful conceptual framework to explain differences in people's achievement motivation and success (Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1984). Two primary reasons for people's engagement in achievement behaviors were identified: mastery goals aim to develop one's competence and performance goals seek to demonstrate one's competence by outperforming peers. While mastery goals have been theorized and confirmed to produce favorable effects on outcomes, performance goals have exhibited a less consistent pattern of results (Senko *et al.*, 2011). It is possible to deduce that people with mastery goals seek out challenging situations at work as a means to growth and self-fulfillment while people with performance goals avoid all possibilities of being unfavorably judged. It thus follows that mastery goals encourage people to commit presenteeism to prove personal strength whereas performance goals compel people to commit presenteeism to avoid personal failure and social disapproval. The intricate interplays among self-efficacy beliefs, outcomes expectations, and goals deserve more research attention, and may hold the key to understand the complex self-regulation mechanisms in the practice of human agency.

Extending SCT to presenteeism
Based on reviews of the emerging literature (Johns, 2010; Lin and Lu, 2013), we feel that devising an approach to presenteeism derived from SCT can make a valuable contribution to the field. Although several researchers made passing reference to SCT and borrowed the self-efficacy construct in their studies on presenteeism (e.g. Consiglio *et al.*, 2013; Lu *et al.*, 2014), other important aspects of SCT should be incorporated and specific theoretical mechanisms should be highlighted. We will outline a conceptual framework that incorporates several personal and environmental variables that have been dealt with to varying degrees in the existing literature. We focus on the core of the framework, namely, the sociocognitive mechanisms that can exert important influences on the act of presenteeism. The directional arrows in the framework represent what we believe are predominant causal pathways. However, to remain faithful to SCT's triadic, reciprocal view of causation, we acknowledge that: over time, the major theoretical elements (person, behavior, context) will tend to influence one another bidirectionally; and at any given point in time (or for particular individuals over time), certain variables will carry differential causal weight.

Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesized sociocognitive determinants of presenteeism and the manner in which presenteeism promotes performance attainment. Over the course of work life, people's environments expose them to a wide array of work activities of potential efficacious relevance. They also observe others perform various work tasks. Not only are they exposed (directly and vicariously) to diverse activities but they are also differentially reinforced for exhibiting certain work behaviors from among those that are possible (e.g. presenteeism vs absence), and for achieving satisfactory performance in chosen behavior (e.g. completing tasks vs defaulting on commitments). Through repeated activity engagement, modeling, and feedback from important others, people refine their skills, develop personal performance standards, form a sense of efficacy in particular tasks, and acquire certain expectations about the outcomes of their performance.

These perceptions of self-efficacy and outcome expectations figure prominently in intentions and goals of work involvement (see paths 1 and 2 in Figure 1). Specifically, people form enduring intentions and goal systems in alignment with their efficacious beliefs

Figure 1.
A social cognitive
framework of
presenteeism
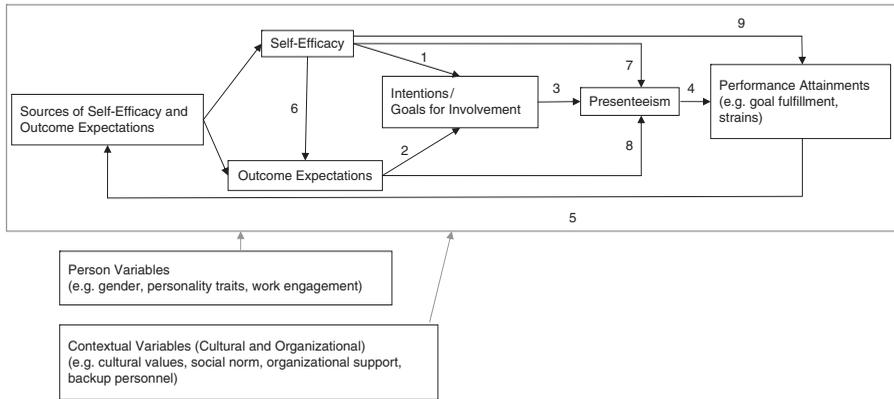
and through which they anticipate positive outcomes (cf. Bandura, 1986, 2001). We posit
that these intentions and goal systems lead to the act of presenteeism (path 3), which in turn
produces particular performance attainments (path 4). Successes or failures of performance
then result in the revision of self-efficacy and outcome expectancy estimates (path 5).

In the course of intention formation or goal setting, it is likely that outcome
expectations will partly be determined by self-efficacy (path 6), since people presumably
expect to achieve desirable outcomes in activities at which they view themselves to
be efficacious (Bandura, 1986). It is also important to note that self-efficacy percepts, as
well as outcome expectations, are assumed to exert direct effects on the act of
presenteeism (paths 7 and 8, respectively). Because of their role in helping people to
interpret, organize, and apply their skills, self-efficacy beliefs are also seen as contributing
directly to people's performance accomplishments (e.g. successes or failures; path 9).

We believe that this process repeats itself continuously over the span of work life.
As stated earlier, person (e.g. gender, personality traits, work engagement) and
contextual (e.g. support system, social norms, replacement arrangement) variables may
impact upon this process as a whole. The lists of these variables are not exhaustive
given the dearth of empirical research in the field.

Conclusions and discussion
In summary, existing research on presenteeism has been a theoretical (Johns, 2010).
While the majority of the studies were conducted from a medical/health perspective, the
emerging organizational studies overlooked the underlying psychological process of
such an act: why do people decide to work while sick? To fill this gap and to facilitate
theory integration, we have outlined a social cognitive conceptual framework as shown in
Figure 1. Researchers can now focus on the main nexus of "self-regulation – presenteeism
– performance attainment," to unravel the central, dynamic processes and mechanisms
through which people ascribe meanings to the situation, make decisions to come to work
when ill, and attempt to achieve performance outcomes. To systematically examine key
mechanisms delineated in the overarching theoretical framework that accounts for the
intricate relationships among self-regulation, presenteeism, and performance, we were
able to bridge social cognitive psychological processes with organizational research on
the global phenomenon of presenteeism. The thrust of using theoretical development to
lead empirical investigation in this emerging field may also enable better managerial
interventions to promote occupational health and employee development.

Aside from the theoretical contribution of the model, it also has relevance in a cross-cultural and international context. In the "contextual variables (cultural and organizational)" box in Figure 1, we have listed both factors related to the work situation and the broader societal environment. While almost all existing research focusses on work contextual variables such as supervisory support and organizational policy, we believe that factors pertaining to the broader societal environment such as cultural values and labor laws, should be systematically explored in cross-cultural comparisons. For example, most Asian businesses are family-run small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which operate with very lean resources, financial, and human. In effect, with increasing global competition and the constant concern to reduce cost, only a very few large companies have provided benefits such as paid leaves and flexible working-time arrangements (Goetzel *et al.*, 2004). Most employees in SMEs are discouraged from taking even legitimate annual leaves. It seems that the cultural imperative for hard work (i.e. perceived social norm of diligence), the prevailing pressure for working long hours, and the lack of labor welfare protection all conspire to exacerbate the problem of presenteeism in economically developing societies such as Taiwan. As such, presenteeism merits cross-cultural research attention and subsequent intervention.

Specifically, a better understanding of presenteeism in the Asian context, can inform strategic management across borders. For example, for a British investor with a subsidiary in Taiwan, he/she should expect Taiwanese employees to adopt the "face time" and/or sickness presenteeism strategy to conform to the "hardworking" social norm while presenting a desirable social image. At the same time, the employer should understand that leniency in offering flexible work polices would be regarded as showing managerial "good will" which would inspire the *bao* mentality. Thus, a win-win strategy would be to introduce humane management practices such as paid sick leaves, rather than encouraging sickness presenteeism. At the broader society level, governments should seriously consider amendments to the labor law to forbid excessive invasion of employers into workers' personal time and space, or to force employers to compensate workers for these "invisible" working hours with reasonable overtime pay. In short, although the line between work and non-work is quite blurred in Asia, employers need to acknowledge and respect employees' paramount needs for and obligations to their family life. After all, "I love my work, but I love my family more" is still the essence of the cultural teaching in the Confucius Asia.

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Appendix

	Items
Behavioral frequency of sickness presenteeism	Have you experienced the following in the last six months?
	1. Although you feel sick, you still force yourself to go to work
	2. Although you have physical symptoms such as headache or backache, you still force yourself to go to work
Avoidance motive	When the above happened, you forced yourself to go to work because …
	1. I worried that I might lose job
	2. I worried that I might suffer economic loss
	3. I worried that my supervisor might think badly of me
	4. I worried that my colleagues might think badly of me
	5. I worried that I might burden my colleagues
Approach motive	1. I believed that I should persevere to go to work
	2. I believed that I should be loyal to the customers
	3. I believed that I should keep up with team schedule
	4. I believed that I should be loyal to my profession

Table AI.
Measures for the
frequency and
motives of
presenteeism

To follow Aronsson *et al.* (2000), we used four-point scales to measure both the behavioral frequency of and motivations for committing "sickness presenteeism." Details are as below:

Rating scale for sickness presenteeism: 1 = Never, 2 = Once, 3 = 2~5 times, 4 = More than 5 times.

Rating scale for motives of presenteeism: 1 = Not at all, 2 = Somewhat so, 3 = Fairly so, 4 = Very much so.

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