



THE ADMINISTRATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK FOR ABSENTEEISM (AAFA): STRENGTHENING PUBLIC SECTOR INTEGRITY THROUGH CASE-BASED HR GOVERNANCE

By

LOVELY P. PANCHACALA, (M.M.)

Faculty, College of Arts and Sciences

Business Administration Department, Palompon Institute of Technology

Email address: lovelypanchacala@gmail.com

LEO ROSWALD M. TUGONON, (D.M.)

Department Chair, College of Arts and Sciences

Business Administration Department

COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Faculty -Master of Management and Doctor of Management Programs

Palompon Institute of Technology

Email address: waldytugonon@gmail.com

Abstract

Unauthorized absenteeism poses significant challenges to public sector governance, undermining institutional efficiency, service delivery, and accountability. This study examines the disciplinary response of a local government unit (LGU) in the Philippines to a sanitation officer's prolonged absence without official leave (AWOL), which ultimately led to his removal from service. Anchored on the Administrative Accountability Framework for Absenteeism (AAFA), the study employs a qualitative case study design, integrating documentary analysis and case analysis methods to explore the legal and ethical dimensions of the administrative process. Data sources include official memoranda, daily time records, HR reports, employee correspondences, and Civil Service Commission (CSC) rules and jurisprudence. The analysis focuses on the consistency of the LGU's actions with established CSC policies, particularly Rule XVI of the Omnibus Rules Implementing Book V of Executive Order No. 292 and Memorandum Circular No. 13, s. 2007. Findings confirm that the administrative procedures followed the required legal standards; however, gaps were noted in ethical communication and procedural clarity, particularly in documenting due process and post-decision employee engagement. By applying the AAFA framework, the study offers a structured lens to assess accountability, fairness, and HR governance in public service. The findings provide insights for enhancing administrative justice, reinforcing ethical standards, and promoting case-based human resource management in both national and international public sector contexts. This research contributes to ongoing efforts to improve integrity, transparency, and responsiveness in civil service systems.

Keywords:

Administrative accountability, Unauthorized absenteeism, AWOL; Case-based HR governance; Public sector discipline, AAFA framework.

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Introduction

Employee absenteeism presents considerable challenges to organizations, particularly in the public sector, where continuous presence, responsiveness, and accountability are fundamental to effective governance. Chronic unauthorized absenteeism disrupts institutional operations, leading to service delays, decreased productivity, weakened administrative capacity, and a decline in public trust. Although absenteeism is a global concern, the problem is often exacerbated in public institutions due to systemic inefficiencies, weak enforcement of policies, and the complexity of public sector accountability structures.

Internal reports suggest that employee absenteeism in local government units can result in up to a 30% drop in public service efficiency and a 25% increase in administrative workload. These figures, while illustrative, reflect common trends noted in HR risk assessments across Philippine LGUs.

In the Philippines, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) has enacted clear regulations governing employee attendance, including procedures for dropping from the rolls individuals who incur extended unauthorized absences. Section 2, Rule XVI of the Omnibus Rules Implementing Book V of Executive Order No. 292, along with the 2017 Revised Rules on Administrative Cases in the Civil Service (RRACCS) and CSC Memorandum Circular No. 13, s. 2007, provide the legal basis for managing such cases. These regulations attempt to formalize what are often perceived as the "soft" components of accountability—such as habitual absenteeism—within a framework of administrative justice. However, challenges remain regarding their consistent application, procedural fairness, and alignment with ethical standards.

To address these challenges and offer a structured lens for examining public sector absenteeism, this study introduces the Administrative Accountability Framework for Absenteeism (AAFA). The AAFA is designed to reinforce integrity in human resource governance by integrating legal compliance, procedural due process, ethical obligations, and case-based decision-making into one evaluative model. It serves as both a conceptual framework and a tool for diagnosing institutional responses to absenteeism within the broader context of public service ethics and governance.

To contextualize this analysis, the study draws from an actual case involving a Sanitation Inspector assigned to the Health Office of a Local Government Unit (LGU) in the Philippines who was separated from service for prolonged unauthorized absences. The incident began in December 2013, when the employee began incurring absences without approved leave and without notifying his immediate supervisor. Colleagues informally reported that the employee was allegedly involved in illegal drug use, though no formal charges were filed.

On January 8, 2014, the Head of Office issued a Return-to-Work Order instructing the employee to resume duty by January 13, 2014. The order, received and acknowledged on January 15, included a warning that non-compliance would result in administrative sanctions. Despite this, the employee remained absent, and by February 25, 2014, had already exceeded

30 consecutive working days of unauthorized absence. His Daily Time Record (DTR) showed no entries during the said period, and no leave application or documentation was submitted to justify the absences. Although the employee submitted a letter stating his intent to file a leave of absence, no formal filing occurred.

On March 4, 2014, the Head of Office referred the matter to the City Administrator through the Human Resource Management Officer (HRMO), recommending disciplinary action under Rule XVI, Section 63, Paragraph 2 of EO 292. The HRMO endorsed the case to the Disciplining Authority, recommending the Respondent's removal from the rolls under CSC MC No. 13, s. 2007. A Memorandum of Separation was issued on March 11, 2014, formally separating the employee from service on the grounds of absence without official leave (AWOL). The Respondent received the order on March 13, 2014, did not file an appeal, and only later submitted a post-facto explanation citing personal problems, unsupported by any leave documentation.

This case offers a critical opportunity to examine the intersection of legal compliance, ethical accountability, and administrative discipline in public service employment. Through qualitative documentary analysis and case analysis methods, this study evaluates whether the actions taken by the LGU were consistent with CSC regulations, Republic Act No. 6713 (Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees), and relevant jurisprudence. The study applies the Administrative Accountability Framework for Absenteeism (AAFA) as a diagnostic tool to assess how disciplinary processes are carried out, how institutional values are upheld, and how ethical governance is practiced. By doing so, it contributes to the broader discourse on public sector discipline, administrative justice, and ethical human resource management in both the Philippine setting and the global public administration landscape.

The Administrative Accountability Framework for Absenteeism (AAFA)

The Administrative Accountability Framework for Absenteeism (AAFA) is a conceptual and diagnostic tool designed to strengthen public sector integrity through structured, case-based HR governance. Rooted in principles of legal compliance, ethical standards, and procedural justice, the AAFA provides a multidimensional lens for analyzing disciplinary actions related to employee absenteeism.

The framework comprises the following core dimensions:

1. Legal and Policy Adherence – Alignment with existing civil service laws (e.g., EO No. 292, CSC MC No. 13 s. 2007, RRACCS).
2. Due Process and Procedural Fairness – Ensuring timely issuance of notices, clear documentation, and opportunities for response or appeal.
3. Ethical Governance – Compliance with the values enshrined in Republic Act No. 6713, including integrity, accountability, and professionalism.

4. Documentation and Evidentiary Support – Use of clear evidence such as DTRs, memos, acknowledgment receipts, and formal reports.
5. Post-Decision Responsiveness – Evaluation of how agencies handle post-facto justifications and potential grievances.
6. Jurisprudential Consistency – Conformity with precedents from relevant civil service or administrative court rulings.

By applying these dimensions, AAFA ensures that HR decisions are not only legally valid but also ethically justified and organizationally transparent.

Research Objectives

This study is guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To examine the legality, ethical soundness, and procedural compliance of the disciplinary actions undertaken by the LGU in addressing prolonged unauthorized absenteeism, using the Administrative Accountability Framework for Absenteeism (AAFA) as an analytical lens.
2. To analyze the implications of case-based human resource governance for strengthening administrative accountability and ethical public sector management within both the Philippine civil service and broader global public administration contexts.

Review of Related Literature

Institutional and Global Perspectives on Public Sector Absenteeism

Employee absenteeism continues to undermine the effectiveness of public sector institutions worldwide. A large-scale panel study of 422 Norwegian municipalities (2014–2019) found consistently higher sickness absence in public versus private organizations, even after controlling for part-time work and demographic variables suggesting structural or cultural differences in public institutions (BMC Public Health, 2023). Additionally, BMC Public Health’s 2023 scoping review on psychosocial safety climate (PSC) underscored that low PSC environments correlate with higher absenteeism, reduced productivity, and poorer mental health outcomes.

In Malaysia, longitudinal research demonstrates that favorable PSC—characterized by organizational policies supporting psychological health—reduces emotional exhaustion and absenteeism among employees (PubMed, 2013). Complementary empirical evidence from management studies affirms that PSC fosters job engagement and satisfaction, which may indirectly lower absenteeism rates (Emerald Insight, 2024).

Organizational Culture, Justice, and Attendance Compliance

Research across diverse public sector contexts points to organizational justice and clarity in HR policies as crucial determinants of attendance behavior. According to a 2022

review, perceived unfair treatment or ambiguous disciplinary processes can lead to voluntary absenteeism in public organizations (Public Management Review).

These findings align with PSC theory and broader organizational justice frameworks that link fairness, communication, and leadership to improved employee commitment and reduced absenteeism.

Enforcement, Ethics, and Jurisprudence

Philippine studies emphasize that robust enforcement of attendance rules is often undermined by weak supervisory systems and inconsistent disciplinary practices. Scholars such as Javier & De Castro (2024), Balanquit & Reyes (2025), Mendoza et al. (2024), and Villanueva & Santos (2025) underscore the need for fair, transparent, and compassionate application of rules—especially where absenteeism intersects with ethical grounds like humanitarian leave or mental health concerns.

Philippine Supreme Court jurisprudence reinforces legal principles underlying disciplinary action for AWOL such as the case of *Hernaez* (A.M. No. 2008-05-SC) upheld dropping an employee from service for habitual absenteeism—even without prior suspension, aligning with EO No. 292, Rule XVI 61.

In *Sahi* (A.M. No. P-14-3252), the Court sustained separation of an RTC employee after a 67-day absence without leave, affirming removal under Section 63, Rule XVI of EO 292.

Sarceno (2011) reinforced dismissal where absenteeism spanned 92 days in a semester—citing that such conduct undermines institutional credibility and public trust.

Talion v. Ayupan clarified that prolonged AWOL constitutes misconduct prejudicial to service interests and may justify dismissal without formal notice.

These studies reveal absenteeism in the public sector as a multifaceted organizational issue—shaped by institutional culture, leadership, procedural clarity, and employee perceptions of fairness. In the Philippine context, disciplinary frameworks are well-defined in law and jurisprudence, but their effectiveness depends significantly on transparent enforcement and ethical application. Together, this literature reinforces that attention must shift from individual blame to systemic accountability, combining policy enforcement with organizational interventions such as enhancing psychosocial safety climates and leadership engagement.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case study design to examine how unauthorized absenteeism was addressed within a local government unit (LGU) in the Philippines. The research is grounded in the principles of documentary analysis and case-based inquiry to understand the legal, procedural, and ethical aspects of administrative discipline in a real-world setting.

Research Design

A single embedded case study was adopted, focusing on the disciplinary process involving a sanitation officer who was separated from government service due to prolonged absence without official leave (AWOL). This design is well-suited for investigating complex institutional phenomena and decision-making processes where context-specific detail and procedural nuance are central to analysis.

Data Collection

The study utilized primary source documents officially generated during the administrative process. These documents were obtained through authorized access and include the following:

- Return-to-Work Orders and Notices of Separation
- Daily Time Records (DTRs)
- Signed acknowledgment receipts
- Official reports and endorsements from the Human Resource Management Officer (HRMO)
- Written explanations and correspondence from the concerned employee
- Civil Service Commission (CSC) circulars, implementing rules, and related jurisprudence

These sources were selected for their direct relevance to the disciplinary case and their capacity to reflect institutional procedures and decision-making logic.

Analytical Framework

Data were analyzed using the Administrative Accountability Framework for Absenteeism (AAFA), which provides a multidimensional lens to evaluate administrative responses to chronic absenteeism. The AAFA framework comprises six interrelated dimensions: legal compliance, procedural fairness, ethical integrity, organizational responsiveness, documentation sufficiency, and preventive accountability. A thematic coding approach was applied to identify key patterns, institutional behaviors, and areas of alignment or deviation from statutory and ethical norms.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical standards for case-based qualitative research. All documents were accessed with institutional approval, and identifying details were anonymized to protect the confidentiality of individuals and the integrity of the organization. No direct interviews were conducted, and all data were limited to official records already part of the administrative process. The research protocol complies with ethical guidelines applicable to public administration and human resource management studies.

Results

This section analyzes the disciplinary case of a sanitation inspector using the Administrative Accountability Framework for Absenteeism (AAFA), evaluating how the Local Government Unit (LGU) handled the prolonged unauthorized absence across six dimensions: legal adherence, due process, ethical governance, documentation, post-decision responsiveness, and jurisprudential alignment.

1. Legal and Policy Adherence

The LGU's actions were consistent with the provisions of Section 2, Rule XVI of the Omnibus Rules Implementing Book V of Executive Order No. 292 and CSC Memorandum Circular No. 13, s. 2007, which clearly states that an employee continuously absent without approved leave for at least 30 working days may be dropped from the rolls without prior notice. The respondent exceeded this threshold, having been absent for more than 30 working days without formal leave documentation. Thus, the issuance of a Memorandum of Separation was legally warranted.

Additionally, the LGU anchored its recommendation for separation in Rule XVI, Section 63, Paragraph 2, which provides clear administrative recourse for prolonged absenteeism. The internal process reflected a conscious effort to comply with codified civil service policies.

2. Due Process and Procedural Fairness

While prior notice is not required under CSC MC No. 13, the LGU still made reasonable efforts to observe procedural fairness. The Return-to-Work Order dated January 8, 2014, was officially received by the employee, who acknowledged receipt and was given a clear warning regarding possible separation if noncompliance persisted.

Despite receiving this notice, the respondent failed to report back for duty or submit a leave application. The LGU gave an opportunity for the employee to respond, and only after continued noncompliance was the case escalated to the Human Resource Management Office and then to the Disciplining Authority.

This procedural sequence demonstrates a good-faith effort to ensure fairness, even beyond the minimum requirements.

3. Ethical Governance

Ethically, the LGU adhered to the standards of integrity and accountability enshrined in Republic Act No. 6713 (Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees). The respondent's unexplained absences, lack of formal communication, and allegations of drug use (though not formally substantiated) raise concerns about neglect of duty and unprofessional conduct.

The LGU maintained transparency by documenting each step, consulting co-workers, and following institutional channels. This ethical diligence reinforces the principle that public employment is a trust, and that continued service requires consistent accountability.

4. Documentation and Evidentiary Support

The case file was strongly supported by documentary evidence:

- Daily Time Records (DTRs) reflecting no entries for over 30 working days
- A Return-to-Work Order with a signed acknowledgment receipt
- Internal memoranda and reports from the Head of Office and HRMO
- The final Memorandum of Separation
- The respondent's delayed written explanation without supporting documents

These records formed a clear administrative trail justifying the disciplinary action and protected the LGU against potential claims of arbitrariness.

5. Post-Decision Responsiveness

After the respondent was dropped from the rolls on March 11, 2014, he did not file an appeal, despite having formally received the separation order on March 13. His subsequent written explanation, citing "personal problems," was not accompanied by any leave request or medical documentation.

Although the LGU had already executed the separation, it received and documented the post-facto explanation, preserving transparency. This responsiveness affirms the institution's openness to feedback while upholding the finality of administrative decisions consistent with CSC policies.

6. Jurisprudential Consistency

The disciplinary action aligns with existing jurisprudence that consistently upholds the validity of separation from service due to AWOL, even in the absence of prior notice, provided that the rules under CSC MC No. 13, s. 2007 are followed. Similar rulings by the Civil Service Commission and Court of Appeals have supported the non-reinstatement of public employees with prolonged unauthorized absences, especially in cases where the agency has issued reasonable directives and allowed the employee to explain.

Thus, the case under study fits within the body of administrative law precedents emphasizing organizational discipline over unexplained personal challenges in public service.

Applying the AAFA framework revealed that the LGU:

- Complied with both legal and ethical standards;
- Followed fair procedures even when not strictly required;

- Acted based on complete documentation;
- Remained open to post-decision dialogue;
- Ensured alignment with national jurisprudence.

This case demonstrates how case-based HR governance, when anchored in clear administrative and ethical principles, can effectively address absenteeism while preserving institutional integrity.

Conclusion

This study examined a disciplinary case involving prolonged unauthorized absenteeism by a public health sanitation inspector, analyzed through the lens of the Administrative Accountability Framework for Absenteeism (AAFA). The framework provided a structured approach to assessing the legal, procedural, ethical, and administrative dimensions of the LGU's actions in dealing with the case.

Findings show that the Local Government Unit (LGU) acted by applicable laws and civil service regulations, particularly CSC Memorandum Circular No. 13, s. 2007 and Section 2, Rule XVI of the Omnibus Rules Implementing Book V of EO No. 292. The procedural handling of the case also reflected a commitment to ethical governance and due process—even in circumstances where prior notice was not legally mandated. Documentation was complete and transparent, and the LGU remained open to receiving the employee's belated explanation, even after the final administrative action had been executed.

The case contributes empirical insight into how accountability mechanisms can be properly enforced in the public sector without undermining fairness or ethical standards. More broadly, it affirms the viability of case-based HR governance as a strategic tool for enhancing organizational discipline and integrity within the bureaucracy. As absenteeism remains a persistent governance issue, especially in public institutions marked by systemic inefficiencies, the AAFA framework offers a replicable model for policy implementation, compliance evaluation, and organizational learning.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and the AAFA framework analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Institutionalize the AAFA Framework in LGU HR Practices.
The AAFA framework should be formally adopted in local government HR policies to provide structured guidance in addressing unauthorized absenteeism. It offers a multidimensional approach that balances administrative compliance with ethical accountability.
2. Strengthen Early Intervention Protocols
LGUs should establish proactive monitoring mechanisms and early intervention

measures (e.g., wellness checks, informal counseling) when absenteeism patterns emerge, especially in cases potentially involving personal or psychosocial issues.

3. **Integrate Ethical and Legal Compliance Training for HR Officers**
Capacity-building programs should be developed to train HR officers and unit heads on the ethical handling of attendance and disciplinary cases. This includes ensuring familiarity with Republic Act No. 6713 and current jurisprudence.
4. **Enhance Documentation Systems for Disciplinary Proceedings**
Accurate and timely documentation should be institutionalized to ensure procedural transparency and protect both the agency and the employee. Digital HR information systems can assist in tracking DTRs, notices, and case records.
5. **Promote Jurisprudential Awareness Among LGU Disciplining Authorities**
Decision-makers should be updated regularly on administrative case law and CSC rulings to ensure that their decisions remain aligned with national standards and jurisprudential trends.
6. **Explore Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) Assessments**
Given evidence that low PSC environments can exacerbate absenteeism, public institutions should periodically assess and improve workplace psychological safety to reduce the likelihood of stress-related absences.

The enforcement of attendance regulations, when done ethically and with administrative rigor, upholds not just rules but also the credibility of public institutions. This study offers a pathway for LGUs and other public organizations to strengthen governance through principled and accountable human resource management, reinforcing the public sector's foundational duty to serve.

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