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## IMPACT OF DISCIPLINARY MEASURES ON WORKERS' PERFORMANCE; A STUDY OF SELECTED FIRMS IN PORT-HARCOURT METROPOLIS

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### ABSTRACT

*Maintaining discipline is one of the central activities that managers and supervisors have to exercise. Almost every experienced supervisor and manager had been faced with the necessity of dealing with ineffective employee at one time or the other during his or her career. One of the most difficult tasks of these supervisors and managers is the effective administration of negative disciplinary action. This paper is on the Impact of disciplinary measures on workers' performance; a Study of selected firms in Port Harcourt Metropolis. For the continuous existence of an organization, it is recommended that appropriate disciplinary actions be taken against employee who commits infraction likely to directly or indirectly affect the harmonious operation and existence of the organization.*

**KEYWORDS:** *disciplinary actions, welfare, employment, good discipline*

### INTRODUCTION

A broad interpretation of disciplinary measure would consider the words "disciplinary action" to mean any consideration of future behavior by the application of either rewards or penalties. This approach would include positive motivational activities, such as praise, increased incentives, pay rise, improved welfare, as well as negative motivational techniques such as reprimand (oral or written), fines or levy, disciplinary transfer, demotion and lay off or dismissal. According to Flippo (1984), both types of activities seek to condition an employee behavior in order to achieve good discipline in the organization. The more commonly accepted definition of the terms and the one to be used for the benefit of this research work, is that which sees disciplinary action(s) as it is confined to the application of penalties to unwanted behaviors, and this will lead to an inhibition of such undesired behavior. However, the majority of employees do adhere to organizational rules, politics and regulations, a minority still require the stimulus generated by penalties to conform. At such, discipline is a form of training that enforces

organizational rules. Discipline at work is the regulation of human activity to produce a controlled and effective performance. According to Milkovich and Boudreau (1997), it ranges from the guard's control of a rabble to the accomplishment of alone individual producing spectacular performance through self discipline in the control of their own talents and resources; from the threat or implementation of dismissal to the subtle persuasions of mentoring and counseling. Maintaining discipline is one of the central activities that managers and supervisors have to exercise. Almost every experienced supervisor and manager had been faced with the necessity of dealing with ineffective employee at one time or the other during his or her career. One of the most difficult tasks of these supervisors and managers is the effective administration of negative disciplinary action. This does not suggest that the problem is commonplace, rather as Anderson (1986), in a study of over 1,600 manufacturing employees discovered that the marginal employee is typically one of a small number of employees, who causes the most problem. The study suggested that, it is this small group, that the manager

must be worried about and not the majority of the employees. A manager's failure to identify and deal with this marginal employee may result in not only lowered performance on the part of the employee, but will also diminish motivation and effectiveness of the entire work group and this will in overall lead to low performance. At this point, we will consider the sources of supervisory and managerial authorities of disciplining workers. And what makes it effective. Each organization has a framework of organizational policy and rules, within which managers administer work rules and procedures and carry out disciplinary measures, and in extreme cases dismiss employees. Although there are series of legal rights; to protect employees against unfair dismissal of all management activities, discipline is one of the most culturally constrained, making any generic or international perspective difficult to discern. The burgeoning literature on international human resources management is silent on this topic because of the varied ways in which authority which the basics of discipline is derived in different countries and again this varies from one organization to another. If the different forms of discipline require a person of authority for them to be effective, then the question should be from where to managers/supervisors derives their authority to discipline? In the course of this research work, we understood that the major sources of authority for the manager or supervisor to discipline are (1) the law; that is organizational rules, regulation and policies and (2) Human predilection and conditioning.

The maintenance of organizational rules and regulations are conferred on managers and supervisors as agents of the employer, exercising these authorities that employers enjoy as parties to a contract of employment. The employer has a range of duties. The main duty is to pay the employee according to the terms of the contract agreed by both. The employer is also required to take reasonable care of the employee as in matters of health and safety, and to be reasonably co-operative with the employee. Employers are not normally obliged to provide work, but they can be so obliged if their failure to provide work jeopardizes the employee's income, currently or in the future. The employee part of the bargain is generally to obey reasonable [awful orders and rules and not to impede the employer's business. An accountant would not be obliged by the contract of employment knowingly to produce a set of false accounts. That is to say that in a normal circumstance, an employee is not obliged to discharge duties falling short or outside the terms of the contract. At such, the accountant would not be obliged to act as a personal driver or a chauffeur to the managing director unless there was some wording of the contract that explicitly allowed for that. Employees also have a legal duty not to allow their own interests

to compete will their duty to their employer. Therefore, most organizational policy supports and confirms a working relationship in which the employer has a legal right, working through the agency of managers and supervisors to exercise power and authority in relation to employees. This includes the power to terminate the contract of employment if dissatisfied. The present paper is the impact of the use of disciplinary measures on workers' performance; a study of selected firms in Port-Harcourt metropolis.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

This study sets out to examine the activities of managers/supervisors as regards the application of or the use of disciplinary actions and how it affects the performance of both the individual and the organization.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION**

To what extent does application of disciplinary measures affect workers performance?

### **HYPOTHESIS**

There is no significant relationship between applications of disciplinary measure an workers performance of selected firms import Harcourt metropolis.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study of discipline, its application and organizational performance can be considered within a variety of theoretical and conceptual frameworks such as learning and social learning theories. One overarching theoretical perspective underpinning discipline is that of learning theory. Within this approach, mechanisms of reinforcement (or reward) and punishment are central to learning and socialization (this includes organization). Learning theory suggests that the consequences of behavior strengthens or weakens behavior in the future: behaviors that are rewarded continue, while behaviors that are punished tend to be dropped out, Eisenberg and Valiente (2002). Punishment here is defined as the presentation of an aversive stimulus or the removal of a positive stimulus. According to principles of learning, punishment following a specific behavior is likely to lessen the likelihood of that behavior being repeated. Punishment can be an effective agent for behavioral change. However, in order for punishment to effectively suppress undesirable behavior permanently, it must be immediate and intensely administered after every transgression. Thus according to learning principles, punishment must be administered to ensure that it is a negative consequence for an undesirable behavior.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The significance/relevance of this work lies in its contribution to the existing literature on disciplinary problems and their impact on organizational

performance, which had been relatively inadequate in this part of the world, Operational Definitions

In a study of this nature, definitions of terms otherwise known as operational definition of terms are very necessary. This is because such explanations will narrow down our understanding of terms as it relates to the topic under research.

- **Disciplinary Action:** This could be referred to as correction, chastisement and sanctions imposed on an employee for exhibiting a negative or unacceptable behavior, especially in the context of that particular organization.
- **Performance:** An action or achievement considered in relation to how successful it is, that is the ability to operate efficiently.
- **Productivity:** This refers to efficiency especially in an industry/organization measured by comparing the amount produced with the time taken or the resources used to produce it.
- **Manager/Supervisor:** This term as used here mean any employee that plays the role of a boss, which is one who has some workers down the hierarchy that receives orders instructions from him/her.
- **Subordinate:** This refers to an employee no matter his/her position in the organization who reports to an officer higher than him/her in the organizational hierarchy.

### LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The geographical scope of this study is limited to firms in Port-Harcourt, River-State, while the central thrust will focus on the application of disciplinary measures as a tool to the maintenance and improvement on the organizations performance, using such organization as a unit of our analysis. This enables the research delineate disciplinary problems in the area. In the achievement of this research goal, some firms were selected within Port-Harcourt metropolis both private and public owned.

#### Limitation and delimitation:-

Firms were selected within the Port-Harcourt metropolis for this study. They are: Agip Oil Company, Airtel Nig Ltd. ABNL Nig Ltd. Dufil prima foods plc, Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), National Institute Agricultural Research Center (NIARC). This gave coverage and a representation of government owned enterprises and the organized private sector. The study was limited to employees of these organizations.

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A study of this nature would be incomplete without an insight into existing literature on the subject matter. Such a review is necessary to enable the researcher and others to achieve a better understanding

of the concepts, theories and problems therein. The importance of such understanding cannot be over-emphasized it will be rather difficult if not impossible to carry out a study if the fundamentals of the issue in question are not well grasped. The review of literature is expressed to provide appreciable conceptual framework for a study. It aims to review the critical points of current knowledge including substantive finding as well as theoretical and methodological contributions to a particular topic Hart (1998).

### The concept “Discipline”

The word “discipline” could mean many things or could be given different interpretation depending on the context in which the definition or meaning is sought In a broad sense, it mean orderliness, the opposite of confusion and that which forms a fundamental requirement for people. In the same vein organizational discipline would equally mean, that which forms a requirement for people working in that organization just as it is for every segment of the society. According to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (1995) and the Webster New Collegiate Dictionary, (1985) the word “Discipline” means:

- (a) Training that develops self-control, character or orderliness and efficiency.
- (b) The result of such training, self-control and orderly conduct.
- (c) A system of rules or methods as for the conduct of members or monastic order.
- (d) A subjection of rules, submissiveness to control. The most perfect that, has their passion in the best discipline.
- (e) Corrective, chastisement, punishment inflicted by way of correction and training.
- (f) Anything taught, branch of knowledge or learning.

### Disciplinary Problems in Organizations

Disciplinary problems have been known to exist in both private and public owned organization and society. Even great men of society like Henry Ford II have observed this when he wrote quote. “Loyalty to institutions and obedience to written and unwritten laws is no longer automatic Henry Ford (1970). He did not stop there, but gave reasons why managers should expect disciplinary problems. In his observation, in modern work organization there is unwillingness at work to buy old-fashioned kind of discipline the way there parents and grandparents did. Again there are new groups in the workforce that would rebel strongly when managers attempts to enforce discipline. More so, minorities in work organizations see traditional organizational discipline as being racist and against them. Even if it is imposed equally on all races and culture in the organization, women on their own tend to resist discipline especially when they see it as having any trace of sexism and because of the level of

education today, people at work refuse to accept unexplained orders, and will not standstill for a punishing type of atmosphere without litigation. Flippo (1984) has categorized offenses that are usually committed in work organization in two broad categories.

- (a) Minor or Moderate offenses and
- (b) Serious offenses

He further argued that a specific situation in a particular establishment might cause an offense listed as “Minor or Moderate” to “Serious” as to justify termination of employment. However, we are not aware of any empirical investigation carried out hitherto to establish the frequency of occurrence of each of these forms of offenses as they occur in work organizations. Nevertheless, it would appear that some forms of discipline or offenses occur more frequently than others, while the effect of some are quite noticeable than the other. In the past two decades, business and professional journals have published a number of articles deploring the high absenteeism rate in American Industries. The average cost of absenteeism ranged from \$1,000 to \$6,000 per employee in a year. Absenteeism just won’t quit,” published the facts that the average monthly rate of absenteeism in the auto industry was running around 15 to 18 percent on any given day. Taking these studies home, problems with drug abuse and alcoholism emerged in Nigeria since the past decades. However, one cannot say for sure now if any empirical studies have been conducted to know the frequency of these problems in the industries. However, in America, well over 80% of organization that responded to a survey in 1991 reported that since 1985, they have to deal directly with drug related problems. They have also argued this stance on the average, invisible sources of alcohol related offenses cost for the employee includes accidents, increased absenteeism, tardiness, illness, loss of moral among fellow workers and work environment, impaired judgment and impaired ability to make decision and all these will result to lots of trained human resources.

### **Disciplinary Actions and Organizational Performance**

Performance here should be seen as an action or achievement, considered in relation to how successful it is. Performance is what a person actually does under a given condition, Maier (1973). It encompasses accomplishment, implementation and efficiency. Maier believes that performance can be assessed using criteria such as; profit or loss, result and quality of management. Sometimes organizations after employing the best people trained and motivate than, they still exhibit certain characteristics, which do not conform to the norms of the organization, and this largely affects the performance of the organization and

different work groups. Although, less research has been carried out in this area, but organizational practitioners and managers suggest that appropriate use of disciplinary action helps to improve performance. O’Reily and Weitz (1980) listed several ways in which sanctions (e.g. informal warnings, forms warning, suspension etc) could improve performance. First, sanctions may act to directly alert the focal employee to his or her low performance and result in a change, example; improve attendance, increase output and etc. Secondly, sanction may be a signal to others in the work group as to expected level of performance and standards of behavior not in punitive sense but terms of social learning. Thirdly, performance may increase when other organizational member perceives the sanction as legitimate. The sanction may remove a source of inequity from group and thus increase motivation and moral. O’Reilly and Weitz (op:cit) in a reanalysis “Hawthorne Experiment” speculated that improvement in the relay assembly test room resulted from “the positive example of the two new workers as well as from the aversive effect of management’s disposal of two of the original workers”.

“If a fellow is just a slacker, the foreman should straighten the man for the sake of everybody. You don’t like to do your best while the others Goofs, off, loaf. ....It burns’ They provided a similar example in which a manager described an incident involving a dismissal and reported that the remaining employees wondered why it had waited so long to correct it dismiss worker, but unofficially agreed with the action of the manager. Luthans and Kreitne (1978) quoted in O’Reilly and Weitz (1980) observed that discipline may act as a negative reinforcement to the focal employee, and may also improve feeling of equity for the group. Thus, when disciplinary actions are perceived by employees as legitimate, and applied in its appropriate way, both the focal employee and the group may improve in their performance.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Methodology is concerned with both the detailed research methods through which data are collected.

### **Research Locale**

This section of the research deals with the research locale. The site for the investigation is Port Harcourt, Rivers state. Rivers State is the hub of Nigeria’s oil and gas industry, with enormous reserves of crude oil and natural gas. The region accounts for more than 40% of Nigeria’s crude oil production. The capital Port Harcourt is an important commercial and industrial center and has the second busiest seaport in Nigeria. According to the 2006 census, Port Harcourt has a population of about 1,382,592. Port Harcourt was founded in 1913. By the British colonial administrators of Nigeria besides farmland called



“Obumotu” near the cliffs of “Iguocha” of the Diobu (or Rumurebisi), Ikwere Igbo village group consisting seven villages Njoku and Onwuka (2008). The purpose of Port Harcourt was to export coal, which a geologist Albert Ernest Kitson had discovered in Enugu in 1909. The colonial government caused the people of Diobu to cede their land and by 1913; the building of Port-town was started. Other villages that were later absorbed into the city included Oroworukwo, Mkpogu and Rumuomasi. In the creeks to the south of the original port were the fishing camps and grounds of the Okrika-Ijaw group. Port Harcourt was renamed from “Iguocha” (from Igbo Ugwu-Ocha meaning “white cliffs”) after Lewi Vernon Harcourt, the secretary of state for the colonies by Frederick Lugard, the Governor General of Nigeria at the time.

**Research Design**

For the purpose of this work, Descriptive Research fundamental and has added immeasurably to our knowledge of the shape and nature of this research work. First, the research is “descriptive”, this is because, the process of descriptive studies goes beyond mere gathering and tabulation of data. It involves an element of interpretation and description of the meaning and significance of the variables.

**SAMPLING PROCEDURE**

In selecting the firms, the judgmental sampling method was adopted in selecting the firms. Here the

researcher decided which population to include in the sample based on our judgment. Here, the researcher chooses the sample based on whom they think would be appropriate for the study. This was equally used because, the researcher is sure to get co-operation from such organization for reliable information, and based on the status of the firm. Only firms with a minimum of 50 employees were included. The next consideration was the period of time a firm has operated. It was only firms that had operated ten years and above that were selected. Thus, the samples of this research were selected using the survey and judgmental sampling methods. The survey was used to assemble the firms, while the judgmental sampling method was used to select six firms to represent the target population.

They are-

1. Agip oil Company
2. Airtel Nigeria Limited.
3. ABNL Nigeria Limited
4. Dufil Prima foods Plc
5. Niger Delta Development commission
6. National Institute for Agricultural center.

**Sampling Size**

The sampling size in this study is 360 respondents. Using all the techniques mentioned earlier, respondents were selected from each of the firms. These are:

Ss/N	ORGANIZATION	MANAGER/supervisors DISTRIBUTED	RETURNED
11	ABNL International	10	8
22	Agip Oil Company	10	7
33	Airtel Nig Ltd	10	8
4	Dufil Prima Foods	10	9
55	Niger Delta Development Commission	10	9
66	National Institute for Agricultural center	10	7
	Total	60	49

Table 1a.

S/N	ORGANIZATION	WORKER	RETURNED
11	ABNL International	50	45
22	Agip Oil Company	50	42
33	Airtel Nig Ltd	50	49
44	Dufil Prima Foods	50	42
55	Niger Delta Development Commission	50	47
66	National Institute for Agricultural center	50	38
	Total	300	263

**Instruments and Data Collection Techniques**

This study is essentially a “Qualitative and a “Confidentiality” survey. Data collection techniques are multi dimensional. The Sources of data collection are obviously the primary and secondary sources. The first data collections method involves thorough interviews of organizational discipline and the ways of dealing with ineffective employees to achieve high performance. In doing this, preliminary personal interviews with few of the subjects were conducted. This enabled the researcher to gain a good knowledge of the subject under study. Information collected from the two sources under reference above was used in the construction of the questionnaires. As such, the researcher relied mostly on questionnaires and oral interview for primary sources of data. The secondary sources of information and data used are list of organizations that exists in Rivers-State, Journals Newspapers, and Magazines and of course library services for existing literature on disciplinary measures. The two methods were combined because of the apparent limitations inherent in either mode.

**METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS**

This has to do with the methods of data analysis from the field. After distributing and retrieving the questionnaire, data were collected for statistical purposes. The hypotheses were tested using “factor analysis”, this is a procedure in which the correlations

between a large set of observed variables are explained in terms of smaller number of variables called “factor” and Sociologist especially has used this in case of “personality analysis” as it is used to discover the constituent mass of data. Again, our main purpose of using factor analysis is:

- (1) To reduce the number of variables
- (2) To detect structure in the relationship between variables

Data Presentation and Analysis

**Data presentation;-**

The questionnaire responses were summarized, using the three possible measures of positions, which depends on the information obtained. These measures of central position (tendency) are the mean, median, mode, standard deviation and in some case the range’ for demographic variables of the sample. Three hundred and sixty (360) copies of the questionnaires were distributed to the six organizations, and this was among managers and workers.

**ANALYSIS OF DATA**

In our analysis of data, we tried to find out the reasons why some firms, even within the same industry and location are growing while others are down the hill. We also looked at how application of disciplinary measures affects and or motivate workers, as this will have direct consequences on organizational performance.

**Table 2: Managers: use of disciplinary measure and performance**

S/N	Variables	Mean	S.D	Range
1.	No of years with organization	3.9	5.7	
2.	No of years as manager	3.7	4.7	
3.	No of subordinates	6.4	3.5	25
4.	Disciplinary Measure & Performance: No of warnings formal informal	2.2	5.7	35
5.	No of employees dismissed	0.7	1.2	15

**Table\_3: Workers: Use of disciplinary measured De1fo1-F1formance**

S/N	Variables	Mean	S.D	Range
1	No of years with organization	2.8	3.9	
2	No of warnings received	3.6	5.3	
3	No of extra task done	1.9	2.7	
4	No of commendation received	1.3	1.06	
5	Performance Rating	7.2	2.6	

It has often been assumed that use and application of disciplinary measures in whatever forms, has its own positive and negative effects on the worker performance. Based on the premise, respondents were asked if the application of disciplinary measures has, any effect(s) on their performance, varied response were given. From the table above 2 and 3 table 1 tried to bring out on the average the number of years of experience of each of the managers studied and the number of warnings issued, both formal and informal warning. Again, the table presents a correlation between performance rating and the use of disciplinary measure by managers. Respondents who indicate more or frequent use of disciplinary measures, that is warning and dismissals have higher performance ratings.

### Test of Hypothesis

Hypothesis: Supervisors/managers who use disciplinary actions effectively are more likely to achieve higher performance than those who seldom use disciplinary measures. From the (workers table) above table 2, the findings showed that use of disciplinary measures has direct consequences on performance. Based on the questionnaire responses, it has shown that the use and application of disciplinary measure actually encourages workers and it allows workers to imbibe positive attitude to work and appreciate the need to complete extra task if need be. From table 3, it shows that there is a positive relationship between disciplinary measure and increased performance. Thus, the numbers of warning were significantly related to the overall performance rating.

### DISCUSSION

Generally, managers seem to vary in the way they perceive workers problem and in their responses to ineffective workers. In most instances, both the problems encountered and styles used are associated with types of disciplinary measures employed. The results, however, showed that specific problems are associated with specific style facts. One important inference from the findings is the fact that managers who employ disciplinary measure more often have higher performance ratings than those who use them less frequently. In interpreting the results of this study, certain limitation must be borne in mind. In the first place, the data are cross sectional while the performance rating and use of disciplinary measures are objective record of past behavior. The questionnaire responses are perceptual assessments. For this reason, causal inferences cannot be drawn safely.

### CONCLUSION

The nature of the problem that characterize ineffective employees and the relationships of these problems to the use of disciplinary measures raises

several issues, first very little data exist on how managers can identify ineffective employees. The literature available lists a variety, of problems that might be encountered by individual managers at the organizational level. Thus problems ranging from absenteeism, dishonesty to in subordination are frequently mentioned. The lists are in exhaustive and can only give an inkling of how often managers actually encounter these problem. The findings of this research suggest that there are unique problem areas that managers should deal with. The problems encountered by most managers as observed in the course of this research are of two categories, conceptually similar to behaviors and output' (performance) control categories. The focus here is that the problems are oriented toward conduct and performance just like O'Reilly and Wietz (1980) stated. The main theme underling this research work is the fact that from time to time managers tends to encounter employees who for a whole lot of reasons are tagged ineffective. It was postulated here that failure to use disciplinary measure against problem employees when necessary would be associated wit reduced performance from both the individual and the entire work group.

### Recommendation

For the continuous existence of an organization, it is recommended that appropriate disciplinary actions be taken against employee who commits infraction likely to directly or indirectly affect the harmonious operation and existence of the organization.

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