

Sustainable Employee Discipline in the Contemporary Work Model

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Abstract: Discipline is a very critical area in an organization. It is one of the toughest aspects of the human resource practice if not the toughest. Humans as we are, we are able to detect if procedures or regulations are not complied with, however the challenge arises when the appropriate sanction should be executed. Tough as it is, work has to continue, as a result, the appropriate sanctions will have to be applied. Majority of the literature available speak to rewards and incentive schemes. Disciplinary action is a grey area which needs to be explored to guide the human resource practice. This research seeks to identify the appropriate disciplinary measures to adopt in the work place, the extent of disciplinary action to take against employees who flout corporate regulations and the best mode of fact finding when organizational procedures are disregarded. The research process will review existing literature on disciplinary measures, identify the inherent gaps and prescribe the best applicable modes of discipline which can stand the test of time and evolve to be sustainable and an appropriate medium of reference. Research findings will be analyzed thematically to enable a prudent conclusion to be arrived at. This document will serve as a relevant document and source of wealth to guide the human resource practice to improve and further develop staff management engagement effectively. This will not be an exhaustive document, it will open room for further research to further broaden the scope of disciplinary measures and policies in the modern workplace.

Keywords: sustainable, employee, discipline, contemporary.

1. Introduction

Discipline has always been a thorny issue in the human resource practice. Discipline is meant to serve as a corrective measure and also to guide the appropriate conduct of employees in the work place. A hardworking and disciplined work force will always draw the business closer to better productivity levels. Failure to discipline employees that flout the company's regulation affects the work culture, breeds favoritism and a skewed approach to discipline in the organization. Discipline should be fair and serve as a preventive mechanism in the workplace. (www.proquest.com, n.d.).

Discipline affects the workforce. Employees that are well motivated and follow diligently the organizations processes will the business to a large extent. A workforce that is well disciplined has the high tendency of adhering to working procedures. Discipline has a positive correlation with productivity. Disciplinary measures should be fair and equally applied to all classes of staff. Discipline has similar effects as

motivation. It places the employee appropriately to heed the organizational processes. (Parashakti et al, 2017).

Disciplinary measures should be designed such that it will shape appropriately the working culture and the employees. It should be applicable in a majority of cases and it should be communicated at the workplace to create the sense of belonging and absence of bias. As the business grows, the lifecycle of the business also evolves. Administrators should have a firm and fair posturing when shaping the discipline culture of the organization. Best practices should be adopted at all times. Employees should be heard whenever a case arises to ensure the disciplinary process is free of bias. For discipline to be sustainable, the disciplinary processes should be dynamic and grow with time. The research paper will review existing literature on employee discipline. The various modes of discipline applicable in the work setting will be reviewed to identify the most ideal method.

Discipline in the modern work setting should be grounded on sound theory and mechanisms to ensure the fairness and equity principle is always prevalent. Disciplinary actions will never be perfect, however as much as practicable; consistency should always be a guiding principle. All disciplinary measures should also be comprehensively documented.

2. Literature Review

A. Discipline in University Libraries

Queries are the disciplinary medium used at two university libraries surveyed in Nigeria. University of Benin Library and Delta State University Library. A query is issued when a staff's work or attitude is not satisfactory. A response will be provided by the staff, following which the staff is cautioned or a warning is recorded in the records of the staff. The staff is given the opportunity to give an appropriate response before any disciplinary action is meted out. The disciplinary action is a warning recorded on the file of the concerned staff. Discipline is carried out to ensure appropriate behavior from the staff and promote labour productivity consistently. (Adomi et al, 2004)

B. Discipline Pertaining to Contractual Agreement

A nurse or an employer can discontinue an employment agreement under predefined conditions. The conditions can be in the form of a contract, collective agreement or a

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memorandum of understanding. When conditions in the agreement are breached, any of the parties can terminate the agreement. The termination serves as a disciplinary measure to the offending party. Before disciplinary actions are carried out, the following steps are normally followed: There is prior agreement on expectations and deliverables by both parties, there is an agreed medium of performance evaluation, there is a laid down procedure for addressing non conformities, action plans for correction are put out when required and finally termination of the agreement is upheld when non conformities are persistent. Disciplinary action is only taken when all the agreed steps have been exhausted. The discipline in this instance is the termination of the agreement. (Smith, 2002)

C. *Discipline as Restoration*

Restoring justice is the disciplinary approach. Injury caused to victims are ascertained and the offending parties are required to put right and form of harm or injury suffered. The injury or harm suffered are classified into four different categories: harm suffered by the victim, harm affecting the interpersonal relationship between the two parties, harm attributed to the guilty party and harm suffered by the community. The discipline meted out is the restoration of the harm to the affected party. In the restoration process, the following factors are considered: the party that has been wounded, the wounded party's requirements, the obligations that existed under the relationship, the party who had a breached duty in the arrangement and what is the suitable means to ensure restitution. When the disciplinary factors have been exhausted and addressed, then justice is restored. (Zehr, 2002)

D. *Discipline in Fairness*

Conditions that attract disciplinary action should be comprehensively outlined with their respective sanctions. All disciplinary conditions and the related sanctions should also be clearly communicated to all employees. These enables employees to identify if they are getting the desired sanctions for their actions and are not being victimized. It also enables the employees to determine biases if any in the sanction process. When processes are clearly documented and communicated, it protects the company from legal consequences. Management of businesses should not take a relaxed stance when staff have to be sanctioned for going contrary to the work culture. It can serve as a demotivation for the hardworking and diligent staff. It ultimately results in a breakdown of discipline in the workplace. Employers to all intents and purposes should apply discipline in truth and fairness. In a fair disciplinary regime, employees should be scored for their extent of discipline breaches. The discipline breaches should be categorized by the level of seriousness. A written record should be kept of the various discipline breaches by employees to serve as a basis for future sanctions. Employees should also have the avenue of using consistent adherence to company regulations as a medium to negate document discipline breaches. This will ensure fairness and diversity in application of disciplinary actions. All disciplinary actions should serve as a corrective medium with particular focus on the action or process rather than the

employee. (Levine, G. 1988)

E. *Discipline through Effective Communication of Sanctions*

Employers should have mechanisms to determine the appropriateness of disciplinary actions meted out to staff. There should be adequate documentation on the actions of the staff that warrants the disciplinary action. All disciplinary actions taken should have a corrective impact on the employee rather than a negative impact. Staff should not feel victimized or unjustly sanctioned. Discipline should be well taught through. Employers should not take disciplinary actions on impulse. There should be adequate justification for all disciplinary actions taken and the disciplinary process should be comprehensively documented. Employers should have a clear distinction when to apply disciplinary actions and when to apply corrective measures. The ultimate purpose of disciplinary actions is to correct the staff and prevent future recurrence. Discipline is a very difficult task. Employers should always endeavour to separate their emotions when administering disciplinary actions. (Lisoki, E. 1998)

F. *Discipline by Measuring Objectives*

When staff do not meet their key results areas, the staff has to be alerted. There should be a discussion with the staff on the shortfalls and devise an action plan for the required corrective measures. It should not be just one meeting, there should be follow up engagements with the staff. Engaging a non performing employee is a difficult task, in other words, it is a difficult conversation. Employers should be well composed to engage non performing staff. The engagement should free of emotions and should be professionally carried out. Employers should always ensure they do not keep postponing difficult conversations till they get out of hand. Events should be followed systematically to ensure the appropriate action is taken timeously. Corrective action should be taken promptly with all due diligence. (Williams, T.H. 1995)

G. *Discipline through Education*

Teachers mold their students morally, attitudinal and through knowledge. Discipline is achieved through the learning process. Teachers impact their students when educating them and, in the process, correct their bad attitudes. Corrective actions are administered through the learning process. Schools also make students time conscious. Teachers sometimes treat all students uniformly in cases where some will need special attention. Some of the students are slow learners, which will impact the extent of disciplinary actions they will have to endure. Building knowledge capacity and attitude modeling require some level of skill and diligence to ensure the appropriate disciplinary actions. Discipline through education is to some extent subjective. Students who are relatively bright and have retentive memories are likely to receive lesser disciplinary actions due to their inherent abilities as compared to other students who may have lesser inherent abilities. Aptitude tests should be conducted to group students appropriately by intellect, speed of response to learning modules and ability to understand subject areas effectively. When students are grouped appropriately, it assists the discipline process and better shapes the class for

more effective engagement. (Kropáč, Buchtová and Chudý, 2023)

3. Methodology

The various ways discipline could be achieved was reviewed through existing literature. Notable best practices were highlighted and reviewed. The measures observed were compared to the normal operations of a modern business enterprise. Likely measures which are likely to be applicable to staff in a corporate setting will be identified and recommended.

4. Results and Findings

Discipline is a process or procedure which administers corrective action in the form of sanctions when organizational procedures are not followed. At any point in the administrative cycle where corrective processes are implemented for organizational non-conformities, discipline has occurred. (Dessler, 2001).

The consequences of employees not following laid down communicated procedures is discipline. Disciplinary measures are instituted to ensure administrative sanity and orderliness in the conduct of business of an organization. (Rue, Ibrahim and Byars, 2016).

Discipline in the contemporary work model should follow this tenets:

1. Discipline is meant to correct and keep the staff. Employers should think of dynamic ways to correct their teams to make them more productive and retain them. Employers should not focus on always terminating staff as the best form of discipline. Before an employer decides to terminate the appointment of a staff, the cost of training a replacement should be considered. In the event discipline would lead to termination, all the relevant processes for redress and avoidance of doubt should be exhausted. A staff wrongly terminated could raise potential legal risks for the company.
2. Discipline should be progressive. Disciplinary action should be taken according to the gravity of the breach and should intensify if the non-compliance by the staff persists. Discipline can progress from verbal warnings to written warnings, suspension and appointment termination. Discipline should also be without biases.
3. All relevant facts should be established and addressed before the disciplinary action is carried out. A query should be given to the staff for a response to be given and a hearing should also be conducted to enable the staff respond to all relevant inconsistencies in work behavioural patterns.
4. Discipline should gravitate with corrective actions. If a staff goes contrary to procedures and requires to be reprimanded. A corrective action plan should be established to ensure improvement and development of the staff subsequently.
5. Management should ensure there exists a staff

handbook which prescribes the appropriate conduct of the staff. Every staff should have a copy of the handbook which should be duly signed to confirm acceptance. There should also be periodic communication on the disciplinary clauses and their related sanctions. Management should not delight in keeping silent on working procedures and only crack the whip when a breach occurs.

5. Conclusion

Discipline should be dynamic and fluid as the life cycle of the business. Management of companies should always find pragmatic ways to apply disciplinary actions to make discipline sustainable in the long run. The core aim of discipline is to set the pace for organizational sanity and resilience. Discipline guides the adherence to procedures and the work culture. Management should not fashion discipline as an effect for going contrary to work processes. Employees should be engaged to develop to embrace working procedures as a tool for business growth. When this concept of discipline is established. Employees will always make it a duty to be committed to work processes to ensure organizational efficiency at all times. This is not to imply there will be no process breaches. They will definitely come up. Discipline to all intents and purposes should be administered according to the extent and willingness to disregard the conventions and procedures of the organization.

Statements and Declarations

The author confirms the research paper is an honest and accurate account of information gathered from literature reviewed without any prejudice.

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