

WORKPLACE DISCIPLINE AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ATMOSPHERE OF ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING SERVICE COMPANIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explored the relationship between workplace discipline and industrial relations atmosphere of electrical engineering companies in South-South Region, Nigeria. Workplace discipline is the predictor variable with preventive, curative and progressive discipline respectively as the dimensions while industrial relations atmosphere is the criterion variable for the study with adversarial and harmonious industrial relations atmosphere respectively as measures. The theoretical framework was drawn from Skinner's reinforcement theory. Based on the findings, it was recommended that: organizations should help employees understand the need for discipline and know why they should align with the workrules and standards of their organizations. Also, managers should enact statements as workrules in the organization's handbook, while employees should be counseled on customs and practices of the organization. Managers should adopt curative techniques that will discourage workers from first time and further violations through the withholding of increment of offenders demotion to lower ranks, the assignment of shifts and changing of offenders assignment. Organization and managers should issue verbal, then written warnings to offenders, threat of suspension, then disengage the workers when they fail to adhere to all these processes.

Keywords: Prevention Discipline, Harmonious Industrial Relation

INTRODUCTION

The adoption of the right disciplinary mechanisms enables management to overcome their disciplinary constraints and enhance the industrial relations atmosphere of the firms (Johnnie & Nwasike, 2002). It is quite unfortunate to note that despite the notable achievements of the manufacturing sector towards the Nigerian economy, most electrical engineering manufacturing and service companies are still unable to adopt the right kind of disciplinary mechanism that will help to prevent misconduct and ensure good discipline enforcement within the organization. Workplace discipline has been identified as one of the mechanism used by organization managers at ensuring discipline in organizations (Davis & Newstrom, 1989). Studies have also reported that workplace discipline instills discipline in workers which reduce their tendencies to misbehave and hence affect the atmosphere of their organizations (Torrington and Hall, 1995). Previous studies (Fathoni, 2006; Rival, 2004) reveal that deteriorated discipline can slow the achievement of corporate goals. Therefore, an employee who has a high work discipline has awareness and desire to perform all the duties and responsibilities with the willingness to comply with all applicable regulations or rules in an organization. Discipline assists organizational managers in the fostering and sustenance of harmonious industrial relations in the organization. However in every organization ensuring regular monitoring and control of group behavior, performance to ensure compliance with the rules and correct deviation is necessary which is the management's prerogative. In their view of Johnnie & Nwasike, (2002), the one major purpose for workplace discipline is to ensure that employee work behavior is consistent with the firm's goals and encourage employees to comply with established standards and rules, so that the infractions do not occur (preventive discipline). On the other hand, it seeks to dissuade organizational members from further infraction of rules, so that future behaviours or acts by employees will be in consonance/compliance with desired standard (curative discipline). Workplace discipline therefore, involves the application established rules, so as to discourage willful occurrence of undesirable acts in organizations.

It is assumed that the implementors of workplace discipline ensure that workplace discipline mechanisms are put in place because, chances are that organizational members as individuals or group at any time can occasionally express tendencies that deviate from the rules of the organization. Hence, some mechanisms need be put in place via traditional or notable processes that have worked overtime. For those likely deviations to be brought to light (preventive discipline); to discourage further deviations (curative discipline) and to discourage any willful or deliberate effort by the workforce to continue to deviate from organizations set standards or rules (progressive discipline).

Similarly, Davis and Newstrom (1989) suggested that discipline prevention (preventive discipline) are actions taken to encourage workers to follow the standards and regulations, so there is no infringement. The essence is to encourage the emergence of self discipline among workers. Discipline repair (corrective discipline) are actions taken to address violation's of the rules; they serve corrective purposes and essentially educate offenders in order to avoid further violations among other workers. It takes the form of punishment or disciplinary action, Davis and Newstrom (1989). On the other hand progressive discipline is a disciplinary action which is becoming increasingly severe punishment every time the offence is committed (Davis and Newstrom, 1989).

In the same vein, Mangkunega (2001) pointed that preventive discipline aims at spurring the employee to follow and adhere to the guidelines. These guidelines are the company's rules and regulations which have been outlined. While curative discipline attempts to mobilize workers in consolidating a rule and ordered to remain in compliance with the set regulations in accordance with the guidelines in force at the company. However, an important perspective within the ambit of workplace discipline machinery that have been misunderstood and therefore not been very well utilized or emphasized by management is the aspect of preventive discipline as an important measure of workplace discipline which is capable of ensuring good workplace behavior among employees who express discontent over work rules that are formed without them in their organizations, that will ensure or bring about the much needed stable industrial relations atmosphere.

The thrust of this work is to ensure behavioural control and compliance to the rules and regulations of organizations. Although, findings from some previous studies show that the use of discipline at work can pose serious threats and demonstration of coercive power French and Raven (1959) in Bennibo and Asawo (2020), however, the outcomes of these studies in other context, might not yield similar outcomes as those in our own peculiar context in south south region, Nigeria, as most of this studies are foreign based. Furthermore, research associating workplace discipline and industrial relations atmosphere appears still scanty (Dans and Newstrom, 1989). It is however worthy of note that, despite the literature that flood the concept of industrial relations atmosphere, only a handful have addressed its association with workplace discipline. More so, the few identified studies on this association have not been conducted in the South-South region of Nigeria or in the Engineering sub-sector.

It is consequent upon all these gaps that this thesis takes its point of departure and examined the relationship between workplace discipline and industrial relations atmosphere of companies in south-south Nigeria, applying workplace discipline approaches such as preventive, curative and progressive discipline, where their are reported fluctuations in the industrial relations atmosphere. This to us, will help broaden knowledge on both variables.

Skinner's Reinforcement Theory

Skinner's reinforcement theory is among one of the theories that focuses on human motivation. This theory was propounded by Burrhus Frederic Skinner, an American social philosopher. The theory is

based on the principles of causality and knowledge that a worker's behavior is regulated by the type of reward. Skinner's (1957) reinforcement theory is aimed at enforcing disciplinary procedure/actions as far as the aims of disciplinary procedure are concerned. The theory acknowledges three basic rules of consequences: i) reward for positive behaviour reinforces positive behavior; ii) punishment for negative behavior weakens negative behaviour and iii) if there is no reward or punishment, behavior is fading.

Negative reinforcement is defined as the reinforcement of behavior that reduces negative situations. Skinner observed that dysfunctional behaviors can be eliminated by extinction, i.e. by not reinforcing them. This justifies our logic in this study that discipline serves as a precursor and reciprocal reinforcement that creates an atmosphere within the organization that directly impacts on workers' behaviour, conduct and reactions toward their organizations. Effective negative reinforcement is supposed to be applied which gives a lot to be desired. Skinner is of the view that positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement and punishment are examples of the learning process (Werneer, 2007). Negative reinforcements in the form of undesirable outcome are given when employees do not exhibit organizationally functional behaviours (Amah, 2010). The essence is to make employees behave well to avoid the negative outcomes of nagging and threats.

Skinner (1957) also analyzed work situations to determine what causes workers to behave the way they do, with a view to initiate changes to mitigate areas where they encountered challenges and the barriers to performance. With clearly set goals and parameters such as participation and assistance, prompt and regular feedback was possible. The approach was found useful though more concerned with the control of employee behaviour. The implication of this theory for this study however, is that reinforcement should be as prompt as possible, especially in the case of negative behaviours to refrain incumbent misconduct and deviant actions among employees. Again, employers of labour can ensure that both positive and negative factors in the employees' work environment are properly identified and enumerated. With proper orientation, expected behaviour and desired performance level can be indicated in measurable terms. This theory gives room for both expanded communication and control through feedback. Managers learn to manage effectively all organizational resources through planning and organization to avoid the frequent demands from labour and their unions.

Concept of Workplace Discipline

For decades now, several studies have emerged to build on the workplace discipline literature. In this study, we have made a choice of workplace discipline as our predictor variable. There has been contrasting views on the concept of work place discipline. Not surprisingly, this disparity in concept may have been triggered by the long standing interest and the outcomes that have been profiled in extant literature by scholars. While some scholars view industrial discipline as a system of rules and mechanism for ensuring that disciplinary codes are followed (Gabriel & Zeb-Obipi, 2019; Dumisan, 2002; Ajumogobia, 2007), others argue that discipline is only but some form of punitive measure or chastisement upon an employee that generates fear or breeds reproach when the employee gets himself involved in a wrongful act (Vonai, 2013; Cole, 2002). This implies that every organization has its rules and regulation "dos and don'ts." Dumisan (2002) referred to the act of observance of the set of rules as discipline. Discipline in the workplace does not mean strict and technical observance of rules and regulations for the survival of the organizational system. Quite in opposition to the earlier views, Mohammed (2013) is of the opinion that workplace discipline rather implies a situation where workers are expected to co-operate and behave in a normal and orderly way, as any reasonable person would expect an employee to do (Mohammed, 2013).

Dzimbiri (2016) citing Grogan (2009) observe further that discipline is one of the most important elements in every organization. Accordingly he stressed that discipline is an action by management

against an individual or group that fails to conform to the rules established by management within the organization. Johnnie & Nwasike (2002) citing Elvin (1985) posited that in normal workplaces, work discipline is the relationship of submission or obedience to some sort of order and value at the workplace. However, knight (2014) posits that workplace discipline is a pattern of behaviour which can be traced back from a particular training. Pidarta (1987) argued that workplace discipline is an appropriate work procedure and rules that have been agreed upon. Lateiner (1995), said that work discipline is a growing force in the body or self-employed, and that causes a person to be able to adapt to the voluntary decisions, and regulations in the high values of work and behavior. Rival (2004), stated that workplace discipline is a tool that managers use to change a behavior as well as an effort to boost awareness and a willingness to obey all the rules of corporate and social norms that apply. While Singodimedjo (2002), said discipline is an attitude of readiness and willingness to adhere to and comply with regulatory norms prevailing around him.

There are diverse ways of carrying out workplace discipline as well as various levels of work discipline (Russel, 1985). Workplace discipline entails customary methods of handling disciplinary activities and is more specific than policies for authorizing disciplinary actions without disrupting work in the organization (Kolade, 2019). Workplace discipline according to Mathis and Jackson (2000) is a training that enforces organizational rules. Dessler (1984) stressed that the aim of workplace discipline is to encourage employees to behave sensibly at work, by adhering to rules. Literature revealed that there has been long standing fluctuations in the industrial relations atmosphere of organizations. Unfortunately this gap and the factors meant to bring an equilibrium such as, workplace discipline, has not been sufficiently captured in literature and the dearth of empirical evidence has even worsened the situation of the atmosphere. The employer considers an employee to be undisciplined if his/her expectations about the employee, arising out of the employment contract, are not fulfilled (Venkatta Ratnam, 2013). Previous studies on the maintenance of industrial discipline by (Das Gupta 2002; Dessler, 1984) reveal that organizations that retain employees who are grossly ineffective and those who are known for repeated misconduct at work are discharged to ensure that the organization thrives carrying along only those who are ready to be useful, effective and loyal. This view agrees with Venkatta Ratnam's (2013, 565) assertion that:

"discipline in the industry cannot be seen as a maintenance of proper subordination, but rather as a willing acceptance of the norms of conduct of the organization and a commitment to behave or act in an appropriate and desirable manner so as to contribute towards effectiveness of an organization".

Viewed in this sense, it is worth reasoning that maintenance and management of discipline presupposes (i) the inculcation of positive attitudes towards oneself and other actors in the industry; (ii) changing appropriate norms of behavior on a continuing basis; (iii) the provision of opportunities for continuous learning for which appropriate industrial relations climate must also be available, so that the workers behave and act in a manners expected of them; and (iv) the creation of conditions whereby workers can experience satisfaction of their socio-psychological needs to avoid frustration manifested in deviant behavior actions, which are traditionally labeled indiscipline or misconduct. It is for this reason that organizations and their managers are meant to check and keep under control the level or rate of indiscipline. However, as organizations differ, so also do their response rate, approach and timing towards ensuring successful workplace discipline different. Workplace discipline hence is that variable that can be viewed to reasonably reduce the impact of the re-percussion of indiscipline, deviant work behaviours and mitigate the effect of wasteful conflicts in the organization (Hackett, 1989; Thomason, 1984).

Workplace Discipline and Industrial Relations atmosphere

Workplace discipline is an essential phenomenon in industries. It is very essential for a healthy industrial atmosphere and in the achievement of organizational goals (Monappa, 1995). According to Salamon (1987), disciplinary policy is set in organizations to set the organizational climate within which disciplinary matters will be determined. Opatha (2017) citing Robbins (1982) defines discipline as a condition in the organization when employees conduct themselves in accordance with the organization's rules and standards of acceptable behaviour. It is necessary for the success and progress of any organization and in achieving the goals of the organizations, whether private or public firms. Mathis and Jackson (2000) are of the view that discipline can be seen as a training that enforces organizational rules. This implies that discipline at every point in time is geared towards ensuring that: i) employees conduct themselves in accordance with set rules and standards of acceptable behaviour; ii) it ensures obedience to rules and standards of acceptable behaviour; iii) ensures punishment for erring employees: iv) managerial action which encourages employees to comply with standards of the organization are put in place. Dessler (1984) stressed that the aim of discipline is to encourage employees to behave sensibly at work by adhering to rules.

This study on Workplace discipline and industrial relations atmosphere is operationalized as follows:

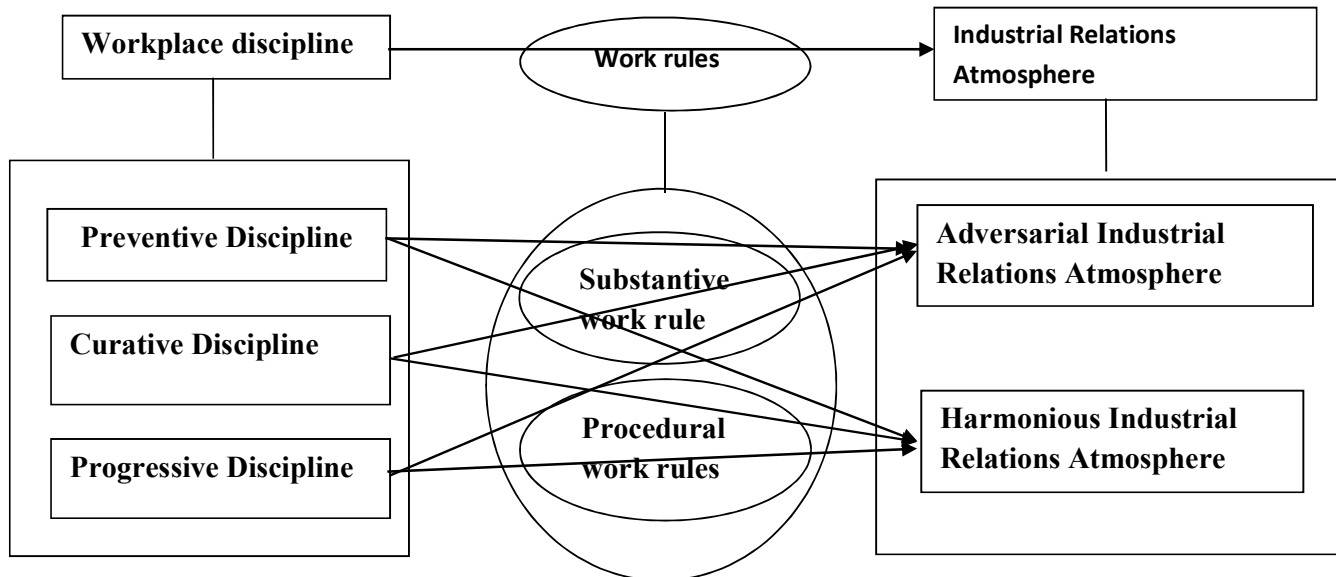


Figure 1: Operational framework on workplace discipline and industrial Relations Atmosphere

Source: Desk Research (Authorities for measure of industrial relation atmosphere (Biriowo, 2020; Ahiauzu, 1999); Authorities for dimensions of workplace discipline: Dumasian, 2002 and Ajumogobia, 2007 in Gabriel & Zeb-Obipi, 2019)

CONCLUSION

The conclusion arising from the this study have been summarized into thirteen points, derived from the main purpose of the study. The twelve points that make up our conclusion are outlined in five clusters as follows:

1. As electrical engineering companies adopt preventive discipline mechanisms to prevent inappropriate behaviours which shows disobedience to rules, the adversarial industrial relations atmosphere is significantly reduced.

2. As electrical engineering companies adopt preventive discipline mechanisms to prevent inappropriate behaviours which shows disobedience to rules, the harmonious industrial relations atmosphere is significantly increased.
3. Industrial relations atmosphere does not increase proportionately to the degree to which preventive discipline in the electrical engineering companies are increasonlyapplied.
4. As electrical engineering companies in south south Nigeria apply curative mechanisim in the administration of discipline, the less Adversarial industrial relation atmosphere is significantly increased.
5. As electrical engineering companies in south south Nigeria apply curative mechanisim in the administration of discipline, the more harmonious industrial relation atmosphere is significantly increased.
6. Industrial relations atmosphere does not increase proportionately to the degree to which curative discipline in electrical engineering organizations are applied in the administration of discipline.
7. As electrical engineering companies apply progressive disciplinary mechanism, adversarial industrial relations atmosphere is significantly decreased.
8. As electrical engineering companies apply progressive disciplinary mechanism,harmonious industrial relations atmosphere is significantly increased.
9. Industrial relations atmosphere does not increase proportionately to the degree of progressive discipline in electrical engineering companies in south south region, Nigeria.
10. As electrical engineering companies apply progressive disciplinary mechanism, adversarial industrial relations atmosphere is significantly decreased.
11. As electrical engineering companies apply progressive disciplinary mechanism, harmonious industrial relations atmosphere is significantly increased.
12. Industrial relations atmosphere does not increase proportionately to the degree of progressive discipline in electrical engineering companies in south south region, Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the implications arising from the study outcomes, the following recommendations are made:

1. Efforts should be made by organizational managers in the electrical engineering companies to help employees understand, the need for discipline in the organizations and why they need to be aligned to the laid down workrules and standards of behaviour of their organization. Through the enactment of a workrules as statements in the organization handbook, this can be achieved.
2. Managers, as a matter of necessity, need to learn to share understanding with their employees, inform them about the penalties for minor and major offences and give them opportunity to learn.
3. Managers need not only to inform but also counsel workers on organization customs and practices, and also initiate fines for minor and major offenders in the organizational handbook to prevent intending violations. In so doing, workers will have full knowledge of the organization's rules and practices.
4. Managers should align with such rules to improve the industrial relations atmosphere.
5. Efforts should be made by organizations and their managers in the electrical engineering companies to adopt curative discipline approach to discourage workers from further violations of the work rules and standards through the withholding of increments of offenders.
6. Managers should ensure the demotion to lower ranks of offenders.
7. Managers should ensure that offenders are assigned on shifts
8. Managers should ensure the changing of assignment of offenders. This way they can be able to encourage organizational members to develop appropriate behaviours that will impact on the industrial relations atmosphere positively. When organizational members feel relaxed, they will enjoy their work and this will reduce the incidences of lateness to work, absenteeism and other unhealthy behaviour patterns that are associated with lack of emotive and normative

commitment. This is because organizational members will see that they are valued based on who they are as individual organizational members rather than for economic exchange reasons.

9. Efforts should be made by organizations and their managers in electrical engineering firms to apply progressive disciplinary techniques in a way that they first describe the actions taken against violators of work rules and ensuring that they follow the disciplinary procedures consistently without bias. Emphasis should be placed on workrules and discipline, instead of punishment to strengthen bonds of relationship among organizational members and their managers. Offending organizational members should therefore be warned verbally.
10. Then through written warning if violators fail to comply.
11. Final warning should as well be issued with a threat of suspension.
12. And finally employee stands the risk of losing their job with or without pay when they refuse to adhere to these processes against them.

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