

Workers' Attitude Towards Disciplinary Actions in Business Organisations

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ABSTRACT This study examined the attitudes of workers towards disciplinary actions in business organizations. Subjects for the study were one hundred and five (male and female) workers drawn from International Breweries Plc, Ilesha, Nigeria. The stratified random sampling technique was used in the selection of the subjects. Questionnaire method was used to collect relevant data for the study and the data collected were subjected to t-test statistical analysis. Each of the three hypotheses postulated were tested at 0.05 level of significance and the results showed that: There is no significant difference between workers sex and their attitudes towards disciplinary actions. There is a significant difference between job level and attitude towards disciplinary actions. There is no significant difference between marital status of workers and their attitudes towards disciplinary actions. On the basis of these findings, some conclusions and recommendations were made

INTRODUCTION

Work is an activity that is expected of all people of any nation, irrespective of tribe or religion. Ever since the dawn of men, work of some kind has been a necessity. Apart from providing economic security, work adds meaning to life. It gives one an identity and a feeling of self-worth. A job can be self-fulfilling as well as have a bearing on one's emotional state and physical well-being. That is why in Nigeria of today where unemployment prevails, the unemployed man is unhappy and frustrated. The purge or retrenchment of workers in the civil service and parastatals and even in the private industries have been creating considerable anxieties and panic because of the loss of income to the affected workers and their families.

Not minding the effects on workers, employers of labour are continually cutting down on production and closing down completely due to the present depressed state

of the economy. The job market continues to worsen, as the number of job seekers in the country continues to increase. Currently, university graduates remain jobless for upward of two years. Yet, so many school leavers, university graduates and a host of others want to have a job, but not everyone wants to really work.

Just as the individual makes certain demands upon the organization, so also the organization expects certain things from its workers. Codes of behaviour are established and for those individuals who do not choose to conform to the codes, disciplinary actions are applied. For if the whole organization climate is such that punctuality is not demanded, level of production is not insisted upon, and a general atmosphere of laxity is allowed to prevail, then that organization faces imminent collapse.

The need for discipline pervades all realms and sectors of human life and endeavours. The major source of problems confronting Nigerians today stems out of gross indiscipline practices on the part of the governed and the government. Hence, the reason why every administration tries to instill a sense of discipline in the citizenry so as to direct and focus general efforts towards the attainment of the general good of making the country a better place to live in.

Indiscipline has eroded moral virtues, crippled economic activities and even socially, increased the level of moral decadence in our society. Discipline is thus needed to bring to bear on the citizenry the need or improvement in all economic sectors so as to revitalize the ailing economy and put everything where they rightly belong. In work organization, discipline constitutes a major tool with which management ensures workers' understanding of, and compliance with work ethics in order for corporate as well as individuals goals accomplishment not to become elusive. Moreso, the need for discipline becomes so obvious in

the work place taking due cognizance of the fact that humans are social animals that can sometimes be rational or otherwise.

Although literatures (Sims, 1980; Arvey and Ivancevich, 1980), indicate that close supervision and sanctions are discouraged in western countries, close supervision and sanctions may be the solution to inefficiency in the work place in Nigeria. Due to the different cultural characteristics, what is applicable in the West may not be the situation to Nigerian's problems. As Ugwegbu (1981) stressed, we need to pay attention to our traditional and cultural ways of life, if need be for advancement.

Individual differences of people are also evident in business organizations as workers who are employed in the same organization act different in relation to laid down policies of the organization, since they have different background and level of education. This made workers to respond in some evaluative manner to organizational policies and disciplinary actions.

Based on the foregoing, the study aims at addressing the following problems:

- will workers' sex affect their attitudes towards disciplinary actions in business organization?
- Will workers' job level affect their attitudes towards disciplinary action in business organization?
- Will workers' marital status affect their attitudes towards disciplinary action in business organizations?

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Solomon (1964) has documented the controversies surrounding the punishment concept and his position was further articulated in his book "Walden Two", in which he declared punishment to be ineffective or only temporary, and to produce undesirable side effects. It was not until the 1960's that researcher as an effective but extremely complex method for suppressing or eliminating behaviour recognized punishment.

In general, Arvey and Ivancevich (1980) opined that punishment has not been viewed favourably by organizational psychologists for several reasons. First, it is thought that the use of punishment by an employer will result in undesirable emotional side effects (e.g, anxiety,

aggressive acts or feelings towards the punishing agent, or passivity or withdrawal). In addition, employees might attempt to escape or avoid (e.g turnover, absenteeism) or show aggression toward (e.g sabotage) the punishing agent.

The belief is that the immediate emotional reaction to punishment may result in the inability to pay careful attention to the work task and therefore may result in a temporary reduction in productivity and quality of work. An additional emotional reaction occurs as a result of the pairing of the punishment with the stimulus of the person delivering the punishment and with any other stimulus present at the time of the punishment. These stimuli may become, either temporarily or permanently, paired with the punishment and may elicit a disruptive emotional reaction similar to that elicited by the punishment. This pairing of punishment with the manager is the opposite of the pairing the manager hopes to achieve.

Organizations, particularly most industries and business, are competing for skilled personnel. If the organization employs punishment frequently, that punishment generalizes to the organization as a whole. All people work to escape aversive condition. If an organization, company, or manager had become an aversive stimulus to his employees, those employees tend to escape or avoid that organization or individual. Such a condition may be very costly in employee turnover and absenteeism costs.

Laboratory experiments have demonstrated that punishment results in an aggressive response against the source of the punishment (Azrin and Holtz, 1966). Individual in the work setting may be induced to aggress against the organization or individual responsible for punishment. While the aggression toward the organization may not produce any desirable external consequence for the individual and internal sense of satisfaction at "getting back at" may be experienced. This satisfaction is reinforcing and results in increased future "getting back at" behaviour. Forms of aggression are increasing problems in the industrial setting, taking the form of disruption. Many of these instances of aggression may be a reaction to previous punishment experiences.

However, the empirical evidence concerning

these presumed effects is particularly weak. Johnson (1972) reports that of the numerous studies he reviewed, only one demonstrated these problems. Instead, his review revealed that there were indications of unexpected improvement in subject behaviour as a result of punishment instead of withdrawal or passive responses. Kazdin's (1975) review likewise does not support the hypothesis of emotional side effects or resulting acts of aggression.

Parke (1972) suggests that undesirable side effect of punishment might occur mainly in situations where the punishment agents are indiscriminately punitive. In addition, acts of aggression may occur when the aversive event is particularly harsh and no alternative behaviour is available. However the evidence collected in non-organizational settings simply does not support the contention of significant undesirable side effects. Before any definitive conclusions about undesirable side effect of punishment in organization are reached, evidence must be gathered within work setting to support or refute these notions.

Second, the use of punishment is thought to be unethical and unhumanitarian. Some people argue that punishment in organization is old fashioned and reflects "tribal mentality" and aver to the retributive justice theme of "an eye for an eye". This thinking confuses the notion of punishing to achieve justice (paying back) in contrast to punishment to change or modify behaviour. Clearly, punishment has different connotations under the two perspectives. Retribution punishment may indeed be unethical, whereas punishment that is intended to be corrective and ultimately operate to the advantage of the person punished may not be considered unethical.

Punishment, however, does involve the systematic administration of aversive or undesirable stimuli. As Rimm and Masters (1974) have indicated, we must consider carefully the potential harm that might accompany some aversive stimuli. It is also clear that one must also consider the potential harm that can occur if nothing is done. Moreover, as Bandura (1969), and Hammer and Organ (1978) succinctly point out, punishment is a frequent and natural occurring event in all our lives that shapes a large part of our behaviour. The use of aversive stimuli has always occurred in organizational setting and probably always will.

Third, punishment is said to never really eliminate undesirable responses. The effects of punishment are said to be only temporary, the undesirable response returning full force when the threat of punishment is removed (Hanner and Organ, 1978). It is apparent from the reviews of Johnson (1972) and Kazdin (1975) that the effects of punishment need not always be temporary and that the recovery rate of the punished response depends on various parameters of punishment often under the control of a punishment agent.

Although some authors (Miner and Brewe, 1983; Arvey and Ivancevich, 1980) pointed out that the issue of punishment in organization has received little research attention, Sims (1980) presents a review of some studies concerning the issue of punishment in organizations. However, much of the research reviewed by Sims is available only in working papers and proceedings from meetings. They however, present a rich source of information on the use of punishment in organizations.

Several studies have used cross-sectional psychometric designs to investigate punishment. In an early study, Katz et al. (1951) found that the low producing railroad section gangs were those led by punitive foremen. Sims and Szilagyi (1975) found that leader reward behaviour generally correlated positively with subordinate performance. Punitive behaviour had no correlation with performance for professional and technical groups, but had significant inverse correlation with performance in administrative and service groups. To the surprise of Sims and Szilagyi, punishment by leaders was positively correlated with satisfaction for the subordinate administrative group. Hunt and Schuler (1976) and Oldham (1976) also found reward behaviour to be positively correlated with subordinate performance. In addition, Oldham related personal punishment by leaders to evaluation of subordinate effectiveness. Punishment was not related to performance in three out of the four performance evaluation measures, but punishment was negatively correlated with subordinate motivational effectiveness.

Overall, the results of the cross-sectional studies show relatively strong positive correlations between reward behaviour and subordinate performance. Punitive behaviour did not show a consistent relationship with

performance, although some evidence points to a modest negative correlation. In addition, by analyzing results for various occupational levels, the relationship found by Sims may be mediated by contextual variables.

Sims (1980) also reviewed a number of longitudinal studies on punishment. Most of the longitudinal designs also used psychometrics methods, and investigated both rewards and punitive leader behaviours. Greene (1976) was the first to investigate reward and punishment with a longitudinal psychometric design. His foremost conclusion was that reward behaviour tended to cause subordinate performance. Sims and Szilagyí also found relationship between reward behaviour and performance in a series of longitudinal studies (Sims, 1977; Sims and Szilagyí, 1978i; Szilagyí, 1979a, 1979b, 1980).

Greene (1976) used a leader punishment scale and concluded that the relationship between leader punitive behaviour and subordinate performance was reciprocal. The word reciprocal in this context means that subordinate performance tended to cause leader punitive behaviour rather than the reverse. To be more specific, when subordinate performance was low, then subsequent leader punitive behaviour was high.

The series of longitudinal studies that Sims and Szilagyí conducted revealed a similar relationship between leader punitive behaviour and subordinate performance. That is, higher levels of punishment tended to follow low levels of performance. Szilagyí's studies were especially note worthy because he investigated goal attainment as a performance measure- a hard measure, as contrasted with soft measures of most other psychometric studies in this area. Szilagyí also found that higher levels of punishment tended to follow higher levels of employee absenteeism (1979a).

Although most of the studies reviewed by Sims (1980) and reports by other authors (Arvey and Ivancovich, 1980) seem to indicate that punishment is ineffective in the organization, some evidence exists that document the positive benefits of punishment in organizations. A survey of one hundred firms showed that 44 percent used the threat of discipline to correct problems and considered it effective (Miner and Brewer, 1983). McDermoth and Newhams (1971), in a study of fifty-three discharged workers who

had been reinstated, found that performance improved after sanctions. Baum and Youngblood (1975) found that a control policy based on legal compliance, significantly improved both attendance and performance without any change in levels of employee satisfaction.

A series of field experiments by Miller (1965) also demonstrated that punishing in effective performance can improve the quality of work. In one experiment, different techniques were employed to cut down on the errors of operations in classifying muffle boxes according to bore size, specifically, persuasion, feedback, and censure, when reprimands and warnings were added to feedback, the number of lots rejected for misclassification dropped to zero and remained at zero for the concluding six weeks of the observation. In two related experiments, performance involved a group of co-workers and again errors were significantly reduced by the imposition of penalties.

Also, Frank and Karl (1978) in a statistical analysis of the original Hawthorne experiments indicated that managerial discipline "seem to have been the major factor in increased rates of output".

In the Nigerian organizational setting, little or no research has been done in the area of discipline. However, Odumosu (1994) in his study of influence of sanctions on employee performance using a sample of 139 male managers amid employing manager facet scale and sanction check list, found out among others that a significant positive correlation exist between managers use of sanctions and rating of unit performance. From the workers point of view, Banjo (1977) studies the effect of discipline on employee efficiency from a sample of 100 workers randomly selected from companies in Lagos State. He found out among others that workers agree to the fact that discipline stimulates their productivity.

Workers' attitudes are also important to management because they affect organizational behaviour of workers thereby affecting their performance. As Alugho (1981) rightly said. "Rightly, attitudes lead to success; wrong attitudes lead to mediocrity or failure for both the business and the people who work for it".

Although no single definition of attitude has emerged over the years. Attitudes are described by Fisbein (1967) as learned dispositions to

respond to an object (or concept), or a class of objects (or concepts), in a favorable or unfavorably way. A more comprehensive definition that also illustrates the three components of attitude is that of Aiken (1980). He stated that attitude may be conceptualized as a learned predisposition to respond positively or negatively to certain objects, situations, concepts, or persons. As such, they possess cognitive (belief or knowledge), affective (emotional, motivational) and performance (behaviour or action tendencies) components.

Similarly, attitude to work is also variously defined and used in describing workers perception and beliefs about work or their job and explaining their behaviour in the organizational context. Attitude to work is very important because it helps to predict work behaviour and it helps workers adapt to their work environment with the organization. Worker negative attitude to work are likely causes of deteriorating conditions in an organization. When attitude to work declines, they may result in strikes, work slowdowns, absence, and workers turnover. They may also be part of grievances. Low performance, poor product quality, workers theft and disciplinary problems. The organization cost associated with poor worker's attitude may be astronomical.

Favourable attitude to work on the other hand, are desired by management because they tend to be connected with the positive outcomes that managers want. Favourable attitudes to work are the product of effective behavioural management. The continuing process of building a supportive human climate in an organization.

From the review above, it is evident that discipline is inevitable for corporate goal achievement. But workers who are at the receiving end of the disciplinary actions, react to such actions, which has a lot of implications that managers should take cognizance of. It is in this regard that this present study is important since it is to ascertain attitudes that workers have towards disciplinary action in businesses organizations.

Hypotheses

- i. There will be no difference between workers' sex and their attitude towards disciplinary action.
- ii. There will be no difference between job level

and attitude towards disciplinary action.

- iii. There will be difference between marital status and attitude towards disciplinary action.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The research design employed in this study is the survey research design. This design helps to describe phenomena as they exist in real life in terms of the degree of association between them.

Subjects

Subjects for the study were drawn from a stratified population in random manner. One hundred and five (male and female) workers were used. Fifteen subjects were drawn from each of the seven department of the company. The same number of questionnaires were administered in each department / unit .

Instrument

The instrument used for this study is a self – developed questionnaire comprising two sections. The first section elicited information about respondents' personal data. Questions relating to sex, age category of staff, marital status and nature of work were asked. Since this part of the instrument is for bio-data, it was not scored.

The second section elicited information about respondents' attitudes towards disciplinary action. It consists of twenty items relating to levels of attitudes towards disciplinary action on which respondents are required to mark an " X " on the point which is appropriate on a 5 – point Likert type scale which ranges from strongly agree (SA) to strongly disagree (SD). Items 1-10 are positive statements and are scored from 5-1 in that order, while items 11-20 are the reversed (negative) statements of the earlier ones and are scored from 1-5 in that order also.

Reliability and Validation of Research Instrument

Face validity as well as content validity were

ensured for the instrument by giving the questionnaire to experts in the field of Industrial Psychology. The irregularities suggested by these experts were rectified in the final form of the questionnaire.

The split – half reliability was used to test the reliability of the instrument. This involves the distraction of same measure to 10 respondents in order to test for the vagueness and clarity of items. The split – half reliability co-efficient of the instrument was 0.74. This shows a high and positive relationship, hence the instrument was considered adequate for administration.

Procedure

Armed with the prepared questionnaires, the personnel manager of the company was approached. The purpose and procedure of the research was then explained to him. Guaranteeing confidentiality the personnel manager was then told how the questionnaires were to be administered. The personnel manger was then given the number of questionnaires required and was asked to distribute them to the employees. The instrument was then administered on the workers at their place of work and all returned questionnaires that were adequately completed were used for the analysis

RESULTS

Hypotheses Testing

The first hypothesis seeks to find out whether there would be no significant difference between workers’ sex and their attitudes towards disciplinary actions. The respondents’ scores were computed and subjected to student t- test statistics. The result of the analysis indicated no significant statistical difference between male and female workers attitudes towards disciplinary actions. The summary of the t-test analysis is presented in table 1 below:

Table 1: Summary of t–test analyses for difference between MALE AND FEMALE WORKERS ATTITUDES TOWARDS DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

Group	N	X	DF	TC	TV	P
Male	67	76.91	103	1.22	1.98	0.05
Female	38	4.03				

The table value at 0.05 level and df 103 = 1.98. tc < tv (i.e 1.22 < 1.89).

The result is not significant. The null hypothesis was accepted. Hence, there is no significant difference between male and female workers attitude towards disciplinary actions. (103)= 1.22, p<0.05.

To test the second hypothesis, which stated that there will be no difference between job level and workers attitudes towards disciplinary actions, the respondents scores were computed and subjected to student t- test analysis of difference. The result indicated that there is a significant difference between junior and senior workers attitudes towards disciplinary actions. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. t (103)=3.33, p<0.05. The summary of the student t-test is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Summary of T-test analysis for difference between junior and senior workers attitudes towards disciplinary actions

Group	N	X	DF	TC	TV	P
Junior	73	73.59	103	3.33	1.98	0.05
Senior	32	81.06				

The third hypothesis which proposed that there will be no difference between workers marital status and their attitudes towards disciplinary actions was also tested using student t – test of difference. After due analysis of the respondents’ computed scores, the result indicated that there is no significant difference between married and single workers attitudes towards disciplinary actions. Hence, the null hypothesis was accepted. t (103)= 1.51, p<0.05. The summary of the t-test analysis is presented in table 3.

Table 3: SUMMARY OF T-TEST ANALYSIS FOR DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SINGLE AND MARRIED WORKERS’ ATTITUDE TOWARDS DISCIPLINARY ACTION

Group	N	X	DF	TC	TV	P
Single	36	72.11	103	1.51	1.98	0.05
Married	69	76.77				

DISCUSSION

Discussions on this study were based on the results arrived at from the data analysed and hypotheses tested.

In the light of the results obtained, the first and third hypotheses were accepted owing to supportive evidence obtained from the statistical

analysis while the second hypothesis was rejected.

The findings of the first hypothesis which stated that there will be no significant difference between workers' sex and their attitudes towards disciplinary actions was accepted in the study. It was confirmed in the study that the sex of an individual does not affect his / her attitudes towards disciplinary actions. This finding is in consonance with the field theory of Lewin (1959) which holds that the only determining force accounting for a person's behavior at any given time is his/ her psychological field as it exists at that time. It does not therefore follow that because an individual is a male or female, his/ her attitude will differ towards disciplinary actions.

The second hypothesis which stated that there will be no difference between job level and workers attitudes towards disciplinary actions was rejected in the study. This might be likely be due to the fact that junior workers and more often than not are at the receiving end of disciplinary actions while the senior workers are usually the one that applies and enforces disciplinary actions. The junior workers might because of this have a different predisposition to disciplinary actions as they way view it from a negative angle, thereby having negation attitudes towards it. The senior workers on the other hand are having a positive predisposition maintain and ensure that workers adhere to the organization rules or they are disciplined.

The findings of the third hypothesis which stated that there will be no significant difference between marital status of workers and their attitudes toward disciplinary actions of workers and their attitudes towards disciplinary action was also accepted in the study. As noted earlier in the works of Lewin (1959) and due to the fact both the married and the single are working under the same rules in the organization, their marital status might not necessarily affects their attitudes towards disciplinary actions.

Finally the study revealed that sixty-one workers (58%) have positive attitudes disciplinary actions, while forty-four workers (42%) shows negative predisposition towards disciplinary actions. This corroborate that of Benjo (1997), which found out that workers have positive attitudes towards discipline and also agreed to the fact that discipline stimulate their productivity.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study were arrived at when the data was analyzed using the student T- test of difference. Therefore, since the first and the third hypotheses were accepted and the second hypothesis rejected, one concludes that;

- There is no significant difference between workers' sex and their attitudes towards disciplinary actions
- There is a significant difference between job level and attitudes towards disciplinary actions.
- There is no significant difference between marital status of workers and their attitudes towards disciplinary actions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that employees should be adequately inducted concerning organization policies and rules. This is very important so that they will be able to know the relevance of disciplinary actions in the organization and consequently, proper knowledge of conditions of work.

Since in organization rules are meant for the workers and not the other way round, the rules should be reasonable and fair, and neither capricious nor harsh, so that they can reasonably comply with them.

In administering punishment to erring workers, the punishment should be targeted towards the undesired behaviour of the employees and not the employees themselves. This is to prevent unhealthy feeling of biases about the disciplinary machinery of the organization as being defective. Also, before administering penalties, proper investigation should be carried out especially in serious cases of misconduct so as to ensure as unbiased and unimpeachable judgement.

Lastly, discipline should be positive oriented. To this end, it should aim towards training and character moulding as against negative tendencies.

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