

PREVENTIVE DISCIPLINE AND HARMONIOUS INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ATMOSPHERE OF ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING COMPANIES IN SOUTH-SOUTH, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explored the relationship between prevention discipline and harmonious industrial relations atmosphere of electrical engineering companies in South-South Region, Nigeria. Using a cross-sectional survey research design, the study employed a positivist approach where the questionnaire was utilized as the major instrument. The theoretical framework was drawn from interactional justice theory. The primary data were collected using two hundred and twenty five (225) employees drawn from the sample size of one hundred and forty four (144) was generated using the taro Yamane formula while Bowley's proportional allocation technique was used for the individual company sample size. For data collection 144 copies of the questionnaire were distributed depicting 100%. The sample subjects were obtained using the simple random sampling technique. The unit of analysis for the study are individual organizational members. Data were collected from a sample of 139 employees from 10 electrical engineering companies operating in South South Region, Nigeria. A total of 139 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved, depicting 96% response rate. A total of 131 copies were used, depicting 90%. For primary data analysis, the study applied mean, mode and standard deviation to test the variables. The Spearman rank correlation coefficient was used to test the hypothesized associations, using SPSS version 25. The study found that in electrical engineering companies there is a strong but negative relationship between preventive discipline and harmonious industrial relations atmosphere. 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 work rules and standards of their organizations.

Keywords: Prevention Discipline, Harmonious Industrial Relation

INTRODUCTION

It was in view of the increasing cases presented against employers who are liable for the torts and wrongful acts their employees committed in the authorized course of employment, which gave rise to the establishment and passage of the Employee's Compensation Act in 2010 (Employment Compensation Act, 2010). Also the failure of employers of labour to understand that they owe it as an obligation to provide working environments or atmosphere that guaranties and promote workers physical, mental, and social development which can transform the industrial relations atmosphere, has led to the increasing employee's awareness about their rights and the enhanced jurisdiction of the National Industrial Court of Nigeria under the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria(Third Alteration) Act. This Act confers on the National Industrial Court of Nigeria jurisdiction over matters relating to or connected with unfair labour practice or international best practices in labour, employment and industrial relations (Atilola and Atilola, 2018).

It has been noted that, employees do not even have the opportunity to determine standards on which they would simply desire to work or even conduct themselves at the workplace, so they become dissatisfied and aggrieved with the entire system within the plant, which adversely affects their conduct and performance. Employees engage in irresponsible actions and at other times express their grievance through agitations accompanied with hostility, passive indifference or apathy in a bid to express their frustration and discontent with employers. Frequent fluctuation in the industrial relations atmosphere of industries is one major problem that has hindered organizational performance and productivity. Managers are left with the decision to tackle such issues as: frequent industrial disputes and prolonged industrial actions which take the form of incessant strike actions, increased lock-outs, prolonged conflict incidences, and practice of exclusion, which has led to deep-

rooted problems such as indiscipline, restriction in output, absenteeism and loitering. All these are manifestations borne from an adversarial industrial relations atmosphere, the proceeds which are not too palatable, being that they have serious negative indications for industry performance and service delivery. It is however, surprising to note that organizational managers are still non-challent toward a review of the conventional methods of handling disciplinary issues within their organizations. From the above problems therefore, this study examined how the various workplace disciplinary approaches can help improve the industrial relations atmosphere and to determine a preferred mechanism among the various approaches so as to increase performance in the organization.

Research Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were examined in this study:

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between preventive discipline and harmonious industrial relations atmosphere of electrical engineering companies in south-south, Nigeria.

Interactional Justice Theory

According to Sapru (2013) citing Swarlicki and Folger (1997) and Cropanzano, Prehar and Chen (2000) state that interactional justice is the individual perception of the degree to which he is treated with dignity, concern and respect. When the employees are treated in an unjust manner, they respond by retaliating. Interactional justice means the thoroughness of information provided (informational justice) as well as the amount of dignity and respect. Accordingly, because interactional justice or injustice is intimately tied to their supervisor, it is expected that the individual would expect perceptions of injustice to be more from his supervisors. Following this sharing information and unbiased procedures, manager can increase the perception of procedural justice. By having achieved this, employees can have a view that their manager or leader are acting positively even when there still exist some problems of distribution in terms of promotion pay and other conitions of service..

Preventive Discipline

Preventive disciplinary procedures are Proactive disciplinary measures aimed at discouraging or dissuading organization members from deviant work behaviours that manifest as lateness to work, absenteeism, redundancy, disobedience to superior officer, insubordination among others (Dumisan, 2002). This implies that it is pre-emptive in nature and so the manager cannot be excluded in the process as it his responsibility to lead and also deter other employees from carrying out acts of violation within the organization. Preventive disciplinary approach is founded on the deterrent theory of punishment as proposed by Peters (1966). The deterrent theory states that punishment is justified as a means of preventing violations of rule. According to peters (1966), the basic case for punishment is surely in terms of deterrence and prevention. In other words, we punish so that the employees do not try to break the rule again, and to prevent other workers from following the same example. Peters (1966, 272) in justifying the need for discipline states that:

"there is considerable merit to the deterrent theory of punishment. It cannot be denied that the fear of punishment can exert a restraining and salutary influence on many workers. However the expected deterrent effect has not always been realized".

Durkheim (1961) does not endorse the deterrent theory. His reason is that, when punishment serves only as a threat, it merely guarantees overt and superficial property. That is to say, it simply is likened to a 'policing procedure' which does not have similar implication as what is expected of any organizational instrument. If this is so reasoned, we therefore are in contrast with this approach of discipline as it does not present the intent of our study; hence the need to address the next approach of workplace discipline.

However, McGregor (1967) an astute behavioral scholar advocates a trend towards preventive and constructive approaches to dealing with deviant behavior in organizations. He addressed to a great extent the limitations posed by other traditional approaches to dealing with indiscipline. McGregor (1967) referred to this approach as 'the hot stove rule.' He posited that a sound disciplinary system should possess the following characteristics: i) advance warning, ii) immediacy of action, iii) consistency, iv) impersonality. Amah (2010) stressed that this approach insist on immediate investigation and discipline just after the rules are broken in accordance with the reinforcement principle. Amah (2010) stressed that the rules are expected to apply consistently to all employees. It is expected that employees will avoid breaking the rules as one avoids touching the hot stove with bare hands. It is assumed that more problems will surface if the investigations are delayed.

Basically, preventive disciplinary procedures are meant to actually prevent violation or deviations of any kind that is against the disciplinary codes of an organization. It is the place of organization managers to state expressly in simple terms without ambiguity the "dos and don'ts" of the organization. It is to some extent therefore obvious that organizational rules and regulations in preventive disciplinary procedures is aimed at educating/counseling employees and is what can bring about the expected cooperation and behavior in a normal and orderly way that is reasonably accepted (Gabriel & Zeb-Obipi, 2019). Accordingly, Bryant (1984) referred to this measure as a positive discipline approach which operates in cooperative environment where employee and supervisor engage in joint discussion and problem solving to resolve incidents of employee irresponsibility. The management point out the misconduct to the employee and expects the employee to take on the responsibility of correcting the misconduct and improving their performance rather than being reprimanded. The procedure involves three (3) steps: i) conference between employee and supervisor with the aim of finding a verbal solution to problem and the employee is expected to promise improvement on his deviant behavior, ii) the employee is reminded about his/her promise if no positive action is forthcoming, iii) finally, if the first and second plan fails, the employee is placed on a day's decision to continue working for the organization or not. After which the employee is invited the next day to improve commitment to organizational objectives or to quit working from the organization due to irresponsibility for the tool preventive discipline are regarded as threat.

Harmonious Industrial Relation Atmosphere

Harmonious industrial relations atmosphere is another measure of industrial relations atmosphere. Harmonious industrial relations atmosphere is a state of persistent effectiveness of industrial relations, the indicator of which is policy stability (Zeb-obipi, Obiekwe and Ateke, 2019); industrial harmony, industrial peace, teamwork (Bamson and Leburu, 2018); collaboration, low strike incidences, increased consultation expanding collective bargaining (Ahiauzu, 1999). It is pertinent therefore, to point out that a good or effective or harmonious industrial relation atmosphere is such that exist in an enterprise or industry, to the extent that the following indicators are present: i) The highest possible levels of efficiency or output; ii) Effective communication and mutual understanding between employers / managements, employee/trade unions and the state; iii) Regular payment of wages and salaries, and the implementation of other conditions of service, which are fair, and reasonable; and iv) The lowest possible level of labour grievances, trade disputes and strikes. It is essentially important in assessing good and effective industrial relations in that the issues there in have direct implications for the other indicators. Thus in analyzing industrial relations in south-south Nigeria, workers strikes, labour grievance and trade disputes will be used as indicators of the trend in industrial relations. These issues according to Atilola (2011) have direct implication for other indicators that could equally be used to analyze industrial relation and other variables.

Expanded collective bargaining is one among many indicators of a harmonious industrial relations atmosphere. Harmonious industrial relations atmosphere according to Onasanya (2005) citing Yesufu (1984) is an industrial climate where good human relations exists, it will be easy to organize

and receive co-operation of the workers for productive purpose. Hence in good industrial relations, understanding and trust through dialogue are therefore necessary to promote industrial harmony. When management and union leaders want to ensure the operation of collective agreements in a true spirit, there is always a sharing of information and joint consultation with each other because such efforts usually lead to full cooperation to provide better services and increase productivity, reduce costs, maintain discipline and create a congenial atmosphere which are the prime concern of management (Dunn, 2007). According to Dunn (2007) collective bargaining can have a positive influence on management- union relationship if the union's efforts can result in better service to customers and in reducing cost. Hence, at the time of signing an agreement between the management and the union in industries, a clause is generally inserted that the workmen will increase production.

Labour Unions existence is another indicator of an industrial relations atmosphere. Labour Union is a combination of workers or employees, whether temporary or permanent, the purpose of which is to regulate the terms and conditions of employment of workers (The Trade Union Decree 31 of 1973). According to Amah (2010) Trade Union is an organization that has the legal authority to negotiate with employers on behalf of employees and arrive at enforceable agreements on issues such as wages, hours of work and other conditions of employment. Employer's hostility has brought about labour unions. In organizations, there is need for channels through which hostility may be expressed without fear. Labour unions have risen for verifying the pent-up hostility. Each employee has an innate human desire for recognition which management may have a tendency to neglect. However, labour unions are becoming the vehicle to accomplish this. Amah (2010, 397) stated that:

" the union's primary objective is the welfare of its members; however in recent times unions tend to seek the welfare and progress of the society as a whole. They are therefore seen and accepted as essential institutions and an internal part of the society. They work towards ensuring industrialization and prosperity of the society, protection of jobs, full employment and humane working environment".

The functions of trade unions as outlined by Amah (2010) include: the organization and government of labour and the provision of affiliate co-ordination services; collective bargaining services ; employment contract administration services i.e the enforcement of collective agreement which involves the use of sanctions; Administration of benefits to members i.e. trade benefits and friendly benefits ; grievance processing and arbitration services; the organization of conference and conventions; joint consultation; influence government to settle industrial disputes, pass favorable law and avoid actions that will adversely affect workers; labour education services which include the training of labour leaders, public relations programmes etc.; legal assistance to members, pension plan administration, the processing of union dues, the discipline of members of union, political activities where permissible and labour representation development.

Research Design

This study adopted is a cross-sectional research design.

Population of the Study

The population of the study was made up of 225 staff of 10 Electrical Engineering companies who are registered with the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) in south-south Nigeria. The population excludes casual workers who are not listed in the nominal roll of the firms or updated gazetted publications of the said firms. The population was restricted to only Electrical Engineering companies in the organized private sector to ease accessibility. The study therefore adopted the 2019 directory of the manufacturers Association of Nigeria (M A N) which is the latest version available.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The simple random sampling method was also adopted to arrive at the study subjects. This is a good and fair representation of the 225 employees that have been identified as our population.

Methods of Data Analyses

The data generated through the quantitative instrument was first of all cleaned after which the items were coded and entered into the data editor of the SPSS. Frequencies, as well as descriptive such as the measures of central tendency (i.e. mean scores) and dispersion (i.e. standard deviation) were computed for the primary analysis, which focused on the study demographics and univariate analysis respectively. At the secondary level of analysis, inferential statistics such as Pearson r correlation coefficients and Regression coefficients including the p-values were calculated for purposes of answering the research questions and testing the research hypotheses. Correlation analyses using the Pearson r correlation were interpreted based on Guilford's (1956) scale giving in Irving (2005, p.16), thus: (a) $< .20$ = slight correlation, almost negligible; (b) $.20$ to $.40$ = low correlation, definite but small relationship; (c) $.40$ to $.70$ = moderate correlation, substantial relationship; $.70$ to $.90$ = high correlation, marked relationship; and (e) $< .90$ = very high correlation, very dependable relationship. According to (Irving 2005, p.16) the Guilford scale provides "a consistent means for interpreting the statistical correlations" and these interpretations should be evaluated in the light of the significance levels, which is set at p value of $< .05$ (one tailed). Kerlinger and Lee (2000) according to (Irving 2005, p.16) give guidelines for accepting or rejecting the null hypotheses as follows: (1) an r value of $< .20$ is the benchmark for accepting the null hypotheses.

Preventive discipline and measure of industrial relation atmosphere

		Preventive Discipline		Harmonious Industrial Relation Atmosphere
Preventive Discipline	Pearson Correlation	1	-.491**	.456**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	131	131	131
	Pearson Correlation	-.491**	1	-.283**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.001
	N	131	131	131
Harmonious Industrial Relation Atmosphere	Pearson Correlation	.456**	-.283**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	
	N	131	131	131

Source: SPSS Data Output, 2020

In addressing research question 2, the result on relationship between preventive discipline and harmonious industrial relations atmosphere becomes the focus. Based on the result presented on table 4.15, where $R = 0.456$, the results indicate that preventive discipline has a direct and moderate correlation with harmonious industrial relations atmosphere. That is to say that the more the preventive discipline tactics is applied in these organizations the more the industrial relations atmosphere becomes harmonious and peaceful.

The test for the relationship between preventive discipline and the measure of industrial relation atmosphere was reflected in two hypothetical statements:

H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between preventive discipline and harmonious industrial relations atmosphere in electrical engineering companies south-south, Nigeria.

Table on the above hypothesis showed that the probability value $p_v = 0.000 < 0.05$, hence from the decision rule, null hypothesis is rejected indicating that there is a significant relationship between preventive discipline and harmonious industrial relations atmosphere. This shows that the preventive discipline has a significant positive influence on the harmonious industrial relations atmosphere.

CONCLUSION

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 increase only applied.

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.

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