

EMPLOYEE DISCIPLINE

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Definition and Meaning

- Discipline is the orderly conduct by an employee in an expected manner. It implies the absence of chaos, irregularity and confusion in the behavior of a worker. It is the backbone of healthy industrial relations. The promotion and maintenance of employee discipline is essential for smooth functioning of an organization. It ensures productivity and efficiency in an organization.
- Employee morale and industrial peace are definitely linked with a proper maintenance of discipline. Disciplinary action can also help the employee to become more effective. The actions of one person can affect others in the group.
- According to Calhoun, 'Discipline is a force that prompts individuals or groups to observe rules, regulations and procedures which are deemed to be necessary for the effective functioning of an organization'.
- It can be said that discipline is a condition in the organization when employees conduct themselves in accordance with the organization's rules and standards of acceptable behavior.

Objectives of Discipline

- **1. Motivate an employee to comply with the company's performance standards:** Employee receives discipline after failing to meet some obligation of job. The failure could be either directly related to the tasks performed by the employee or ignoring rules and regulations that define proper conduct at work.

- **2. Maintain respect and trust between the supervisor and employee:** Discipline if not properly administered can create problems like low morale, resentment, and ill-will between the employees. In such case, improvement in employee's behaviour, if any, will be relatively short-lived and the supervisor will need to discipline the employee again and again. On the contrary, properly administered discipline will not only improve employee behaviour but will also minimize future disciplinary problems through good relationship between the supervisor and the employee.
- **3. Improve the performance of the employee:** Discipline for poor task performance should not be applied while employees are on training or learning the job. Nor should employees be disciplined for problems beyond their control, for example, failure to meet output standards due to the lack of raw materials. Yes, discipline should be exercised when employees are found responsible for unsatisfactory performance.
- **4. Increase the morale and working efficiency of the employees.**
- **5. Foster industrial peace which is the very foundation of industrial democracy.**

Types of Discipline

1. Positive Discipline:

- This is also called 'self-imposed discipline'. It involves creation of an atmosphere in the organization through rewards, appreciation, incentive payment, promotion, constructive support etc. to motivate employees to work willingly to accomplish the set goals.
- In essence, positive discipline emphasizes the concept of self-discipline or self-control. Thus, it reduces the need for personal

supervision to make employees conform to organizational rules, regulations, procedures and standards.

- According to William R. Spriegel, “Positive discipline does not replace reason but applies reason to the achievement of a common objective. Positive discipline does not restrict the individual but enables him to have a greater freedom in that he enjoys a greater degree of self-expression in striving to achieve the group objective, which he identifies as his own'
- Evidences suggest that self-disciplined person tends to be a better worker than one who is not. Self- discipline, when developed from within, leads to building up morale to run organizations successfully.

2. Negative Discipline:

- It is also called ‘enforced discipline’. In case of negative discipline, employees are forced to obey orders and abide by rules and regulations that have been laid down, failing which penalties and punishment would be imposed on them. Thus, the objective of using punitive or coercive discipline is to ensure that employees do not violate rules and regulations formed by the organisation.
- In other words, the purpose of negative discipline is to scare other employees and to ensure that they do not indulge in undesirable behaviour. It is worth mentioning here that negative discipline cannot eliminate the undesirable behaviour of the employees, but can merely suppress it.
- Punishment is not pleasant. It causes resentment and hostility on the part of employees. That is why this kind of discipline results in only the minimum standards of performance on the part of employees. This is precisely the reason why it is rarely used in the organizations.

- Because punitive discipline leads to resentment, it needs to be exercised in a progressive, sequential and chronological manner. A progressive system of discipline generally contains five steps, viz., an oral reprimand, a written reprimand, a second written warning, temporary suspension and dismissal or discharge.

Indiscipline

- Indiscipline is the act of misconduct in the workplace, when the employee ignores the established rules and doesn't follow them. It is a lack of discipline or lack of control. It means disorderliness, insubordination and not following the rules and regulations of an organization.
- The act of indiscipline occurs for many reasons, some of them may be personal, but many are related to the socio-economical factors of the time.
- In a situation in which the management does not get the cooperation of workers and employees. Non-cooperation of employees is in most cases the result of faulty attitudes and behavior of the management. In many companies indiscipline occurs as the result of bad management, mistreatment or low wages.
- Indiscipline in the workplace can be direct and noticeable, causing discomfort to managers and co-workers because of its sometimes confrontational or aggressive nature. These behaviors set a bad example to other workers, undermine the authority of supervisors and create a sometimes-scary work environment.

Causes of Indiscipline

- **Unfair Management Practices:** Management typically indulges in unfair practices like Wage discrimination, Non-compliance with promotional policies and transfer policies, Discrimination in allotment of labor, Defective handling of grievances, Payment of low wages, Delay in payment of wages, Creating caliber work life etc. These unfair management practices bit by bit lead to indiscipline.
- **Absence of Effective Leadership:** Absence of effective leadership leads to poor management within the areas of direction, guidance etc. This successively, leads to indiscipline. When the leader or supervisor is not active in delegating the duties and responsibilities to the employees it leads to indiscipline. In case he fails to check whether the employees are following the desired course of action it may lead to chaos eventually. Employees start doing their job according to their desire which will lead to inefficiency in achieving organizational objectives.
- **Communication Barriers:** Communication barriers and absence of humane approach on the a part of superiors lead to frustration and indiscipline among the staff. The management ought to clearly formulate the policies concerning discipline. These policies ought to be communicated and also the policies ought to be systematically followed within the organizations. The management ought to even be emphatic towards the workers.
- **Varying Disciplinary Measures:** Consistent disciplinary actions must be there in the organization to provide equal justice to all

concerned. At different times and for everyone, the same standard of disciplinary measures should be taken otherwise it may give rise to growing indiscipline in the industry in future i.e., the judicious function on the part of management must be free from any bias, privilege or favoritism.

- **Defective Supervision:** Supervisor is the immediate boss of the workers and many disciplinary problems have their origin in faulty supervision. The attitude and behavior of the supervisor may create many problems. As the maintenance of the discipline is the core of supervisory responsibilities, indiscipline may spring from the want of the right type of supervision.
- **Inadequate attention to personnel problems:** Delay in solving personnel problems develops frustration among individual workers. The management should be proactive so that there is no discontent among the workers. It should adopt a parental attitude towards its employees.
- **Victimization:** Victimization of subordinate also results in indiscipline. The management should not exploit the workers. It is also in the long-term interest of the management to take care of its internal customers.
- **Absence of Code of Conduct:** This creates confusion and also provides chance for discrimination while taking disciplinary action. A code of conduct is a set of rules outlining the responsibilities of or proper practices for an individual, party or organization. Related concepts include ethical codes and honor codes.

- **Deferring settlement of Employee Grievances:** The employee grievances cannot be put off by deferring or neglecting their solutions. The grievances should properly be inquired into and settled by the managers in a reasonable period. Neglect of grievances often results in reduced performance, low morale and indiscipline among the employees. Strikes and work stoppages stem in many cases from the utter neglect of employee grievances.
- **Divide and Rule Policy:** Many managers in the business obtain secret information about other employees through their trusted assistants. The spying on employees is only productive of a vicious atmosphere and of undecidability in the organization. Henry Fayol has rightly pointed out that dividing enemy forces to weaken them is clever, but dividing one's own team is grave sin against the business. No amount of management skill is necessary for dividing personnel, but integrating personnel into a team is the challenging task of sound management.
- **Mis-judgment in Promotion and Placements:** Mis-judgment in personnel matters like promotion and placements contribute to the growth of indiscipline in an enterprise. Cases of mis-judgment are carefully noted, widely circulated, and hotly debated by the employees. Expecting discipline from misruled people is not possible. Sometimes, undesired persons are placed on the jobs which makes the employees discontented, then giving rise to the problem of indiscipline.

Disciplinary Procedure

1. Location of Responsibility:

- ✓ In one view, the responsibility for administering discipline should fall on the shoulders of immediate supervisor of the employee. The reason being the immediate supervisor is responsible for employee's output.
- ✓ He/she also knows better about employee's performance problems. The contrary opinion expressed in this regard is that discipline should be administered on an equitable and uniform basis by the H R department. However, this approach has its drawbacks: first, the H R department must spend inordinate amounts of time on disciplinary matters; second, the supervisor will lose some control over subordinates.
- ✓ In order to overcome the problem of where to place the responsibility for discipline, the supervisor should be entrusted with the responsibility to administer less severe forms of discipline, such as an oral warning or a written notice. For serious situations involving discharge or suspension, the suspension should consult with H R representatives in order to administer such disciplines.

2. Define Performance Expectations:

- ✓ A core ingredient in every disciplinary procedure is to clearly define the standard of behaviour that management expects from its employees. Employee standards of performance or behaviour must be in conformity with the organizational objectives.
- ✓ Obviously, these standards need to be revised along with change in organizational goals and objectives. Many organizations provide their employees with written principles of behaviour in the form Employee Manuals.'

3. Communication of Policy, Procedures and Rules:

- ✓ In order to maintain satisfactory levels of employee performance, the disciplinary policy, procedures and rules formulated by the organization need to be clearly communicated to the employees.
- ✓ Employees about their expected behaviour should be communicated through employee handbooks/manuals, orientation programmes, rules and regulations distributed in writing to employees or posted on bulletin boards.

4. Collection of Performance Data:

- ✓ Before an employee is disciplined, it is of the utmost importance to prove that some rule, regulation or standard is violated and, has taken place. Here, one problem is while collection of some performance data is easy, others are difficult.
- ✓ For example, an employee's absence finely recorded is rarely subject to misinterpretation. However, there are some measures of performance such as 'horseplay', 'insubordination', and abusive language to supervisors', which are somewhat subjective and difficult to record.
- ✓ Knowledge about concrete records of unsatisfactory performance of employees is considered important for three reasons. First, the burden of proof lies with the manager or employer. This is based on the common law that a person is innocent until proven guilty.
- ✓ Second, an employee if, convinced with proof about his unsatisfactory performance. Third, if the accused employee questions the punishment awarded to him/her and the grievance reaches arbitration, the arbitrator may ask the employer to supply the proof of employee misconduct or undesirable behaviour.

5. Framing Charges and Intimation:

- ✓ Once the prima facie case of employee's misconduct is established the employer then issues a notice to employee stating charges labeled against him.
- ✓ Such a notice is generally known as a 'show cause notice'. In the notice, each charge needs to be clearly specified.
- ✓ Also, the accused employee should be given an opportunity to explain his/her position.

6. Consideration of Explanation:

- ✓ On receipt of explanation from the accused employee, the management may consider any one of the three types of options available to it:
 - ✓ a. If the accused employee confesses the charge labelled against him/her, the management can dispense any further enquiry and award punishment to the accused employee.
 - ✓ b. In case the management is satisfied with the explanation given by the accused, the charge against him/her can be cancelled and quashed.
 - ✓ c. If the management is not satisfied with the explanation given by the accused, the management can proceed to further probing of the matter so that the fact is established and an appropriate action can be taken.

7. Awarding Punishment:

- ✓ Once the unsatisfactory performance of the accused is well established the management then awards punishment to the accused employee. As already motioned, while awarding punishment, the management should follow a procedure of 'progressive discipline'.
- ✓ The progressive discipline is characterized by either a penalty commensurate with the offense or increasing serious penalties for

continued unsatisfactory performance. These in that order are discussed in the subsequent section.

8. Follow Up:

- ✓ The last step in the procedure of positive discipline is follow-up. It means, once the punishment is awarded, it is necessary to keep vigil whether the punishment has any salutary effect on the behaviour and performance of the accused employee or not.
- ✓ If not the corrective measures like corrective counseling should be introduced to improve the accused's behaviour.

Types Of Penalties and Punishments

1.Oral Warning: The mildest form of discipline is the oral warning. This is usually awarded on minor offences like late coming, absenteeism, etc. which are committed for the first time. A common practice followed in this regard is to make a temporary record of this warning and place the same in the employee's file. Once the employee has shown better performance and willingness to adhere to rules and regulations, the record of the oral reprimand is removed from his file.

2.Written Notice: The second step in order of severity in progressive discipline is the written notice or warning. This is awarded for repeated minor offences or some major lapses. The procedure involved in writing of the warning is the same as the oral warning. The only difference is that the discussion concludes with the employee being told that a written warning will be issued. Then, the manager writes up the warning. A copy of the warning is sent to the personnel department. Like oral warning, organizations may allow employees to purge their personnel file of these

warnings after some period of time, i.e. usually two years of proper work behavior.

3.Suspension: Suspension, also called lay off. is the next logical step taken in progressive discipline. Suspension as punishment is awarded for some major/serious offences.

Suspension may be for a certain period ranging from one day to several weeks or months. During the suspension period, the employee is paid a reduced pay known as 'subsistence allowance'. Full pay can be given if the suspension is withdrawn.

However, suspension can have some implications for both the organization and the employee. For organization, suspension means loss of the employee for the lay off period. It is particularly so if the suspended employee is a skilled one.

From the employee's standpoint, suspensions can result in a more negative frame of mind than before the layoff. Nonetheless, one reason why management considers suspending employee is to give an awakening to the problem employee.

4.Demotion: For the serious offences where suspension has not been effective and management wants to avoid dismissal, demotion is considered as an alternative punishment. It is noteworthy that, in contrast to the previous disciplinary actions, demotion is not temporary, but a constant one. It has serious implications for employee morale and motivation.

5.Pay Cut: Another alternative, also rarely applied in practice, is cutting the problem employee's pay. This is awarded mostly when offence led to damage or loss of property. A part of the loss is recovered from such pay cut of the employee.

6.Dismissal/Discharge: Dismissal is the ultimate disciplinary action taken against problem employee. This punishment is awarded only for the most serious offences involving integrity.

Both dismissal and discharge lead to employee separation from the organization. However, the severity of punishment is more in dismissal than discharge.

In case of dismissal, the employee is deprived of service benefits such as gratuity, provident fund, pension and other perquisites and even disqualified for securing job in other organizations.

As regards discharge, it is termination of employee's job with notice and with service benefits earned so far.

Rewards of Discipline

1.Physical Discipline: Such a discipline rewards us with a healthy body and loads of more energy. It helps us to remain energetic throughout the day at the workplace and has a positive effect on our productivity.

2.Emotional Discipline: It rewards us with a strong, confident, balanced self and family. It helps us in taking the right decision at workplace and strengthen our interpersonal relationship.

3.Spiritual Discipline: Taking out sometime from our hectic schedule for "Ourself" each day rewards us with a sense of calmness, direction and gives us a purpose to survive. This further promotes higher productivity as it leads to better engagement at the workplace.

THANK YOU

