PERCEIVED DISCIPLINE, PUNISHMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE AMONG EMPLOYEES OF FEDERAL MINISTRIES IN CROSS RIVER STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at finding the relationships among discipline, punishment and organizational performance as perceived by staff of federal ministries in Cross River State. Purposive sampling technique was employed in drawing a sample of 1000 staff from an estimated population of about 8000 federal workers, whose ministries are domiciled in the federal secretarial complex in Calabar. The study design was correlational design, and the instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire called Discipline, Punishment and Performance Opinion Questionnaire (DPPOQ). The independent variables of the study were discipline (classified into, persuasion, issuance of query, warning letters & withholding of reward), and punishment (classified into suspension, demotion & dismissal), while the dependent variable was organizational performance. Results of the study indicate that there is a positive strong correlation between all the sub-scales of discipline and organization performance. Findings on the comparison between punishment indicators and organization performance show an inverse relationship. The study recommends the use of discipline instead of outright punishment in correcting staff to enhance effective goal attainment in organization.

KEYWORDS: Discipline, punishment, performance, query, reward, suspension, dismissal.

INTRODUCTION

Discipline and punishment are two constructs often considered, by students, teachers, even some authors and people in circular settings to be synonyms. Authors who attempt to give distinction between the constructs have diverse opinions. While some researchers feel that discipline and punishment in an organization mean one and the same thing, some other analysts feel that punishment is a harder form of discipline and it comes after disciplinary measures have failed to change an employee's behaviour. For instance, Agulanna and Awujo (2005) see punishment to be a function of discipline by describing discipline as having dual nature — preventive and punitive. It is preventive, according to them, when discipline is used to sharpen the awareness of employees regarding organizational rules, and it is punitive when persistent violation of the rules forces the organization to exert some stiffer measures on the staff involved. Slim (2013) noted that discipline and punishment are different and have separate outcomes for employees and distinct impact on the organization. Any measure that sentences and abuses a worker is punitive not disciplinary because discipline is expected to be

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used for correction. In the same vein, punishment is about controlling and regulating workers' behaviour through instilling fear in them by threats of transfer, withdrawal of rewards, suspensions and outright sack. This may result in workers not behaving in certain ways in the presence of the superior. Agulanna and Awujo (2005) discouraged workers from trying to do things that could bring shame or pain to their employer resulting from negative behaviours. Conversely, disciplinary measures, though requiring that supervisors should be consistent and firm, may teach workers what is proper and expected of them. Also, they are used to develop and equip workers with knowledge, skills and abilities to help them function well in the organization, hence promote the attainment of organizational goals.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The main essence of an organization, commercial or non-commercial/ humanitarian, is to perform maximally. When performance is maximal, the organization's continuous existence is guaranteed. For commercial organizations maximal performance boosts their profit margins and creates confidence in stakeholders. For non-commercial/humanitarian organizations like the federal ministries, maximal performance is important to enhance the achievement of federal government in policy implementation. In recent times, however, observation and experience have shown that workers in government establishments believe that government is an impersonal affair therefore, should be treated or handled with frivolity and disdain. This should not be so, if government establishments must perform well. One begins to wonder why public workers have such unwholesome attitude towards work. These factors have raised great concern for researchers particularly this study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between discipline and organizational performance on one hand, and punishment and organizational performance on the other hand. The study investigated persuasion, issuance of query, warning letters and withholding of reward as disciplinary measures, and suspension, demotion and dismissal as punitive measures. Based on these,

the following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study.

$H0_1$: Disciplinary measures on workers of public establishments, particularly federal ministries in Cross River State, do not significantly relate with their job performance.

$H0_2$: Punitive measures on workers of public establishments, particularly federal ministries in Cross River State, do not significantly relate with their job performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

When rules are made for an organization, they stand a chance of being flouted by employees. Discipline is applied to ensure that the rules are kept for the success of the organization. Sometimes, instead of just disciplinary measures, punitive measures are applied to address negative vices. Different research works have addressed the two concepts and their effects on organizational performance.

Vonai (2005) conducted a research on the theoretical analysis of the types of discipline that can be adopted or applied by an organization without infringing on employees' motivation and performance. The study observed that most organizations and managers are exposed to increasing pressures; those of competition, client demand, customer care, and financial constraint, which can be argued, warrant reassessment of models of discipline. The study used the punitive model, corrective model, revisionist and metaphorical model of discipline. It was concluded that, disciplinary management system must be such that does not disrupt employees' motivation and commitment. The analysis of different disciplinary approaches (like queries, warning and withdraw of reward), point to the end for organizations to make discipline a corrective mechanism and not a punishment tool.

Punishment has not been reviewed 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 (e.g. sabotage) towards 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 temporary reduction in productivity and quality of work (Baum, 1986; Armstrong, 2003).

Laboratory experiments have demonstrated that punishment results in an aggressive response against the source of the punishment. In their study on the organization of discipline, Joe, Richard and Sandford (2011) suggest that scholars may misinterpret the incidence of discipline when they fail to account for the dynamic ways that organizations and management shape sanctioning patterns. Daft (2009) suggests that managers should dispense punishment carefully to avoid employees giving up on attitudes of high performance. This, according to the study, brings to light the fact that business is dependent upon how well the manager manages disciplinary measures. This means that employee behaviour is a true reflection of the manager's attributes.

According to Chion (2004), successful management of the balance between discipline and high performance is a combination of manager and employee personalities, workplace situations, pressures, as well as effective management techniques and strategies. The study indicated that very few managers find it easy to address performance and discipline since poor performers require a unique skill set, a combination of conflict resolution techniques, an ability to empathize, high levels of emotional intelligence and an understanding of the impact of the legislation. This line of thinking was further substantiated by Crete (1995) who argues that there is a synergy between discipline and corporate performance. He notes that performance feedback is of great influence on the disciplinary system as it holds employee accountable for their actions. With an instrument he tagged Performance Assessment Guide (PAG), he emphasizes that organizations need to make sure that job standards are communicated, employees receive feedback on performance and job standards are set. The guide also stresses on the notion that if job standards are set then an employee is liable to continuously receive feedback on performance if not, it is the duty of the superior to investigate reasons. After investigation, action plan may be developed, implemented and or modified, and it is at this point that discipline may be imposed.

From these different views of early researchers, it does appear that the bottom line of discipline and punishment points to the fact that punishment comes after spelt out disciplinary measures have been exhausted by management and after enough feedback system has been employed. The learning point from literature is that when managers employ punitive measures in trying to achieve organizational goals they end up creating unfriendly scenarios that finally lead to poor performance. This present study noticed a gap in literature with regards to spelling out the real factors that one may say are the dimensions of discipline and punishment in a true Nigerian public service setting. This study cannot wholly fill the gap, which calls for further research efforts.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted survey research design, which led to the utilization of structured questionnaire that provided primary data that were analyzed statistically. The study sample was made up of 1,000 public servants drawn from a population of about 8,000, staff of Federal Ministries which constituted the study area in Cross River State. The method adopted in selecting the sample was purposive sampling technique. This technique was adopted for convenience since it was not possible to know the exact population of the area and also to reach out to all the extra-ministerial departments. The study instrument contained a total of 54 items, which were streamed into three major sections – A, B and C. Section A had five demographic questions representing 9.26%; section B, discipline and perceived organizational performance, 25 questions or 46.30%; and section C, punishment and perceived organizational performance, 24 questions or 44.44%. A few lead questions in form of Yes or No were asked to elicit the consent of respondents, and followed with other major questions using Likert five-point scale (strongly Agree – SA, Agree – A, Undecided – U, Disagree – D and Strongly Disagree – SD). Of the 1,000 questionnaires administered, nine hundred and fifty were successfully retrieved accounting for 95%. Pearson product moment coefficient of correlation (r) was employed in testing the hypotheses:

$$r = \frac{n\sum xy - \sum x \sum y}{\sqrt{n\sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2}\ \sqrt{n\sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2}}$$

RESULTS
Results of the analyses are presented in tables 1and 2.

Hypothesis one
Workers perception of disciplinary measures in an organization does not significantly relate with their job performance. Two variables in this hypothesis are disciplinary measures (classified into persuasion, issuance of query, warning notice and withholding of reward), and job performance.

Table 1: Summary of Pearson product moment coefficient of correlation for: Relationship between disciplinary measures and perceived organizational performance.

DV/IV	r	Tt	(tc)	r 2	Accept/Reject
x/y		4.303			
Discipline					
i. Persuasion	0.45	-	1.27	0.2025	Accepted
ii. query	0.15	-	0.59	0.0225	Accepted
iii. warning letters	0.18	-	0.66	0.0324	Accepted
iv. withdrawal of reward	0.42	-	1.9	0.1764	Accepted

Decision rule: Accept if tc   tt (tc = calculated value)
Reject, if tc   tt (tt = table value)

Results of analysis in table 1 show that the calculated r-value for the relationships between organizational performance and discipline by persuasion is (0.45), issuance of query (0.15), warning notice (0.18, and withdrawal of reward (-0.42) are each, in absolute sense lesser than the critical r-value of 4.303 measured at 0.05 level of significance using 95 degree of freedom. These results indicate that there are significant positive relationships between discipline by persuasion, issuance of query and warning notice and organizational performance, that is, staff of federal establishments in Cross River State perceived that the more these disciplinary measures are used in an organization; the better would be the performance of the staff.

Hypothesis two
Workers perception of punitive measures in an organization does not significantly relate with their job performance. Two variables in this hypothesis are punitive measures (classified into suspension, demotion and dismissal), and job performance.

Table 2: Summary of Pearson product moment coefficient of correlation for: Relationship between punitive measures and perceived organizational performance.

DV/IV	R	Tt (H)	Cv(tc)	r2	Accept/Reject
x/y					
Punitive measures		12.706			
i. Suspension	0.87	-	3.65	0.7569	Reject
ii. Demotion	0.91	-	4.48	0.8281	Reject
iii. Dismissal	0.92	-	4.47	0.8464	Rejected

Decision rule: Accept if tc   (tc = calculated value)
Reject if tc   (tt = table value)

Results of analysis in table 2 show that the calculated r-values for the relationships between organizational performance and punishment by suspension (-0.87), demotion (-91) and dismissal (0.92) are each, in absolute sense, greater than the critical –r-value of 0.062 measured at 0.05 level of significance using 95 degree of freedom. These results indicate that there are significant inverse relationships between punishment by suspension, demotion and dismissal and organizational performance. That is, staff of federal establishments in Cross River State, perceived that the more the punitive measures are used in an organization; the less would be the performance of staff. Accordingly the null hypothesis is rejected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDING

The findings of this study are in agreement with the findings of earlier studies as revealed in literature. For instance, the study by Vonai (2005) suggested the use of discipline as a corrective measure instead of as a punitive measure. The study emphasized that the withdrawal of reward is punitive and not corrective, hence may create some negative impact on the performance of the organization. Another study replicated by this present study is that of Arvey and Ivancevich (1980) who opined that the immediate emotional reaction to punishment may result in the inability to pay careful attention to work and therefore may result in temporary reduction in productivity and quality of work.

Persuasion, issuance of query, warning letters and withholding of reward (reinforcement) have been identified in this study as most applied disciplinary measures in public service in Nigeria. Persuasion is an attempt by the manager to introduce dialogue in trying to instill personal discipline in workers. Through dialogue workers are able to do the right thing even when the manager or supervisor is not around. Management normally resorts to the issuance of query when persuasion fails. The use of query as a means of instilling discipline in workers is highly productive (Slim, 2013) and corrective (Chion, 2004) especially if answers to queries are used in advising the erring staff instead of punishing them. As may be expected, leader behaviour generally may correlate positively with subordinate's performance if the reward is given to workers, and negatively if the reward is withdrawn from them. Armstrong (2003) opined that every organization has its own reward policy - which provides guidelines for rewarding its employees. He suggests competitive pay, internal equity, contingency pay, employee benefits, among others, as issues that reward policies could address in an organization.

Results from this present study show that punishment of staff has significant inverse relationship with their job performance. That is, the more punishment is meted on workers, the less they tend to perform on their assignment in the organization. This finding is in consonance with those of Joe et al. (2011) who conducted a study on the organization of discipline and found out that punishment relates negatively with performance. They however, argue that scholars may misinterpret and misrepresent the incidence of punitive measures when they fail to account for the dynamic ways that organizations and management shape sanctioning patterns. Also, Daft (2009) recommends that managers should dispense punishment carefully to avoid a situation in which employees would give up on an attitude of high performance. The three punitive measures (suspension, demotion & dismissal) articulated in this paper have been viewed differently by different authors. Agulanna and Awujo (2005) quoted Baum (1986) as describing suspension as a disciplinary measure without punishment since it involves a worker's time off with pay to think about whether he or she really wants to follow the rules and continue working for the organization. In some organizations, though rare among public offices, erring staff are demoted by one or two ranks to serve as deterrents to others who might be contemplating similar acts of misconduct. Most often, however, demoted staffs themselves do not change completely in behaviour. In some organizations where supervisors are complaisant, such demoted staff stay away from work unnoticed. The issue of outright dismissal from work as a punitive measure has been viewed as unproductive as it tends to create a gap most often. The experience of the dismissed staff is lost if the replacing staff is a beginner.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The major recommendation offered by the study is that managers and supervisor should completely exhaust discipline as corrective measures before introducing punishment to staff. They should employ appropriate approaches to disciplinary actions like; progressive discipline and discipline without punishment in trying to enhance performance.

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