



**EFFECTS OF EMPLOYEE DISCIPLINE ON WORK PERFORMANCE
AMONG JUNIOR SUPPORT STAFF OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN
KENYA: EVIDENCE FROM MOI UNIVERSITY.**

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ABSTRACT

Performance is a very important aspect which pre-occupies the minds of all managers in any organization and those charged with the responsibility of managing human resources in particular. Achievement of organizational objectives requires a committed, effective, efficient highly motivated and above all a disciplined workforce.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the effects of discipline on work performance among junior employees in Kenyan public universities. The study targeted 1,643 junior support staff of Moi University, 3 junior union officials and 10 administrative staff out of which Thirty (30) members of the junior staff were selected, while 3 officials of junior staff union and 10 administrative staff were purposively included in the study. The results of the study indicated that disciplinary cases common in the university includes Absenteeism, Lateness, Poor performance, negligence, Theft and Insubordination, vices precipitated by the nature of the locality in which Moi university is located. The results also showed a strong link between employee discipline and performance. It was generally agreed by all (junior staff, Union officials and administrative staff) that the disciplinary mechanism at Moi university was 100% positive in that they stated that the steps the university put in place in terms of procedures was very exhaustive. However, they pointed out some few areas in the mechanism whose effectiveness is in doubt such as use of warnings and recommend that its use be.? More research should be conducted in specific areas of discipline among university employees in general to understand the causes and find out ways on how to improve it.

Key Words: Employee discipline, absenteeism, misconduct, disciplinary procedure,

1.0. Introduction

In recent times, discipline has gained currency among managers in general and human resource managers/human capital managers in particular. The reason is that they see such negative/deviant behavior, which include habitual lateness to work, loafing, buck passing, bribery, corruption, embezzlement or misappropriation of public funds, misuse of government property as counter-productive and therefore detrimental to the accomplishment of organizational goals (*Ehiyamen, Abah, Gberevbie, 2009*). To maintain effectiveness in production activity and for achieving efficiency in realization of organizational goals, it is important to promote and maintain employee discipline (Saleemi 1997).

The way organizations handle disciplinary issues may have a bearing on employee behavior and attitude (Chirasha, 2013). Handling employee discipline casually may result in far reaching consequences to organizations. Among the long term cost of poor management of discipline to the company/organizations include legal costs arising from law suits by wronged employees, time lost in preparing or attending court cases, reduction in productivity and expenses associated with replacing staff (Redeker 1983)

Improvement in work performance in any given organization is, to a large extent, a function of the type and nature of discipline employees have or rather the level of staff discipline in that given organization. Many organizations have excelled in their relevant activities/functions while others have failed to withstand all organizational challenges as a result of the level of employees' discipline.

1.1. statement of the problem

Disciplinary issues in public sector in Kenya and specifically universities are becoming serious. Every employee upon being recruited into the organization pledge and undertake to follow to the letter organizational rules and procedures that guide the conduct and behavior of all employees in the organization. But despite affirming their signatures to organization's rules and regulations, the actual conduct and behavior of employees in the subsequent days after employment goes contrary to their pledge. Employees in all cadres (junior and senior staff) are fond of not only reporting to work late but also close earlier than the normal closing time. Besides, some of them usually leave for break before time and return to work after the required time. Others are perpetually absent from work without prior permission resulting in delays in production, decrease in production and low level of productivity (Wedaga, 2012), a scenario attributed to employee discipline. The purpose of this study was to investigate: the common disciplinary cases among junior support staff in public universities; the link between employee discipline and work performance and the effectiveness of disciplinary procedure used in Kenyan public Universities. The results of this study will help universities to develop policies and procedures and communicate these policy guidelines to the employees to ensure adherence, commitment and punctuality which will subsequently lead to increased discipline and performance.

1.2. Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study were

- i. To determine the common disciplinary cases among junior support staff in public universities.
- ii.To investigate the link between employee discipline and work performance.
- iii.To access the effectiveness of disciplinary procedure used in public Universities.

1.3. . Research questions

To achieve the above stated objectives, the researchers proceeded to answer the following research questions:

- i. What are the common disciplinary cases among junior support staff in public universities?
- ii.what is the link between employee discipline and work performance?; and
- iii. How effective is the disciplinary procedure used in public Universities?

2.0. Literature review

Decenzo and Robbins (1988) define discipline as the conditions in the organization where employees conduct themselves in accordance with the organizations rules and standards of acceptable behaviour.

According to McFarland (1979), discipline refers to conditions of orderliness in which members of an organization conduct themselves with respect to the needs and desires of the organization, subordinating to some extent their own needs and desires. Discipline involves control over behaviour and is vital in any organization if specific objective are to be met. It may be imposed where it is backed by sanctions if there is infringement or may take the form of “self-discipline” in which common purpose by employees to control their own behaviour within the framework of acceptable conducts (Tunner and Turner 1994).

Indiscipline, on the other hand, refers to conditions of disorderliness in which members of an organization conduct themselves without respect to the rules and regulations and subordinating their needs and desires to the overall needs of the organization (Ehiyamen, Abah, Gberevbie, 2009). Indiscipline manifests itself in many ways in the public sector such as habitual lateness to work, truancy, and lack of commitment to work: loafing, buck-passing or refusing to take responsibility, bribery and corruption, tribalism and nepotism, misuse of government property, drunkenness, embezzlement or misappropriation of public funds (Ochai 1984)

In any organization, Moi University included, indiscipline is caused by a number of factors which are either organizational or personal to the employees concerned but the major causes are organizational and are as follows:-

Poor placement of employees will cause indiscipline in that people placed in wrong jobs will not take their jobs seriously and in the process they will always violate rules and regulations.

Lack of communication or poor communication within an organization between the subordinates and the management to enable them convey their feelings and reactions to the top management. This may ultimately result in rebellious behaviour of employees.

The other cause of discipline in organizations is an aspect of management which can breed indiscipline among employees. This is so if the executive exercise favouritism, exhibit distrustful and weak leadership which is incompetent discrimination of employees by managers in matters concerning promotion, rewards and even in imposing penalties or laxity on the part of managers. The unwillingness on the part of managers to enforce discipline on erring subordinates is one of the factors responsible for staff indiscipline in public organizations (*Ehiyamen, Abah, Gberevbie, 2009*) also bad judgment by management can cause indiscipline.

Poor working conditions is another cause of indiscipline in organizations. If employees' welfare are not adequately taken care of, employees spend most of their time and energy outside the organization looking for welfare services. Some employees may have congenial tendencies to flout rules and regulations through absenteeism, alcoholism and lateness.

Ochai, (1984) in Ehiyamen, Abah, Gberevbie, (2009) paint a grotesque picture of how cunning or unpredictable employees are in public organizations in Nigeria, a picture that perfectly reflects worrisome level of discipline in the public sector in Kenya as well, where employees exhibit discipline at a minimal level coupled with some elements of indiscipline. Cases of staff reporting on duty in time and sometimes late, performing their duties without seriousness, vanishing to the drinking places within their official hours of duty, fabricating reasons to get permissions to be off-duty and Absenteeism without cogent reasons are not uncommon incidences of indiscipline among staff in public sector (ibid). But of all the above disciplinary problems, the most serious is work attendance (Decenzo and Robbins, 1988).

Indiscipline adversely affects the performance of any organization and in Kenyan Universities this act of indiscipline has often resulted in students unrests resulting in enormous destruction of property within the Universities and even outside. Torrington and Hall (1995) regards discipline as a regulation of human activity to produce a controlled performance and it involves; managerial discipline where everything depends on the leader from start to the end, team discipline whereby perfection of performance derives from mutual dependence of all and finally self-discipline whereby a sole performer is absolutely dependent on training expertise and self-control. According to *Alexander* (2000), Poor performance originates either from management- and organization-centered causes or from employee-centered causes.

2.1. Theoretical framework

This study is grounded on Mc Gregor's (1987) "hot stove" metaphor. Mc Gregor [1987] propounds the "red hot stove rule" which says that sound and effective disciplinary systems in an organization should have the following procedures:

- **Immediate:** Just as when you touch a red hot stove, the burn is immediate, similarly the penalty for violation should be immediate, immediate disciplinary action must be taken for violation of rules.
- **Prior warning and notice:** Just as an individual has a warning when he moves closer to the stove that he would be burnt on touching it, likewise, a sound disciplinary system should give advance warning to the employees as to the implications of not conforming to the standards of behavior/code of conduct in an organization.
- **Impersonal:** Just as a person is burnt because he touches the red hot stove and not because of any personal feelings, likewise, impersonality should be maintained by refraining from personal or subjective feelings.
- **Consistent:** Just as a red hot stove burns everyone in the same manner; likewise, there should be high consistency in a sound disciplinary system.

3.0. Methodology

This study adopted a case study design and used Moi University as a case study. The case study method was chosen because, as a popular form of qualitative analysis which places more emphasis on the full analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their interrelations and involves a careful and complete observation of a social unit, which can be a person, a family, an institution, a cultural group or even the entire community and is concerned with in depth study of a phenomenon rather than breadth (Kothari 2004).

To facilitate an in-depth study of the aspect of discipline in relation to performance of junior employees of Moi university. This study targeted 1643 junior staff, 3 officials of junior staff union (shop stewards) and 10 administrative staff out of which, a sample of 30 junior staff was randomly selected from 1643 while 3 union officials and 10 administrative staff were purposively included in the study because their views were required to corroborate those of the junior staff giving the total number of participants to be 43.

A self-designed questionnaire containing of structured and unstructured measurement items was used to collect primary data while secondary data was extracted from personnel records maintained by the university. The two kinds of data were used because they have reinforcing effect and make the phenomenon under study, discipline, clearer and its effect on performance more explicit. However before the administration of the questionnaire used in gathering primary data, its validity was established by giving it to experts in the study area who generally agreed with its validity save for some few suggested alterations which were effected. The reliability of the instrument was established by administering the validated instrument to the same pilot group twice at an interval of two (2) weeks to junior employees of a constituent college of Moi university and who did not participate in the final study. Analysis of data from this test-retest method yielded a coefficient correlation of 0.836 depicting a fairly strong level of reliability as it was above the generally accepted minimum level of instrument reliability of 0.7.

The research used both primary and secondary data. Secondary data was obtained from personnel records within the University, reports and agenda in the archives and the personnel officers while primary data was obtained through questionnaire. The procedure before going to

the field was to get a letter of introduction from Institute of Human Resource Development and permission from the University administration to undertake/carry out the study in the University.

4.0. RESULTS

4.1. Characteristics of Respondents

Respondents' personal information/characteristics revealed that out of the 30 junior staff who responded to the questionnaires, 60% went through and completed primary education; 13.3% have junior secondary education and 16.7% went through form four with the remaining 10% having trade certificates in various fields of specialization. On the other hand, it was also established that 26.7% of the same ground of respondents fell within the age group of 35 – 39. 20% each within 30 – 34 and 40 -44 age groups with 13.3% falling within age group of 25 – 29 and those within 45 – 49 and above 50 years comprised 10% each. These findings revealed that majority of the employees at the junior grade are below 45 years.

These information on the level of education of the informants, particularly the administrators showed that at least all of them have a basic degree given that the basic qualification for all administrative staff is at least a degree. The administrators who were informants mainly fell within the age group of 41 – 50 years 60% as shown earlier in Table 3 and they fall within the age bracket of 31 and 60 years.

4.2. Common Disciplinary Cases

Analysis of data revealed that absenteeism, Lateness, Poor performance, Negligence, Theft of university property, Insubordination and other offences are some of the common cases handled by the disciplinary committee in the university. Among all the respondents, 47.4 %, 18.4%, 15.8 %, 7.9 % , 2.6 %, 2.6% and 5.3% cited absenteeism, Lateness, Poor performance, Negligence, Theft of university property, Insubordination and other offences in that order as common indisciplinary offences that junior staff of Moi university often commit. The results are as summarized in table 4.1

Table 4.1: Disciplinary Cases (n=38)

Case	Respondents	Percentage
Absenteeism	18	47.4
Lateness	7	18.4
Poor performance	6	15.8
Negligence	3	7.9
Theft	1	2.6
Insubordination	1	2.6
Others	2	5.3
Total	38	100%

Source: Personnel Department (2016)

The plausible explanation for the above state of affairs is that given the location of Moi University which by design was to be in a rural setting, (Moi University Act 1984); it therefore means that much of the work to be done to tidy up the environment was to be manual. This necessitated employment of a large workforce of junior staff to man grounds (Estates), security, cleaners and messengers, catering staff and clerical staff.

Another factor which contributed to larger number of junior staff and hence many disciplinary cases in Moi University as a result of its location was that private firms which offer services like cleaning and security were not available nearby

Most of the junior staff who work in Moi University are drawn from the surrounding environment and commute from home. This gave rise to fertile ground for indiscipline behaviour like absenteeism, lateness and even truancy among such employees. Such employees are also vulnerable to alcoholism for they are locals and more often know where they can sneak for the stuff (Local brews), even during working hours particularly during lunch breaks.

4.3. The Link between employee discipline and work performance

The study revealed that many cases of indiscipline and actions taken have effect on performance within the sections of the University. The researchers found out that high incidences of absenteeism 52.9% were recorded in the catering and hostels departments out of the 85 cases of absenteeism recorded.

During the same period, there were 36 interdictions in the whole university as revealed by the records available in personnel department with cases which attracted 103 warnings during the same period. The interdictions and absenteeism negatively impacted on performance of the affected staff as reported by both the heads of departments and section interviewed and also personnel officers. Given that employees serving a suspension or interdiction enjoys half salary and all other benefits without rendering services, the work at the departments suffer due to this kind of action given that research findings revealed that the earliest time a case can be conclusively dealt with by the disciplinary committee is after a period of four months.

Time consumed by the university management (personnel, registrars and other officer, staff disciplinary committee) wasted a lot of man hours which could be used in productivity. In some cases, disciplinary panel can take a whole day hearing cases and determining them. In cases which requires witnesses, university activities are sometimes paralyzed since a whole section of staff of a particular department may be involved in the case in one way or another either as accused, complainant or as witnesses.

4.4 Effectiveness of Disciplinary Procedure Used In Public Universities

During the study, the researchers sought the views of staff on how they rate the disciplinary mechanism that is used in Moi University.

The response from the union officials on whether the mechanism in place offer fairness to employees was 100% positive in that they stated that the steps the university has put in place in

terms of procedures is very exhaustive. Some of the procedures singled out by the shop steward in particular which provides fairness to staff with disciplinary cases includes warnings (verbal/oral, first written, second and final), provision for a chance for hearing through the staff disciplinary committee where staff are allowed to be accompanied by union officials, legal counsel or any person of his or her choice. After disciplinary committee's decision, one is also allowed to appeal to the vice chancellor and if not satisfied, can appeal to the chairman of council and under normal circumstances, one is given a hearing by the appeals board of council which is also a subcommittee of council provided for in the statutes to handle cases of appeal by both staff and students who are not satisfied with the decisions of respective disciplinary committees.

The study also revealed that junior staff have no problem with the procedure. Similarly the administrators and heads of departments also fully supports the procedure in place for it involves them in the management of staff and their discipline.

The areas which the union officials criticized are not on the procedures per se but the way it is implemented. The shop steward interviewed felt that cases take long before they are dealt with by the disciplinary committee at times taking up to six months before a staff serving an interdiction is called to appear before the committee. The study further revealed that members of staff and the union expressed opposition to heads of departments sitting in the disciplinary panel since they are the ones reporting the case to management who take action by forwarding the case to the committee. Their argument is that heads of departments are complainants and cannot sit as judges at the same time.

5.0. Summary of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendation

The purpose of the study was to examine and analyse extend and effects of discipline on work performance among junior staff in Kenyan public universities: a case study of Moi University. The study also sought to record the major cases of indiscipline among such employees and steps the university management takes or how such cases are handled.

The cases of indiscipline which are frequent among the junior staff in Moi University are those which involve attendance (absenteeism and lateness) with cases of absenteeism recorded according to personnel records being the highest with 47.4% of the total cases reported by respondents. Lateness comprised 18.4% of the cases of indiscipline. Other cases of indiscipline dealt with in the university included poor performance 15.8%, negligence 7.9%, theft and insubordination 1% each. Other cases including alcoholism, fighting, gambling and dishonesty constituted 5.3% of the cases.

It was further revealed that the most frequently used method of dealing with indiscipline particularly with regard to all cases of indiscipline except those amounting to serious misconduct which is only dealt with through dismissal or suspension, warnings are widely used measure to deal with indiscipline in the University.

This is supported by the personnel statistic which indicated that 103 warnings were issued by personnel department for various offences with absenteeism attracting 34% of the total warning issued, lateness had 24.2% of the warnings, while others like alcoholism, dishonesty and fighting in the work place with 18.4%; poor performance with 11.7% of the warning issued during the period among others.

The research also showed that there are various options of disciplinary measures to be used by the university in dealing with cases of indiscipline among its junior staff. Different cases of indiscipline attract different measures such that measures like warnings, demotion, interdiction and fines can be applied in cases of negligence depending on the magnitude of the offences. Other measures identified which management can use to deal with cases of indiscipline are transfers either for closer supervision or redeployment in cases of poor performance while fines are used in cases of negligence, fraud and damage to university property by the employees. This agrees with the findings of Wheeler (1976). All these measures mentioned above constitute negative discipline which is also known as corrective, punitive or enforced discipline.

From the above summary, it can be concluded that offence of absenteeism was the most prevalent among junior staff while insubordination and theft are the least prevalent. It can also be concluded that employee discipline has a strong link with individual performance.

Further, it can be concluded from the data that disciplinary machinery employed at Moi university is satisfactory and considered fair by all parties affected by it. However, the effectiveness of disciplinary procedure of Moi university is in doubt as the research revealed that despite action being taken against employees who commit such offences, the trend show no sign on declining. Additionally, the procedure is highly bureaucratic and the system is not efficient due to attendant red tapes and bottlenecks associated with all bureaucratic systems.

Another conclusion that could be drawn from the study is that cases of indiscipline negatively impact on performance among junior staff of Moi University as indicated by the number of absenteeism and lateness cases obtained by the researchers from personnel office. Finally, the study concluded that warning as a punishment for indiscipline has not caused or bring about desired results of change in behaviour of employees. This was evident in that many warnings meted out did not resulted in much change in behavior.

The following recommendations can be made based on the findings of this study:-

First, It is therefore recommended that the levels be reduced and personnel department be empowered to deal with disciplinary cases without necessarily referring them to another body which in this case is the disciplinary committee of council. This will speed the time with which cases of indiscipline are dealt with and disposed of.

Secondly, University should not employ negative (punitive) discipline in dealing with cases of indiscipline. In this case, it is recommended that the university should employ positive measures like applying principles of positive motivation (i.e. emphasizing carrot rather than stick approach); good leadership and framing of effective rules and regulations. Disciplinary action should be used as a corrective mechanism, and not a punishment tool (Chirasha, 2013).

Finally, Indiscipline should be taken by university administrators as an indication of dissatisfaction in the place of work. In this case, it should be understood that disciplining employees is like treating the symptoms and not causes of indiscipline, such causes as poor working conditions, supervision, leadership, placement and communication should be solved in order to improve employee discipline.

There is need therefore to review the use of warning as a disciplinary action in the University among junior employees. More research should be conducted in specific areas of discipline among university employees in general to understand the causes and find out ways on how to improve it.

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