International Journal of Public Administration (IJOPAD)

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3 (2) August, 2024 p-ISSN: 2617-129X; e-ISSN: 1115-7119

Available online at: https://ijopad.org



Work Place Ethics and Organizational Discipline in Business Enterprise Odinanwa Kachikwulu Anastasia<sup>1</sup> and Onya Chinwe Caroline<sup>2</sup>

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#### **Abstract**

The study investigated workplace ethics and organizational discipline. The objectives of the study are to examine the relationship between: accountability and written reprimand: trustworthiness and demotions; courteousness and temporary pay cut; fairness and suspension; mutual respect and termination of appointments .by organizational management. Four research questions guided the study. The literature approach was used to handle the study. Literatures were used to explain the variables used in the study including accountability, trustworthiness, courteousness, fairness, mutual respect, written reprimand, demotions, temporary pay cut, suspension and termination of appointments. It was discovered that a serious link exists between workplace ethics and .organizational discipline. Poor altitudes to-accountability may attract written reprimand; betrayal of trust may\* attract demotion: poor attitude to courteousness may attract temporary pay cut; unfairness may lead to suspension and lack of mutual respect may attract termination of appointments. The study concluded that workplace ethics is the core basis for implementing the disciplinary measures available in any 'business organization, it was' recommended that workers among others and management of organizations should always be transparent and accountable in the discharge of their duties.

Keywords: Workplace, Ethics, Organizational Discipline, Business Enterprise and disciplinary measure.

Citation of article: Odinanwa, K. A, and Onya, C. C. (2024) Work Place Ethics and Organizational Discipline in Business Enterprise International Journal of Public administration (IJOPAD), 3(2): 261-275.

Date submitted: 22/07/2024 Date accepted: August 27, 2024 Date published: August, 2024

#### Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

As the pressure to remain competitive becomes tense day by day the question of what is right and just are becoming more relevant. The pressure lo increase profit by firm pursued at the detriment of the employees, customers, and even the society at large. On one hand, society always wants the company to create more high-paying jobs, but on the other hand, the company, wants' to reduce costs and improve labour productivity. Consumers wish to purchase at the lowest prices, and commercial establishments would want the highest interest rate. Society desires to reduce environmental', pollution and companies want to minimize costs incurred when complying with regulations on environmental protection in their production activities. This fact makes-conflict inevitable in the concept "of business and work place ethics. owingto discrepancies in the company's interests with the interests of workers and consumers and whole society. Because all these are in opposition, it becomes inevitable for managers to balance the interests/of the company with that of other stakeholders. (Vickers. 2005).

Ethics are the moral principles that govern people's behavior. In the workplace, ethics are the. Moral guidelines that an organization as a whole, and the individuals who comprise it, follow to comply with state and federal laws. Workplace ethics are by definition the moral principles that guide employees" actions in the workplace. Ethical standards can vary from industry to industry, and from position to position within an industry. They can also vary by specific field within a larger industry. For example, the workplace ethics that doctors and others in the health care industry follow are different from the ethics that govern police officers and others in law "enforcement. In turn, these ethics are different from the ones that govern telecommunications. IT and education. Therefore, an individual's personal workplace, ethics depend on his role in the' company, the industry and the company's, relationship with the-"outside world," which includes consumers, vendors and industry regulators' (Lindsay, 2018).

However, work ethics as noted by Cascio (2013) is the accepted standards in terms of personal and social welfare of employee", their work attitudes, self-discipline and commitment to their assignments. Velasquaez(2002) observes that work ethics is the principle of conduct .governing an individual or a group in the work place, which makes them conform to the ethical standards thus influencing organizational output level and the resultant profitability level'.

Ethics & Compliance Initiative, (ECL, 2018) reported that in 2013. 51% of employees said that within the last 12 months they observed conduct that either violated organizational standards or the law. In 2017, .47% reported observing misconduct; an 8% decrease and close to the historic low of those who observed abusive behavior. 63% of employees reported that the misconduct they observed was committed by someone in management or a first-line supervisor.

Those who observed, the misconduct said that 67% of the wrongdoing consisted of incidents or was part of an ongoing pattern. Despite the decline in misconduct overall, the most frequently observed types of misconduct remain virtually unchanged since 2011 as depleted.

Achieving sustainable work place ethics, organizational leaders must make ethical decisions since there will be a valuable effect of their behavior on employees. Without guidance, employees working in an ethical vacuum will make, decisions at work based on their own personal values. This can lead to conflict when differing values clash or when the employee's own values are not aligned with that of the organizations. This is why it's essential for those who hold a leadership role- lo exemplify the organization's ethical standards. Setting the ethical standards for the organization will signify to current employees the behavior that is expected of them and will attract prospective employees who hold similar values, establishing ethical leadership will also result in employees who are able to turn lo their supervisors for-guidance when confronted' with their own ethical dilemmas at work.

Workplace ethics may be the basis for invoking, or applying various types of organizational discipline. Organizational discipline as used in this study is the ability of organizational management to use written reprimand, temporary pay cut suspension, demotion and termination of appointment against those workers who have abused such workplace ethical values .like accountability, trustworthiness, courteousness, fairness-and mutual respect.

### 1.2 Statement of Problem

The-researcher has observed from various empirical studies that a serious research gap exists in the area of workplace ethics and organizational discipline. For example, Adeyeye Adeniyi, Osibanjo and Oludayo (2015) wrote on the effects of workplace ethics on employee and" organizational productivity in Nigeria". Also Loe, Ferrell, and Mansfield (2000) did 'a review of empirical studies assessing, ethical -decision making in business". In fact, • Onyeagaga-(2015) conducted, a study on adherence to ethics and performance of business organizations in

Nigeria: an empirical analysis. None of these studies examined the link between accountability and written reprimand; trustworthiness and demotions by organizational management: courteousness and temporary pay cut: fairness and suspension in organizations-: mutual respect and termination of appointments by organizational management. The researcher is therefore faced, with the major problem of filling these enormous gaps on workplace ethics and organizational discipline.

Today most employers and employees arc guilty of un-ethical practices in their respective work place. Work place unethical, practices commonly seen or heard, include: asking a job applicant if she has children, as this can be construed as a discriminatory question over invading, supervisor failing to provide necessary safety equipment for staff to perform a manuallabor task, engaging in gossip or starling a rumor about a fellow .employee, failing to report a piece of broken equipment to a supervisor, failing to provide testimony to support a colleague's' sexual harassment claim despite having witnessed the harassment firsthand, taking office supplies from work for personal use offering a raise or other favorable treatment in exchange fora sexual-relationship with a subordinate, making personal purchases with a company credit card, covering up unethical or ethically ambiguous business practices, paying workers less than the legal minimum wage, and engaging in exploitative sourcing or labor practices. All these may destroy the spirit of accountability, trustworthiness, courteousness, fairness and mutual respect in the workplace.

# 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The major objective of this study is to investigate workplace ethics and organizational discipline. Specifically this study is conducted to:

- I. Examine the relationship between accountability and written reprimand.
- ii. Find out the relationship between trustworthiness and demotions by organizational management.
- iii.Investigate the link between courteousness and temporal pay cut.
- iv. Determine the relationship between fairness and suspension in organizations.
- v. find out relationship between mutual respect-and termination of appointments by organizational management.

### 1.4 Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, the researcher developed the following researchquestions: i. what is relationship between accountability and written reprimand?

ii. What is the relationship between trustworthiness and demotions by organizational management?

iii. How does courteousness affect in organization?

iv. How does fairness affect suspension in organizations?

v. What is the relationship between mutual respect and termination of appointments by organizational management?

# **Review of Related Literature**

In this section the researcher reviewed related literatures on workplace ethics and organizational discipline. It comprises of conceptual, theoretical and empirical reviews.

### Conceptual Framework

### 2.1.1 .Tin- Meaning of Ethics and Workplace Ethics

The concept of ethic(s) can be defined in many ways. For the purpose of this study.- we define ethic as the collection of principles and values that specify the goodness or badness of behaviour of individual, group or an organization. It can further be seen as principles and methods that specify the standards of goodness or badness.

We define workplace ethics as the application of moral principles, standards of behavior, or set of values regarding proper conduct in the workplace as individuals and in a group selling. Work ethics as defined by Cascio (2013), is the accepted standards in terms of personal and social welfare of employee, their work attitudes, self-discipline and commitment to their assignments. Similarly, Velasquez (2002) observes that work ethics is the principle of conduct governing an individual or a group in the work place, which makes them conform to the ethical standards thus influencing organizational output level and the resultant profitability level.

An organization's ethical philosophy can affect the organization in many ways including its reputation, productivity, and the bottom line of the organization. Ethics within an organization can be full of benefits. A positive ethical corporate culture improves the morale among the

workers in an organization, which could increase productivity and employee retention (Kelchner 2014). More productivity improves the efficiency of the organizations and increased employee retention reduces the cost of replacing employees (Matthews, 2014).

Organizations focusing on encouraging ethical practices are commonly viewed with respect by their employees, (he community, and corresponding industries. Ethical business practices of organizations have resulted a solid financial bottom-line. This has been seen through greater sales 'and increased revenue by companies retaining talented personnel and attracting new skilled employees. More importantly, an ethical organization will have the ability to retain employees that are experienced and knowledgeable (generally referred to as human capital). This human capital results in less employee turnover, less training time for new employees, and greater output regarding services (or production of goods) (Wikipedia.org. Retrieved. Oct. 2018).

There are at least four elements that aim to create an ethical culture and behavior of employees within an organization. These elements are (Kelchner. 2014):

- 1. a written code of ethics and standards (ethical code)
- 2. Ethics Training for executives, managers, and employees
- 3. The availability of ethical situational advice (i.e. advice lines or offices)
- 4. Confidential reporting systems
- 2.1.2 Basic Workplace Ethics

Ethics behaviors differ among industries sector, and firms. But there basic element of workplace ethic which employees" in respective of industry or sector should strive at. They include;

Always excellence; this is the first rule to achieving greatness in whatever endeavor one undertakes. This is the quality that makes employee and his work stand-out. Excellence is a quality of service which is unusually good and so surpasses ordinary standards, it should be made a habit for it to make a good impression on your bosses and colleagues.

Trustworthy: In today's society trust is an issue and any employee who exhibits trustworthiness is on a fast track to professionalism. Trustworthiness is about fulfilling an assigned task and as an extension- not letting down expectations, it is been dependable, and reliable when called

upon to deliver a service. For an employee to earn the .trust of his/her bosses and colleagues, worth and integrity must be proven over lime.

iii. Accountable: To be accountable is to stand tall and be counted for what actions one(employee) has undertaken, this is the blameworthiness and responsibility For one's actions and its consequences whether good or bad.

iv. Courtesy and respectful Courteousness is being friendly, polite and well-mannered with a gracious consideration towards others. It makes social interactions in the workplace run smoothly avoid conflicts and earn-respect. Respect is a positive feeling of esteem or deference for a person or organization: it is built over time and can be lost with one stupid or inconsiderate action. Continued courteous interactions are required to •maintain or increase the original respect gained.

v. Honesty and Transparency: honest is a facet of moral character that connotes

positive and .virtuous attributes such as truthfulness, straightforwardness of conduct, loyally, fairness, sincerity, openness in communication and general operating in a way for others to sec what actions are being performed. This is a virtue highly prized by employers and colleagues, for it builds trust and increases an employee's personal value to all.

vi. Competence and improve continually: competence-is the ability of an individual to do ajob properly, it is a combination of knowledge, skills and behavior used to improve performance. Competency grows through experience and lo the extent one is willing to learn and adapt. Continuous self-development is a pre-requisite in offering professional service at all time.

vii. Always be ethical; ethical behavior is acting within certain moral codes in accordance with the generally accepted code of conduct or rules. It is always safe for an employee to "play by the rules". This is always the best policy and in instances the rule book is inadequate, acting with a clear moral conscience is the right way to go. This may cause friction in some organizations but ethical organizations will always stand by the right moral decisions and actions of their employees.

viii. Always be honorable and act with Integrity; honorable action is behaving in a way that portrays "nobility of soul, magnanimity, and a scorn of meanness" which is derived from virtuous conduct and personal integrity. This is a concept of "wholeness or completeness" of

character in line with certain values, believes, and principles with, consistency in action and outcome.

ix. Be Respectful of Confidentiality is respecting the set of rules or promise that restricts an employee from further and unauthorized dissemination of information. Over the course of an employee's career, information will be passed on to him in confidence cither from the organization or from colleagues and it is important to be true to such confidences. An employee can gain trust and respect of those confiding in him/her and increase his/her influence within the organization.

From the organizational perspective, Lindsay (2018) identified as ethical values an organization should uphold for organizational prosperity;

#### a. Fairness

According to him, rules and regulations ought to be same for everyone working in the organization. Every worker needs to office on time irrespective of their designation, distance of their home from the workplace, salary grade status. An employee cannot come to office late just because he is the team leader and his team is already present and working on his behalf. If a day's salary of a clerk should be deducted for coming late to work, it should be the same for the marketing manager as well.

Salaries should be decided in the presence of the employee and also keeping in mind an individual's role in the organization, his/her gross salary in the previous organization responsibilities within the current system and of course his/her years of experience. One of the major reasons as to why employees quit their jobs after a year or so is poor appraisal system.

Increment ought to be directly proportional to the amount of hard work an employee puts in throughout the year and also his/her performance. Unnecessary favours are against the workplace ethics

# b. Respect

Respect is an important workplace element. An organization ought to respect its employees to expect the same in return. Rules and regulations should not be too rigid, for instant, expecting an employee to attend office two days before his marriage date. Management must not forget that money is a strong motivator for .employees. Everything is important, be it career, growth, job satisfaction but what is most important is employee's salaries. Unnecessary holding of

employees salaries for a long time is unethical practice. Also, employees' viewpoints must be respected.

### c. Responsibility

Employees must be given the space they require. Key responsibility areas need be communicated to the employees on the very first day of their joining. Roles and responsibilities need to be assigned as per an individual's expertise and experience. An employee with few years of experience should not be expected to head strategic positions like marketing, human resource, production departments, Employees need to be trained well. Organizations need to give at least six months' time to the new employees to adjust in the new environment.

### 2.1.3 Importance of Workplace Ethics

The following are the importance of workplace ethics as discussed Lindsay (2018).

Workplace ethics ensures positive ambience at the workplace

Workplace ethics leads to happy and satisfied employees who enjoy coming to work rather than treating it as a mere source of burden. Employees also develop a feeling of loyalty and attachment towards the organization. Organizations need to have fool-proof systems to measure the performances of individuals. Appraisal system needs to be designed keeping in mind employee's performance throughout the year and his/her career growth. Periodic reviews are essential. It is mandatory for superiors to know what their subordinates are up to. You need to know who all are going on the right track and who all reed that extra push.

# ii. Workplace ethics ensures management guides and mentors (heir employees well

Appraisal and salary hikes should not happen just for the name sake of it workplace ethics- is important as it enables management to treat all employees as equal and think from their perspective as well. Employees must have a say in their appraisal system. Transparency s essential. An employee is bound to move on after a year or so if he/she is not appreciated and rewarded suitably. It is indeed the organization's loss when employees alter being trained-quit and move on. Employees change primarily because of two reasons; Career growth and monetary benefits. Management needs to make employees feel secure about their job and career. Unnecessary favoritism is against workplace ethics. If a manager favour anyone just because the person is his/her relative, the other team members are bound to feel demotivated and thus start looking for new opportunities. An "individual's output throughout the year should

decide his/her increment. Workplace ethics says that organizations need to retain and nurture talents. If an organization has hired someone, it becomes its responsibility to train the individual, make him/her aware of the key responsibility areas, policies, rules and regulations and code of conduct of the organization. Employees need to be inducted well into the system. The)' must be aware of the organization's policies from the very first day itself.

iii. Workplace ethics also go a long way in strengthening the bond among employees and most importantly their superiors

Employees tend to lie if the organization does not allow them to take leaves. If a manager do not allow an employee to take leave on an important festival, what would managers expect the employee to do'.' What is the alternative left with such an employee? He/she will definitely lie. It will also be unethical if management should exploit their employees and treat them as machines. It should be noted that no employee can work at a stretch without taking a break. It is okay if they talk to their fellow workers once in a while or go out for a smoke break. It has been observed that organizations which are impartial to employees, lend a sympathetic ear to their grievances and are employee friendly seldom lace the problems of unsatisfied employees and high attrition rate.

# 2.1.4 Organizational Discipline

The concept of organizational discipline has attracted many researchers in the area of Management. Jerry (2017) believes that organizational discipline is the practice of self-restraint and learning to follow the best course of action which may not be one's desire. In learn activities, where several individuals work towards\* the same goal, discipline is of utmost importance. Organizations thrive on team work and without discipline, teams cannot function properly, ll acts as the backbone of the organization structure and maintains order. Organization discipline thus can be explained as system of conducting the organizational proceedings by its members who abide by the guidelines laid out by the organization, it imbibes a sense of obedience towards the organization that works instinctively under different circumstances.

Nwachukwu (2015) maintains that having a disciplined workforce ensures that the work environment is peaceful and provides a sense of security. Discipline eradicates issues such as absenteeism, presenters, missing deadlines, etc. Also, improved performance results in higher efficiency and productivity and following a set of conduct naturally makes sure that all employees exhibit behavior lilting the company's image. The cardinal objective of

organizational discipline is therefore to mould the behavior of its workforce *by* training and instruction to belter achieve its goals, it is the supervisor's duly to explain to his subordinates. The necessary areas of improvement. This promotes employee wellbeing.

### 2.1.5 Employee Discipline in Organizations

The meaning of employee discipline has been described by various authorities at various times. Harris & Dumi (2011) cited the business dictionary as defining employee discipline as the regulations or conditions that are imposed on employees by management in order to either correct or prevent behaviours that are detrimental to an organization. The purpose of employee discipline is not to embarrass or degrade an employee. The purpose is to ensure that an employee performs in a manner that is deemed acceptable by the organization.

In his own view, Hassan & Emesiadi (2012) opine that the concept of employee discipline was brought up in the early 1900s. It was during that period that Henri Fayol a noted French Management theorist proposed the 14 principles that he fell were essential to effective management. Discipline was one of those principles. Fayol believed that a disciplined employee was one that not only was sincere about his work, but also had faith in the policies and procedures of an organization, the also believed that a disciplined employee would fulfill the orders given to him and respect management. In Fayol's opinion, discipline in the workplace was necessities for an organization to prosper. Without it an organization would certainly fail. Though Fayol was an avid supporter of the discipline concept, lie did not believe that discipline should mimic bullying. Instead, he felt that employee discipline should be handled in a fair and just manner and should apply equally to everyone.

This accounts for the reason why Victor & Austin (2011) maintain that over the years, the concept of employee discipline has grown. Managers realize that discipline is a part of the job. They also realize that there must be disciplinary action within an organization to maintain some sense of control. In today's workplace, discipline and documentation go hand in-hand. Most disciplinary action policies are progressive. This means that as rule violations increase, sodo the consequences. To protect-the organizations, adequate documentation of the rule violation and the consequence must exist. The researcher posits at this juncture that discipline may he considered as a force that prompts individuals or groups to observe the rules, regulations, and procedures which are deemed to be necessary for the effective functioning of an organization. It is the exercise of restraint or the enforcement of penalties for the violation of group regulations.

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There are features of discipline. According to Abbasi &Baumann (2012), the features include that discipline is self-control hence it refers to one's efforts at self-control to conform to organizational rules, regulations and procedures which have been established to ensure the successful attainment of organizational goal it is a negative approach hence discipline encourages people to undertake some activities on the hand, and restrains them from undertaking others on the other; it is a punitive approach hence discipline imposes penalty or Punishment if the rules and regulations framed by the organization are not obeyed or ignored by the members. Punishment is imposed not to change past behavior but to prevent its recurrence in future (Abbasi & Baumann, 2012).

## 2.1.6 Objectives of Discipline

There are various objectives of discipline. According to Beadles and Lawrence (2014), the objective of discipline are to:

Motivate an employee to comply with the company's performance standards hence on 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.

Maintain respect and trust between the supervisor and employee hence discipline if not properly administered can create 'problems like low morale, resentment, and ill-will between the employees. In such ease, improvement in employee's behavior, 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 behavior but will also minimize future disciplinary problems through good relationship between the supervisor and the employees.

Improve the performance of the employee hence discipline for poor task performance ought not to be applied while employees are on training or learning the job. Nor should employees be disciplined for problem beyond their control, for example, failure to meet output standard due to the lack of raw material. Discipline ought to be exercised when employees are found responsible for unsatisfactory performance.

Increase the morale and working efficiency of the employees.

Foster industrial peace which is the very foundation of industrial democracy.

## 2.1.7 Approaches to Disciplinary Action

The approaches to disciplinary action are as follows:

- 1. Progressive discipline
- 2. Discipline without punishment

# 2.1.7Progressive Discipline

A progressive discipline system appears to be the best way to correct employee performance problems. It is the best way. According to Crowny & Holzer (2010) to protect against wrongful termination lawsuits. It allows the manager lo ensure that any employee fired because of inferior performance was treated fairly and in accordance with the company's policies.

A five-step model for progressive discipline according to Mangione & Mobley (2013) is as follows:

### 1. Oral Reprimand

As soon as a supervisor perceives «a worker's performance problem, he or she must issue an oral reprimand. The supervisor must ask the worker whether there are long-term problems or skill deficiencies that need to the corrected. Let the manager keep detailed notesor prepare a memo to file about the conversation, in case further action is necessary.

# 2. Written Warning

If the problem persists (or more problems emerge), the supervisor must provide the employee with a written warning detailing the objectionable behaviour along with the consequences. Explain the standards that will be used to judge the employee. Specify time frames for performance improvement, and state that continued failure will result in termination. Place a copy of the memo in the employee's personnel file. Have the worker sign a copy to acknowledge 'receipt. Otherwise, the employee could claim, that he or she never received it.

### 3. Final written warning

If performance does not improve, deliver a final written warning perhaps accompanied "probationary status, for the employee. Include copies of the previous warning, indicate specific areas in which the employee must improve and specify the time period within which life workers behavior or performance must be corrected.

### 4. Termination review

If the problem persists, the supervisor must notify 1IR. In general, supervisors must not have final firing authority. Someone else ought to evaluate the full range of discharge-related considerations.

# 5. Termination

Is only after one must have completed these entire steps can one go ahead with firing an employee. One will do so knowing that one gave the employee every opportunity to succeed. If one has documented one's entire progressive discipline process, court will know that, too (Mangione and Mobley (2013).

In the views of Agulanna and Awujo (2005-), progressive discipline is the disciplinary action approach designed to ensure that the minimum penally appropriate to the offence is imposed. They cited Monde and Noe (1993) as using the following diagram to show the progressive discipline approach:

### Conclusion

The urge to attain and maintain high level of productivity is needed for the establishment of commercial and business ventures. Ethical consideration in labor management relationship is a concomitant for organizational development. For high productivity, it's important that all stakeholders observe ethical conducts in their dealings with one another. This must be openly displayed through positive attitudes; committed teamwork, high integrity and self-discipline. The above mentioned variables serve as indicators of organizational development.

### Recommendations

This implies that efforts must be made to ensure and observe etiquette and ethical conducts within work centers for the expected goals of the complex organization to be attained. Absence of etiquette in work places has created among the employees attitude, which may hinder productivity. On the part of the Indian workers, for ethical conducts to have been properly

observed, thereis the need to align wage demands and increase in productivity and performance. A stable pattern of rising productivity will naturally improve and sustain wages and favorable conditions of employment relationship in Nigeria.

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