

The Effect of Staff Perception of Consistency or inconsistency in Disciplinary Decision Making on Workforce Output at a Nigerian University

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Abstract

Discipline is decisive in achieving organisational goals. If properly applied, discipline curtails the excesses of employees with deviant tendencies in organisations, and increases productivity and outputs generally. Nonetheless, of recent, there has been an increasing incidence of reactions against perceived inconsistent disciplinary decision-making in universities in Nigeria. Several employees who go through the disciplinary process complain of inconsistencies and some of these employees have resorted to civil litigation at public courts of law. It is against this backdrop that, this article explores the effect of staff perception of consistency in disciplinary decision-making in a Nigerian University. The objective is to identify the impact of perception of consistency or inconsistency in disciplinary decision-making on staff output and morale. Data were collected from both primary (interviews) and secondary (journals, text books, law reports and other documents) sources. The article adopted a qualitative research approach. The findings established that perception of consistency in disciplinary decision-making among the interviewees, majority of whom, have experienced the disciplinary process directly, is favourable; though among many of the employees yet to go through the process, the perception of consistency of disciplinary decision-making is unfavourable. When the views of employees who had gone through the process and those yet to have direct experience is aggregated however, the perception of the employees on consistency of disciplinary decision-making seems positive. This positive perception of consistency in the disciplinary decision-making resulted in increased output and high staff morale. However there is always room for improvement. Among others, it is proposed that consistency of disciplinary decision-making in the case university could be enhanced if the leadership improves on the publicity and transparency of disciplinary decision-making processes; appointment of members of disciplinary panels on the basis of their expertise; as well as specify timeframe for the conclusion of all disciplinary matters. These will likely enhance disciplinary decision-making at the university and impact positively on staff morale and productivity.

Keywords: Staff perception, consistency, disciplinary decision-making, workforce

Introduction

Nigeria is rich in human and material resources, but it is a low-income economy characterised by many socio-economic challenges (Kalu & Otto, 2011). One of the reasons used to explain the contradictions in Nigeria is indiscipline in the workplace (Abiyeyi, 2004). Newspapers often report about the attitudes or actions of workers, which are not in sync with organisational expectations. In different sectors of the economy the facts are similar, as workers exhibit tendencies that are not in tandem with the expectations and goals of such organisations. These include absenteeism, arriving late for work, corruption, plagiarism, theft and insubordination, among others. These attitudes impact on output and could create a corrupting effect if there are no commensurate and deterring sanctions, which are consistently applied in such work places (Edeko, 2011; Obinna, 2011).

According to Oludayo (2015), the university is intended for the quest of intellectual development of society and should be separated from the everyday considerations, but saints and sinners cohabit there. Disciplinary procedures become relevant when people contravene laid down and well-advertised rules of conduct (work procedures). Disciplinary procedures and policies outline likely effects or sanctions for offences, depending on the degree of contravention. This is important to encourage transparent and consistent decision-making when different people contravene procedures of the work environment (RCVS, 2013). Management implements these rules through decisions that are taken at disciplinary panels in different contexts. The ultimate effect is that when disciplinary decisions are consistent, people are more likely to develop confidence in such institutions and project. Consistency of disciplinary decision-making make people accept responsibility for their actions, but when such decisions are

inconsistent, there may be loss of confidence and abuses, which could weaken morale, and affect productivity.

Problem statement

Workers get employed into a workplace with a view to exchange their human capital investments for wages and salaries. Accordingly, they offer their services to the organisation and receive income. In many instances, the workplace aggregates people from different backgrounds and uses the collective human capital to provide its services to the general public. Thus, in a university for instance, there is a collection of experts from different fields of learning that are taught in such institution. There will also be people who provide administrative or other ancillary services, which add to the output of the university. The point is, these staff members who may come from various backgrounds may need rules of conduct that will define and govern the mode of operation of the workplace, which is one way to enhance output at the workplace.

For the rules to be seen as defining conduct at the workplace, the rules must be consistently applied and any errant behaviour should be appropriately disciplined in order to reform such staff to the dictates of the rules. This function is an administrative function and could be compromised by inefficient leaders when they deliberately redefine the rules for different members of the workforce thus giving an impression of inconsistency.

Research question

The above problem statement triggered the research question below:

- What impact do staff perceptions of consistency or inconsistency in disciplinary decision-making have on staff output and morale?

Objective of Study

The research objective is:

- To explore the impact of perceptions of consistency or inconsistency in disciplinary decision-making on staff output and morale.

Literature review

In several organisations, people are employed to assist the organisation generate its services to its clientele (Arrey, 2013). This explains why such organisations seek for competent employees that will enhance this objective. In doing this they aggregate people from varying backgrounds, which introduce heterogeneity in the workplace (Schenk, 2009). This is often the case in universities and other institution of tertiary education where experts converge and dispense knowledge (Nwakaudu, 2014; Weiler, Guri-Rosen, & Sawyer, 2006; Alubo, 1999).

Government policies and laws can also introduce heterogeneity into a workforce. For instance, in Nigeria, employers are required to employ workers from the host communities, particularly at the lower levels. This is enshrined in the Federal character principle, as provided in CAP F7, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (LFN 2004) with an agency of the Federal Government of Nigeria to implement this law (FGN, 2004). This law encourages the recruitment of people from the 36 states federal structure of Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory. The effect of all these have tended to encourage a multi-cultural environment especially for public institutions (Knight & Ukpere, 2014). The essence of the federal character principle in Nigeria's Constitution was to ensure a fair representation of all sections of the nation in any recruitment and promotion processes. This is with a view to give every Nigerian a sense of belonging.

An effect of the diversified background of the workforce, is a tendency for misunderstanding, conflict and aberrations among the employees. Except there are rules to guide conduct in such establishments, conflicts may arise through incompatible goals, interests or feelings among some staff leading to antagonistic interactions (Haralambos, Holbom, & Heald, 2008). When these happen, they work against the essence of the employment. This is where the need for workplace (organisational) procedures, ethics and regulations become imperative (Williams, 2002; Nel, Kirsten, Swanepoel, Erasmus, & Poisat, 2012). Discipline was required and disciplinary procedures are to enhance orderliness, uniformity of purpose and direction at the workplace. Discipline is essentially an instrument of engineering conformity to organisational culture, rules and expectations (Garner, 2012; Net et al., 2012; Idris & Alegbelaye, 2015). In sum, discipline is a leadership function. Discipline is seen as punishment by many people but actually it consists of instructions, and training (Onderi & Odera, 2012). Discipline is a way of enhancing conformity to pre-set models of behaviour in a workplace. The procedure incorporates instruction, preparing, advising, coaching, 'restorative and corrective' activities (Chella, 2006). Discipline facilitates the coordination of efforts, development of character and self-control, and fostering efficiency and orderliness.

Discipline

Discipline may also be defined as an attribute of people, groups of people or communities which could facilitate orderliness at the workplace. According to Ndu, (2002 p.1-2), among individuals attribute that leads others to describe them as self-controlled, sociable, co-operative, law-abiding and so on, discipline may also mean a form of influence that helps an individual achieve informed decisions. It is an essential element of group activities (Mbiti, 1977; Ngu, 1990; Ndu,

2002; Vonai, 2013). In other words from the perspectives of the above authors, discipline means punishment meted out in the workplace to employees who fail to perform optimally or resort to deviant attitudes and behaviours which are contrary to the expectations of management in the workplace.

Impact of discipline and perceptions of fairness

Aside from theories, postulations and propositions, many studies have been conducted empirically on modern workplace discipline in different settings including breweries, banks, and institutions across the globe with varying results. Knight and Ukpere (2014) analysed the adequacy and consistency of disciplinary activities and procedures inside a South African firm. According to them, disciplinary actions are imperative in defining the future conduct of workers in the work environment. To achieve its purpose, disciplinary actions need to be uniformly meted out in similar situations using the same procedures. According to Knight and Ukpere (2014), there were perceptions of unfair disciplinary actions in the case organisation. Knight and Ukpere (2014) using a survey method with closed-ended questionnaires and a focus group interview were able to show that workers were unsatisfied because of inconsistency in the application of disciplinary rules.

Ajila and Omotayo (2002) examined the case of business organisations in Nigeria. The article examined the perceptions (or attitudes) of workers towards disciplinary action at a brewery in Western Nigeria. A sample of 105 workers was used, which was drawn by using a stratified random sampling technique and information elicited from questionnaires. The article observed that attitudes towards disciplinary actions were similar for married and unmarried workers, but there was a significant difference between job levels with respect to procedures and attitudes towards disciplinary actions. In other words, there were perceptions of fairness or consistency in disciplinary decisions. Ajila and Omotayo (2002) also observed evidence of the positive benefits of discipline among the organisation's workforce. This was owing to the consistency of decision-making in disciplinary cases though the perception of privilege treatment for superior officers was also acknowledged in the surveyed organisation.

The success in the use of discipline in the work environment depends on perceptions of fairness. Having the right attitudes or perceptions enhance success, while wrong attitudes may generate mediocrity and failure for both employees and the business (Alugho, 1981). Therefore, staff perceptions or attitudes regarding the fairness of disciplinary matters are important. This aligns well with Knight and Ukpere (2014) who note that discipline, when perceived to be fair or right, leads to success, but when these are perceived to be unfair, wrong or inconsistent, it generates negative consequences. Organisational justice and perceptions of fairness do indeed generate strong emotions in the workplace (Cropanzano, 2001).

Okonkwo (1996) identifies the position of discipline in Nigerian universities. The work notes that the problem of enforcing discipline currently, constitutes a major concern. According to Okonkwo (1996) policy (decision) making has not been systematic and coherent, resulting in ad-hoc or panic measures taken in the heat of crisis. This is informed by tribal and other primordial, sectional or particularistic sentiments. He notes that, up to the mid-1970s it was easy to discipline staff for various kinds of misconduct, including downgrading, and termination of appointment. Those decisions were hardly contested in the courts and, therefore attracted little publicity. By the end of the 1970s, this situation became different owing to the rising wave of misconduct at the universities, which elicited stern disciplinary actions by authorities. Okonkwo's work is based on the South Eastern Nigeria environment.

Nwafor and Nnokam (2012) studied a similar situation in Rivers State and established that the trend of litigations against universities by staff in Rivers State increased. This issue was complicated owing to the fact that many people tend to deny committing offences for which they are guilty even when the issues are obvious. Makinde (2016) refers to an instance of a lecturer of the Department of Languages and Linguistics, at Osun State University, in Nigeria, who was evidently involved in a sex scandal. According to the report, the matter was captured on video and the video was made available by a fourth year student, clearly showing details of the offence and implicating the lecturer, yet the lecturer still denied the incident, describing the video as a lie, though the lecturer could not deny that the person in the video was him nor did he claim that the video had been manipulated. Situations like these are common in the society (Adesomaju & Oladimeji, 2016). Hence, there is a need for disciplinary processes to follow a consistent and properly laid out procedure to minimise errors, criticisms and negative perceptions about the implementation of disciplinary actions. However, as noted by the erstwhile President of Nigeria, many decision makers in the public sector tend to overlook these rules. In his *Preface of Public Service Rules in Nigeria*, Obasanjo (2000, p11) averred:

...a substantial number of public officers behave as if there are no rules and regulations that govern their conduct. Our laws have always been clear: public service must be conducted according to stipulated rules and procedures.

Consistency in relation to disciplinary procedure

The processes prior to the application of sanctions on workers in the organisation who breach the rules of the organisation are defined as disciplinary procedures. A departure from these rules can prompt an affected staff to institute an action in court, which could nullify the sanctions. Therefore, there is need to apply the rules consistently. Consistent decision-making in disciplinary procedure defines a situation where disciplinary procedures apply to all staff without any form of bias. The application of the rules or procedure should not only be fair but be seen to be similar for similar aberrations and offences by different employees, notwithstanding the contract status, grade and staff category. This is the situation in the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow (2014). According to the University, “the university will act timely and dispense with meeting decisions”. These decisions are usually the interpretations of extant rules with respect to specific situations and actions. The interpretations ought to be predictable and consistent, so that staff members are aware in advance of decision outcomes in respect of the different courses of action (Landy & Conte, 2008). Knight and Ukpere (2014) posit that when disciplinary procedures decisions are inconsistent, the effect of these disciplinary procedures on staff members is likely to be inconsistent.

Nel *et al.*, (2012) clarified that policies are broad sets of guidelines, while procedures are more detailed codifications of what must occur when specific issues arise. For disciplinary procedures for instance, when breaches or unacceptable behaviours are observed, the response by management in terms of disciplinary action is essential to curtail excesses. Anstey, Grogan and Ngcukaitobi (2011) state that when two or more persons are required to work together on a specific set of tasks, conflicts are likely to arise. Thus, there is always a need to state how to resolve such conflicts in the disciplinary manuals of the organisation. There is also the need to be consistent in the application of the procedures, especially where disciplinary decision-making are involved. In Nigeria, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) insists that organisations should be consistent and fair with their disciplinary procedures.

Organisational justice

The disciplinary process falls within what scholars categorise as organisational justice (Kabanof, 1991). According to Nel *et al.*, (2012) organisational or workplace justice is often used to define organisational activities that relate to the distribution of resources and rewards within an organisation. These could include wages, salaries, promotions and sanctions. Perceptions of justice play a crucial role in the organisation and often impact attitudes, co-operation and output in such places. In fact, Landy and Conte (2008) use the 1915 Ludlow massacre in America to make the point that people could stake their lives when they feel unjustly treated in the workplace. Workplace justice is seen as a framework for examining disciplinary activities within an organisation. According to Kabanof (1991), organisational justice is a constant element in organisations, which influences people’s thoughts, actions and ties in the workplace, including employee attachments to the organisation in general.

Landy and Conte (2008) use the concept of organisational justice to define fairness in an organisation. According to Landy and Conte (2008), though the terms justice, fairness and trust in the workplace may be used interchangeably, there are minor differences between the concepts. Justice and fairness are used to characterise events, while trust is an anticipation of the actions or reactions of colleagues and leaders at the workplace. For instance, the employee reports daily for duty in the belief that in due time, wages or rewards will accrue to him/her for services rendered to the organisation. This is trust. Similarly, a worker may perform a duty in anticipation that his colleagues will continue from where he or she stopped, which is also based on trust. Management often hires workers entrusting them to perform a standard of work that will enhance the fortunes of the establishment. Trust is an essential element in team activities (Nel *et al.*, 2012, Ndu 2016). Without trust it will be difficult to achieve social production epitomized by the workplace. Employees need to trust management and be assured that management will act in accordance with a fair process especially in disciplinary matters. When there is a break down in expectations and a loss of trust, there is a major challenge in the organisation, which is likely to affect work attitudes, morale and organisational output and in some extreme cases, leading to the death of employees or even the organisation. A good example is the Ludlow Massacre of 1915 (Landy & Conte 2008).

Research methodology

Data for this article were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The article adopted a qualitative research approach, using a non-probability sampling technique. Fifteen persons who had the requisite characteristics were identified, selected and interviewed to generate necessary primary data. Out of this number, five were academics, five were senior administrative and professional and five were junior administrative and professional staff while ‘PA’, ‘PS’ and ‘PJ’ were used respectively as codenames to differentiate the categories of staff. The interviews were semi-structured and the respondents had the liberty to freely air their views in accordance with the issue of focus. These were supplemented by data generated from journals, text books, law reports and other documents. The primary and secondary data gathered were thematically and critically analysed to evaluate the objective. The stages in the thematic analysis are presented in Figure 1 below.

Data analysis and discussion of findings

To generate necessary data about the impact of staff perception of consistency of disciplinary decision-making or its absence on staff output and morale, three related questions were asked the fifteen

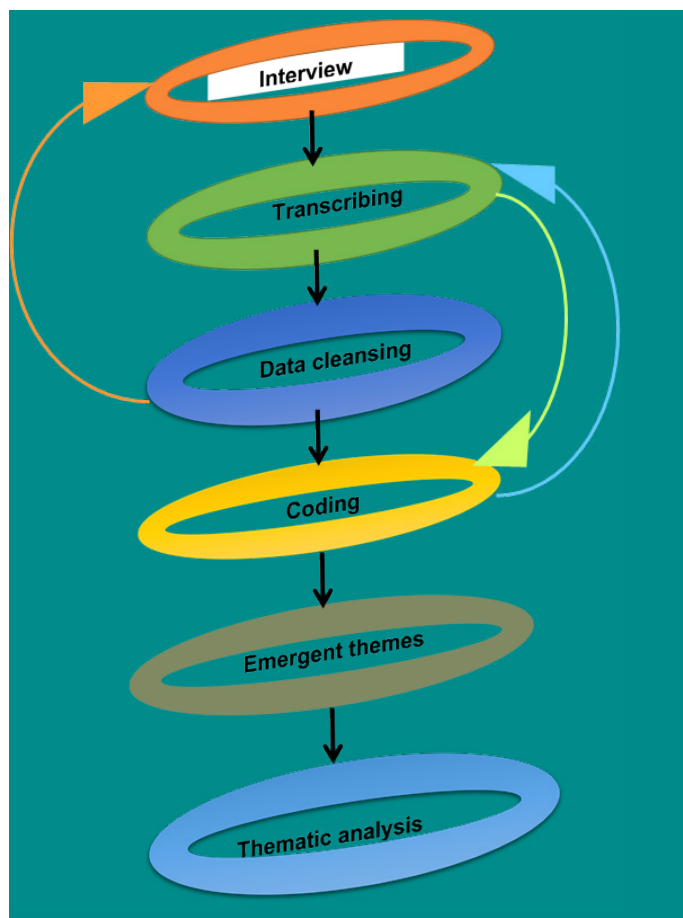


Figure 1. Stages in the thematic analysis

Source: Author's fieldwork

interviewees on what the impact of their own perception of consistency or inconsistency as well as that of other staff have made on their output and morale. Below is a synopsis of data analysis/discussion of findings.

Impact of interviewees' perceptions of inconsistency or consistency in disciplinary decision-making on outputs and morale

The first question was: Did your perception of consistency or inconsistency of disciplinary decision-making in your case affect your output and morale? Relying on the interviewees' responses, two themes emanated as follows: decreased output and morale, and increased outputs and morale. On decreased output and low morale of the interviewees, less than half of them responded that their perception of the disciplinary decision-making was inconsistent and this impacted negatively on their output and morale. In other words, their output decreased and their morale was low. In this regard, PA1 (one of the interviewees) stated:

"Of course, it affected my output...first when the case was on one was ostracised. Now to get back to the mainstream, you cannot just come back and immediately begin to blossom."

PA1 said that he did not blossom upon return from his disciplinary suspension at least not immediately after. This situation he ascribed to his perceived inconsistency in the disciplinary decision-making. In all, three interviewees were of the view that their perception of inconsistency of disciplinary decision-making decreased their output and morale.

On the other hand, when asked the same question as stated earlier, other set of interviewees felt that their perception of consistency of disciplinary decision-making increased their outputs and morale. In response to the same question, PA2 (one of the interviewees) said:

"Yes, even though I was the accused, because I was given fair hearing before those that could have said anything negative, I felt better and this boosted my morale and output at work."

Similarly, PS1 stated:

"My perception of consistency of disciplinary decision-making strengthened me to work better and relate well with other staff. This is because I was encouraged that justice will prevail if the extant rules are applied and disciplinary cases are decided consistently."

On the whole, twelve out of the interviewees opined that perceptions of the consistency of disciplinary decision-making increased their outputs and morale. Clearly, not all of them had positive perceptions about the disciplinary decision-making being consistent. For those who perceived that the disciplinary decision-making was inconsistent, the fear of being subjected to disciplinary action prompted them to work well and hard. These findings are presented in Figure 2 below.

Impact of staff perceptions of the consistency of disciplinary decision-making on workforce outputs and morale

The second question the interviewees were asked was: Do you think the perceptions of consistency in the university's disciplinary decisions impact on staff outputs and morale? This question was intended to identify the general feeling of the staff beyond the interviewees. The responses of the interviewees generated the following themes: (i) decreased outputs and low morale of staff, (ii) increased outputs and high morale of staff, and (iii) increased outputs but low morale of staff. From the data generated, PA1, PA4 and PA5 (three of the interviewees), stated that there is some perception of inconsistency of disciplinary decision-making in the case university which tend to decrease staff output and affect morale adversely. Two interviewees, PS1 and PS5 expressed the view that the perceptions of inconsistency of disciplinary decision-making increased outputs but their morale was low. The other ten interviewees did not share this opinion, as they perceived that consistency in the university's disciplinary decision-making has indeed increased staff outputs and morale. This is depicted in Figure 3 below as means to provide clarity in this respect.

Likely outcomes for similar misconducts or offences

The third question posed to the interviewees was, if based on previous disciplinary decisions, staff could anticipate the likely outcome for similar misconducts or offences. The responses of the interviewees

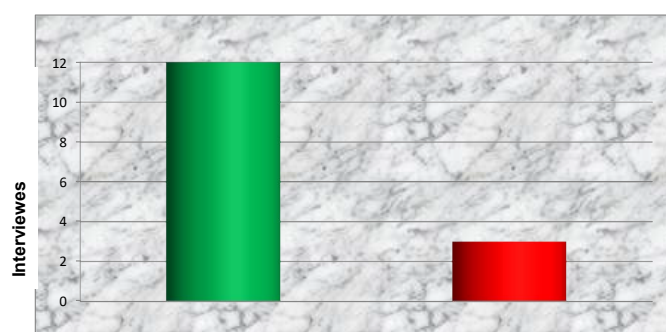


Figure 2: Impact of interviewees' perceptions of the consistency of disciplinary decision-making

Source: Author's fieldwork

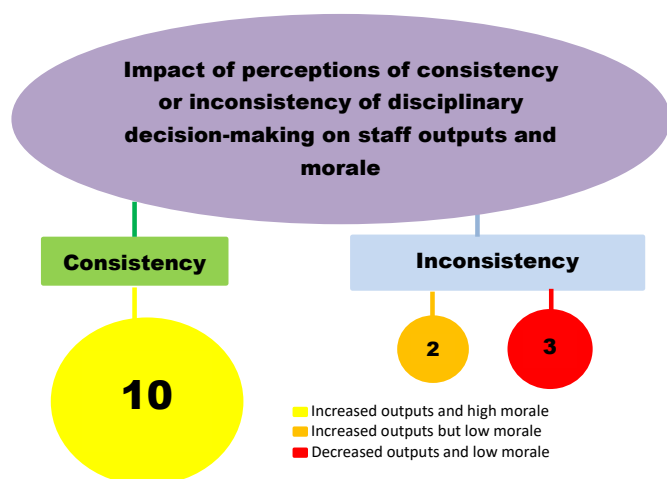


Figure 3. Impact of perceptions of consistency of disciplinary decision-making on staff outputs and morale
Source: Author’s fieldwork

were categorised into two themes: (i) likely outcome anticipated, and (ii) likely outcome not anticipated. In sum, a total of thirteen interviewees stated that based on previous disciplinary decisions made, staff could anticipate likely outcomes for similar misconducts or offences. Arising from the above, there is a perception that disciplinary decision-making is clearly anticipated along the lines of those whose interests are protected and favoured, and those who are not. The responses of a majority of the interviewees tend to point to the fact that there is a positive impact on staff outputs and morale owing to the institution’s disciplinary decision-making. Even for staff who perceive inconsistency in the disciplinary decision-making, the perception was that it increased outputs and morale. For the interviewees who asserted that there was consistency in the disciplinary decision-making, concerted efforts were made by them to align themselves to university rules with a view to avoiding consequences of the discipline. Interestingly, interviewees who perceived the disciplinary decision-making to be inconsistent, and who did not have ‘godfathers’ to assist them, also made conscious efforts to stay out of trouble by complying with the institution’s rules.

Basically, the article sought to know the impact of staff perceptions of consistency or inconsistency in disciplinary decision-making on workforce outputs and morale. In this respect the finding was that twelve of the fifteen interviewees noted that there were positive perceptions of consistency, which increased staff outputs and morale. Only three interviewees (PA1, PA4 and PA5) asserted that there was a decrease in staff outputs and low levels of morale. The bulk (twelve) of the interviewees stated that the positive perceptions of consistency in the university’s disciplinary decision-making also increased their outputs and morale. For instance, PS4 (one of the interviewees) stated as follows:

“... I perceived that the disciplinary decision-making was consistent, it boosted my output and morale.”

Similarly, PA2 (another interviewee) stated:

“...though I was accused, because I was given fair hearing...I felt better and this boosted my morale and output at work.”

This was also the view of another interviewee (PS2) who said:

“...The decision made me to sit up, to do my work.”

Earlier, PS1 (one of the interviewees), in line with the above, stated that:

“My perception of consistency in disciplinary decision-making strengthened me to work better and relate well with other staff.”

This finding of the article further reveals that perception of consistency in disciplinary decision-making can increase staff output and morale in an organisation when properly implemented. This aligns with extant literature, for example Grogan (2018), who claims that discipline can improve organisational output if perceived to be consistent. In fact, outputs could be higher if perceptions of consistency in disciplinary decisions were high amongst staff, particularly if staff come to the realisation that the discipline was purely corrective, and that it was executed for the mutual benefit of both the employee and the establishment. The objective of discipline could be achieved faster if there is confidence and trust amongst the workforce. This result conforms with extant literature. According to Cole (2006), when disciplinary decision-making is consistent and the process is properly executed, then the outcome is be positive for both the organisation and the workers, as the latter’s confidence will generate positive perceptions. Workers become reformed, colleagues or peers learn from the disciplinary experience and the overall effect on the system is an improvement in work attitudes and overall progress, that is, outputs and morale.

Conversely, three interviewees expressed unfavourable perceptions of consistency in the case university’s disciplinary decision-making. The perception generated a counter-productive effect on some staff (decreased output and low morale) as stated by PA1, PA4 and PA5 (interviewees) because they were dissatisfied or felt insecure. This may also be because these employees had assumed that the laws could not affect them, but found that this was not the case, which decreased their morale. These findings align with the work of Idris and Alegbelaye (2015) who observed from their study of another extra ministerial department in Nigeria that staff who assume that laws will not affect them, can be embarrassed because of this inaccurate perception when they are actually made to account for their misdemeanours. This can even lead to them losing their jobs. It could also be because they were embarrassed by being accused of an offence they were not guilty of, and found the whole process embarrassing, especially when they are suspended from duty for a number of years, and lose their income as well as the security that the job and a salary afforded them. It becomes especially embarrassing when they are accused and charged in this manner for an offence that they neither anticipated nor committed. This could well elicit the negative feelings and disaffection. These findings corroborate well with the outcome of the study of Nwafor and Nnokam (2012), and Ajetumobi (2013) who noted growing dissatisfaction among staff who faced disciplinary panels in higher institutions in Nigeria, leading to increased litigations with the universities. In recent times, one of the most difficult assignments of university managers has had to do with taking appropriate disciplinary decisions. This is so because when such decisions are not made appropriately, the outcome on both the worker and the organisation turn out to be negative, sometimes leading to needless costs for the organisation including loss of output, morale, litigation, hatred and loss of confidence, among others. This is what was observed among those who feel that disciplinary decision-making in their cases was inconsistent especially in terms of procedural decisions. These staff members seemed dissatisfied with the experience of their disciplinary trial and their expressions reflected the extent of their frustration with the system. The work of Okonkwo (1996) also lends credence to this view. In identifying the position of discipline in

Nigerian universities, Okonkwo (1996) noted that policy (decision) making has not been systematic and coherent, and as a result, impromptu or panic actions are taken in the heat of crisis. This, he stated is of major concern in most Nigerian universities.

For those who had not experienced the process directly but saw, observed or heard about those who had, many of them had learnt because of the experiences of others and the outcomes of this study show that staff perceptions of consistency in disciplinary decision-making affected outputs positively. In other words, the administration of discipline in the workplace generated a salutary effect on the staff's outputs and morale. However, two of the fifteen interviewees gave the impression that even though their outputs increased, their morale was low. For instance, according to PS5 (one of the interviewees):

"For the staff who do not have godfathers, they tend to live up to expectation knowing their handicap in the university system."

This is because they observed inconsistency in the disciplinary decision-making but had to increase their outputs in order to keep their jobs. Far less than a sizeable number of interviewees were dissatisfied and negatively affected by the disciplinary decision-making while the rest stated that their perception of consistency in the disciplinary decision-making had a salutary impact on their output and morale. Simply put, more staff outputs and morale increased as a result of their perceptions in the consistency of the disciplinary decision-making. Only three interviewees stated that their perceptions generated low morale and decreased their outputs. These categories are few when compared to the interviewees whose outputs increased and was accompanied with high morale, as noted by one of the interviewees (PA2),

"The perception that the panels disciplinary decisions are consistent has positive effect on staff morale and output generally."

In sum, a total of thirteen interviewees stated that based on previous disciplinary decisions, staff could anticipate likely outcomes for similar misconducts or offences. Figure 4 below presents these findings.

On the whole, the finding of the article showed that perception of consistency in disciplinary decision-making boosted productivity and staff morale in the university both for those who had directly encountered sanctions through the disciplinary process and for those who were yet to directly experience the process. When those who had engaged the disciplinary process and those who had not are aggregated, then the overall effect is positive. This indicates that perceptions of consistency in disciplinary decision-making have a beneficial impact on productivity in the case institution. This finding conforms with extant literature and supports the outcomes in several studies. For example, Adebajo's (2005) showed that, when discipline is conducted fairly,

and decision-making is consistent with the rules of the workplace, this generates positive perceptions. In this case, employees are motivated and encouraged to abide by the rules and workplace procedures. This leads to stable and continuous flows of outputs, which eventually leads to greater outputs and less frictions for the establishment. The finding is also consistent with Grogan's (2018) works. As stated by Grogan (2018) the role of discipline in the workplace is to increase contribution to organisational output. Grogan (2018) observed that when implemented effectively discipline tends to increase staff outputs at the workplace.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proffered:

- **A need for induction and periodic orientation for the workforce:**
 - There is a need for more efficient induction programmes for new employees and regular orientation and re-orientation of the workforce about work expectations, procedures, conduct and other rules which are stated in the code of conduct of the university, including educating them on the consequences of breaching such rules.
- **More transparency and publicity about disciplinary procedure:**
 - There should be deliberate efforts by the university leaders to encourage more transparency and publicity of disciplinary decision-making at all levels in the case university.
- **A need for an objective timeline of the disciplinary process:** - In addition, there should be specific time frame for the disciplinary process at each level to be fixed.
- **Proper definition of offences and the corresponding sanctions:-** The acts that constitute an offence in the case university should be more clearly defined, and in such a way that there is no ambiguity. In the same vein, the sanction for each offence should be equally specified.
- **A need for employee counselling:** - Counselling is an important aspect of human resource management. Therefore, the leaders, including heads of department/unit, deans of faculty and directors of institutes/centres should engage their subordinates periodically for general counselling on work-related issues.
- **Fair hearing:** - Leaders should ensure that, suspected offenders are given enough opportunity and time to prepare and state their side of the case before any disciplinary decision is made in accordance with the Latin maxim; *Audi alterem partem* and that disciplinary decisions are transparently borne out of the presentations made to disciplinary panels or from the facts available to the disciplinary panels. This should take place at all stages of the disciplinary process and will increase the acceptability of disciplinary decisions, and mitigate the rising incidence of litigations and cost borne by staff who fall victim to inconsistent disciplinary decision-making or who are dissatisfied with disciplinary decisions in terms of procedural and substantive matters.

Conclusion

Generally, staff perception of consistency in disciplinary decision-making among those who had gone through the process seems favourable, but among other staff the perception seems unfavourable. However, when aggregated, the perception of staff regarding consistency in the disciplinary decision-making in the case university seems more positive than otherwise as majority of staff were satisfied with the consistency of disciplinary decision-making at the university. Specifically, staff members' perception of consistency in disciplinary decision-making has a positive impact on outputs and morale. For many who affirmed consistency in the disciplinary decision-making,

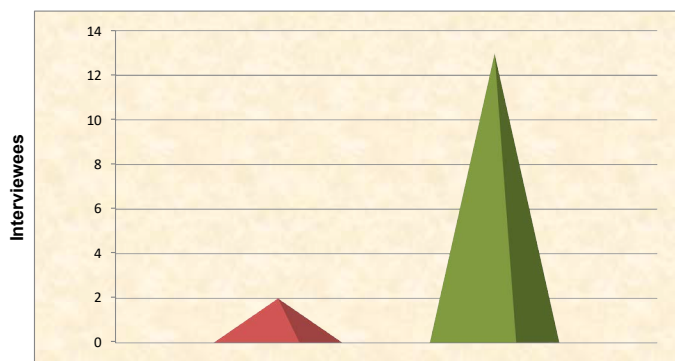


Figure 4. Likely outcomes of similar misconducts or offences based on previous disciplinary cases

Source: Author's fieldwork

their output increased and their morale became high. For the few who noted that god-fatherism and other primordial factors influenced disciplinary decision-making, the fear of disciplinary panels without a "god-father" made them to be more careful at the workplace. Though their outputs were high but their morale was low because of their perceptions of inconsistency in disciplinary decision-making at the case university.

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