

An Analysis of the Effectiveness of Disciplinary Procedures on Company Performance, A Case of African Distillers (Pvt) Limited.

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ABSTRACT: The study sought to analyse the effectiveness of disciplinary procedures on company performance with particular reference to African Distillers (Pvt) Ltd. Data collection involved mainly the use of questionnaires and interviews. Out of a total of 101 questionnaires distributed, 89 questionnaires were completed and returned by respondents and all were valid for analysis. The study revealed that employees at African Distillers (Pvt) Ltd had knowledge of disciplinary procedures and knew that disciplinary action is aimed at transforming employee behaviour for the good of the organisation in order to promote productivity in the workplace. Further findings indicated that there was a strong link between poor management style and an increase in the number of disciplinary cases in an organisation. Poor communication, lack of continuous training strategies, failure to live by the letter and spirit of the company's code of conduct by both management and employees were identified as barriers to engagement. This led to lack of trust between workers and management. The study recommended continuous in-house staff development workshops to remind workers and managerial staff on disciplinary procedures and other fundamentals such as regular communication and transparency in order to create an enabling working environment which is conducive for dialogue.

Key Terms: Discipline, Disciplinary procedure, Misconduct, Company Performance

Date of Submission: 13-02-2019

Date of acceptance: 28-02-2019

I. INTRODUCTION

Disciplinary action at a workplace is not often appreciated by employees most of whom view it as a cruel, unfair, inhuman, oppressive and inconsiderate way of curtailing their workplace freedoms and rights. This is supported by earlier studies which revealed that employees desire to be free from control. They view leaders, managers or supervisors as some form of 'cats' or 'policemen' who are there to fault-find and chase them around like 'mice' or 'criminals' at a workplace where they feel should be like a home to relax, behave as they like or chat endlessly to while up time until pay day. Several organizations have been formed to represent the rights and interests of workers who are perceived to have been unfairly treated for not concentrating on what they were employed to do. This study sought to analyse the effectiveness of disciplinary procedures in order to have in-depth understanding of why they are viewed with such negativity by employees they are supposed to serve. More and more complex misbehaviours by both parties (employer and employees) have continued to emerge leading to critical questions being raised by the modern strategic human resources practitioner: Are disciplinary procedures currently in use effective and are they achieving what they were set to achieve? What are the effects of using a right or wrong disciplinary procedure on company performance? What constitutes an effective disciplinary procedure? What is the relationship between the number of disciplinary cases in an organisation and the leadership style(s) used by management?

1.1 Background to the study

The art of discipline is as old as mankind and has been used to whip errant behaviour and create order in families, chiefdoms, kingdoms, churches, companies, institutions, governments and even in gangster, dissident or rebel groups worldwide since time immemorial to control behaviours of their members lest their goals would not be achieved. Discipline has therefore been understood to be the best weapon to employ when a people desire to achieve set goals in an effective and efficient manner at whatever level; it all starts with discipline. The United Nation Organisation has formed such organs as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), International Court of Justice (ICJ), International Court of Human Rights, International Court of Arbitration to

mention but just a few, as a way to regulate employer-employee relations, world order and discipline among its member states.

In Africa, the African Union (AU) has discredited several governments for behaviour inconsistent with its values, norms and practices. Furthermore, high profile leaders have been reprimanded as individuals or as governments for unfairly treating their own people. These are just but examples of various forms of disciplinary procedures taken by various organisations to correct wrong behaviour and instil discipline.

Disciplinary action is a behaviour change philosophy that brings and maintains a balance in the employment relationship (Grogan, 2014). According to Freeman & Stoner(2005) and Flippo (2009) disciplinary action has generally been the correct way to go when an employee violates company rules, regulations, procedures, policies or when one falls short of work expectations. Torrington & Hall (1998) as cited in Chirasha(2013)states that disciplinary action arises from management dissatisfaction with the employment contract rather than employee dissatisfaction.

African Distillers (Pvt)Ltd is a Zimbabwean company that manufactures quality branded wines, spirits and ciders for the Zimbabwean market(Afdis Report, 2015). It consists of both permanent and fixed-term contract employees. The employees work in 13 different departments. According to the Afdis Report (2016), cases of misconduct continue to rise and taking disciplinary measures has become unavoidable.The table below analyses disciplinary cases at Afdis (Pvt) Ltd in the month of June over a period of 5 years.

Table 1: Afdis Staff Complement since 2013

Year	Permanent Employees	Fixed-term Contract Employees	Total Employees	Disciplinary Cases held in June of each year
June 2013	186	118	304	9
June 2014	198	112	310	7
June 2015	204	84	288	12
June 2016	205	109	314	15
June 2017	209	99	308	22
Total				65

Source: Afdis Human Resources F17 Q3 Board Report

In April 1944, P J Joubert Limited was registered as a company in Bulawayo. In 1946, this Company changed its name to African Distillers (Afdis) Private Limited. In 1951 African Distillers became a public quoted company on the Rhodesia Stock Exchange. In 1974, the company then moved from Bulawayo to its current headquarters at Stapleford, a complex just outside Zimbabwe’s capital – Harare; which houses production, warehousing and distribution facilities. The company has six depots in Bulawayo, Harare, Kwekwe, Masvingo, Mutare and Victoria Falls which ensure a first-class distribution service country-wide.

As at October 2018, African Distillers (Pvt) Ltd had 13 sub divisions namely Human Resources, Marketing, Sales, Procurement, Blending, Packaging, Engineering, Safety Health and Environment, Finance, Administration, Information Technology, Secretariat and Risk Management. Its permanent staff stood at 187 employees supported by 118 fixed-term contract employees. The workforce is however male dominated as 89.5% of the employees were males. This is largely due to the nature of work in the manufacturing sector which historically is physical by nature.

1.2Afdis Policies on disciplinary issues

As provided for under Section 101 of Zimbabwe’s Labour Act [Chapter 28:01] of 2006, African Distillers (Pvt) Ltd developed and registered its own Code of Conduct. The Code basically consists of three main sections; the correctional section, management of disciplinary issues section and the appeals procedure section. The first section emphasizes correcting wayward behaviour in the workplace. It comprises verbal warnings and grievance handling procedures. The second section involves disciplinary hearings. One important feature under this section is a schedule of offences, which are then classified into four main categories to guide disciplinary committees in coming up with fair judgements. The four main categories are:

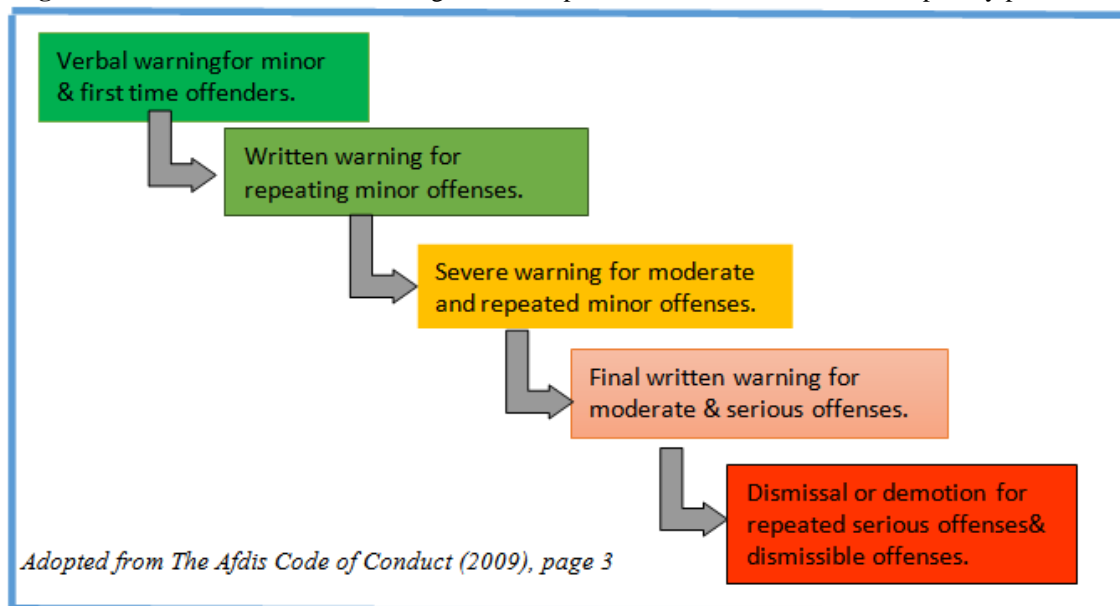
Group 1: Minor offenses – this category lists offenses agreed as minor such as malingering, leaving work early, being late for work and taking unauthorised breaks.

Group 2: Moderate offenses – these are offenses relating to carelessness, timewasting, negligence and inefficiency.

Group 3: Serious offenses – these constitute such offenses as being absent from work without official leave for a period of 2-4 days and conflict of interest offenses.

Group 4 Dismissible offenses – this covers such misconduct as theft, drug abuse, disobeying a lawful order, absence from duty for 5 or more working days, violence, disorderly behaviour, inciting among other offences viewed as dismissible.

Figure 1: Afdis offenses Table showing relationship between a misconduct and disciplinary procedure.



II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Acts of misconduct are rampant at African Distillers (Pvt) Ltd. Disciplinary measures have been taken by management to try and correct the alleged wrong behaviour. Sadly, an increase in the acts of misconduct by workers continues unabated. Many negative consequences have resulted within the case organisation, raising a big question on the effectiveness of disciplinary procedures used as a tool to curb errant behaviours and promote productivity. This has negatively affected the overall performance of the organization as more time is spent attending to hearings instead of concentrating on production. Production capacity of the organisation has visibly dwindled due to the aforementioned acts of misconduct. In some cases, customers wait for longer periods before they are served as they wait for employees who either arrive late for the day's work or return from lunch or tea break late. Management styles have also been condemned for the increase in misconduct cases. There was need for a study to investigate the effectiveness of disciplinary procedures and their relationship to production, management style and positive behaviour change. Earlier researchers in Zimbabwe had not focused of these areas.

2.1 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study was to analyse the effectiveness of disciplinary procedures on company performance with specific reference to Afdis (Pvt) Ltd.

The specific objectives of the study were:

- 1.2.1 To establish the various forms of disciplinary procedures currently in use.
- 1.2.2 To investigate the relationship between disciplinary procedures and positive behaviour change by employees.
- 1.2.3 To investigate the link between the increase in disciplinary cases and management styles.
- 1.2.4 To investigate the extent to which corrective disciplinary action can improve productivity.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Reasons for disciplinary procedures.

The survival of any institution lies on the ability or conduct of its own human capital (DeLanzor, 2007). Adherence to institutional procedures, rules, regulations, policies and procedures therefore, becomes the backbone of its success. Durban (2004) as supported by Ukpere (2009), Madhuku (2010), Mintah (2011) and Pasaoglu (2013) advise that new employees must be oriented into company culture during induction as soon as they join the company. However, when one's behaviour is not in tandem with the set rules and regulations, disciplinary procedures should be enforced as a way of correcting the wayward behaviour. It is imperative to

note that the Latin word *disciplinaire* is not necessarily punitive as most revered by employees. Not all disciplinary hearings lead to employee dismissals. According to Armstrong (2010) supported by Wolhuter (2010) note that consistency in following procedures brings harmony amongst employees and ultimately high productivity. Additionally, disciplinary procedures encourage employees to behave sensibly at work adhering to rules and regulations (Dessler, 2007). Discipline is enforcing rules and regulations and it ensures the smooth running of the organisation. Furthermore, it increases work efficiency and maintains industrial peace. Disciplinary procedures act as the fulcrum upon which workplace discipline and high production are achieved.

3.2 Effectiveness of disciplinary procedures.

Disciplinary procedures are only effective to a certain extent (Salomon, 2012). Disciplinary procedures encourage employees to adhere to workplace rules and regulations (Dessler, 2007). Discipline enforces rules and regulations and ensures the smooth running of organisations. Furthermore, it increases working efficiency and maintains industrial peace, hence improving workplace relations and tolerance (Grogan, 2014 and Gwisai, 2006). Disciplinary procedures act as the bridge between goals and accomplishments. If properly administered, disciplinary procedures can convert an ineffective worker into a productive member.

However, disciplinary procedures have their own limitations as managers initiating the process might have incorrect information which can permanently damage workplace relationships (Saunders et al, 2004), Stecher et al, 2005 and Strain, 2017). The hearing is sufficient to sour relationships permanently if there is no case to answer or if the employee feels unfairly treated. Torrington & Hall (1998) as supported by Tyrone & Chelliah (2010) point out the disadvantage that disciplinary situations are most disturbing for employees and are frequently very worrying, stressful and surrounded by feelings of hostility and mistrust.

Danku, Apelety, Aboagye, & Benyebaar (2015) postulate that the success of disciplinary action at a workplace depends on transparency and good corporate governance culture and practices present in the organisation.

3.3 Forms of disciplinary procedures

According to Armstrong as supported by Hall & Anderson (2010), Eby (2009) and Engelbrecht et al (2013) disciplining an employee can take the form of warnings, dismissals, transfers, fines, counselling, reduction of salaries, withholding performance awards, demotions, suspensions, removal of certain privileges as well as denial of promotion for a certain period.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Burney (2001) as supported by Mack (2017), there are four main approaches to disciplinary procedures namely progressive approach, positive approach, negative approach and non-punitive discipline approach.

4.1 Progressive Discipline or Traditional Approach

According to Mark (2009), progressive discipline approach is a series of management interventions that give employees opportunities to correct undesirable behaviours before being discharged. Ibid (2009) states that if an employee continuously fails to respond to progressive warnings, the employer is then justified in discharging the individual. Frank (2011), Atiomo (2000), Croke (2009) and Bulin (2004) agree that Progressive Discipline involves a sequence of penalties that are administered each one slightly more severe than the previous one. The first step is usually oral or verbal warning and the second step is written warning. When a supervisor first observes an act of misconduct, the employee is warned that the misconduct should not recur and told to correct the errant behaviour. A written warning which is filed comes when the unacceptable behaviour is repeated by an employee. This step may be repeated three or four times depending on the company's policy or Code of Conduct. The third step leads to a disciplinary hearing and verdicts may take different forms such as fines, demotion, dismissal etc.

The above is in sync with the Afdis Code of Conduct as depicted in the diagram below. Penalties start with a verbal warning and end with a dismissal for serious offences or repeated offences. Each warning has a life span ranging from four months to twelve months depending on the severity of the offense committed.

Table 2: Afdis Code Disciplinary Penalty Table

PART 8: AFDIS TABLE OF PENALTIES

SCHEDULE OF OFFENCES AND RECOMMENDED PENALTIES

GROUP 1 : MINOR

1 ST Breach	2 nd Breach	3 rd Breach	4 th Breach
Written warning	Severe warning	Final warning	Dismissal

GROUP 2 : MODERATE

1 ST Breach	2 nd Breach	3 rd Breach
Severe warning	Final warning	Dismissal

GROUP 3 : SERIOUS

1 ST Breach	2 nd Breach
Final warning	Dismissal

GROUP 4 : DISMISSIBLE

1 ST Breach
Dismissal

Adopted from the Afdis Code of Conduct (2009) page 8

There are four types of warnings used at Afdis– verbal, first written, severe, and final. The life of each warning varies according to its severity. The table below shows the life of each warning.

<u>Type of warning</u>	<u>Duration of warning</u>
First written warning	4 months
Severe written warning	8 months
Final written warning	12 months

V. METHODOLOGY

The study used the mixed research approach and took the form of a descriptive survey research design.

5.1 Population

The target population of employees at African Distillers (Pvt) Ltd was 305. These were drawn from all the main sections of the organization.

5.2 Sampling procedure

Quota sampling and stratified sampling techniques were used. The justification of selecting these techniques was premised on the belief that the sample would be a true representative of the population. The computed sample size was 101 distributed as follows:

Table 3: Study Sample - Staff Distribution by section and Gender.

MALE

FEMALE

TOTAL

SUPPLY CHAIN

Executives	1
	-
	1
Managers	1

	1
	2
Junior Staff	36
	4
	40
TOTAL	38
	5
	43
SALES MARKETING & DISTRIBUTION	
Executives	1
	-
	1
Managers	1
	1
	2
Junior Staff	36
	2
	38
TOTAL	38
	3
	41
FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION	
Executives	1
	1
	2
Managers	2
	1
	3
Junior Staff	7
	2
	9
TOTAL	10
	4
	14
HUMAN RESOURCES	
Executives	-
	-
	-
Managers	1

	-
	1
Junior Staff	1
	1
	2
TOTAL	2
	1
	3
GRAND TOTAL	88
	13
	101

Source: Researchers' own field work (2018)

5.3 Response rate

From a total of sample of 101 employees, 89 respondents completed and returned completed questionnaires, representing 88.12% response rate. There were 77 males who constituted 86.5% and females who made up 13.48% of the respondents. This confirms that the manufacturing industry is still dominated by man due to the nature of manual work involved. Women in Zimbabwe generally shun work requiring hard labour.

VI. FINDINGS

6.1 Awareness of disciplinary procedures at Afdis

In response to whether employees are aware of the disciplinary procedures at Afdis, 96.6% of the respondents confirmed that they were aware of the procedures. This was also confirmed by 100% of the respondents who acknowledged that the company fully inducted its employees on the Code of Conduct.

6.2 Employee perception on disciplinary action and behaviour

Analysis of responses showed that employees had a clear view of the different forms of disciplinary actions taken by employers in workplaces. Their response depicts that they have a clear idea of severity of each misconduct as per the Afdis Code of Conduct.

6.3 Fairness and transparency in disciplinary hearings

Respondents were asked to indicate their perception on the transparency and fairness of disciplinary action at Afdis. The results showed that 75% or 71 out of the 89 of the respondents felt that disciplinary action was not transparent and fair, 23% felt it was fair and transparent while 2% opted to be neutral. It was quite interesting to note that 14 of those who strongly objected to the idea of fairness and transparency had at one point been subjected to a disciplinary hearing.

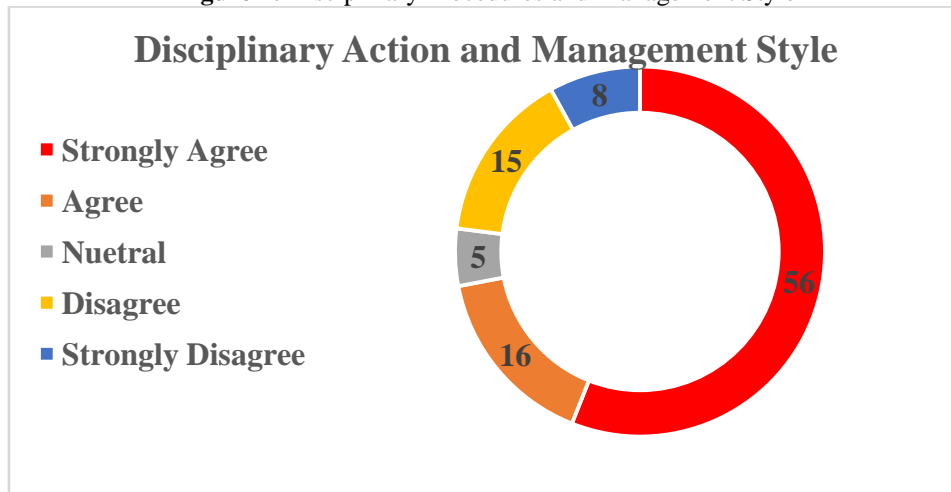
6.4 Effect of disciplinary procedure on employee performance

Disciplinary procedures are fundamental tools to re-align undesirable employee behaviour to the business objective. In light of that, 87% or 77 out of 89 respondents agreed that disciplinary procedures had a positive impact on employee performance. This response revealed that workers at Afdis (Pvt) Ltd knew the importance of discipline in achieving the company's strategic goals.

6.5 Management style on discipline

Employee perception on the relationship between disciplinary hearing and management style was also analysed. In response to whether there is a relationship between the number of disciplinary cases and the dominant management style in the company, the following responses were noted:

Figure 2: Disciplinary Procedures and Management Style



Source: Researcher’s field work (2018)

72% of respondents made up of 56% who strongly agreed and 16% who agreed confirmed that management style at African Distillers (Pvt) Ltd had an adverse effect on the number of disciplinary cases. This implies that there can be no change in discipline at Afdis without changing the dominant management style used.

6.6 Problems encountered during disciplinary procedures

Respondents ranked lack of communication as the major driver of disciplinary problems at Afdis. This was followed by lack of training, Trade Union interference and inconsistencies in decision-making.

6.7 Suggested Measures to Reduce Disciplinary Cases

In light of the disciplinary challenges that fuelled cases in the preceding years at the case organisation, respondents further suggested the following measures to arrest the situation. Respondents were of the view that good communication and fair punishment for same offense would aid transparency in the disciplinary process at the organisation. Training of employees was another proposal in terms of recommendations and handling hearings within stipulated time was also recommended by respondents.

6.8 Measures to discourage indiscipline

Respondents suggested incentives for good discipline as a way of encouraging staff to deter from engaging in indiscipline. Such incentives as promotions, spot bonuses, coaching, leave and job rotation were suggested.

6.9 interview analysis

Qualitative data in this study involved analysing responses from interviews involving line managers.

Table 4: Interview Response Rate from Line management

Respondents

	Number targeted for interviews	Interviews Conducted	Response Rate (%)
Line Managers	7	7	100

Source: Researcher’s field work (2018)

6.10 Summary interviews

Seven interviews were carried out and all the interviewees were either line managers or senior managers at Afdis. Analysis of responses showed that interviewees were generally aware of the various forms of disciplinary procedures and gave adequate examples of the same. There was also awareness of the link between a misconduct and the severity of punishment as outlined in the Afdis Code of Conduct. Interviewees confirmed that their management style could either fuel indiscipline or encourage discipline. The managers interviewed did not find a strong link between their exemplary behaviour and discipline among workers opting to postulate that

workers had no business observing their behaviour and instead they should behave in accordance with the Code of Conduct. They tended to be defensive and resisted to acknowledge the need for exemplary behaviour on their part a thing which led to the conclusion that most managers did not exude exemplary behaviour. Managers interviewed preferred to behave as they wished but still expected employees to behave well. Interviewees agreed that discipline at a work place led to high production.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that Disciplinary procedures used at African Distillers (Pvt) Limited are well established and are in sync with the Labour Act, Chapter 28:01. The Disciplinary procedures have a two-way effect on employee behaviour change and improvement in work performance. The study also found out that poor management style had an adverse effect on discipline at a work place. The study also concluded that management's ability to manage discipline leads to improved employee performance.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations were drawn:

- 8.1 In order to improve the deteriorating disciplinary situation at African Distillers (Pvt) Ltd, employee-employer communication must be improved to achieve employee engagement.
- 8.2 Fairness in handling disciplinary cases is fundamental.
- 8.3 Timeous administration of disciplinary hearings is important.
- 8.4 Staff, managers and Disciplinary Committees should be continuously trained on the fundamentals of discipline.
- 8.5 Management should use appropriate leadership style and be exemplary in their conduct as a way of reducing disciplinary cases.
- 8.6 There is need to create an enabling environment at every workplace.

FURTHER RESEARCH

This research covered a sample of 101 employees out of a population of 305 at the case study organisation. Information obtained was not exhaustive. The researcher recommends that similar studies be conducted in other manufacturing institutions of different sizes in order to ascertain if the findings of this study could be generalizable.

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BhebheThomas. "An Analysis of the Effectiveness of Disciplinary Procedures on Company Performance, A Case of African Distillers (Pvt) Limited." IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS). vol. 24 no. 02, 2019, pp. 59-68.