

**DETERMINANTS OF EMPLOYEES' VIOLATIONS OF DISCIPLINARY STANDARDS
IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SECTOR (A CASE STUDY OF ANCHOR INSURANCE)**

BY

**IMOH GEORGE OTONG
DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL STUDIES,
AKWA IBOM STATE POLYTECHNIC, IKOT OSURUA, IKOT EKPENE,**

**ETTE PETER AKPAN
DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION,
AKWA IBOM STATE POLYTECHNIC, IKOT OSURUA, IKOT EKPENE**

**&
IME ROBSON NSEBOT
DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION,
AKWA IBOM STATE POLYTECHNIC, IKOT OSURUA, IKOT EKPENE.**

ABSTRACT

The study examined the determinants of employees' violations of disciplinary standards in the Nigerian public sector, using Anchor Insurance as a case study. The population of the study consisted of 103 staff, being made of 89 junior staff and 9 senior staff with five (5) management staff of Anchor Insurance Company, Akwa Ibom. Simple random sampling technique was used to arbitrarily select 50 respondents out of the population. The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire. The instrument was validated by two experts in evaluation and Test and Measurement. Data from 50 completed questionnaire forms were subjected to simple percentages and independent t-test analysis. The findings of the study concluded that ambiguity of disciplinary standards and lack of knowledge are contributing factors to employee's violations of disciplinary standards in Nigerian public sector. The study, however, recommends that the organization's structure of justice should clearly determine the penalties that go with the breaking of each rule in order to guide the disciplining decisions and procedures to the employees to disambiguate rules which contradict employees' in order to overcome the employees' violation of disciplinary rules. Rules are static, and should thus be periodically reviewed to ensure that they are always up-to-date.

KEYWORDS: Employees; violations; discipline; conduct; regulations

INTRODUCTION

Organizations, in any setting, are made up of group of persons who are known and addressed as "employees", inter-connected and working together to achieve the set aims and objectives of the organization. Therefore, these employees relate with their co-staff at the work place on a daily basis to fulfil their contractual obligations in order to contribute their quota to the attainment of organizational goals while maintaining work standards. However, each employee enters the work place with their own unique values, attitudes, abilities and perceptions. This may bring about conflicts in any organization (Robbins, Odendaal &Roodt, 2003). To handle conflicts between individuals and to ensure an appropriate work environment, managers, supervisors and other leaders make use of disciplinary action to curb conflicts and maintain serenity. Disciplinary measures are designed to correct behaviors and maintain balanced serene work environment (Grogan, 2009). When inappropriate behavior or conduct is noticed in the organization, it is the responsibility of leaders and managers to reprove such behavior and maintain acceptable norms

or standards (Rao, 2009). Therefore, discipline, regulations and procedures form the core of the employment relationship between employer and employee. In order for discipline to be effective and beneficial, it needs to be considerably and procedurally fair (Bendix, 2005). This means that proper disciplinary measures need to be followed to ensure that all organizational policies and legislative requirements are being adhered to. Substantial fairness relates to the reason for embarking on disciplinary actions, and the course of action. There has to be a just reason for implementing disciplinary measures, and this needs to comply with the organization's policies as well as those promulgated in the labour legislation of the country (Venter & Levy, 2011). Procedural fairness relates to the correct process that needs to be followed during the disciplinary inquiry (Bendix, 2010). This refers to the organization's core rules and processes that need to be followed progressively to ensure that employee rights are not being violated and to ensure that the business is against claims of unfair labour conducts and unfair dismissals. Maintaining the balance of fairness is a difficult task for every manager or supervisor in a business. As these aspects have to be attended to, supervisors and managers need to ensure that correct policies and procedures are followed in this respect. Leaders thus have a demanding responsibility towards the business in ensuring that their actions are appropriate within the context of disciplinary measures, and that they, at all times, act with the organization's interest at heart. This view is demonstrated by Cole (2007:110) who stated that "fairness is the key to positive reactions to discipline on the part of employees".

Disciplinary measures are necessary at the work place for promoting orderly employment relations as well as fairness and uniformity in relating with individuals. Measures enhance standards of conduct and performance at work; measures help to ensure that standards are adhered to and make way for a fair method of dealing with supposed failures to observe them. In most cases, issues of misconduct or unsatisfactory conduct are handled with the normal daily dialogue between managers and staff.

DeCenzo and Robbins, (1998) in Personnel/Human Resource Management, define Discipline as a condition in the organization when employees conduct themselves in accordance with the organization's rules and standards of acceptable behavior. Supporting the author Pettinger, (2001) in Mastering Management Skills, Discipline is defined as a reflection of a standard of attitudes, behaviors and performance required in a particular situation.

Also Gupta, (2006) in Human Resource Management, argues that, in many organizations, managerial attitudes about discipline have changed considerably from what they were in the "good old days" when it was taken for granted that employees could be discharged for any or no reason. Some of the drift to a more reasonable analysis were noted in the early 1970's. For example, according to a BNA survey, 56 percent of responding companies had made changes in "their rules for employee conduct, and or penalties for violations of rules", in the 5 years before the latest survey. Some form of counseling preceded any formal disciplinary action in 85 percent of responding companies.

Conceptual Explanation of Conflict in Workplace

Following DeCenzo and Robbins, (1998) in Personnel/Human Resource Management, defines discipline as a condition in the organization when employees condition themselves in accordance with the organization's rule and standards of acceptable behavior. Footing on the author, Singh (2005) in Industrial Relations (emerging paradigms), defines discipline as the regulation and modulation of human activities to produce a controlled performance. The aim of discipline is quite simple; it is to check employees into established standards of the organization's performance and to conduct themselves safely at work. Discipline is a needful action to all organized groups.

Subsequently, Dessler, (2001) in Human Resource Management, comments that discipline is a procedure that corrects or punishes a subordinate because a rule of procedure has been violated.

Relying on Pettinger, (2001) in Mastering Management Skills, Staff Discipline is a reflection of the standard of attitudes, behaviors and performance required in a particular situation. Disciplinary measures help to check when there is any variation from these standards. All disciplinary measures and procedures state the circumstances where they are to be conducted and applied.

According to Gupta, (1996) in Human Resource Management, in simple words, discipline means orderliness or the absence of disorder, chaos and confusion in human behavior and actions. It occurs when employees behave in an orderly and responsible manner. Footing on the author Ngirwa, (1993) in Human Resources Management in Africa Works Organizations, discipline is a deliberate management action or behavior used to encourage compliance with organizational standards and rules.

A researcher said, an Employee can be defined as a person who is hired by another person or a business for a wage or fixed payment in exchange for personal services and who does not provide the services as part of an independent business; any individual employed by an employer. An employee is any person who has been employed to work, under contract of employment with an employer.

Why Employees Break Rules in Workplace

Ngirwa, (1993) in Human Resource Management in Africa Works Organizations, argued that, in most human resources problems, only very few employees cause disciplinary problems. Majority of the employees are comfortable with a disciplined job measure and so obey the established procedures. What are the common reasons why few employees do not follow procedures? This includes, but not limited to, these under listed factors.

Poor Leadership: A poor quality manager reproduces himself in the employees under his or her span of control. If the leader is dishonest, has no vision, is undedicated to his work, not change-oriented, uncooperative, a poor problem solver, does not accomplish tasks, employees will not derive enjoyment from their work and must start eliciting signs of indiscipline.

Poor Adjusted Personal Characteristics: Some employees possess personal characteristics which have been acquired either in other organizations or in their current work organization, which have not been adjusted. Such characteristics may include; carelessness, lack of cooperation, laziness, dishonesty, lack of initiative, chronic lateness and lack of effort. These characteristics must be adjusted in order to bring them to the forms and standards preferred for the particular work organization. Living together involves sacrifices of individual freedom and interest so as to conform to group norms. Most people understand the need to rectify their behavior for purposes of coexisting peaceably with others. Unfortunately, there are always a few persons in every group who must be forced to change their preferred behavior so that it conforms to group norms. The disciplining function usually has particular problems with such people.

Private Problems: Sometimes employees break rules for reasons that have very little to do with their working conditions. The employee may be having a quarrel at home, money problems, fear, frustrations, or even be sick. These problems often cause undesirable behavior, which disrupts peaceful coexistence in the work group, as well as the organizational performance. The leader should be careful in handling discipline problems caused by employee's private problems. They should avoid interpreting these as having the opportunity to snoop into the employee's personal affair, but they should encourage the employees to share private problems with them and be able to offer a listening and uncritical ear. This shows that the managers care and understand.

Poor Publicity of Rules: Rules ought to be publicized so that the party, which must observe them as well as that which should enforce them knows that such rules exist, and why. The principal of organizational justice requires that rules be formulated with adequate participation of all concerned and thereafter they should be thoroughly explained to the employees and management's poorly publicized rules are slightly less than camera tricks with questionable objectives.

Very often the poor publicity of rules emanates either from management's arrogance or from the assumption that, since the formulation of rules included representatives of management, employees and unions, the human resources department needs to make efforts to publicize them. This can be a big mistake. The human resources department ought to take steps to avail the awareness of all new rules to all organizational members. This can be done through orientation programs, circulars, meetings, posters, etc. It is useful to remember that poorly publicized rules will most likely be broken and poorly enforced.

The Effectiveness of Disciplinary Actions in Business Organization

According to Miner and Miner, (1977) in *Personnel and Industrial Relations*, it is clear that different circumstances surrounding the offence tend to elicit discipline in varying degrees. What is not so clear is how effective discipline usually is. The most consistently positive evidence comes from the area of absence control. Spot checks at home by visiting nurses can prove useful in uncovering and correcting sick-leave abuses. Studies have also demonstrated the value of formal discipline in holding down absenteeism.

Another approach to the evaluation of discipline as a collective procedure has been to follow the performance of individuals who were discharged for disciplinary reasons and then reinstated by an arbitrator on appeal. Do people who have had such an experience improve after it?

Although among employees suffering from emotional problems the impact has been minimal, studies dealing with individuals whose discharge resulted from a much greater variety of causes produced results more favorable to the disciplinary approach. Very few were discharged a second time, and most maintained at least minimally satisfactory performance level. It is apparent from this research that discipline can work, although not with everyone. Among those with whom it often does not work are employees whose problems involve addiction and those who frequently violate safety rules.

Approaches to Discipline in the Workplace

Following Singh, (2005) in *Industrial Relations (emerging paradigms)*, the limitations of legalistic approach are obvious. It is basically against human dignity and HRD approach. Researches in behavior science area have brought to light many unknown aspects of human behavior and group dynamics. HRD specialists are busy inventing alternative methods of managing discipline based on those advancements in behavioral sciences. The Paradigm and assumptions have changed and are further changing.

Assumption of Theory X, human beings are essentially honest, sincere, job lovers and disciplined, has been put to use. Human beings have latent qualities and they can be reformed, corrected, developed and salvaged if properly managed. Target the root causes and not the individual (hate the sin, not the sinner) and remove the causes responsible for indiscipline. If the resources are plugged, the incidence of indiscipline will be less. Keep the majority of employees in view rather than the undisciplined few. Do not sacrifice the whole for the fault of a few.

No one changes unless he understands and gets convinced about the usefulness of change in him. A well-planned, well researched intervention through educational and attitudinal inputs can bring the desired understanding and thereafter intended change, professional counseling and self understanding.

Positive discipline is not a passive and weak disciplinary concept. Not that it rules out the element of punishment. But it uses punishment as the last resort with doses of punishment in the right proportion, using the punishment more as educative and developing opportunities than negative and deterring ones. Reckless use of punishment leads to nothing. It does create ripples temporarily, but gets evaporated soon and indiscipline reoccurs, resurfaces and multiplies.

Positive discipline is a system which looks at employees with a positive attitude when they face disciplinary problems, and eliminates the element of hastiness in the use of punishment, affords employees opportunities for improvement, recognizes and reinforces the culture of good discipline displayed by majority of employees within the organization. The emphasis is to reclaim and improve the employees than to annihilate them.

Therefore, there has to be a shift in the perception of discipline from maintenance of proper subordination or obedience of rules, to willingly accepting the norms and conduct and a commitment to behave or act in an appropriate or desirable manner.

Holistic/ Integrative Approach: According to Singh, (2005) in Industrial Relations (emerging paradigms), the following constitute the holistic/integrative approach;

- (i) More preventive than curative, like Ayurvedic medicine. It acts slowly but goes direct to the roots and provides permanent solution. It cures chronic cases and prevents the spread of endemic causes of indiscipline.
- (ii) It aims at creating a culture of discipline where discipline is practiced as a habit rather than exception.
- (iii) It does not prohibit the use of punishment altogether. It prescribes for punishment as the last resort.
- (iv) It is not airy, impractical and theoretical as it has been perceived by some. It is most mundane, simple, practical and also effective, in the long run. It is an alternative method based on HRD philosophy to manage discipline.

Positive Discipline Approach: This approach is based on the premise that the disciplinary approach should not always be to punish; rather, it should try to regulate the negative behavior of employees to make them better workers. Positive discipline is a corrective action which results in improved performance, more productivity and a more effective workforce. Harsh and negative punishment might work in the short term, but the end result will eventually be employee's dissatisfaction, low productivity, higher rates of absenteeism and reduced turnover. This approach tries to mend the negative behavior of employees by first providing them counseling in terms of what is expected of them and then giving verbal and written warnings to them. Termination or discharge in extreme cases may also take place.

Steps Involved in Positive Discipline Approach

According to Herbert, 2003, the following steps are involved in positive discipline approach:

1. Counseling: Counseling is an important part of the disciplinary process, because it gives the supervisor the opportunity to identify employee's work behavior problems and discuss possible solutions with him. The goal of this phase is to make the employee aware of organizational policies and rules. Counseling by a supervisor in the work unit can have positive effects also. Often, employees simply need to be made aware of rules. A verbal warning can also be given to employees during counseling. Confrontations help to understand the employee's point of view as well. However, proper training should be given to the supervisors regarding counseling skills to make this process successful.

2. Written warnings: If the employee's behavior has not been improved by counseling sessions, then a second conference is held between the supervisor and the employee.

This stage is documented in written form. As part of this phase, the employee and the supervisor develop written solutions to prevent further problems from occurring.

3. Final warning: When the employee does not follow the written solutions, a final warning conference is held and the supervisor emphasizes to the employee the importance of correcting his inappropriate actions. Some firms incorporate a decision-day off, in which the employee is given a day off with pay to develop a firm, written action plan to remedy the problematic behavior. The idea is to impress on the offender the seriousness of the problem and the manager's determination to see that the behavior is changed.

4. Discharge: If the employee fails to follow the action plan that was developed and further problematic behaviors exist, then the supervisor should discharge the employee. The positive aspect of this approach is that it focuses on problem solving rather than punishing and penalizing. This approach involves positive confrontation with the problematic employee and thus giving him an opportunity to justify himself. The supervisor makes him aware of the company's policies. The greatest difficulty with this is the extensive amount of training required for supervisors and managers to become effective counselors. Also, the process often takes more supervisory time than the progressive discipline.

Progressive Disciplinary Approach

Herbert, (2003), comments the following in progressive disciplinary approach, It is a step-by-step program designed to correct performance problems arising out of employee's misconduct. This approach typically follows four progressive steps to rectify offences committed by an employee. It suggests that actions to modify behavior become progressively more severe as the employee continues to show improper behavior.

Verbal reprimands: It is a verbal interaction between employees and supervisor where they discuss the problem behavior and the expectations to change the behaviors. A verbal warning is issued as an informal reprimand that is simply noted in the record.

Written reprimand: It involves documentation between employee and supervisor if the behavior continues or if the employee further commits a more serious offense. A written warning is more official and summarizes the previous verbal attempts. This written feedback is discussed with the employee and then placed in his personal file.

Suspension: The third step is suspension without pay; its purpose is to emphasize the seriousness of the offense and the necessity for change.

Dismissal: The final step is dismissal of employee and is used only when previous steps have failed to change unacceptable behavior.

The progressive discipline model has two advantages for managers:

- (i) It gives the employee additional opportunities to correct his performance prior to discharge.
 - (ii) It stresses the seriousness of repeated violations to employees.
- This progressive discipline has the following disadvantages:
- (i) Progressive discipline may result into bitter relationships between supervisor and employee.
 - (ii) Supervisor may feel obligated to address every performance offence and assign an appropriate punishment to it, even though it may not be required. Management may focus only on the problematic employees at the expense of the good performers, thereby consuming too much of the manager's time.

METHODOLOGY

Area of the Study

The research area for this study was in Akwa Ibom State.

Design of the Study

The design of the study was ex-post facto. Ex-post facto is an enquiry design in which the researcher has no control over the independent variables because they have already occurred. Asika, (2000), stated that ex-post facto design investigates the consequences and searches back by analyzing to establish possible causal factors. The researcher compared the independent variables to the dependent variables. The difference in the dependent variables was attributed to the impact of independent variables.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of 103 staff, made of 89 junior staff and 9 senior staff with five (5) management staff of Anchor Insurance Company, Akwa Ibom State.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample of this study consisted of fifty (50) respondents who were selected for the study. The simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting the respondents from the study area. The balloting system was used in selecting the sample.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire was used to obtain data on the independent and dependent variables presented in both sections (A and B) of the questionnaire. Section A measured demographic data of the respondents such as the name of the organization, names of respondents, gender, age, educational qualification, profession and marital status, while Section B contained information on the independent and dependents variables.

Validity of Instrument

In order to establish the validity of the instrument, three Test and Measurement experts in the Department of Test and Measurement, University of Uyo, were given the instrument for vetting. The items in which at least two experts agreed upon were regarded as suitable and used in the instrument. The items in the questionnaire were consequently properly worded to meet the respondents' level of understanding.

Reliability of the Instrument

The "Determinants of Employees Violations of Disciplinary Standards Questionnaire (DEVDSQ)" was administered on a sample of 30 respondents who were not part of the sample used for the main study. The internal consistency reliability of the instrument was determined by split-half method whose correlation coefficient was converted to that of the full length of the instrument using the Spearman Brown formula. The coefficient obtained was 0.76 and was deemed acceptable for the use of the instrument in the study.

Administration of the Instrument

The researcher contacted each of the respondents during work hours, administered the questionnaires to them and retrieved them that same day.

Statistical Treatment of the Data

Data gotten from the field were presented on tables which were calculated to descriptive analysis based on the answers elected from the respondents.

Objectives of the Study

To examine the effects of ambiguity of rules on the violation of disciplinary standards at Anchor Insurance Company.

To examine the contribution of lack of knowledge of disciplinary rules on violation of disciplinary standards in Anchor Insurance Company.

Research questions

What are the effects of ambiguity of rules on the violation of disciplinary standards at Anchor Insurance Company?

What are the contributions of lack of knowledge of disciplinary rules on violation of disciplinary standards Anchor Insurance Company?

Hypothesis

There is no significant effect of ambiguity of rules on violation of disciplinary standards at Anchor Insurance Company.

RESULT

Sex/Gender of Respondents

Table 4.1: Respondents According to their Gender and Position

Position	Male	Female	Total	
			Number	Percentage
Management	11	06	17	34%
Workers	22	11	33	66%
Total	33	17	50	100%
Percentage	66	34		

Source: Field Research Data, (2018)

Table 2 Distribution of Participant’s According to their Education Level

Formal Education	Management	Workers	Total	
			Number	Percentage
O’ level	-	04	04	08%
A’ level	-	06	06	12%
Diploma	-	14	14	28%
Advanced Diploma	02	04	06	12%
1 st Degree	09	05	14	28%
2 nd Degree	06	-	06	12%
Total	17	33	50	100
Percentage	34	66		

Source: Field Research Data 2018

Organization activities need people with good and adequate educational background. It is an indisputable fact that educated, skilled and experienced employees have more confidence in their jobs and are likely to perform better than the unskilled and less educated (Taylor, 1996 and 2001), Armstrong and Baron, (1998).

Table 3 Number of Respondents who know the Disciplinary Rules of the AIC

Cadre	Yes	No	Total	Percentage
Directors	02	-	02	04%
Management	15	-	15	30%
Employees	10	23	33	66%
Total	27	23	50	100
Percentage	54%	46%		

Source: Field Research Data, (2018)

Findings obtained from the respondents indicated that AIC top management are the people who are informed about the presence of disciplinary rules in the corporation and few employees; 10 (20%) employees are aware of disciplinary rules of AIC. Out of 33 employees, 23 (46%) employees are not aware of disciplinary rules of AIC. Also, analysis shows that a total number of 15 (30%) managers at AIC know about AIC disciplinary rules. Also the respondents from Directors who were 02 (04%) were also aware of disciplinary rules of AIC. This shows that only

top managers are well informed about the disciplinary rules because they are the ones who discipline employees, and the employees at AIC think it is not their job to deal with or to know the disciplinary rules guiding the corporation.

Research Question One

What are the effects of ambiguity of rules on the violation of disciplinary standards at Anchor Insurance Company?

Table 4: Effects of Ambiguity of Rules on Violation of Disciplinary Rules at AIC

Cadre	Yes	No	Total	Percentage
Directors	02	-	02	04%
Management	10	05	15	30%
Employees	23	10	33	66%
Total	35	15	50	100
Percentage	70%	30%		

Source: Field Research Data, (2018)

Findings obtained from the respondents indicated that AIC Directors; 02 (04%) argue that ambiguity of rules contribute to the employees’ violation of disciplinary rules at AIC. Also, analysis shows that 10 (20%) respondents at management level argue that ambiguity of rules contributes to employee’s violation of disciplinary rules at AIC. Out of 15 managers, 05 (10%) do not agree that ambiguity of rules affect the violation of disciplinary rules at AIC. Out of 33 employees, 23 (46%) accept that ambiguity of rules contributes to the violation of disciplinary rules at AIC. Also, analysis shows that 10 (20%) employees do not accept that ambiguity of rules affects the violation of disciplinary rules at AIC. This shows that a total of 35 (70%) employees accept that ambiguity of rules affect the violation of disciplinary rules at AIC, while only 15 (30%) employees say ambiguity of rules do not contribute to the violation of disciplinary rules at AIC.

Research Question Two

What are the contributions of lack of knowledge of disciplinary rules on violation of disciplinary standards Anchor Insurance Company?

Table 5: Contribution of Lack of Knowledge of Disciplinary Rules on Violation of Disciplinary Rules at AIC

Cadre	Yes	No	Total	Percentage
Directors	02	0	02	04%
Management	12	03	15	30%
Employees	28	05	33	66%
Total	42	08	50	100
Percentage	84%	16%		

Source: Field Research Data, (2018)

Findings obtained from respondents indicated that lack of knowledge of disciplinary rules is one of the most contributing factors for employees’ violation of disciplinary rules in the AIC. About 02 (04%) directors argued that lack of knowledge of disciplinary rules is a factor for employees’ violation of disciplinary rules at AIC. Out of 15 managers, 12 (24%) accepted that lack of knowledge of disciplinary rules is a factor for employees’ violation of disciplinary rules at AIC, while 03 (06%) managers affirmed that lack of knowledge of disciplinary rules is not a factor for employees’ violation of disciplinary rules. Also, analysis shows out of 33 employees, 28 (56%) accepted that lack of knowledge of disciplinary rules is a factor for violation of disciplinary rules at AIC. While 05 (10%) employees said that lack of knowledge of disciplinary rules is not a factor. This shows that 42 (84%) employees agreed that lack of knowledge of disciplinary rules is a factor for employees’ violation of disciplinary rules, while 08 (16%) employees argued that lack of knowledge of disciplinary rules is not a factor for such.

Hypothesis Testing

There is no significant effect of ambiguity of rules on violation of disciplinary standards at Anchor Insurance Company

TABLE 6: Independent t-test analysis of scores on the ambiguity of rules on violation of disciplinary standards at Anchor Insurance Company

Variable	N	\bar{X}	SD	t_{cal}	t_{crit}
High Effect	32	15.16	1.798	9.73	1.96
Low Effect	17	14.65	1.498		

*Significant at 0.05 level; df= 48; N= 50

Table 5 presents the obtained t-value as 9.73. This value was greater than critical t-value (1.96) at 0.05 level of significance with 48 degree of freedom. This observation indicates that there is

an effect of ambiguity of rules on the violation of disciplinary standards at Anchor Insurance Company. Hence, null hypothesis, which assumed no significant difference, was rejected.

Conclusions

Based on the data analysis of the study, the researcher concluded that ambiguity of disciplinary standards and lack of knowledge are contributing factors to employee's violations of disciplinary standards in the Nigerian public sector.

Recommendations

The study however recommends that the organization's structure of justice should clearly determine the penalties that go with the breaking of each rule in order to direct the disciplining decisions and procedures to the employees. To disambiguate rules- to overcome the employees' violation of disciplinary rules. Rules are static and should thus be periodically reviewed in order to ensure that they are always up-to-date.

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