

**PREVENTIVE DISCIPLINE AND WORKPLACE COOPERATION OF
TELECOMMUNICATION SERVICE DISTRIBUTION FIRMS IN PORT HARCOURT**

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ABSTRACT

This work examined the relationship between preventive discipline and workplace cooperation of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt. Objectives of the study were to examine how dimensions of preventive discipline such as rules and regulations, and employee counselling influence measures of workplace cooperation such as of management-employee relationship and team work. The survey research design was adopted. The target population for this study comprised of 94 employees from 8 telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt. The sample size was 76 which were obtained using the Krejcie and Morgan Sample Size Determination Table of 1970. Bowley's formula was adopted in the number of questionnaires distributed in each of the hotel. Data were collected through primary (questionnaire). A structured questionnaire designed in four point likert rating scale format was adopted for the collection of data. Out of 76 questionnaires administered, the researcher was able to retrieve 58 copies. Spearman Ranking (r) was used for the test of hypotheses via SPSS Version 23.0. The findings revealed that the dimensions of preventive discipline (rules and regulations, and employee counseling) have significant positive influence on measures of workplace cooperation (management-employee relationship) of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt. The study concluded that preventive discipline is evident in telecommunication service distribution firms and it has a positive influence on their cooperation. The study recommended among others that rules and regulations should be well stated made by managers of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt to help employees understand, the need for them to be followed in order to promote management-employee relationship; Employees should be drilled on daily basis before the commencement of work as it will promote team work among telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt.

Key Words: Preventive Discipline, Rules and Regulations, Workplace Cooperation, Employee Counselling, Management-Employee Relationship and Team work

Background of Study

The workplace constitutes humans of different background, gender, qualification and potentials. The workplace is said to be un-cooperative when these qualities are not harnessed effectively by management. It is important to note that these diverse features of humans in the workplace are more reason management is to design a work environment were these indispensable qualities of humans would boost cooperation in the workplace, as workplace cooperation is essential to increasing the performance, growth and development of the organization. The presence of cooperation is a sign of industrial harmony. This is why management of organisations place priority in ensuring the cooperativeness among its workers in the workplace. Workplace cooperation is a major component in the study of industrial harmony. It pertains to working together to achieve a common goal. It is one of the most widely taught skills in organizations (Gilani, 2019). Argyle in Agabe (2020) defined it as "acting together, in a coordinated way at work, leisure, or in social relationships, in the pursuit of shared goals, the enjoyment of the joint activity, or simply furthering the relationship". The definition above implies that workplace cooperation focuses on the interaction within individuals, groups and organizations, and the subsequent psychological

relationships either for common gain or benefit. The prime reason to cooperate in a workplace is to achieve synergy. Achieving this is only possible when the management allows employees to work their best at their own level. Therefore, employees who cooperate with others and strive for mutual accomplishment should be encouraged as such leads to organizational success. A workplace where workers trust, assist and support each other produces the best results. Top management needs to keep boosting cooperation by talking about it to the employees and setting examples. Workplace cooperation permits collaborative behavior effective and efficient performance among workers. Workplace cooperation can take various forms, such as information sharing, direct or indirect consultation, financial participation, joint decision making, and voluntary negotiation (Robert et al., 1997; International Labour Organization, 2009). However, in the light of the above, this paper measures workplace cooperation in terms of management-employee relationship and team work.

Management-employee relationship is a state of relations where employee and management work together to accomplish certain goals using mutually acceptable means. It is the outcome of a continuous process of enhancing mutual trust and respecting through sharing information, discussion, consultation, and negotiation. It is a scheme of workers' participation process on matters not covered by collective bargaining agreements. Employee-management relationship is often confused with collective bargaining, although these two are not the same or identical. Employee-management cooperation, as viewed by Weinberg in Akkas et al. (2015), is not an alternative to free collective bargaining, rather it extends collective bargaining beyond its traditional limits that is to deal with issues of mutual interest without impairing either party's bargaining strength. Collective bargaining deals with matters of the divergence of interests, while employee-management relationship deals with matters of common interest, i.e a state of friendliness before, during and after work processes.

Team work is another sign of an effective cooperation in the workplace. Teamwork refers to a work group with a common purpose for the achievement of goals/task (Harries & Harries, 2015). They are individuals who work collectively to achieve the same purposes and goals to provide an excellent quality of services (Shouvik & Mohammed, 2018). The above implies that individuals work in a cooperative environment in the interest of a common goal by sharing knowledge, skills and being flexible enough to serve multiple roles. Employees who work in team become the standard for the organization (Alie et al., 2018). Nowadays, managers who know the value are assigning more team projects to employee with opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and develop their skills (Hartenian, 2014). Teamwork has the ability to enable the members of the team to have a higher level of emotional security, self-confidence and the ability to plan and decide with others positively. Also, it helps in creating a healthy work environment with workable agendas, creative activities, positive strategies and values. On the other hand, the absence of teamwork's concepts and strategies can lead to occupational failure, disappointment, low morale and poor productivity which threaten the entity of the organization.

Due to the diverse behavioural dispositions of workers in the organization, fostering cooperation in the workplace is not an easy task. This has prompted management to delineate mechanisms that would guide behaviour and actions among workers in the organization. Among other things is the adoption of preventive discipline in the workplace, where expectations, guidelines and rules and regulations are established to proactively promote positive behavior and prevent disruptions in the workplace. The concept preventive discipline according to Yussif (2021) refers to strategies designed to keep misbehavior from happening in the first place instead of reacting when it does happen. It is believed amongst managers that the best way to prevent workers' misbehavior or deviances is to provide stimulating behavioural guidelines so as they would follow suit while working for the organization. Nduka et al. (2019) stated that this type of discipline is enforced to

prevent employees from violating the rules and regulations of an organization. The essence of preventive discipline is to dissuade employees from undertaking activities contradictory to the policies and procedures of an organization. It is important to note that preventive discipline is taken to encourage employees to follow standards and rules so that indiscipline is prevented. Preventive disciplinary procedures are proactive disciplinary measures aimed at discouraging or dissuading organization members from deviant work behaviours that manifest as lateness to work, absenteeism, redundancy, disobedience to superior officer, insubordination among others (Dumisan, 2012). This implies that it is pre-emptive in nature and so the manager cannot be excluded in the process as it his responsibility to lead and also deter other employees from carrying out acts of violation within the organization. Thus, there is need for management to prevent employees from deviating from the norms and practices of the organization's operations.

However, preventive disciplinary procedures are meant to actually prevent violation or deviations of any kind that is against the disciplinary codes of an organization. It is the place of organization managers to state expressly in simple terms without ambiguity the "dos and don'ts" of the organization. It is to some extent therefore obvious that organizational rules and regulations in preventive disciplinary procedures is aimed at educating/counseling employees and is what can bring about the expected cooperation and behavior in a normal and orderly way that is reasonably accepted (Gabriel & Zeb-Obipi, 2019). The goal of preventative discipline is to provide proactive interventions to potential disruptive behaviors by clearly explaining to employees what behaviors are and are not appropriate. The most basic component to preventative discipline is a concise outline about work expectations for employees. Employees need to know what is expected of them for effective operations in the organization. Among others, such guidelines might include rules, regulations, counseling. It is important to note that scholars have measured preventive discipline in many ways such as rules and regulations, employee counseling (Nduka et al., 2019); verbalizing the consequences of negative or disruptive behavior and providing positive reinforcement for following the rules (Public Health Informatics Institute, 2022). In line with the above, this paper adopts the measures of preventive discipline as averred by Nduka et al. (2019).

Rules are guidelines and instructions for doing something right. It is created to manage behavior in an organization. They are written principles that guide actions and inactions of workers in the organization (Girigiri, 2002). It is a prescribed guide for conduct or action. On the other hand, regulations are directives made in addition to the laws in a particular country. They are imposed to address gaps in the existing system. Kimberlee (2018) stated that in the most basic sense, the benefits of rules and regulations in business are that they protect the company. By protecting employees, management protects the company from lawsuits. Following rules and regulations help employees understand what is expected of them and what will happen if they violate the rules. It makes for a stable office environment where people feel safe to come to work, to be themselves and to go about their business. The result is less turnover, more teamwork and higher company morale. However, for the organization, bottom line is profit. It costs money to recruit and onboard new people. Lack of innovation or inefficiency results in slower production times, thus lower revenues. Organization morale has a direct effect on employee performance, as well. Happier employees don't call in sick as frequently or come in late. People who feel safe at work will speak with co-workers to resolve problems faster and more effectively. So, by having everyone follow properly communicated rules and regulations, the team does better; thus, the company makes more money and as it enhances industrial harmony.

Employee counselling refers to a process where an employee meets with a trained professional counsellor to talk about issues, problems and likely ways of preventing them (Opatha & Mithani, 2017). It is important to note that counseling employees on the dos and don'ts of the organization is one way to prevent deviant behaviours in the workplace. Employee counselling is the most important tool of a supervisor who wants to improve the performance and behavior of employee. If performance problems persist even after feedback and coaching which are other two important

tools with a manager, one may need to proceed to counseling (Mohar, 2021). Counselling focuses on the problem, not the employee, and is positive and constructive, thus proffering further preventive ways to such problems. Counselling is a formal straight, face-to-face conversation between a supervisor and an employee concerning conduct, and performance. It is an efficient means for a supervisor to have a positive effect on employee performance. Managers frequently identify counselling as a task that they have trouble implementing. For successful counselling it is important to win the employee's confidence that change is needed, identify the problem, agree to specific actions the employee would take, providing regular feedback and recognizing improvements. Counselling helps in improving employee performance when applied properly and at the appropriate time.

The necessity of a cooperative atmosphere in the workplace among telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt cannot be overemphasized. It is vital to note that workers (managers and employees) have to cooperate even when the organisation is constantly engulfed with inherent and endemic conflicts of employment relations (Tamunomebi as cited in BlueJack et al., 2021). Among others, this could be effectual when preventive disciplinary measures are adopted in the organisation.

The Problem

Every organisation faces one or more issues of uncooperativeness. This is inclusive of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt. This manifests among others in the form of hostile relationship between managers and employees, and conflict among team members. There seems to be low levels of mutual trust and respect through sharing information, discussion, consultation, and negotiation between management and employees. Team members seem to be at war in almost every team task or project assigned to them. Among others, it could be that there is no or adequate specified rule and regulations that guide behaviours in the workplace, or employees seem to be counselled on the go-about of their tasks and responsibility in line with standards designed for them. The non-presence of discipline such as preventive disciplinary strategies permeates uncooperativeness in the workplace, which are harmful to the peace and harmony of the organization. Uncooperativeness in the workplace result into frustration among managers and employees and this could be solved through the adoption of preventive discipline. More so, Google search has shown that little has been empirical done with the concept of preventive discipline and workplace cooperation. It was against this background that the researcher decided to go into this study with focus on telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt.

Theoretical Framework

This work is based Max Weber's bureaucratic management theory. According to Patrick (2015), the theory of bureaucratic management hinges on three major elements: every activity in a bureaucratic work environment is official; management has the power to establish rules and regulations; and rules can be respected based on laid down methods. The implications of the theory to this study lies on the fact that management has the power to design preventive disciplinary practices in the workplace. These preventive disciplines are respected based on laid down methods adopted by management. However, when management adopts appropriate way of preventing deviances in the organization, workplace cooperation is enhanced. Through bureaucratic management rules and requirements, career orientation and impersonal issues are well managed. A well bureaucratic organization enshrines discipline in order to command perceived positive behaviour among workers that would lead to enhanced cooperation in the workplace. Thus, when employee counseling, and rules and regulations are clearly designed and enforced, workers in the organization tend to cooperate which in turn promote the growth and development of the firm.

Procedure

The study adopted the survey research design. The target population for this study comprised of 94 employees from 8 telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt namely: Assortel, Intra Metropolitan Technology, Dizengoff Electro-Mechanical Engineering, Multimesh Communication, Multinet Systems Nigeria Limited, World Telephone Communication Limited, Beruk International Limited and Cee2cee. The sample size is 76 which were obtained using the Krejcie and Morgan Sample Size Determination Table of 1970. Bowley’s formula was adopted in the number of questionnaires distributed in each of the telecommunication service distribution firm. Data were collected through primary (questionnaire) and secondary (textbooks, journal articles and internet). A structured questionnaire titled “Preventive Discipline and Workplace Cooperation Index (PDWCI)”. The questionnaire was designed in four point likert rating scale format with the following response options: Strongly Agreed (SA) 4, Agreed (A) 3, Disagreed (D) 2, and Strongly Disagreed (DS) 1. The instrument was validated by two industrial relations experts and one measurement and evaluation expert. The reliability coefficient of the instrument (0.74) was elicited using Crombach Alpha. Spearman Ranking (r) was used for the test of hypotheses. Out of 76 questionnaires administered, the researcher was able to retrieve 58 (76%) copies. A bivariate analysis (test of hypothesis) was done using SPSS Version 23 at 0.05 level of significance. The formula for Spearman Rank Order Correlation is stated thus:

$$r = 1 - \frac{6\sum d^2}{n(n^2 - 1)}$$

Where;

n = number of pairs of data

d = different between the ranking in each set of data.

Σ = Summation

The study was predicated on the conceptual framework presented below:

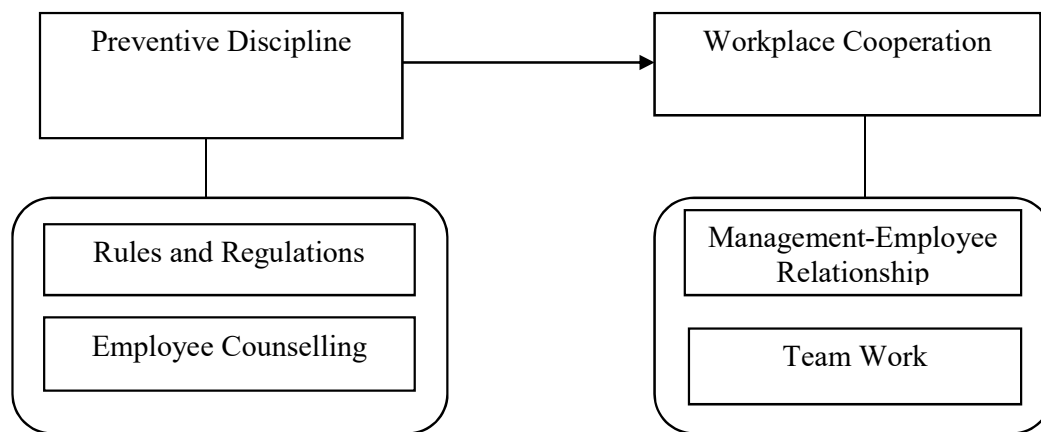


Fig. 1.1: Conceptual Framework Showing Relationship between Preventive Discipline and Workplace Cooperation.

Source: Researcher’s Conceptualization, 2023.

In order to establish the empirical relationship between preventive discipline and workplace cooperation, four (4) null hypotheses were tested which were stated thus:

Ho₁: Rules and regulations do not significantly influence management-employee relationship of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt.

- Ho₂: Rules and regulations do not significantly influence team work of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt.
- Ho₃: Employee counselling does not significantly influence management-employee relationship of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt.
- Ho₄: Employee counselling does not significantly influence team work of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt.

Results

- Ho₁: Rules and regulations do not significantly influence management-employee relationship of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt

Table 1 Rules/Regulations and Management-Employee Relationship

		Rules/Regulations	Management-Employee Relationship
Rules/Regulations	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.611**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	58	58
	Correlation Coefficient	.611**	1.000
Management-Employee Relationship	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	58	58

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 above shows r value of 0.611 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05. Since the significance value 0.000 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho₁) which states that rules and regulations do not significantly influence management-employee relationship of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt was rejected and the alternate hypothesis (Ha₁) is accepted. This implies that rules and regulations significantly influence management-employee relationship of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt

- Ho₂: Rules and regulations do not significantly influence team work of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 2 Rules/Regulations and Team Work

		Rules/Regulations	Team Work
Rules/Regulations	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.475**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	58	58
	Correlation Coefficient	.475**	1.000
Team Work	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	58	58

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 above shows r value of 0.475 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05. Since the significance value 0.000 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho₂) which states that rules and regulations do not significantly influence team work of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt was rejected and the alternate

hypothesis (Ha₂) is accepted. This implies that rules and regulations significantly influence team work of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt

Ho₃: Employee counselling do not significantly influence management-employee relationship of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 3 Employee Counselling and Management-Employee Relationship

		Employee Counselling	Management- Employee Relationship
Employee Counselling	Correlation	1.000	.623**
	Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
Management- Employee Relationship	N	58	58
	Correlation	.623**	1.000
	Coefficient		
Team Work	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	58	58

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 above shows r value of 0.623 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05. Since the significance value 0.000 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho₃) which states that employee counselling do not significantly influence management-employee relationship of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt was rejected and the alternate hypothesis (Ha₃) is accepted. This implies that employee counselling significantly influence management-employee relationship of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt

Ho₄: Employee counselling do not significantly influence team work of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 4 Employee Counselling and Team Work

		Employee Counselling	Team Work
Employee Counselling	Correlation	1.000	.828**
	Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
Team Work	N	58	58
	Correlation	.828**	1.000
	Coefficient		
Team Work	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	58	58

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 above shows r value of 0.828 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05. Since the significance value 0.000 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho₄) which states that employee counselling do not significantly influence team work of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt was rejected and the alternate hypothesis (Ha₄) is accepted. This implies that employee counselling significantly influence team work of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt

Summary of Findings

Based on the analyses of data, the following findings were made:

1. Rules and regulations significantly influence management-employee relationship of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt.
2. Rules and regulations significantly influence team work of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt..
3. Employee counselling enhances management-employee relationship of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt.
4. Employee counselling enhances team work of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt

Discussion of Findings

The analyses of data revealed that preventive discipline such as rules and regulations, and employee counselling have significant relationship with workplace cooperation such as management-employee relationship and team work of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt. It is therefore undisputed that preventive discipline is incorporated in telecommunication industry, be its production or distribution sub-sectors. The adoption of preventive discipline in the workplace fosters the charting of rules and regulations to guide behaviour while promoting positive management-employee relationship in the organization. It is important to note that the essence of preventive discipline is to dissuade employees from undertaking activities contradictory to the policies and procedures of an organization. Thus, when such (employee counseling, rules and regulations) is enshrined in the disciplinary mechanisms of the organization, workers tend to cooperate both individually and team-wise as they attain team goals and objectives. Gabriel & Zeb-Obipi (2019) asserted that preventive disciplinary procedures is aimed at educating/counseling employees and is what can bring about the expected cooperation and behavior in a normal and orderly way that is reasonably accepted. The above implies that through rules and regulations workers actions and inactions to both management and fellow workers are guided (Girigiri, 2002), and such guide promote cooperativeness in the workplace, enhancing management-employee relationship and team work. Kimberlee (2018) stated that in the most basic sense, the benefits of rules and regulations in business are that they protect the company. By protecting employees, management protects the company from lawsuits. Following rules and regulations, and counseling employees help them understand what is expected of them and what will happen if they violate the rules. Counseling employees on the dos and don'ts of the organization is one way to prevent deviant behaviours in the workplace (Mohar, 2021). Thus, when employees are counselled, their relationship with management is sustained, as they promote team work among themselves.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analyses of data and discussion of findings, the study concluded that preventive discipline significantly influences workplace cooperation of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results and conclusions, the following recommendations were made:

1. Rules and regulations should be well stated made by managers of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt to help employees understand, the need for them to be followed in order to promote management-employee relationship.
2. Designed rule and regulations should be team considerate so as to promote team work in telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt.
3. Employees should be consistently trained to portray positive behaviours that would endear amiable relationship with management of telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt.
4. Employees should be drilled on daily basis before the commencement of work as it will promote team work among telecommunication service distribution firms in Port Harcourt.

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