

**STAFF QUERY IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR STAFF
CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINE**

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Abstract

Considering the important role university libraries play in achieving organizational goals by supporting education, research, and community engagement, discipline among library personnel should be viewed seriously. This work focused on staff query in university libraries and highlighting its implications for staff conduct and discipline. The paper delineated the unique role of the university libraries, conceptualized the major variables like discipline, query and pointed out the implications of staff query for staff conduct and discipline. It was discussed that one of the implications of staff query is that it enables the staff to sit up and live up to the expectations of the overall good of the library. Suggestions made include that query should be the first option used when a librarian misbehaves. This will create the opportunity for the librarian to explain himself and try to extricate himself from further disciplinary infractions. It was concluded that disciplinary measures can evoke negative feelings if not meted out fairly and appropriate to the misconduct of the librarian.

Keywords: Discipline, Libraries, Librarians, query, staff conduct

Introduction

Over the years, organizations have developed different mechanisms for providing employees with a formal opportunity to improve on acceptable performance. The first structured introduction of discipline into organizations was established in the United States of America in the 1930s in response to trade unions' request eliminating summary terminations (Apalia, 2017). It is in this place that a progressive system of punishment was developed.

University libraries play an important role to facilitate research scholars, students, and teachers at all levels of education generally and at higher education particularly (Auten et al., 2020). The library is providing different sources including print and digital collection to users (Shoaib et al., 2020). University libraries are crucial for achieving organizational roles by supporting education, research, and community engagement. They provide access to information, foster learning environments, and facilitate knowledge creation, ultimately contributing to the institution's overall success and its impact on society. The effectiveness and efficiency of these roles depend on the commitment of the library personnel. However, some library staff have been noted not to be dedicated to their work (Baro & Oyeniran, 2014).

Libraries, as key educational institutions, aim to deliver academic and research resources and services to their diverse user communities (Hussain, 2023). Because libraries must adapt to changing user expectations driven by technology and increased information availability (Kalu & Ochepe, 2021) there is need to review staff discipline which affects service delivery. This transformation necessitates a focus on service quality to meet users' evolving needs (Mayende, 2021). The quality of service depends on the commitment of staff in the libraries. Many organizations including libraries anticipate meeting their stated objectives through effective performance on the job. However, studies have empirically found that librarians in public university libraries are unable to meet the information needs of their stakeholders which amount to the fact that they are not performing well (Oyeniran & Irenea, 2021). Staff discipline becomes paramount. One of the ways to discipline staff is the use of staff query.

Query is an aspect of disciplinary measure. Disciplinary measures are codes of conduct instituted by an organization to control and guide the workers. They are written procedures used to correct behavioural deficiencies of workers in relation to organizational policies, rules, established practices and other conditions of employment. Discipline is essential for the smooth functioning of today's organizations including the university and it is one of the basic strategies of achieving effective job performance and the university's goals and objectives (Agbor, 2023).

The university library as a part of the university system has policies and procedures that all employees are expected to follow. These policies and procedures may include, but are not limited to, acts of insubordination, tardiness, and absenteeism. It could be essential to reprimand library employees when a problem arises with their behaviour or performance. Libraries utilize discipline to teach self-control and correct misbehaviour. Olayinka (2022) postulates that the rules or requirements imposed by management on staff in order to fix or

avoid unfavourable behaviours in the library constitute staff discipline. Discipline is implemented in the library not to denigrate, frustrate, or humiliate employees but to assure higher performance in a manner that the organization deems appropriate.

Review of Literature

Concept of Workplace Discipline

Discipline generally is the practice of adhering to laid down rules and regulations of an institution or an organization. It is the ability to behave in accordance with desired standards of practice. Workplace discipline involves laid down rules, policies and practices that guide the behaviour of employees to ensure that organizations achieve set goals. Bélanger et al. (2020) conceptualized workplace discipline as the teaching which makes a man do something which he would not unless he had learnt that it was the right, the proper and the expedient thing to do. As for Kuncorowati and Rokhmawati (2018), workplace discipline is a significant tool used to develop an employee's personality characteristics such as confidence, responsibility and persistence in work and self-control. According to Otto and Ukpere (2020), workplace discipline is the correction of improper conduct at the workplace and is intended to alert employees of their behaviour and help them understand how these inhibit organization performance. As encapsulated by Mohammad and Elok, (2022) discipline in the workplace constitute the accepted norms, ethics and habits as well as procedures for behaving in an atmosphere and in relation to the organization.

Staff discipline is one strategy for ensuring order, advancement, and organizational effectiveness. Effective organizational functionality will not be achieved in the absence of proper disciplinary procedures for negligent employees. An organization is not developed in a vacuum; it is made up of individuals who have objectives and goals that they would like to attain while working for the firm (Idris & Alagbeleye, 2018).

Every organization requires its employees to maintain rigorous discipline to achieve its objectives. Consequently, individuals significantly influence a company's performance (Assefa, 2022). Employees must maintain a rigorous standard of discipline to enhance system performance. The strategies employed to uphold discipline within the organization are crucial to its success in attaining its goals and objectives (Ubah et al., 2019).

Staff discipline is defined as an employee's orderly behaviour in accordance with expectations; it is the use of force or the threat of force to prevent a person or team from acting in a way that would jeopardize the achievement of collective goals (Neeraj, 2023). There

are several objectives for maintaining staff discipline. According to Simatipang and Putu (2018), the main objective of staff discipline is to optimize effectiveness through preventing and rectifying individual acts that are necessary to enhance the effectiveness of all organizational activities in order to achieve the largest practicable goal. It is stated that discipline helps address incorrect behaviour and ensure accountability.

Staff discipline is crucial in academic libraries to uphold professionalism and ethical standards (Smith, 2018). Implementing disciplinary measures fosters a sense of accountability and responsibility among library staff (White, 2017). By holding employees responsible for their actions, academic libraries can ensure a commitment to excellence and efficiency in service delivery. Discipline is necessary to ensure compliance with established policies and procedures governing library operations (Garcia, 2016). Regular adherence to these guidelines helps maintain order, consistency, and the overall effectiveness of library services. These ensure that performance is at high levels to meet institutional goals and missions.

Disciplinary actions may be regarded as constructive in nature when the primary aim is for the purpose of correcting inappropriate behaviour which may involve several actions to accomplish this objective (Dagogo, 2019). Discipline is essential for organizational growth, primarily to educate employees to comply with and enjoy existing regulations, procedures, and policies, to produce a good performance. Good discipline reflects a person's great sense of responsibility for their tasks; that encourages the passion of work, the spirit of work, and the realization of the organization's objectives (Indra et al., 2021).

One of the things that affect staff performance is discipline (Iskamto, 2020). Without discipline, all activities that will be carried out will produce unsatisfactory results and are not in accordance with expectations. Individuals enter the workplace with their own unique abilities, attitudes, values and perceptions, and this in itself can be a source of conflict/value in any organization (Norhidayah et al., 2022). One of the means in ensuring decorum, progress and effectiveness in organizations is discipline. Where there are no proper disciplinary procedures for erring employees, there will be a dislocation of effective organizational functionality.

Efendi et al. (2020) succinctly isolated what constitutes workplace discipline as timeliness, responsibility, compliance with work rules and regulations among others. Likewise, Kogah and Ibegbulam (2021) indicated that dimensions of work disciplinary measures include oral and written

reprimand/query, suspension, demotion and termination. Our focus for this study is on staff query (Oral and written reprimand)

Oral reprimand (query) means a formal disciplinary Action consisting of a discussion with an employee by a supervisor in which the supervisor expresses dissatisfaction (Oluwatayo and Adetoro, 2020). Written reprimand is given for the same verbal warning given by a boss or manager to an employee as a way of correcting any instance of improper activity or behavior in the workplace. A reprimand is a written or oral reproach given as part of an employee's disciplinary following an act of misconduct (Norhadayah et al., 2022). They further notes that in most cases, organizations might consider written reprimand's to be more formal or part of the employees' file; or on the other hand, oral reproaches may not be so thoroughly noted. Oral reprimand is viewed as a supervisor's or manager's verbal warning to an employee for engaging in inappropriate conduct or behavior (Umoh, 2020). Disciplinary measures are instituted with the intention to improve the future behaviour of the employee who has broken the rules and also to influence the behaviour of other staff.

PERFORMANCE

Employee's performance is the successful completion of tasks performed by individuals, and measured by the supervisor or organization, to be accepted as existing standards while maintaining the efficient and effective use of the resources available in the environment. According to Moeheriono (2015), performance is a description of achievement of an activity or policy programme in realizing organizational goals, objectives, vision and mission as outlined through strategic planning of an organization. Performance can be known and measured if an individual or group of employees already have a criterion or standard of success that has been set by the organization. Sinambela (2016) states that performance is the implementation of a job and the improvement of the work according to its responsibilities so that it can achieve the results as expected.

As postulated by Astuti and Dharmadiaksa (2014), performance is the level of success achieved by a person in performing tasks that are compared with standard work or criteria that has been determined and agreed previously. Insufficient employee commitment will lead to diminished performance or productivity, or conversely, inadequate employee commitment will result in reduced business performance (Ubah et al., 2019). Discipline correlates work performance. Empirical evidence suggest that discipline affects work performance.

The study of Sishi (2022) established the nexus between workplace disciplinary measures and employee performance, stating that if employee discipline is good, it will improve work performance. To achieve

goals, discipline can be an important function for the organization because if employee discipline is good, it will improve work performance (Sishi, 2022). There are three advantages of a consistent disciplinary procedure. Firstly, it maintains the stability of the workforce. Secondly, there is reduced labour turnover and thirdly, it contributes to improved performance, which leads to more productivity (Obon & Beja, 2022).

Concept of Query

Query remains the most effective corrective measure in the public sector for monitoring employee wrong doing. Its aim is to enhance performance and service delivery. It is a written statement of formal censure issued to an employee for misconduct. There is evidence to suggest that misconducts are widespread in Nigerian public service and that attempts to address some of these issues result in the issuance of query to the offenders (Out et al. 2023). There are verbal and written queries. Verbal queries are a common initial step in addressing minor infractions, allowing for informal resolution and corrective action. Written queries provide more formal documentation of misconduct, signaling the seriousness of the issue and potentially leading to further disciplinary action if necessary (Owushi & Ogonu, 2024). Depending on the explanation given by the offending employee after a query, the office may decide that further action is necessary or that a formal letter of warning/advice is given. On the other hand, further punishment could be meted out if the explanations were not deemed to be satisfactory. This procedure is considered effective because, it not only alerts the employee that he has breached the rules but that his infractions are being noted and would form part of his records of service. It also gives the employee an opportunity to explain reasons for the act of indiscipline. Such a written document can be used as evidence if further action needs to be taken in the future against the employee. It also serves as an evaluative tool for harsher disciplinary measures in the eventuality of future infractions. Acts that may result in a query being issued include the use of abusive or discourteous communication with fellow workers or with clientele, performing duties in a lackadaisical manner, absenteeism, lateness loitering, absconding from one's duty post and refusal to carry out reasonable instructions (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2009).

The letter usually follows counselling and coaching by the manager that is carefully documented to ensure that a paper trail exists. The paper trail is important because it provides evidence that the employee was informed and counseled at each step of the improvement process. This ensures, first of all, that the employee was aware and informed about what the organization saw as his or her shortcomings (Heathfield, 2019). Employers often fail to give

guidelines to staff on what to include in an oral or written disciplinary warning letter. A badly prepared misconduct warning letter can render a dismissal unfair. The writer sets out the basic ingredients for misconduct letter which according to Huberman, (2016) should take the following steps:

- Confirm the decision in writing.
- Explain the nature of the misconduct.
- Set out the improvement required.
- Point out the possible consequences of a failure to improve.
- Specifying the length of the warning.
- Confirm the right of appeal.
- Keep the record of the warning.

Agbor (2023) in the study on work disciplinary measures and employee performance of Federal Universities in North Central Nigeria found that oral/written reprimand, suspension, demotion and termination had significant and positive effect on employee performance of Federal Universities in North Central Nigeria. The study of Ameen et al. (2022) on effect of disciplinary measures on employees' behaviour in Offa Local Government Area Council revealed a significant relationship between disciplinary measures and employees' attitude to work. These are empirical evidence of the place of discipline in achieving organization's goals. There should be more research emphasizing the need to further investigate staff discipline highlighting its role in achieving organizational mission and vision and the attendant implications.

Implications of Staff Query to staff conduct and discipline

Generally, staff disciplinary measures affect workers' timeliness and productivity. Query should be a take off point for disciplining the librarians as the disciplinary measure gives a chance for the erring librarian to explain why rules were not obeyed. Thus, query helps to improve librarians' job performance. It also makes librarians perform their duties more efficiently.

Implications of queries on staff discipline and conduct reveals that clear rules, consistent enforcement, and a focus on improvement, rather than punishment, are crucial for effective and fair disciplinary procedures. While queries can trigger disciplinary actions, the primary aim is to correct behaviour and ensure a fair and productive workplace.

Staff discipline positively impacts both individual employee's conduct and overall organizational performance. Effective disciplinary systems, characterized by clear expectations, fair procedures, and consistent application, foster a more productive, efficient, and respectful work environment. Conversely, poorly administered discipline can lead to decreased morale, increased misconduct, and reduced productivity.

Suggestions

The following suggestions are made:

1. Query as a disciplinary measure should be the first option used when a librarian misbehaves. This would create the opportunity for the librarian to explain himself and try to extricate himself from further indiscipline. Using the measure first in the case of an infraction also gives the supervisor the chance to build up just cases against such librarian.
2. First line Managers should issue queries fairly and appropriately to erring staff.
3. Queries should be correctional not punitive especially if they are the first time such queries are issued.
4. Staff queried should be counselled regarding their identified infractions. Sometimes they need to be educated or trained on their job roles or on communication skills.

Conclusion

Disciplinary measures can evoke negative feelings when it is not meted out fairly and appropriately according to the level of misconduct of the librarian. Empirical work consistently demonstrates a positive link between organizational discipline and improved employee conduct and performance. Effective disciplinary systems, characterized by clear rules, consistent application, and fair procedures, are shown to enhance employee compliance with policies, boost productivity, and foster a more harmonious work environment. Conversely, poorly managed discipline can lead to decreased morale, increased conflict, and ultimately, reduced organizational effectiveness.

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