

# A Study on Effective Employee Discipline Management in Organizations

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**Abstract**— *Employees are the life-blood of an organization. It is expected that their conduct must be in tandem with the rules and policies of their organization. Discipline is the most important for healthy atmosphere, sustainable growth of Industry, and for achievement of organizational goals. The study examines that the enforcement of sanctions and penalties on violators, responsive and sound leadership and giving attention to employees' needs and grievances are the most effective ways of maintaining discipline in any organization. Based on this, the study recommended that Management should attend swiftly to the yearnings and grievances of its staff. Management should try as much as possible to create opportunities that would meet the needs of their staff. This would go a long way to spur oneness and adherence of rules and requirements. The discipline should start by having self-discipline and hence discipline should not be seen as punitive measure it is means to correct and enforcement of standards in the organization. The present study aims to study the effective framework available for employee discipline management in organizations and to suggest measures to be taken for the establishment of strong workplace discipline on organizations.*

**Indexed Terms**— *Discipline, Organization, Workplace, Penalties, Standards, Atmosphere*

## I. INTRODUCTION

*"Nothing left loose ever does anything creative. No horse gets anywhere until he is harnessed. No steam ever drives anything until it is confined. No Niagara is ever turned into light and power until it is funneled. No man ever grows until he is disciplined".*

Organizations are constituted by individuals and groups of individuals who work collaboratively and interdependently to ensure organizational targets are met. There is a sort of daily interaction among individuals and groups of individuals in order to carry out their job responsibilities and contribute their quota to the organization. Individuals, having different

interests, ambitions, orientations, and focus are employed in the organization, and most likely would result in conflict due to the divergence in interests. Due to the conflicting interests of employees and the possessive attitude of employees or employees, there is a tendency for behavioral attitudes to deviate from the established rules and regulations of the organizations.

Within an organization whether it is a business, a society, a university, a trade union or an association, the creation, promotion and maintenance of employee discipline are essential for making any organized activity efficient and effective. Employee morale and industrial peace are definitely linked with a proper maintenance of discipline (Mamoria, 1991). Also Mamoria (1991) stresses that if the members of a group do not abide by the rules, the organization itself may collapse and chaos, confusion, disobedience, disloyalty and anti-social and anti-organizational activities develop to the detriment of everyone. Discipline is very essential for a healthy industrial atmosphere and the achievement of organizational goals (Monappa, 1995).

Robbins (1982) defines that the term "discipline" refers to a condition in the organization when employees conduct themselves in accordance with the organization's rules and standards of acceptable behavior. According to Collins Birmingham University English Language Dictionary (1987), discipline is the practice of making people obey strict rules of behavior and of punishing them when they do not obey them. Werther and Davis (1989) define discipline as management action to encourage compliance with organizational standards. Mathis and Jackson (2000) define discipline as a form of training that enforces organizational rules. *Discipline implies*

*the absence of chaos, irregularity and confusion in the behaviour of a worker.*

Effective employee discipline management should focus on achieving following objectives:

1. To develop self-control among all the employees.
2. To encourage employees to meet established rules of behaviour.
3. To protect the organization from illegal and harmful actions of employees.
4. To protect the life of an employee from illegal and harmful actions of another employee or a group of other employees.
5. To ensure peaceful and orderly working environment for the achievement of organizational goals and objectives.
6. To promote fairness and order in the treatment of employees and in the conduct of industrial relations.

### 1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the main objectives of the present study:

1. To study the significance of maintaining employee discipline.
2. To study types of employee discipline.
3. To identify the causes of employee indiscipline in organizations.
4. To study different kinds of disciplinary actions undertaken in an organization
5. To study the effective framework available for employee discipline management in organizations.
6. To determine the approach for effective employee discipline management (EDM).
7. To suggest measures to be taken for the establishment of strong workplace discipline on organizations.

### 1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present work is based on secondary data that has been collected with the help of various online sites, books and resources. In order to achieve the research objectives, an in-depth literature review through various related articles is conducted. The researcher employed the descriptive study to examine the role and importance of discipline in an organizations.

### 1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

Megginson (1958) discipline involves the following three things:

1. Self-discipline implies that a person brings the discipline in himself with a determination to achieve the goals that he has set for himself in life.
2. Orderly behavior refers to discipline as a condition that must exist for an orderly behaviors in the organization.
3. Punishment is used to prevent indiscipline. When a worker goes astray in his conduct, he has to be punished for the same and the recurrences of it must be prevented.

Allen and Meyer (2009) gives a description of organisational commitment in organising as a psychological concept that is typical of the relationship of the organization's members with its organisation and has implications for personal decisions to keep participating in organising. According to these definitions, members who are dedicated to their organisation will have a better chance of surviving as a part of the organisation than members who are not.

Luthans (2008) explains that the level of organizational commitment and discipline determines how strongly a person identifies with their membership in the organisation. Organizational commitment goes beyond simple allegiance to a company. Additionally, it entails a committed partnership with organisations in which people are ready to contribute in some way to the development and success of the latter.

Irefin& Mechanic (2014) affirms that less disciplined and low-committed employees will have an impact on turnover, high attendance, increased employee lag and lack of intensity to survive as employees in the organization, poor quality of work and lack of agency loyalty.

Hasibuan (2012) argues that discipline is the awareness and willingness of a person to obey all the rules of the institution and the prevailing social norms. Discipline must be enforced within an organization. Without the support of good employee discipline, it is difficult for a company to realize its goals. So, discipline is the key to a company's success in achieving its goals. Discipline is the adherence to the rules in the organization related to the absence, quality

of work, quantity of work, knowledge of work, and so forth.

Koopmans et al, 2014. Discipline is the capital needed in achieving the desired goals. So that the existence of work discipline is needed in an agency or organization, because in the atmosphere of discipline an agency or organization will be able to implement its work programs to achieve the target set. The main purpose of discipline is to improve efficiency as much as possible by preventing and correcting the individual actions necessary to support the smoothness of all organizational activities to achieve maximum goal.

### 1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF MAINTAINING EMPLOYEE DISCIPLINE

The word "discipline" conjures up horrible images of punishment, but it also conjures up the idea of "just cause," which places restrictions on an employer's ability to reprimand and fire an employee. The term has been expanded to include a system of instruction and training for the employee's supervisor that aims to promote orderly behaviour.

The significance of discipline can be explained as under:

#### 1. From the Point of View of an Individual:

- (i) Discipline provides self-safety to an individual.
- (ii) It enhances an individual's progress.
- (iii) An individual needs it for his own satisfaction.

#### 2. From the Point of View of a Work Group:

- (i) Discipline ensures better teamwork and cohesive.
- (ii) A disciplined atmosphere is the key to the progress of the group.
- (iii) Discipline ensures higher productivity.
- (iv) Discipline enhances morale and motivation of employees.

#### 3. From the Point of View of an Organization:

- (i) Discipline ensures higher productivity and quality.
- (ii) Discipline helps an organization in attaining maximum profit.
- (iii) It is essential better all-round benefits.
- (iv) It helps in keeping a check on wastage and costs.
- (v) It helps in developing a sense of belonging.

### 1.6 TYPES OF EMPLOYEE DISCIPLINE

Discipline is of various types, and the types depend on the functions it performs. The commonest types of discipline in a work environment are preventive, corrective and progressive discipline

#### a) Preventive Discipline:

This type of discipline is enforced to prevent employees from violating the rules and regulations of an organization. The essence of preventive disciplines to dissuade employees from undertaking activities contradictory to the policies and procedures of an organization

#### b) Corrective Discipline:

This type of discipline is enforced to punish employees that violated the rules and regulations of an organization. Idris and Alegbeleye (2015) noted the essence of corrective discipline is to impose sanctions on erred employees and discourage future reemergence of unacceptable behaviors among other employees. Corrective discipline is usually used as a deterrent for employees planning to engage in such unacceptable behaviors. The difference between preventive and corrective discipline is that the tool of the former is a threat while that of the latter is punishment.

#### c) Progressive Discipline:

This kind of discipline involves the imposition of heavy sanctions on misbehaviors that are consistently committed. As an employee keep committing the same offense, the sanctions become heavier.

### 1.7 CAUSES OF EMPLOYEE INDISCIPLINE IN ORGANIZATIONS

The causes of indiscipline among employees are divergent across organizations but could range from poor remuneration to poor leadership and to lack of effective communication between employers and employees (Onah, 2009). However, the notable causes of indiscipline in the workplace are:

#### 1. Inappropriate management practices:

At times, management embark on unjust and inappropriate acts such as poor compensation package for staff, lack of mechanisms to ensure proper work-life balance, poor attention to employees' demands and grievances, late payment of wages and salaries and

favoritism in promotional policies. The result of these inappropriate management practices is indiscipline.

2. The inadequacy of effective leadership and deficient supervision:

Ineffective leadership could lead to indiscipline if managers lack the capacity to inspire and control employee behaviors to acceptable standards. Furthermore, ineffective supervision would create an avenue for employees to misbehave as there is no mechanism propelling them to adhere to stated rules. Deficient supervision spurs indiscipline.

3. Violation of employee rights:

Every employee regardless the position is entitled to certain rights such as respect, freedom of expression, freedom to contribute their quota to the progress of the organization, right for personal growth and right to fair and just treatment. In a situation where these rights are infringed, it would result in job dissatisfaction among employees, eventually culminating to indiscipline.

4. Communication gap:

For communication to be effective, it must freely flow from subordinates to superiors and vice-versa. Managers must acknowledge the inputs of their staff to understand their feelings and disseminate information to lower-level employees. The gap in communication between managers and employees could generate indiscipline.

5. Inadequate attention to staff grievances:

Lack of attention to settle employee grievances results in frustration. Employee grievances should receive speedy attention from management. Neglect of staff grievances births declined job performance, reduced commitment, industrial disputes and indiscipline among staff.

6. Lack of rules and regulation:

The absence of rules and regulations in an organization makes it impossible to differentiate acceptable work behavior from unacceptable ones, and this gives employees the opportunity to behave the way they like. The absence of a code of conduct or defined rules and regulations tend to create indiscipline among staff.

7. Poor working conditions and discrimination:

A work environment that is poor and uncondusive spurs undesirable behaviors among staff. On the other hand, discrimination in the form of gender, religion, education as well as the applying nepotism on issues relating to recruitment, promotion, and transfer result in indiscipline among staff.

8. Divide and rule policy:

The adoption of divide and rule policy generates resentment, misunderstanding, and division among employees, which is injurious to the growth of an organization

9. General misconduct: It describes unacceptable behavior of employees in an organization. The employees will be warned for misbehaving, if he continue the same the organization will be issue the memo

10. Poor performance/ capacity: The employee's performance is evaluated periodically. If the performance of the employee is poor. The organization finds the reason for poor performance. Some of the employees lack training; in that case the organization provides additional training to employees. Some employees will be excellent in doing the work, but they spend the time by being idle, in the case the organization will warn the employees and monitored by the supervisor.

11. Poor timekeeping: The work has to be completed by employees on time. The work done by the employees is measured based on the quality of work, quantity of work, time taken to complete the task. If the employees completed the task before the time specified he should be encouraged and He should be given some free time for relaxation. If the employees fail to do so the particular employees have to be guided by the senior executive or he must be given additional training. Some employees even though they are excellent in doing the work, but they sit idle and do unnecessary activities in an organization.

12. Unauthorized absence: The employees have to get the prior permission from the manager before taking leave. If the employees fail to do that the organization will suffer. The employees who are absent without getting permission will be warned by the employer.

13. Misuse of office documents: The document in organization is kept confidential and only some employees have access to it. If any confidential documents are misused by the employees a strict action will be taken against them. Punitive measures like suspension, demotion will be given to employees.

1.8 KINDS OF DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN IN AN ORGANIZATION

Disciplinary actions in an organization span from verbal warnings to dismissal. Disciplinary actions are enforced in an organization to reduce undisciplined acts to the barest minimum. The kinds of disciplinary actions utilized in workplaces include

1. Verbal warnings:

This equally refers to an oral reprimand. The purpose of verbal warnings or oral reprimand is to communicate to erred employees that such behaviors are undesirable. Verbal warnings should be done in a mature way to avoid employees from losing their self-esteem. As Nwosu & Ugwuera (2015) rightly put it verbal warning is to correct the behaviors of an employee, not to embarrass or disgrace such employee.

2. Written reprimand:

This equally refers to a letter of warning. This involves sending a warning letter to erred employees to desist from behaviors unacceptable to the organization. A written reprimand is usually sent after erred employees failed to heed to verbal warnings'

3. Reassignment:

This involves transferring employees to lower-level positions. Ignatius and Ruliyanto (2017) commented if reassignment is undertaken as a disciplinary measure to embarrass the employee rather than correcting the bad behavior, it has no benefits for the organization. Thus, even though erred employee would be transferred to the less-desirable position, an organization must ensure that such employee is competent to handle the new(lower) position.

4. Suspension:

This is very effective in situations where the presence of an erred employee would obstruct the investigation carried out by the organization to determine if such

employee is innocent or guilty. An employee receives a suspension if he continues to undertake unacceptable behaviors after a series of warning letters have been issued to him. Management experts asserted that suspension is not a potent disciplinary action because an erred employee may exhibit worse behavior than when he left. Suspension ranges between a day to a month, and an employee is entitled to remuneration (wages/salaries) in the suspended period

5. Demotion:

This refers to the act of reducing the position or rank of an employee. Demotion is rarely used to correct indiscipline in most organizations. However, demotion is appropriate in situations when an employee was promoted without observance to due process. Demotion as a disciplinary measure has some demerits. Firstly, it results in a reduction in the remuneration of an employee. Secondly, it is a form of disgrace to an employee. Lastly, it de-motivates an employee, thereby resulting in dwindled job performance (Ignatius and Ruliyanto, 2017).f.

6. De-hiring:

This is an act that prompts employees to resign at free-will. It brings damage to the career of an employee. Typical examples of de-hiring include non-promotion, poor attitude from managers and assigning less-desirable tasks.

7. Dismissal:

An employee is dismissed if there is strong evidence of misconduct or violation against the rules of an organization. This is the most severe form of disciplinary action. It is expedient for organizations to issue dismissal letter after a series of warnings might have been given to an employee.

Table 1.1 depicts several typical rules and relevant reasons behind each rule. All the rules are important as they directly or indirectly affect job effectiveness, organization productivity, efficiency and effectiveness.

RULES	REASONS
Rule 1: During the working hours or reporting for work being under	Reason: To be under the influence of

the influence of liquor and/or drugs is strictly prohibited.	liquor may cause damages to properties of the organization and other employees, confrontations with other people at work, make wrong decisions and many other evil consequences.
Rule 2: Acts of violence, abusing or assaulting superiors,peers,subordinates,customers/clients are strictly not permitted within the organization’s premises at any time and at any place.	Reason: It is more likely that these acts cause serious physical and/or mental harms or even death.
Rule 3: To keep the work area free from clutter at every possible time.	Reason: Having work area free from clutter is important to prevent from possible accidents and resultant costs. Also it gives a good appearance/order.
Rule 4: Smoking in areas/places designated as “no smoking” is strictly prohibited.	Reason: It is because of the need to prevent from possible fire

	hazards as well as possible health hazards.
Rule 5: Every employee must not commit a willful insubordination to any lawful and reasonable order of a superior.	Reason: Insubordination is not strictly permitted because it does undermine the orderly system of conduct and discipline within the organization and hamper superior-subordinate relationship. Also insubordination likely causes to jeopardize results of the organization.

Table 1.1: Typical discipline rules and relevant reasons behind each rule.

### 1.9 A FRAMEWORK OF EMPLOYEE DISCIPLINE MANAGEMENT

EDM is perceived as a systematic process that involves a series of steps to be followed (Opatha, 2002). The process is depicted in Figure 1.1. As shown in the Figure, there are basically eight steps in the process of EDM. First, what objectives to be achieved through EDM should be determined along with a clear policy statement. As the second step, rules of behaviour every employee should adhere to must be established. Also rationale for each rule should be stated. Third step involves specifying penalties for rule violations and authorities who may impose these penalties to the employees who have violated the rules. Fourth step is communicating all. This means making

all employees aware and understood about EDM objectives, policy, rules, their rationales, penalties and authorities of penalties.

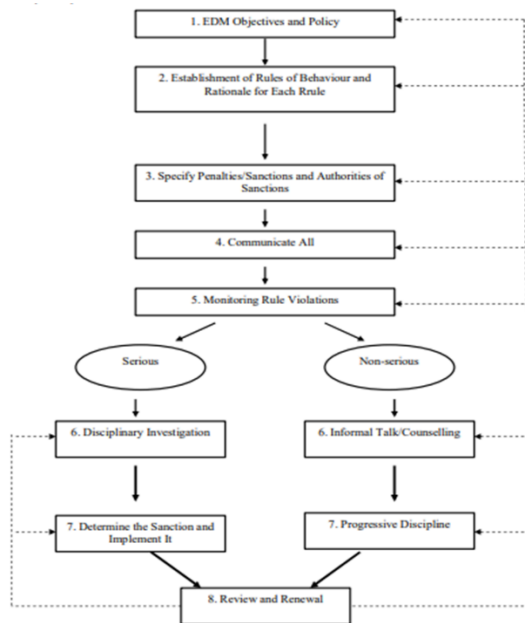


Figure 1.1: Framework of Employee Discipline Management

Having communicated all, the next step, i.e. fifth step has to be carried out. This step involves observing whether actual behaviour of employees is in compliance with expected/desired behaviour of employees and receiving any deviations (rule violations). Rule violations may be serious or non-serious. If the rule violation is a serious one, the next step is to conduct a disciplinary investigation in order to determine whether the rule violation is true or not and causal factors of the rule violation. If the rule violation is true, then next step, i.e., seventh step is to determine an appropriate penalty or sanction and to implement it. On the other hand, if the rule violation is a non-serious one, the sixth step is to hold an informal talk or counselling. If the same rule violation, after counselling, continues, the seventh step is to apply progressive discipline that is penalizing the rule violator in an increasing way in terms of the severity. The final step of the process of EDM is review and renewal. Once rules and other disciplinary programmes are developed they may not be possible to use forever. Rules, reasons behind them, sanctions, sanction authorities, domestic disciplinary investigation procedure etc may change due to various

changes, which occur within the organization and the organization environment as well. Thus, there is a need for review and renewal. A proper review will lead to improve EDM through the feedback.

### 1.10 APPROACH FOR EFFECTIVE EDM: PENALTIES OR SANCTIONS:

Penalties or sanctions refer to actions that follow rule violations or infractions. Penalties are taken under Corrective Discipline (CD) The objective of CD is that through penalties employees are discouraged to repeat violations of rules and they are encouraged to correct their future behaviour. In CD, penalties (generally called punishments) have to be taken and these are called disciplinary actions in EDM. A disciplinary action may be an oral warning or may be a serious one such as termination of employment. According to Wherther and Davis (1989) there are three objectives of a disciplinary action.

1. To reform the offender.
2. To deter others from similar actions.
3. To make discipline effective.

Examination of the above objectives of a disciplinary action reveals that they are more positive rather than negative. The degree of penalizing varies depending on the gravity of the offence mainly. Basically there are two approaches of penalizing an offender. First one is negative approach whereby the offender is punished with the objectives of retaliation, dismay, shame or discredit. Second approach of penalizing an offender is the positive approach whereby the offender is punished with the objective of reformation. For effective EDM, use of positive approach is recommended as it has positive influences on labour management relationship, employee job satisfaction and productivity. It is a principle to penalise the employee who has done wrong in order to reform him/her, deter others from similar actions and make the rules effective. Also it is a principle to penalise the offender only for corrective purposes and never as a display of authority or personal power or hostility or retaliation. Certain disciplinary actions are available under positive approach of penalizing an offender. They are as follows:

1. Oral warning
2. Written warning
3. Final written warning
4. Fining
5. Suspension of work for two days without pay
6. Suspension of work for four-days without pay
7. Suspension of work for one week without pay
8. Suspension of work for one month without pay
9. Stoppage of salary increment
10. Stoppage of applying for a promotion
11. Transfer to a difficult area/unpleasant work
12. Reduction of seniority
13. Demotion
14. Termination of employment /dismissal

Another important issue in EDM is to determine the authorities of penalties. Just like specifying what disciplinary actions may be taken against a rule violation it is important to specify which level of management has the authority (legitimate power) to decide the disciplinary action for a rule violation. Table 1.2 indicates typical delegation of authority among different levels of management in respect of disciplinary actions.

Disciplinary Action	Management Level
1. Oral warning	Immediate superior of the offender
2. Written warning	-do
3. Final written warning	Immediate superior and immediate superior's superior
4. Suspension of work without pay for up to one week	-do
5. Suspension of work without pay for more than one week, stoppage of pay increment, and similar penalties.	Department Manager and Personnel/Human Resource Manager Personnel/Human Resource Manager and Top management
6. Transfer, Demotion, and Dismissal	

Table 1.2: Typical Delegation of Authority among Different Levels of Management Regarding Disciplinary Actions

1.11 MEASURES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF STRONG WORKPLACE DISCIPLINE ON ORGANIZATIONS:

An effective disciplinary programme emphasizes the constructive behaviors that the company expects of its employees so that they are aware of how they should conduct themselves at work. It also emphasizes how crucial employees' contributions are to the accomplishment of the company. Following are the key factors that establish strong workplace discipline:

1. Policy Development

Developing company policies is a shared task of the human resource department, management, and executives. The aim is to provide standardized company rules and regulations. Workplace policies should be:

- Clear and relevant. They should apply to the organization, not just a copycat version of another company's employee handbook.
- Attainable and realistic. The policies can be successfully implemented. They also have to make sense.
- Properly communicated or endorsed. Employees need to be aware of these policies so they can hold themselves accountable.
- Accessible. Employees need to go through the code of conduct during onboarding and at least once a year.

2. Implementing Disciplinary Actions

Organizations should maintain zero-tolerance for violating their policies. It's important to be fair at all times and ensure consistency in implementing disciplinary actions. These include:

- Monitoring time and attendance, along with productivity and efficiency of employees.
- No discrimination. Employees must be treated equally in the sense that disciplinary measures should be taken when they break a rule.
- Keep proper records of sanctions that have been issued.
- Inform employees that need to undergo disciplinary actions and conduct a proper investigation.
- Ensure that those in charge of applying disciplinary actions are fully aware of the policies violated so they can act fairly on each case.



### 3. Performance Discussions

Positive discipline is geared towards helping employees progress and ultimately, succeed in their roles. Thus, managers should provide timely feedback to address growing concerns that can lead to disciplinary action later on. For example, arriving at work late frequently can trigger disciplinary action. Early intervention should help an employee improve his or her performance. Feedback needs to be a two-way conversation to fully understand the cause of a performance issue and help the employee find the most appropriate solution to address it.

### 4. Managers as “Listeners”

Listening skills enable managers to understand their team and build a strong relationship with them. When employees feel they are heard, they begin to trust their leaders and feel motivated to strive for their best. Active listening skills also encourage employees to be more open about their feelings and intentions. In turn, managers can easily help them address performance issues and improve their stats over time.

### 5. Healthy Work Culture

A workplace with a healthy culture is one where employees feel valued, comfortable, and safe. It's one where they are not afraid to make mistakes because managers and leaders understand that failures lead to big successes and innovations. A healthy work culture offers opportunities for growth and can be created in the following ways:

- Increase employee engagement. Research shows that engaged employees are 40% less likely to incur absenteeism.
- Allow for workday flexibility. It allows employees to maintain a work-life balance, which in turn boosts their performance at work.
- Improve communication with employees. Managers should check in often with their team and talk about their goals and successes. They should be available not only when employees have questions or concerns, but also to support them in overcoming work-related problems.
- Build a strong employee reputation. Creating an environment where employees have a sense of purpose doesn't only promote productivity and engagement, but it also helps foster a healthy workplace culture.

## 1.12 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENTATIONS

*'Discipline is a force that prompts individuals or groups to observe rules, regulations and procedures which are deemed to be necessary for the effective functioning of an organization'.*

*-Calhoun*

Discipline is considered as an important factor that contributes to the overall outcome in an organization. The organization should take proper measures to maintain discipline. The rules framed should to inform to all the workers or employees in the organization. The employees who fail to follow the rules have to be monitored and called for counseling they have to be informed about their mistake. Even after if he doesn't correct his mistakes he will be given punishment. Proper guidelines and flow of communication helps to maintain a good discipline. There can a discipline manager in an organization to monitor the employees discipline and to deal with employee's indiscipline.

The study concludes that an organization cannot be effective towards achieving its predetermined goals if employees are not in compliance with the laid down rules and policies. In line with the findings, the following recommendations were proffered:

1. Management should attend swiftly to the yearnings and grievances of its staff. Management should try as much as possible to create opportunities that would meet the needs of their staff. This would go a long way to spur oneness and adherence of rules and requirements.
2. Employees, especially those at the junior position, should be adequately monitored. Moreover, the management of an organization should ensure that credible and qualified personnel are admitted to the service.
3. Sanctions should be imposed on employees found violating the established rules. However, sanctions should follow a sequential path from oral reprimand, to query letter, suspension, and dismissal. Sanctions should be imposed fairly and justly.
4. Critical matters relating to transfer, promotion, placement, etc., should follow due process. Issues like these should be handled with merit and

unbiasedness.

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