**Discipline: Meaning, Importance, Purpose and Code | Personnel Management**

**Read this article to learn about Discipline in an Organisation:**

 **1. Meaning of Discipline**

**2. Importance of Discipline**

**3. Purpose**

 **4. Code.**

**Meaning of Discipline:**

The term discipline refers to a condition in the organisation wherein employees conduct themselves in accordance with the organisation’s rules and standards of acceptable behaviour.

For the most part, employees discipline themselves. This means that members conform to what is considered proper behaviour because they believe it is the right thing to do.

Once they are made aware of what is expected of them, and assuming that they find these standards or rules to be reasonable, they seek to meet these expectations.

But all employees will not accept the responsibility of self-discipline. For some employees the organisation’s rules and standards are not enough to elicit the accepted norms of responsible employee behaviour. These employees will require some degree of extrinsic disciplinary action frequently labelled punishment. It is this need to impose extrinsic disciplinary action that is of concern to the personnel manager.

**Importance of Discipline:**

To ensure that an organisation runs smoothly there must be staff discipline. How­ever, an autocratic management style is not acceptable today. So, this is a difficult task. No longer will workers tolerate fines or similar pecuniary penalties for what the organisation sees as departure from acceptable behaviour.

However, there must be rules of behaviour for staff which must be accepted by workers, particularly in the area of punctuality and absence. It follows, therefore, that a code of discipline must be drawn up and agreed with the workers and written into their service contracts. New recruits must be made aware of the code and the requirement for them to comply.

The surest way to achieve and maintain good staff discipline is to ensure a high morale, which is, after all, one of the marks of good management. Discipline is concerned with setting standards of performance, attitude and behaviour at work­place in the interest of ensuring that everyone knows what is expected of him and he conforms to them.

If the approach taken is both positive and understood by all concerned it follows that such problems are kept to a minimum. Any organisation is allowed and expected to set its own standards, and these will be reflected both in the nature of the work itself and also in regard to the expectation of customers.

When problems occur the manager’s first task is to get the individual concerned back-performing or behaving adequately and effectively.

Normally, this is to be achieved by having a quiet word with the individual, pointing out to him where his behaviour or activity is falling short of the required standard, ensuring that he knows what the required standard is and concluding the discussion with an agreement that this is now the way in which matters will be conducted.

If this fails to work, various other procedures will have to be invoked. The basic objective is to remove the cause of the problem. And any and every warning issued by the manager or the organisation in the pursuit of a resolution of the problems will furnish detail in clear terms of the nature of it, the steps taken to try and resolve it and the levels of performance now expected of the individual.

These warnings will either be orally issued, or in writing. (In either case a record will be kept by the manager concerned).

**Purpose of Discipline:**

Discipline and counseling are designed to do one thing – correct problems. Employee problems can be associated with lack of effort, poor performance and the inability to reach organisational and individual goals. If these problems are permitted to manifest to the point of termination, then both the employee and the employer lose.

In addition to the ’emotional scars’ discipline or discharge may cause for the employee, the organisation is losing a once-valued employee. That individual was chosen after a careful recruiting and selection process. Getting to this point did not occur cost-free. In fact, every time an employee is terminated the organisation is, in essence, eliminating any further ‘return on its investment’ for the employee.

The purpose of discipline and counselling, then, is to get the employee back on the right track. By helping him (or her) to perform better, organisational goals can be achieved, as well as individual goals. See Fig. 4.8 which is self-explanatory.

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In reality, most grievances arise from disciplinary actions. The labour contract usually states that management may discipline an employee ‘for just cause’. How­ever, the perception of what is ‘just cause’ and what is ‘fair punishment’ may differ between management and employees.

To avoid this kind of problem, rules should be clearly spelled out and communi­cated to employees. Penalties should also be made known and fit the crime. Most discipline systems use ‘progressive penalties’ the more often the violation is repeated, the more serious the penalty.

For instance, a first incident of go-slow practice (tardiness) might occasion only a reminder, the second a stern warning, the third a written warning in the employee’s file, and the fourth a short suspension. Some violations, such as fighting, stealing from the employer, and sabotage, obvi­ously call for a much more severe initial penalty.

**Fairness:**

There is another aspect of discipline. The discipline process must be appropriate and fair. If discipline is handled haphazardly, or there is no apparent reason for such action to take place, this can have a detrimental effect on employee morale. And this very fact results in less effort being put. Hence organisations must make sure that they are not diminishing motivation by having a poorly operating discipline process. No doubt discipline and counselling are two necessary components of personnel management.

**Code of Discipline:**

**The code of discipline as spelt out in the Report of the National Commission on Labour, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Rehabilitation, Government of India is as follows:**

**1. To maintain discipline in industry (both in public and private sectors) there has to be:**

(i) A just recognition by employees and workers of the rights and responsibili­ties of either party, as defined by the laws and agreements including bipartite and tripartite agreements arrived at all levels from time to time; and

(ii) A proper and willing discharge by either party of its obligations consequent on such recognition.

The Central and State Governments, on their part, will arrange to examine and set right any shortcomings in the machinery they constitute for the administration of labour laws. To ensure better discipline in industry:

**2. Management and union(s) agree:**

(i) That no unilateral action should be taken in connection with any industrial matter and that disputes should be settled at appropriate levels,

(ii) That the existing machinery for settlement of disputes should be utilised with the utmost expedition,

(iii) That there should be no strike or lockout without notice,

(iv) That affirming their faith in democratic principles, they bind themselves to settle all future differences, disputes and grievances by mutual negotiation, conciliation and voluntary arbitration,

**(v) That neither party will have recourse to:**

(a) Coercion;

(b) Intimidation;

(c) victimisation, or go-slow,

(vi) They will promote constructive cooperation between their representatives at all levels and as between workers themselves and abide by the spirit of agreements mutually entered into.

(vii) That they will establish upon a mutually agreed basis, a grievance procedure which will ensure a speedy and full investigation leading to settlement.

(viii) That they will abide by various stages in the grievance procedure and take no arbitrary action which would bypass this procedure, and

(ix) That they will educate the management personnel and workers regarding their obligations to each other.

**3. Management agree:**

(i) Not to increase workloads unless agreed upon or settled otherwise,

(ii) Not to support or encourage any unfair practice, such as:

(a) Interference with the right of employees to enroll or continue as union members;

(b) Discrimi­nation, restraint or coercion against any employee because of recognised activity of trade unions; and

(c) Victimisation of any employee and abuse of authority in any form,

(iii) To take prompt action for:

(a) Settlement of grievances; and

(b) Implementa­tion of settlement, awards, decisions,

(iv) To display in conspicuous places in the undertaking the provisions of this Code in local languages,

(v) To distinguish between actions justifying immediate discharge and those where discharge must be preceded by a warning, reprimand, suspension or some other form of disciplinary action and to arrange that all such discipli­nary action are subjected to an appeal through normal grievance procedure,

(vi) To take appropriate disciplinary action against its officers and members in cases whose enquiries reveal that they were responsible for precipitate action by workers leading to indiscipline, and

(vii) To recognise the union in accordance with the criteria (evolved at the 16th session of the Indian Labour Conference held in May 1958).

**4. Union(s) agree:**

(i) Not to engage in any form of physical duress,

(ii) Not to permit demonstrations which are not peaceful and not to permit rowdyism in demonstration,

(iii) That their members will not engage or cause other employees to engage in any union activity during working hours, unless as provided for by law, agreement or practice,

(iv) To discharge unfair labour practices, such as:

(a) Negligence of duty;

(b) Careless operation;

(c) Damage to property;

(d) Interference with or disturbance to normal work; and

(e) Insubordination,

(v) To take prompt action to implement awards, agreements, settlements and decisions,

(vi) To display in conspicuous places in the union offices the provisions of the Code in the local language(s), and

(vii) To express disapproval and to take appropriate action against office-bearers and members for indulging in action against the spirit of this Code.

**Grievances:**

As with all human activity the operation of a business or other organisation is bound to produce grievances from time to time. These may be small and minor and easily settled on a personal level, or may be major resulting in strike action or threat of such action.

**Consequently, it is prudent to have some formal grievances procedure to settle these matters:**

1. Major disputes involving all or most of the work-force are normally dealt with at a senior level and may involve a trade union.

2. Grievances involving one or a small number of workers are best dealt with internally and a formal procedure to deal with these should be established as it enables employers to deal with complaints quickly and fairly.

An equitable grievance procedure well-known and accepted by the work-force demon­strates the employer’s commitment to fair play and helps to ensure that similar problems are all dealt with on the same basis and that decisions will be consistent in like cases. It is recognised that grievances ignored or badly handled can lead to discontent which may spread beyond the staff involved.

3. The exact procedures to be adopted will vary according to the size of the concern. In a small firm access by the complainant may be direct to a senior member of the company, whereas in a larger organisation there may be more than one level of management to go through if satisfaction is not forthcoming at the first level.

In all cases, however, it is usual for the grievance to be taken up initially with the worker’s immediate superior.

Where there is a recognised union presence in an organisation it is very usual for the first step to be to the worker’s shop steward. At all times, the employer must be seen to be trying to be fair.

4. Unfortunately, some complaints lead to litigation and the absence of a formal grievances procedure, or the failure to adopt its provisions, may prejudice the employer’s case, whereas the existence of such a procedure will demonstrate the employer’s desire to be fair.