

### Chapter Highlights

What is Discipline? Types of Discipline, Types of Discipline Problems, Causes of Indiscipline, Disciplinary Procedure, Principles in Administering Discipline, Factors to be Considered in Taking Disciplinary Action, Disciplinary Actions, Questions to answer, Indicate True or False.

*Discipline refers to a condition in which the employees of an organization conduct themselves in accordance with the rules and standards of acceptable behavior.*

## 14.1 What is Discipline?

Discipline refers to a condition in which the employees of an organization conduct themselves in accordance with the rules and standards of acceptable behavior. For the most part, employees take resort to self-discipline that is they discipline themselves. By that we mean that members conform with what is considered proper behavior because they believe it is the right thing to do. Once they are made aware of what is expected of them and assuming they find these standards or rules to be reasonable, they seek to meet those expectations.

But in many cases the employees do not accept the responsibility of self-discipline. These employees will require some degree of extrinsic disciplinary actions. These extrinsic actions are frequently labelled punishment. It is this need to impose extrinsic disciplinary actions that we will address in this chapter.

## 14.2 Types of Discipline

Discipline may be of the following types :

*Netative discipline is used to refer to the act of imposing penalties for wrong behaviour.*

**1. Negative Discipline :** Traditionally, discipline is interpreted as a sort of check or restraint on the freedom of a person. Discipline is used to refer to the act of imposing penalties for wrong behaviour. If employees fail to observe rules, they are punished. The fear of punishment puts the employee back on rails.

*Positive Discipline makes employees comply with rules out of an inherent desire to co-operate and achieve goals.*

**2. Positive Discipline :** Employees comply with rules not out of fear of punishment but out of an inherent desire to co-operate and achieve goals. Where the organisational climate is marked by two-way communication, clear goals, effective leadership, adequate compensation employees need not be disciplined in the traditional way. There is a conscious co-operative effort on the part of management to secure compliance to company norms from the employees.

The differences between the two approaches may be summarised thus :

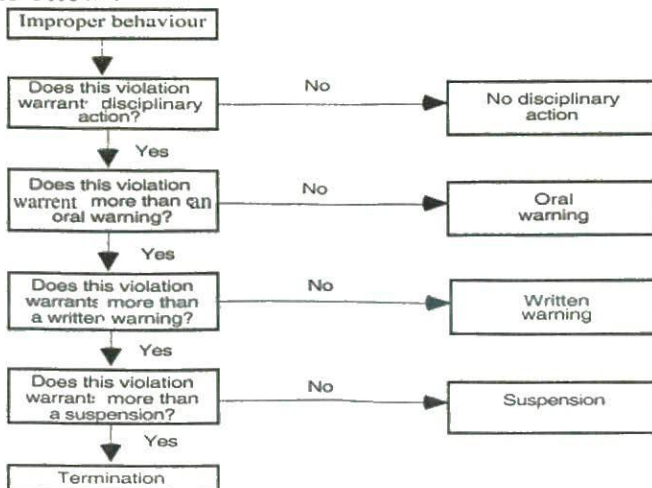
**Table 14.1 : The Differences between Positive and Negative Discipline**

Points	Positive Discipline	Negative Discipline
<b>Concept</b>	It requires the creation of a conducive climate in an organisation so that employees willingly conform to the established rules.	It indicates adherence to established norms and regulations, out of fear of punishment.
<b>Conflict</b>	There is no conflict between individual and organizational goals.	The interests of employees and of the organization are conflicting.
<b>Supervision</b>	Employees exercise self control in order to meet organisational objectives.	Requires close supervisory control to prevent employees from going off the track.

**3. Self Discipline and Control :** Behavioural scientists view discipline as a self-control to meet organisational objectives. It refers to employees' efforts at self-control for the purpose of adjusting oneself to certain needs and demands. This form of discipline is desirable on two psychological principles. First, punishment seldom produces the desired results. Often, it produces undesirable results. Second, a self-respecting person tends to be a better worker than one who is not.

**4. Progressive Discipline :** The concept of progressive discipline states that punishment should start at its bottom line and must be appropriate to the violation. If inappropriate behaviour is minor in nature and has not previously occurred, an oral warning may be sufficient. If the violation requires a written warning, it must be done according to a procedure. After written warnings, if the conduct of the employee is still not along desired lines, serious punitive steps could be initiated. In case of major violations such as hitting a supervisor, may justify the termination of an employee immediately.

In order to assist a manager to recognise the proper level of disciplinary action, some firms have formalised the procedure. One approach in the establishment of progressive disciplinary action is shown in figure 14.1 below :



**Figure : 14.1 : The Progressive Disciplinary Approach**

*Self discipline indicates employees' efforts at self-control for the purpose of adjusting oneself to certain needs and demands.*

*Progressive discipline states that punishment should start at its bottom line and must be appropriate to the violation.*

### 14.3 Types of Discipline Problems

One could list several dozen or more disciplinary problems that require action. For simplicity's sake, we have classified the more frequent violations into four categories—improper attendance, inappropriate on-the-job behaviors, dishonesty, and unacceptable outside activities.

**1. Improper Attendance :** The practice of exercising improper attendance by employees causes a serious disciplinary problem. Thus a study of two hundred organizations in the USA, 60 percent of which employed over one thousand workers, found that absenteeism, tardiness, abuse of sick leave, and other aspects of attendance were rated as the foremost problems by 79 percent of the respondents. Importantly, attendance problems appear to be even more widespread than those related to productivity—such as carelessness in doing work, neglect of duty, and not following established procedures. This problem is severe in the context of Bangladesh since our people are more or less habituated to be late at attendance.

The reasons why improper attendance is a discipline problem are :

(i) **First**, many organizations have failed to align workers' goals with those of the organization. When employees cannot relate to their work or to the organization, the result is usually a decline in attendance.

(ii) **A second** reason may be a changing attitude toward employment. For many people, work is not their central life interest, and hence the desire to conscientiously be at their jobs regularly, and on time, is not of primary importance.

(iii) **A third** reason may be the different backgrounds of new entrants into the work force.

(iv) **Fourth**, it is obvious that many employees believe that earned sick-leave days have to be consumed, regardless of whether they are ill or not.

(v) **A final** reason is the greater difficulty involved in firing an employee, especially those union members protected by a collective-bargaining agreement. Under the guidance of union leaders workers may be more apt to take advantage of management's restricted options. However, it has to be kept in mind that no union or government legislation will protect a worker who is a disciplinary problem.

**2. Inappropriate On-the-Job Behaviors :** The second category of discipline problems covers on-the-job behaviors. It includes insubordination, horseplay, fighting, gambling, failure to use safety devices, carelessness, drug abuse, etc.

*The practice of exercising improper attendance by employees causes a serious disciplinary problem.*

Most of the above mentioned actions reflect direct infractions of organization rules. For instance, refusing to obey a boss's orders, ignoring safety procedures, or being intoxicated on the job are all behaviours that are usually expressly forbidden. Because they represent a clear violation of an organization's acceptable standards of behavior, corrective action should be taken immediately.

**3. Dishonesty :** Dishonesty has traditionally been a major discipline problem in almost all types of organizations. Starting from the CEO, down to the shop floor workers level there may be numerous examples of cases concerning dishonesty like theft, falsification of information, manipulation of accounts, etc. Dishonesty needs immediate corrective actions to be taken, or otherwise it may have widespread impact.

**4. Unacceptable Outside Activities :** The last problem category covers activities that employees engage in outside of their work, but which either affect their on-the-job performance or generally reflect negatively on the organization's image. Included here are outside criminal activities, engaging in terrorist activities, picketing etc. and working for a competing organization. Among managerial personnel, this category would also include bad-mouthing the organization or questioning the organization's key values in public.

An individual may be on the job only forty hours a week, but that does not exclude the organization from disciplining employees when their behaviour off the job embarrasses the organization. It is not out of place to mention that the outside activities of the lower level employees do not concern management in the same way as those of the top level employees. For senior executives, what they say or do twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, reflects on the organization. Hence their off-the-job activities must fall within the acceptable standards of the organization or they will be subjected to disciplinary action by their organization.

#### 14.4 Causes of Indiscipline

Mostly non co-operation results in indiscipline. Various factors like social, economic and cultural also play a significant role in causing indiscipline. In most cases indiscipline is due to managerial faults, lapses, improper communication and poor management.

The common causes of indiscipline are :

**1. Absence of effective managerial leadership :** Absence of effective managerial leadership results in poor management in the areas of motivation, direction, counselling, etc. This, in turn, leads to indiscipline.

*Refusing to obey a boss's orders, ignoring safety procedures, or being intoxicated on the job are all behaviours that are usually expressly forbidden.*

*Dishonesty has traditionally been a major discipline problem in almost all types of organizations.*

*Engaging in terrorist activities, picketing etc. are examples of unacceptable outside activities.*

*For senior executives, what they say or do twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, reflects on the organization.*

**2. Unfair management practices :** Managers often indulge in unfair practices like wage discrimination, non-Compliance with promotion and transfer policies, improper allotment of work, defective handling of grievance, delay in payment of wages, creating low quality work life, etc. These unfair management practices gradually result in indiscipline.

**3. Ineffective communication :** Communication barriers along with absence of transparency in communication result in frustration and leads to indiscipline.

**4. Non-uniform disciplinary action :** Management has to treat all cases of indiscipline in a fair and equitable way. But management may undertake disciplinary actions in a discriminating way, leading to violent protests from various quarters.

**5. Divide and rule policy :** Managers may often divide the employees into groups and follow the policy of divide and rule. Henri Fayol pointed out that dividing enemy forces to weaken them is clever, but dividing one's own team is a grave sin against the organization. Building a team is highly difficult when compared to dividing the team. Dividing the team results in indiscipline.

**6. Inadequate attention to personnel problems** and delay in solving personal problems create frustration among individual workers.

**7. Victimisation** and excessive pressures on the work of the subordinate may lead to indiscipline.

## **14.5 Disciplinary Procedure**

Though there is no rigid and specific procedure for taking a disciplinary action, disciplinary procedure followed in industries usually consists of the following steps :

**1. Framing a charge and issuing a letter :** When an employee commits an act of misconduct that requires disciplinary action, the employee concerned should be issued a charge sheet. Charges of misconduct or indiscipline should be clearly and precisely stated in the charge sheet. The charge sheet should also ask for an explanation for the said delinquent act and the employee should be given sufficient time in answering this.

**2. Consideration of explanation :** On getting the answer for the letter of charge served, the explanation furnished be considered and if it is not satisfactory then disciplinary action need be taken. On the contrary when the management is satisfied with the employee's explanation there is no need for serving a show cause notice.

**3. Issuing show-cause notice :** Show-cause notice is issued by the manager when he is convinced that there is sufficient prima facie evidence of employee's misconduct. However, this gives the employee another chance to account for his misconduct vis-a-vis. the charges made against him. Enquiry should also be initiated by first serving him a notice of enquiry indicating clearly the name of the enquiring officer, time, date and place of enquiry, etc.

**4. Making a full-fledged enquiry :** In conformity with the principle of natural justice, the employee concerned must be given an opportunity of being heard. When the process of enquiry is over and the findings of the same are recorded, the Enquiry Officer should suggest the nature of disciplinary action to be taken.

**5. Passing the final order of punishment :** Disciplinary action is to be taken when the misconduct of the employee is proved. While deciding the nature of disciplinary action, the employee's previous record, precedents, effects of disciplinary action on other employees, etc., have to be considered.

When the employee feels that the enquiry conducted was not proper and the action taken is unjustified, he must be given a chance to make an appeal.

**6. Follow up :** After taking the disciplinary action, a proper follow up action has to be taken and the consequences of the implementation of disciplinary action should be noted and taken care of.

## 14.6 Principles in Administering Discipline

The human resource manager should follow some guidelines in the administration of disciplinary action. They are :

**1. Disciplinary action is to be corrective rather than punitive :** The objective of disciplinary action is to correct an employee's undesirable behaviour, not to deal out punishment. While punishment may be a necessary means to that end, one should never lose sight of the eventual objective.

**2. Disciplinary action should be progressive :** Typically, progressive disciplinary action begins with an oral warning and proceeds through a written warning, suspension, and, only in the most serious cases, dismissal. This will provide the incumbent with a chance of correction and also an scope of improvement in motivation.

**3. "Hot Stove Rule" is to be followed :** Administering discipline can be viewed as analogous to touching a hot stove. This principle, if followed properly, will ensure the reaping of a few advantages which are as under :

**a. Provides warning :** It is very important to provide advance warning that punishment will follow unacceptable behaviour. As you move closer to a hot stove you are warned by its heat that you will be burned if you touch it.

**b. Burns immediately :** If disciplinary action is to be taken, it must occur immediately so that the individual will understand the reason for it. With the passage of time people have the tendency to convince themselves that they are not at fault.

**c. Burns impersonally :** Disciplinary action should be impersonal. There are no favourites when this approach is followed.

**d. Gives consistent punishment :** Disciplinary action should also be consistent in that everyone who performs the same act will be punished uniformly. As with a hot stove, each person who touches it is burned consistently.

#### 14.7 Factors to be Considered in Taking Disciplinary Action

There are a wide range of problems that might require disciplinary actions. More important is the fact that infractions vary greatly in terms of severity. Therefore, before we review the types of discipline available to managers, we should look at the major factors that need to be considered if we are to have fair and equitable disciplinary practices.

The contingency factors that help us analyze discipline problems are:

**1. Seriousness of the problem :** How severe is the problem? For example, dishonesty is usually considered as a more serious infraction than reporting to work a few minutes late.

**2. Duration of the problem :** Have there been other discipline problems in the past, and over how long a time span? A first occurrence is usually viewed differently than a third or fourth offence.

**3. Frequency and nature of the problem :** HR manager is to be concerned with not only the duration but also the pattern of the problem. Continual infractions may require a different type of disciplinary action from that applied to isolated instances of misconduct. They may also point out a direction that demands far more severe action in order to prevent a minor problem from becoming a major one.

**4. Employee's work history :** It is justified that the punishment will be less severe for those employees who have developed a strong track record. Equity would suggest that a violation incurred by an employee who has been with the organization for three months, be treated differently from a similar violation incurred by another employee who has proved to be an excellent employee for more than twenty years.

**5. Extenuating factors :** Extenuating circumstances related to the problem deserve consideration. The student who fails to turn up in her mid-term examination because of the death of her mother is likely to have her violation assessed more leniently than will her class-mate who missed the exam because she attended a picnic.

*Extenuating circumstances related to the problem deserve consideration.*

**6. Degree of socialization :** Discipline severity must reflect the degree of knowledge that the violator holds of the organization's standards of acceptable behavior. In contrast to point 4, the new employee is less likely to have been socialized to these standards than the twenty year veteran. Additionally, the organization that has formalized written rules governing employee conduct is more justified in aggressively enforcing violations of these rules than is the organization whose rules are informal or vague.

*The organization that has formalized written rules governing employee conduct is more justified in aggressively enforcing discipline.*

**7. History of the organization's discipline practices :** How have similar infractions been dealt with in the past? Has there been consistency in the application of discipline procedures? Equitable treatment of employees must take into consideration precedents within the organization. Equity demands consistency against some relevant benchmark.

*Equitable treatment of employees must take into consideration precedents within the organization.*

**8. Implications for other employees :** What impact will the discipline selected have on other workers in the unit is to be given due consideration. For example, if the cases of pilferage are not effectively dealt with they will induce many workers to indulge in theft.

**9. Management backing :** If the top level management declines to support a disciplinary action taken by a lower level manager against an indisciplined employee, the environment of enterprise discipline would be affected. If, for example, a worker commits a crime and for that matter he gets due punishment from his departmental manager but the CEO of the organization yields to the pressure of the CBA and orders the concerned departmental manager to withdraw punishment, the environment of disciplinary practices in the organization will suffer.

*Top management support is essential to enforce discipline.*

## 14.8 Disciplinary Actions

Discipline generally follows a typical sequence of four steps: oral warning, written warning, suspension, and dismissal. Two additional steps, which would logically follow suspension—demotion and pay cuts—are less popular in practice but are important enough to justify discussion. These six steps are discussed below:



*The mildest form of discipline is the oral warning. This reprimand is best achieved if completed in a private and informal environment.*

**1. Oral Warning :** The mildest form of discipline is the oral warning. This reprimand is best achieved if completed in a private and informal environment. The manager should begin by clearly informing the employee of the rule that has been violated and the problem that this infraction has caused. For instance, if the employee has been late a number of times, the manager would reiterate the organization's rule that employees are to be at their desks by 9 a.m. and then proceed to give specific evidence of how violation of this rule has resulted in an increase in workload for others and has lowered departmental morale. After the problem has been made clear, the manager should then allow the employee to respond and correct her behavior.

If the oral warning is effective, further official disciplinary action can be avoided. If the employee fails to improve, the manager will need to consider more severe action.

*The written warning becomes part of the employee's official file.*

**2. Written Warning :** It is the second step in progressive discipline. In effect, it is the first formal stage of the discipline procedure. This is true because the written warning becomes part of the employee's official file. This is achieved by not only giving the warning to the employee but sending a copy to the personnel department to be inserted in the employee's permanent record. In all other ways, however, the procedure preceding the writing of the warning is the same as the oral warning. That is, the employee is advised of the violation, its effect, and potential consequences of future violations. The only difference is that the discussion concludes with the employee being told that a written warning will be issued. Then the manager writes up the warning—stating the problem, the rule that has been violated, any acknowledgement by the employee to correct her behavior, and the consequences from a recurrence of the deviant behavior.

**3. Suspension :** A suspension or layoff would be the next disciplinary step, usually taken only if the prior steps have been implemented without the desired outcome.

*Some organizations avoid suspension because it can have negative consequences for both the company and the employee.*

Some organizations skip this step completely because it can have negative consequences for both the company and the employee. From the organization's perspective, a suspension means the loss of the employee for the layoff period. If the person has unique skills or is a vital part of a complex process, her loss during the suspension period may severely impact on her organization's performance if a suitable replacement can not be located. From the employee's standpoint, a suspension can result in the employee returning in a more unpleasant and negative frame of mind than before the layoff.

Then why should management consider suspending employees as a disciplinary measure? The answer is that a short layoff, without pay, has the potential to be a rude awakening to problem employees. It may convince them that management is serious and shock them back to accepting responsibility for following the organization's rules.

*A short layoff, without pay, has the potential to be a rude awakening to problem employees.*

**4. Demotion :** If suspension has not been effective and management wants to strongly avoid dismissing the problem employee, demotion may be an alternative. However, it should be used with care because it tends to demoralize not only the employee but the co-workers as well. A demotion is a constant punishment to the demoted employee and hence has broad motivation implications.

*A demotion is a constant punishment to the demoted employee*

Demotion may bring in desired results where :

- (1) the employee clearly has the ability to perform the job,
- (2) management perceives itself legally or ethically constrained from firing the employee (for example, an employee with thirty years of tenure in the organization), and
- (3) it is believed that a blatant demotion will awaken the employee.

In such instances, demotion is a loud message that such employees will have to shape up radically if they want their old job back, and that management has no intention of letting them "get away" with chronic abuses of the organization's rules.

**5. Pay cut :** Another alternative is cutting the problem employee's pay. Certainly, this approach usually has a demoralizing effect on the employee, but it can be used if the only alternative is dismissal.

*By cutting the pay of the problem employee and saving the investment the organization has already made in that person is rather a wise decision.*

From management's perspective, dismissal is costly. In cost-benefit terms, pay cut may be to management's advantage to save the hiring and training costs incurred with a new employee. By cutting the pay of the problem employee and saving the investment the organization has already made in that person is rather a wise decision. And, of course, if the problem employee alters her behaviour, the pay cut can always be rescinded.

**6. Dismissal :** The most severe disciplinary punishment is dismissing the problem employee. Dismissal should be used only for the most serious offenses. Yet it may be the only feasible alternative when an employee's behavior is intolerable.

*The most severe disciplinary punishment is dismissing the problem employee.*

A dismissal decision should be given long and hard consideration. For almost all individuals, being fired from a job is an emotional trauma. A dismissed employee is devoid of all service benefits and also finds it almost impossible to get a job elsewhere.

*For almost all individuals, being fired from a job is an emotional trauma.*

**QUESTIONS TO ANSWER**

1. (a) Define discipline.  
(b) What are different types of discipline?
  2. Discuss the types of discipline problems you know of.
  3. (a) What are the causes of indiscipline?  
(b) Management can take a number of disciplinary actions against indisciplined acts of employees—What are they? Discuss.
  4. (a) Elaborate the principles in administering discipline.  
(b) What factors are to be considered in taking disciplinary actions.
  5. Discuss the disciplinary procedure to be followed in order to ensure justice.
- Indicate True or False.**
- a. Discipline is always negative by nature.
  - b. Behavioral scientists view discipline as a self-control.
  - c. Punishment should start at its bottom-line.
  - d. There can be only one disciplinary problem.
  - e. All employers have successfully aligned workers' goals with those of the organization.
  - f. Trade unions give workers the strength to practise improper attendance.
  - g. Refusing to obey the boss is an appropriate on-the-job behaviour.
  - f. Outside activities of senior executives do have little effect upon organizational discipline.
  - i. Victimization by management has not been treated as a disciplinary problem.
  - j. 'Hot Stove Rule' does not ensure consistent punishment.
-