

## **Influence of query and demotion as disciplinary measures on librarians' job performance in university libraries in South East, Nigeria**

<sup>1</sup>Loveline Kogah, *PhD* and <sup>2</sup>Kelechi Ibegbulem, *PhD*

<sup>1,2</sup>Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria

E-mail: <sup>1</sup>lovevictorkogah@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup>kelechiibegbulem@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

The study examined the influence of query and demotion as disciplinary measures on librarians job performance in university libraries in South East, Nigeria. Correlational research design was adopted for the study while the instrument for data collection was a rating scale. The population consisted of 156 librarians in the university libraries in the South Eastern states of Nigeria (Asbia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo) which was also used as sample. Data collected were analyzed with Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to answer the research questions while t-test was used to test the hypotheses formulated at 0.05 level of significance. Findings show that; the query as a disciplinary measure have significant influence on the job performance of librarians while demotion has a very low negative and non significant influence on the job performance of librarians. The researcher recommends that query should be used as the first disciplinary measure when a librarian misbehaves. The study concludes that though query as a disciplinary measure evoked negative feelings, it has the capacity to spur librarians to perform their duties more conscientiously while demotion in rank can lead to counter productive work performance.

**Keywords:** Influence of query, demotion influence of demotion, disciplinary measures, job performance, librarians, university libraries, South East, Nigeria

### **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 the trade unions' request eliminating summary terminations (Apalia, 2017). It's in this place a progressive system of punishment was developed. It was envisaged that this process would provide a worker with protection against job loss (Huberman, 2009).

The concept of discipline in organizational context has been defined effectively as the presentation of an aversive event or the removal of a positive event following a response which decreases the frequency of that

response. A relationship or contingency exists between a response and the aversive consequences or stimuli. In simple terms, the measure is the product that is used when certain behaviors are observed. The product is meant to be unpleasant to discourage recurrence. In Africa, there are very rare circumstances where an employee will agree to a disciplinary sanction where the employer's reasons are considered acceptable by the employee. In these situations, an employer is well advised to have the employee provide written confirmation of the acceptance of the action so that it will not later be used against the employer if the employee thereafter is terminated or changes his mind as to the appropriateness of the disciplinary action taken against him or her. Without the employee's consent or a properly documented performance deficiency trail, an employer can still

discipline employees as it considers appropriate by providing appropriate notice of the action (Banda, 2004).

Employee performance is the successful completion of tasks performed by individuals, as set 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 changing environment. According to Moeheriono (2015), performance is a description of the 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. 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 have been determined and agreed previously.

### **Objectives of the study**

The study set out to determine the influence of query and demotion as disciplinary measures on librarians' job performance in university libraries in South-East, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to ascertain the coefficient of relationship between:

1. use of query as a disciplinary measure and job performance of librarians in university libraries;
2. use of demotion as a disciplinary measure and job performance of librarians in university libraries.

### **Research questions**

In line with the objectives, the following research questions were posed for the study:

1. What is the coefficient of relationship between the use of query and job performance of librarians in university libraries?
2. What is the coefficient of relationship between the use of demotion in rank and job performance of librarians in university libraries?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses are tested in the study at 0.05 level of significance:

- Ho<sub>1</sub>:** The coefficient of relationship between the use of query and job performance of librarians in university libraries is not significant.
- Ho<sub>2</sub>:** The coefficient of relationship between the use of demotion in rank and job performance of librarians in university libraries is not significant.

### **Literature review**

The recognition then that if an individual cannot ordinarily be persuaded to behave in a particular manner in a specific environment as required by the established norms of that environment; he might be coerced to do so, is a basic premise for disciplinary measures in the workplace (Onah, 2008). 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 as regards organizational policies, rules, established practices and other conditions of employment. The measures also indicate the different actions that an organization can take

when staff fails to behave according to expected standards (Ujo, 2000).

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. They have the ability to help in developing an attitude of co-operation amongst employees, maintaining good industrial relations in the workplace and increasing the efficiency and morale of the employees. The measures provide a framework for clear and transparent structures for dealing with untoward situations which may arise as outcomes of work relationships between employees and the employers. They let employees know what is expected of them in terms of standards of behaviour and performance and the probable corollary of continued failure to meet the expected standards. Organizations often then deem it proper to adopt disciplinary measures as the avenues through which supervisory personnel communicate with employees to correct behavioural deficiencies, maintain high standards of service and productivity and ensure adherence to established and communicated company rules (Cook, 2012).

The measures are also used to deter others from considering and committing such behaviours, while the absence of established ways to deal with performance problems and indiscipline in an organization may imperil organizational goals (Griffin & Lopez, 2005). The measures are used as a managerial tool intended to amend the shortcomings in employees' behaviour and conducts, correct situations which interfere with efficient operations and aids in maintaining the high standards of organizations (Circadian Information

Limited Partnership, 2005). Disciplinary measures have been regarded as being most essential as it enables organizations to meet its goals through ensuring of optimal performance from employees (Adiele, 2001).

The groundwork for an efficient disciplinary system in any work place is the formal setting out in writing of organizational rules and regulations and ensuring that all employees sign that they have read and understood the rules. This aids in the avoidance of ambiguity and guarantees that due process is adhered to in disciplining employees. Before the initiation of disciplinary measures, it is therefore critical to establish through an investigative review whether the defaulting employee has an understanding of disciplinary procedures as is portrayed in the organizations' rules and regulations and if the employee's perception of the misdemeanor tallies with that of the supervisor. This is because the neglect in communicating organizational rules and having the employee understand them is a major reason for a reversal of disciplinary action taken against an employee (University of British Columbia, 2010).

Three months after a worker is being employed, the employer is expected to give the worker a written statement specifying the detailed terms and conditions of the employment in which is enshrined the disciplinary code and procedure of the organization (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2011). In an investigation of employee misbehaviour and management among academic and non-academic staff of university of Abuja, Nigeria, Ukertor (2011), studied 378 staff made up of 150 academic and 228 non-academic staff of the institution. The questionnaire using a Likert Scale Rating method on five-point

continuum was used for data collection. Frequencies, simple percentages and at t-test were used to analyze data and to determine if significant differences exist between academic and non-academic staff in their ratings. One of the findings of the study is that the non-academic staff have a low level of awareness of what the institution considers as acts of misconduct and the disciplinary measures the infractions attract and this is a major contributory factor to their committing more infractions than the academic staff.

Issuing of a written query as a disciplinary measure according to Madurasingh (2006) is a serious matter is considered as the first formal stage of discipline. It is a written statement of formal censure issued to an employee for misconduct. It usually informs the officer in writing of the misdemeanor committed while calling upon him to submit within a specific time a written representation to exculpate himself from further disciplinary action. Goode (2011), a query should include the extent of the offence committed, the violated rules, policy or procedure, a statement of consequences should there be no behavioural change and further courses of action.

Depending on the explanation given by the offending employee, the office may decide that no 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 is 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. 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).

De Lara, Tacoronte and Ding (2006) investigated the effectiveness of disciplinary measures towards curbing cyber-loafing in an academic institution. The population of the study was made-up of 758 non-teaching staff from a public university in Spain. Data was collected with the questionnaire, through observation and documentary analysis. Using Structural Equation Model (SEM), empirical evidence was found that issuing of queries is effective as a disciplinary measure, can potentially reduce the tendency of employees to engage in organizational deviance and also serve as a deterrent to further misdemeanors.

A letter of reprimand also known as Query is issued to an employee when the employee's manager, in conjunction with Human Resources staff, sees an employee making no improvement progress after encouragement over time. The letter usually follows counseling 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 a misconduct warning letter which according to Huberman, (2016) should take the following steps:

- Confirm the Decision Writing
- Explain the Nature of the Misconduct.
- Set out the Improvement Required.
- Point out the Possible Consequences of a Failure to Improve.
- Specify the Length of the Warning.
- Confirm the Right of Appeal.
- Keep a record of the Warning.

Demotion in rank as a disciplinary measure involves the downgrading of an employee to a lower level position. The measure may include lowering the salary of an employee within his current pay grade or the employee may be given a lower designation. Demotion could also involve a reassignment of duties to a lower level of responsibility even if there is no change in the employee's job title or position (Stone, 2004). However, before the disciplinary action is used, the employee must have a current unresolved incident of unsatisfactory job performance and at least one prior query or any other disciplinary action for inefficiency (MICMA and Associates, 2007).

The measure is most often used in cases of inadequate performance and when it is obvious that an employee cannot handle responsibilities at a particular level. It is also used to signal to all staff the serious view taken of the offence (s) by management. In addition, it could also be used in circumstances where dismissal could be justified but the measure is resorted to due to mitigating factors such as if the staff concerned has been a long time employee and has behaved satisfactorily for most of that length of time. However, demotion can also mean a reduction or diminution of dignity, importance, responsibility, power or status even if salary attendant benefits and rank are retained. It usually involves giving an employee lesser responsibilities which do not require much dexterity to handle. However, the employee must have the minimum qualifications for the post he is being demoted to (Roseville Municipal Code, 2011).

The notice of demotion must be delivered to the employee prior to or no later than the commencement date of the sanction and the date of the receipts of the letter must be documented for future references (Pima County, 2011). Nonetheless, it has been noted that the use of demotion as a disciplinary measure can have long lasting negative repercussions on the employees as the employee concerned most probably would feel aggrieved and dissatisfied with his downgraded status and salary. Such feelings will affect the employee's and possibly his colleague's motivation and performance. A demotion that is imposed on an employee as a disciplinary measure especially where wage and salary is reduced can lead to the dismissal of the employee where the employee refuses. However, Cheadle

(2012), argued that an employee can only be demoted if he agrees to the measures being imposed on him. Roskem (2007), debunked this view and pointed out that once the measure is part of the disciplinary code of an organization assented to by staff it can be applied whether the employee gives his consent or not. Nevertheless, whether the measure is regarded as unfair, provisions are usually made in the disciplinary code for it to be challenged (Bhorat & Van der Westhuizen, 2008).

In a study on the effectiveness of disciplinary measures in the workplace, Maphosa and Mammen (2011), investigated demotion in rank. Demotion had a mean score below 3.0 for minor and major infractions suggesting that it is not very effective as a disciplinary measure. One of the conclusions of the study indicated that demotions should be used very sparingly as a disciplinary measure as it has strong capabilities of eliciting negative attitudes like sabotage and theft from the disciplined employee and others.

## Methods

The study adopted the correlational design. The population of the study comprised 156 librarians in public university in South-East (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States), Nigeria. The public universities in South-Eastern Nigeria include: Imo State University, Owerri (12 librarians);

Federal University of Science and Technology, Owerri (30 librarians); Chukwuemeka Odumegwu University, Igbariam/Uli (10 librarians); Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (13 Librarians); University of Nigeria, Nsukka (45 librarians); Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Agbani (12 librarians); Federal University Ndu Alike (4 librarians); Ebonyi State University, Abakiliki (14 librarians); Federal University of Agriculture, Umudike (9 librarians); Abia State University, Uturu (7 librarians). The entire population was used as sample for the study. The study made use of rating scale as the instrument for data collection. Rated on a four point Likert scale as; Strongly Agree (SA) 4, Agree (A) 3, Disagree (D) 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) 1. Research questions were answered using Pearson (r) statistics thus indicating the coefficient of relationship between the Disciplinary measures and Job performance variables in the study while the hypotheses were tested with t-test of significance of simple correlation statistics.

## Results

### Research question 1

**RQ<sub>1</sub>:** What is the coefficient of relationship between the use of query and job performance of librarians in university libraries?

**Table 1: Relationship between the use of query and job performance of librarians in university libraries**

Variables (V:X&Y), Sample Size (n), Summation ( $\Sigma$ ), Sum of Squares (SS), Sum of Products (SP), Variance ( $S^2$ ), Covariance (Cov.), Pearson r (r), and Remarks

V	n	$\Sigma$	SS	SP	$S^2$	Cov.	r	Remarks
X	156	4398	3076.231		19.847			<b>High Positive Relationship</b>
Y	156	4451	3614.840	2368.038	23.322	15.278	<b>0.71</b>	

Magnitude of relationship = High

Direction of relationship = Positive

Percentage coefficient of determination = 50.41%

Table 1 showed the relationship between the use of query and job performance of librarians in university libraries. Through the sum of squares and sum of products, an index of 0.71 was realized. The index shows that there is a high positive relationship between the use of query and job performance of librarians in university libraries. The percentage coefficient of determination shows that 50.41% of the variations in

job performance of librarians could be attributed to use of query. This shows that the extent of issuance of query increases, so the libraries job performance increases and as one decreases the other decreases

**H<sub>01</sub>:** The coefficient of relationship between the use of query and job performance of librarians in university libraries is not significant.

**Table 2: Significance of relationship between the use of query and job performance of librarians in university libraries**

Sample Size (n), Coefficient of Relationship (r), Alpha Level ( $\alpha$ ), Degree of Freedom (df) and t-test of Significance of Correlation between two Variables

V	n	$\Sigma$	R	A	Df	$t_{cal}$	$t_{tab}$	Decision
X	156	4398						<b>H<sub>0</sub> Rejected</b>
Y	156	4451	0.71	0.05	154	12.516	1.96	

Table 2 presents the test of the coefficient of relationship between the use of query and job performance of librarians in university libraries. The degree of freedom is 154 and the t-calculated value of 12.516 is greater than the t-tabulated value of 1.96. Since the t-calculated value is greater than the t-tabulated value, the null hypothesis is

rejected; thus concluding that there is significant relationship between the use of query and job performance of librarians in university libraries.

**RQ<sub>2</sub>:** What is the coefficient of relationship between the use of demotion in rank and job performance of librarians in university libraries?

**Table 3: Relationship between the use of demotion in rank and job performance of librarians in university libraries**

Variables (V:X&Y), Sample Size (n), Summation ( $\Sigma$ ), Sum of Squares (SS), Sum of Products (SP), Variance ( $S^2$ ), Covariance (Cov.), Pearson r (r), and Remarks

V	n	$\Sigma$	SS	SP	$S^2$	Cov.	r	Remarks
X	156	4398	3076.231		19.847			<b>Very Low Negative Relationship</b>
Y	156	4365	2922.942	-28.423	18.858	-.183	<b>-0.01</b>	

Magnitude of Relationship = Very Low  
 Direction of Relationship = Negative

Table 3 showed the relationship between the use of demotion in rank and job performance of librarians in university libraries. Through the sum of squares and sum of products, an index of -0.01 (near zero) was realized. The index shows that there is a very low negative relationship between the use of demotion

in rank and job performance of librarians in university libraries.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** The coefficient of relationship between the use of demotion in rank and job performance of librarians in university libraries is not significant.

**Table 4: Significance of relationship between the use of demotion in rank and job performance of librarians in university libraries**

Sample Size (n), Coefficient of Relationship (r), Alpha Level ( $\alpha$ ), Degree of Freedom (df) and t-test of Significance of Correlation between two Variables

V	n	$\Sigma$	R	A	Df	t <sub>cal</sub>	t <sub>tab</sub>	Decision
X	156	4398						<b>H<sub>0</sub> Accepted</b>
Y	156	4365	-0.01	0.05	154	<b>0.118</b>	1.96	

Table 4 reveals the test of the coefficient of relationship between the use of demotion in rank and job performance of librarians in university libraries. The degree of freedom is 154 and the t-calculated value of 0.118 is less than the t-tabulated value of 1.96. Since the t-calculated value is less than the t-tabulated value, the null hypothesis is accepted; thus concluding that there is no significant relationship between the use of demotion in rank and job performance of librarians in university libraries.

**Discussion**

Based on the findings of the study, query as a disciplinary measure has significant influence on the job performance of librarians both negatively and positively. The findings proved that query exerts positive influence on job performance by the librarians. The findings are also a pointer to the fact that the measure has the capacity to be used for correcting misdemeanors without seriously affecting the attitude to work of librarians. This is against the backdrop

that query positively influenced the job performance of librarians as it spurs them to complete their job tasks, undertake extra tasks, become committed and show more proficiency in handling all the duties assigned to them, even as query engenders counterproductive work performance on a relatively small scale.

This agrees with the findings of De Lara, Tacoronte and Ding (2006) who postulate that query is effective in checking further infractions and can lead to better performance in the workplace as the disciplinary measure puts one on notice that the infringement committed has been noted, and thus serves as a wake-up call for enhanced performance. This measure also does not have any stigmatizing after effects as other staff may not know that one has been queried.

Issuing of query as a first disciplinary measure is necessary as it can equally serve as evidence proving the just cause of an organization's reason in the surcharge of a staff or outright dismissal. Also, query as disciplinary measure reflects a more formal and inoffensive way of reprimanding a staff. In as much as it is only used at early stage of an employee's infraction, it does not breed resentments or withdrawal of efforts. Given these reasons, query should be adopted by library management as a disciplinary measure in order to improve the job performance of librarians.

Demotion in rank as a disciplinary measure influenced the job performance of librarians negatively. The performance of the librarian disciplined by demotion in rank could make him/hers to complete job task, maintain orderliness in the library, become more responsible, become more efficient and productive, show proficiency in handling

assigned duties the findings of the study, however revealed that demotion in rank resulted to negative performance and attitude on librarians to become less industrious, in decent and lazy to work, not generating new ideas to move the library forward, disassociating oneself from performing extra tasks and not co-operating and helping other librarians. This could be as a result of the stigma and ill-feelings experienced by the demoted staff. The more demotion in rank is used as a disciplinary measure, the less effective librarians are in job performance.

This corresponds with the findings of Judge, Scott and Ilies (2006) that negative attitudes have adverse effects on job performance at the workplace. It also confirms the findings of Mamphosa and Mammen (2011), in their study that demotion in rank has strong capabilities of evoking negative attitudes in the work place which can lead to withdrawal of efforts and counterproductive work performance not only from the disciplined worker but also from other members of staff. This however disagrees with the findings of Roskam (2007), that when an employee cannot perform acceptably in a rank, demotion is the best option rather than a termination of the appointment and that it does not always elicit negative consequences because the cause of the disciplinary action must have been known to the demoted staff as he must have received queries before hand to explain his shortcomings.

### **Implications of the findings**

The findings of the study have the following implication;

Query should be take-off point for disciplining the librarians as the disciplinary measure, gives a chance for

the misbehaving librarian to explain why he failed to obey the rules. Thus, query help to improve librarian's job performance. Findings of the study also imply that use of the measure in the library makes librarians to perform their duties more conscientiously. No wonder librarians do everything possible to avoid the issuance of query and whenever they are issued, they ensure, they avoid circumstances that lead to the use of query on them. For the library administrators, use of the measure may give them inkling into how to move forward with the disciplinary process as unilaterally disciplining a librarian without first granting him an opportunity to explain his actions may yield negative results.

The findings of the study indicate that demotion in rank negatively impacts the job performance of librarians. The implication of this is that it can be used sparingly by library administrators who have to build up just cause before the measure is applied. Also, when a librarian is demoted, he needs to be made to understand that the measure was applied not just for a lone infraction but rather that it is based on the previous and present job performances which had been found wanting and for which he had formerly been disciplined about. This realization would help to curb negative feelings and apathetic job performance.

### **Conclusion**

The findings show that though disciplinary measures can evoke negative feelings, it does not in most cases produce counter productivity work behaviour. However, the measures do find out that the measure can influence the task performance, contextual performance as well adaptive

performance negatively. Which are capable of affecting the job performance of librarians. Nevertheless, if disciplinary measures are meted out fairly and proportionate with the level of misconduct by the Librarians, it will improve the job performance of the Librarian and ultimately the effectiveness of the Library.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations 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 discipline. Using the measure first in the case of an infraction also gives the supervisor the chance to build up just causes against such librarian.
- 2) Demotion in rank as a disciplinary measure should be used cautiously. If the qualifications of a librarian are suspected, they could be investigated and it might lead to demotion but where for performance reasons a librarian is demoted question could arise as to who evaluated the tasks not well performed and the indices for the evaluation. When a librarian is under-performing seriously, his annual performance evaluation forms will be marked accordingly. He may be queried serially as he keeps on failing in his assigned duties. All these will speak against him when he is due for promotion and eventually, he will not be elevated and his colleagues will surpass him. This will minimize the negative feelings that the measure has the capacity to engender.

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