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LOAFING: A CASE OF EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE ISSUE

Leo Roswald M. Tugonon

*Faculty, College of Arts and Sciences (CAS); College of Graduate Studies (CGS), Palompon
Institute of Technology, Palompon, Leyte, Philippines*

waldytugonon@gmail.com

Abstract

Employees are expected to be at work on time and perform their tasks to be productive. Otherwise, it is a performance issue, unauthorized absenteeism, or loafing. It is not only prevalent in private entities but also in government agencies. The Civil Service Commission (CSC) in the Philippine context is a government agency that discouraged loafing during work hours and limits the use of official time for non-related government tasks. The study utilized an observational research technique using a single case method where the participant was closely observed in the most natural settings in the workplace. The study investigates the performance of the employee and shows solutions to how the management addressed the issue. This case study presents an instance wherein an employee was reported by his co-employee (an informant) who committed loafing or frequent unauthorized absences from duty during office hours. Three alternative solutions are offered. First, refer the case to the Human Resource Management Officer who is a trained adjudicator, mediator, and conciliator. Second, determine the root cause of the problem and suggest an alternative course of action; and third, instead of imposing a harsh penalty of suspension or dismissal as the case may be, it would be appropriate for the

management to subject the problem employee to an intervention program. There is a need to act with compassion and justice to ensure no repetitive action that may happen in the future.

Keywords

Absenteeism, Employees, Loafing, Management, Single Case Study

1. Introduction

The most essential difficulty that human resource managers face is regulating their employees' absenteeism. It can also refer to an employee's deliberate or frequent absence from work (Cucchiella et al., 2014). Many cases of frequent unauthorized absences or office loafing exist nowadays, making this problem all too common. Employees are important factors in service quality, organizational performance, and success (Nickson et al., 2002; Schneider et al., 2003). Human resource officers are in charge of managing employees, which is a management job. This includes keeping track of their whereabouts and activities while on the job. However, there may be factors related to loafing or unlawful absences that management must consider. One research study suggests that absence from work is the result of a complex set of factors. Further, it suggests that the attitude and disposition of individuals and a range of non-work factors may combine to make attendance difficult or impossible (Bevan & Hayday, 1997).

Loafing or frequent unauthorized absences is also by law wrong. Looking at the government sector, this is an act that is tantamount to taking advantage of the time without the government employee working during hours of work. The Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for public officials and employees and other pertinent laws and issuances (RA 6713), provides that officers and employees of all departments and agencies except those covered by special laws shall render not less than eight (8) hours of work a day for five (5) days a week or a total of forty (40) hours a week exclusive of time for lunch, which as a general rule shall be from 8:00 A.M. to 12:00 Noon and from 1:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M. on all days except Saturdays, Sundays and Holidays. Notwithstanding, it has been reported that many government officials and employees have been remiss in their obligation regarding the required government work hours. Thus, many are facing administrative charges and their employment is at stake. This needs urgent concerns on the part of the management and to be dealt with promptly.

According to the Human Relations Theory of Elton Mayo (Kumar, 2016), employees are seen as human beings, instead of a meager human supplement of machinery or hands for work. It

is mainly established on a humble principle that the “human problem requires a human solution.” One of the emphases of the theory of Human Relations is that workers are human beings with all human attributes. Therefore, the administration or management must not forget to value the importance of employees as human beings in an organization.

This study focuses on a government employee who has been reported by an informant and co-employee to have been out of the office and was charged with loafing.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the performance of the employee accused of loafing and how the management resolves it. Henceforth, this study is beneficial to managers and/or heads of agencies similarly situated and who are facing the same predicament. With this, managers and/or heads of agencies would be able to adopt the proposed approaches contained in this study and will help them in making the crucial decision as to the employment of the worker.

2. The Case

This part contains the background information that describes the participant involved in the case. In addition, the development of the case narrates the infraction done by the case participant.

2.1 Background Information

The respondent in this case study is a government employee of a particular local government unit. For the last five years in the government service, she has not been charged with an administrative offense or implicated with acts in violation of the Civil Service Law. This is the first time that Ms. Respondent is being dragged into controversy and was not escaped from the filing of an administrative complaint initiated by the disciplining authority (DA). The source of the facts which was made as the basis for the filing of the case is an Informant. The information was validated through secret surveillance. Video surveillance is a common technique employers use to monitor employee activities in the workplace. Many employers use video surveillance to minimize employee misconduct. Video monitoring can also provide evidence of a crime if one were to occur at the worksite (Sreenu, & Saleem, 2019). Meanwhile, the head of the local government unit concerned is a local executive clothed with authority to discipline his subordinates. His authority to discipline is attached to his authority to appoint. He has disciplinary jurisdiction and may cause the filing of administrative proceedings against erring

officials and employees who may have committed an offense in the performance of their official duties.

2.2 Development of the Case

It was observed during the periods from March to April 2017, that Mr. Informant was ordered to conduct surveillance and monitor the activities of Ms. Respondent. Thereafter, a report was made and submitted to their office. Mr. Informant claimed that on March 31, 2017, Ms. Respondent left the office on her way to her residence at 10:30 A.M. and back to the office at 12:30 noon without a pass slip. The report also says that on April 3, 2017, Ms. Respondent again left the office at 12:01 noon and was back from her residence at 1:30 in the afternoon. Mr. Informant likewise said that Ms. Respondent went to a department store for shopping on April 4, 2017, at 10:00 A.M. and was back at her office at 11:15 A.M. He added that Ms. Respondent had lunch with somebody at 12:50 P.M. and went back to the city hall at 1:45 P.M. on April 5, 2017. Continually, she did it again on April 6 and 7, 2017. The leaving of the office was done again at 10:30 A.M. and back at 12:45 P.M. and 11:30 A.M. and back to the office at 1:30 in the afternoon, respectively. Under these circumstances, Ms. Respondent did not secure pass slips.

Mr. Informant did not stop there. He again followed Ms. Respondent on April 17-28, 2017, and reported that Ms. Respondent habitually left the office during working hours and went to her residence and fast-food chains, respectively. Allegedly, it became a habit of Ms. Respondent. During all these times, Ms. Respondent never had pass slips as testified by the Informant in his report. The Human Resource Management Office of the agency, on the other hand, issued a certification upon request that there were no pass slips secured by Ms. Respondent on April 3-7, 2017, and April 17-28, 2017.

Consequently, on August 22, 2017, a formal charge was issued to Ms. Respondent charging her with loafing from duty during regular office hours and was required to file her answer within 72 hours from receipt of the same.

Thereafter, on August 24, 2017, Ms. Respondent submitted her answer alleging that entries in the logbook revealed that she was present at the city hall during the alleged hours. This is contrary to the report of the Informant. Moreover, she vehemently denied the charge against her and strongly refuted the allegations. She insisted that she had logged in and out of the biometric machine during the time that she was allegedly seen leaving the place. She argued that her Daily Time Record (DTR) showed that she was present at the city hall during the periods

alleged by the Informant. She further explained that there are times that she left for lunch since it is lunch break and back after 1:00 P.M., the same is reflected in the DTR. She said that she doesn't need to secure a pass slip during those times.

She also stressed that there were discrepancies in the report. For instance, it was reported on March 31, 2017, April 6-7, 2017, and April 24-26, 2017 that she left the city hall at 10:30 A.M. and back at 12:45 P.M. and 11:30 A.M. and back again at 1:30 P.M. almost of the same time. But the DTR showed that she logged out past noon and logged in before 1:00 P.M. Moreover, on April 20, 2017, a report that she had lunch with an unidentified woman is baseless, she was on leave during that time.

Although Ms. Respondent already explained her side, a resolution was still issued finding a prima facie case against the respondent for loafing. Mr. Disciplining Authority recommended that the administrative board convenes and proceed with the formal investigation of the instant case.

3. Analysis

The study utilized an observational research technique using a single case method where the participant was closely observed in the most natural settings in the workplace. With this, the presentation includes three parts. The first part discloses the problem and how the agency head displays the competence in solving the issue. The second part purports the alternative solutions, and lastly the decision arrived at to solve the issue on loafing.

3.1 The Problem

The main problem is the loafing of the employee and how the disciplining authority as the agency head or manager would react to the action of the employee. How will he deal with the situation taking into account that the respondent is a first-time offender and has not been implicated with wrongful acts in the past?

True, that the law on the matter classified the action of the respondent as loafing or unauthorized absences from duty during regular office hours but looking at the other side of it, the employee has been performing her job faithfully with a very satisfactory rating. This is shown in her performance document for the last ten years. It was calibrated and approved by the local chief executive himself. The respondent is well-known to the agency manager and has not been subjected to criticism for her work done. Her commitment and loyalty to the service and the

agency are manifested by her loyalty award given by the agency head. This is a recognition and acknowledgment of her contribution to the agency for the last (ten)10 years. But in one instance, her commitment to the agency is now held in question with the reports against her. The agency head is expected to take cognizance of this issue and shall deal with it according to the best solution to address it.

The majority of the problems that organizations face in terms of decreasing human resource productivity and increasing customer complaints about the high waste of time in receiving services from public organizations can be avoided by engaging in anti-production behaviors, specifically organizational loafing. As a result, it is critical to comprehend the factors that contribute to organizational loafing (Fathizadeh & Zabeti, 2021).

The alleged infractions of Ms. Respondent if proven true, may result in her suspension or dismissal as the case may be. However, in all instances of administrative cases, due process cannot be denied to the respondent. The right to due process should be at all times taken into account. Section 1 of Article 3 of the Bill of Rights of the 1987 Philippine Constitution states that “No person shall be deprived of his life, liberty or property without due process of law nor shall be denied of the equal protection of the law”. The due process clause applies to administrative cases such as in the instant case of the respondent.

3.2 Alternative Solutions

The most difficult part of the job of a manager is knowing that his subordinate could face the worst nightmare of her life. Letting an employee go or the least is suspension is a tough decision to make and it can be hostile to both of them. The Agency Head is expected to exercise carefully his authority and/or discretion in deciding the fate of an employee. This includes knowing the truth of the incident, considering the performance of the employee, knowing the gravity of the offense, and applicable mitigating circumstances among other things (Kelley & Simmons, 2019). In this instant case, three possible solutions are offered to solve the problem.

The first solution is to refer the case to the Human Resource Management Officer. It is part of the agency head’s delegation power. The HR Officer is responsible for the initial assessment of the behavior of the employees. The HR can get answers to the questions as to why, what, when, where, and how things happened. The HR officer is trained personnel and it is expected of him/her that he/she will do the job and recommend the best solution to the disciplining authority. The HR officer is considered an adviser, a friend, a pro-employee, and an

agent of the employees. He/she knows how to handle problematic employees, make an assessment of the behavior of the employee and determine the appropriate action to guide the employee to become effective in his/her work in the workplace. One of the strategies that may be adopted is to look at the performance behavior of the employee and determine whether or not her wrongdoings could be offset by her satisfactory performance, or at least mitigate the consequences of her action. Performance behavior is mandated by a person in authority . To avoid a general decrease in the personal effort toward individual tasks, performance behavior should be investigated (Praveen & Connie, 2008) (Nilsen et al., 2014).

The social psychology literature suggests that one source of legitimate authority is trust, which in turn develops out of a perception that an actor is fair, knowledgeable, and/or competent (Espeland & Sauder 2007; Rieh, 2002; Wilson, 1983). Social loafing leads to an overall reduction in the personal effort towards– individual tasks (Praveen & Connie, 2008; Nilsen et al., 2014).

The second solution is to determine the root cause of the behavior deviance of the problem employee and suggest an alternative course of action. The Head of Agencies should not only inquire about what the employee did that brought her into this mess but why she was able to do this. They may look at the factors why she did it, which may be because of poor employee monitoring. The question is the type of monitoring that is acceptable. A report by the U.S. Office of Technology Assessment defines computerized performance monitoring as, “the computerized collection, storage, analysis, and reporting of information about employees' productive activities” (Peters, 1999). The practice of monitoring a company’s workers is a controversial practice that is undeniably on the rise (American Management Association (AMA) 2008). When it comes to the subject of employee monitoring there is a grey area; current laws mandate that monitoring is legal, yet the questions of effectiveness and ethics arise. Organizations must monitor employees to protect both the company as well as the employee, but organizations must also give diligent attention to the ethical treatment of employees (Bezek, Britton, 2001). Bhatt (2001) describes employee monitoring and knowledge management by pointing out that many organizations “believe that by focusing exclusively on people, technologies, or techniques, they can manage knowledge.” Such a strategy will not allow a firm to maintain a competitive advantage. Organizations must create an environment of accountability and transparency to operate effectively (Bhatt, 2001).

Conversely, there is the failure of the immediate head to constantly remind employees of the policies and rules and regulations relative to loafing or unauthorized absences during work because it may be due to the lack of awareness. The head of an agency may revisit the policy on loafing and adopt measures to eradicate this practice of the employees. It should not be at all times the fault of the employees because the management may be lenient in the implementation of the policy, and thus, an employee would think that she would not be sanctioned. Sometimes, the management must acknowledge its weakness and inability to implement its own rules and make the necessary correction because punishing an employee when the management has no moral ascendancy, is a disaster for the organization. An organizational factor could be the reason why an employee refuses to abide by the rules. One of the reasons is lack of accountability (Elias, Capri, Masicampo, Lara, Robert, & Steven (2017).

Another research has looked into accountability as a fundamental value for good governance in organizations (Norfaiezah & Ian, 2014). It is the most important requirement for public administration reform because accountability is one of the most important fundamental aspects of organizations that ensure proper performance (Tariq & Aini, 2018). It also gives stakeholders more oversight. Furthermore, it contributes to the effectiveness of administrators by requiring them to keep their agreements and perform to the expected standard. They must bear the consequences of failure as well. Accountability implies that work must be completed professionally. When responsibility is delegated to another member or an individual, the standard of responsibility rises, but accountability cannot be delegated (Stephen & Stephen, 2018). Organizational accountability can also play an important role in developing and sustaining individual trust by meeting their needs and expectations. Organizational accountability can also help to reduce information asymmetry, which can affect participation in the exercise and potentially be a barrier to confidence-building (Noel & Danielle, 2017).

The third solution is, instead of imposing a harsh penalty of suspension or dismissal as the case may be, it would be appropriate for the management to subject the problem employee to an intervention program that includes reorientation of the rules and regulations relative to unauthorized absences from work and/or loafing and some motivational training, and the like. This is a very common approach aligned with the human relations principle and compassionate justice. It acknowledges the employee's capability to learn, re-learn, and be trained. There should be a workplace-based intervention program that promotes company rules and regulation

compliance, employee productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency (International Organization, Summer 2019). This could reduce the probability of committing loafing or unauthorized absences.

3.3. Decision

After weighing all the alternative solutions, the writer came up with the decision to adopt the second alternative solution.

In the present case, the charge of loafing needs to be proven by substantial evidence and the decision cannot be made without regard to the rules on administrative cases laid down by the Civil Service Commission. It is promulgated to govern cases such as in this instant case.

Accordingly, in this modern times, dealing with a problematic employee can always relax the rules and insist on a more humane, reasonable, and morally upright decision. As explained in the Human Relations Theory of Elton Mayo, employees are human beings, and human problems require human solutions.

As the writer of this case study, it is suggested to adopt the three suggestions as it will be both beneficial to the agency and the employee. It will prevent strained relations in the workplace. Employees will be allowed to understand and value their importance to their organization, and that they could always be a part of an asset rather than a liability. The employee in this case study is not necessarily spared from the consequences of her acts. It is the most humane and compassionate decision (Cohen, Malka, Rozin, & Cherfas, 2004). She is given the chance to work again and be productive, effective, and efficient. This emphasizes sustaining the organization accountability which has to be monitored to have a consistent positive consequence towards increasing awareness and work productivity (Al-Jubouri, Alabassi, & Mohammed, 2020).

4. Intervention Program to Reduce Loafing

Organizational loafing refers to the concept that people are prone to exert less effort when working collectively as part of a group compared to performing a task alone. Social loafing is more evident in tasks where the contribution of each group member is combined into a group outcome, making it difficult to identify the contribution of a single person. Social loafing can be detrimental in workplaces. When everyone does not put in their full amount of effort because they are part of a group, this can lead to reduced productivity (Hoffman, 2020).

Social loafing can be limited by establishing individual accountability, minimizing free riding, encouraging team loyalty, and by assigning distinct responsibilities for each team member.

Establishing Individual Accountability. One factor that increases group productivity is when group members feel that they are being evaluated individually. Increasing identifiability, therefore, tends to decrease social loafing (Hardy & Latané, 1986).

Minimizing Free-Riding. Minimizing free-riding is another important step that groups can take to decrease work loafing. Free-riding refers to situations in which group members exert less effort because others will compensate for them. When group members are unable to free ride, work loafing decreases because group members feel more responsibility (Kerr & Bruun, 1983).

Assign Distinct Responsibilities. Assign separate and distinct contributions for every team member. Without distinct goals, groups and group members drift into the territory of loafing with much more ease. Setting clear goals helps group members to become more productive and decrease loafing (Harkins & Szymanski, 1989). The goals also must be attainable; they should be not too easy, but also not too difficult.

Encouraging Team Loyalty. Another factor that can greatly affect the presence of loafing is involvement in the group. When group members feel involved and invested in the group, they tend to be more productive (Stark, Shaw, & Duffy, 2007). So, increasing involvement in the group can encourage team loyalty and decrease social loafing.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The reinforcers of loafing such as incompetence of managers and physical and mental problems of employees lead to organizational loafing and will have many negative consequences for the individual, group, and organization. Considering that both parties, the employer and the employee are not paying much focus on organizational performance, subsequently loafing took place. With this, settlement is needed to maintain a good organizational relationship. One of the key indicators to the success of the organization is understanding and forgiveness. The limitation of the study is that it covers a single government agency and involves only a participant. As a result, some issues discussed will not hold to other organizations. Moreover, the study lacks the

categorization of the negative effects of loafing based on emotional dimensions. The result may be used as a takeoff for further study.

The scope of future research may include the right workshop program and conduct of work evaluation after its process is an important factor, and it also can be added to its individual annual report.

As public-sector employees, there is a need to adhere to informal, official, decision-making, and process accountability. It improves group cohesion and has been shown to reduce and eliminate social loafing. Organization accountability can increase awareness of the importance of workplace performance and can contribute to sustaining motivation and avoiding social delay.

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