

Milgram experiment

[Business](#), [Business Ethics](#)



Stanley Milgram, a famous social psychologist, and student of Solomon Asch, conducted a controversial experiment in 1961, investigating obedience to authority. The experiment was held to see if a subject would do something an authority figure tells them, even if it conflicts with their personal beliefs and morals. This experiment brought uproar amongst the psychological world and caused the code of ethics to be reviewed and ultimately changed. In the experiment subjects were asked to administer shocks ranging from fifteen volts to four hundred and fifty volts to actors, who the subjects thought were also participants in the experiment. The actors did not receive any shocks, but acted as if they were being hurt by the voltage. The actors were asked to answer questions, and when an incorrect response was given the subject was told by the experimenter to give the actor a shock. (Voltage increased after each wrong answer). After a dangerous level of voltage was applied, the actors screamed out in pain, and then fell to the ground, not responding to the experimenter or the subject. Many subjects were said to show signs of distress at this point, but after being prompted by the experimenter to continue on with the experiment, and increase levels of voltage, they did. After the experiment subjects were debriefed, and told that the participants they administered shocks to were actually actors. The subjects realized the cruelty of their actions and some suffered emotional break downs. Because of the stress that a lot of the subjects experienced after the experiment, the experimental code of ethics was placed under review. The clause ' no mental harm should come to participants' was added to the ethical code.. Milgram's experiment showed that when placed in a situation of pressure, people tend to conform to the requests of an authority

figure, because they would have no responsibility over their own actions by obeying commands. Even though some subjects stopped to question the experiment, they still carried on administering shocks, which were highly dangerous and potentially deadly to the actors, simply because someone in charge told them to do so. Milgrams experiment was seen as unethical because the subjects were tricked into thinking that they were actually hurting an innocent human who had told them that he had a previous heart condition. This caused trauma to some subjects that experienced great emotional strain after the experiment as they realized that they would have been responsible for possibly taking away someone's life if the situation was real. I suspect that the subjects continued on administering shocks, even when the actor appeared unresponsive, because they felt free from their responsibilities as human beings. As long as someone else was able to take the blame for any consequences that may arise, the subjects were willing to continue the experiment. However, when faced with the reality that they would have been responsible for hurting an someone, granted the situation was non-experimental, they realized how sadistic they could be. The code of ethics had to be established to protect subjects from such mental anguish.