

# Concepts of workplace ethics



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## Workplace Ethics

### Abstract

Every day in our society we deal with ethical issues that affect our professional workplace and some of those ethical issues are quite serious, however; the issues are all in some violation per the American Psychological Association (APA) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct. A few of the ethical issues presented can be as meniscal as taking home office supplies, having one too many complimentary snacks or sodas during the day or even taking something home. Some of those issues you may not think as being unethical but there are many others that are quite serious and have consequences. These ethical issues can be described as taking credit for someone else's work, spending personal time utilizing company time (being a time thief), the power struggle between men and women and sexual harassment. We deal with ethical dilemmas every single day in this world and it is important to understand which ones hold more weight over another. In this paper, we will gauge our level of ethics based upon the severity of the issue.

*Keywords: ethics, sexual harassment, time thief, personal time, dilemma*

### Workplace Ethics

The information found within this paper has been previously written by me and even though my position has not changed towards sexual harassment, the power struggle between men and women, and using personal time on company time, the view I have chosen to take is the view of what society has

in perspective towards these topics. In our society, workplace ethical issues do exist, in fact, those exist in many professional work settings though we may not always be able to decipher what is or is not ethical. We are all human and it is easy to make mistakes though some are much more serious than others. There are many workplace ethics issues in our daily lives however; I will be discussing some of the most common workplace ethical violations: sexual harassment, the power struggle between men and women and utilizing company time for your personal time (being a time thief). We often spend many of our waking hours in the workplace therefore; some ethical dilemmas are bound to appear and as a society today, we must find a way to incorporate ethics into our everyday life.

### Sexual Harassment

It happens every day. That is a statement that we should not equate to sexual harassment. It happens every day. Sexual harassment happens every day whether we are naïve, ignorant or in denial because you don't want to believe it's truth. In our modern-day world, sexual harassment often happens in the corporate world, at the grocery store, at a fast food joint, at a hospital, at the university, in a home, on a bus, so everywhere every day in any environment and any demographic. We have all seen those Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) work posters within workplaces that outline sexual harassment, policies, employee rights and workplace ethics. So, it brings me to my point. What is society's view towards sexual harassment in the workplace? Within the past few years, sexual harassment has been much more of a buzz word and is often heard but rarely really spoken of, until recently. The #MeToo Movement which launched in October

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2017 mostly via social media, works to help bring awareness to victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault especially in the workplaces.

In an article from the Psychiatry Investigation, “ about 30% of women and 4% of men among U. S. academic medical faculty members reported experiencing sexual harassment” (Lee, 2018, p. 433). According to the APA Code of Ethics pertaining to Section 3. 02 and 3. 03, “ psychologists do not engage in sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is sexual solicitation, physical advances, or verbal or nonverbal conduct that is sexual in nature, that occurs in connection with the psychologist’s activities or roles as a psychologist” (Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, 2017, n. d.). A case example from our text, *Ethics in Psychology and the Mental Health Professions: Standards and Cases*, Case 10-54. Dr. Thelma Flitty, Ph. D., had a very fond attraction toward supervisee Jack Frost and was not afraid to express her flirtation towards him. Even though Dr. Flitty had a constant sexual contact with Mr. Frost, it seems very certain there is a sexual chemistry. Mr. Frost verbally expressed his discomfort though this did not stop the harassment. There is a line between being a nurturing and caring doctor for the patients however; this crossed that line ( *Ethics in Psychology and the Mental Health Professions: Standards and Cases*, 2016, p. 341). Within the workplace, sexual harassment is a very serious matter and has been handled quite lightly over the years. It is common for sexual harassment to involve power and it’s generally non-reciprocal but there are some that may expect women are the pseudo victims of this harassment since men typically hold higher a power status.

In recent findings according to the Equal Employer Opportunity Commission (EEOC), harassment can occur in any workplace setting and may include “offensive jokes, slurs, epithets or name calling, physical assaults or threats, intimidation, ridicule or mockery, insults or put-downs, offensive objects or pictures, and interference with work performance” (Harassment, EEOC). Harassment is not to be tolerated and the employer could be held liable if a negative action is being brought forward within the company using a whistleblower line. There are some employers that have taken it upon themselves to incorporate additional information specifically for sexual harassment and the ethical dilemmas that arise. When implementing policies, sexual harassment is an issue that is widely spread and needs to be talked about more frequently since it happens in our society so often. Over time, sexual harassment has taken another meaning when it comes to fulfilling your job and doing the extra necessary things to ensure you keep your job. There are often times when men and women have very different feelings towards the definition of sexual harassment or what is being flirty, forward or kind. According to the U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), sexual harassment is against the law. Sexual harassment is also “unwelcome or unwanted sexual conduct that is either very serious or occurs frequently. The harasser may be another employee, a supervisor, the company owner or even a customer. The harasser may be male or female. The sexual conduct can be verbal, physical, in writing or in pictures. Illegal sexual harassment creates a hostile or intimidating work place and interferes with an employee’s job performance” (U. S. EEOC (n. d.)).

There is often a double standard when it comes to sexual harassment and coincidentally the power struggle between men and women. When sexual harassment occurs within the workplace, there are some who believe it to be woman's fault for wearing clothing which provokes a man, and some think they are entitled to behave this way in close quarters with other colleagues. Both are false, both are wrong. We know this to be false, sexual harassment occurs between men and women, both can be victims, both can be perpetrators. Though, you do not often hear of a man being the victim, but this does happen, hence the double standard. According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, "1 of every 45 men will be sexually harassed in their lifetime" and 91% of the victims of rape and sexual assault are female, and 9% are male" (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015, n. d). According to an article from the New York Times, society is really out of sync with the notion of sexual harassment and happens to be the same towards keeping information suppressed from others. We encounter this a lot within the media space and celebrity lives or involving politicians. There are many times when information is suppressed because some people simply don't want to speak up for fear. The view of sexual harassment through my perspective of what society believes is "it happens but you just don't talk about it because then maybe the issue will go away". One very prominent topic in society right now are the scandals and allegations and truths behind celebrity injustice towards sexual harassment. From Harvey Weinstein and James Franco to Matt Lauer and now Brett Kavanaugh, these are all examples of celebrities faced with sexual harassment whether any are in fact true or not.

In order to change and execute sexual harassment in the workplace, it requires policies, procedures, training and education toward accomplishing a new mindset and shift in the norm. There is a large reason why this occurs in the workplace and that is because there is a “ general consensus that a lack of effective reporting systems is a major factor that drives sexual misconduct” (Lee, 2018, p. 433). Some companies have implemented a whistleblower line as part of their ethical practices yet there are many who do not feel comfortable reporting another for sexual harassment behavior. Others don't want to cause trouble between another colleague, so they don't report any misconduct.

The power struggle between men and women

When talking about sexual harassment, this can occur during a power struggle between subordinates, superiors or via quid pro quo harassment. This type of harassment is often assumed by a person of authority and they ask for something and in return a sexual favor. A case example from our text, *Ethics in Psychology and the Mental Health Professions: Standards and Cases*, Case 10-50, Professor Jerry Built, Ph. D., exhibited an attraction towards technical equipment supervisee, Dyna Graph and wanted a more flirtatious relationship in turn for supplies that Graph was needing. Built's requirement was for Dyna to “ be nice to him” and her job would be easier and supplies available although if his requirement wasn't met, she may lose her job ( *Ethics in Psychology and the Mental Health Professions: Standards and Cases*, 2016, p. 339). There is often a power struggle between men and women in society because in many cases “ men” were always in roles of power and women were at home or their subordinates.

In my opinion, no matter the position in power, men and women should hold the same weight as each other therefore; if one is acting in a negative nature toward the other, disciplinary matters must take place.

#### Personal Time on Company Time (Time Thief)

According to the APA Code of Ethics pertaining to Section 2.06 Personal Problems and Conflicts, “when psychologists become aware of personal problems that may interfere with their performing work-related duties adequately, they take appropriate measures, such as obtaining professional consultation or assistance, and determine whether they should limit, suspend, or terminate their work-related duties” (Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, 2017, n. d.). In our daily lives, when we are at work many hours of the day, it is easy to conduct various personal matters on the company’s time however; this is considered an ethical dilemma. I don’t believe that it’s really jeopardizing company resources while you make a doctor’s appointment from your office assuming you don’t spend hours doing this daily. I feel that if your business matters are not being overrun with personal dealings or bothering others, your tasks are being completed, and you aren’t putting anyone out mainly clients, there shouldn’t be any issues with the ethical dilemma. For our personal and work life balance to be successful and productive, it is important to have the flexibility to conduct these personal matters. I have used company time to conduct personal matters at times which equates to a very small percentage of my day in accordance to the hours I put in. It is healthy to take breaks from your desk, a bathroom break, lunch break and calm breaks. Productivity is important and to be productive, you need moments of stepping away from



the desk. Sometimes a break from the same monotony of the day is very necessary.

Then there are the people who abuse this and are spent scrolling through their feeds, taking longer breaks than others, having a longer lunch, and multiple smoke breaks. The point is their work isn't getting completed or is handed off to another person thus being an ethical issue. This behavior is disrupting, disrespectful and therefore; allowing these ethical dilemmas to become an issue. This work/life balance is very important in the working world. When there is this balance, both work life and personal life thrive since each is given the time it needs to function. Both are very successful, both flourish and both win at life. As adults, we do not need to be micromanaged so if you feel that you are abusing company time, make sure to limit your personal matters each day and prioritize the necessities. In most of the corporate ethics policies, there will be a paragraph outlining the use of company computers and personal time. This is information that should not be overlooked.

Within all the topics I have included: sexual harassment, the power struggle between men and women, and being a time thief which all incorporate the workplace and the values of what's right or wrong. In any situation, feeling comfortable and safe are requirements no matter what and when those are being threatened in any capacity, ethics are a concern to be aware of. There are many venues to bring awareness to sexual harassment which include your local or state legal authorities and occupational administration and your voice. Your voice is powerful, you can make a change by speaking up.

Overall, I have learned that not only my position on these workplace ethics topics matter but society's position and perspective on the topics matter.

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