

Enhancing ethical awareness in the APS



Australian Government
Australian Public Service
Commission

Reflecting on the Vodcast

Vodcast 5 – A Fine Pair

Individual values (private ethics), attitudes and behaviours can impact on working relationships and in turn influence the achievement of business outcomes for a workgroup. The Australian Public Service (APS) encourages cooperative and productive workplace relationships founded on a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.

Under the APS Values agencies have an obligation to provide a safe, harassment free, flexible and rewarding workplace. In turn, APS employees have an obligation to treat everyone with respect and courtesy, without harassment, contribute effectively to corporate management and obey lawful and reasonable directions.

This obligation extends to valuing differences between individuals and being mindful of the impact our actions may have on others. Different working styles form part of a diverse workplace that encourages the participation of a range of backgrounds, skills, talents and perspectives. A commitment to diversity does not, however, mean that any behaviour will be tolerated.

Where possible, when dealing with complaints about workplace behaviour, managers should assist the parties to resolve their differences and agree on ways of working together. Outcomes could be as simple as a clearer understanding of both parties' concerns, an agreement about future behaviour, improved work practices or an apology. If this approach is unsuccessful then a resolution may need to be pursued through more formal channels. It is important to remember that all complaints must be acted on promptly.

People's perceptions can differ about behaviour that is disrespectful or harassing. While differing work styles or behaviours must be respected it is important to recognise when this gives way to bullying behaviour. It is not acceptable to use offensive, belittling or threatening behaviour towards an individual or group of employees. If a harassment or bullying complaint has been made, managers have a responsibility to deal with the matter seriously and sensitively.

Relevant Values and elements of the Code of Conduct

- The APS provides a workplace that is free from discrimination and recognises and utilises the diversity of the Australian community it serves (s10(1)(c) of the Public Service Act).
- The APS establishes workplace relations that value communication, consultation, cooperation, and input from employees that affect their workplace (s10(1)(i) of the Public Service Act).
- The APS provides a fair flexible, safe and rewarding workplace (s10(1)(j) of the Public Service Act).

- The APS has the highest ethical standards (s10(1)(d) of the Public Service Act).
- An APS employee must behave honestly and with integrity in the course of APS employment (s13(1) of the Public Service Act).
- An APS employee must act with care and diligence in the course of employment (s13(2) of the Public Service Act).
- An APS employee must, when acting in the course of APS employment, treat everyone with respect and courtesy, and without harassment (13(3) of the Public Service Act).
- An APS employee must comply with any lawful and reasonable direction given by someone in the employee's agency who has authority to give that direction (13(5) of the Public Service Act).
- An APS employee must at all times behave in a way that upholds the APS Values and the integrity and good reputation of the APS (13(11) of the Public Service Act).

Key issues

Simon's dislike for his colleagues' management style

Should Simon be more accepting of Chris' management style? What options does Simon have to resolve the issue? What help is available to Simon? Was Simon's discussion of the matter at a team meeting an acceptable approach?

Chris' management style

Is Chris being respectful of his colleagues? Should he be more compromising and change his management style to work more effectively with Simon? Could his behaviour be a breach of the Code of Conduct? How do you think Chris' team regards his management style?

Brett's role and responsibilities

Could Brett have done more to defuse or manage the emerging issues between Simon and Chris? What could he have done to prevent the problem? What assistance was available to him? What actions can Brett now take to manage the situation? What is the likely effect of the issue on the work teams and their outputs? What is Brett's role in the situation?

Tips

- As a manager ensure that your standards of expected behaviour are clear and understood by all. Use induction processes, team meetings and performance agreements to reinforce those behaviours.
- Consider developing with the team an agreed set of team behaviours that reflect and embed the APS Values and Code of Conduct.
- Consider agreeing with the team an acceptable process for providing regular ongoing feedback to each other.
- Discuss your agency's harassment and bullying guidelines and check that staff are aware of them and know how they apply.
- Arrange for a presentation from the human resource area or an outside expert on

appropriate behaviour and respecting diversity at a team meeting.

- Consider mediation between the parties to agree upon a way forward.
- If a complaint is made act on it promptly (consult agency policies and guidelines and/or your agency's human resource area).
- Discuss the matter with the agency Harassment Contact Officer. They can provide information to employees, managers and supervisors about what is harassing and bullying behaviour and discuss methods or processes to resolve issues or complaints.
- Discuss appropriate standards of behaviour with your manager. Report unacceptable behaviour.

Useful references

APS Values and Code of Conduct in Practice: a guide to official conduct for APS employees and agency heads (Chapters 6 and 9)

www.apsc.gov.au/values/conductguidelines.htm

Respect: Promoting a culture free from harassment and bullying in the APS

www.apsc.gov.au/ethics/respect.html

Embedding the APS Values: Framework and checklist

www.apsc.gov.au/values/framework.htm

Comcare publication – Bullying in the workplace: a guide to prevention for managers and supervisors

www.comcare.gov.au/forms_and_publications/publications/safety_and_prevention/bullying_in_the_workplace