

CASE STUDY NO. 2 – THEFT IN THE WORKPLACE

DESCRIPTION¹

Wendy, a junior administrative officer, has recently joined the University in the Tibetan Studies Department.

She is having a discussion with a fellow worker and direct supervisor, Sharon, over a coffee at the local coffee house on campus. Discussions turn to the recent BBQ at Steven's place, a fellow staff member in that Department. Sharon indicates to Wendy that Steven does some work for a local child minding centre out of office hours.

Back at the workplace while working back late, Wendy notices on a couple of occasions Steven taking stationery items from the cupboard then placing them in his briefcase. On separate evenings, she observes him taking a three drawer filing cabinet and an older model (surplus) computer from the office. She does not say anything to Steve (or anyone else) at the time.

Wendy is stressed about the situation, so she raises the matter with Sharon who is dismissive and warns that if she pursues it, she could damage the friendships that she is making in the Department.

Wendy decides to take the matter one step further to John, Sharon's manager. John washes his hands of the matter, saying that he trusts his staff and makes them responsible for their actions. John then confides in Wendy that Steve is a recent widower left with two small children who is also dealing with a personal serious illness. Any action taken against him by the University could adversely affect him physically, mentally and emotionally.

Wendy is obviously unhappy with this outcome, and is left with a moral dilemma.

WHAT ARE THE RISK ISSUES, AND WHAT MEASURES COULD HAVE BEEN/SHOULD BE TAKEN TO PREVENT, MINIMISE OR MANAGE THEM?

Risk Issues

1. Possible major breaches of the University's Code of Conduct by multiple parties.
2. Indicators of a poor workplace culture, where people are discouraged or prevented from addressing, pursuing or disclosing fraudulent or inappropriate behaviour.
3. Staff may be encouraged to conduct themselves inappropriately if they see that this is the norm in the workplace and are never held to account for their behaviour.

¹ Adapted from the ATO's "Play it Again Sam" or "Judge for Yourself" Presenters' Guides.

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4. Financial losses from stealing/asset misappropriation in the workplace – possible criminal charges.
5. Staff frustration, anger, helplessness leading to physical, mental or emotional problems (Occupational Health and Safety issues).
6. Loss of confidence in managers and supervisors.
7. Poor management of staff leading to IR issues.
8. Adverse reputation effect should the outcome be reported in the press, or picked up by an external oversight body.

Measures (for complainants)

1. This is a potential serious staff misconduct issue involving multiple officers – both the person who has allegedly taken the items (Steven) and those who have been made aware of it but have done nothing (Sharon and John). Either seek advice from the Integrity and Standards Unit (ISU) or personally lodge a complaint via the Complaints Portal. Alternately, if you feel comfortable doing so, contact a higher level manager to discuss your concerns. Under the Complaints Procedures, a line manager is also required to formally lodge the complaint once they are made aware of it (if not already done so).
2. In relation to reporting possible staff misconduct, there are other options available to you (though it is preferable to report such matters internally wherever possible):
 - Personally notify the Corruption and Crime Commission (CCC) or another external oversight or regulatory body direct e.g. the Public Sector Commission (PSC); or
 - Make a protected disclosure under the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2003 (WA)*, via the University's Public Interest Disclosure (PID) Officer – refer to the Curtin PID webpage on the ISU website for more information.

Measures (for line managers)

1. Where staff are having personal problems that may be affecting their work performance, listen to them and provide guidance and advice. You should also recommend that they seek help from the University's Counselling Services, where necessary. However, you need to understand that personal problems of staff can never justify criminal or corrupt behaviour and once you become aware of a matter such as the one discussed above, it becomes your responsibility as a manager to do something about it.

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2. Manage staff in accordance with relevant People and Culture policies, procedures and guidance. Seek advice from People and Culture officers if necessary.
 3. Ensure staff have, where required, completed relevant online education modules e.g. the Code of Conduct module.
 4. Lead by example, act within the law and internal policy, and make it clear that you expect those who report to you to do the same. You (and your managers and staff) have a responsibility to perform work duties professionally and in accordance with the law and Curtin policy, both as public officers and as Curtin staff who are required to meet internal professional standards of behaviour described in the Code of Conduct.
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