CASE STUDY NO. 2 – THEFT IN THE WORKPLACE

DESCRIPTION

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. Major breach of the University’s Code of Conduct.

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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5. Staff frustration, anger, helplessness leading to physical, mental or emotional problems (Occupational, Health and Safety issues).


7. Poor management of staff leading to IR issues.

8. Adverse reputation effect should the outcome be reported in the press.

Measures:

1. Where staff are having personal problems that may be affecting their work performance, listen to them and provide guidance. You may also recommend that they seek advice from the University’s Counselling Services.

2. Manage staff in accordance with Human Resources policies and procedures. Seek advice from Human Resources if necessary.

3. If you are uncomfortable with the situation, seek clarification of your concerns but be aware of the limits to which you should investigate the matter personally. If necessary, seek advice from or make a report to the Integrity and Standards Unit or a higher level manager where there is suspicion of workplace misconduct.

4. In relation to reporting possible misconduct or improper conduct, there are other options available to you:

   • Contact the Corruption and Crime Commission or another external oversight or regulatory body direct (e.g. the Public Sector Commission, OAG or the Ombudsman); 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 website for more information.

5. Always act within the law – The University is a public authority operating within a state public sector legal and accountability framework and you have a responsibility to perform your duties professionally, both as a public officer and in accordance with expected internal standards of behaviour – again refer to the Code of Conduct.