

Accountability in Managerial Action



IAEA
International Atomic Energy Agency

Prevention of Sexual Harassment

Take responsibility

Be informed

Act with integrity

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Prevention of Sexual Harassment

Maria is a nuclear scientist who has been with the Agency for over 10 years. She manages a Unit of eleven people, including three Professional staff, five General Section staff and three interns. The Section Head, John, joined the Agency eight months ago. He previously worked in the nuclear sector in his home country, and is fifteen years older than Maria.

When he started, John set up monthly Section meetings on Friday afternoons, in order to easily transition to a regular social gathering to build team spirit. All staff attend the Section meeting, and the majority of the team joins for drinks afterward, starting in the VIC bar and usually moving to a local restaurant.

At a recent social gathering, after several drinks, John was overheard commenting on how his Section has the most beautiful interns in the whole Division, and he'll do everything he can to keep that record. Maria pulled him aside and said "you can't say that kind of thing here, it makes me uncomfortable to hear that." He rubbed her arm and, laughing, said "I'm only teasing Maria, you know you're the only one I have feelings for."

At a meeting the following Monday with all Unit Heads, John started the meeting by saying "I had a little too much to drink on Friday. I won't tell you what happened with me and Maria, I wouldn't want her to blush." There was an awkward silence, and everyone looked at Maria; nobody said anything. Maria told two of her P staff, Ling and Ali, who were not in the meeting, what happened. They said they both have a good relationship with John, and it's probably just a cultural misunderstanding and a clumsy attempt at being funny. Maria then questioned whether she was over-reacting or imagining things. Later, as she entered the kitchen to get some water, she overheard

John laughing and telling Ling "I have to send you this picture. I can't concentrate when she wears things like that." They stopped talking when they saw her; she didn't know who they were talking about.

After the Monday Unit Head meeting, one of the P staff in Maria's team told her that the three interns said that John often stopped by their shared office and asked about their weekend plans. They went on to say that once an intern told John she was going to Salzburg for the weekend, and John laughed and said "maybe we should go together, I've heard it's a very romantic city. Just don't tell my wife! Just kidding!". The interns all felt uncomfortable and started closing their doors, hoping he gets the message. John told Maria that he thinks one of the interns in particular, Ana, is excellent. He said that he wants to find some way to give her another contract so she can work closely with him on an upcoming project.

This was the final straw for Maria. She went to see her Director, also a woman, and explained what was happening. The Director listened carefully to everything Maria described and said "Look. Yes, the guy is a bit creepy. But I've dealt with this situation hundreds of times in my career. The best thing you can do is just ignore him - he thrives on the attention. I don't think he'd ever actually do anything."

Maria left the meeting disheartened, and approached her Administrative Officer to see if she could be reassigned to another position. The Administrative Officer had already heard rumours about John from someone in a different Department. One of the interns left Maria's Unit the following month, and in her exit interview report said that the IAEA was the most sexist and demeaning environment she had ever seen, and she would never recommend competent women to work here.

Key reference materials

- [Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service, AM.II/1, Appendix A](#)
- [Prevention of Harassment and Sexual Harassment Framework, AM.II/17, Appendix E](#)
- [Procedures to be Followed in the Event of Reported of Misconduct, AM.II/1, Appendix G](#)
- [Whistle-Blower Policy, AM.III/3](#)
- [OIOS Procedures for the Investigation of Staff Members, AM.III/4](#)
- [Standards of Conduct for Personnel Other Than Staff Members, AM.II/11, I](#)