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# WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT & ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE

JOB AID



**CDSE** Center for Development  
of Security Excellence

# INTRODUCTION

This job aid will provide information about the workplace environment and the concept of organizational justice used to refer to individuals' perception about the fairness of decisions and decision-making processes within organizations and the influences of those perceptions on behavior.

When an employee perceives that the organization is not being fair or organizationally just, it can impact his or her behavior and actions, contributing to the potential for insider threat risks. The organization's awareness of its workplace organization, how it operates, how it engages with

its employees, and its policies and practices can help prevent and mitigate any risks. Management and human resources teams who are well trained, proactive, and involved are essential and beneficial to organizations and often serve as the first line of defense to prevent workplace issues.

## WHAT IS A WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT?

Jennifer Herrity, a seasoned professional coach from the employment website Indeed.com, identifies a work environment as the setting, social features, and physical conditions in which you perform your job. These elements can impact feelings of well-being, workplace relationships, collaboration, efficiency, and employee health. Here are the significant elements of a work environment:

### Physical Environment

This element refers to the size, layout, and location of a workplace, whether work is conducted indoors or outdoors, the facilities offered in a workplace, and the furnishings used while working.

### Organizational Culture

This element refers to the way a company and its employees operate, including what effective communication looks like between different levels of staff, employees' perspective of company leaders, the company's goals, and what the organization values.

### Working Conditions

This element includes the formal terms under which staff members are hired, such as the rate of pay, contract of employment, and length of the workday. It can also cover recreational activities and other initiatives to promote a healthy workplace.



# WHAT IS ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Every organization has its own organizational culture, and smaller groups within the organization have their own subcultures. These subcultures arise from the engagement and operation of personnel within the sections and eventually become a part of the organizational culture. It is important to understand how the organization operates as well as the expectations and perceptions of employees. Your organization's beliefs and how its goals align with yours can be a substantial factor in your comfort in the workplace. Here are the significant elements of organizational culture:

## Code of Conduct

Some companies may explain their business culture in a formal code of conduct or provide guidelines for employees. These documents can have you following certain conditions when performing tasks as well as when interacting with coworkers, workplace leaders, and external stakeholders. These guidelines are often found in an employee handbook.

## Encouragement and Development

Some employers directly promote collaboration and teamwork, emphasize positive feedback, and consistently celebrate employees who succeed. Other employers may provide more constructive feedback to encourage employees to improve.

## Organizational Values

This refers to a set of values the organization seeks to advance through its work. While these values may not be discussed daily, they guide every task you do and each goal you set as a contributor to the organization.



# WORKING CONDITIONS

Organizations' working conditions may vary based on the focus and type of organization. In government, there may be on-site requirements, security requirements, safety requirements, remote and telework options, and so forth. The recent events of the pandemic made organizations rethink their business operating models and prioritize which workers were required on site as opposed to teleworking. Within DOD, employees may be required to work in secure facilities on tasks that require on-site work. In addition to the location, organizations have other elements that determine what the day-to-day may look like and how employment impacts areas of life unrelated to work. Some of those elements include:

## Work-Life Balance

The number of hours worked each week, and when, can vary depending on the role, organization, and industry. Some organizations may promote work-life balance by offering generous paid time off or flexible work schedules. Other employers may encourage employees to work overtime to meet deadlines or provide 24/7 service to clients.

## Terms of Employment

In addition to set hours, these terms may include whether your work is a temporary contract or permanent employment. This element may include benefits and paid time off stipulations as well.

## Workplace Safety

There are nationally mandated workplace safety regulations that all employers must follow. Your employer might display the regulations in public spaces to ensure all employees understand and adhere to them. Also, the safe use of equipment, as well as accessibility to exits, emergency equipment, and first-aid, impacts this element of working conditions.

## Healthy Lifestyle

Some employers may encourage employees to stay fit and eat balanced meals to improve their overall well-being. They may even stock healthy snacks, partner with a nearby gym, or host team events that incorporate physical activity.



# TYPES OF WORK ENVIRONMENTS

There are many different types of work environments that include a combination of physical components, organizational culture, and working conditions. What elements make for the best type of work environment depend on an organization's industry, the number of and types of employees, and the ideal environment the organization wants to cultivate.

According to the Holland theory of personality and job compatibility, some work environments may be a better match for certain individual personalities. When considering a work environment, discover the characteristics and values of your personality type to find one that best suits you. Personality-based work environments include:

## Realistic

This environment promotes physical activity and may be best for more kinesthetic employees, also called "doers." Those who work well in this environment are often skilled at and prefer using tools and working with their hands. Jobs with realistic work environments include those in engineering, maintenance, and construction.

## Investigative

This type of environment is built on critical thinking, experimentation, and problem solving. Much of the work in this environment involves gathering evidence, studying information, and learning as well as making conclusions. Employees who are "thinkers" can thrive in these environments, which are often found in careers like healthcare, engineering, and technology.

## Artistic

This environment encourages innovation and experimentation as well as personal expression. Artistic environments are often best for those known as "creators" who thrive in more flexible and emotional settings. Some careers that work best in this type are in fields like design, fine art, and performance.

## Social

This type of environment promotes communication, help, healing, and education between employees. Those who do well in this environment are often known as "healers" and have traits such as kindness, empathy, and compassion. Careers that typically offer social working environments include education, social work, counseling, and nursing.

## Enterprising

This work environment also involves communication but emphasizes guiding others toward goals. Enterprising environments are best for "persuaders" who thrive on competition and prefer to serve in roles that involve selling, convincing, and debating. Some careers that have enterprising environments include real estate, politics, public service, and sales.

## Conventional

This environment is built on specificity, predictability, and organization. Those who prefer traditional environments are often referred to as "organizers" and work best in settings that have clear order, encourage practicality, and value dependability. Roles that exist in conventional work environments include those in finance, assistant positions, and traditional office settings.



# COUNTERPRODUCTIVITY, HOSTILITY, AND GRIEVANCES

Now that we have explored what organizational justice is and why it is important to an organization and its workforce, let us explore some counterproductive workplace behaviors or markers. Hostile workplaces create cycles of incivility, and can result in organizational grievances. Counterproductive and hostile workplace behaviors can originate from managers, employees, and can even involve external parties that visit the organization. Grievances can also come from various sources via the organization's policies. In some cases, an organization that fails to address grievances could be held liable.

## Counterproductive Workplace Behavior

Counterproductive work behaviors are voluntary behaviors that harm organizations or the people working in them. Some counterproductive behaviors include destroying company property, calling in sick when not ill, insulting another employee, or stealing something from the employer. Other counterproductive behaviors are negative talk, dismissing or not taking tasks seriously or performing them in a counter-productive manner, and originating or spreading gossip or rumors. It is challenging for employees to take actions when they witness such behaviors,

as they may not want to get involved or view it as a temporary or one-time thing. However, the behavior can have harmful effects on others and the organization. When organizations become aware of such behavior, they must determine the source and how to deal with it effectively. The organization has to also determine if the behavior violates any organizational policies or is illegal and take the appropriate action. Actions can range from a conversation with the employee to termination or even referral to law enforcement.

## Hostile Workplace Behavior

Hostile workplace behavior is very serious and can severely and negatively impact the organization and employees if not addressed immediately. Some hostile workplace behaviors include sexual or racial harassment, which are two things that always create a hostile environment for employees. Other hostile workplace behaviors are bullying, discrimination of any kind, consistent aggressiveness, ridiculing or victimization, or using complaints and threats as punishment.

## Grievances

A grievance is generally when an employee claims they are adversely affected by the misinterpretation or misapplication of a written company policy or agreement. An employee may state their grievance in a conversation or formally and documented in writing. Organizations address grievances via their grievance procedures that normally include management and human resources. Grievance procedures may include other sections as applicable, such as employee relations, equal opportunity, and others who may be able to contribute information that is beneficial to addressing and resolving the grievance. The grievance policy must ensure employees are treated with fairness and offer transparency. Action must be timely, appropriate, and fair. Failure to do so may create more or larger problems in the workplace on multiple fronts – from low staff morale to legal action. Organizations should be aware that sometimes a grievance will be raised in an informal manner, and the employee may not want a formal investigation. However, depending on the type of grievance and its seriousness, the organization may need to follow a formal grievance procedure, such as in the case of sexual harassment or physical abuse. In some cases, the matter may require referral to external parties such as law enforcement.

## Training and Awareness / Audits and Assessments

The organization should have a grievance policy that has been vetted and approved by the organization's human resource and legal offices. The policy should be available to all employees and incorporated into the organization's training and awareness program. Employees should not only be

aware of the policy but also know how to recognize and respond to concerning behaviors. Additionally, the organization has to demonstrate that it takes such behaviors and grievances seriously through demonstrative actions recognizable to the employees. The organization should conduct regular self-assessments and audits of its organization or even consider using a third party to

avoid any organizational bias. The assessments and audits may include sensing sessions with employees, evaluation and execution of the organization's policies and training and awareness, and examination of the organization's documentation regarding actions taken with respect to grievances.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE RESEARCH

Organizational justice research focuses on the role of fairness as a consideration in the workplace. Numerous studies suggest that fairness affects employee job satisfaction, organizational commitment, sabotage, turnover intention, stress, organizational citizenship behavior, job performance, and trust.

Organizations that promote a positive workplace environment

and take a proactive, preventative approach to mitigating issues are likely to experience fewer negative workplace events. By contrast, research on insider events consistently indicates that negative organizational interventions after employees have displayed concerning behaviors can escalate rather than mitigate the problem. This was particularly the case when an

employee was rapidly terminated without sufficient evaluation and assessment of risks of retaliation against the organization. Organizations that have the capability to assess insider risk prior to management intervention and that use the assessment process to design risk mitigation plans for potential insider threats will be better able to minimize insider risk.



## CONCLUSION

There are many complexities to workplace environments to include the personnel themselves, policies, practices, the type of organization, locations, and the perceived expectations regarding all facets of employment, such as assignments, projects, location, furnishings and office space, promotions, monetary or other compensation, and even title and status. Understanding

the complexities of workplace environments and the concept of organizational justice can help an organization avoid issues and mitigate risks within. A holistic or multi-disciplinary counter-insider threat or risk mitigation program should have management and human resource personnel take the potential impacts of workplace environments into account.

# QUESTIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS REGARDING WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT & ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE

1. How would you describe your organizational culture? What are some aspects that make up the culture? Are they organization-wide or does it vary by location, section, and division?
2. How has your organization handled or changed since the increase in telework or remote work due to the pandemic?
3. What are some measures your organization has in place to promote fairness in the workplace to include work-life balance measures? What policies are in place, and are employees able to seek assistance if needed?
4. Are assignments, promotions, compensation, and other benefits applied consistently and fairly across the organization? Are there clear policies that address these and allow employees to seek redress or file complaints if necessary?
5. Are the management team and human resources involved with policy decisions and engaged with employees to address perceived organizational justice issues?
6. Does your organization have a counter-insider threat or risk management/mitigation team to address potential issues? How do employees report issues? Are actions taken when necessary?
7. Does your organization conduct training and awareness regarding workplace environment and organizational justice-related topics?



# WHAT ARE SOME MEASURES YOUR ORGANIZATION CAN TAKE TO MITIGATE POTENTIAL ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE ISSUES?

1. Apply fair and consistent policies across the organization.
2. Ensure the management and human resources teams are trained, engaged, and involved.
3. Provide training and awareness to address workplace environment and organizational justice topics.
4. Conduct assessments of your workplace environment and organizational culture, including the sub-organization level. This can be aided by random sampling or sensing sessions with employees.
5. Ensure your organization has a counter-insider threat or risk management/mitigation program that includes reporting, investigation, and referrals. Ensure employees receive training regarding potential risks to the organization and how to report those incidents. Create an environment of trust rather than distrust.



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Webinar: Maximizing Organizational Trust](#)

[INT270 Maximizing Organizational Trust eLearning](#)

[PERSEREC Insider Risk Evaluation and Audit Tool, Management Intervention, Assessment, and Planning section](#)

[PERSEREC Technological, Social, and Economic Trends That Are Increasing U.S. Vulnerability to Insider Espionage](#)

[The Relationship between Organizational Justice and Quality Performance among Healthcare Workers: A Pilot Study](#)

Salwa Attia Mohamed

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PMCID: PMC3997151

[The Effects of Organizational Justice on Positive Organizational Behavior: Evidence from a Large Sample Survey and Situational Experiment](#)

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