



Guidelines For Safe Workplace¹

Bahujan Economists

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Disclaimer: This document is *not to be* treated as a guideline on *How to Talk to Bahujan Colleagues* in workplaces. We are not ‘different’. The points noted here **should apply to everyone** irrespective of social geography. However, it is important to note that usually the defaults that exist in organizations are defined by people from privileged castes and communities, consciously and unconsciously. Small and basic changes in the structure can go a long way in creating a more inclusive, healthy and comfortable workplace. Often, employees from underprivileged backgrounds and communities feel they don’t belong, not because of incapability but out of the sheer lack of sensitivity among colleagues. Here we make a few suggestions in creating an accessible and safe workspace for everyone.

Professionalism without empathy is just about rewarding privileges.

A: Representation

1. Acknowledge/document the lack of (near absence of) researchers/employees as well as employers from Bahujan and specifically SC-ST communities and have targeted hiring processes in place. Afterall, selective progression is regression for all.
2. The best way to ensure a better work environment is increased representation at different levels of position (gender and caste-wise)- like hiring more managers and higher-level people from non-Savarna backgrounds.
3. The PoSH committee should have Bahujan women’s representation. If such representation is not possible from within the organization itself, external members should be appointed on the committee.

¹ We thank Adv Disha Wadekar for her valuable comments in preparing this document

4. The chairperson of the PoSH committee should be rotated after a set amount of time and Bahujan members should be given the opportunity to not only be a part of the committee but also head it.
5. Representation in promotion is a must to ensure substantive representation (and not just token representation) at all levels in the organisation.
6. At the field team level, there are no clear-cut rules for the promotion. These promotions happen on an ad-hoc basis which leaves a lot of room for exploitation and latent discrimination against members from under-represented communities.

B: Grievance redressal in the cases of caste based discrimination and harassment

1. Two types of discrimination take place at the workplace- first, that which attracts the SC,ST Atrocities Act. The second is more lateral and subtle forms of discrimination, harassment and victimisation, for which an active Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) that acknowledges caste-based bias is essential.
2. For the discrimination which attracts criminal law such as the Atrocities Act and IPC offences, the organization/institution should not shy away to file a complaint (given that this is the course of action the victim wishes to pursue. At all times, the victim's autonomy and decision must be respected).
3. The importance of ADC cannot be emphasized enough. Workplace exclusion, subtle discrimination, harassment and victimisation, are widespread and yet unacknowledged. In the absence of any support and acknowledgement of caste discrimination, the survivors suffer.
4. The responsibility to ensure a discrimination, harassment and victimisation free workplace for its employees is the primary responsibility of the employer.
5. ADC should comprise members from Bahujan communities and also have women from Bahujan communities.
6. There should be punishments clearly defined under ADC. Most of the time, such bodies act more like mediating channels, but that does not help survivors in most cases.

7. Any kind of small but material punishment towards abusers should be a part of the ADC, like a written apology (written by the defendant, not dictated by the committee), suspension of only the abuser and not the victim, salary reduction, stepping down from positions, and so on. The victim should also be consulted about the outcome/punishment.
8. Some examples of subtle forms of discrimination include using casteist slurs, disrespecting for availing affirmative action (reservation), making fun of accents, commenting on appearances or clothes and deliberately referring to people with their last names when they have not explicitly clarified that is okay for them, and so on. Unlike western cultures, last names come with casteist prejudices.
9. The committee should give a fair hearing to both sides and should also ensure a faster conclusion of the inquiry. The committee should acknowledge power dynamics and not indulge in moral policing.
10. During the pendency of the inquiry process, the abuser should be suspended or at least not be the immediate supervisor of the survivor. The safety and demands of the survivor should be given due consideration during the pendency of the inquiry process. The survivor should be given the option of taking a paid leave and free counselling sessions sponsored by the employer.
11. Witness Protection: Ensure confidentiality of all parties involved as it is difficult for survivors to complain due to fear of non-confidentiality.
12. Ensuring a functional and accessible PoSH committee as per the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. However, the definition of “Aggrieved” must be expanded to include members of the trans and non-binary communities.
13. PoSH inquiry reports must acknowledge the power dynamics involved in the case. It should not be limited to acknowledging gender, age, and seniority of the two parties but must extend to their caste identities.
14. Cases of harassment of field staff should be appropriately addressed. Their issues usually go unnoticed. They face more constraints than RA-level staff in reporting harassment. Organisation must provide a safe workspace to every member wherever they are or have to go in part of the employment responsibilities (any place visited by the employee

arising out of or during employment including transportation by the employer for undertaking such a journey – as mentioned in PoSH).

C: Sensitization

1. Orientations on PoSH and anti-discrimination rules must happen before new hires start work. This would ensure that it is clear to everyone how they should behave at the workplace, what their rights are, and what action can be taken against them in case of violations. These orientations should also include discussions on micro-aggressions. To ensure successful understanding and learning, these orientations and workshops should be open spaces where questions can be raised freely. As work-from-home is ongoing, such orientations and workshops should take this new remote setup into account when discussing these rules and acceptable workplace behavior,
2. All employees (including management level) should come together and do periodic discussions on gender, caste, and religion. These discussions can also involve watching movies, documentaries and reading and discussing books and articles. Sensitising the issue of casteism should not be the sole burden of the marginalised communities.
3. Sensitivity and workplace happiness/safety surveys should happen periodically (say, every two months) to spot any building issues early on. Aggregated results of these surveys can be shared organization-wide along with a discussion on steps needed to deal with any issues raised.
4. Employees should be able to access the following leaves freely, without shame, and without having to divulge more information than necessary.

-Menstrual leaves: there should be at least two to three days long leave granted to all menstruating employees.

-Leaves for transition surgery for trans employees

-Care leaves: Care work usually falls on women, especially from Bahujan communities.

5. Pregnancy/Maternity and Paternity leaves should be a part of the organization's policy too.
6. Workplace Interactions: There are also conversations about caste without thinking that someone from the other background is sharing the room. This leads to some discomfort because one becomes conscious about whether the colleagues know their caste or not. For example, discussions around reservations and other affirmative-action policies should not make people who have availed of such policies uncomfortable. They should not be forced to provide their views on such policies if they do not wish to, i.e. they should not be pointedly asked to present their opinions.
7. The sensitization should also happen at the field staff level. There is rampant normalised discrimination happening which becomes difficult to address at the individual RA level
8. Do not identify/refer to people with their surname
9. Moreover, when field team members go to the field, they need to be sensitized on how to behave with respondents. The surveyor-surveyee power dynamic is very real and needs to be addressed as well.
10. Social Interactions: The organization can make active efforts to organize socializing events that create an inclusive space. Example/Suggestions: (a) low-cost, daytime activities like a park hangout, (b) happy hours on Fridays in the office funded by the org, (c) semi-formal chats about the latest developments in research. The goal is to create a space to socialize after work that is not cost-prohibitive or exclusionary. While work from home is ongoing, points 2 and 3 can be conducted remotely over Zoom/Meet.
11. Promote sensitivity towards and inclusion of diverse food cultures and practices. Discriminatory rules (written or unwritten) around the use of common utensils, microwaves, or other appliances at the workplace should not be condoned. Proactive inclusion and acceptance can be fostered through the employer organizing meals that are reflective of the food practices of all employees. Any cases of food allergies or other intolerance to food items of individual employees should be treated as exceptions that do not lead to generalizable rules or norms.

D: Work Tasks

1. **Work Task Allocation:** Ensuring that Bahujan people are not assigned only responsibilities of training or managing field teams. They should be given data cleaning and analysis tasks (everyone should rotate across different work tasks).
2. **Data Experience:** A data cleaning class would be beneficial. Young employees working with data for the first time do not know Stata or R very well. A certain amount of time should be devoted to training young employees with little experience in data cleaning and analysis.
3. Field team members should also be given the opportunity to improve their skills in software (excel, STATA). Invest some time on human capital and not be dependent on the privilege of the employees.
4. **Manager Interaction:** Regular work tasks focused check-ins with the manager help understand that one can reach out to the manager for guidance or support.
5. **Time-sensitive/Efficient Allocation:** This leads to trade off skewed against marginalized students most of the time. Exposure to certain fields leads to some people getting more exposure to work which is considered more 'serious' in the job market and allows them to speak more.
6. **Patience:** Interns and RAs will make mistakes. While this is understood on paper, in reality, there is sometimes little space given to interns and RAs to make mistakes. Often errors can mean losing out on further opportunities. For example, if someone makes mistakes in a data cleaning task, they might fear losing out on other and more complicated data cleaning opportunities. Such cases should be avoided, and people should feel free about owning mistakes. Such an atmosphere will help them learn better.
7. **PI Interaction:** Equal chance should be given to everyone to interact with researchers/Pis.
8. **Mentorship:** Preferably, the interns should have a contact point to discuss their career goals. Apart from the supervision of their work, it is vital that the interns can utilize their internship experience to define and advance their career trajectories. Discussions on potential career options in research, consulting, how to network, and reach out for

guidance are some of the areas that the organization can emphasize when creating interactive platforms for the interns.

E: Work from home

1. **Internet and Connectivity:** The issue of access to the internet and good connectivity is real, and this is the reality of most of the employees from non-metropolitan cities. Wi-Fi solutions such as internet dongles/JioFi should be provided to employees or compensated for data used along with call charges.
2. **Work Timing:** This should be decided mutually, keeping in mind issues arising from working at home and time differences with PIs based outside India.
3. **Place/Equipment to Work:** Organisations should compensate employees for equipment required to set up places to work at home. This would include a desk, a chair, and internet, headphones, etc.
4. **Camera:** People should not be forced to turn their cameras on during meetings. People can be asked whether they would be comfortable with keeping their cameras on during meetings beforehand to avoid discomfort during meetings.
5. **Right to Disconnect:** Employees should not be expected to be available by email or text for work-related communication after working hours.
6. All the points mentioned above about ADC, PoSH, and sensitization should apply in the WFH setup. Discriminations and harassment do not need physical presence to take place.
7. **Professional Mental Health support:**
 - Mental health support should be a part of health care plans
 - There should be caste-informed therapists on-call for people who want to access them.
 - People should not be discriminated against (in terms of work allocation, promotions, etc) on the basis of mental health issues
 - Organizations should ensure that rates of burnouts reduce - ways to do this should be decided collaboratively with the entire team.
 - Immediate help should be provided to all employees (specifically focusing on field team members) who face harassment or violence while on the field.