

10-2-2015

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Recommended Citation

Boersma, Kees (2015) "An Alternative to the Strictly Legal Approach on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: Giving Voices to Values," *Organization Management Journal*: Vol. 12: Iss. 4, Article 7. Available at: <https://scholarship.shu.edu/omj/vol12/iss4/7>

LINKING THEORY & PRACTICE

An Alternative to the Strictly Legal Approach on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: Giving Voices to Values

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This Linking Theory & Practice section contains an interesting article on organizational responses to sexual harassment. Although the legal environment so far hasn't found an adequate answer to the ways in which organizations address the problem of sexual harassment, the authors of the piece "Improving Organizational Responses to Sexual Harassment Using the Giving Voice to Values Approach," Stacie F. Chappell and Lynn Bowes-Sperry, ask attention for a new perspective based on organizational ethics. Their article draws on the Giving Voice to Values (GVV) approach pioneered by Mary Gentile and written about by her in this journal in 2012. Gentile's (2012) GVV does not by any means restrict itself to sexual harassment issues, but in their article in this issue, the authors utilize it to help make their points regarding the limitations of current training as it is commonly presented in many corporate and organizational settings.

Thus, the authors contend here that the main problem with the legal approach to dealing with sexual harassment on the organizational level is that the focus is on the implementation of organizational "solutions," such as training focusing on definition, policies, procedures, and legalities. Paradoxically, this results in protecting the already more powerful worker instead of protecting the less powerful. The legal procedures can be a threshold for those who want to discuss certain behaviors

at work that they label as sexual harassment. In other words, they might consider some behavior to be inappropriate but fear that they have misinterpreted the witnessed behavior and/or that it would not hold against legal definitions. This results in a Catch 22 situation in which the question of whether or not sexual harassment in the workplace exists is related to the legal structures that are part of the same power structures one wants to discuss. To overcome this paradox, the authors advocate the action-oriented approach labeled Giving Voice to Values (GVV). The GVV is a curriculum-based approach that hopes to enable a person's ability to recognize, learn, and give voice to moral values. Stacie F. Chappell and Lynn Bowes-Sperry convincingly show that this approach not only offers an alternative to the legal approach, but in fact expands the options to address sexual harassment in multiple ways. While sexual harassment in the workplace is still a pervasive problem, this is a contribution that will set the agenda for a more open dialogue on this sensitive issue.

REFERENCE

Gentile, M. C. (2012). Values-driven leadership development: Where we have been and where we could go. *Organization Management Journal*, 9(3), 188–196. doi:10.1080/15416518.2012.708854

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