

4th Edition

Newsletter

August 2025



AT A GLANCE

From the Founder's Desk

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The Astronomer “Kiss Cam” Controversy

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Empowering Leaders

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From the Founder's Desk

Dear Readers,

Greetings!

As a workplace ethics and PoSH compliance practitioner, I often reflect on how leadership behavior shapes organizational culture in powerful and sometimes unexpected ways.

As we reflect on recent conversations shaping global workplaces, the Astronomer CEO-HR episode reminded us why boundaries, ethics, and leadership accountability can't be taken lightly. This wasn't just a viral moment—it was a wake-up call for organizations across sectors.

This incident reaffirmed why we must continue to engage deeply with leadership teams on issues like power dynamics, consent, accountability, and the impact of perception in a workplace setting. These are not just “HR topics” — they are cornerstones of an organization's credibility and trust.

At **AD-roit LinkS**, we've always believed that prevention and awareness are better than cure. Last month, we had the privilege of conducting a comprehensive training session in **Kolkata** for **OIL India Limited**. The program focused on **leadership's responsibility in modeling respectful conduct**, clarifying, and reinforcing organizational values that promote dignity, inclusion, and fairness. The session focused on:

- Understanding harassment and sexual harassment in the context of the workplace,
- The leadership's role in upholding a culture of safety and respect, and
- Aligning individual behavior with the broader **values and ethics** that define an institution.

As we continue to support organizations across sectors in strengthening their internal mechanisms, this moment calls on all of us — especially those in positions of influence — to remember that **boundaries are not limitations; they are safeguards**. And leadership is most visible not in crisis communication, but in everyday choices that uphold fairness, integrity, and dignity.

Warm regards,

Leeza Dutta Singh

Founder, AD-roit LinkS

PoSH Compliance Specialist | Ethics Trainer | Workplace Governance Advocate



The Astronomer “Kiss Cam” Controversy

A Leadership Misstep and a Wake-Up Call for Workplace Ethics

By Leeza Dutta Singh 



In July 2025, Astronomer – a fast-growing US\$1.3 billion data infrastructure firm – found itself unexpectedly in the headlines for all the wrong reasons. At a Coldplay concert, the company’s CEO, Andy Byron, and Chief People Officer, Kristin Cabot, were caught on the venue’s “kiss cam” in a moment of personal intimacy. Within days, both senior leaders stepped down following an internal investigation.

While the incident played out publicly as an awkward and meme-worthy moment, its implications ran much deeper. It sparked important conversations across boardrooms, HR departments, and everyday teams – about professional boundaries, power dynamics, and the non-negotiable responsibility that leaders hold to model ethical behavior.

Why **Professional Boundaries** Matter – Especially **at the Top**

1. Trust is the First Casualty

Senior leaders represent not just the face of an organization, but its values. When they blur personal and professional lines, particularly in roles tied to employee welfare or governance, it erodes institutional trust. In this case, involving the head of HR – a role expected to be neutral and fair – only deepened the perception of bias and favoritism.

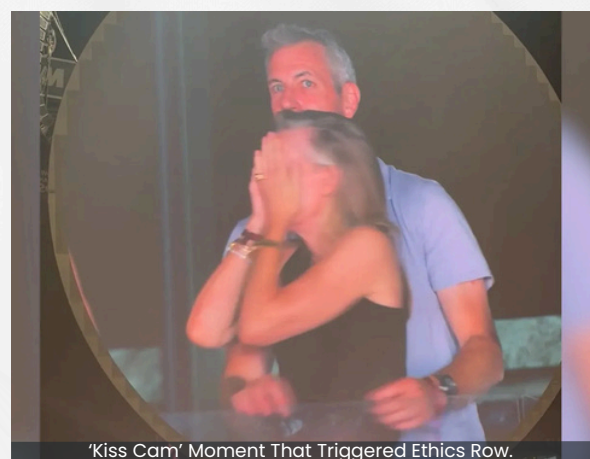
2. Perception Is Powerful

Regardless of intent, the public nature of the

interaction and the couple’s visible discomfort – covering their faces, pulling away – quickly became internet fodder. In today’s digital age, perception often precedes fact. The viral spread of such moments creates reputational noise that even the most well-intentioned crisis communication strategy struggles to silence.

3. Power Dynamics Cannot Be Ignored

When a CEO is involved with the Chief People Officer, even a consensual relationship is complicated by hierarchy. Employees may feel unsure about raising concerns, fearing partiality or inaction. It can compromise grievance redressal mechanisms and erode the very structures meant to protect workplace safety.



‘Kiss Cam’ Moment That Triggered Ethics Row.

The Ripple Effect: Beyond the Headlines

1. Organizational Disruption

- **Leadership Void:** The sudden exits left a vacuum at the top, with co-founder Pete DeJoy stepping in as interim CEO. Such transitions, however swift, can unsettle strategic continuity.
- **Trust Deficit:** The incident shook employee morale and investor confidence. Analysts warned that reputational setbacks could hurt future funding and long-term growth.

2. Reputational Fallout

- **Media & Meme Storm:** The moment became a spectacle – discussed not for its business value, but for its virality. The company's core mission got drowned in noise.

- **Damage Control:** Astronomer brought in celebrity influencer Gwyneth Paltrow in a video campaign, attempting to shift attention back to its product suite. Ironically, website traffic surged – but for the wrong reasons.

3. The Human Cost

- **Family Impact:** Both Byron and Cabot are married. Byron's wife, Megan, reportedly distanced herself publicly and privately. Sources suggest family upheavals on both sides, a reminder that public missteps can tear into private lives.
- **Personal Disintegration:** Behind the boardroom fallout were real people grappling with emotional and relational loss. As much as this was a governance issue, it was also a human one.



Leadership, Culture & Governance: Where It All Converges

Ethical lapses at the top don't just violate rules – they influence culture. Employees look to leaders not just for direction but for demonstration. Culture doesn't shift because of policies alone; it reflects how consistently leadership walks the talk.

- **Culture is Top-Down:** If boundaries blur at the top, they disappear elsewhere. Organizations need a clear Code of Conduct that extends to off-duty behavior where it intersects with brand reputation.

- **Governance Is Your Compass:** Robust policies on conflict of interest, whistleblower protection, and leadership accountability must be real, enforced, and revisited regularly.
- **Legal Lens – The PoSH Perspective:** In India, the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PoSH) Act mandates safe and unbiased workplaces. While this incident may not fall under sexual harassment per se, the principles of fairness, role clarity, and power neutrality apply. Globally, similar frameworks underline these responsibilities.

PoSH-Aligned Do's and Don'ts for Organizations

DO'S

- Encourage reporting – even when it involves senior leadership.
- Regularly train employees (including leaders) on ethics and boundaries.
- Ensure neutrality – HR should stay independent of leadership influence.

DONT'S

- Don't allow romantic involvement between individuals with supervisory or HR authority.
- Avoid public conduct that could invite rumors or misinterpretation.
- Don't ignore viral or internal gossip; address it transparently and swiftly.

Policy Recommendations for Ethical Workplaces

- *Clear Policy on Leadership Relationships:* Organizations must be upfront. Romantic or sexual relationships between top-tier leadership roles – especially between evaluators and the evaluated – should be strictly avoided. Even consensual relationships can raise doubts of fairness.
- *Social Media & Public Conduct Guidelines:* Executives need clarity on how public appearances and social media presence reflect the company. Personal actions can unintentionally become brand statements.
- *Crisis Communication Playbook:* A proactive strategy helps manage the unexpected. Clear protocols for internal updates, public statements, and leadership accountability are a must.
- *Independent Ethics Panel or Ombudsperson:* Especially for issues like PoSH or other sensitive complaints, an external, impartial body inspires more confidence than internal investigations – particularly when HR or senior leadership are involved.

The Humanitarian Lens: Why This Isn't Just Policy?

Strip away the titles, and this is a story about people. Two executives whose lives – and families – are altered. Employees questioning whether their voices matter. And an organization working to rebuild trust and credibility.

The lesson is not just about rules, but about the need for empathy and accountability to co-exist. Ethics isn't punitive; it's protective. And every policy has to consider the people it's meant to safeguard.

Final Thoughts: Boundaries Aren't Optional – They're Foundational

The Astronomer episode isn't an anomaly. It's a reflection of what happens when power, proximity, and privacy collide without clear boundaries. Leaders are

always under the microscope – not just for what they achieve, but how they behave.

In today's world, good governance goes beyond metrics and valuations. It's about creating workplaces where dignity, fairness, and professionalism are non-negotiable. Where leaders lead not just with strategy, but with self-awareness.

Because in the long run, a company's true value isn't just its product – it's its people, and the principles that protect them.



Empowering Leaders

Navigating Grey Areas of PoSH at OIL, Kolkata



Leaders and teams together — 80+ participants joined for a powerful PoSH training session.

Adroit LinkS recently conducted an engaging and thought-provoking Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PoSH) training session for Oil India Limited, Kolkata, with a special emphasis on leaders and decision-makers. While the session welcomed participants from all levels, the primary focus was on those in leadership positions, the individuals who set the tone for workplace culture and uphold compliance standards.

The training was designed not only to reinforce the fundamentals of PoSH compliance but also to equip leaders with the nuanced understanding needed to handle complex, real-world situations. This leadership-centric approach encouraged active participation and led to an exceptionally engaging Q&A session, where thought-provoking questions emerged and many of which addressed the grey areas of the law that leaders often encounter.

Some of the key questions discussed included:

- *Since the impact matters under PoSH and not intent, should we avoid complimenting a female colleague if she is dressing well or looking beautiful?*
- *In team WhatsApp groups, if positive quotes or poems sometimes reference a woman's beauty and someone feels offended, what should be done?*
- *If I genuinely like a colleague and wish to propose marriage and pursue her respectfully, can that be considered sexual harassment?*

...and many more

These questions highlighted a recurring reality that leaders, despite their experience, often face uncertainty when navigating sensitive interpersonal situations. Addressing these queries not only clarified the law's stance but also deepened participants' understanding of the importance of empathy, clarity, and policy awareness in leadership roles.



Meyabi Arho Niphi – CGM (HR & Learning)

The session concluded with a strong message that Creating a safe and respectful workplace begins with leadership and every leader must be equipped to handle sensitive issues with both legal precision and human understanding.

Ask the Legal Expert!

Your **legal queries**, addressed with **expert insight**.

Q. Is it true that PoSH is biased against men? Can a male employee file a case under PoSH?

No, the PoSH Act (Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act) is not biased against men; however, it is not gender-neutral and is designed exclusively to protect women from sexual harassment at the workplace. While men cannot file complaints under the PoSH Act, organizations are encouraged to adopt broader, gender-neutral policies that address sexual harassment cases involving all employees, regardless of gender.

Q. Is filing a false PoSH complaint punishable under the law?

Yes. The PoSH Act includes provisions to take action against false or malicious complaints. If, after investigation, it is found that a complaint was made with malicious intent or using false evidence, the Internal Committee (IC) may recommend action against the complainant as per the service rules of the organization. However, simply not being able to prove a complaint does not mean it is false—action is only taken when there is clear evidence of bad faith.

Q. Can IC members be sued if the complainant or respondent is unhappy with the outcome?

The POSH Act provides for appeals against the IC's recommendations. If either the complainant or respondent is unhappy with the outcome and they believe the process was flawed or the outcome unjust. They can appeal to the appropriate authorities, such as the employer, a higher authority, or a court or tribunal, depending on the specific situation and the applicable rules and regulations.



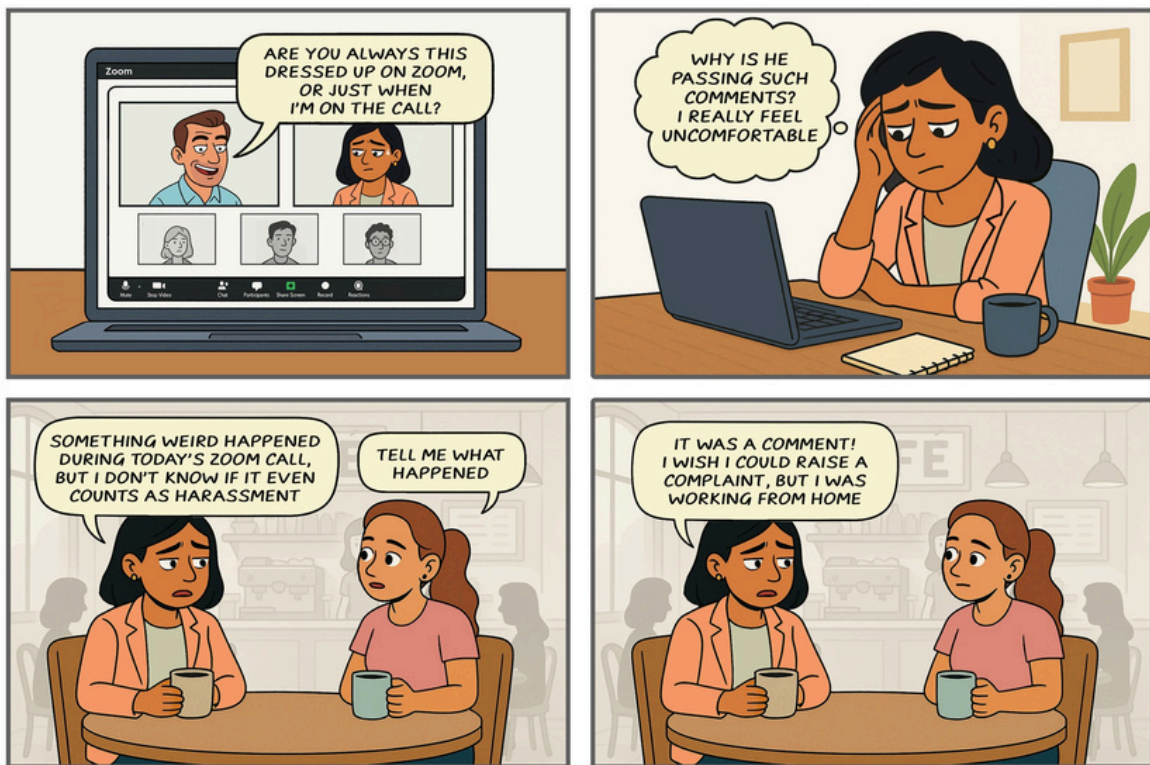
WANNA KNOW MORE ???

Send us your Queries at: leeza.singh@adroitlinks.com

SafeSpace Stories: Last Month's Comic

The **SafeSpace Stories Comic Strip** series is a creative initiative by AD-roit LinkS to spark meaningful conversations around workplace safety, dignity, and the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PoSH). Every month, we bring you a relatable, thought-provoking comic to help spread awareness in a memorable and engaging way.

What is Workplace under the PoSH Act?



Love our comics?

Follow us on **LinkedIn** to see every new SafeSpace Story and join the conversation about building **safer workplaces**.

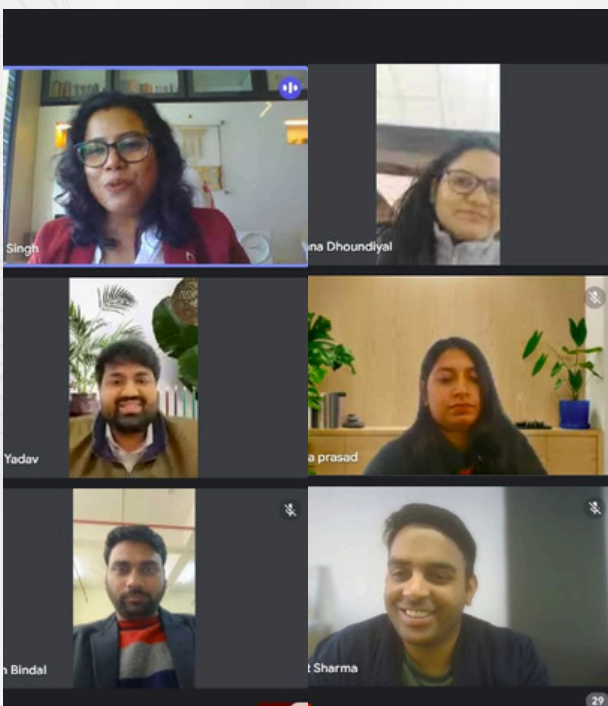
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Highlights in Frames



Travel for Work? A Perfect Work Life Balance!



Faculty Development Program for IILM University -
Learning Should Never Stop!



Vijay Mohan Bareja
DGM (Official Language) OIL Kolkata

What we offer:



PoSH & POC SO

Training & Awareness Programs



Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI)

Inclusive Workplaces



Code of Conduct (CoC)

Integrity & Behavioural Compliance



Employment & Labour Law

Legal Advisory & Documentation



Contract Management

Drafting, Vetting & Negotiation



Academic Institutions

Compliance & Protection Services



Consumer Law Matters

Advisory & Dispute Resolution



Anti-Bribery & Anti-Corruption

Ethics & Compliance Framework



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