New Dynamics

Policies and practice

Code of conduct: drafting guide and framework

Create clear conduct expectations, reporting routes and an adaptable policy framework.

Practical guidance · Worked examples · Printable worksheet

New Dynamics Editorial Team
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www.new-dynamics.com
contact@new-dynamics.com

Inside this guide

Read in order for the full approach, or use the linked contents to find a section. The final worksheet gives you space to record decisions and next steps.

Create clear conduct expectations, reporting routes and an adaptable policy framework. This practical guide to code of conduct policy brings together a step-by-step approach, illustrative examples, a reusable worksheet and answers to common questions. Start with the section closest to your current challenge, then use the working session to turn the guidance into a clear next action.

Make expectations understandable

A code of conduct explains how people should behave at work and where to seek help when something is wrong. It needs to cover everyday decisions as well as serious concerns. Define who it applies to and which settings are included, such as customer visits, work events and online communication.

This is a drafting framework. Have the relevant local HR or legal reviewer check it before adoption. Do not assume a single document can replace required local procedures or employment terms.

Draft a usable policy core

Purpose and scope: “Our organisation expects everyone covered by this code to act respectfully, honestly and responsibly in work-related activities. Managers are responsible for explaining the standards and modelling them.” Replace the organisation reference and define the covered population.

Respect and integrity: “We expect colleagues to communicate respectfully, protect confidential information, use company resources appropriately and raise potential conflicts of interest. Harassment, discrimination, retaliation and dishonest records are not acceptable.” Add examples that reflect your work and align the language with approved policies.

Advice and reporting: “If you are uncertain about a decision, seek advice through the designated channel. Concerns may be raised through more than one route, including an alternative when the usual manager is involved.” Insert actual contacts and an accessible route before publishing.

Explain what happens after a concern

State who receives a report, how immediate risks are assessed and how the reporter receives appropriate updates. Do not promise absolute confidentiality or a fixed outcome. Explain that information is shared only as needed for a fair response and applicable requirements.

Link to the organisation’s investigation, grievance, disciplinary and whistleblowing procedures where relevant. For a UK starting point, consult Acas discipline and grievance guidance. Local rules and circumstances determine the required process.

Worked example: a supplier invitation

Illustrative scenario: an employee receives an expensive invitation from a supplier during a purchasing decision. The code directs them to disclose the offer before accepting it. A reviewer who is independent of the purchase checks the organisation's gifts and conflicts rules and records the decision.

The useful part is a clear route before the employee acts. A vague instruction to "use good judgement" provides less practical support and makes inconsistent decisions more likely.

Policy completion checklist

- Define the people, activities and locations covered.
- Add work-specific examples for confidentiality, resources and conflicts.
- Insert named reporting channels and an alternative to the line manager.
- Explain confidentiality limits and protection against retaliation.
- Link to approved procedures and identify the policy owner.
- Record approval, effective date and next review date.
- Test whether a new starter can locate the right route in a realistic scenario.

Remove drafting instructions and unresolved placeholders from the organisation's final version. Keep a record of the approved version and the people responsible for maintaining linked procedures.

Introduce the code through real decisions

Use short scenarios in onboarding and manager discussions. Ask employees where they would seek advice and whether any route feels inaccessible. Monitor recurring questions to identify unclear wording.

Review the code when work arrangements, risks or applicable requirements change. A signed acknowledgement can record receipt; it does not demonstrate that people understand the standards or feel able to raise concerns.

Put the guide into practice

Set aside a working session with the people who own this process and one or two people who experience it. Use a fictional or appropriately authorised case, so the discussion can be specific without sharing unnecessary personal information. The purpose is to leave with a usable decision or document, not just agreement that the topic matters.

Prepare the case

Choose three ordinary decisions from the organisation’s work: accepting a gift, sharing a document and raising a concern. Ask a new starter to locate the relevant guidance without help. Note where the code uses an abstract principle but does not explain the next action or the right contact.

Write the starting assumptions down before discussing solutions. If the group disagrees on what happened, identify the information needed to resolve that difference rather than building a plan on an untested story.

Work through the decision

Draft a short response for each scenario using the proposed policy. Check that it names the decision owner and links to the authoritative procedure. Where an approval threshold or local rule applies, confirm it with the owner rather than inventing a convenient number for the example.

Ask each participant to explain the proposed decision in their own words. Differences in interpretation often reveal an unclear criterion, a missing responsibility or an instruction that will be difficult to follow.

Test an exception

Imagine the usual contact is implicated in the concern or the employee cannot use the standard digital channel. Test the alternative route. Check that the policy does not require someone to confront the person involved, reveal a concern publicly or navigate an inaccessible system before receiving help.

Record what changes in this situation and what remains the same. An exception should lead to a clear next step, with an owner, rather than an informal workaround that nobody can explain later.

Agree the handoff

Give managers an introduction plan based on the scenarios. Confirm who maintains reporting contacts and who receives questions about ambiguous wording. The final handoff should include the approved code, linked procedures and a record of changes needed in onboarding or other employee communications.

Finish by confirming the owner, the next action and the date when the result will be reviewed. Give the person receiving the work enough context to continue without repeating the whole discussion.

Frequently asked questions

Is a code of conduct the same as an employee handbook?

A code focuses on expected behaviour and the routes for advice or concerns. A handbook usually covers a wider set of working information, such as pay questions, leave processes and development. They can link to each other, but neither should duplicate detailed procedures inconsistently. Decide which document owns each rule and keep the employee's route to the current version clear.

Should every breach lead to the same consequence?

No generic guide can prescribe a universal outcome. The organisation needs an appropriate, fair process that considers the facts and applicable requirements. The code should explain the relationship with approved investigation and disciplinary procedures without prejudging individual cases. Seek local advice on the final wording and ensure managers know when a matter requires specialist handling.

How do we know employees understand the code?

Ask people to work through realistic decisions and explain where they would seek advice. Use questions from new starters and managers to identify unclear sections. Acknowledgement records show receipt, but understanding requires more than a signature. Review whether employees can use reporting routes and whether managers respond consistently when someone asks for help before acting.

Review the first cycle

Check the reliability of contact details, the accessibility of the document and the way managers answer common questions. Review recurring conduct concerns for lessons about unclear expectations or weak processes. Update examples when the organisation's work changes, while preserving an approved version history and appropriate confidentiality.

Keep a brief record of what was tried, what participants found useful and what needs to change. Compare the result with the original problem rather than judging success only by completion. If the process created extra work without improving clarity, quality or support, simplify it and test again. Share the agreed change with the people who will use it, and name the person responsible for keeping the guidance current.

About New Dynamics

New Dynamics connects goals, feedback, recognition and reviews around the way organisations work. This guide is published by the New Dynamics Editorial Team as part of our practical library for HR leaders, managers and People teams.

Use the examples and worksheets to structure your own discussions and adapt them to your organisation. Illustrative scenarios are not customer case studies. Policy and employment guidance needs appropriate local review before adoption.

For questions about this guide, corrections or a conversation about your performance management process, email contact@new-dynamics.com. Explore the complete guide library for related resources.

Your working worksheet

Use the prompts from this guide to prepare one real conversation or decision. Keep personal or sensitive information in your organisation’s approved records. This page is for your own working notes.

Define the people, activities and locations covered.

Add work-specific examples for confidentiality, resources and conflicts.

Insert named reporting channels and an alternative to the line manager.

Explain confidentiality limits and protection against retaliation.

Link to approved procedures and identify the policy owner.

Record approval, effective date and next review date.

Test whether a new starter can locate the right route in a realistic scenario.

Discuss your next step with New Dynamics: contact@new-dynamics.com