

Case Study Example - 3M

Text:

Lerner, S. (2024, May 20). Toxic Gaslighting: How 3M Executives Convinced a Scientist the Forever Chemicals She Found in Human Blood Were Safe. ProPublica.

<https://www.propublica.org/article/3m-forever-chemicals-pfas-pfos-inside-story>

Ideas for preliminary activity:

- map out gender dynamics at your workplace
- ethical dilemmas activity (what does it mean to act ethically): short workplace scenarios (stations in classroom) to give examples of how naturalized workplace structures make it hard to act ethically

Assignment:

1. Workplace problem analysis. What are the issues here? What is the dilemma(s) that Dr. Hanson and her colleagues are dealing with? What social norms of the workplace or the profession are contributing to the problem?
2. Macro-level context. What is 3M? What industry do they fit into, and what are some important hallmarks or facets of that industry? What is the company's purpose and goals? What is the scope and structure of their company, and how does that inform their work, their products and their purpose? What are the significant events or technological advances that loom large in their company's history? You will need to expand your investigation beyond the article in order to answer this question.
3. Vocabulary. Define the following terms, and describe their significance or connection to the narrative:
 - a. Microplastics/fluorochemicals/"forever chemicals"
 - b. Manhattan Project
 - c. Corporate hierarchy
 - d. EPA / industrial regulation
 - e. Workplace secret-keeping
 - f. Compartmentalization
 - g. Patriarchy?
 - h.
4. Practices and skills. If you could change some of the workplace norms and practices at 3M during the time period that this article covers, what would you change? For this question, write out each workplace norm, practice or policy that you think needed to be implemented, and then explain what it would look like for the employees at the company to change their behavior. What skills would the employees need to develop and put into practice? Try to identify at least 3-5 norms/practices, and for each one write a few sentences to describe what cultural change would look like.

5. Contemporary relevance. How do the problems that Dr. Hanson faced some 25 years ago connect to our professional, economic and political world today? Use the issues that you found in this article to make a comparison to a contemporary institution, community or workplace that you are familiar with. Have the issues changed? In this reflective response, you should write from your own perspective, choosing a contemporary example that you feel some connection to.
6. Personal connections. How does this story of 3M's problems, and Hanson's situation as a worker, connect to your own academic and professional interests? How does the case make you think differently about your own potential path? What does it make you want to learn more about?
7. Course connections. How does the case of 3M and Kris Hanson connect to the broader themes we've already discussed in this course? In your response, bring in at least two other texts, case studies, class discussions, presentations or activities we've done so far.