



Misuse of Power and Authority

Misuse of power and authority can occur in everyday decisions - not just extreme cases.

These FAQs explain what misuse looks like in practice, why it matters, and how to avoid common pitfalls.

They are intended to help employees at all levels - particularly those in positions of authority or influence - recognise how power affects decision-making and behaviour, and how ordinary actions can become integrity risks.

1. What does 'misuse of position' mean in a public sector role?

Misuse of position occurs when a public sector employee or officer uses their role, authority, or decision-making power in a way that is inconsistent with their official duties or professional obligations. This includes acting beyond authorised powers or using influence inappropriately. A misuse of position may:

- ▼ benefit the employee or another person improperly;
- ▼ disadvantage or harm others; or
- ▼ undermine confidence in the organisation or the public sector more broadly.

Misuse of position is not about honest mistakes or reasonable judgement calls. It involves using authority in a way that advantages, disadvantages, or influences outcomes improperly.

2. How can power or authority be misused in everyday work?

Misuse of position may include:

- ▼ using official authority for personal gain;
- ▼ abusing power or influence;
- ▼ endorsing or promoting private interests;
- ▼ crossing professional boundaries;
- ▼ nepotism, favouritism, or cronyism; or
- ▼ exercising powers or delegations without proper authority.

3. What legal and professional obligations apply?

Public sector employees are subject to multiple, overlapping obligations. They all reinforce the same expectation: public sector power must be exercised lawfully, fairly, and in the public interest. They include:

- ▼ **Codes of Conduct**

These require employees to act with integrity and not misuse their position, authority, or public resources.

- ▼ ***Integrity Commission Act 2009 (Tas)***

Section 4 defines misconduct to include misuse of power, authority, or public office.

- ▼ **Employment and industrial frameworks**

These typically require employees to maintain the integrity of their office, act lawfully, follow directions, and behave professionally when undertaking official duties.

4. What harm can result from misuse of position or authority?

Misuse of authority can:

- ▼ damage workplace culture;
- ▼ interfere with fair decision-making;
- ▼ reduce the efficiency and effectiveness of government; and
- ▼ erode public trust in the public sector.

5. What consequences can flow from misusing a position?

Misuse of position can have lasting professional and legal consequences, which will depend on the nature and seriousness of the conduct.

Possible outcomes include:

- ▼ managerial or disciplinary action;
- ▼ reassignment of duties;
- ▼ formal warnings or sanctions;
- ▼ termination of employment; and
- ▼ in serious cases, investigation by an external integrity body or criminal prosecution.

Early disclosure, seeking advice and corrective action can often prevent issues escalating to misconduct.

6. When can ordinary behaviour become problematic because of my role or authority?

Public sector roles often involve authority, seniority, or access to decision-making. This can create power imbalances, particularly with junior staff, clients, or stakeholders. Even actions that may feel normal or well-intentioned can:

- ▼ place others in uncomfortable or pressured situations;
- ▼ blur professional boundaries;
- ▼ expose others to perceived or actual coercion; or
- ▼ lead to allegations of bullying, harassment, or inappropriate relationships.

7. How can I maintain professional boundaries?

Maintaining professional boundaries means using your role, authority and influence fairly, impartially and in the public interest, and not allowing personal relationships, familiarity or emotion to influence decisions or behaviour.

Power imbalances can occur between managers and staff, decision-makers and applicants, or senior leaders and stakeholders. Blurred boundaries can lead to real or perceived misuse of power, even where there is no improper intent.

Maintaining boundaries is about ensuring that authority is exercised appropriately and transparently, and that no one is advantaged or disadvantaged because of personal connection, access or influence.

8. How do favouritism, nepotism, and cronyism relate to misuse of power?

Favouritism is giving unfair preference to a person or group for reasons unrelated to merit or performance.

Nepotism is favouring relatives, partners, or close friends.

Cronyism involves appointing or advancing associates without proper consideration of merit or process.

All three undermine fairness, transparency, and public confidence, and are regarded as forms of misconduct.

9. When can personal relationships create a risk of misuse of power?

Nepotism or favouritism can arise if personal relationships influence:

- ▼ recruitment or selection decisions;
- ▼ assessment of merit; or
- ▼ access to opportunities.

Where someone has a personal relationship with a candidate, this needs to be declared and managed, and all decisions documented.

10. Why is exercising power without delegation a misuse of power risk?

You must only exercise powers that have been formally delegated to you. If a task requires authority, you do not hold, you should:

- ▼ inform the relevant delegator or manager;
- ▼ seek clarification or an appropriate delegation; or
- ▼ arrange for the task to be completed by someone who has the required authority.

Acting beyond delegation – even where outcomes are positive – can expose both you and your organisation to risk.

Using public power carries responsibility. When in doubt, act transparently, seek advice early, and prioritise the public interest. Diligent, ethical use of authority protects you, your colleagues, and the integrity of the public sector.



The Commission can help

We are available to provide support and assistance with identifying, reporting, investigating, managing and preventing misconduct: contact@integrity.tas.gov.au or 1300 720 289.