

Video 2 transcript: Scenario 1 Alex conducts research in the workplace

Alex is studying towards a Bachelor of Library and Information Studies. They work in a large public library, incorporating a council service centre, and they want to conduct a research project for their final course that evaluates how welcoming people find the library to be, and how easily they can find where to go.

Alex's plan is to unobtrusively observe people as they enter the building. They think observation will be easy to achieve and can do it when they are not rostered on the Reference desk.

Alex was not intending to tell library management about the observation but their manager has found out and suggests the focus should be on retired people only, because that is the library's current outreach focus.

Ethical issues

One ethical issue is that Alex wants to observe library users in what may or may not be considered a public place. It is a space where patrons might justifiably **not** expect their actions to be observed or monitored.

At the same time, if Alex provides them with information about the observation, it may change their behaviour and the research may not get a valid or representative picture of how welcoming people find the library, nor how easily they know where to go.

A second ethical issue is that Alex has not sought permission from their senior management.

Remediation

The correct response to the question of permission **is simple**: Alex needs to obtain permission to conduct research in the library, just as anyone else would if they did not work there. Additionally, Alex will be making the observations during work hours and monitoring library users; library management must be made aware that this is happening.

When it comes to the ethics around observing library users, there are several possible solutions.

- In order to ensure transparency without placing the validity of their observations into question, Alex could write about their research for the library's newsletter and indicate times that they will be conducting their observations.
- Alternatively, the library management might decide that the library foyer is indeed a public place and that anyone in it can expect to be observed by anyone else.
- Bypassing the issue of observation altogether, Alex could decide to send a survey out to library users instead. If a survey is sent, management approval would be required to use the membership database for contact details.