
Code of Conduct

stsing e.V.

19.02.2024

Contents

0. Quick user’s guide **2**

1. Preamble **2**

 1.A. Good labor relations 3

 1.B. Good stsing practice 3

 1.C. Shared accountability 3

2. Overview **4**

Why do we need all the above? **5**

3. The stsing ombudsgroup **5**

 3.A. Respond to particular incidents that are covered by this Code of Conduct. 6

 3.B. Convene an event’s ethics group 6

 3.C. Draft political position for the association 6

 3.D. Report back to the stsing board and members’ general assembly 7

 3.E. Sanction 7

 3.F. Record keeping through two annual reports 7

4. Process of requesting and responding to internal conflict **8**

5. Process of reporting and responding to incidents of prohibited behavior **9**

6. Living document review **11**

0. Quick user's guide

- If you are a (new) member seeking to familiarize with our **three overarching principles**, go to *1. Preamble* on page 2.
- If you want to know what kind of **behavior stsing expects and prohibits** of its members and in stsing contexts, go to *2. Overview* on page 4.
- If you seek information about **the stsing ombudsgroup**, go to *3. The stsing ombudsgroup* on page 5.
- If you wish to inform yourself about the **in/formal mediation of a conflict**, or if you have been the addressee of such request, go to *4. Process of requesting and responding to internal conflict* on page 8.
- If you wish to **issue a complaint, or if you have been the subject of a complaint**, and seek information about established procedure and your rights & obligations therein, go to *5. Process of reporting and responding to incidents of prohibited behavior* on page 9.

1. Preamble

Welcome to stsing e.V.–Science and Technology Studies in and through Germany (hereafter, stsing), a community of STS scholars that is more than the sum of its parts. We maintain that it is not sufficient to simply put scholars in contact with each other. At stsing, we actively craft spaces that allow different modes of engagement, thinking with and acting in solidarity with non-STS-scholars, non-academics and more-than-humans. stsing intends to actively engage and make a difference in the world in open-ended practices of experimentation, aware that outcomes may be different than imagined but aiming for new, better, and more sustainable ways of collaborating and relating in our work contexts.

The purpose of this Code of Conduct for stsing is to protect scholarly inquiry and debate in and across our collaborative spaces. This document lays out approaches and policies that discourage harassment, prejudice, and aggression, and instead encourage the reporting and responding to prohibited behaviors if/when spotted in our midst. To fulfill its purpose, the Code of Conduct outlines and codifies the association's commitment to protect—first and foremost—stsing members. This commitment is realized to a great extent by our members upholding the Preamble's three overarching principles in their engagements—good labor relations, good stsing practice and shared accountability. With it comes the need to engage in the uneasy work of not just speaking, but doing things differently.

1.A. Good labor relations

stsing postulates good working conditions as a foundational requirement for good scientific conduct. This stipulation applies to the entire workforce that enables, maintains and performs teaching, researching and their administration. We adopt a critical stance vis-à-vis dominant, exploitative patterns of academic labor (and labor in academia) in and through Germany. We witness firsthand how German academia is shaped by the strategic, organizational and individual enrollment of chronically precarious labor. This spans administration, teaching and knowledge transfer, research, management and/or leadership roles, and service labor. We experience ourselves the devastating effects this has for researchers and the shape of STS knowledge production in the country. Examples include a frequent absence of decent working conditions for early career researchers, which often translates into unrealistic and unfair expectations to combine employment and qualification work; a lack of structural support for collaborative STS; a stress on academic productivity that often distracts from achieving good standards of quality in epistemic practice; a consistent burn-out and/or forced exit of research practitioners and academic staff from German institutions of higher-education and research. We are also painfully aware of the systematic misrecognition and devaluation of the substantial and constitutive labor in administration, infrastructure and maintenance, all vital to good STS practice.

1.B. Good stsing practice

stsing is committed to fostering a culture that is free of abuses of power, discrimination and harassment. It seeks to promote collegial exchange and professional development without bullying, exploitation, intimidation, and victimization. Every member of stsing should strive to create and maintain a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment for all members and guests/participants at any stsing activity and venue. This includes but is not limited to conferences, events, and virtual meetings, in order to provide opportunities for participants to share research, learn, network, and converse in respectful, widely accessible and safe environments. In the ways our members choose their degrees and shapes of involvement in our activities, we recognize various idioms of speaking and doing membership in stsing. We honor the variability generated by grass-root involvement and initiative, and we seek to foster further diversification of the association's make-up by upholding standards of good interpersonal communication, including considerations about accessibility and awareness.

1.C. Shared accountability

The paradox of stsing membership is that the more labor a member volunteers, or the livelier and more variegated a working group's (WG) activities get, the more likely it is that conflictual styles of work might become apparent. Expectations might diverge, tacit assumptions might come into play

and even character traits might clash. We believe that mechanisms should be available to resolve possible conflicts and prevent effects like the deadlock of WG activities, the retraction of valuable membership or doubts regarding the broader stsing climate. stsing commits to an intersectional feminist perspective in which conflict and violence are seen as social and political issues, rather than merely individual or interpersonal. Our response to conflicts and violence embraces support of/for those harmed and strives to go beyond sanctioning, shaming or isolating individuals. This requires that all members accept own and others' boundaries and the commitment of reflecting and recognizing one own's and others' intersectional implications in hierarchies and power relations. stsing is dedicated to developing tools that help members share accountability and develop collaborative practices that seek to transform power abuse into solidarities.

2. Overview

stsing *expects* its members to observe good labor relations, good stsing practice and to participate in shared accountability, inside stsing collaborations as well as beyond the scope of stsing. All members of stsing and participants of stsing activities and events are expected to abide by this Code of Conduct.

stsing *prohibits* abuses of power, discrimination or harassment and other inappropriate conduct as set forth in this document. Prohibited behavior can be one or a composite of the following categories, which we illustrate with examples:

1. Abuses of power, including labor-related (unjustified transfer of professorial tasks to non-professorial staff or student assistants; systematic overloading of employees with work; arbitrary exercise of professorial decision-making power, e.g., over travel and project funds; demands for free labor, e.g. for the employer organization's Diversity-Equity-Inclusion or accessibility policies)
2. Community misconduct (academic bullying; career sabotage; professional slander; gender disparities in hiring and promotion decisions)
3. Publication misconduct (fabrication; falsification; plagiarism, unwarranted claiming of authorship)
4. Sexual harassment (unwanted sexual attention; sexual coercion; derogatory use of language, with sexual sub-text or connotations)
5. Discrimination on the basis of sex (including actual or perceived sexual and gender identity, as well as pregnancy, marital status and parental status, but excluding sexual harassment), age, disability, physical appearance, ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic status or background, religion, citizenship status, criminal record

6. De facto exclusion/s (from academic opportunities, e.g., lack of accessibility or diversity, monetary and other institutional/organizational support)
7. Physical assault
8. Other gross violations of good academic conduct (quid-pro-quo arrangements; threats; targeted isolation from networks or resources; cultivating toxic or hostile group dynamics)

Prohibited behaviors may be verbal or written, intentional or unintentional and take place in virtual or physical spaces. Prohibited behavior covers also retaliation for making a good faith reporting of such behavior, harassment, or discrimination. It also covers false reporting and other types of abuse of ombudsgroup limited resources.

stsing *establishes* an ombudsgroup to observe that this Code of Conduct is upheld by members and to support the exercise of membership in fair, dignified, less exploitative, safe and more inclusive ways.

Why do we need all the above?

When/if it happens that you observe or experience issues with the behavior of another member, you have two ways to make use of this Code of Conduct depending on whether you consider the incident a matter of internal conflict or prohibited behaviors:

- You may first request an informal mediation of an internal conflict in a working group where the incident has developed that need not involve the ombudsgroup, if the issue at stake can be made a topic of collective reflection and resolution. Members mediate and share conflicts on the basis of shared accountability. You can ask for mediation if you are part of a conflict or suggest the possibility to others. If required, you can reach out to the ombudsgroup for getting involved in the mediation process. How mediation works is described in §4.
- Or you may report an incident when/where any of the prohibited behaviors described in §2 were observed and put others in the way of harm. You are encouraged to report if you are affected directly as well as if you witness the behavior. How reporting works is described in §5.

3. The stsing ombudsgroup

The stsing ombudsgroup is an organ within stsing as established in the statutes. It works towards the prevention of harm against or by our members or any guests/participants of stsing activities, the creation and maintenance of good conditions for good STS practice, and offers interpretative resources and practical assistance in cases of discrimination, harassment and misconduct.

Paragraphs A-F draw a general outline of its activities, namely the extent of its discretionary power and reciprocity toward the association's membership. The verbs chosen (Respond; Convene; Draft; Report; Sanction; Record keeping) capture the essence of what the ombudsgroup can and should do. Elected members can define the exact shape and regularity of these activities, as long as they adhere to the statutes and the Code of Conduct that define their roles.

3.A. Respond to particular incidents that are covered by this Code of Conduct.

- respond to internal request/reporting concerning the conduct of a member (or organ or group belonging to stsing, e.g. the board or a WG).
- respond to external request/reporting concerning the conduct of a member (or, as above)
- take initiative to draw a position statement on behalf of the association if/when a members (or a group's) conduct is a matter of public discussion
- take the initiative to draw position statement on behalf of the association if/when a broader issue in regards to STS (beyond stsing e.V.) integrity is a matter of public discussion
- in the process of responding to a request for conflict mediation (§4) to treat it according to the process for responding to a report of incident of prohibited behavior (§5) instead – and vice versa. This decision needs justification on the basis of facts established fairly and objectively.

3.B. Convene an event's ethics group

- answer requests for recruitment of events accessibility and awareness policy group (or otherwise named ethics-type of initiative)
- take initiative to launch recruitment of events accessibility and awareness policy group

3.C. Draft political position for the association

- take initiative to draft standards for implementation by stsing and Best Practices guidelines also for use by other associations or science advice or academic conferences or media
- take initiative to put together small ad-hoc committees of limited duration, on particular issues that fall outside the purview of established WGs and the board
- publish the fruits of such initiatives in their name or, upon agreement, that of other organs of the association or the whole association

3.D. Report back to the stsing board and members' general assembly

- report on internal stsing debates, especially on topics/questions covered by their mandate (including choosing appropriate analytical or reflexive methods for the report)
- report for the purposes of record keeping, including as outlined at §3.F
- report on discretionary choices, including methodology, while/for responding to the report of incident of prohibited behavior
- accompany any of the above reports with report/s on possible minority views expressed inside the ombudsgroup

3.E. Sanction

- The ombudsgroup is primarily not a disciplinary organ. In the extreme case where facts have been established in a fair and objective manner and point to a member's behavior/s considered prohibited under this Code of Conduct, the ombudsgroup can determine reasonable sanctions that reflect the gravity of the offense/s. Possible sanctions may include one or a combination of the following:
- issuing a warning to cease the discriminatory or harassing behavior and retaining a record of that warning in case of future violations;
- inviting the member to participate in a restorative justice meeting to listen and learn about the consequences of their behavior and about likely consequences of similar behavior in the future;
- termination of immediate participation at a specific stsing activity or event and any responsibilities or roles held in the context of that event;
- barring the member from participating in future stsing activities and events;
- barring the member from assuming any future governance positions within stsing;
- making clear that membership won't be renewed upon end of term; and/or
- notifying the member's home institution of the violation.

3.F. Record keeping through two annual reports

- keep a brief record that will contain general information about the number and types of requests and reports received. No names will be included in the brief version, it will be provided to the stsing board and will be available to any member of stsing through request to the ombudsgroup.

- keep a long record that will describe every response to reporting or other initiatives taken by the ombudsgroup, including names of the parties involved as well as any other relevant information that may facilitate contextualization and foster understanding of the broader circumstances of the incident or of the ombudsgroup's decisions. This record is to be treated as confidentially and may be consulted only by the involved parties, members of the board in the course of their official duties, or as otherwise required by law.
- keep a record of changes of the Code of Conduct, available to any member of stsing through request to the ombudsgroup.

stsing members should acknowledge and respect the voluntary nature of the work of the ombudsgroup and refrain from abusing its limited resources. The ombudsgroup can initiate an inquiry in repetitive cases of false reporting at its own discretion.

4. Process of requesting and responding to internal conflict

The process for requesting and responding to **internal conflict** is guided by the principle of shared accountability as outlined under §1.C. In principle, stsing WGs (or organs) should acknowledge and positively respond to any member suggesting the informal mediation of conflict. Informal mediation proceedings need not go through the ombudsgroup. During informal mediation, it is the responsibility of the whole WG/organ to protect what is openly shared inside the proceedings from being misconstrued and taken out of context. It is the responsibility of all those involved to protect against reputational damages of any of the parties in conflict.

To support our most vulnerable members, those often subject to various forms of intersecting power differentials, the Code of Conduct provides the option that members turn to the ombudsgroup with a formal request for mediation, to prevent harm. The responsibilities outlined above do not shift to the ombudsgroup; rather, the latter acts as a careful observer until a reconciliation or a workable solution has been achieved.

Any member submitting a request (**requester/s**) to the ombudsgroup needs to name the member/s with whom a conflict has emerged (**addressee/s**), briefly describe the nature of the conflict (including ways their membership has been affected or undermined) and name the stsing context (i.e. WG or other organ) primarily responsible for fulfilling shared accountability in this case.

The **ombudsgroup** is responsible for a) receiving the request; b) processing it appropriately in a timely and confidential manner; c) communicating the next steps back to the requester (also in a timely manner); d) forward the request to the addressee/s and to the WG (or organ) named as relevant context of both requester and addressee/s. They are also responsible for remaining informed of any development and, if need be, contribute or intervene appropriately (more details below).

The **WG (or organ)** that receives such a formal request via the ombudsgroup needs to react appropriately in a timely manner. It is expected that members of the WG (or organ) will decide the shape and regularity of the mediation they will pursue in a democratic manner as befitting their shared norms and established practices. Goal of the mediation should be, if not reconciliation, a workable solution for everyone involved.

During the process, the **requester/s** need to be prepared to articulate their grievances in an honest way, showing clearly how their participation in stsing activities has been or could be affected and they need to be open to work toward, if not reconciliation, at least a workable solution for everyone involved.

Any member named as **addressee** must take this request and process of mediation seriously (even if they do not recognize a conflictual situation), show adequate willingness to participate in shared accountability and listen to any grievances expressed, while acknowledging any effects their behavior might have had for the requester/s. If appropriate, consider offering an apology and work toward, if not reconciliation, at least a workable solution for everyone involved.

During the process the ombudsgroup may, but need not necessarily, participate in the WG's mediation. Instead, what they should do is to regularly check in with those involved to make sure the mediation hasn't stopped on its tracks through negligence, retaliation or bad faith communication. Evidence of negligence, retaliation or bad faith communication constitute incidents the ombudsgroup may further pursue under their mandate. In the latter case the ombudsgroup may demand the relaunch of the mediation—this time under their supervision—and, in extreme cases, decide to treat the request for conflict mediation according to the process for responding to a report of incident of prohibited behavior (§5) on the basis of the facts established.

If applicable: at the end of a process where the ombudsgroup was involved, the WG (or organ) responsible for mediation needs to report the outcomes of the mediation process to the ombudsgroup. The ombudsgroup must include those reports in their record keeping.

5. Process of reporting and responding to incidents of prohibited behavior

The process for reporting and responding to incidents of **prohibited behavior** is guided by the values of fairness, objectivity and the ombudsgroup's accountability (§3) and is done in ways that fulfill the ombudsgroup's mandate. The main interpretative resource for the ombudsgroup are the annexed Definitions.

Any stsing member submitting to the ombudsgroup a report of incident of prohibited behavior (**complainant/s**) needs to name the member/s alleged to have harassed, discriminated or commit-

ted types of misconduct (**respondent/s**), describing the nature of the behavior reported (including whether they report from the perspective of someone directly affected or as witness of the incident) and name how immediate the need for a response on behalf of the ombudsgroup is. Immediacy speaks here not to gravity of the alleged incident, but rather the urgency of the situation.

The **ombudsgroup** is the organ responsible for a) receiving the report; b) processing it appropriately in a timely and confidential manner that respects the immediacy communicated and deciding on the type of response (what type of process/what type of methodology); c) communicating back to the complainant/s their next steps also in a timely manner; d) get in touch with the respondent/s and inform them of next steps (if applicable, protect the identity of complainant/s); e) decide on appropriate course of action after facts have been established. The ombudsgroup is at relative liberty to set terms of process and method, to the extent that their choices reflect the values of fairness (i.e., hearing both parties' accounts without prejudice or bias), objectivity (establishing facts to the extent possible and necessary) and the ombudsgroup's accountability (finding ways to account for discretionary choices made and for sanctions determined) in ways that fulfill the ombudsgroup's mandate. If background circumstances demand it, a recusal from processing a certain report might be a relevant consideration for individual members of the ombudsgroup. If a member must recuse themselves and considering the limited resources available, the ombudsgroup can recruit a trusted stsing member to support their work during the case. In turn, they are bound by the ombudsgroup mandate and any other restriction the ombudsgroup establishes.

During the process the **complainant/s** need to be prepared to recount what transpired during the reported incident, allowing the ombudsgroup to establish a relevant timeline, the range of prohibited behaviors under question in the reported incident and perhaps identify potential witnesses. The complainant/s need not respond to lines of questioning they deem offensive, prejudicial or biased. They have the right to record their objection to the process and withdraw from a hearing without reprisal. Their report still counts as properly submitted and processed, even if the ombudsgroup doesn't pursue further action after withdrawal.

Any member named as **respondent/s** needs to take the report and process seriously (even if they have an alternative interpretation of the incident). They will be given opportunity to share their views over what transpired during the reported incident, allowing the ombudsgroup to establish a relevant timeline, the range of prohibited behaviors under question in the reported incident and perhaps identify potential witnesses. The respondent/s aren't allowed to retaliate against the complainant or any witness. They shall also refrain from anyhow tampering with the ombudsgroup's record or undermine the ombudsgroup's process. Tampering and undermining a fair and objective process constitute incidents the ombudsgroup may further pursue under their mandate. The respondent/s need not answer lines of questioning they deem offensive, prejudicial or biased. They have the right to record their objection to the process and withdraw from a hearing. The ombudsgroup may still complete the process if an adequate record can be established (i.e., through witnesses) and may nevertheless

determine appropriate sanctions against the respondent/s.

In extreme cases, if an adequate record cannot be established despite best efforts, or the ombudsgroup has good reason to mistrust testimonies received, they may decide for alternative courses of action or bring the process to an early end without result.

6. Living document review

Deliberation in the stsing community about professional ethics and conduct is complicated and dynamic, as we continually must address new issues, new categories and new cases. Further, conduct-focused policies, such as the Code of Conduct and the two processes described, could have unanticipated effects upon use. Because of this, stsing members—while informing the ombudsgroup or in collaboration with the ombudsgroup—will revisit this policy as frequently as they see fit and deem appropriate. We particularly aim for a useful resource and encourage reflections and feedback on usability. A record of changes and the lessons learned will be archived through the record-keeping of the ombudsgroup.