

Dark patterns are commonly known in UX design as tactics developed to trick users of a website into doing something they do not wish to do. For example, a common dark pattern on sites is not allowing users to cancel accounts once they are created. I believe that this same concept can be applied to our current working environments.

Current working environments are dark patterns stemming from the task and project options presented to employees in a given role. Drawing first on [Harris's](#) descriptions of menu options, employees are given an implicit menu of what tasks they are allowed to work on in their given role, which often extends into what areas of the business they are allowed to think about. For example, an employee on the digital marketing team for a clothing company may have an interest in how merchandise is being presented in the company's retail location. However, the employee is often told this line of work is outside the team's purview. This employee should not let her mind wander down that path because, as the manager often puts it, she shouldn't "step on any toes." With Harris's framework, what's really being said is, "Anything involving retail is not on the menu for you." This direct acknowledgment of menu options contradicts Harris's description that technology users don't ask what the menu is not offering. In corporations, the most astute employees recognize what they are not being offered, ask for it, and are denied.

This process leads to a dark pattern of preventing employees from growing intellectually and within a company. Interestingly, unlike the dark patterns of technology which only benefit the tech company and hurt the consumer, the dark pattern in organizational behavior hinders both the individual and the organization. Without the ability to follow her interests, the employee will slowly disengage from her work, and if the company continually limits her work menu options, she will likely leave in search of an organization that allows her to grow.

Clearly, her leaving causes a direct financial burden to the company. However, there is an additional loss to the organization in the form of creativity and innovation. It is widely accepted that people do their best work when they are interested in the work. They are also able to creatively put seemingly siloed ideas together and innovate when given the opportunity to work cross-functionally in areas of interest. Through the limitation of menu options, the company has inadvertently put themselves in a dark pattern of innovation and growth, in addition to their employees.