

Communicating for Results

Communicating for Results

Sixth Edition

Carolyn Meyer

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Brief Contents

From the Publisher xvi

Acknowledgements xxii

- 1 Issues and Trends in Professional Communication 1**
- 2 Getting the Message Across 38**
- 3 Getting Started: Planning, Writing, and Revising Business Messages 76**
- 4 Business Style: Word Choice, Conciseness, and Tone 120**
- 5 Business Style: Sentences and Paragraphs 157**
- 6 Routine Messages 190**
- 7 Delivering Unfavourable News 244**
- 8 Persuasive Messages 278**
- 9 Communicating for Employment 309**
- 10 Informal Reports 351**
- 11 Proposals and Formal Reports 413**
- 12 Oral Communication 464**
- 13 Social Media and Mobile Communications 499**
- Appendix A Business Usage: A Style and Mechanics Guide 531**
- Appendix B Grammar and Punctuation Handbook 561**

Notes 580

Index 594

Contents

From the Publisher xvi

Acknowledgements xxii

1 Issues and Trends in Professional Communication 1

- 1.1 Communication: An Essential Workplace Skill 3**
- 1.2 Communicating in the Current Workplace 5**
 - Flexible Work Arrangements 5
 - The Knowledge Economy and Datafication 5
 - Risk and Security at Work 6
 - Sustainability, Environmental Awareness, and Corporate Social Responsibility 7
 - Business on a Global Scale and Workforce Diversity 8
 - A Growing Millennial and Gen Z Workforce 9
 - Team Work Environments 10
 - Indigenous Economic Growth 10
- 1.3 Professionalism and Employee Engagement 13**
 - Why Professionalism Is Important 13
 - Qualities, Characteristics, and Expectations 14
 - Professional Boundaries and Behaviours 15
- 1.4 Teamwork 18**
 - Characteristics of High-Performing Teams 19
 - Team Members and Roles 19
 - Team Decision-Making Models 21
 - Stages in Team Development 22
 - Managing Team Conflict 23
 - Virtual Teams 23
 - Tools for Online Collaboration 24
- 1.5 Ethical Communication 25**
 - Ethics and Legal Responsibilities of Business Communication 25
 - Ethical Lapses and Why They Happen 26
- 1.6 Privacy in the Workplace 29**

2 Getting the Message Across 38

- 2.1 Communication Defined 40**
- 2.2 Communication as a Field of Study 40**
- 2.3 The Communication Process 41**
 - Elements of the Communication Process 41
 - Barriers to Effective Communication 43
- 2.4 Communication Contexts 44**
 - Interpersonal Communication 45
 - Organizational Communication 48

- Intercultural Communication 48
- Mass Communication 48
- 2.5 Non-Verbal Communication 49**
 - Components of Non-Verbal Communication 51
- 2.6 Communication Competence 55**
- 2.7 Communicating in Organizations 56**
 - Internal and External Communication 56
 - Essential Skills for Workplace Communication 57
 - Informal and Formal Channels 58
 - The Flow of Information 58
- 2.8 Intercultural Communication 59**
 - Communicating in a Global Economy 59
 - Understanding Culture and Diversity 60
 - Defining Intercultural Communication: Theories and Concepts 61
 - Communicating Interculturally 65

3 Getting Started: Planning, Writing, and Revising Business Messages 76

- 3.1 Writing in Context: Four Key Concepts 78**
 - Contextual Factors 78
 - Genre and Register 78
 - Discourse Communities 79
 - Rhetorical Situations 80
- 3.2 Steps in the Writing Process 81**
 - The Importance of Message Planning 82
- 3.3 Prewriting 83**
 - Purpose 84
 - Scope 84
 - Audience Profile 86
 - Medium or Channel 89
 - Design 91
 - Content Generation 94
 - Supporting Points: Evidence and Examples 98
 - Storytelling and Corporate Narrative 99
- 3.4 Organizing and Outlining 102**
- 3.5 Drafting 103**
 - Overcoming Writer's Block 104
- 3.6 Revising, Editing, and Proofreading 104**
 - Step 1 106
 - Step 2 106
 - Step 3 106
- 3.7 Collaborative Writing 108**
 - Collaborative Writing Tools 110
 - Critiquing Others' Writing 111

4 Business Style: Word Choice, Conciseness, and Tone 120

4.1 Style and Organizational–Interpersonal Roles 122

4.2 Word Choice 123

Plain Style 123

Word Choice Step 1: Use Familiar Words 124

Word Choice Step 2: Use Fresh and Current Language 127

Word Choice Step 3: Keep Language Specific, Precise, and Functional 129

Word Choice Step 4: Practise Factual and Ethical Communication 131

4.3 Achieving Conciseness 132

4.4 Tone 137

Tune In to Word Connotations 138

Keep Your Style Conversational 138

Select the Right Level of Formality: Personal and Impersonal Styles 139

Be Positive 140

Stress Reader Benefits and Relevance 141

Be Polite 143

Use Inclusive and Gender-Sensitive Language 144

Write with Confidence 149

5 Business Style: Sentences and Paragraphs 157

5.1 Effective Sentences 159

The Building Blocks of Complete Sentences: Phrases and Clauses 159

Putting the Building Blocks Together: Sentence Structures 160

Improving Sentence Variety and Length 162

5.2 Sentence Purpose and Type 164

5.3 Improving Sentence Clarity 166

5.4 Writing with Consistency 166

Writing Balanced Sentences: Parallel Structure 167

5.5 Writing for Emphasis 168

Use Eye-Catching Mechanical Devices, Punctuation, and Formatting 168

Add Emphasis through Style 169

De-emphasize Unpleasant Information through Style 171

5.6 Applying Active and Passive Voice 171

5.7 Eliminating Grammar Errors and Awkwardness 174

5.8 Effective Paragraphs 178

Paragraph Length 178

Topic Sentences 179

Paragraph Development 180

Paragraph Coherence 181

5.9 Proofreading 183

6 Routine Messages 190

6.1 E-mail 192

Formatting and Writing E-mail 193

Reading and Processing Incoming Messages 197

- Formatting Lists for E-mail 197
- E-mail Style and Tone 200
- 6.2 Instant Messaging 200**
- 6.3 Letter Formats 202**
 - Letter Balance and Placement 202
 - Font Style 203
 - Letter Styles and Layouts 203
 - Letter Elements 203
 - Using Mail Merge and Templates 204
 - Addressing Envelopes 207
- 6.4 Direct Writing Plan 207**
- 6.5 Requests 208**
 - Requests for Information or Action 209
 - Claims 209
- 6.6 Responses 214**
 - Information Responses 215
 - Claims Adjustments 215
- 6.7 Informative Messages 218**
 - Announcements 219
 - Messages Confirming Contracts, Meetings, and Arrangements 221
 - Transmittals 223
 - Instructional Messages 223
- 6.8 Goodwill Messages 226**
 - Thank-You Notes 227
 - Notes of Congratulations 229
 - Notes of Sympathy 229

7 Delivering Unfavourable News 244

- 7.1 Goals of Negative Messages 246**
- 7.2 Tone in Bad News Messages 246**
- 7.3 Organizing Bad News Messages 248**
- 7.4 Indirect Writing Plan for Bad News Messages 249**
 - Using the Indirect Approach 249
 - Bad News Buffers 249
 - Explaining the Bad News 250
 - Revealing the Bad News 252
 - Goodwill Closing 253
 - Indirect-Approach Message 254
 - Limitations of the Indirect Strategy 255
- 7.5 Direct Writing Plan for Bad News Messages 255**
 - Using the Direct Writing Plan 255
 - Limitations of the Direct Approach 256
- 7.6 Apologies in Bad News Messages 256**
- 7.7 Types of Bad News Messages 260**
 - Refusing Requests for Information, Actions, and Favours 260
 - Refusing Claims 262

- Turning Down Job Applicants 264
- Announcing Bad News to Employees 266
- Declining Invitations 268

7.8 Responding to Negative Messages on Social Media Platforms 269

8 Persuasive Messages 278

- 8.1 Writing Persuasively 280**
 - Preparing to Write Persuasively 281
 - Persuasive Appeals 282
 - Indirect Writing Plan for Persuasive Messages 284
- 8.2 Types of Persuasive Messages 285**
 - Favour and Action Requests 285
 - Persuasion for Solving Workplace Problems 286
 - Persuasion for Motivating Performance and Managing Change 289
 - Claim Requests 290
- 8.3 Sales Messages 292**
 - Aiming to Make a Sale: Analyzing the Product and Audience 292
 - Writing Plan for Sales Messages 293
 - Sales Follow-Up 297
 - Fundraising Messages 298
- 8.4 Traditional versus Digital Marketing 299**
 - Persuasion through Social Media 300
 - Promotion and Self-Promotion in Social Media 300

9 Communicating for Employment 309

- 9.1 Analyzing Your Career Goals and Qualifications 311**
- 9.2 Job Hunting 312**
 - Networking Communication 316
- 9.3 Using Social Media to Attract and Impress Potential Employers 317**
 - Establishing an Online Presence 318
- 9.4 Writing Persuasive Resumés 321**
 - ATS-Friendly Resumés 322
 - Resumé Writing Style 322
 - Parts of a Standard Resumé 323
 - Resumé Length 326
 - Resumé Styles and Layouts 326
- 9.5 Preparing a Persuasive Cover Letter 331**
 - General Tips for Cover Letters 332
 - Solicited Application Letters 332
 - Unsolicited Application Letters 335
- 9.6 Personal Statements 337**
 - Job Application Round-Up: Some Additional Tips 338
- 9.7 Digital Career Portfolios 338**
- 9.8 Job Application Videos 338**

- 9.9 Job Interviews 339**
 - Before the Interview 339
 - Behavioural Interview Questions and How to Prepare for Them 340
 - At the Interview 341
 - After the Interview 342
- 9.10 Follow-Up Employment Messages 342**
 - Follow-Up Message 342
 - Thank-You Message 342
 - Job-Offer Acknowledgement 343
 - Job-Acceptance Message 343
 - Job-Refusal Message 343
 - Reference-Request Message 343

10 Informal Reports 351

- 10.1 Introduction to Report Writing 353**
- 10.2 Purposes and Features of Short Reports 354**
- 10.3 Direct and Indirect Approaches 354**
 - Direct Approach: Informational and Analytical Reports 354
 - Indirect Approach: Analytical Reports 355
- 10.4 Writing Style for Short Reports 355**
- 10.5 Headings 355**
- 10.6 Steps in the Writing Process 358**
 - Prewriting and Planning 358
 - Gathering and Analyzing Data 359
 - Composing and Revising 360
- 10.7 Elements of Informal Reports 361**
 - Introductory Statement 361
 - Findings 362
 - Summary/Conclusions/Recommendations 362
- 10.8 Using Graphics and Visuals 363**
 - Tables 364
 - Matrixes 365
 - Pie Charts 365
 - Bar Charts 366
 - Picture Graphs 367
 - Line Graphs 369
 - Gantt Charts 371
 - Flow Charts 371
 - Organizational Charts 372
 - Infographics and Data Visualizations 372
 - Incorporating Report Graphics 374
- 10.9 Commonly Used Short Reports: Informational and Analytical 376**
 - Informational Reports 376
 - Analytical Reports 390

11 Proposals and Formal Reports 413

- 11.1 Proposals 415**
 - Project Workflow: Proposals in Context 416
 - Elements of Informal Proposals 416
 - Elements of Formal Proposals 424
- 11.2 Researching and Collecting Data 426**
- 11.3 Formal Reports 429**
 - Preparing to Write Formal Reports 430
 - Writing Style for Formal Reports 432
 - Creating a Work Plan 432
 - Time Management 433
 - Report Design 433
- 11.4 Elements of Formal Reports 435**
 - Front Matter 435
 - Body of the Report 436
 - Back Matter 438

12 Oral Communication 464

- 12.1 Oral Presentations 466**
 - Types of Oral Presentations 466
 - Synchronous and Asynchronous Delivery 466
- 12.2 Analyzing the Situation and Audience 467**
- 12.3 Structuring Presentations 468**
 - Developing a Three-Part Presentation 469
 - Oral Presentation Outline 471
- 12.4 Using Visual Aids 472**
 - Types of Presentation Aids 472
 - Using Presentation Software Effectively 472
 - PechaKucha Presentations 476
- 12.5 Methods of Delivery 476**
 - Elements of Effective Delivery and Platform Manner 477
- 12.6 Rehearsing a Presentation 478**
- 12.7 Delivering a Presentation 479**
 - Handling Questions 481
 - Public Speaking as a Career Skill 481
 - Team-Based Presentations 481
 - Special-Occasion Presentations 483
- 12.8 Meetings 484**
 - Types of Meetings 485
 - Preparing for a Meeting 485
 - Leading a Meeting 487
 - Special Considerations for Leading a Virtual Meeting 488
 - Participating in a Meeting 489
 - Meeting Minutes 490
- 12.9 Communicating by Telephone 491**
 - Making Calls 491

- Receiving Calls 492
- Using Voicemail Productively 493

12.10 Media Relations 493

13 Social Media and Mobile Communications 499

- 13.1 What Is Social Media? 501
 - Social Media Use in Canada 502
- 13.2 Social Media for Business 503
 - Goals and Benefits 503
 - Risks and Challenges 504
- 13.3 Social Media for Customer Service 507
- 13.4 Social Media Strategy and Planning Social Media Campaigns 508
 - Social Media Objectives 508
 - Audience Analysis 509
 - Looking Inward and Outward: Social Media Campaign Audit and Industry Analysis 510
 - Social Media Campaign Content Plan 510
- 13.5 Social Media Tone of Voice 513
- 13.6 User-Generated Content 513
- 13.7 Building a Business-Ready Social Presence 514
 - Blogs for Business 514
 - Micro-Blogs 516
 - Podcasts 518
 - Social Networking Sites 519
 - Photo- and Video-Sharing Sites 520
- 13.8 Measuring Social Media Performance 522
- 13.9 Mobile Communication 523
 - Designing and Writing Messages for Mobile Devices 524
 - Writing Promotional Messages for Mobile Devices 525
 - E-mail Marketing Campaigns for Mobile Apps 525

Appendix A Business Usage: A Style and Mechanics Guide 531

- Usage 531
 - Commonly Confused Words 531
 - Usage Exercise 552
- Abbreviations and Acronyms 553
 - Abbreviations 553
 - Acronyms 554
- Numbers 555
 - Numbers Usage 555
 - Number Usage Exercise 556
- Capitalization 556
 - Capitalization Guidelines 556
 - Capitalization Exercise 559

Salutations and Complimentary Closes: A User's Guide	559
E-mail	559
Standard Letters	560
Standard Business Phrases and Their Plain-Language Alternatives	560

Appendix **B** Grammar and Punctuation Handbook 561

Subject–Verb Agreement	561
S Rule for Third–Person Agreements in the Present Tense	561
Finding the Simple Subject	561
Compound Subjects	562
Joining Words Not Equivalent to <i>And</i>	562
Collective Nouns as Subjects	562
Singular Subjects in Plural Form	563
Amounts and Units of Measurement as Subjects	563
Titles, Terms, and Organization Names as Subjects	563
Sentences Beginning with <i>Here</i> or <i>There</i> + the Verb <i>Be</i>	563
Subjects and Linking Verbs	564
<i>Either . . . Or</i> Sentences	564
Indefinite Pronouns as Subjects	564
Antecedents of <i>That</i> , <i>Which</i> , and <i>Who</i> as Subjects	564
Verb Agreement and the Phrases <i>One of the . . .</i> , <i>One of the . . . Who</i> , and <i>the Only One of the . . . Who</i>	565
Subject–Verb Agreement Exercise	565
Verb Tense Accuracy	566
Sequencing Past Tenses	566
Shifts in Verb Tense	567
Other Verb Problems	567
Speculating about the Future, Making Recommendations, or Expressing Wishes	567
Speculating about the Past: Appropriate Use of <i>Could</i> , <i>Would</i>	567
Emphasizing a Main Verb with <i>Do</i>	568
Using Passive–Voice Constructions	568
Avoiding Logically Mismatched Subjects and Verbs (Faulty Predication)	569
Using Parallel Phrasing for Items in a Series (Parallelism)	570
Parallelism Exercise	570
Making Comparisons Clear and Logical (Sentences with <i>Than</i> or <i>As</i>)	571
Using Pronouns with Precision	571
Avoiding Vague References	571
Knowing When to Use <i>I</i> versus <i>Me</i>	572
Pronoun Exercise	572
Correcting Modifier Mishaps	572
Reining In Misplaced Modifiers	573
Correcting Dangling Modifiers	573
Modifier Exercise	574

Punctuation 574

Commas 574

Semicolons 575

Colons 576

Apostrophes 576

Periods 577

Question Marks 577

Parentheses 577

Dashes 578

Quotation Marks 578

Punctuation Exercise 579

Notes 580

Index 594

From the Publisher

With the expansion of the knowledge-based economy, Canadian employers are—now more than ever—increasingly interested in hiring individuals who are able to communicate clearly and effectively.

Building on the foundation of its predecessors, the sixth edition of *Communicating for Results* continues to address the needs of today's students by providing them with a thorough understanding of how to communicate effectively in diverse Canadian business environments. A thorough, hands-on approach engages students in the processes of critical thinking, stylistic development, and content evaluation. Extensive models and organizational plans for letters, e-mails, reports, and presentations—as well as extensive exercises based on real-life situations—help to simplify the writing process, banish writer's block, and ease fears about public speaking.

Throughout, this highly effective approach emphasizes practical knowledge that will give students a head start in the business world. They will develop confidence in their skills and will ultimately have everything they need to become competent and successful communicators who get their message across, get noticed, and get results.

Highlights from the Sixth Edition

10	Communicating for Results	1 Issues and Trends in Professional Communication	5
Team Work Environments Teams are a centrepiece of organizations and essential to workflow, driven by the demand for skill diversity and high levels of expertise and the need to stay competitive, adapt, and innovate.¹ A team refers to two or more people who interact (face-to-face or virtually) to achieve one or more common goals through relevant and interdependent tasks.¹ Team effectiveness is based on the logic of an I-P-O formula: • Inputs: the composition of a team—its individuals, human capital, and resources • Processes: the activities that team members engage in to fulfil shared goals • Outputs: performance in meeting goals as judged by others outside the team, the meeting of team member needs, and members' commitment to remaining in the team² Collaboration through cross-functional teams, in which individuals with different areas of expertise come together to share information for a common goal, makes the most of a workforce's creative potential by increasing individual involvement in decision-making and project development. According to Eva Wong, co-founder and chief operating officer of Toronto-based Borrowell, a fintech firm that started in 2014, being part of a great gender-balanced team that enabled people to thrive "no matter their gender" was the biggest factor in her entrepreneurial success in the tech industry.³ Innovations in information technology and mobile communications have made it possible for employees to be part of globally distributed teams and virtual project teams, which can eliminate time and space barriers—by allowing team members to contribute outside of traditional work hours and from various locations—and still provide quality, low-cost solutions to organizational problems. Working in teams, however, depends on strong communication and interpersonal skills to overcome conflicts that arise when people with differing viewpoints must make joint decisions. Indigenous Economic Growth Since the 1990s, there has been extraordinary growth in Indigenous business in Canada; however, there is still far to go in achieving economic reconciliation and overcoming a history of economic segregation of Indigenous Peoples arising from colonization. It is important to recognize that the governments of Canada and their settler economies were founded on and drew resources from First Peoples' lands. These colonizing practices displaced Indigenous Peoples physically and psychologically from their homelands and imposed on them economies that were not their own. In recognizing these painful truths, organizations such as the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business have a mission to promote and enhance a prosperous Indigenous economy through programs such as the Progressive Indigenous Relations Program, a certification program confirming corporate performance in Indigenous relations and promoting prosperity in Indigenous communities.⁴ Indigenous Works, a national not-for-profit Indigenous-led enterprise, has a similar mandate "to improve the inclusion and engagement of Indigenous people in the Canadian economy."⁵ In 2020 alone, the gross domestic product attributable to Indigenous Peoples was \$48.9 billion.⁶ It has been reported that there are now more than 30,000 Indigenous-owned businesses across many sectors.⁷ Young entrepreneurs and women account for much of the recent growth in Indigenous business.⁸		1.2 Communicating in the Current Workplace Contemporary changes in the Canadian workplace—and beyond—have implications for learning, job requirements, sought-after business talent, hiring, and the quality of work life. Despite these changes, communication is a constant cornerstone for successful professionals. Flexible Work Arrangements For many Canadian workers, the COVID-19 pandemic shifted preferences for work to more permanent remote and hybrid arrangements. Professional services, information and culture, and finance and insurance are among the industries in which remote and hybrid work arrangements are common.⁹ For example, information technology company SAP Canada has received positive ratings for its Flex Appeal policy, which enables employees to work non-traditional hours from a remote location or in an office that provides designated space for every task. Strong digital skills and the ability to self-manage tasks and time effectively are core to a skill set demanded of remote workers. The Knowledge Economy and Datafication Whereas Canada's economy used to be based on the products people made from raw materials through manual labour and industrial production, the information age has made it knowledge-based. Information is a valuable commodity and now, more than ever, it is easily accessed and disseminated through digital technology. The knowledge worker makes and sells some kind of idea-based product, such as software, consulting and financial services, music, design, or pharmaceuticals. The advantage that knowledge products have over products produced through manual labour is that their value can dramatically increase as the global market expands. Workers are expected to have both the skills necessary to find and evaluate information and the know-how to process and communicate that information effectively. Businesses rely increasingly on artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithm-based big data analytics, the practice of collecting, analyzing, and comparing large data sets and identifying patterns in them, to better understand consumer preferences; forecast trends; attune strategies, products, and services; and boost marketing, customer-relationship management, data sharing, human resources and hiring, and security enhancement.¹⁰ For approximately a decade, the Toronto Raptors front office has drawn insights from big data to make the strategic draft picks that helped it clinch the 2019 NBA championship.¹¹ Canadian shoe retailer Aldo, which has a global presence, made gains following a post-COVID-19 restructuring by using its stores as what CEO David Bensadoun called "a massive data collection service." Staff scan and record the footwear a shopper tries on. This data can then be used by Aldo's design team to determine which fits work and by the company itself to advise wholesale customers which styles are popular in specific locales in North America.¹² Companies also now rely on competitive intelligence—the practice of deriving data insight from external sources to gain a competitive advantage by utilizing data about a competitor's products, services, and customers to make business decisions.¹³ Knowledge management (KM) refers to the creation of technological systems knowledge management "A collection of information technologies used to collect, transfer, and distribute knowledge among employees."¹⁴	

Expanded coverage of Indigenous Peoples in business and business communication weaves Indigenous perspectives throughout the text, examples, and activities, preparing students to be informed and culturally sensitive communicators within the Canadian context.

New content on generative artificial intelligence (AI) offers guidance on using these tools appropriately in the classroom and the workplace.

154

Communicating for Results

Identify Strategies for Concise Messaging

6. Achieving Conciseness by Eliminating Clutter.

Edit and revise the following sentences by eliminating noun conversions, long lead-ins, expletive constructions, prepositional phrases, and relative clauses.

Sample:

The company undertook action that was decisive despite the fact that the resources it had were limited.

Revision:

The company acted decisively despite its limited resources.

a) It was a clerk from accounting who located the spreadsheets that had been missing.

b) A senior engineer will complete an inspection of the safety requirements and, if necessary, make changes to them.

c) By and large, it is our assumption that share prices have been sagging due to the fact that there is by all accounts weakness in this particular sector.

d) In response to your letter of August 16 that was received August 18, we cannot act in accordance with your express wishes in making a refund due to the fact that the warranty of the product you purchased from us has expired.

7. Achieving Conciseness by Eliminating Redundancies and Repetition.

Revise the following sentences to eliminate obvious statements and unnecessary repetition.

Sample:

Her sister is a woman who works as an investment advisor at Forest Financial.

Revision:

Her sister is an investment advisor at Forest Financial.

a) If you refer back to the final section of the report, you will see that the recommendations suggest we should continue on with the current profit-sharing plan.

b) In view of the fact that your freight has not arrived as scheduled, we have asked our supervisor of shipping to make the necessary inquiries.

c) During the course of the meeting, the need for mutual co-operation was brought to our attention.

d) The customer service department should continue to monitor all calls for purposes of quality control.

8. Writing Conversationally and Informally. Rewrite the following sentences in a less formal, impersonal style.

Sample:

Subscription rates have increased by less than 5 per cent.

Revision:

I am sorry to tell you that subscription rates have increased by less than 5 per cent.

a) Those interested in volunteering for the United Way fundraising committee should inform human resources at their earliest convenience.

b) Supervisors should discipline brokers who use discriminatory language when communicating with clients and co-workers.

9. Writing Informally. Lessen the formality of the following e-mail message:

It is most important to note that, as of today, advertisements for departmental job openings must be routed through the human resources department. This improvement is made in accordance with the company's commitment to efficiency and operating expenditure reduction. Following this new procedure will save employees work and enable human resources to help employees fill their openings more quickly.

Differentiate between Personal and Impersonal Styles

6 | Routine and Goodwill Messages

155

Create Constructive, Inclusive, and Reader-Oriented Messages

10. Being Positive.

Revise the following sentences to create a positive impression.

Sample:

Because you failed to provide us with your postal code, we could not send you the estate-planning package you requested.

Revision:

Please tell us your postal code so that we may send you your estate-planning package.

a) We never fail to offer our GIC investors the most highly competitive rates.

b) In your e-mail to our customer service department, you allege that our Dependability-Plus model printer is defective.

c) Aren't you being unreasonable in asking for your vacation at this time of year?

d) It is categorically impossible for us to obtain model A311, which is no longer in production. Only model A312 is available.

11. Stressing Reader Benefits and Relevance. Revise the following sentences so that they reflect the reader's viewpoint.

Sample:

We charge our guests only \$275 per person for one night's accommodation at our deluxe resort, a full spa treatment, and dinner at our award-winning restaurant.

Revision:

For only \$275 (per person), you can enjoy a night's accommodation at our deluxe resort, a full spa treatment, and dinner at our award-winning restaurant.

a) I will allow you to take your vacation during the last two weeks of August.

b) We are currently seeking individuals to be part of our highly focused and dedicated team.

c) We are pleased to announce a new rewards program that guarantees discounts on future purchases.

d) I am enclosing Form C32, which must be completed before we can reimburse you for your educational expenses.

12. Being Polite. Revise the following sentences to make them courteous.

Sample:

You had better get moving on that draft proposal.

Revision:

Please begin work on the draft proposal as soon as possible.

a) If you honestly expect me to meet the November 21 deadline, I need the latest sales figures and I need them now. Can you at least hand them over?

b) We have far better things to do here at Apex Industries than speak with customers who could easily find the same information on our website.

c) Have the decency to let me know how the meeting went.

d) Since you're the team leader, motivating team members is your problem, not mine.

13. Using Inclusive Language. Revise the following sentences so that they are bias-free, gender-neutral, and non-discriminatory.

Sample:

John is the best disabled IT specialist we've ever had.

Revision:

John is one of the best IT specialists we've ever had.

a) The suspension of mandatory retirement means that the old guys can stay in their jobs as long as they like.

b) Jennifer suffers from bouts of clinical depression, but she still gave a great presentation yesterday.

c) All executives and their wives are invited to our annual Christmas party. Every executive will have his choice of seating arrangement.

d) Our director is committed to improving service provision for Aboriginal Canadians. Our new program also has options for Inuit people and the Métis.

14. Identifying Gender-Insensitive Language. The following job description includes gender-insensitive language. Identify words and phrases

Extensive new and updated end-of-chapter exercises—featuring individual and group activities, writing improvement exercises, and case study exercises—provide realistic business situations that encourage students to develop their critical-thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration skills.

50

Communicating for Results

• Body movements, posture, gestures, and touch

• Appearance (bodily characteristics and clothing)

• Personal space and the use of time

These non-verbal cues have the power to both intensify a message and contradict its primary aim. A nod of the head, a point of a finger, a steady gaze, a slumped posture, a frown—these signals, like all non-verbal cues, are powerful indicators of feelings and attitudes in verbal communication (Figure 2.4).

REPETITION

• Non-verbal displays can repeat a verbally delivered message.

• E.g., instructing a computer technician to repair “this computer” while pointing at the computer

CONTRADICTION

• Non-verbal messages can conflict with verbal messages, posing challenges for the decoder.

• E.g., a job candidate saying she is confident but avoiding making eye contact

REGULATION

• Non-verbal displays can also regulate conversations.

• E.g., tapping a person on the shoulder to initiate conversation

SUBSTITUTION

• Sometimes a non-verbal display can stand in for a verbal message.

Decoders with expressive sensitivity can “read” facial expressions, gestures, and posture.

• E.g., team members might guess that an important contract has been lost if their team leader enters the meeting room with slouched shoulders and a downcast expression.

ACCENTING AND COMPLEMENTING

• Non-verbal displays can undermine, amplify, or tone down a verbal message. This is accenting.

• E.g., pounding the table while exclaiming “We have to cut our budget, now!”

• Complementary non-verbal cues reinforce or affirm a message, making it easier to remember.

• E.g., a boss who shakes a junior associate’s hand while praising them

FIGURE 2.4 Non-verbal communication cues can play five roles in relation to verbal communication.

6

Routine Messages

Chapter Preview

This chapter introduces you to routine business messages. You will be introduced to best practices for formatting and writing e-mail, managing your inbox, and communicating via instant messaging. You'll also discover standard approaches to formatting formal business letters for those occasions when they're required. Finally, you'll see how the adaptable direct writing plan can be applied for specific purposes to different types of routine messages.

Learning Objectives

6.1 Apply best practices when writing and managing e-mail.

6.2 Understand when and how to use instant messaging in the workplace.

6.3 Format formal letters in a variety of ways.

6.4 Use a direct writing plan for routine business messages.

6.5 Request general information and claims adjustments.

6.6 Respond positively to requests for information and claims adjustments.

6.7 Write announcements, follow-up messages, transcripts, and instructional messages.

6.8 Compose messages of appreciation, congratulations, and sympathy.

A dynamic full-colour design, featuring infographic presentation of concepts, engages students and helps reinforce key concepts.

Learning objectives and chapter previews prepare students for what they will encounter in each chapter.

2 | Getting the Message Across39



Case Study

Christine Paquette encountered questions asking her to explain her favourite tradition and even dress in traditional regalia when she applied for a job that was recruiting indigenous candidates.

Effective communication is essential to success in the business world, as no organization can exist or develop without it. Businesses that are ethical and able to keep their employees, customers, and other stakeholders well-informed about their business practices and values while operating according to values such as inclusion, equity, diversity, and sustainability are more likely to gain positive reputations and advance their organizational goals. Cross-cultural communication, for example, requires knowledge and sensitivity. In 2022, Christine Paquette, a 21-year-old Ojibway and Métis woman from Winnipeg, came across a CIBC customer service recruitment posting directed to Indigenous Peoples. Paquette believed her work experience and fluency in French made her a good fit for the job, which held possibilities for advancement. As she began to fill out the application, she was dismayed at a question that asked her to explain her favourite tradition or story, as it seemed such knowledge or experience was irrelevant to the bank teller role she was seeking. Even more troubling for Paquette was the requirement for a video cover letter submission in which applicants were asked to describe their communication skills and let their personality shine by writing a song or poem or dressing in traditional regalia, even bringing in "back-up dancers!" Stunned by this, Paquette believed such questions amounted to CIBC asking her to prove how Indigenous she was and brought up powerful emotions connected to the shame her grandmother was made to feel over her heritage throughout her residential school experience. Paquette found it ironic and highly insensitive on CIBC's part that applicants were asked to share stories and traditions that Indigenous Peoples had been robbed of through colonization and the residential school system. The suggestion that applicants dress in sacred traditional clothing, typically reserved for ceremony, as part of the application struck her as yet another sign of cultural insensitivity.

An outraged Paquette aired her concerns on Twitter. CIBC explained on Twitter that it partners with Our Children's Medicine, an organization specializing in Indigenous employment processes, whose HigherMe platform includes questions in consultation with Indigenous community leaders and leaders. Although a CIBC spokesperson maintained its questions for applicants were designed to help remove barriers through a prioritization of

Chapter-opening vignettes illustrate each chapter's main themes with real-life examples.

2 | Getting the Message Across49

audience made up of individuals they do not know. Instead, the transmission is indirect and often mediated through radio or television broadcasts or newspaper or magazine articles. An example of mass communication is a webcast of a chief executive officer's (CEO) address at an annual general meeting of shareholders.

Checklist

Communication Contexts

- What is interpersonal communication? What is its purpose?
- What factors set the emotional temperature of workplace relationships?
- What is emotional intelligence and what competencies are associated with it?
- How can interpersonal communication be improved?
- What is behavioural plasticity and why is it important?
- Why are interpersonal and personal management skills important?
- What strategies contribute to successful interpersonal communication?
- What is organizational communication? What role does organizational culture play in organizational communication?
- What is intercultural communication?
- What is mass communication?

2.5 Non-Verbal Communication

Communication involves more than just spoken and written words. Messages are also actively conveyed through a subtext of non-verbal language, both unwritten and unspoken, and even through touch (haptics) and social distances. As communications researcher and UCLA professor Albert Mehrabian found, the impact of spoken communications containing an emotional or attitudinal element comes largely from non-verbal elements:

- 7 per cent of the meaning is in the words that are spoken.
- 38 per cent of the meaning is paralinguistic (voice quality).
- 55 per cent of the meaning is in non-verbal expression.¹³

Although this finding is intriguing, if somewhat misleading, other research has shown that non-verbal cues have over four times the effect of verbal cues.¹⁴ This alone suggests that **non-verbal communication** is very important to social interaction.

Non-verbal messages communicate emotions, attitudes, greetings, and cues of status.¹⁵ Effective non-verbal skills and abilities can therefore play an important role in building and maintaining interpersonal relationships and managing impressions,¹⁶ which are key components of successful careers. How a message is encoded with any of the following non-verbal cues can influence how it is interpreted:

- Tone, inflection, and other acoustic properties of speech
- Eye gaze and facial expression

non-verbal communication

Communication that does not use words but takes place through gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions.

12Communicating for Results

- Use transitions and animation.** Effects such as dissolve, fade, vortex, or wipeout keep the eyes of your audience focused on the screen between slides. It is usually best to use one transition effect consistently throughout your presentation.
- If you are using Prezi, use rotation and size to convey meaning.** Rotation can be used to emphasize changes in perspective, thinking, or understanding about a particular topic. The size of objects can be increased for greater emphasis.
- Proofread the slides before your presentation.** Review your slides for accuracy, completeness, coherence, and clarity.
- If you are using PowerPoint, use the "Slide Sorter" and "Outline View" to review your presentation.** These features allow you to see the structure and big picture of your presentation and reorganize slides easily. Slide-Sorter can help you gauge the flow of your presentation and its graphical elements; with Outline View you can see the text of your presentation.
- Produce speaker notes as reminders.** You can set up notes to appear on a second monitor, or you can print them. Consider using your notes as handouts.
- Back up your work.** Copy everything to a USB flash drive or cloud storage, or e-mail your work to yourself. Take printouts of your slides to your presentation for ready reference in your equipment fails.
- Rehearse the slide show.** To ensure your slide show fits the allotted time, do a dry run and record the timing. You can then edit or eliminate slides as needed.
- Never read from a slide.** Maintain eye contact with the audience and never assume that a slide is self-explanatory.
- Keep the limitations of presentation software in mind.** Presentation programs can enhance the look of your presentation, but they are not effective for conveying large amounts of complex information. As American statistician Edward R. Tufte has noted, standard PowerPoint templates simplify information to the point that they "usually weaken verbal and spatial reasoning, and almost always corrupt statistical analysis."¹⁷

QUICK TIPS

Presenting with Visual Aids

- Test audiovisual equipment in advance and check the optics of the room to ensure that all participants have unobstructed views.
- Display your visual aid only when you are ready to talk about it, and give your audience a few moments to digest the information it supplies before you speak.
- Introduce your visual aid and/or give it a meaningful, self-explanatory title.
- Comment on-but do not read from—what you show, and match your delivery to the content of the visual.
- Make sure you direct your words to your audience, not to the aids you are using.
- Remove the visual as soon as you are finished with it.
- Never allow visual aids to dominate so much that they prevent you from connecting with your audience.

Checklists and quick tips boxes summarize key points for easy reference.

42 Communicating for Results

FIGURE 2.1 Transactional Communication Model

Claude Shannon, the father of the computer age. For communication to occur, Shannon, Weaver, and others claimed, there must be both a source and a destination—someone at one end to formulate and launch the **message** and someone at the other end to receive and respond to it (Figure 2.1).⁶ The goal is for the message to be understood as it was intended. The process, unfortunately, is not always as simple and straightforward as it sounds. Difficulties with transmission, reception, and interference can disrupt the communication process.

message Any type of oral, written, or non-verbal communication that is transmitted by a sender to a receiver or audience.

sender The participant in a communication transaction who has an idea and communicates it by encoding it in a message.

encoding Converting ideas into code in order to convey a written, oral, or a non-verbal message.

channel A communication pathway or medium over which a message travels.

Sender The **sender**, also called the transmitter or the communicator, is the person or group with a particular idea or purpose in mind and an intention to express that purpose in the form of a message. The form that the idea ultimately assumes—its content, tone, emphasis, and organization—is shaped by the sender's context, knowledge, attitudes, background, and other assumptions based on the sender's experience. Taking ideas and putting them into a code is known as **encoding**. The message can be encoded verbally or non-verbally—in writing, speech, or gestures, even visually—with the goal that it will eventually be understood. For this to happen, however, the sender must consider the receiver's context, knowledge, attitudes, and communication skills and then choose the right code to convey the intended meaning; otherwise, the communication transaction can fail.

Channel The **channel** is the medium by which the message is transmitted. Delivery can be by spoken word, image, letter, memo, report, telephone, computer, or gesture. A medium can be synchronous (i.e., communication takes place directly, at the same time or in real time) or asynchronous (i.e., information is stored or archived and accessed later so that sender and receiver do not need to be present at the same time). Face-to-face conversations, telephone conversations, synchronous texting, synchronous

2 | Getting the Message Across 41

The US-based National Communication Association describes communication studies as “focusing[ing] on how people use messages to generate meanings within and across contexts, cultures, channels, and the media” and “promot[ing] the effective and ethical practice of human communications.”⁷ Communication studies shares theories and assumptions with multiple disciplines, including sociology, psychology, political science, law, philosophy, and linguistics. Its theoretical frameworks study

- the practical art of discourse (**rhetoric**),
- the way our behaviour is influenced by the words and symbols we choose (**semantics**),
- how meaning is assigned and understood (**semiotics**), and
- how information is processed and communication systems function (**cybernetics**).

Throughout this book, we explore what these frameworks have in common, as well as the distinctive branches of communication that are integrated in the workplace.

2.3 The Communication Process

The idea of exchange and interaction—the flow of information from one person to another—is fundamental to modern communication and to the theories that systematically explain how meaning is created, shared, and managed.⁸ It is important to remember that communication is

- situated (i.e., embedded in a particular environment or socio-cultural context)
- relational (i.e., involves the ability to interact effectively and ethically according to what is needed at a given moment)
- transactional (i.e., exists as a co-operative activity in which people adapt to one another)

Communication is a process or series of actions aimed at achieving a desired outcome or goal. Senders and receivers of information are involved in this partnership. Communication is therefore the means by which we create our professional world and relationships and conduct business activities.

This partnership involves an exchange that takes place through language or a set of signs and symbols (e.g., words or gestures). In this exchange, a sender transmits a thought that carries an agreed-upon meaning within a particular context with the aim of eliciting a receiver's response. The receiver must be able to understand what is significant about the data and make meaning out of it in order for this exchange to be truly effective. Through communication, we assign meanings to the world around us, although the realities we create are shaped by our cultural experiences and individual knowledge.

Elements of the Communication Process

How does communication “work”? Many conceptual models have been developed to explain it, including the Shannon-Weaver model from Bell Telephone Laboratories, the mother of all conceptual models developed by scientist Warren Weaver and engineer

rhetoric The use of language to persuade an audience.

semantics The study of the words and symbols we choose.

semiotics The study of how meaning is assigned and understood.

cybernetics The study of how information is processed and how communication systems function.

A **marginal glossary** defines key terms and concepts at their first appearance in the text.

Student and Instructor Resources

Communicating for Results is accompanied by a comprehensive package of online resources for students and instructors alike, all designed to enhance and complete the learning and teaching experiences. These resources are available at www.oup.com/he/meyer6e.

For Instructors

- A series of **AI exploration modules** suggest activities encouraging hands-on exploration of how generative AI tools can be applied to concepts and processes discussed in the text.
- A comprehensive **instructor's manual** provides an extensive set of pedagogical tools and suggestions for every chapter.
- Classroom-ready **PowerPoint slides** summarize key points from each chapter and incorporate figures and tables drawn straight from the text.
- An extensive **test bank** includes hundreds of questions in multiple-choice, true-false, and short-answer formats.

For Students

- A **student resource page** includes a suite of materials to support students' understanding of the text, including flashcards, review questions and quizzes, grammar resources, and additional sample documents.

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Carolyn Meyer

To my mother, Margaret
—and in memory of my father, George Homer



1

Issues and Trends in Professional Communication

Chapter Preview

This chapter introduces you to the contemporary workplace and what it takes to be a professional, both individually and as part of a team. You'll see why it's important to be honest and principled and to keep private information private.

Learning Objectives

- 1.1** Identify the link between effective business communication and personal career success.
- 1.2** Recognize key changes and trends in the workplace.
- 1.3** Understand professionalism and professional boundaries.
- 1.4** Identify the importance, types, and characteristics of workplace teams and models for team decision-making.
- 1.5** Identify the goals and standards of ethical business communication.
- 1.6** Understand workplace privacy issues and identify strategies to safeguard personal information.

Case Study



By permission of Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development Inc.

Brenda LaRose lives her values in her approach to business communication.

Values of honesty and respect for diversity and differences, a commitment to trust and relationship building, collaborative and virtual-team practices, and open and transparent communication: These are the cornerstones on which Brenda LaRose has built her outstanding 25-year career as an executive search company head. As the 2019 recipient of the Aboriginal Business Hall of Fame Lifetime Achievement Award from the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business and as a Métis Anishinaabe citizen, Winnipeg-based LaRose lives the values of her culture while applying a wealth of expertise as a Certified Management Consultant and a Certified Professional in Human Resources. She is the founder of Higgins Executive Search, a national leader in diverse and Indigenous

executive recruitment, and is now a partner at Leaders International, as well as the co-founder of SheDay. For LaRose, communicating is about more than just getting the message across. "It's extremely important. You are projecting your values and image every day when you're interacting with people, including clients. It's all about communicating from an ethics-and-values perspective—that's key for communicating. Our job is to make sure that we are communicating well, that we're managing the expectations [of clients and candidates] and that we're making sure they understand how we work and understand the process."

LaRose's ethics-and-values perspective makes good business sense, but it comes from a wider world than business. It comes from who she is and who her people are, as embodied in part by Indigenous knowledge, the Anishinaabe Seven Sacred Laws (respect, love, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility, and truth), and millennia-old practices of storytelling and conflict resolution—practices that have been emulated in the mainstream business communication tool kit. LaRose stresses that working in the Indigenous community demands an understanding of its diversity—there are more than 600 First Nations here in Canada, different from one another in more than just geographical location—and a nuanced appreciation of communicative differences. That respect for differences carries over to LaRose's respect for the communication preferences of her Indigenous and non-Indigenous team. LaRose encourages them to communicate both verbally and in writing and to use Teamer, a tool for interoffice communication, to promote sharing and clear up uncertainties.

With a team of 12 and offices in Winnipeg, Vancouver, and Ottawa, LaRose knows the importance of collaborative software tools and strong relationships between team members based on trust and mutual respect as the keys to productive virtual meetings and on-site project partnerships. When she founded Higgins Executive Search 26 years ago, she realized that many interactions among staff were virtual and invested heavily in technology to keep her dispersed team in regular contact to work on a number of different projects at once. Says LaRose, "You've got to be able to work together, trust each other, and like each other to be part of a team. If you're not communicating, not working together, and not spending time together, you can't be a team."¹

1.1 Communication: An Essential Workplace Skill

According to Bruce Mau, co-founder and chief executive officer (CEO) of Massive Change Network, “Historically, the workplace was designed to prevent communication. What we realize now is that communication flow within an organization is the most powerful creator of wealth, so we as business leaders need to find the synthesis between our physical and digital workspaces to facilitate this communication.”² Creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills are all factors in business success.

In today’s global business environment, everyone communicates for a living. It is impossible to think of work environments without some of the many communication activities that anchor organizations:

- Writing reports
- Dashing off e-mails
- Composing formal letters
- Producing media releases
- Using social media for relatable, educational, or brand content
- Participating in meetings
- Connecting through video-conference or group software
- Texting or speaking on the telephone
- Networking and collaborating face-to-face with colleagues
- Giving presentations
- Curating or creating high-quality images, video, and infographics
- Facilitating audio chats
- Using digital technologies to carry out any of these functions

Spoken and written **communication** that is focused, reliable, and disciplined has the power to influence opinion and shape perceptions on which an organization’s competitiveness, productivity, and success depend. Goal-driven and actionable communication that makes data both meaningful and manageable for those who must use it to make decisions plays a crucial role in building credibility and upholding standards of accountability. In a global business environment in which relationships thrive on trust, how you write, speak, and listen reflects who you are professionally.

Successful communication on the job doesn’t happen by chance. It is the result of

- learning how to structure information strategically using text, design, and relevant technologies flexibly to achieve an intended purpose for a clearly defined audience
- achieving a fine, context-sensitive balance between a commitment to your business goals and an awareness of your audience’s needs
- understanding your role in various communication (based on your job status, your task and duties, and your relationship to those you are interacting with)
- building beyond basic literacy skills (rules of grammar, spelling, and punctuation) as an ethical and tech-literate communicator proficient in using language to

communication

A transactional and relational process involving the meaningful exchange of information.

- » problem-solve and present alternative solutions
- » explain and rationalize, including for training, work processes, production, and resource management
- » motivate and gain compliance
- » define organizational culture, goals, issues, and public policy
- » negotiate and manage conflict
- » lead or foster co-operation and collaboration
- » position products, build brand identity, and gain access to customers and markets
- » relationship build, foster community relations, and conduct customer relations³

soft skill A social, interpersonal, self-management, or language skill that complements a person's technical skills.

hard skill A technical skill (know-how and abilities) that a person requires for a specific job.

The ability to communicate effectively is considered a “**soft skill**”—a social and self-management behaviour—as opposed to a “**hard skill**”—technical know-how, a tool, and/or a technique that equips people to work in a professional capacity. Soft “human” skills include interpersonal skills that characterize relationships with others as well as communication and listening skills, problem-solving ability, time management skills, and qualities such as empathy and leadership. Among the 95 Canadian human resource specialists surveyed for Navigating Change: 2018 Business Council Skills Survey, maintaining a “human touch” and hiring graduates with a comprehensive mix of skills were key priorities.⁴ Topping the list of skills employers are looking for in entry-level hires are

- collaboration/teamwork/interpersonal/relationship-building skills
- communication skills
- problem-solving skills
- analytical capabilities
- resiliency

A 2022 survey conducted by Censuswide on behalf of Indeed found that among 1,000 employers throughout Canada, 77 per cent see the merits of hiring a candidate based on their soft skills alone.⁵

Communication capabilities are not just a pathway to career advancement but also a route to satisfied customers and a healthy bottom line. The Conference Board of Canada argues that progress in the work world depends on the ability to do the following:

- read and understand information in many forms;
- speak and write to command attention and promote understanding;
- actively listen and appreciate other points of view;
- use scientific and technological skills to clarify ideas;
- share information via a range of technologies;
- manage information by gathering and organizing it through the use of technologies and information systems; and,
- apply and integrate knowledge and skills from other disciplines.⁶

Developing these skills leads to advantages that have lasting benefits for organizations and stakeholders. Advantages include enhanced problem-solving and decision-making; increased efficiency, workflow, and productivity; and improved professional image, business relationships, and group dynamics.

1.2 Communicating in the Current Workplace

Contemporary changes in the Canadian workplace—and beyond—have implications for learning, job requirements, sought-after business talent, hiring, and the quality of work life. Despite these changes, communication is a constant cornerstone for successful professionals.

Flexible Work Arrangements

For many Canadian workers, the COVID-19 pandemic shifted preferences for work to more permanent remote and hybrid arrangements. Professional services, information and culture, and finance and insurance are among the industries in which remote and hybrid work arrangements are common.⁷ For example, information technology company SAP Canada has received positive ratings for its Flex Appeal policy, which enables employees to work non-traditional hours from a remote location or in an office that provides designated space for every task. Strong digital skills and the ability to self-manage tasks and time effectively are core to a skill set demanded of remote workers.

The Knowledge Economy and Datafication

Whereas Canada's economy used to be based on the products people made from raw materials through manual labour and industrial production, the information age has made it knowledge-based. Information is a valuable commodity and now, more than ever, it is easily accessed and disseminated through digital technology. The knowledge worker makes and sells some kind of idea-based product, such as software, consulting and financial services, music, design, or pharmaceuticals. The advantage that knowledge products have over products produced through manual labour is that their value can dramatically increase as the global market expands.

Workers are expected to have both the skills necessary to find and evaluate information and the know-how to process and communicate that information effectively. Businesses rely increasingly on artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithm-based big data analytics, the practice of collecting, analyzing, and comparing large data sets and identifying patterns in them, to better understand consumer preferences; forecast trends; attune strategies, products, and services; and boost marketing, customer-relationship management, data sharing, human resources and hiring, and security enhancement.⁸ For approximately a decade, the Toronto Raptors front office has drawn insights from big data to make the strategic draft picks that helped it clinch the 2019 NBA championship.⁹ Canadian shoe retailer Aldo, which has a global presence, made gains following a post-COVID-19 restructuring by using its stores as what CEO David Bensadoun called “a massive data collection service.” Staff scan and record the footwear a shopper tries on. This data can then be used by Aldo's design team to determine which fits work and by the company itself to advise wholesale customers which styles are popular in specific locales in North America.¹⁰ Companies also now rely on competitive intelligence—the practice of deriving data insight from external sources to gain a competitive advantage by utilizing data about a competitor's products, services, and customers to make business decisions.¹¹ **Knowledge management** (KM) refers to the creation of technological systems

knowledge management

“A collection of information technologies used to collect, transfer, and distribute knowledge among employees.”¹²



The Toronto Raptors are just one of the businesses, ranging from large to small, that are using the power of big data and AI to improve their products, market knowledge, and processes.

ye1634/6123RF.com

for the collection, creation, storage, transfer, curation, and distribution of knowledge among employees.¹³ Company intranets—private communications networks that allow employees to share insider information in a protected Web environment—are among the tools that support problem-solving in organizations.

information and communication technologies (ICTs)

Technologies, such as mobile phone systems and the internet, used for transmitting, manipulating, and storing data by electronic means.

piracy The unauthorized reproduction and distribution of copyrighted material, including video games, software, music, and films.

cyberwarfare A form of information warfare, usually the conducting of politically motivated sabotage through hacking.

identity theft The act of acquiring and collecting an individual's personal information for criminal purposes.

Risk and Security at Work

Sociologists Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck have called our modern society a “risk society.”¹⁴ Risk is the potential for loss. When we act to gain something, we must often assume a certain level of risk. Today's businesses face challenges from a complex threat landscape and carry out extensive assessments to identify potential risks and avoid risk-related losses. Dangers include not only environmental risks, such as natural disasters, but also manufactured risks that have the potential to be catastrophic and affect many people. Examples of manufactured risks in **information and communication technologies (ICTs)** include **piracy**, **cyberwarfare**, and **identity theft**. Security breaches result in lost or compromised data, as well as a loss of trust; they can harm commerce and a company's credibility, reputation, and bottom line through legal costs, settlements, and public relations (PR) costs. Governments and businesses attempt to control such risks by building trust, establishing cross-border co-operation, and forging networks. Under federal privacy protection law, Breach of Security Safeguard Regulations in effect as of November 1, 2018, require companies to report breaches to the Privacy Commissioner in writing or face penalties of up to \$100,000. The report must specify the nature and cause of the breach, when it occurred and how they learned of it, the type of information breached, the number of people affected, and their crisis

response to reduce the risk of harm to those affected. Preventive measures and regulation, including data security and cybersecurity, are also part of the management of risk, as are the specialized protocols of crisis and **risk communication**.

Sustainability, Environmental Awareness, and Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporations hold significant power and influence in the world. In fact, 42 of the 100 largest economies in the world are companies.¹⁶ According to Natural Resources Canada, **corporate social responsibility (CSR)** refers to “voluntary activities of companies, over and above regulation, that serve to integrate social, environmental and economic concerns into their activities.”¹⁷ CSR got its start in the 1990s amid growing stakeholder concerns over globalization and environmental catastrophes such as the sinking of the *Exxon Valdez* oil tanker.¹⁸ Forward-looking companies such as Ben & Jerry’s began to issue sustainability reports, and many others gradually embraced a three-part (three P’s) **triple bottom line** framework through which they evaluate their performance and the value they create:

1. **Economic—profit.** This refers to the profit a company’s financial performance generates for its shareholders. In the past, a company’s goals would be purely economic, but now adopting sustainability measures and creating positive change are seen as drivers of business success: “doing well by doing good.”
2. **Social—people.** This part involves creating value for stakeholders, including employees, customers, and the community, through volunteerism and fair hiring practices as well as through a commitment to an equitable, diverse, and inclusive work environment in which all individuals are valued, respected, and treated with dignity.
3. **Environmental—the planet.** This part is concerned with having a positive impact on the planet through environmental awareness; pollution and carbon footprint reduction; ethical sourcing of materials; and water, energy, and resource conservation.¹⁹

Today, important initiatives such as the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) drive transparency on how corporations earn their money, treat their employees, and protect the planet’s finite resources. The UNGC asks companies to embrace, support, and enact core values related to particular areas:

- Human rights, including the rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Labour standards (e.g., bans on forced and child labour, recognition of collective bargaining rights, and elimination of employment discrimination)
- The environment (adoption of environmental protection initiatives and environmentally friendly technologies, and use of precautionary approaches to environmental challenges)
- Anti-corruption (zero tolerance for all forms of corruption, including bribery and extortion)²¹

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act came into force in Canada on June 21, 2021, with measures to “address injustices, combat prejudice, and

risk communication An interactive exchange of information and ideas on risk among risk assessors, risk managers, and other interested parties.¹⁵

corporate social responsibility (CSR)

A company’s voluntary contributions to sustainable development through the support of non-profit organizations and/or the creation of socially conscious corporate policies.

triple bottom line

A business concept, encapsulated in the three P’s of profit, planet, and people, which holds that organizations should not only focus on the standard bottom line of financial performance but also commit to measuring their environmental and social impact.²⁰

sustainable development

Economic development that maintains natural resources for future generations and recognizes the relationship between economic, social, and environmental issues.

eliminate all forms of violence, racism and discrimination against Indigenous peoples” and promote mutual respect and understanding.²²

Communicating these values to stakeholders is likewise becoming increasingly important for companies. Reporting **sustainable development** is more than a PR exercise.²³ Through a combination of voluntary and mandatory disclosures, sustainability reporting can accomplish many objectives:

- Strengthen the link between a company and its stakeholders and increase stakeholder value
- Boost financial performance
- Showcase efficiency in production and lead to better use of company assets and innovative technology
- Increase the company’s appeal to socially responsible investors
- Build industry credibility, set an example, and enhance company reputation

Business on a Global Scale and Workforce Diversity

The world’s economy is increasingly global. This is due, in large part, to several key factors:

- Web browsers promoting connectivity and the free flow of information
- Software (e.g., PayPal) and other communication platforms promoting wider co-operation
- Open-source software (software that users are permitted to change and improve)
- Outsourcing and offshoring (designing at home and redistributing customer service functions and production facilities to distant countries)
- “Amplifiers” that are digital, virtual, mobile, and personal (cellphones, smart-phones, chips, file-sharing networks, VOIP, Wi-Fi)

This globalized business structure provides new opportunities and a demand for greater competitiveness from Canadian businesses. Products from Canadian brands may or may not be wholly produced within the country’s borders. For example, Canadian aerospace and transportation giant Bombardier has facilities in 28 countries.²⁴ The trend toward outsourcing and offshoring customer service functions also continues. The need to explore new and emerging markets, negotiate, buy and sell overseas, market products, and enter into joint ventures is anchored in effective communication with people from throughout the world that overcomes differences in culture, time zones, and language.

In today’s globalized economy, a company’s human capital—or the individuals who make up an organization—is arguably its greatest asset. By 2032, it is estimated that one in four Canadians will have been born outside of Canada, with new Canadians making up a growing percentage of the nation’s workforce.²⁵ A diverse employee base reflecting differences in ethnicity, age, race, ancestry, physical ability, religious belief, sexual orientation, and gender identity can bring many possible advantages:

- A wider and deeper skill set and talent base, with potential exposure to diverse insights and viewpoints to spur creativity, innovation, and synergistic teamwork

- Greater productivity, performance, and employee satisfaction,²⁶ with potential for an enriched work life through daily cross-cultural contact and interactions²⁷
- Enhanced access to foreign markets and capacity to compete globally, with multilingual employees of diverse backgrounds bringing cultural knowledge and market insights as well as the ability to interact effectively with global stakeholders²⁸

Although prioritized across Canadian organizations,²⁹ **diversity** and inclusion still come with challenges rooted in differing values and communication styles, which may in turn contribute to miscommunication and lack of understanding. Challenges, too, such as bias, microaggressions, barriers to promotion, and lack of support from colleagues, disproportionately affect people of colour and other diverse employee groups. All of these concerns highlight the need for organizations to shift mindsets and achieve shared understanding through diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and supportive programs.³⁰ Among the top 100 companies listed by the Great Place to Work Institute Canada, Grant Thornton LLP has made a mark with its Diverse Exchanges program, which provides an opportunity for employees to connect and learn from each other by sharing diverse perspectives.

diversity Variety among people with respect to gender, race, ethnicity, ancestry, age, sexual orientation, religious belief, and physical ability, which is to be acknowledged, valued, and celebrated in today's workplaces.

A Growing Millennial and Gen Z Workforce

The term *millennials* refers to individuals born between 1981 and 1996, and *Gen Z* refers to those born between 1997 and 2009.³¹ Not yet in the employment market, *Generation Alpha* refers to anyone born since 2010.³² According to Statistics Canada, millennials account for the largest share of the working-age population, at over 33 per cent.³³ Millennials bring unique talents and competencies to the workforce, but their numbers alone make for a competitive labour market. Their work styles and preferences show desire for

- financial rewards and benefits
- flexible hours
- work-life balance
- ongoing learning, coaching, and real-time feedback
- fulfillment—work that is authentic and allows them to be themselves and develop their strengths
- being kept in the loop—having access to all workplace information that they perceive to be relevant to them and to their jobs³⁴

Millennials are also known for their willingness to work in teams; communicate openly with managers; embrace new communication technologies; and change jobs frequently, in fact twice as often as previous generations, in order to achieve career goals.³⁵ A full 70 per cent of millennials prefer to work from home,³⁶ making telecommuting, mobile offices, online collaboration tools, and cloud software more than just passing trends. Eighty per cent of millennials and Gen Zs find the **gig economy**, based in freelance and contract work, appealing because of the opportunity to work part-time and supplement existing employment.³⁷ Gen Zs, the generation now entering the workforce, are also characterized by a desire to work for accountable employers that do good in the world, make a difference, and are responsive to issues that matter to them.³⁸ If this new generation of employees has a personality, it could be summed up as the Pew Research Center has described it: confident, connected, and open to change.³⁹

gig economy a labour market characterized by a high number of freelance and contract jobs.

Team Work Environments

team A group of people who accomplish common goals through the performance of interdependent tasks.

Teams are a centrepiece of organizations and essential to workflow, driven by the demand for skill diversity and high levels of expertise and the need to stay competitive, adapt, and innovate.⁴⁰ A **team** refers to two or more people who interact (face-to-face or virtually) to achieve one or more common goals through relevant and interdependent tasks.⁴¹ Team effectiveness is based on the logic of an I–P–O formula:

- Inputs: the composition of a team—its individuals, human capital, and resources
- Processes: the activities that team members engage in to fulfil shared goals
- Outputs: performance in meeting goals as judged by others outside the team, the meeting of team member needs, and members' commitment to remaining in the team⁴²

Collaboration through cross-functional teams, in which individuals with different areas of expertise come together to share information for a common goal, makes the most of a workforce's creative potential by increasing individual involvement in decision-making and project development. According to Eva Wong, co-founder and chief operating officer of Toronto-based Borrowell, a fintech firm that started in 2014, being part of a great gender-balanced team that enabled people to thrive “no matter their gender” was the biggest factor in her entrepreneurial success in the tech industry.⁴³ Innovations in information technology and mobile communications have made it possible for employees to be part of globally distributed teams and virtual project teams, which can eliminate time and space barriers—by allowing team members to contribute outside of traditional work hours and from various locations—and still provide quality, low-cost solutions to organizational problems. Working in teams, however, depends on strong communication and interpersonal skills to overcome conflicts that arise when people with differing viewpoints must make joint decisions.

Indigenous Economic Growth

Since the 1990s, there has been extraordinary growth in Indigenous business in Canada; however, there is still far to go in achieving economic reconciliation and overcoming a history of economic segregation of Indigenous Peoples arising from colonization. It is important to recognize that the governments of Canada and their settler economies were founded on and drew resources from First Peoples' lands. These colonizing practices displaced Indigenous Peoples physically and psychically from their homelands and imposed on them economies that were not their own. In recognizing these painful truths, organizations such as the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business have a mission to promote and enhance a prosperous Indigenous economy through programs such as the Progressive Indigenous Relations Program, a certification program confirming corporate performance in Indigenous relations and promoting prosperity in Indigenous communities.⁴⁴ Indigenous Works, a national not-for-profit Indigenous-led social enterprise, has a similar mandate “to improve the inclusion and engagement of Indigenous people in the Canadian economy.”⁴⁵ In 2020 alone, the gross domestic product attributable to Indigenous Peoples was \$48.9 billion.⁴⁶ It has been reported that there are now more than 50,000 Indigenous-owned businesses across many sectors.⁴⁷ Young entrepreneurs and women account for much of the recent growth in Indigenous business.⁴⁸

The term *Indigenomics* describes the effort of Indigenous Peoples to build their futures and improve their communities and quality of life through equity ownership, environmental planning, and procurement.⁴⁹ According to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Indigenous entrepreneurship can be distinct from mainstream understandings of entrepreneurship because of its emphasis on collectiveness and community development and its foundations in Indigenous knowledges (IK)—understandings and ways of knowing that are cumulative and interconnected and emphasize the relatedness of all living things.⁵⁰ For Winnipeg-based Manitobah Mukluks, founded more than 25 years ago, creating handmade moccasins and mukluks sold throughout the world is just the beginning in carrying out its vision of positively impacting Indigenous communities, sharing success, keeping traditions alive, and celebrating Indigenous values.⁵¹ Its four pillars of impact are Art in Action, which involves providing a platform for authentic Indigenous art; Education for Change, bringing Indigenous youth and artists together through its Storyboot School to preserve traditions; Trade for Community, hosting an Indigenous market where 100 per cent of sale proceeds go to the artist; and Sovereignty Through Leadership, serving as a pathfinder demonstrating how Indigenous values can find success in the global market.⁵²

Business success stories represent a broad range of sectors:

- Sequoia, a proudly Indigenous beauty brand with global sales, was founded in 2002 by Michael Lee Lazore, who is Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) from Akwesáhsne and Northern Paiute from Nevada.⁵³ Sequoia's products have been featured in *Allure*, *Refinery29*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *ELLE*.
- Cheekbone Beauty, founded by award-winning social entrepreneur Jenn Harper from the Ojibwe Nation, is a cosmetics brand based in St. Catharines, Ontario, that “creates a space in the beauty industry where Indigenous youth feel represented and seen.”⁵⁴
- Indigo Arrows, a design studio based in Winnipeg, specializes in handcrafted modern home décor pottery, bed and table linens, and blankets that reimagine the bone tool patterns of founder Destiny Seymour's Anishinaabe ancestors.⁵⁵
- Section Thirty-Five (35), founded and owned by Justin Louis, a member of the Samson Cree Nation, is a premium streetwear brand aimed at amplifying Indigenous art, culture, and fashion.

A fact of living and doing business in Canada is that our lives and work are conducted on the traditional territories of First Peoples.⁵⁶ Acknowledging territory shows respect for and recognition of Indigenous Peoples and helps build reciprocal relationships necessary for achieving understanding and reconciliation. **Territorial acknowledgements** are statements read out or displayed at the beginning of meetings, conferences, ceremonies, presentations, courses, and community events. More than mere formalities, they are important cultural protocols (based on formal protocols long used by Indigenous Peoples to acknowledge their surroundings) and positioning statements that show how an organization is changing how it works on Indigenous lands and actively working with respect and integrity with Indigenous communities.⁵⁷ As such, they are an essential part of doing business. There is no single land acknowledgement statement that can be used Canada-wide—only context-specific statements are true acknowledgements. Each is dependent on geographical location⁵⁸ and on the past and continuing presence of specific Indigenous groups or nations, named in the statement, who called and continue

**territorial
acknowledgement**

A statement that recognizes the traditional territory of the Indigenous Peoples who inhabit, or once inhabited, the land on which an event happens or people have gathered.

to call that place home. Educational tools, such as the Whose Land app and website, make it easy for people to identify the Indigenous land they are on.⁵⁹

At its most essential, a land acknowledgment names and recognizes a specific Indigenous group or groups: “We want to acknowledge that we are on the traditional territory of [nation names].” International human rights organization Amnesty International proposes a reflective process for writing a land acknowledgement:

1. Naming the Indigenous territory you are on
2. Explaining why you are acknowledging that land
3. Speaking to the relevance of Indigenous rights to the event
4. Incorporating answers to 1–3 in a meaningful statement⁶⁰

According to Selena Mills, Cree French Canadian-Settler, Centre for Wise Practices in Indigenous Health, Women’s College Hospital, “For Indigenous Peoples land acknowledgements are not only to assert our sovereignty and treaty rights of today but it’s also a way for all peoples to feel more connected to a place.”⁶¹ In its unwavering commitment to offering more culturally safe, anti-racist services where reconciliation can thrive, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), Canada’s largest teaching mental health hospital, envisions the development of its land acknowledgement as “an act of reconciliation.”⁶² It came about through extensive consultations with Indigenous community members on a learning journey seeking to acknowledge the past, with direction from Elder Diane Longboat, member of the Turtle Clan, Mohawk Nation at Six Nations Grand River Territory and a citizen of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, who also holds the role of Senior Manager, Strategic Initiatives for Shkaabe Makwa.⁶³ CAMH took the added step of creating a 15-page guide to help its organization more fully understand the rationale and process that went into creating it as well as its purpose, use, and delivery. CAMH views its land acknowledgement as an opportunity for Settler-Canadians and non-Indigenous peoples to examine their relationship to the history of settler colonialism and their positionality and identity, as well as to reflect on their responsibilities and reciprocal relationship to the land and what has been granted to them as visitors.⁶⁴ Its land acknowledgement shows how the organization is actively working to broaden its approach to care, one that is founded in respect for and full embrace of Indigenous medicine, ways of knowing, and healing practices:

CAMH is situated on lands that have been occupied by First Nations for millennia; lands rich in civilizations with knowledge of medicine, architecture, technology, and extensive trade routes throughout the Americas. In 1860, the site of CAMH appeared in the Colonial Records Office of the British Crown as the council grounds of the Mississaugas of the New Credit, as they were known at the time.

Today, Toronto is covered by the Toronto Purchase, Treaty No. 13 of 1805 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.

Toronto is now home to a vast diversity of First Nations, Inuit and Métis who enrich this city.

CAMH is committed to reconciliation. We will honour the land through programs and places that reflect and respect its heritage. We will embrace the healing traditions of the Ancestors, and weave them into our caring practices. We will create new relationships and partnerships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis and share the land and protect it for future generations.⁶⁵

Almost no region of Canada has been untouched by the radical displacement of Indigenous Peoples from their lands and the desecration of that land through Settler-Canadian resource mining and land use practices. Some organizations are beginning to address these long-standing inequities, however. The Real Estate Foundation of BC, an organization that makes grants of approximately \$4.6 million a year to advance equity, sustainability, and social justice in land use, prioritizes Indigenous-led projects that support Indigenous rights and the rights of communities that are systemically shut out of land-use decisions.⁶⁶ In 2024, its Land Awards recognized the emerging leadership of Sulatiye' Maiya Modeste, the P'hwulhp Restoration Project Coordinator for the Stqeeye' Learning Society, for her work with the organization in land restoration and education around Xqwaaqw'um, a Quw'utsun village site on Salt Spring Island.⁶⁷

Checklist

Communication Skills and Trends in the Canadian Workplace

- ☐ How do hard skills and soft skills contribute to success?
- ☐ What is the knowledge economy?
- ☐ How does risk affect business decisions?
- ☐ Why are sustainable development, environmentalism, equity and diversity, and corporate social responsibility important in modern business?
- ☐ What is global business?
- ☐ Why is it important for organizations to promote diversity in the workplace?
- ☐ What strengths do millennials and Gen Zs bring to the workforce?
- ☐ How are Indigenous businesses making their mark, and what are the core values on which many are founded?

1.3 Professionalism and Employee Engagement

Why Professionalism Is Important

A professional is a worker or a practitioner (e.g., a doctor, a lawyer, an engineer, a performing artist, or a fundraiser) in whom others put their trust. **Professionalism**, or the act of being professional, requires a worker to demonstrate they are worthy of that trust through their attitudes and actions. Workers can show professionalism through

- putting clients first
- maintaining confidentiality
- using their knowledge for honest, legal, and ethical purposes⁶⁸

Professionalism involves an active process of developing work identities, modes of conduct, and practices.⁶⁹ A starting point for many new workers is getting to know and understand their shared work identity. This identity links them to others who do the

professionalism The act of being professional, which requires demonstrating the competence and/or skill expected from a professional.

same work and reinforces a sense of belonging based on what they have in common, including their

- educational background
- professional training
- experiences and expertise
- membership in professional associations
- shared work cultures
- shared ways of solving problems and helping clients and customers deal with uncertainty and risk⁷⁰

Adapting to a workplace and developing work identities isn't about wearing the right suit or looking the part. It's about standing out as someone who can act decisively and knowledgeably, adapt to new situations, and add value to an organization through their high-quality work.⁷¹ As an employee, professionalism is an ongoing process of social learning that involves thinking about and carrying out your duties according to a set of shared values, objectives, norms, and expectations important to you, your organization, and its stakeholders.

The link between organizations and professionalism is strong. In fact, professionalism is embedded in every aspect of the workplace, including its systems, structures, rules, and procedures.⁷² For individuals, its outcomes can lead to higher status and authority.⁷³ For organizations, professionalism, by reducing risk of conflict and error, can improve workflow, the quality and conditions of work life, and the customer–client experience. In the end, professionalism is good for business because it enhances a company's efficiency, productivity, competitiveness, and reputation.

Qualities, Characteristics, and Expectations

No matter your profession or occupation, being professional depends on your capacity to act in the best interests of customers and colleagues, never purely out of self-interest.⁷⁴ It involves not just a single skill or capacity but a whole range of integrated skills and qualities (highlighted in Figure 1.1). The combined characteristics each organization values are as unique as the organizations themselves. Such characteristics also define organizational culture.

From a different perspective, the expectation to be professional can be interpreted as a way for organizations to exercise domination and control over their members. This negative interpretation of organizational expectations explains why businesses may opt to become “**authentic organizations**.”⁷⁵ Authentic organizations aim to foster creative, innovative environments that will attract top talent and thereby bring meaning and engagement back to the workplace. **Employee engagement** has to do with harnessing an employee's “self” to their work role in a way that makes the employee not just attentive to the role but fully immersed in it.⁷⁶ Engaged employees boost organizational performance and increase revenues,⁷⁷ making engagement a top priority for managers. Gallup's 2022 *State of the Global Workplace Report* found that in 2021, 33 per cent of US and Canadian employees were engaged at work and 60 per cent were thriving in their well-being; in the rest of the world, only 21 per cent of employees were engaged and 33 per cent were thriving.⁷⁸ Among the most engaged workplaces are Air Canada, Herbalife Nutrition, and Scotiabank.⁷⁹ Many companies in Canada now survey employee

authentic organizations

Organizations that encourage employees to be their best selves by valuing and nurturing their perspectives and differences in attitude.

employee engagement

Employees' genuine enthusiasm for and commitment to their work and organization.

engagement and satisfaction frequently (weekly, even daily) and have introduced measures to increase it. For example, the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), one of the *Globe and Mail's* Top 100 Employers, formed a committee to foster long-term employee engagement through a collaborative approach.⁸⁰

Professional Boundaries and Behaviours

Relationships are defined by the boundaries we set to map out what is acceptable behaviour and what is off-limits in particular contexts. Boundaries create transparency and help build strong, respectful relationships. **Personal boundaries** are the limits (emotional, physical, and mental) we establish to protect ourselves and set our own thoughts and feelings apart from others'. **Professional boundaries**, on the other hand, define the roles and responsibilities of employees in the workplace. Professional boundaries help employees work safely, comfortably, and productively. They help each member of an organization know where they stand, what is expected of them, and what they can rightfully say "yes" and "no" to. Recognizing and respecting boundaries helps people work together more effectively, and it helps build an environment of transparency in which there is less chance of stress, blame, or bullying.

Defining and establishing professional boundaries begins with recognizing personal boundaries and making sense of guidelines for workplace interactions and your roles in those interactions. To start, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- What is your role according to your job description?
- What are your duties and responsibilities?
- Who do you support and report to?
- Who assigns your work and sets your priorities?
- Who evaluates your work and provides feedback?

You should also be aware of different types of boundaries and how they relate to communication on the job:

- Organizational rules and regulations (positive/negative sanctions)
- Norms (obligations that must be met)
- Cognition (ways of thinking)
- Individualized self-regulation (self-control and personal commitments, such as pride in performance, that guide you where organizational regulations leave off)

Reading your job description, perusing your employment manual, reflecting on your personal values, and having appropriate conversations with superiors or supervisors are all good ways to gain the insight and information you need to set professional boundaries. Observing workplace culture and paying attention to how others interact can also yield valuable information. Learning about organizational culture and respecting professional boundaries are both essential to professionalism.

Unprofessional behaviour is often the result of loose or unrecognized boundaries. Crossing these unseen limits—for example, by intruding on someone else's space or sharing too much personal information—can cause confusion, conflict, embarrassment, and loss of respect and reputation. Such behaviour can shift attention off-task and away from a customer's needs, disrupt co-worker relationships, or change perceptions

personal boundaries The emotional, physical, and mental limits individuals establish to protect themselves from harm and set their thoughts and feelings apart from others'.

professional boundaries The emotional, physical, and mental limits that define what employees should and should not do and how they should be treated in the workplace.

Accountability (owning up to and making amends for mistakes)	Commitment to excellence (having high expectations for your performance and doing your best)	Dedication (being hardworking and finishing what you start)	
Action orientation and autonomy (knowing how to self-direct and executing tasks self-reliantly)	Commitment to service (understanding and responding to the needs of employers and customers)	Discretion (keeping private information private and avoiding causing offence)	
Altruism (not letting self-interest prevent you from acting in the best interests of others)	Competence (being able to do a job well, usually based on the possession of appropriate practical and theoretical knowledge)	Ethical awareness (identifying ethical dilemmas and assessing the impact of values and behaviours on others)	
Attention to detail (being thorough and accurate in completing tasks)	Confidence (maintaining a calm, well-spoken demeanour and inspiring trust by having confidence in yourself)	Etiquette awareness (being familiar with codes for polite behaviour; avoiding making assumptions about people based on appearances)	
Audience-focused communications (considering the needs of your readers and listeners)	Co-operation and mutual support (committing to and helping to achieve common goals)	Expert judgement (making decisions and finding solutions based on specialized knowledge, training, experience, and skill sets)	
Collegiality and corporate citizenship (sharing power and authority among colleagues; being pleasant, co-operative, and ready to help) ^a	Cultural sensitivity and cultural fit (respecting diversity and adapting to social groups at work)	Fairness (making judgements that are free from discrimination and treating people in a reasonable way)	

^a From Shin Freedman, (2009). *Collegiality matters: How do we work with others?* Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference.

FIGURE 1.1 Skills and Qualities That Indicate Professionalism

of an individual's reputation. Unprofessional behaviour takes many forms, including the following:

- Gossiping about colleagues
- Bullying and intimidating colleagues
- Using cliques to ostracize or harass certain colleagues
- Using profane or abusive language
- Ignoring messages or responding to colleagues in an inappropriate way
- Sabotaging a colleague's efforts
- Blaming a colleague unfairly for your mistake
- Not acknowledging a colleague's presence or contribution

	Honesty (being forthright and authentic; telling the truth)	Organizational skill (prioritizing important tasks and planning ahead)	Reliability (demonstrating that others can count on you to show up and get the job done well)
	Image awareness (meeting basic context-specific standards for grooming)	Poise (maintaining self-control and remaining calm even when others are angry)	Respect and consideration (showing respect and consideration for authority, other people, rules and policies, and differences)
	Industry-standards compliance (having appropriate credentials; acting in accord with your organization's goals and objectives)	Politeness and audience awareness (practising good manners and staying humble about your accomplishments)	Responsibility (taking charge of your own actions and the actions of others)
	Integrity (having strong moral principles)	Pride and satisfaction in work (deriving satisfaction from work that is well done and up to standards)	Service orientation (focusing on customers and their needs and concerns)
	Knowledge and commitment to professional development (keeping up to date on important information and maintaining the right credentials)	Problem-solving skills (finding effective solutions to difficult or complex issues)	Team orientation (actively contributing to the achievement of group and organizational goals)
	Objectivity and professional detachment (maintaining proper distance; selectively withholding expression of personal values, emotions, and preferences) ^b	Punctuality (being on time and prompt in your communications)	Trust (placing confidence in things and others and inspiring others' belief in you; not abusing customers' trust)

^b From Mike W. Martin, (2000). *Meaningful work: Rethinking professional ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 85.

Professional lapses draw criticism, especially when they happen repeatedly. As a result, they can have costly consequences, lowering morale and hurting employee retention.

How can you tell if you are being professional? Professionalism is subject to self-judgement and the judgement of others.⁸¹ Evaluations on several levels have a role in shaping dynamic professional identities:

- Self-reflection and self-regulation (One's work identity is never fixed but always evolving; day-to-day sensemaking in relation to other people, self-improvement, and self-branding can help employees create work identities for themselves based on their identification with their organization and acceptance of—or sometimes even resistance to—organizational control.)

- Evaluations, reactions, and feedback from colleagues, managers (including through performance reviews), and other stakeholders
- Awards, merits, and citations
- Acceptance into professional associations and accrediting bodies

Checklist

Professionalism

- ☐ What is professionalism?
- ☐ What are some factors that help foster a sense of belonging among professionals?
- ☐ How is professionalism embedded in the workplace?
- ☐ What are the benefits of being professional?
- ☐ What skills (attitudes, beliefs, behaviours) are associated with professionalism?
- ☐ What is employee engagement?
- ☐ How do companies measure employee engagement?
- ☐ What are professional boundaries and why are they important?
- ☐ What constitutes unprofessional behaviour?
- ☐ How can professionalism be measured?

1.4 Teamwork

Part of the professional identity practitioners work hard to develop involves supporting teamwork and its knowledge-, attitude-, and skill-based competencies. Teams are now the modern organization's method of choice for responding to change and bettering their chances of survival.⁸² A team is a specific type of group whose members have complementary skills and work toward a common mission or goal. Teams are different from work groups in that they focus on the collective production of a product rather than individual accountabilities and goals. Team orientation is a sought-after skill because teams are the foundation of organizational life.⁸³ Teams are formed deliberately and carefully to help organizations perform crucial functions, including meeting work needs, realizing specific outcomes, and sustaining a competitive advantage. Teams are an essential feature in organizations because of their capacities in

- accomplishing projects too large or too complex to be completed by individuals;
- forming bonds and a sense of community;
- proposing and evaluating solutions to organizational problems; and,
- facilitating innovation.

Teams can be measured and understood in terms of three dimensions of performance:

- Quantity
- Quality
- Satisfaction⁸⁴

Teams may be of several different *types* according to the context and their purpose (Figure 1.2).

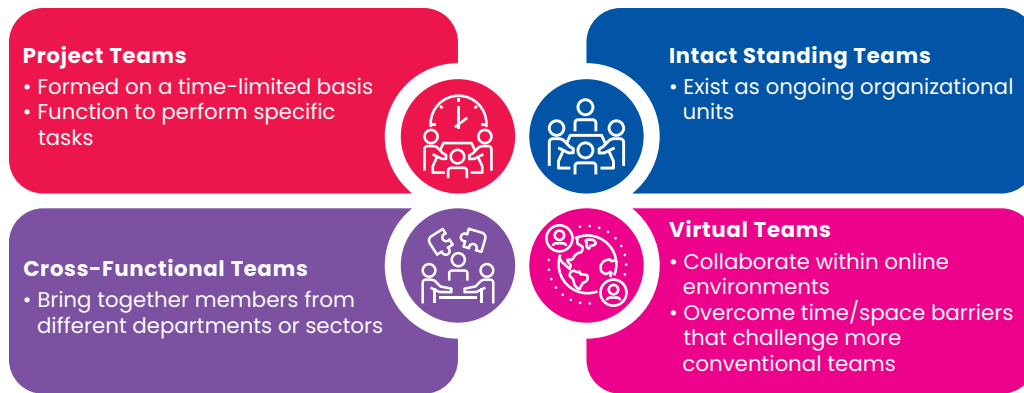


FIGURE 1.2 Types of Teams

A successful example of cross-functional teams comes from Canadian Tire's research and development division, which has set up labs in Waterloo, Winnipeg, and Calgary that are staffed by teams of behavioural scientists, game and virtual-reality developers, and statisticians. These teams work on a range of projects, including an interactive, three-dimensional-style patio-building app and an app that enables anglers to post photos, share their fishing locations, and mention fishing equipment they may have purchased at the store.⁸⁵

Characteristics of High-Performing Teams

Team performance refers to the degree to which teams meet objectives for time, quality, and cost.⁸⁶ High-performance teams establish a record of working well together and succeeding according to these objectives. The experience of working on such a team can be exhilarating and empowering for its members; however, optimal experience and success depends on adhering to specific principles and boundaries (Figure 1.3).

An environment that encourages the open, respectful sharing of ideas and deals with conflict fairly and supportively is essential. It is also essential that all team members recognize the decision-making model and understand who makes decisions and how others are involved.

Team Members and Roles

Being a team member can involve a combination of skills:

- Technical skills
- Problem-solving and decision-making skills
- Social and interpersonal skills

For each member, teamwork involves two complementary and well-balanced types of roles:

1. Task-facilitating roles based in carrying out assigned activities as well as the following:
 - Information gathering and sharing, including offering ideas, sharing points of view, and soliciting viewpoints of team members



FIGURE 1.3 Principles and Boundaries for High-Performing Teams

- Monitoring and confirming by checking for progress, comprehension, and common understanding
 - Direction-giving and providing constructive suggestions and feedback
 - Enforcing and motivating, including keeping the team on task, preventing sidetracking, directing team energies, and ensuring decisions are made⁸⁷
2. Relationship-building roles aimed at promoting a positive emotional environment based in equal participation, co-operation, and group cohesion, which may take the form of the following:
- Encouraging participation, ensuring that more- and less-assertive members are heard from
 - Supporting participation by empathizing, praising, and valuing members' input
 - Facilitating communication and building consensus

- Observing group dynamics by making sense of interactions and monitoring the emotional temperature of the group
- Relieving stress, calming the group by calling a time-out or likewise breaking the tension
- Mediating conflict, often through tactful conversations to diffuse emotionally charged situations⁸⁸

A team member may prefer to fill one specific task-facilitating role that plays to their strengths but may draw on all their skills in fulfilling relationship-building roles.

To the detriment of team performance and productivity, team members may also assume harmful blocking roles that result in group dysfunction:

- **Non-co-operatives and non-contributors** who fail to do their fair share or complete assigned tasks. Setting clear goals, expectations, and rules for conduct with penalties for non-compliance can reduce the incidence of slacking and commitment issues.
- **Dominators** who take control, make decisions on their own, and do all the work for the group without consultation. Acknowledge their contribution without allowing them to hold the floor, politely interrupting if they do, while encouraging unheard group members to share their thoughts.
- **Rescuers** who, like dominators, assume control but believe as enablers that they are doing so in the interest of the group because they consider themselves more competent than others. Limit this excessive helping behaviour, which can create dependence and negative results, by encouraging the rescuer to help others find solutions instead of over-reaching and providing solutions to them.⁸⁹
- **Distractors** who seek attention and take it away from the tasks at hand. Discreet conversations with distractors may help them stay on-task.
- **Cynics** who are pessimistic and distrustful of the group's potential for success. Showing optimism or confronting cynics are ways to counter their impact.
- **Aggressors** who behave negatively due to interpersonal grievances or for other reasons. If one-to-one consultations with an aggressor aren't effective, they may be asked to leave the team.

Even teams that appear to cohere and function can sometimes fall prey to locked-in decision-making resulting from a phenomenon that psychologist Irving Janis called **groupthink**, in which group members block or eliminate dissenting opinions and views that do not support the favoured viewpoint of the group. Potential problems, solutions, and new ideas are all overlooked. Groupthink puts group conformity and harmony ahead of good decision-making.⁹⁰ In 2023, for the first time in its history, the Bank of Canada offered minutes from its policy-setting meeting as a possible antidote to groupthink, in an effort to encourage out-of-the box thinking in a time of high inflation and lost credibility.⁹¹

Team Decision-Making Models

The team leader plays a central role in group performance, managing a small group and ensuring it attains organizational goals. The team leader can help build **cognitive trust** among team members and enhance the team's shared sense of **collective efficacy**.⁹²

groupthink A theory that describes premature consensus-seeking in highly cohesive groups, leading to failure in considering favourable alternatives and poor or defective decision-making.

cognitive trust In a team setting, individuals' beliefs in the reliability and dependability of fellow team members.

collective efficacy In a team setting, the group's belief in the ability of the team to organize and execute activities that will enable it to achieve its goal(s).

Several models, with differing team-leader roles, are open to teams for guiding the decision-making process:

- Unilateral decision-making by the team leader, who then informs other members of the decision (often preferred in time-sensitive situations)
- Decision-making by the team leader with input from team members based on their expertise
- Decision-making through delegation to team members
- Decision-making through a consensus model with input from all members
- Decision-making through a majority-rules model

Consensus decision-making has specific requirements that must be met in order to be effective: a commitment to hearing and understanding the positions of all members, a willingness to change viewpoints to strengthen the team position, and a general acceptance that the decision reached through the collaboration and co-participation of team members is the best one. It may take time and adjustments before team members reach the level of trust and comfort with one another that is required for interacting co-operatively and making decisions in this way.

Regardless of the model, quality decisions involve a process in which group members engage in open communication, respect each other's input, and actively support any decision that is made. There must be a sound and logical rationale for every decision, based on reliable information that has been shared with all team members and, when appropriate, input from outside stakeholders affected by the decision.

Stages in Team Development

Teams need to evolve and pass through four stages of behavioural development before they can perform at the highest level (Figure 1.4).

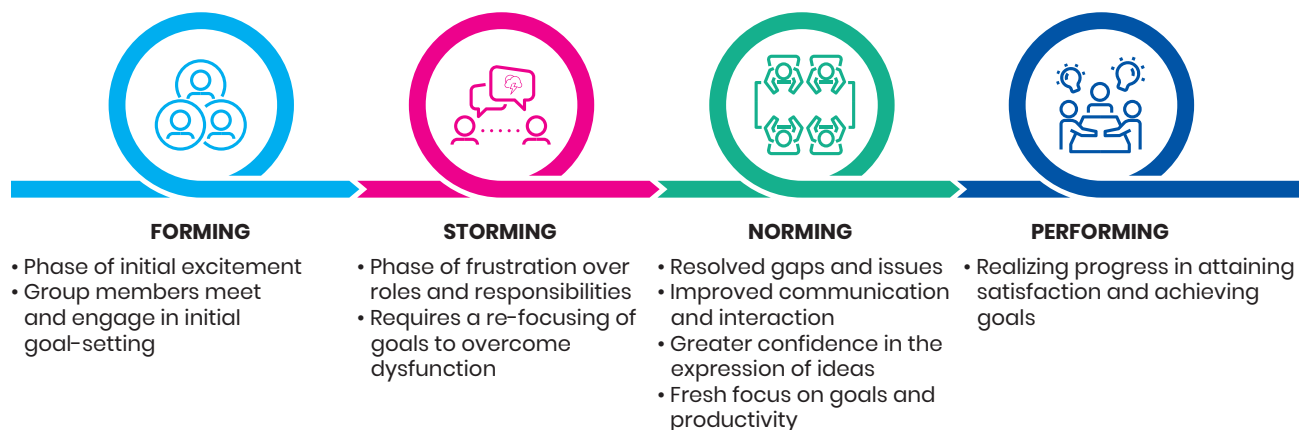


FIGURE 1.4 The Four Stages in Team Development

Managing Team Conflict

Conflicts in teams are common. The way team members respond to and manage conflict can affect a team's overall performance.⁹³ Facing up to conflict and developing effective ways to manage it can therefore improve team performance.

- Rely on co-operative approaches to conflict centred not only on concern for yourself but also on concern for others on the team.⁹⁴
- Think of conflict as a mutual problem that needs to be dealt with in order to complete a critical task rather than as a clash of interests where only one person can win.⁹⁵
- Express ideas, feelings, and positions without animus and look for areas of agreement—goodwill and good feelings can lighten the mood and ease interactions.
- Listen carefully to what others are saying and concentrate on asking each other for more information rather than each person stubbornly defending their position.
- Combine good ideas to arrive at creative solutions.⁹⁶
- Adjust your perspective by recognizing that success for one really means success for all—avoid competing.
- Develop a sense of team identity to improve loyalty and trust while refusing to engage in power struggles.
- When leading a team, enhance team identification by increasing team member input into decision-making.
- Encourage active participation to promote a sense of belonging⁹⁷ and co-operation.
- Have confidence in overcoming interpersonal difficulties and handling oppositions and disagreements.
- Focus on common goals rather than letting individual priorities take you off-task.

Virtual Teams

With the growth of offshoring (a company practice of subcontracting of a business unit to a different company in a different country), flexible work arrangements, and rapid advances in technology, virtual communication has become increasingly common for business meetings and critical tasks by dispersed, often global, work teams.⁹⁸ Virtual teams use technology to overcome differences in space, time, and sometimes outlook in order to work together to achieve project and enterprise goals. Communication in virtual teams is different than face-to-face communication and comes with unique advantages, namely saving time and money, but also challenges.⁹⁹ Geographically dispersed team members may be less able to use informal communication approaches and pick up on non-verbal cues. They may not have the benefit of contextual information that is typically shared among team members. Misunderstandings may be more common.¹⁰⁰ Communication tools and techniques can compensate for some of the challenges of leading and being part of a virtual work team:¹⁰¹

- **Communication frequency:** expectation of regular communication between the team leader and team members that promotes team cohesion, stronger relationships, and better performance



Ground Picture/Shutterstock

Virtual meeting tools allow geographically dispersed teams to work together, but these virtual teams also face unique challenges.

- **Communication predictability:** a commitment to regular and accurate task feedback that team members can count on to stay informed and apply to procedures and outputs
- **Responsiveness:** asking for and receiving timely answers to questions
- **Clarity:** communicating clear expectations, goals, and directions as well as guidelines for communication and interaction that allow team members to regulate their performance; following agreed-upon protocols for language choice, team member introductions, and turn-taking; and speaking in a well-projected voice and adapting word choice for multinational participants, if necessary providing a written transcript as follow-up
- **Mode:** using a synchronous (at the same time) or asynchronous (at different times) communication tool that is the best fit for team members¹⁰² and ensuring all members have installed necessary software, are trained in using that technology, are prepared and ready to use it, and are logged on before the meeting or project consultation begins; being mindful of time zone differences when communicating synchronously (e.g., videoconferencing) in order to schedule meetings at mutually convenient times; and taking steps to limit background noise so speech is intelligible

Tools for Online Collaboration

Collaboration apps are productivity tools that enable teamwork. For every task or function, there are categories of collaborative software that help people get work done together and scores of options to fit individual teamwork needs:

- Communication and videoconferencing tools: Skype, Zoom, Flowdock, Slack, GoToMeeting, Microsoft Teams
- Documentation tools: Google Docs

- File-sharing tools: OneDrive, Dropbox, Google Drive
- Task and project management tools: Asana, Monday.com, Microsoft Projects, Zoho, LiquidPlanner, Jira, Teamwork Projects

Checklist

Teamwork

- ☐ What is a team? How is a team different from a work group?
- ☐ What do teams help organizations achieve?
- ☐ What are the three dimensions of performance associated with teams?
- ☐ What types of teams are typically found in organizations?
- ☐ What are the characteristics of high-performing teams?
- ☐ What task-facilitating and relationship-building roles can help teams function? What blocking roles can harm their performance?
- ☐ What does consensus decision-making require?
- ☐ What are the five team decision-making models?
- ☐ What are the stages of team development?
- ☐ How can teams manage conflict?
- ☐ What tools and techniques can aid communication in virtual teams?

1.5 Ethical Communication

Ethics and Legal Responsibilities of Business Communication

Ethics refers to a system of knowledge and general rules that apply to a person's behaviour. Ethics have special importance in work environments. When you communicate on the job, you not only represent your organization but also assume responsibility for its actions. Every document (letter, e-mail, social media post, or report) you write is in reality a contract acceptable as evidence in a court of law. Signing a letter means you agree to its content. It makes your promises and agreements legally binding and makes retractions next to impossible to carry out without proof of altered circumstances. For the good of your company, its image, and its bottom line, communicating legally and ethically is of the highest importance.

Business ethics stipulate that employees at every organizational level “do the right thing” with regard to both relationships with stakeholders (employees, customers, investors, and the public) and the administration of products and services. In fact, an ethical imperative is so important that in a survey of *Fortune* 500 company communications officers, trust, integrity, and candour ranked as the most important critical issues in corporate communication.¹⁰³ Behaving ethically in business settings involves an awareness of how the choices you make affect and influence others, for better or worse. Corporate codes of ethics—upholding equal commitment to values such as

ethics Norms for conduct that establish boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and what is morally right and wrong.

business ethics The socially accepted moral principles and rules of business conduct.

honesty, integrity, fairness, social responsibility, accountability, and respect—sensitize managers and staff alike to how they should behave. The growing emphasis on business ethics is more than just a trend or bandwagon effect. Most public- and private-sector firms across Canada have instituted a code or policies to deal with matters such as conflicts of interest; external and customer relations; the handling of company assets, relationships with competitors, and employee workplace issues. Canadian companies are being recognized for their commitment to values-based leadership and ethical business practices. In 2023, BMO was recognized as one of the world’s most ethical companies for a sixth consecutive year by Ethisphere, a leader in defining ethical business practices. BMO scored high for its ethics program and culture of ethics, corporate citizenship, governance, and reputation. According to Darryl White, CEO, BMO Financial Group, “How we achieve our goals is critically important. Our long-established ethical business practices translate into enduring relationships and strong financial performance that enable us to deliver progress for our clients, communities and the planet.”¹⁰⁴

Having moral and interpersonal ground rules in place in the form of policies, training programs, and other initiatives helps companies weather crises and controversies by allowing them to distinguish right from wrong in times of fundamental change. A company’s ethical practices speak to its social responsibility and integrity—an invaluable asset in an age weary of corporate corruption. Ethical business conduct and communication create a marketplace advantage, enhance employee performance, promote a strong public image, prevent legal challenges, save huge sums in legal fees, and provide incentive for leniency in legal proceedings. And ethical conduct isn’t just important at home: In 2022, the government of Canada announced a responsible business strategy to ensure that companies uphold human rights and protect the environment in their overseas operations.¹⁰⁵ The consequences of ethically questionable practices were seen in 2017, when a Competition Bureau of Canada investigation revealed that several major bakery wholesalers and grocery retailers had engaged in bread price-fixing for up to 14 years. Many Canadian consumers took to social media to voice their concerns over long over-paying for a loaf of bread and over the Competition Bureau’s immunity program, which enabled some companies to secure immunity from prosecution in exchange for their co-operation in the investigation.

Ethical Lapses and Why They Happen

Ethical lapses occur for a variety of reasons, but mostly they are the result of all-too-convenient excuses, beliefs, and rationalizations. Here are a few of the better known ethical traps:¹⁰⁶

- **The safety-in-numbers rationalization:** the belief that such behaviour is excusable or guaranteed immunity
- **The head-in-the-sand rationalization:** the belief that remaining silent about wrongdoing will make it go away, or fear that taking action to correct it will be seen as “rocking the boat”
- **The between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place rationalization:** the belief that a positive or favourable outcome justifies any means said to be necessary, even if they are unethical

- **The it's-no-big-deal rationalization:** an attempt to excuse wrongdoing as unimportant and minimize its consequences
- **The entitlement rationalization:** self-deception based on the argument that one is entitled to break the rules and be free from consequences
- **The team-player rationalization:** the reluctance to expose or confront colleagues about their wrongdoing out of fear that it will harm professional relationships and career advancement (also known as the yes-man syndrome)

Responsible and accountable workplace communication, especially written communication, plays a big part in ethical business conduct. Here are some tips for becoming a good and ethical corporate citizen:

- **Tell the truth.** Avoid deceptive language, words with double meanings, and extremes of overstatement and understatement. Misrepresentation, especially when in the form of false advertising, is punishable by law. Make sure that your motives are clear, with no indications of a hidden agenda, and that others will perceive them as such.
- **Avoid language that attempts to evade responsibility.** The passive voice, used improperly, can mislead readers through its failure to assign responsibility for certain actions.
- **Don't suppress or de-emphasize important information, including information that the public deserves to know or that people need to do their jobs.** Ensure facts are presented accurately, are relevant, and are used in a reasonable way to reach conclusions and make recommendations. Include any information the reader would want and need to understand your recommendations (as long as the information is within your authority to disclose). Don't hide facts or conflicts of interest, or emphasize or de-emphasize certain facts to give readers a false impression; avoid half-truths and exaggerations. Give clear warnings of risks and dangers when issuing safety information—the liability of your company, not to mention someone's life, could depend on it.
- **Offer good value for money.** Back up and never falsify any claims about the value of a service or performance of a product, including claims made through visual images.
- **Be timely in your communication.** Avoid unjustified delays in replying to or processing information and be sure to direct your message to the right person.
- **Consider your obligations.** Keep in mind to whom you are responsible when you carry out communications on the job—your managers, co-workers, suppliers, customers and clients, the company, regulators, shareholders, other stakeholders, the public and community, and society at large.
- **Show respect and consider ideals and impacts.** Speak, write, and act with the inherent dignity of others in mind. Think about how your communication impacts and helps stakeholders and how it reflects the positive values to which you aspire. Provide the opportunity for stakeholders to give input into decision-making.
- **Avoid libel.** **Libel** is printed and recorded defamation and is characterized by false, malicious, or derogatory remarks—remarks that arouse hatred, contempt,

libel A false published statement that is damaging to a person's reputation.

or ridicule toward the individuals to whom they are applied. Common law protects every person against libel.

- **Distinguish between fact and opinion.** Let readers know the difference between conjecture and a verifiable fact. Passing off an opinion as a fact is misleading and unethical.
- **Use a layout that doesn't hide information.** Style elements such as lists, bullets, and spacing should be used to spotlight important information, not hide it.
- **Know what you can and cannot disclose to certain parties.** Careless publication or misuse of your company's intellectual property and confidential information, even in the form of an offhand remark, can be detrimental to your organization and might result in charges of wrongdoing. Not advising investors of major corporate events that affect such things as share prices can, on the other hand, expose companies to lawsuits under new legislation. Knowing company disclosure practices and terms of confidentiality agreements you sign is essential.
- **Be especially careful communicating online.** Remember that you have virtually no control over where e-mail and text messages are forwarded after you send them. Many companies now have regulations in place regarding the type of information their employees can transmit via e-mail and how long information is archived before being destroyed. A general rule is to not electronically send anything you would not want your employer, colleagues, friends, or the general public to see.
- **Don't claim authorship of documents you have not written.** Disclose how you obtained your information and how you used it in making your arguments. The consequences of plagiarism—not giving due credit for borrowed words or ideas—are serious. Always acknowledge your sources by using quotation marks, notes, and/or citations.

Checklist

Ethical Writing

- ☐ Is the document truthful?
- ☐ Is the action the document endorses legal?
- ☐ In writing the document, do you treat others in a way you would like to be treated, with respect and concern for their inherent dignity? Have you violated anyone's rights?
- ☐ Are you willing to take responsibility for what the document says?
- ☐ Would your perspective on an issue still seem fair if you were viewing it from the opposite side?
- ☐ Is the information in the document based on thorough research from recent, reliable, and unbiased sources?
- ☐ Do you use sound and logical reasoning and avoid exaggeration?
- ☐ Are you acting in the best interest of your employer and your client?
- ☐ Are ethical standards applied consistently to your writing?
- ☐ Have you discussed any ethical dilemmas with someone who will give trusted advice?