

CHAPTER 1

Issues and Trends in Professional Communication

Chapter Overview

This chapter connects effective communication with personal and professional success. Given the growth of technology, business communication no longer entails just traditional skills such as speaking and writing; it means using applications and software to communicate with others and building understanding with a global audience. Students will learn the importance of maintaining professionalism and sound ethics which underpin all of their communication in the workplace.

Changes to the contemporary Canadian workplace create new communication purposes and challenges. Students must learn to communicate any potential risks associated with their future work (e.g., identity theft) in a way that is both accurate and reassuring. Transparency about how businesses “earn their money, treat their employees, and protect the planet’s finite resources” is now the standard and employees should be able to articulate these responsibilities. Different generations collaborate in the workplace which requires students to recognize their expectations for communication and professionalism and reconcile them with those of others. Diversity is a valued quality of Canadian workplaces and in their future organizations, students must be able to demonstrate this in their everyday work. Students will learn about the ongoing effort toward the economic empowerment of Indigenous people in Canada.

The chapter describes professional and personal boundaries with examples of specific behaviors that show professionalism. A working knowledge of business ethics, the moral principles that guide communication, will prevent lapses which are described in this chapter. Finally, best practices for maintaining the privacy of one’s self and others are described, emphasized by examples of the impact of privacy breaches.

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, the student should learn to do the following:

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

Key Concepts

1. Communicating for Change—and a Stronger Bottom Line—in the New Economy

- Assessing the effect of social media and good communication skills on the economy
2. Communicating in the Current Workplace
 - The Knowledge Economy – the move of Canada’s economy from a manufacturing economy to a knowledge economy
 - The Risk Society – exploring the potentials for loss through environmental and manufactured risks
 - Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility – companies extend their appeal to clients and employees with egalitarian and eco-friendly policies
 - Business on a Global Scale – the challenges and necessity of doing business with the world
 - More Diverse Employee Base – strategies for working in a diverse workplace
 - The Growing Millennial and Gen Z Workforce – the ambitions and preferences of millennial and Gen Z employees
 - Team Work Environments – strategies for success in team environments
 - Disruptive Technologies – understanding and coping with effects of these technologies
 - Digital Connectivity – the dangers and advantages of instant, global communication
 - New Economies: Attention, Distraction, and Share – the importance of “attention” to workers and to potential customers who are in a state of “continuous partial attention”
 - Indigenous Economic Empowerment – the effort to reintegrate Indigenous people into the Canadian economy in response to their historical and current economical segregation
 3. Professionalism and Employee Engagement
 - Why Professionalism is Important – professionalism defined, as well as its importance to individuals and organizations
 - Qualities, Characteristics, and Expectations – how professionalism is demonstrated by employees and organizations
 - Professional Boundaries and Behaviours – how relationships and behaviours need to be defined in order to work positively with others
 4. Teamwork
 - Characteristics of High-Performing Teams – the essentials for creating an optimal team experience
 - Team Decision-Making Models – the role of the team leader and how teams achieve consensus
 - Stages in Team Development – forming, storming, norming, performing
 - Managing Team Conflict – recognizing that conflict is common and approaching it with appropriate strategy
 - Virtual Teams – technology (rather than traditional meetings and workspaces) is the means of communication for members working towards a joint goal/project
 - Tools for Online Collaboration – apps and software used by virtual teams to share their work
 5. Ethical Communication

- Ethics and Legal Responsibilities of Business Communication – ethical business practice and the marketplace advantage
- Ethical Lapses and Why They Happen – a list and explanation of ethical traps and rationalizations

6. Privacy in the Workplace

- the necessity for privacy and the high cost (both to the bottom line and to reputation) of errors or lack of diligence that exposes confidential information

Discussion Ideas

1. In a small group, discuss the impact of a company's sustainability and corporate responsibility policy with regard to buying its products or seeking employment with that company. Explain the impact of a company's policies on your decisions in the marketplace. Formulate some questions you might ask at an interview to find out more about a company's policy and to show that you have done your homework. (Twenty minutes to discuss/research and five minutes to present).
2. Reflect on a person who you feel demonstrates a high level of professionalism. The person might be a former or current colleague, teacher, coach, or other. With a partner, describe the specific qualities, characteristics, and/or behaviors which convey your selected person's professionalism
3. In a small group, have one person share with other group members a disappointing experience working in a team or group. As a group, identify the problem and offer solutions. Present your problem/solution results to the class. (Twenty minutes to discuss and five minutes to present).
4. With group members, discuss the challenges of communicating within a virtual team. Has anyone worked as part of a virtual team in a professional or academic context (i.e., while taking an online course)? Identify the challenges associated with using strictly virtual communication and how a team might overcome them.
5. With a partner, think of a hypothetical unethical situation in the workplace (e.g., embellishing one's resumé). What are the possible implications of this unethical behavior on the employee and on the organization?
6. In small groups, research "multi-tasking." What are the general findings about the benefits, disadvantages, and actual ability to multi-task? Do you think that doing homework, while listening to music or texting with friends helps the learning process? What do you think of Carr's observation that "the more the Internet seizes our attention, the more it shortens our attention spans, encourages shallow thinking, and lessens our capacity for critical thinking and ability to absorb and filter information"?
7. Has anyone in the class had their personal information compromised? Has anyone had their e-mail, Facebook, or Twitter account hacked? How did this happen? What was the result of this infringement of privacy? What can you do to protect your privacy?

Further Reading and Tasks

1. Go to the [CBC website](#) and type in keywords (e.g., millennial workforce, ethics in business, employee engagement, privacy in the workplace, etc.). Find a story related to a topic in Chapter 1 and briefly summarize it orally and/or in writing.
2. Read the article on the [CBC website](#) entitled “Frustrated TD Bank customer stunned after service rep bites back online” by Shannon Martin. Is the case described in the article an example of unethical behaviour, a lack of professionalism, or both? Are there privacy issues involved?”
3. Read the article in [Canadian Business](#) entitled “Indigenous urban business initiatives growing as demographics shift” by Ian Bickis. What are some of the opportunities and challenges for the Tsuut’ina associated with the development of the reserve land?
4. Read the article on [Canadian Business](#) entitled “Why do (or don’t) companies go green?” by Chris MacDonald. What “green” policies have been initiated at your school or place of work?
5. Read the article in the [Globe and Mail](#) entitled “Beer-throwing suspect at Blue Jays game no longer with Postmedia” by Mark Blinch. What does Pagan’s case suggest about personal and professional boundaries?
6. Read the article in [Maclean’s](#) entitled “At startups, burnout is as common as communal workspaces” by Erin Davis. Davis lists ways that start-up or small business owners can support their employees. Is there one support that you feel is most important? Why?
7. Read the article in [theStar.com](#) entitled “Millennials Don’t Want to Work for the Man” by Lisa Wright. After reading the article, comment on the statement, *“Most Millennials told us they valued the freedom and flexibility of new ways of working. Inspired by their peers, including tech entrepreneurs like (Facebook founder) Mark Zuckerberg, many see running a business they are passionate about as their ultimate goal,”* says the “Pursuit of Happiness” study.

Homework Assignments

See below for answer guidelines.

1. Conduct a job-posting survey through your institution’s careers page or another online job-search database such as workopolis.com or monster.ca. What proportion of entry-level positions in your career field list communication skills as a job requirement? Has this research changed your opinion of the importance of communication skills in the workplace? Include at least ten job postings in your survey. In a one-page report, list the titles of the job positions, the source of the job postings, and summarize your findings in paragraph form (i.e., specific communication skills requirements).
2. Review the [“Social Impact”](#) section of Starbucks Canada website. What efforts does Starbucks make towards corporate social responsibility? What measures does Starbucks take to promote sustainable development?

3. Review Shopify’s description of their [corporate culture](#). Summarize Shopify’s employment practices and values in one paragraph. In a second paragraph, share your perspective on their corporate culture. Do you find their corporate culture desirable? Why or why not?
4. Review the definitions of attraction economy and distraction economy. Visit two or three websites belonging to corporations whose business focuses on customers between the ages of 18 and 30 (consider certain clothing stores, gaming stores, cinemas, etc.). Which methods do these corporations use to keep the attention of those who visit their websites?
5. Download the Whose Land app or visit [the website](#). Identify the Indigenous territory you live on. Assume you start to work in the same location. How would you appropriately write a land recognition statement? Use the [FAQ](#) section of the website for support.
6. Consider examples of professionalism that are presented in current media (films and/or television programs). Evaluate the professionalism that is demonstrated by one or two characters. Is professionalism represented as a positive quality? Why or why not?
7. Research the privacy policy of a Canadian organization. Briefly summarize the policy. How might this policy impact the organization’s ability to conduct business? Present your findings in a one-page report.

Answer Guidelines

1. Answers will vary.
2. Starbucks’ corporate social responsibility efforts (from website)
 - Community – commitments to hiring/work placements for youth from the communities in which Starbucks are located; Ethos water fund; organization of community service projects (you can search projects/events in your city on the Community page of the website)
 - Diversity – hiring policy; “connecting with our customers in a culturally relevant way”; choosing minority- and woman-owned businesses as suppliers
 Starbucks’ measures towards sustainability (from website)
 - Ethical Sourcing – paying fair price for materials (coffee, tea, etc.); ensuring materials are sourced from a farm that supports the environment and improves local life; they note that tea and cocoa are not yet 100% ethically sourced (goal by 2020)
 - Environment – recycling program (customer and store waste); energy efficient stores; green buildings; reducing water wastage; “fighting climate change”
3. a) Shopify’s corporate culture (from website):
 - They value people and invest in their well-being (self-directed budget for health, catered lunches).
 - They value diversity and believe different perspectives make stronger products and remove each other’s “roadblocks.”

- They value autonomy and employees have the freedom to create their own path, problem-solve, etc.
- b) Answers will vary
4. Answers will vary.
5. a) Territory will vary.
b) To write a land recognition statement, the website states “we highly suggest contacting and working with the community or friendship centre closest to the land you are recognizing so that you can make it as personable and meaningful as possible. It is important to work with the community and friendship centre in order to honour the land with sincere intentions.”
6. Answers will vary.
7. Answers will vary.

Exercises from the Fourth Edition

Exercises, Workshops, and Discussion Forums

Discussing the Facebook Phenomenon. In a small group, discuss your answers to the following questions:

- a) How long have you used Facebook?
- b) How long do you spend per day on the site, and how many times per day do you log on?
- c) What is in your profile?
- d) Who has access to your profile?
- e) What privacy settings do you use?
- f) What are your online interactions?
- g) What positive outcomes have resulted from your use of Facebook?

Share your findings with your instructor and compare them with findings and viewpoints from the rest of the class. What conclusions can you draw about Facebook and social networking platforms in general?

Considering Privacy. In a small group, review each of the following scenarios and discuss whether it constitutes a breach of privacy according to the ten principles set out in PIPEDA.*

- a) You work at the reception desk in a local bank branch. A customer rushes in and says that her boyfriend has lost his last account statement and desperately needs to review it. She explains that he is attending a two-day conference out of town and the bank will be closed on Sunday, when he returns. You ask her for her boyfriend’s name and access and print the monthly statement for her.
- b) You are a financial representative about to go on your lunch break. Before leaving, you phone a client to set up her pay for direct deposit. You are not able to reach her directly but leave a detailed voicemail message that includes the account information, despite the fact that her outgoing message does not include her name. Realizing that you have only 45 minutes left for lunch, you rush out—without logging off your computer—and leave files and loose documents on your desk.
- c) You are a bank teller who processes a transaction for a casual labourer-tradesperson who does not have an account at your bank but who frequently comes in to cash cheques from

his clients. As you finish the transaction and count out his cash payment, he asks if he may open an account. You direct him to a financial service representative, who asks for his SIN. He returns to your service area a few minutes later, angrily questioning the need to show his SIN and taking exception to the financial service representative's insistence that this information is required by law.

Hint: Refer to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada's fact sheet on Social Insurance Numbers at <https://www.priv.gc.ca/en/privacy-topics/sins-and-drivers-licences/social-insurance-numbers/protecting-your-social-insurance-number/>

*Please note, scenario a is included in the 5e, but scenarios b and c are not, which is why there are included here.

Fourth Edition Case Study

The ability of businesses to manage and adapt to change is currently a popular topic with communicators. For example, at a 2012 International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) event, former international president Julie Freeman stated: "Current market forces such as economic uncertainty, globalization, a more diverse workforce, innovations in technology and demands for transparent and socially responsible behaviour are compelling organizations to change the way they do business. And when organizations change, so must the communicators that serve them."¹ For Freeman, the better employees communicate, the more they are engaged and the stronger a company's financial results tend to be. Understanding company goals and strategies and being able to bring those strategies to life is one of the roles of communicators, but the challenges don't stop there. Globalization has made it more important for communicators to position their messages for multiple audiences worldwide and to understand how their organization's finances impact their communications.

¹ International Association of Business Communicators. (2012). Comms expert offers international insight at HRM. Retrieved from <http://maritime.iabc.com/news/global-comms-expert-offers-international-insight-to-hrm/>