BSBREL401
Establish networks

Release 1

Learner guide

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Learner guide

Aspire Version 1.1

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Contact details

Participant	
Name:	
Start date:	
Phone number:	
Email:	

Work location	
Name:	
Address:	
Postal address:	
Workplace supervisor name:	
Phone number:	
Fax:	
Email:	

Registered Training Organisation (RTO)	
Name:	
Address:	
Postal address (if different):	
Phone number:	
Fax:	
RTO contact name:	
Mobile:	
Email:	

Contents

Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *BSBREL401 Establish networks*, Release 1. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: www.training.gov.au.

How to work through this learner guide

This learner guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the learner guide you need to read, and which practice tasks and learning checkpoints you need to complete. The features of this learner guide are detailed in the following table.

Feature of the learner guide	How you can use each feature
Learning content	Read each topic in this learner guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake.
Examples and case studies	Examples of completed documents that may be used in a workplace are included in this learner guide. You can use these examples as models to help you complete practice tasks and learning checkpoints. Case studies highlight learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations.
Practice tasks	Practice tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into action. Your trainer will tell you which practice tasks to complete.
Video clips	Where QR codes appear, learners can use smartphones and other devices to access video clips relating to the content. For information about how to download a QR reader app or accessing video on your device, please visit our website: www.aspirelr.com.au/help
Summary	Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic.
Learning checkpoints	There is a learning checkpoint at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which learning checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt.

Foundation skills

As you complete learning using this guide, you will be developing the foundation skills relevant for this unit. Foundation skills are the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills and the employability skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.

The following table outlines specific foundation skills noted for your learning in this learner guide.

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Learning	• Seeks opportunities to develop and extend expertise and identify areas for professional improvement
Reading	• Sources and analyses information to establish networks that consistently promote business opportunities
Writing	• Uses appropriate vocabulary, layout and grammatical structure to convey ideas and information
Oral Communication	• Utilises persuasive language and appropriate non-verbal features to achieve mutually acceptable outcomes • Uses active listening and questioning techniques to confirm understanding
Navigate the world of work	• Understands and adheres to organisational policies and procedures
Interact with others	• Actively identifies the requirements of important communication exchanges, selecting appropriate channels, format, tone and content to suit purpose and audience • Looks for ways of establishing connections and building genuine understanding with a diverse range of people • Begins to cultivate relationships with people with the knowledge, skills and influence to get things done or provide support
Get the work done	• Takes responsibility for planning, sequencing and implementing tasks required to build and maintain networks • Uses analytical processes to identify problems, gather relevant information, evaluate options and determine solutions

What do you already know?

Use the following table to identify what you may already know. This may assist you to work out what to focus on in your learning.

Topic	Key outcome		Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 1 Develop and maintain business networks	1A	Use strategies to establish networks	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	1B	Identify and pursue network opportunities	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	1C	Share and communicate information about new networks	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	1D	Participate in professional networks and associations	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
Topic 2 Establish and maintain business relationships	2A	Develop and maintain effective business relationships	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	2B	Gain the trust and confidence of your contacts	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	2C	Use negotiating skills to encourage positive outcomes	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	2D	Resolve difficult situations	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	2E	Seek specialist advice when developing contacts	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident

Topic	Key outcome	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 3 Promote the relationship	3A Develop strategies to represent and promote the interests of the relationship	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	3B Use presentation skills to communicate the goals and objectives of the relationship	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	3C Communicate the relationship's issues, policies and practices to a range of audiences	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	3D Obtain feedback to improve promotional activities	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident

Topic 1
Develop and maintain business networks

Developing networks of contacts is essential in today's business environment if organisations are to grow and identify new business opportunities.

As a manager or leader within your organisation, it is important that you are aware of, and have access to, an array of informal and formal network channels. Managers can no longer afford to work in isolation and focus solely on events within their own business.

Rather than leaving the development of business networks to chance, it is important that as a manager you are aware of the various strategies and channels that exist for developing and maintaining business networks that benefit the organisation, your team and yourself.

In this topic you will learn how to:

1A   Use strategies to establish networks

1B   Identify and pursue network opportunities

1C   Share and communicate information about new networks

1D   Participate in professional networks and associations

1A | Use strategies to establish networks

The first part of the networking process involves communicating with people and finding out about them, their interests and activities.

The second part is deciding how the person, their skills or their information could benefit you or your organisation, now or sometime in the future.

The third part of the process is maintaining these contacts so that you can use them when you need them. There are many different ways you can go through the networking process and different situations will require different strategies.

Networking strategies include:

- participating in conferences
- attending seminars and business functions
- becoming a member of a professional association
- maintaining regular contact with people you meet professionally and personally
- targeting individuals you believe may be able to assist you and your organisation through meetings, correspondence, etc.
- distributing information about your organisation that will be remembered by people who could recommend you to others.

Conferences

Conferences are an opportunity for people working in similar or related fields to come together and share information about their current work, findings and ideas. Thousands of conferences are held every year, representing every possible industry.

The format of each conference varies. A small conference may last one day and consist of papers presented by different people, with a lunch break where attendees can talk informally. A large conference may comprise a whole week of organised activities.

Here are some features of conference activities.

Conference activities
• One or more high-profile keynote speakers
• Papers presented by various speakers
• Workshops where everyone can participate
• Trade displays
• Debates and forums
• Social activities; for example, a cocktail party, dinner or ball, visits to local attractions

Seminars and business functions

Seminars are smaller meetings, generally lasting from an hour to a day. One or more speakers present their work and ideas, and usually invite the audience to ask questions.

Business functions can be any events that have a business connection. For example, a key supplier may invite you and other major customers to a sporting function, or the organisation you work for may hold an annual dinner where outstanding sales staff are honoured.

You never know who you will meet or what you will find out. Always carry some business cards with you in case an opportunity arises to exchange cards with other people unexpectedly. Always follow up new contacts by keeping in touch with them after the function.

Here are some ways of finding out about seminars and business functions.

Ways of finding out about business seminars
Searching on the internet
Looking for advertisements in trade journals, newspapers and business magazines
Hearing about them from work colleagues
Receiving promotional material that may be forwarded to you through professional associations and universities

Professional associations

Professional associations are groups set up to represent the common views and interests of their members. Most industries have one or more professional associations representing them; for example, the accounting industry is represented by Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand, CPA Australia and the Institute of Public Accountants.

Individuals or organisations usually pay a fee to become a member of these associations. In return they receive a range of benefits such as newsletters identifying industry issues, meetings and access to industry publications.

Membership of professional associations may include access to:

- publications; for example, a magazine, journal or website
- regulatory and legislative information
- conferences, seminars and business functions (including networking events)
- the right to use the association's member logo for promotional purposes
- staff training at reduced rates
- special interest groups
- research reports
- business advice
- business contacts.

Industry websites

Professional associations include organisations that are exclusive to one industry, those that are set up to benefit a particular interest group and those that are geographically based. Chapters or sub-groups within a larger organisation also cater to the needs or interests of a specific group of people.

Here are some examples of industry groups.

Industry groups

  └ Australian Hotels Association – www.aha.org.au

  └ Australian Medical Association – www.ama.com.au

  └ Institute of Professional Editors – www.iped-editors.org

  └ Master Builders Australia – www.masterbuilders.com.au

Beneficial groups

  └ American Chamber of Commerce in Australia – www.amcham.com.au

  └ Chamber of Women in Business – www.cwb.org.au

  └ Directory of businesses owned by Indians living in Australia – www. indiandownunder.com.au

Geographically based groups

  └ Australian Business Network in Italy – www.australianbusiness.it

  └ City of Moreland Economic Development Branch – www.bizmoreland.com.au

  └ City of Whitehorse Business Group – www.wbiz.com.au

Maintain regular contact with people

One of the most effective networking strategies is to maintain regular contact with people you have met. If you make a conscious effort to remember people, ideas and resources, you can draw on this information and use it when you need to.

The types of contacts you may choose to maintain could include both personal and business friends and acquaintances, as shown here.

Contact sources
• School, college or university
• The local community
• Your current workplace and previous places you have worked
• Contact lists from your supervisor and other work colleagues
• Family
• Clubs or associations you belong to
• Clients or customers
• Trade fairs
• Business functions
• Conferences
• Businesses nearby
• Sporting clubs and activities, such as the gym

Target individuals

Seeking out an individual person can be an effective networking technique. You may have identified someone who could help you; for example, a person with the potential to become a good customer or help you with a particular project. Targeting individuals involves focusing on your target, preparing what you are going to say and finding an appropriate opportunity to say it, either through arranging a meeting or touching base in a less formal way.

If you take a genuine interest in people and their ideas, your contact lists will quickly grow.

You never know when your network of colleagues, friends or acquaintances may come in handy. However, contacts can only be of use if you stay in touch with them and keep their contact information up to date.

Here are some tips for maintaining contact lists.

Keeping contact lists
Collect business cards and note key information about the person on the back; for example, where you met, their special interests, how they might help your organisation.
Enter contact details into an email database, smartphone, electronic address book or organiser.
Prepare lists of contacts to keep handy in a paper or electronic file for easy reference.

Distribute materials

In some cases, you may wish to expand your circle of contacts by sending information out to a specific group of people. Your organisation may want to attract new customers by alerting them to your latest products and services.

You could send brochures, emails or social media links to a particular group of businesses, and then follow up the contact with phone calls, emails, visits or an invitation to visit your showroom or office.

You will probably find that some of the recipients do not respond to your invitations, while others take up your offer to find out more and may even become key contacts.

Choose the right strategy

If you want to contact a large number of people at once, a group email or text message may be appropriate. If there is a particular person you would like to meet, you could devise ways of arranging a meeting or talking to that person at a particular function. If your budget is limited, you can explore new ways to use the equipment and resources you already have, such as calling or emailing people who have attended a function or dealt with your organisation in the past.

Some strategies may yield immediate results, while others may take longer to produce benefits for your organisation. Choosing the appropriate strategy for your purposes will become easier as you become a more experienced networker. There are many different ways to cultivate beneficial business networks.

Factors to consider in networking strategy:

- The type of people you are contacting, either internal or external to your organisation
- The resources available to you
- Your expectations or the benefits you hope to gain from the process

Example: keep in touch with others

The Federation of Automotive Products Manufacturers (FAPM) was formed in 1958 and currently consists of some 80 member companies employing more than 45,000 people, with sales of over $8.5 billion. It is still recognised as the primary voice of the automotive components industry.

Membership of FAPM offers those in the industry numerous benefits, many of which are financially and competitively oriented. However, the very first member benefit listed on their website is the opportunity to network regularly with industry peers, customers and suppliers at FAPM events.

FAPM has proven beneficial for an account manager at a large aftermarket manufacturer of tow bars. He has been involved with FAPM for seven years and has found the association beneficial for many reasons. FAPM runs presentations from different car companies and has other groups that are affiliated with the automotive industry, such as Austrade and AusIndustry.

He says, 'It's good to hear from them about the state of the industry and programs that are coming up that may give my company opportunities. But the best thing is the networking – knowing what other people are up to, what's happening and hearing "on the grapevine" about new projects.'

You can find out more about FAPM online at: www.fapm.com.au.

… continued

FAPM has broad objectives, which include:

- promoting the interests and welfare of the automotive components industry
- encouraging and supporting government policies that assist the operation of a large and diverse industry
- supporting and promoting the development of an increasingly efficient and internationally competitive Australian motor vehicle industry.

Practice task 1

1. Define what networking is.

2. How could you record contact details?

3. List four strategies you could use to network with others and explain how these strategies can help.

<table>
<tr><td>**1B**</td><td>**Identify and pursue network opportunities**</td></tr>
</table>

Identifying network opportunities means thinking about how to increase and effectively maintain your circle of contacts and looking for places to find new contacts, as well as considering how the contacts you already have can help you. Sometimes the connections and potential benefits may not be direct or immediately visible.

Expand your networks

You share information with friends, family and colleagues that you think is beneficial; for example, the name of a good plumber. By being aware of the many opportunities you have for networking, you can make better use of such occasions and expand your networks. Almost every time you meet someone, you are provided with a networking opportunity. If you think of each meeting as a networking opportunity, you will become more aware of who is out there and how they may benefit you or your organisation.

You can expand your networks by more consciously gathering and sharing information at every opportunity. For example, instead of thinking of staff meetings as a series of routine reports, you could use the information presented to learn about what other teams are doing and identify new projects that may enable you to gain valuable cross-departmental experience.

Another way to expand your networks is to seek out new opportunities to network. Consider joining a special interest group or attending more functions. You could join a professional association or start subscribing to an email newsgroup for members with interests similar to yours. There are many ways to make contact with more people.

Here are several examples of opportunities for meeting people.

Opportunities for meeting people
• In the corridor at work
• At a staff meeting
• At social events
• Over coffee
• During a sales presentation
• At a function

Make effective use of your networks

After you have made new contacts, make sure you retain the information you have gained. It is important that you keep their details updated. If you are networking by attending a conference or other function or distributing materials, record a summary of the networking activity, including details about who was contacted or in attendance and possible ways to use the information. Include initial follow-up reminders for yourself, noting when to contact the people and why.

Make sure the information you record is accessible and easy to use. Be creative. To make the most effective use of network opportunities, keep an open mind about how each contact may be beneficial. Don't dismiss people because their interests are in a field unfamiliar to you. You never know when their expertise may come in handy.

Some contacts may be valuable because they can put you in touch with others. They can be seen as a 'network partner' that you work in partnership with to establish networks.

Personal information that you can record about a contact includes:

- where they work
- the type of work they do
- what their organisation does
- who they know
- their skills
- their access to further resources or information.

Pursue network opportunities – networking skills

Regardless of the strategy you choose, when pursuing network opportunities you require some key skills. The most effective networkers have excellent communication skill and use excellent written and verbal communication skills to establish, cultivate and promote professional business relationships.

Interpersonal skills are important when building relationships with people. To ensure that you do not miss out on networking opportunities, you need to use networking skills. When pursuing any network opportunity, make the most of the occasion or contact by making an effort to remember who was there, what they had to say, what further contacts they may be able to introduce you to and how all this information could possibly assist you.

The following are skills that you may need to practise.

Listening, interpreting and evaluating

While you need to manage your time well, you should also take time to actively listen to those you meet. The sales representative may deal with companies that do have something to offer you after all. Listening to and sifting through the information you hear and drawing out parts that may be of value are important networking skills.

Effective networking

Effective networkers are interested in people and take time to listen to what they have to say, which encourages the contact to disclose information. You can then interpret the information, working out what it means for you and your organisation. The information can later be evaluated by exploring different ways to use it, and recorded for future use.

Making judgments

You have to make judgments as you conduct your networking: which function to attend, which people to talk to in a room and which people to follow up. The decisions you make will be related to your experience and current needs. Be wary of prejudging people or situations; don't stereotype people. Good networkers keep an open mind, as they never know what they might find.

Questioning

It is sometimes difficult to know the right questions to ask. Good planning involves preparing some questions for specific people. Consider what you would like to gain from a meeting or contact. What questions can you ask to obtain the information? You could ask a friend or colleague for some feedback regarding your questions before you try them on your target.

Managing the information you gather

The information you gather will be useless if you do not manage it effectively. Recording contact details accurately and making them accessible are just as important as obtaining the information in the first place. You may need to ask for some advice about how best to manage the information you have gathered.

Writing

Written material that you distribute (such as information you publish about your organisation or follow-up emails) must be accurate, written clearly and in appropriate vocabulary, and presented in an engaging manner. Well-written material gives a good impression of your organisation and the way it operates, and is an effective way to promote business opportunities. Check for errors before sending.

Example: use networking skills

Julie is looking for a new job. She has just moved to Sydney with her husband and does not know many people. She has been answering job advertisements for three months with no success, and is becoming depressed and cynical.

In frustration, she contacts a couple of friends in Melbourne for advice and support. One of them has a very good relationship with his former HR manager, who is now working as a consultant in Sydney. He introduces Julie to the HR manager, who in turn introduces Julie to two further people, one of whom offers Julie a job that has not been advertised.

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Practice task 2

1. What are some ways that you could expand your existing networks?
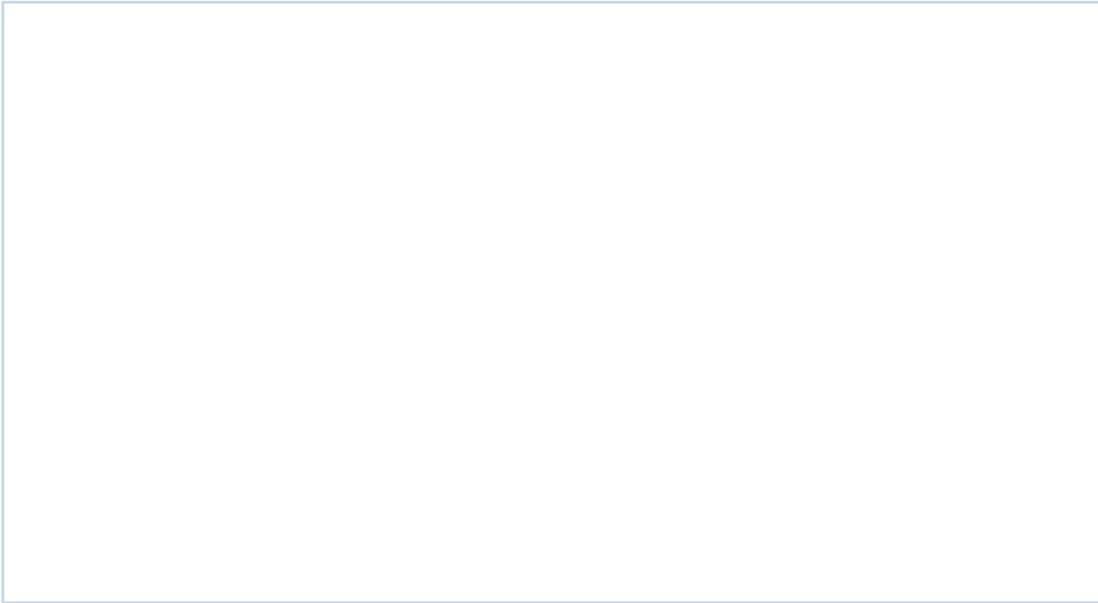
2. List five networking skills that could help you establish, cultivate and promote professional business relationships.

Practice task 2

1C — Share and communicate information about new networks

Sharing information about new networks with individuals, colleagues and clients is an important part of the networking process. Communication is a two-way process and while you are gathering information from someone, they are also gathering information from you. Mutual sharing of information can be extremely beneficial.

By sharing network information, you are making yourself available to receive new ideas, connections and information that you perhaps didn't directly seek out – this is one of the beneficial by-products of networking. If you work alone, sharing information with your contacts about people and ideas that may benefit them will encourage further sharing of information back to you.

Being involved in a range of networks can reduce feelings of isolation and help you by providing you with a context in which to base your work. The information you have collected can be pooled together with information from others to create a set of data that the work group can use for a range of purposes to benefit the organisation.

Ways of sharing information with networks include:

- in a short written report, memo or email
- via social media such as LinkedIn
- informally, at a meeting
- as part of a verbal presentation
- by entering details into a database
- in conversation at a function.

Use technology

Computers and modern technology such as smartphones and cloud computing make it very easy to record, store, sort, retrieve and analyse information. You can record the details of a casual meeting or some snippet of information about a competitor's product, market intelligence and other network information in a database. When the information is sorted and reviewed along with the other data in the database, important new information and connections may be revealed.

Networking often involves many meetings, encounters and complex interactions with all sorts of people and groups. Databases allow you to collect all these different pieces of information about people and make them work for you.

Databases can be relatively simple, such as an electronic organiser or address book where you record people's contact details and when you last contacted them. A more complex system, like a database for recording sales prospects, may record a larger range of information, such as name, address, business interests, every interaction with the contact over time and their responses to the interactions.

Think about how you can improve the ways you manage contact information by inputting more detail, checking the accuracy of the data and regularly checking the database.

Example: address business interests

Alicia is an agent for a company that sells cruises and specialist holidays in Scandinavia. She works for herself with two assistants and has a contract with the company, whose head office is in Copenhagen. Alicia's job is to sell and promote cruise packages to travel agents in Australia and to represent the company here.

One day she attends a regular travel industry lecture and lunch. At the table, she introduces herself to the people next to her and chats to them about what they do. Alicia quickly finds out that she is sitting next to a Danish hotelier named Markus, who is in Australia for a few weeks on business, and a woman called Susi, who is a Tourism NSW representative. They all swap business cards at the end of the lunch.

Afterwards, Alicia enters the information from the business cards into her contacts database, as she always does whenever she meets new people.

A fortnight later, Alicia is having a regular phone call with Lisbet, the sales manager of the cruise company, and Lisbet remarks that they are having difficulties with the hotel they have been using prior to embarkation. They need to transfer guests out of the hotel after receiving a number of complaints about the service and standard of the rooms.

Alicia mentions that she has just met someone who owns a hotel in Copenhagen and that he might be interested in new business. She logs into her database and calls up Markus's details. Lisbet passes these onto the cruise company's product managers, who are seeking a replacement hotel.

A few weeks later, Alicia is pleased to receive an email from Markus, who has just won the lucrative hotel business in Copenhagen. He remembers their meeting and is keen to thank her for passing his details onto the cruise company's head office.

Practice task 3

1. Who might you share your network information with?

2. Describe how sharing information may benefit you and your organisation.

3. What systems could you put in place to ensure that others within your organisation pass on contact details of useful or interesting people they meet?

1D Participate in professional networks and associations

Here are examples of types of professional networks.

Work teams

Your work team is the team in which you work on a daily basis; for instance, an accounts team, a sales team or a warehouse team. Be sure to get to know your colleagues and take the time to introduce yourself to new team members. A work team can also be a group of people who have different skills and experience but have been asked to work together.

Suppliers

Working closely and effectively with suppliers of products and services to your organisation is important to ensure you receive high-quality materials or assistance. Networking with suppliers can mean developing a good relationship where your needs are understood by them. It can also mean introductions to other providers who may be more cost-effective.

Other organisations

There are a wide variety of professional organisations in any industry – in your own industry there may be suppliers, manufacturers, marketers, purchasers, supporters, advocates and regulators who each have their own industry organisation. Networking with associated organisations and those along the supply chain in your industry (and in similar industries) can be very useful.

Committees

Committees are usually made up of representatives of a group who have been given the task of performing a particular function. Committees often have to report back to the group from which they are drawn. Your organisation may have a workplace safety committee or a superannuation committee that includes people from all levels of the organisation.

Internal or external customers

Networking with customers helps you understand their needs, deliver a better level of service and meet new clients. Networking is one way of deepening a relationship beyond that of 'supplier' and 'buyer'. Taking the time to network with customers can forge deeper and more complex relationships on personal and professional levels.

Government agencies

Government agencies such as Austrade, AusIndustry and inter-agency groups within local, state and federal government departments may be able to provide you with useful contacts, networking opportunities, money (in the form of grants), information, support and advice that may help your business grow.

Associations and groups

Here are some examples of types of professional associations and groups.

Professional associations

Professional networks can be defined as any type of business relationship, such as a work team or a group of suppliers you work with. Professional associations are groups set up to represent the views and interests of their members. You may need to pay a fee to become a member of the organisation and, in return, you receive a range of benefits.

Groups for specific projects

You may be involved in a group set up for a specific project, such as a working party, reference group or steering committee. It is important that groups set up to work on a project are conscious of the need to network, both within and outside the group. Involvement in projects can also benefit you after they have concluded.

Advisory committees

Advisory committees may be called on to review information, canvass opinions or make recommendations to others about a situation or issue of importance. Networking is a tool used in these situations that helps committee members understand the concerns and opinions of those affected by the recommendation.

Lobby groups

Lobby groups are most commonly found in politics, where they use their power (often derived from a large member base or combined financial strength) to influence the creation of laws and policies. Lobby groups can be formally organised professional associations or informal groups of people with a common cause or interest.

Benefits of professional networks and associations

Participating in networks and associations involves attending, actively listening, interacting, learning and sharing with others or in a group environment.

Professional networking can provide a range of benefits.

Benefits of professional networking include:

- increased knowledge
- increased skills
- obtaining key information for others in your organisation
- finding out about the latest developments (including opportunities and threats) in your field
- meeting people with common business interests
- gaining access to a useful resource you can call on when you need to.

Strategies for active participation

It is important to take time to listen and absorb what people are saying. The ability to remember what others say and value is critical to fostering good relationships. Listening is just as important as talking when it comes to establishing good relationships with others. Think about how you come across to other people.

If you feel comfortable about yourself, you will project confidence. Recognise and try to resolve the aspects of networking that you are least comfortable with. For example, if you are nervous about meeting people, begin by practising with trusted friends. Talk to them about your interests or even role-play conversations until you feel confident about what to say.

Here are some tips for active participation.

Active participation tips
• Don't panic.
• Focus on an aspect of your industry or field that interests you.
• Let people know what your passion is.
• Discuss current events that have captured your attention.
• Get involved – what new products or developments fascinate you?
• When you talk about topics you know and like, speak with conviction and insight.
• In social events, use positive body language.
• Try to maintain some eye contact. However, don't do anything that seems artificial or contrived and try to be yourself.

Smart conversation

There's nothing wrong with a simple 'small talk' comment to start a conversation, such as, 'Great venue, isn't it?' or 'What did you think of Jenny's presentation?' Asking a question is often a good way to start a conversation.

If you find group interaction difficult, look for other people who are on their own and may be feeling the same way, rather than trying to approach groups of people who are obviously already familiar with each other. But don't stay with one person too long; move around to others.

What you know can be just as important as who you know. Let people know that they can contact you for the latest information on whatever is relevant to your field. Take the initiative to share your findings with others.

If you are uncomfortable at events that are solely networking opportunities, try to attend gatherings that have a purpose, such as educational seminars or workshops. Such activities have a built-in agenda that involves structured networking. Make sure that you are positive and prepared, and don't keep useful information to yourself.

Here are examples of the reasoning behind why you need to do these things.

Be positive

You may think talking to a particular person or attending a particular event will be a waste of time. Are you certain that this is the case or are you just nervous? Almost all interactions are worthwhile. If they don't produce instant or spectacular results, you will at least have practised your networking skills.

Be prepared

Always keep handy a supply of business cards and also a phone or notebook and pen for recording names and contact details.

Don't keep information to yourself

Some people worry that they will bother people, so they tend to contact others only when they are worried or excited about something. Instead, try to get into the habit of interacting with people over small things. This will help you develop ongoing relationships and ensure that your contacts are there when you need to discuss more important issues.

Example: network the smart way

Ella works in the HR department of a national manufacturing company. She perceives her role as just getting her work done well and on time. When her manager asks her to attend a seminar run by a professional association for people working in HR, Ella is sceptical and cannot see how it is relevant to her job. At the seminar, she is interested to learn about new global developments in HR, which could mean that her role will become more interesting over the next year. She also starts chatting to Rebecca, who is sitting next to her. They are about the same age and have similar jobs.

After that positive experience, Ella decides to join a special interest group for people with job roles similar to her own, organised by the professional association. The group meets once a month. At each meeting, they listen to an invited speaker and then stay for dinner. Rebecca has also joined the group and the two of them have both made further friends and acquaintances with similar work and personal interests. They have exchanged email addresses and Ella finds the group is a valuable resource when she needs advice or information.

Practice task 4

1. List at least three government agencies or groups that may be able to assist you.

2. How can government agencies or groups help you and your organisation?

Summary

1. As a manager or leader within an organisation, it is important that you are aware of, and have access to, an array of informal and formal network channels.

2. Strategies you can use to network include participating in conferences, attending seminars and business functions, becoming a member of a professional association and maintaining regular contact with people you meet professionally and personally.

3. Many informal settings provide you with networking opportunities. Think about the opportunities you have for meeting people in the corridor at work, at a staff meeting, at Friday night drinks, over coffee, during a sales presentation or at a function.

4. Listening, interpreting and evaluating, making judgments, questioning and managing the information you gather are some skills that you may need to practise when forming networks.

5. Network contacts and information you gain that are beneficial to the organisation should be shared with colleagues, to maximise the potential benefits to the business.

6. There are many professional networks and groups you can participate in to obtain knowledge, skills and expertise about your industry, such as work teams, supplier networks, committees, internal and external customers, government agencies and professional associations.

Learning checkpoint 1
Develop and maintain business networks

This learning checkpoint allows you to develop your skills and knowledge in developing and maintaining business networks.

Part A

Access business networks from your organisation or one that you are familiar with. Think about the business networks in your industry.

1. What networks do you or your organisation currently belong to and how were these contacts developed?

2. List some network strategies or channels that exist for you to develop new networks and contacts.

3. How does networking through these strategies or channels help promote your organisation and assist it in achieving its objectives?

4. Explain how you will actively pursue these networking strategies to expand and make effective use of your business contacts.

5. List the interpersonal skills required to effectively develop network contacts.

Part B

When a new network contact has been developed through contact with current or previous organisations:

1. How is information regarding new network contacts shared, recorded and communicated with others in your organisation?

2. Why is it important to share and communicate information about new contacts with others in the organisation? What are the benefits to the organisation?

Part C

Consider the professional networks and associations that exist within your role and industry that you could participate in to obtain personal benefits.

1. List how each network could be contacted and the benefits it could provide you with personally.

2. What useful information will each network provide?

Topic 2
Establish and maintain business relationships

When attempting to establish and maintain business relationships with networks and contacts, it is important that once you have made initial contact with people, you then make the most of that contact by developing a mutually beneficial relationship with them.

You work more effectively if you can work well with others, gain their confidence and trust, and use the skills required to resolve conflict and diffuse stressful situations. The organisation benefits as a result.

In this topic you will learn how to:

2A   Develop and maintain effective business relationships

2B   Gain the trust and confidence of your contacts

2C   Use negotiating skills to encourage positive outcomes

2D   Resolve difficult situations

2E   Seek specialist advice when developing contacts

2A | Develop and maintain effective business relationships

Organisations that are committed to effective relationship management perform better economically than those that are not, while organisations with poor relationship management find it difficult to compete successfully.

It is important to conduct yourself in an ethical and professional manner when you are working with others, as you are effectively representing your organisation. As an employee, you are obliged to work within certain boundaries and to adhere to standards, policies and procedures set by your organisation.

You may also be expected to report back to your manager, a committee or others within the organisation on your activities, including information on who you met at networking functions (such as conferences, conventions or industry dinners) that you have attended.

An ethical organisation:

- provides information that is accurate
- is open and honest with others
- respects others' opinions
- follows up and does what it says it will do
- has clearly defined business plans with identified goals, systems and processes
- has a quality assurance and continuous improvement program
- follows access and equity principles
- incorporates workplace health and safety policies into all programs
- complies with legal policies, guidelines and requirements.

Behaviours that impact on relationships

There are many ways to establish successful business relationships. Networking is a practice that you can undertake regularly to make and retain contact with people. There are also behavioural aspects to relationship building that can help to foster effective networking, resulting in successful relationships.

Everyone exhibits behaviours that impact on the effectiveness of an organisation. Consider the people working or studying around you. Can you think of a word or phrase to describe each person? Maybe they are hard-working, efficient, lazy, thorough, not a team player, etc.

These are all behaviours (either real or perceived) that affect others. If you behave positively, you encourage others to do the same. An organisation full of positive people is likely to be more successful than one full of negative people.

Develop self-awareness

Developing self-awareness enables you to make changes in the thoughts and interpretations you make in your mind about others. This allows you to change your emotions. Self-awareness is one of the attributes of emotional intelligence and an important factor in achieving networking success.

Having self-awareness allows you to see where your thoughts and emotions are taking you. It also allows you to see the controls of your emotions, behaviour and personality, so you can make the changes you want.

It is important to be aware of your own behaviour and how it affects others. People can have entirely different perceptions of each other and these perceptions can make or break business relationships. Self-awareness helps you develop and maintain positive relationships, which in turns benefits your organisation.

Here are some examples of positive and negative behaviours.

Positive behaviours

- Communicating clearly, openly and constructively
- Actively listening
- Displaying empathy
- Being supportive
- Exploring the needs of others
- Creating opportunities for feedback
- Being flexible
- Being consistent

Negative behaviours

- Poor communication
- Competitiveness
- Confusion about expectations
- Lack of trust
- Inequality
- Inaccessibility
- Lack of flexibility
- Being reactive rather than proactive
- Lack of self-awareness
- Lack of feedback
- Not listening to others

Develop self-awareness

Example: good perceptions make good business sense

Chris is a successful business development manager (BDM) with a funds management company. His manager, Jan, periodically evaluates the performance of his team and sees that his results are consistently good. Even in the months when other BDMs do not perform as well, Chris's results are always good.

Jan needs more people like Chris in her team. What is his secret? She watches him at functions as he talks to clients, but he seems to be doing exactly what the other BDMs are doing. She talks to him about what he does to create such great business relationships with people. His answers are not really different to those of his colleagues.

So, with his permission, Jan decides to talk face-to-face with his clients (financial planners) and find out why they are so loyal to him and how he manages to bring in such good results every month.

She finds that although he is a salesperson with targets and budgets, his clients do not see him as a typical pushy salesperson. They say he is honest and upfront, and always follows up and does what he says he will do within a short period of time (this is something they all comment on). He is more of an adviser and supporter than a salesperson.

Quite simply, it is the way Chris manages his business relationships that sets him apart from the field. By talking with clients, Jan discovers that the other BDMs are not as helpful in their approach and talk more than they listen.

Practice task 5

1. List three ethical standards you must comply with when networking.

2. Explain why it is important to be aware of your own behaviour and how it may impact on the people you are networking with.

3. List three ways you can develop and maintain positive relationships with your network contacts.

2B | Gain the trust and confidence of your contacts

Establishing effective business relationships requires the ability to get along well with those you work with. To do this, you need to establish relationships based on positive behaviours of honesty, respect, empathy and trust. When such standards of behaviour are maintained, relationships prosper.

The needs of the individual and those of the organisation should complement and support each other. Each has a responsibility towards the other. The individual needs to behave in ways that benefit the organisation and the organisation needs to provide a beneficial environment for the individual to work in. Everyone is different: in their approaches to work, attitudes, ways of working and communicating. It is important to accept others and recognise these differences, in order to work well together.

Sometimes it can be difficult to work with people who have very different ways of behaving to your own. The ability to remain flexible and tolerant when dealing with other people is a powerful skill. By accepting the differences in people, you can grow both professionally and personally.

There are a number of ways you can show people that you accept and support them.

Supporting and accepting people require you to:

- listen
- show personal interest
- provide positive feedback
- provide help and support
- support their feelings
- support their decisions
- ask for help and support
- spend time with them
- be honest
- accept individual differences.

Develop trust

When there is an environment of trust in an organisation, problems can usually be discussed, explored and resolved before they escalate. If people don't trust each other, it can be difficult to adjust to changes and challenges in the workplace.

Trust is an important part of business and personal relationships: when people trust you, they develop confidence in you and in the work you do. Lack of trust in a workplace is an extremely destructive force. It leads to individuals acting only with their own interests in mind, and not those of the organisation. Groups and teams do not function well without trust, and lack of confidence in each other and the organisation can lead to those outside losing confidence in the organisation.

Building trust is not an easy task and does not happen overnight. You can help to build trust by modelling trust-building behaviours.

Here are several specific ways you can build trust in relationships.

Building trust
• Tell people how you feel.
• Be open and honest.
• Share organisational information appropriately.
• Keep confidential information to yourself.
• Demonstrate that you are working in the organisation's interests, not solely your own.
• Support others.
• Demonstrate that others can rely and depend on you.
• Keep promises.
• Cooperate with others.
• Behave in a consistent way.
• Be friendly and approachable.

Build trust

In contrast with all the work that is done to build trust, sadly trust can be rapidly destroyed.

Here are some types of behaviour that can work against the building of trust.

Common ways to destroy trust
• Acting secretively
• Acting suspiciously
• Being selfish
• Keeping organisational information to yourself
• Betraying the trust and confidence of others
• Acting aggressively
• Being uncaring or intolerant
• Being unreliable, unpredictable or inconsistent
• Ridiculing others
• Disrespecting others
• Making moral judgments about others

Communication skills

Communicating well with others is essential if trust is to grow. Communication skills are extremely important in the workplace. People spend much of their time communicating, by speaking, reading and writing, often giving little thought to how they communicate. It is easy to forget that communication requires special skills, which take practice to perfect.

Communication channels should be free and open. Employees, managers, customers and suppliers should feel comfortable approaching each other about all sorts of issues, without fear of recrimination. You should feel comfortable addressing a range of people, individually and in groups.

Listening to those around you is a vital part of communicating effectively. Hearing and listening are not the same thing. Active listening means attempting to make real sense of what the person is saying, by asking questions, making eye contact, connecting with the person and confirming that you understand what they are saying.

Different situations require different responses

It is important to remain flexible when communicating, as different situations will demand different responses from you. Some situations are routine, others more unusual.

Different audiences and situations require different responses. It pays to put some thought into choosing the most appropriate way of responding to specific people. You need to decide whether verbal or written communication is more appropriate, delivered to a group or individual, formally or informally.

Types of communication include:

- written reports
- group discussions at team meetings
- telephone calls and text messages
- letters, memos and email messages
- social media postings
- face-to-face discussions.

Respect, empathy and integrity

Treating people with respect means listening to what they have to say, trying not to prejudge them and respecting their opinions even if you do not agree with them. Everyone is different and has varied backgrounds, beliefs, opinions, skills and experiences. All these things may affect the way people relate to others and react to particular situations.

Show respect by remaining polite and treating people courteously, even if they are behaving unreasonably. Avoid reacting emotionally. Empathy refers to listening to others and showing that you understand their situation. You do not have to sympathise or agree with them; instead, try to understand what they are thinking and feeling – place yourself in their shoes. By showing genuine interest in people, you are on the path to developing trust, rapport and positive relationships.

Sometimes being honest can be difficult, especially when others don't want to hear the truth. However, most people will respect someone who admits their own mistakes and takes steps to avoid similar mistakes in the future.

Remember that in all your business interactions, you must behave appropriately and according to your organisation's standards for privacy, confidentiality and security.

Gain confidence

You can gain people's confidence by always aiming for the highest standards, both in the tasks that you complete (your work) and in the way that you complete them (your behaviour).

Aim to complete your work well, to the organisation's highest expected standards, on time and consistently. Show initiative and the ability to work independently. Ask for assistance, advice and feedback when appropriate.

Through your actions, show people that they can depend on you. A team that does not respect its members does not function well.

Here are several tips for working with integrity.

Working with integrity
Be honest.
Accept your mistakes.
Recognise ways you could improve your behaviour.
Treat people fairly, with respect and empathy.

Be positive and aim for improvement

By acting positively, you encourage positive behaviour in those around you. Do not become complacent, however. Stay aware of how you are performing, identify your strengths and weaknesses, and look for areas to improve.

Avoid words like 'no', 'can't' and 'won't'. Instead of saying, 'This doesn't work', you could say, 'Let's look at ways of understanding how this works'. Turn negative situations into positive ones. If a customer is upset about poor service they have received, you may be able to turn them into one of your most loyal customers by responding appropriately and resolving the situation.

Work cooperatively

Learning to work cooperatively with individuals and in groups is a major factor in developing the trust and confidence of business colleagues. If you behave in positive ways, display trust-building behaviour, treat people with respect, empathise with their situation and develop a reputation for integrity, others will learn to trust you, develop confidence in your abilities and enjoy working with you. Positive business relationships are thus encouraged.

Example: a communication style that causes problems

Nicole is the owner and manager of an online children's clothing company. She has seven staff and runs the business as she has since the beginning – in a casual way. She has a habit of calling a staff member as soon as she thinks of something, telling them about her idea and then asking them to implement it. This works if it is a simple task, but sometimes her ideas are big and complex ones.

Nicole has very clear ideas about how she wants things to be done and some of her newer staff members find that this is causing problems, as she calls them from her mobile phone with instructions and ideas, but they are not exactly sure what they are expected to do then.

Two of Nicole's staff speak to the operations manager, who agrees that her style of communicating can be difficult to work with. He agrees to chat to Nicole and ask her to begin communicating these things in ways that are more formal, so staff can effectively implement her ideas. She reluctantly agrees that as her business grows, she needs to change her style and give clearer information and instructions to her staff to ensure that things are done the way she wants them.

The business begins to use emailed memos and hold weekly meetings that, following Nicole's lead, become brainstorming sessions where people bring their ideas and discuss them.

While Nicole takes a little while to get used to this new way of working, after just a few weeks she can see the benefits it is bringing her business. She sees that her employees are happier with a clearer way of communicating.

Practice task 6

1. List at least five ways that you can build trust and confidence with your network contacts.

2. Select a communication behaviour that might be difficult for people to follow and explain how you could improve this.

2C | Use negotiating skills to encourage positive outcomes

An essential element of working cooperatively is negotiation. Negotiation is the process of two or more parties with different attitudes, needs and motivations coming together to try to agree on a matter. People are constantly negotiating how they will do work tasks, such as who will take meeting minutes and who will complete what task and when.

Whenever decisions need to be made between two or more people or groups, negotiation skills are used. Sometimes difficult situations need to be resolved through negotiating solutions.

Successful negotiation requires you to distance yourself from the emotional responses that often accompany conflict and block effective communication. Some of the most difficult business relationships in the world are those bound together in alliance and partnership relationships.

To encourage positive negotiating outcomes, ask yourself:

- What is at stake here?
- What are my expectations?
- What do I hope to achieve?
- What do I know about the other party and what they want?

Plan for negotiation

Before you begin to negotiate, you should have a good understanding of the situation and what you hope to achieve.

Perhaps you need to conduct some research before you begin. If you are unsure about some of the answers to the questions below, you may need to prepare further.

Questions for planning your negotiation
- Who will be involved?   - Where will we negotiate?   - What are the priorities?   - What questions will I ask?   - What skills will I need to use?   - How will I behave if the situation becomes stressful?   - How will I adjust my plan if needed?   - How will I document the key arguments?

Follow your negotiation plan

Here are some key considerations of a successful negotiation plan.

Location

There are advantages and disadvantages to holding a meeting at 'your place'. You may feel more comfortable and have people around who can support you if needed, but you also need to look after the other party.

Similarly, if you are on the other party's premises, you have to adapt to unfamiliar surroundings, which may be unsettling.

Listing the issues

What issues need to be negotiated? It is important that both parties understand the reason for negotiating. Your priorities may be different from theirs and you may have to direct the negotiation a certain way to achieve what you want.

What issues should be avoided? There is no point in bringing up issues that are not relevant to the current aims.

Priorities

Are certain issues more important than others? It can be useful to rank items in order of importance so the crucial issues are dealt with first. There will be some things you need to have (you won't come to an agreement without them), others you would like to have (you'll work hard to get them) and trade-offs (areas where you are willing to bargain and concede to the other side).

Questions to ask

What questions will you ask the other side? Use the facts of the situation as a basis for your questions. Use your questions to find out as much about the other side as possible. Knowledge is powerful. Are there outside influences affecting the negotiations? What other information may be relevant?

Skills required

Review your negotiation skills. Try to identify your strengths and weaknesses. For example, if you know you are a poor listener, make a mental note to listen carefully to the other party's arguments.

Stressful situations

Prepare yourself for dealing with potentially stressful situations. If you learn beforehand some strategies for diffusing tense situations, you will not become unduly stressed if they occur. Refer to the following section on 'negotiation skills' for some tips.

Changes of plan

You can never predict exactly how a meeting will turn out. You will have to make decisions about how to react, what to say and what to agree to as you go along. If you are well prepared and have thought about a variety of possible eventualities, you will be better able to respond appropriately to situations as they arise.

Negotiation skills

Negotiating often involves settling on an agreement or idea where everyone gets part of what they want. This is reaching a mutually satisfactory agreement, commonly known as a win–win situation. To establish this, you need to establish mutual trust, through honesty and integrity from both parties.

It is essential during the negotiation stages that both sides are able to work together to come up with a compromise solution that suits the needs and wants of everyone as far as possible. Acting in an assertive (not aggressive) manner, each party should try to see things from the other's perspective.

Useful negotiating skills include:
- active listening
- questioning and clarifying
- communicating openly and positively
- assertiveness
- acknowledging feelings and emotions
- collaboration
- bargaining and making offers and counteroffers to create solutions
- conflict reduction
- stress management
- empathy.

Implement the negotiation plan

Once you have conducted your research and thought carefully about how you will conduct your side of the negotiation, and then prepared your plan, you are ready to put the plan into action.

Here are some stages of the negotiating pattern.

Negotiation pattern
Getting to know each other
Defining your objectives
Negotiating
Expressing disagreement
Reassessing and compromising
Reaching agreement

The stresses of negotiation

Sometimes negotiation can be stressful, especially if the conflict has already reached crisis point. People may behave aggressively towards you. In such situations, it is important to stay calm. If people start to criticise you personally, remember that their behaviour is likely to be caused by their own fears, insecurities or lack of confidence. It is not all about you.

In such situations, remember that you have the right to assert yourself (or not to, if you don't want to) and to be treated with dignity and respect.

Assert yourself by:

- thinking positively
- believing in yourself and your ability
- sending out clear messages and using a confident tone of voice and appropriate body language
- using 'I' statements to keep the conversation objective
- remaining firm and trying not to be intimidated, stating what you need repeatedly if necessary.

Get to know each other

It is important to spend a few minutes on introductions and scene-setting before you start negotiating. People should be made to feel at ease so a climate of agreement is promoted from the beginning. Try to focus on the problems to be resolved, not the person. Be friendly and approachable.

Here are examples of how you may proceed during the negotiation.

Defining your objectives

Develop the objectives or goals of the negotiation. Clearly stating what you hope to achieve from the negotiation assists in ensuring your negotiation strategies and techniques are geared towards achieving this. By defining your own objectives, you are also finding out about the other party's goals and expectations.

Negotiating

Start the negotiations using your plan and prepared questions to guide you. It may be useful to take notes. Refer to your plan frequently to make sure you stay focused on your goals. Be flexible, open and reasonable. Discuss the issues, with each party stating their position. Each party will try to persuade the other side to agree with their point of view.

Expressing disagreement

If disagreement occurs, think about how you can turn it into something positive. When conflict is dealt with effectively, it brings people closer together.

Reassessing

You need to confirm, at an appropriate stage, what has been discussed and where the two parties stand. It is useful to go over areas of common ground and restate the objectives you are both aiming for. Both sides may need to make compromises in order to reach an agreement.

Reaching agreement

An agreement must be settled on by both parties. Everyone must be clear about what has been decided. It is best to put your agreement in writing, confirming the actual wording with the other party. The two sides can then sign off on what they have achieved.

Reviewing

Reviewing what has happened can be useful to establish whether you have achieved your objectives, where you may have gone wrong and what you could learn from the experience for next time, as well as what you did well and how you could repeat that success in the future. It is a good idea to take notes and document the negotiation.

Active listening

Active listening means paying attention to what the other person is saying, focusing on them, making eye contact and acknowledging what they are saying by nodding or using 'verbal nods', such as 'I see'. It also means clarifying, paraphrasing and confirming what they are saying by restating it and writing notes if appropriate.

Question and clarify

Clarifying involves confirming that you have the same understanding of the information as the other party. You can ask questions to confirm your mutual understanding, rephrase what has been said or summarise things up to the current time. This gives the other party the opportunity to correct you if there has been some misunderstanding.

Open-ended questions are most effective for learning about the other party during negotiations. Open-ended questions are those that cannot be answered by 'yes' or 'no'. For example: 'What sort of outcomes are you hoping to achieve?' as opposed to 'Have you made a decision?'

Here are examples of the types of questions commonly used and questions that can assist in clarifying a situation.

Types of questions

- Hypothetical – What would happen if … ?
- Leading – So you're happy with everything we've agreed on so far?
- Directing – Could we return to item 1? Could you explain what you mean by … ?

Clarifying questions

- What do you mean by … ?
- Am I right to assume that you are ready to … ?
- You say the current estimated budget is too small. Is that correct?

Communicate openly and positively

Communicating openly and positively requires you to be sensitive to cultural differences, speaking clearly and avoiding jargon and slang. Avoid negative language such as 'can't', 'won't' and 'but'. Instead of saying, 'I would love to meet again, but I don't have any time', you could say, 'I would love to meet again. I don't have any time just now'. The first response might encourage the other party to give up, while the second response might encourage the other party to help you with another task so you could find the time to meet again.

Assertiveness

Being assertive means being confident enough to state how you feel and asking for what you want. Being assertive is not about getting your own way, bullying, threatening or harassing people.

Can you think of a recent situation where you behaved assertively with success? What did you do or say and why did this work?

It is important that those you work with understand your views and positions on matters of mutual importance. By stating your position, you can ensure that there is no confusion over what you will concede or the outcome you are working towards. This can be done in a non-threatening, non-aggressive way that will not be offensive to the people you work with.

If you behave assertively, you can:

- regard yourself and others as equals
- express your thoughts, emotions and feelings clearly
- encourage others to be open with you and trust you
- behave and communicate confidently
- act appropriately and positively.

Acknowledge your emotions

Here are some key points to consider when acknowledging your own emotions and the opinions and requirements of others.

Acknowledging feelings and emotions

By acknowledging feelings and emotions, you promote an atmosphere of trust. Using 'I' statements (for example, 'I feel concerned about … ') can also help everyone remain objective by focusing on the issues surrounding the problem, rather than on the personalities involved.

Collaboration and creating solutions

You may need to be prepared with options and counteroffers if your contacts want different things from the relationship. Never dismiss someone's opinion or requirements immediately. A useful tip that aids in negotiation and fosters effective business relationships is to work on an issue as if you were a team, not as if you were approaching the issue from two different angles.

Conflict reduction

Avoid arguments and unproductive discussions that may harm your relationship. If you find yourself in a situation where others are becoming aggressive or stirring up conflict, react by stating that you don't want to argue with them, just to work out a solution that helps everyone.

Stress management and empathy

Acknowledging the issues of the other party and understanding what motivates them are important ways of reducing the stress associated with negotiations. Think of what you would typically be worried about – 'Do they really understand what we're all about? I don't think they realise how important this issue is to us.'

Example: form business alliances

A business alliance is where two or more organisations come together to create benefits for themselves or their customers and, in doing so, create some sort of advantage for each other.

Often alliances are formed between extremely different organisations (such as petrol stations, supermarkets and credit cards, or banks and supermarkets), yet they can also be formed between similar organisations (such as airlines or internet search engines) and those linked by a supply chain (such as materials providers, manufacturers and distributors).

Imagine how difficult it would be to negotiate your own position in an alliance where there were more than three or four members and everyone had their own unique position on matters. Many alliances make decisions by voting, so the process of decision-making may be prolonged and may result in conflict. So negotiation skills are vital in the building of business alliances.

Practice task 7

1. Define what is meant by negotiation.

2. List what you think are five essential skills for successful negotiation.

3. Why is it a good idea to make a plan before negotiating?

4. What are some things you could do during the 'getting to know each other' phase of negotiation?

2D | Resolve difficult situations

Developing effective business relationships involves interacting and working together with a range of people. You may be involved in a committee, a work team or a network of business associates where you are required to cooperate with members of the group.

The individuals that make up the group may have diverse skills, knowledge, cultural backgrounds and experience. Each person has responsibilities to meet and needs to work cooperatively to achieve agreed goals.

In any work or personal situation involving groups of people, there is the potential for differences to cause tension, which can lead to conflict. Sometimes people do not agree, but clash or misunderstand each other, and problems occur.

Reasons for conflict include:

- a clash of interests, values, actions, behaviours or aims
- a real or imagined situation
- a situation facing an individual or between individuals
- a situation that appears threatening to an individual, a group, their position, beliefs or goals.

Identify sources of conflict

When it comes to conflict management, prevention is better than cure. Being able to identify possible sources of conflict is an important skill and a useful risk management tool.

When individuals or teams spend time brainstorming potential sources of conflict, strategies can be put in place to minimise or eliminate conflict. This can avoid unproductive situations where damaging or hurtful things may be said or done in anger or frustration between colleagues.

Here are several examples of sources of conflict.

Sources of conflict
Power differences between people
Lack of clarity about who is responsible for certain tasks
Dependence on others
Blockages in communication
Differences between individuals
Differences in goals and objectives

Identify the problem

There are many ways a problem may come to your attention. You could hear about it from someone else, observe it developing or experience it yourself.

Once you are aware of a problem, you can label it broadly. Personality clashes could be labelled 'communication' and staff taking too many sick days as 'absenteeism'.

Problems that may come to your attention include:

- a supplier going to a competitor because they are not satisfied with the service from your organisation
- a difference of opinion between clients and your organisation
- a business associate being unhappy with results of a negotiation
- work not being completed on time
- work not being completed to the required standard
- people arriving late for work
- a colleague divulging confidential information
- lack of resources
- poor information flow.

Analyse the problem

Solving a problem requires some analysis. It is easy to jump to conclusions and base your response on incorrect information. Analyse the potential causes of the difficult situation. Causes for problems can be complex and varied.

For example, if someone is not completing work to the required standard, it could be that the person has never been made aware of the standards expected or they lack some of the skills required to complete the work. The person may have other, more important work competing for their time or have inadequate equipment. In this situation you need to analyse the needs and fears of those involved. Talk to them and find out how they view the situation. What do they really want?

Needs are usually described as wants, interests, values or something you or they care about. Fears can be anxieties, concerns or worries. It does not matter if the fears are realistic or not. Different types of conflict will require different responses, and you need to detect the level of conflict and act accordingly.

Here are some different types of conflict.

Different types of conflict
• Discomfort – you sense that people are not happy, something is wrong.
• Incidents – minor outbursts often indicate suppressed conflict, with the reason for conflict being unrelated to the minor incident.
• Misunderstandings – problems can arise from poor communication or imagined conflict.
• Tension – negative and inflexible attitudes exist, or perceptions of the situation are distorted.
• Crisis – extreme behaviour is evident, both verbal and physical.

Develop options

After analysing a problem, you can begin to seek possible solutions. Be creative – the more new ideas for solutions, the better.

There are many ways to react to difficult situations, some better than others. You need to determine the most appropriate reaction to each particular problem.

Here are some examples of reactions to avoid.

Reactions to avoid
• Being aggressive
• Being verbally abusive
• Using intimidation
• Suppressing feelings
• Aiming for a win–lose situation – where one side wins and the other loses
• Ignoring the situation, withdrawing, running away
• Trying to placate or please the other party at any cost
• Compromising so that both sides lose

Collaborative problem-solving

Reflect on a time when you were involved in a conflict situation at work. What happened? How did the conflict arise? How did you (and the other party/parties) manage it? Could you have responded differently? In hindsight, how do you think it could have been avoided? Managing conflict and dealing with difficult situations is an important skill.

Difficult situations should not be seen as negative. If handled in an appropriate manner, they can lead you to a greater understanding of the issues at hand and help you find effective solutions. Difficult situations can be resolved through collaborative problem-solving techniques.

Listen carefully so you know what the problem is and let everyone have the opportunity to respond in turn.

Collaborative problem-solving skills include:
- identifying sources of conflict
- identifying the problem
- analysing the problem
- developing options
- choosing options
- acting on the chosen options.

Choose and act on chosen options

It is important to remain flexible and choose a strategy that is appropriate for the specific situation. If you and your team have come up with a range of possible solutions, it can be helpful to rate them from 'very useful' to 'not practical'.

Ask whether the proposed solutions are possible to implement, will effectively solve the problem and are fair to all those involved. Make sure all parties understand the proposed solution and are clear about what their responsibilities will be. Many plans fail because the solutions chosen are never implemented.

Your hard work must be followed through with action. Document the tasks that need to be done, who will do them, when they will be done, and how and when progress will be reviewed. Stay flexible – your plan may have to change if new issues arise.

When solutions are found for difficult situations, the conflict can be seen as constructive and result in a range of positive outcomes, such as improved work practices, better communication, new ideas, more motivated staff and increased self-awareness.

Example: a negative reaction

Whenever Jo holds a meeting with her team, she finds that some team members react negatively to items under discussion, often before they have even fully heard what the item is about. This makes it difficult for people to contribute effectively to decision-making. Jo decides to find out what the problem is. She casually questions each team member on their own when they are talking about other work tasks, by asking if there is anything that bothers them about the meetings. She also asks each person to suggest ways to improve the mood of the discussions.

It soon becomes clear that team members feel excluded because Jo always prepares the agenda herself, deciding which items need to be raised. She thinks she is merely saving time, but the others feel they have no input into decision-making and would like to have the opportunity to raise additional points at meetings.

From then onward, Jo invites every team member to submit agenda items the day prior to meetings. The mood change is dramatic. Team members are now enthusiastic about discussing items they have suggested, as well as those raised by others.

By identifying the source of conflict and reorganising the way things are done, Jo has been able to prevent conflict from occurring.

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Practice task 8

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Emily heads a project management committee of three colleagues from her organisation plus Ross, who is part of her external network, and Mai, who is from a government agency involved in grant applications. Emily needs to discuss how to apply for funds for the project and to negotiate how the project will be managed.

Emily sets up a meeting. She has listed the questions she will ask and what she wishes to achieve. She knows there may be a clash between a colleague, Joanne, and the agency representative, Mai, as they have worked together before and always disagree on the funding level, so Emily is ready to look for any signs of discomfort or tension.

The participants greet each other and Emily makes sure they are comfortable and understand the reason for the meeting. As the meeting gets underway, Mai explains the funding process they should follow, and immediately Joanne interrupts and starts talking about previous unsuccessful applications. Emily stops the discussion and assertively brings the conversation back to the topic, to ensure the meeting has a positive outcome.

Ross then queries the time frames for each phase of the project and argues that they are not feasible. Two others agree. Emily conducts a brief brainstorming session to identify more effective time lines and how they can meet the funding guidelines. The discussion is heated, but Emily makes sure everyone has their say. She decides she needs to be flexible and accommodate some of the changes to the time frames if she is to achieve consensus.

Emily follows up the meeting with minutes she sends to participants that include the changed time lines and the actions to take to apply for funding.

1. What actions did Emily take to ensure the meeting went well?

2. What actions did Emily take to ensure the negotiation went well?

2E Seek specialist advice when developing contacts

Establishing and maintaining contacts both require work. Some people find it difficult to make new contacts or to keep in touch with those they have. This may be because of time constraints or they may feel they lack the communication, personal or technical skills to develop effective business relationships.

An important skill is the ability to communicate appropriately with people from diverse backgrounds and those with diverse abilities. Learn what an appropriate greeting is. In some cultures a handshake is considered polite, whereas in others touching is unacceptable. Be respectful and understand a person's title and how to pronounce their name correctly. Be aware of their personal space and where they like to stand when talking with you. Cultivate relationships with local people from other cultures to learn more.

Your organisation may have specific training sessions to help staff communicate effectively and appropriately if the business deals with people from other cultures. Similarly, you need to know how to work with people of different levels and abilities, as well as the communication skills to help you achieve a sound understanding of what they require.

Strategies to develop your expertise

The following are strategies that can be used to develop your expertise.

Experienced people

Speaking to experienced people, such as your manager, can help you identify how they manage relationships. Be prepared with questions you want to ask, such as: 'I'm not sure how to advance the relationship once it is established, so how can I demonstrate that they can trust me?' and 'What can I do to maximise the benefits to our organisation?'

Qualities and behaviours

You could ask your manager to monitor you to help you identify your own qualities and behaviours, and any weaknesses that may affect your ability to develop contacts. Develop one aspect at a time, such as the way you approach people or the strategies you use to negotiate with a contact who has misunderstood you.

Observations

First impressions are important. Watch others in action at conferences and meetings to see how they use their expertise to approach and develop a contact's confidence and trust. Make notes, then practise when you next attend a function.

Industry associations and groups

Joining a professional industry association is useful, as they provide a range of services that can help you, such as access to journals, special interest groups, training and business advice.

Specialist advice

If you are developing a contact but don't have the technical knowledge required in the specific area, you need to identify who the most appropriate person might be – either within or outside your organisation – and make an appointment with them. Be prepared with the questions you need answered and the specific specialist advice needed.

Practice task 9

Complete this table to explain how you can seek help when developing relationships.

Action	Why this is important	Who can help
Greeting people appropriately		
Using a person's correct title		
Approaching a new contact positively		
Needing to know more about a specific area		

Summary

1. Business relationships must be developed and maintained in order to provide benefits for the organisation. This requires developing self-awareness and exhibiting positive behaviours, while avoiding negative behaviours that can harm business relationships.

2. The trust and confidence of business colleagues must be gained by being honest with people, sharing organisational information appropriately, keeping confidential information to yourself, supporting and cooperating with others, and demonstrating that others can rely on you.

3. You can lose the trust and confidence of colleagues by acting secretively or suspiciously, being selfish, keeping organisational information to yourself, betraying the trust and confidence of others, acting aggressively, or being unreliable, unpredictable or inconsistent.

4. Effective negotiation skills may be required to maintain business relationships. In negotiations aimed at maintaining a relationship, it is important to plan for the negotiations by considering what is at stake and identifying the expectations and goals of the negotiation for both yourself and the other party.

5. When undertaking negotiations with business colleagues, negotiations should follow a process of getting to know each other, defining each party's objectives, negotiating, expressing disagreement, reassessing and compromising, and finally reaching agreement.

6. The skills required when negotiating with business colleagues include active listening, questioning and clarifying, communicating openly and positively, acknowledging feelings and emotions, conflict reduction and empathising.

7. To resolve difficult situations and conflict, you need to identify the sources of conflict, identify the problems faced, analyse the problems, develop options to resolve the conflict, choose an option to resolve the conflict and then implement that action.

Learning checkpoint 2
Establish and maintain business relationships

This learning checkpoint allows you to develop your skills and knowledge in establishing and maintaining business relationships.

Reflect on how you (and your team) manage your various business relationships. You can reflect on your current team or one that you have worked with in the past. Write approximately half a page on each of the following five aspects.

1. What types of business relationships do you have? Categorise the most important ones.

2. Explain why each of these types of relationships is important and describe how you manage them to develop and maintain the trust and confidence of business colleagues.
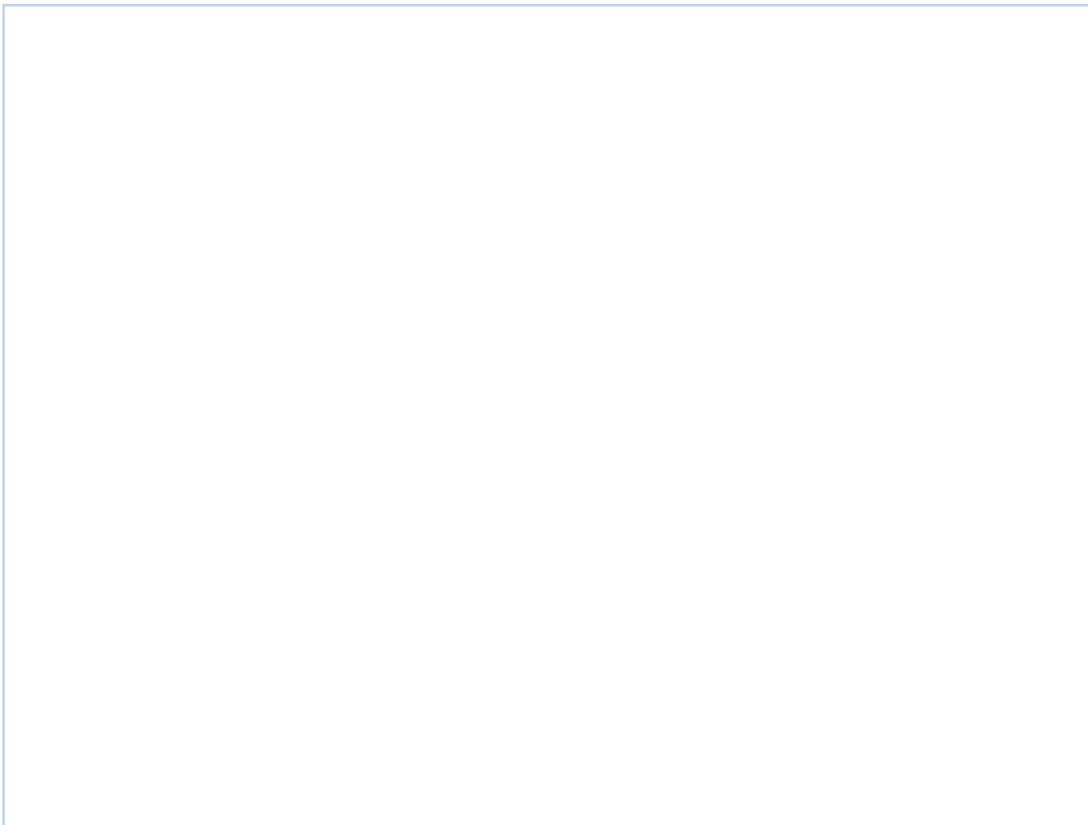
3. What challenges have you recently faced in terms of keeping these relationships healthy?
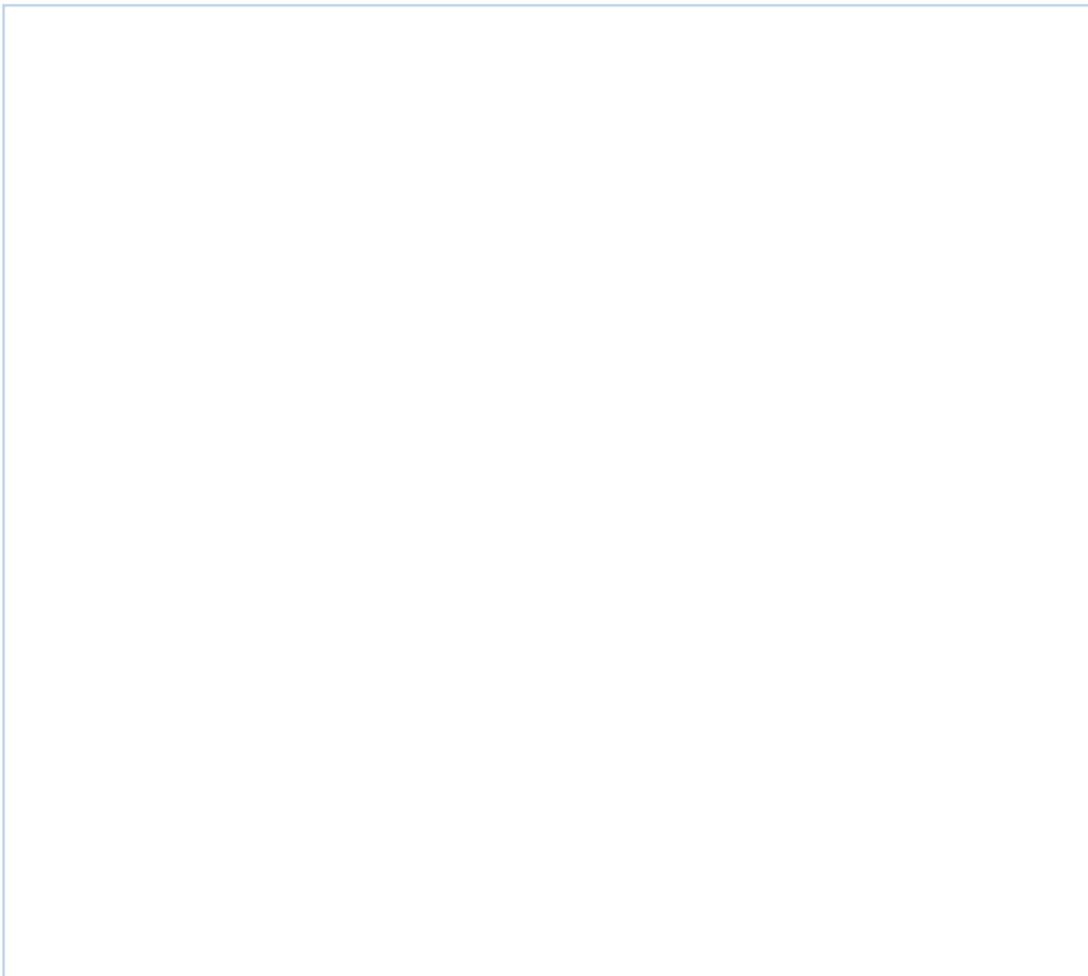
4. How have you overcome problems that have arisen? Explain how you have managed negotiations and conflict situations.

5. Identify areas where these relationships could be managed more effectively and create an action plan that will enable you to do this in the future.

Topic 3
Promote the relationship

Image is extremely important when selling products or services to customers, presenting ideas to your team, and promoting your organisation to other organisations or your own ideas to your manager.

In order to establish successful business networks, you need to be able to nurture and promote your business relationships in a positive way. Promoting involves communicating in a variety of ways and to a range of audiences for various purposes.

In this topic you will learn how to:

3A   Develop strategies to represent and promote the interests of the relationship

3B   Use presentation skills to communicate the goals and objectives of the relationship

3C   Communicate the relationship's issues, policies and practices to a range of audiences

3D   Obtain feedback to improve promotional activities

3A | Develop strategies to represent and promote the interests of the relationship

It is crucial to maintain interest in your contacts and to continually promote ways they will benefit from an association with your organisation. The strategies you choose need to match the audience you are trying to appeal to and the message you are trying to convey to them.

Promote the organisation's image

Whenever you attend a business function or meeting, or communicate (verbally or in writing) to customers, suppliers or other business contacts, you are seen by them as a representative of the organisation where you work. The image you convey is the one they take away with them as their impression of the organisation, whether it is an accurate representation or not.

These situations are opportunities for you to promote your organisation's activities, collective knowledge, expertise of its staff, culture, contacts and networks, and products and services, so the contact can identify the benefits to be gained by maintaining the relationship.

Here are several examples of promotional strategies.

Promotional strategies
• Written reports
• Verbal presentations
• Emails and postings on company websites and social media
• Advertisements
• Representing your organisation at key industry events
• Developing and displaying a consistent, professional corporate image
• Arranging meetings with key people

Convey the right message

The image that you project tells people who you and your organisation are, and conveys an impression about how you feel about yourself and what you are capable of doing.

It is important that the impression you convey to others says what you want it to say. For example, if you want to let clients know that they can depend on you, it will not look good if you fail to deliver on time.

If you wish to portray a professional image, this professionalism must extend to every dealing and interaction with the business contact.

Conveying a poor image through lack of understanding or sloppy planning may result in people losing confidence in you and the organisation.

Means of conveying a particular image include:

- business name
- signage
- business cards
- stationery
- a consistent look used on all promotional material
- a consistent style used for all written communication
- staff attitudes and behaviour.

Publicise the organisation's interests and business activities

Promotion is the way an organisation lets others know about its products and services. It can enhance the success of an organisation.

The most common methods of promoting an organisation include publicity, advertising and personally getting out there and selling your products and services.

Here are some publicity strategies.

Publicity strategies for your organisation
• Create a desire for the organisation's goods and services
• Provide reassurance
• Attract new customers
• Retain the loyalty of existing customers
• Create a positive image in the marketplace
• Change people's perceptions about the organisation

Advertise products and services

Publicity is gained when the organisation's interests and requirements are exposed to the public. You can help your organisation by seeking positive publicity for the work it does and the products and services it offers.

Organisations can use written or spoken information to promote themselves by advertising on television, in newspapers and magazines, on billboards, on trams and buses, using brochures, flyers, leaflets, direct mail packages, email, websites and social media, as well as through directories such as telephone books, search engines and community or trade publications.

You can also advertise your organisation's products and services by speaking to people about what you do and perhaps following up these conversations with further discussions or some written material.

One of the most powerful ways of advertising your organisation is through the recommendations of others. If people are happy with your products and services, they will tell others about you.

Here are some strategies for gaining positive publicity.

Strategies for obtaining positive publicity
• Sending press releases to the media
• Posting on the company website and social media
• Promoting the company through email lists
• Presenting written information or verbal presentations to a range of audiences; for example, newspapers, magazines, media groups and other organisations
• Holding product launches or demonstrations
• Distributing samples or trials of products and services
• Giving interviews
• Any networking activity
• Hiring a public relations consultant to obtain positive publicity for the organisation

Keep contacts up to date

Keeping contacts up to date and maintaining relationships require that you stay in touch, even when there is no active involvement through a project or alliance. Maintaining contact with your networks is one way that you can make sure you continue to represent their interests and requirements. You can do this in a number of ways.

Ways to maintain contact include:

- making regular calls to your contacts and ensuring their details are current
- making sure the contact's requirements are being met and they are gaining benefits from their association with your organisation
- exploring other ways your organisation can help your contacts; research the contact's needs and interests
- letting the contact know when there is a new product, service or activity that might benefit them
- developing a newsletter to inform contacts of further ways your organisation can represent their interests.

Choose the right strategy

The best strategies for maintaining your contacts depend on what you hope to achieve and who you are targeting. Your reasons or objectives for promoting the organisation may be to attract new customers or to differentiate the organisation from its competition. Perhaps you want to let existing contacts know about a new direction the organisation is moving in.

Different strategies require different resources, such as time, money and equipment. If you are promoting the organisation to other people through networking activities, you could ask yourself which type of activity is the most appropriate for your objectives. Will you meet all the key people you need to talk to at the business seminar next week? Could you ask some specific contacts to pass on your information to key people they know?

As with all business communication, whatever strategy you use, it must match the audience. A group of managers may respond well to an invitation to a breakfast seminar, while busy people may take up the offer of a free sample.

Example: establish and promote a corporate image

Terri, a marketing coordinator, has been asked to prepare a company image policy for her organisation. She includes the usual information on brands and corporate logos, and makes sure she includes samples of how different documents should look, such as corporate letterhead and business cards.

Terri goes a step further and adds a section called 'Staff image and conduct'. In this she includes photographs of sales staff members wearing their uniforms and outlines some basic presentation requirements for those staff who are not required to wear uniforms.

She also includes hints and tips on politely greeting customers and suggests some phrases staff could use in difficult situations, such as when they encounter an unhappy client.

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Practice task 10

1. List at least four items that are associated with an organisation's image.

2. List at least six steps you could take to promote your organisation in a positive manner.

3. What might be the consequences of conveying a poor image?

3B Use presentation skills to communicate the goals and objectives of the relationship

Presenting information professionally takes practice. Develop a range of skills to ensure you present information so your networks clearly understand the goals and objectives of the relationship between them, you and your organisation.

Effective verbal presentations

Much of the communication used to establish and maintain business networks is done verbally. People talk to colleagues, chat to contacts, ask customers questions, negotiate in teams, listen to presentations and hold telephone conversations.

When you are developing a relationship with a new contact, you need to be very clear about what you expect from the relationship and what you can offer the other person, so no misunderstandings arise that could threaten the relationship later.

Speak clearly and honestly. Listen actively to what the other person is saying. Some people are so intent on getting their message across that they don't give the listener time to respond or stop to check that they understand what they have been saying.

Limit the use of jargon unless you are certain the person understands what you mean and explain technical terms they may be unfamiliar with.

Prepare yourself for what you want to say about:

- the goals of the relationship, such as a strong, ongoing partnership
- what your organisation will gain from the relationship, such as an interstate or overseas network
- what the contact will gain from the relationship, such as increased profit.

Present information in a group setting

Sometimes you may have to present information in a group setting. When it comes to making formal presentations, people often become anxious. This anxiety can be overcome by preparing well, practising the necessary skills and learning as much as possible about the issue you are presenting on.

Research suggests that verbal messages (what we say) account for only 7 per cent of what is believed; vocal messages (how we say it) account for 37 per cent of what is believed; and visual messages (what the audience sees and imagines) account for 56 per cent of what is believed.

So it is not only what we say that sends messages to people, but also how we say it. Your body language sends out very strong messages that can be more powerful than the spoken word.

Practise using positive rather than negative body language, as described here.

Positive body language

- Standing at ease
- Making eye contact
- Using hands to point to visual aids
- Moving around the room from time to time
- Smiling

Negative body language

- Slouching
- Looking down at hands
- Using hands and arms too emphatically
- Standing in one spot
- Frowning

Written presentations

Written presentations are usually more formal than verbal communication. Like verbal presentations, all written communication should be structured to meet the objectives of the presentation and the needs of the target audience. Different situations require different types of written materials.

To communicate the goals and objectives of the relationship you wish to develop, your written material must stand out from all the other information that people receive. You need to first grab people's attention, then gain their interest, create a desire and then prompt them to act on that desire.

Write accurately, clearly and with no spelling or grammatical errors. Have someone check your work before the presentation.

Written presentations may include:

- press releases
- website and social media postings
- brochures and flyers
- product information
- correspondence and emails
- reports and memos.

Example: a creative presentation

Courtney and Rob are salespeople who work for a conference centre in the Hunter Valley, NSW. Part of their job involves making presentations to companies on the range of services and facilities they offer (to increase their networks and win new business for their centre). They do so by hosting conferences, meetings and company training sessions. Courtney is very experienced in sales and has given many great presentations to companies. Rob is less experienced in presenting and feels more comfortable talking to a small group or one-on-one.

Rob knows that this is a problem, as virtually all of their clients expect a slick presentation before they make their decisions. He goes to Courtney for advice. She suggests that Rob comes along to a few of her presentations and observes how she presents. He does and is very impressed: she rarely looks at her notes, has several different types of presentations she uses for different situations, engages her audience and talks confidently about the conference centre. Afterwards, Rob asks Courtney for help.

'It's not that hard', she says. 'Focus on what you know they are going to want to hear about – that way you won't feel like they are getting bored, which can make you really nervous. Ask the key decision-makers questions beforehand and respond to their concerns during the presentation. Make sure your PowerPoint slides are clear and brief, and talk to them in more detail about the benefits of coming to us. But most of all – practise!'

She offers to spend 20 minutes every week with Rob, watching him practise his presentations. Each week he finds his confidence has improved, his presentation is more professional and Courtney tells him he is making more of an impact. Following her tips, he finds that he does not dread the task of presenting as much as he did in the past and he is actually getting sales on the basis of his presentations.

Practice task 11

Give an inexperienced colleague four crucial tips for making an effective presentation that successfully communicates the goals and objectives of the relationship.

3C Communicate the relationship's issues, policies and practices to a range of audiences

An important responsibility may be to communicate the issues, policies and practices of the relationship to a range of audiences, in writing and verbally.

There may be sensitive issues such as those concerning funding, confidentiality or people's roles. Approach these thoughtfully and considerately, and be sure everyone is clear on the outcome of any discussion.

You and the group may need to set up policies that will govern the relationship; for example, all information remaining the property of the group; how the relationship will work; and what happens if it breaks down.

Clearly outline practices that will be followed during the relationship; for example, the need to report back promptly from any meetings; communication strategies; work practices of the organisation.

Explain complex information

In many business relationships, the information to be shared is complex. If you are communicating issues, policies and procedures to others, you need to devise effective ways of getting your message across.

When explaining complex information, an important step is to make sure you yourself are clear about what you are presenting. You must understand your topic completely. Look at your information from a number of different viewpoints. Imagine how different people you know may view the information. Are there varying levels of understanding in your audience? Will some people be more familiar with certain technical aspects or jargon than others?

You must also be aware of people's abilities. For instance, a handout written in small type will not be helpful to a staff member who has impaired vision.

In many workplaces, audiences come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. What may make sense to one person may be difficult to grasp for another, so you may need to present important information in several languages, or take extra time and care to make sure everyone understands the messages you are trying to convey.

Consider running training sessions if there is a lot of new information to share, particularly if you need staff to follow new procedures.

Retain information

When communicating in the workplace, it is vital that you use clear, simple language. Take the time to ensure that the information you are providing is fully understood.

Try to come up with a variety of ways of presenting the information. For example, sales figures may be boring if read out, whereas a graph or chart may make the trends more dramatic and easier to remember.

Another useful strategy is to use case studies, examples or stories to illustrate your points. People always retain information more easily if they can relate it to a real-life example or story. Make your stories relevant. For a story to be effective, you need to know as much about your audience's world as possible.

Tell stories about individuals – it is more powerful to have the listener empathise with a single person than with hundreds of people. The listener can then place themselves in the shoes of the subject and relate better to the situation. Interesting stories also have unusual examples to illustrate points – something unexpected but also plausible. True stories are best; the more recent, the better. Make sure your audience is following what you say.

Give your audience plenty of opportunities to ask questions. Look for nods of understanding or affirmative voice gestures such as 'uh huh'. Make sure you don't get to the end of a presentation and find out you lost most of your audience near the beginning.

Barriers to effective communication

Barriers to effective communication include poor use of technology and equipment, a poorly prepared speaker, a noisy environment and dull or overly bright lighting making it hard to see people. Always make sure the location is conducive to listening, and make sure the equipment is in good working order and practise using it beforehand.

The barriers can be technical, cultural or linguistic, and psychological.

Here is an outline of barriers that you are likely to experience.

Technical barriers

Technical barriers are related to the equipment used to communicate; for example, a projector that doesn't work, someone's voice or body language, or the way a room is set up. Technical barriers are often the easiest to identify and rectify. The language and words you use, your body language and tone of voice are all important when trying to convey a message effectively.

Cultural or language barriers

Cultural or language barriers can be overcome by recognising that everyone interprets information differently depending on their beliefs, views, cultural background, age, education and current situation. Two people may think they are speaking plain English, but each may have different meanings for the same word. Never assume that others understand issues the way you do.

Psychological barriers

Psychological barriers exist when a person's background or experience stops them from hearing information that is being conveyed. For example, if an employee has always been bored in staff meetings, they will expect to be bored even before they hear what is being said – switching off before any information is conveyed.

Improve your verbal communication

Here are five tips to help improve verbal communication and public speaking.

Steps and rationale for public speaking

1

Know your material

Knowing your topic thoroughly makes you more at ease talking about it, better able to respond if people ask questions and more natural in your responses. You sound more interesting to the audience if you are knowledgeable and interested in what you are saying.

2

Know your audience

You may have to do some research to find out how much people know and what they are hoping to learn. You can then tailor your presentation to the audience. People quickly switch off if they think they already know what you are talking about.

3

Engage your audience

Engage your audience by keeping them interested, with their attention on you. Maintaining eye contact helps – try speaking to one person at a time, for a few seconds each. You can also encourage the audience to ask questions or offer suggestions.

4

Make public speaking easy

Nervousness soon disappears once you start talking about a topic you have prepared well. Audiences are very quick to notice if a presentation is poorly prepared. The easiest way to overcome stage fright is through practice. Public speaking becomes easier the more you do it.

5

Use visual aids

Most presentations benefit from the use of visual aids. People become bored listening to one voice and looking at the same thing (the presenter) for too long. Visual aids such as slides, handouts, graphs and products must be simple and appropriate.

Improve your written communication

Are you or your organisation a member of any professional bodies? Do they offer information, advice, workshops or courses that are designed to help members improve their communication skills? Find out what is on offer and whether there are any courses or other resources that could assist you.

Here are three commonly used resources that can assist in improving your written communication.

Resources that assist with written communication
Australian Direct Marketing Association The Australian Direct Marketing Association (ADMA) is the peak body for organisations involved in direct marketing activities. It has over 500 members who enjoy a range of benefits, including best practice guidelines and professional development. Find out more at: www.adma.com.au.
Australian Institute of Management The Australian Institute of Management (AIM) offers short courses that assist managers to become more effective at their jobs. Courses in effective communications are considered 'core skills' and there are several on offer, including effective communication and business writing skills. Find out more at: www.aim.com.au.
CPA Australia CPA Australia is one of the peak bodies for accountants in Australia. This organisation offers workshops and courses to enhance members' communication skills – both written and verbal. Find out more at: www.cpaaustralia.com.au.

Example: identify and resolve communication barriers

Sarah has just conducted a meeting with a group of potential suppliers from China. At the end of the session, she does not feel that it went well and says to her manager, 'That was terrible. I didn't get across any of the information I wanted'. Sarah is frustrated that she could not communicate effectively to the group. She thinks about the barriers that may have been there.

- The barrier could have been technical – would the use of an interpreter have helped? Did she need to speak more slowly and clearly, using less technical language?

- There could have been a psychological barrier – Sarah was nervous and may have rushed through the meeting without engaging with her audience or checking for understanding. Perhaps the audience sensed her nervousness and did not respond so they could get out of there as quickly as possible.

- The barrier could have been cultural – maybe the group thought the presentation was very good and they understood everything, but their response was not one that Sarah was familiar with. Perhaps Chinese suppliers prefer to respond later in writing, rather than immediately after a meeting.
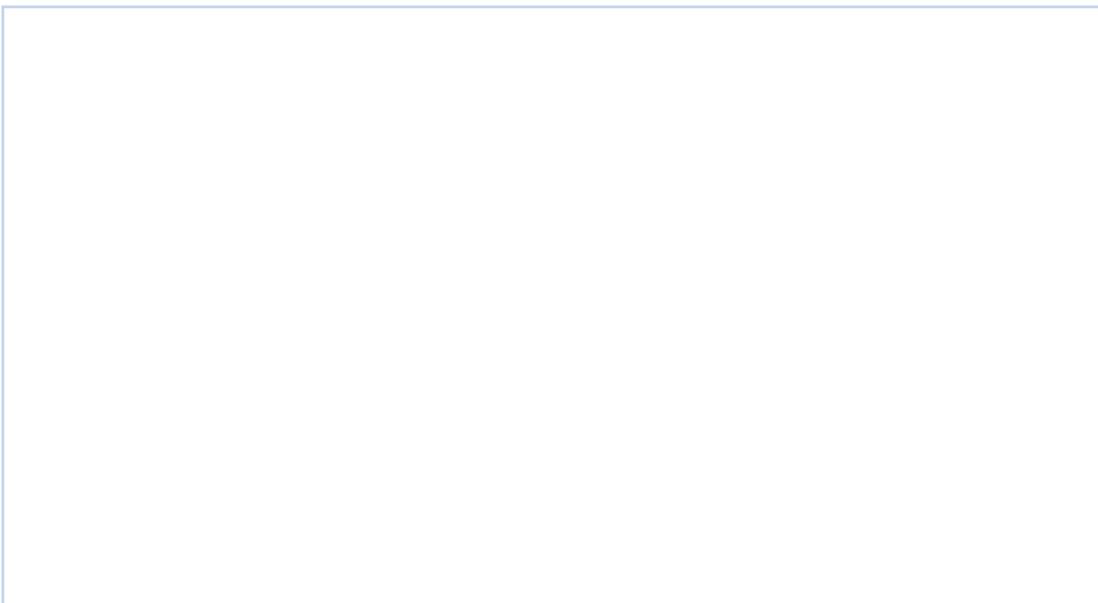
Practice task 12

1. List three factors you need to consider when explaining information such as issues, policies and practices of the relationship.

2. What are three barriers to effective communication?

3D | Obtain feedback to improve promotional activities

As with anything you do, in establishing business networks, whether it is expanding your circle of contacts or fine-tuning your listening skills, you should aim for continuous improvement. An excellent way to improve your skills in a targeted way is to seek feedback from others.

The feedback you collect can be helpful in directing your future networking activities more effectively. Constructive feedback can be negative as well as positive. Use the feedback to highlight problem areas that require improvement, confirm that you are doing certain things well or poorly, and suggest new areas to explore.

No matter what sort of feedback you are seeking or how you gather it, it is important to remember to ask open-ended questions, rather than yes/no questions. Your questions should focus on the task and what was expected, provide meaningful information on the quality of your work and give people an opportunity to provide clear statements on how you can improve, offer little room for misunderstanding or misinterpretation, and also provide an opportunity to reinforce what was done well.

Take time to review how well you are developing and maintaining your business relationships. It is important to stop, take stock, put things into perspective and evaluate.

Here are some reasons for seeking feedback.

Reasons for seeking feedback
• To make sure that the information you have prepared or shared is accurate and sufficient
• To ensure that the activity you are undertaking is beneficial to your organisation
• To gauge the impact of the message you are trying to send
• To evaluate and compare the effectiveness of different media for your purpose
• To initiate contact with other networks
• To confirm your target audience is appropriate for your objectives
• To evaluate the reaction of competitors

Sources of feedback

Sources of feedback can be internal or external to the organisation. The people you work closely with can be excellent sources of information. Sometimes friends and family can also offer advice.

Feedback can also be sought from those you are trying to develop relationships with: customers, suppliers, colleagues, contacts, competitors, individuals and organisations.

Here are examples of both formal and informal feedback.

Formal feedback

- An evaluation of your performance
- Customer satisfaction questionnaires
- Written complaints
- Written acknowledgment of work well done
- Reports; for example, from an advertising agency regarding coverage, sales reports market research

Informal feedback

- Conversations with managers or other colleagues
- Conversations with network contacts
- Second-hand reports; for example, about a competitor's activities
- Audience reactions
- Organisation visibility; for example, invitations to functions, invitations to speak, media coverage
- Increase in offers to work collaboratively
- Increase or decrease in problems; for example, complaints or returned goods

Analyse feedback

The best source and type of feedback will depend on what you want to understand or improve. For example, if you want feedback on the way you present yourself to colleagues, you may want to adopt an informal face-to-face approach, asking a few simple questions.

On the other hand, if you are after feedback on ways to improve promotional activities, you may wish to adopt a more formal interview or survey-based approach, including questions on the specific areas you wish to evaluate.

Effective feedback

Whenever you set out to get feedback on your performance, you should aim to make sure that the feedback is constructive and useful to you. In other words, the feedback should be effective.

Here are several characteristics of effective feedback.

Specific

- It is specific rather than general. Ask for examples or data to support comments offered.

Focused

- It is focused on the behaviour, not the person. Ask people what they thought about specific aspects of your performance, not what they thought of you.

Timed

- It is well timed. Don't ask for feedback when people are rushing out the door or months after the activity.

Descriptive

- It is descriptive, not evaluative. Ask people to describe how they responded, rather than how you did.

Succinct

- It is succinct. Ask a few carefully targeted questions, rather than a lot of general questions. This increases people's readiness to respond more thoughtfully and thoroughly (and is less likely to annoy them in the process).

Clear

- It is clearly communicated. However you seek feedback, make sure that the message is clear. If seeking feedback in person, try rephrasing what the person has said to ensure you get the right message. If feedback is written, give the respondent plenty of space to explain themselves.

Consequential

- It has consequences. Try to seek feedback about things you can change or ask for suggestions about alternatives. There is no value in feedback that focuses on things that are outside your power to do something about.

Consistent

- It is consistent. Try to get feedback from more than one source wherever possible. This helps you determine what really needs to improve (or what you are doing really well). It also makes sure you react to feedback that is agreed on by the majority, rather than a single person's opinion.

Understand feedback

For any feedback to be perceived correctly and to be effective, it is essential that it is understood. Every message has an impact that can have a negative or positive outcome.

Here are examples of some of the outcomes of feedback provided.

Accuracy and sufficiency of information

- Did you give enough information for people to understand your message?
- Was there anything else you could have included?
- Was the information accurate?
- Did people have any other questions that needed to be answered?
- Was there anything that you missed?

Benefits to the organisation

- Did people understand how the organisation would benefit?
- Was this clearly articulated?
- Do they agree with these benefits?
- Were these well-presented?
- Are there any benefits (or downsides) that you didn't consider?

Impact of message

- How did people feel about what you were saying?
- Do they agree with it? Was the message clearly articulated?
- What reflections do they have on the way you delivered the message?
- How could you have increased the impact of your message?
- What do they intend to do with the information?

Use of media

- Did the medium you used help or hinder?
- Was it appropriate?
- Was it used and operated confidently and seamlessly?
- Would another medium have been more appropriate?

Understand feedback

Liaison with networks

- Did you liaise appropriately with networks?
- Should there have been more or less liaison?
- Are there any suggestions or input from network members that should have been incorporated?
- Did all appropriate network members receive the message?
- Do you have strong relationships with network members?
- How can these be improved?

Appropriateness of audience

- Were the right people hearing your message?
- Was anybody missing?
- Were there people who didn't need to be there?
- Was the message delivered in a way that was appropriate for the audience?

Participation of competitors

- Did competitors participate?
- Was this appropriate?
- Was the message appropriate for competitors to hear?
- Was any commercially sensitive information discussed?

Identify areas for improvement

Regardless of whether feedback is formal or informal, it can be useful to record what you have learnt. The feedback can then be evaluated and used to identify ways of improving.

Collect all the feedback relating to a particular task you have undertaken. Rate the information according to how accurate you think it is. Document solutions to overcome the problems identified and discuss these with colleagues.

Be aware that there are very common reactions to negative feedback. It can be difficult for individuals, teams or organisations to hear negative feedback – but remember not to take it personally and try to think of ways you can improve so next time the feedback is positive.

If you can recognise when you are reacting badly to feedback, you will be able to change your behaviour and accept the feedback more appropriately. You will also be able to understand the key messages and improve your performance.

When receiving feedback, whether positive or negative, try not to be defensive, but clarify any possible areas of misunderstanding, get feedback from more than one source if possible and don't overreact. Most people give feedback to help, not hurt, and offer open, honest and sincere feedback.

Here are some common ways that people respond to negative feedback.

Common reactions to negative feedback
Selectively hearing or understanding the message
Assigning ulterior motives to the person giving the feedback
Denying the feedback
Rationalising the feedback or making excuses
Attacking the person giving the feedback

Practice task 13

1. What are the benefits of seeking feedback in order to identify and develop ways to improve promotional activities within available opportunities?

2. List four strategies for obtaining feedback.

3. Explain what you should do with the feedback you receive.

Summary

1. When networking, strategies must be developed to represent and promote the organisation and its activities, collective knowledge, expertise, staff and culture.

2. Effective promotion of the organisation enhances its success by reminding people of the organisation, creating a desire for its products and services, attracting new customers, retaining the loyalty of existing customers and creating a positive image in the marketplace.

3. Strategies to promote the organisation are wide-ranging and can include sending press releases or giving interviews to the media, presenting written information or verbal presentations to a range of audiences, holding product launches or demonstrations and networking with colleagues within the industry.

4. Appropriate presentation skills must be used when promoting the organisation via verbal or written communication. Central to this are personal appearance and body language.

5. In order to effectively communicate the organisation's issues, policies and practices to a range of audiences, it is important to be aware of potential barriers to communication and their effects on the message being delivered to the listener.

6. Feedback can be used to identify and develop areas for improvement when promoting the organisation.

Learning checkpoint 3
Promote the relationship

This learning checkpoint allows you to develop your skills and knowledge in promoting the relationship.

Part A

Access current or previous business networks and reflect back on internal and external networking opportunities.

What strategies or methods could you use to represent and promote these relationships and their interests?

Part B

You are in the role of representative of an organisation. What effects can your presentation skills have when promoting the relationship and its goals and objectives through verbal and/ or written communication? Provide examples.

Part C

Reflect on a time or situation where barriers to communication developed when discussing relationship issues, policies and practices. Consider the barriers that you faced and how you overcame them to ensure the relationship was promoted effectively.

Prepare and complete the following table.

Barrier to communication	How you overcame the barrier to ensure the relationship was promoted effectively

Barrier to communication	How you overcame the barrier to ensure the relationship was promoted effectively

Part D

1. What feedback could you obtain to identify areas for improvement when networking and promoting relationships?

2. How could you monitor your effectiveness in promoting relationships?

3. How could this feedback assist you in improving your performance in networking and promoting relationships?