BSBLDR412

COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY AS A WORKPLACE LEADER

Aspire
Learning Resources

BSBLDR412

Communicate effectively as a workplace leader

Release 1

Learner Guide

Aspire Version 1.1

Aspire also has learning resources available in these areas:

· Foundation skills
· LLN and employability skills (non-competency)
· Community services
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Before you begin

This Learner Guide is based on the unit of competency *BSBLDR412 Communicate effectively as a workplace leader*, 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	These highlight key 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.
Summaries	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 provides definitions for each foundation skill.

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Reading	• Analyses and evaluates textual information from a range of sources to inform communication processes
Writing	• Plans and prepares workplace documentation for relevant stakeholders according to organisational formats
Oral communication	• Participates in a variety of spoken exchanges with a range of audiences using structure and language to suit the audience
Initiative and enterprise	• Adheres to organisational policies and procedures relevant to own role
Teamwork	• Cooperates, collaborates and consults with others to clarify and confirm understanding and seek feedback • Selects and uses appropriate communication conventions and practices to build rapport, seek or present information
Planning and organising	• Plans and implements activities and processes to identify and establish communication and record keeping requirements • Uses analytical processes to identify potential problems and generate solutions • Systematically gathers and analyses all relevant information and evaluates options in order to make decisions about communication processes

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: Prepare for communication	1A	Identify the purpose of and audience for communication	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	1B	Identify the desired outcome of the communication	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	1C	Evaluate communication methods	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	1D	Identify and minimise communication barriers	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
Topic 2: Engage in communication	2A	Communicate using media and format	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	2B	Use respectful and positive communication	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	2C	Use two-way communication	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	2D	Provide opportunities to confirm understanding	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident

Topic	Key outcome		Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 3: Review communication	3A	Maintain record of communication according to policies	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	3B	Identify and communicate follow-up actions	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	3C	Seek feedback about communication processes	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	3D	Opportunities to improve leadership communication processes	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident

Topic 1 | Prepare for communication

1A   Identify the purpose of and audience for communication

1B   Identify the desired outcome of the communication

1C   Evaluate communication methods

1D   Identify and minimise communication barriers

1A Identify the purpose of and audience for communication

To effectively communicate as a supervisor, determine which team members you need to communicate with and the purpose of the communication.

Communication is a complex process that includes words, body language, voice, tone and volume. It involves gathering and providing information to achieve an outcome and is a critical factor in organisational success. Effective communication unites people and helps them work as a team.

The Shannon-Weaver model of communication states that every communication includes a sender. As a team leader, you will often be the person sending communication via a communication channel. For example, you may send instructions or encouragement via channels such as telephone or email. This communication is then decoded by the receiver (the team member you sent the communication to). This act of decoding results in the team member either understanding or misunderstanding your communication. Sending and receiving communication effectively can be negatively impacted by barriers such as noise.

Communication happens in a range of situations and for a variety of reasons. Effective communicators tune into their environment and are aware of context. Different contexts require you to use different types of communication or choose different words to express yourself. Be aware of the purpose of your communication and who you are communicating with.

Being an effective communicator does not simply mean being a great talker. You need to be able to 'read' people, tune into signals, be aware of your environment and adapt your communication accordingly. Effective communicators focus on the receiver. They know that communication is not about the sender; rather, it is about meeting the needs of the receiver.

Achieving these baselines or standards of communication is a performance expectation of you as both an employee and a manager/team leader. To function effectively as an employee and to organise your team efficiently, know who you need to communicate with and why you need to communicate with them. To achieve this, consider the:

- common purposes of the communication
- context of the communication
- different workplace situations involved
- common audiences for the communication.

It can also help to step aside from your team leader role for a moment to identify the purpose of and audience for the communication from an employee perspective.

Identify the purpose of communication

The purpose of communication is the reason you are communicating with others.

Communication is a tool we use every day to seek and give information, understand a situation and/or persuade others to our way of thinking. It was an effective survival technique for our ancestors, who shared information about food, supplies and weather patterns, and it continues to help us make sense of the world today.

Prior to engaging in communication, determine your purpose. This is the reason you want to take time from your work tasks to engage others in an interaction. It will help you identify who to communicate with, how to communicate with them and the content of your communication. The purpose of each communication will change as it depends on your role, the type of organisation you work for, and the policies and procedures in place. Knowing the precise reason for your communication will help you achieve the desired outcome more efficiently.

Workplace communication is usually for work-related purposes. However, we also interact with others for reasons related to our personal wellbeing, happiness in the job role or to discuss topics of interest that can boost morale during a difficult workday.

Below are some common purposes for workplace communication.

We communicate to:
• build relationships by connecting with colleagues, managers and customers
• give or receive information about job requirements, task updates or policies and procedures
• share ideas about how to improve workplace efficiency
• inform others of key information related to their job role
• persuade or influence others to support our suggestion to implement a workplace policy or procedure
• express our needs or emotions, such as satisfaction or disappointment, joy or sorrow
• engage in respectful social conversations about topics of interest such as entertainment, media or sport
• market our business's products and services by convincing others of their benefits
• negotiate with others to resolve a workplace dispute or disagreement.

Identify the audience for communication

The audience for communication is the individual or group you need to communicate with.

Once you know *why* you need to communicate (the purpose), the next step is to identify *who* you need to communicate with. In some workplaces, this can be a complex task. For example, large organisations contain a 'labyrinth' of personnel and you may not be experienced enough to know who to ask for assistance or who to forward a vital customer email to. In situations like this, refer to documented communication protocols or organisational policies and procedures, or consult an experienced colleague.

Determining your audience is vital to efficiently resolving the initial purpose of your communication. For example, you may need some information about a customer complaint. To more quickly resolve this issue, identify the best person to speak to rather than talking with five different colleagues who are all incapable of assisting as they do not have the required information.

Below are some examples of typical people you will need to communicate with and some possible purposes.

Managers	- Discuss the performance of team members. - Adjust work schedules to meet department needs. - Clarify responsibilities of each manager.
Colleagues	- Ask for resources. - Request assistance with a task. - Follow organisational protocols.
Customers	- Inform them of the benefits of the business's products and services. - Respond to a customer complaint. - Answer questions about products and services.
Contractors and suppliers	- Confirm dates and times of attendance (e.g. tradespeople such as plumbers). - Seek information about how their services can help our business. - Seek quotes about pricing and time frames.

Learn about your audience

The audience you identify will have varying characteristics that will determine how you communicate with them.

As a workplace leader you will spend most of your time communicating with the people in your team as well as with other team leaders and managers.

Always be aware of the possible impact of your communication on others and be willing to adjust accordingly. For example, you may need to speak more slowly and clearly, and avoid colloquialisms or business jargon; managers may prefer you to make an appointment to speak with them, or provide a written report in addition to a verbal presentation.

Avoid communicating with audiences as though they were a single bloc. For example, you may identify customers as an audience you will be in regular communication with. In this audience group, there is massive differentiation in personality types. Some customers are quiet and mannered, while others may be loud and aggressive in their demands. Similarly, some of the colleagues you communicate with will be cooperative and respectful; others may be brash and require you to use more advanced communication skills.

Below are some strategies to use when determining how to communicate with your audience.

Tips for considering your audience
Know each team member well. Be aware of their strengths, preferred working and learning styles, and literacy skills, so you can communicate effectively.
Consider who else, either intentionally or unintentionally, is going to hear or see your message.
If you do not know the person you have to communicate with, find out who to address and the best way to present the information.
Be prepared and make notes on what you are going to say.
Find out whether they prefer you to communicate informally (e.g. face-to-face or by email) or formally (e.g. with an appointment and a written report or form).
Consult others who are familiar with the person or group you are about to communicate with. Ask if there are any strategies you should use.
When communicating with team members and colleagues, you may have access to notes on their personality types that you can use to determine the best communication strategy.

Identify the purpose of and audience for communication for your leadership role

Your role as manager/team leader carries specific responsibilities in relation to identifying the purpose of and audience for communication.

As a team leader, you will manage employees who are still developing their communication skills. They may be unaware about how to identify who to communicate with, or they may communicate with no clear purpose in regard to what they want or the type of assistance they need. Along with improving the efficiency of the team you lead, you will also be expected to support the communication standards of your team.

The purpose of and audience for communication in your role as team leader will be different from when you interact as a team member. This is because your task responsibilities will be different. As a leader, the emphasis is on you managing a team rather than being entirely focused on specific tasks. For example, a customer service team leader enables their team to provide quality customer service; they may not talk to customers at all. In this role, you will speak to different people and often have different communication purposes – some are listed below.

Communication purposes and audiences in your role as team leader
- You may need to communicate with government or local councils. For example, you may have applied for a permit and attempted to resolve a compliance issue regarding waste or resource usage.   - You will have to communicate with other managers and team members to formally assess the performance of team members.   - You will need to discuss budgeting and funding issues with finance managers.   - Often, team members will want to discuss their pay or shift details with you.   - Disciplinary issues with a member of your work team may require follow-up communication.   - You may need to communicate with job applicants about their suitability for roles.   - Upper managers will communicate with you about the efficiency of newly implemented processes and programs.   - You will be asked to attend meetings where ideas for improving efficiency are discussed.   - You may be asked to produce written summaries of events, such as conflicts or safety incidents.   - You will be asked to communicate with team members about their engagement levels, and then to report to upper management.

The scope of these extra communication responsibilities is dependent on the organisation you work for and the specific requirements of your role. Seek clarification if you are unsure about what your communication responsibilities are.

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Example

Identify the purpose of and audience for communication

George needs to put a proposal together to reorganise the shifts of his work team. One of his key responsibilities as team leader is to produce shift rosters that meet the needs of the business while supporting the work–life balance of team members. The team members appear tired and overworked and he would like them to have shorter shifts. George produces a proposed shift chart and wants to present it to a manager who can implement this plan.

This is an important communication; therefore, George plans his communication so it will be understood by team members. First, he uses the workplace organisational chart to find out exactly who he will be writing to and how they fit in the organisation. George also uses the intranet to access the person's profile. He uses this information to target his communication. While he has never met this manager, he has found they are in a position to make this proposal happen.

George knows that the time taken to complete this step will be beneficial in getting the results he is looking for. He sends an email to this manager explaining exactly why he believes this proposal is necessary, and stating that it will lead to a more contented and efficient work team.

The manager thanks George for getting 'right to the point' without any waffle and invites George to discuss his proposal further in a face-to-face meeting.

At a later date, George reviews the effectiveness of his communication plan and asks for feedback from his manager as it is a key area of his responsibilities.

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Practice Task 1

Read the case study then complete the task that follows.

Case study

Jill is a team leader in telecommunications company TeleNet and she manages a sales team of 12. She is responsible for leading her team, achieving sales targets and communicating organisational objectives and plans. Jill's manager Arika has discussed organisational changes with Jill that will impact her team. TeleNet will merge with another internet provider and will offer new products and services for customers. After the merger, Jill's team will become part of a larger national sales team. Arika asked Jill to put a request in to the human resources (HR) department for training to upskill all sales consultants, and to advise her of the training schedule and duration. In the coming meeting Jill needs to present the transition process to her team. She decides to invite other team leaders to the meeting to discuss the impact of the change and how their teams are responding.

Question 1

Complete the following table by identifying three different leadership communication tasks, their audience and the purpose of communication, appropriate to this case study.

Task	Audience	Purpose of communication

1B Identify the desired outcome of the communication

Be clear about the result you want to achieve from your communication.

To make sure communication results in the outcome you want, take time prior to communicating to clearly identify what you want to achieve. Being clear about what you want helps you to make informed choices about how you will communicate. This process helps you to anticipate any issues that may arise during or after the communication, and to adjust the communication as needed.

Having a clear outcome in mind when communicating allows you to deal with any changed circumstances you must adjust to. Because you have a defined goal for your communication, you can adjust details such as how to communicate and who to communicate with. For example, you may need to adjust the work schedules of your team. Your desired outcome for the communication is to gain approval to change your team's shifts. With this clear outcome in mind, you can get the required approval even if you must communicate with multiple people or in different communication formats.

Communicating with a clearly defined outcome will be noticed by your colleagues and other managers. A valuable trait for managers is the knowledge of what you want to achieve from a communication and being direct and clear with those you communicate with.

You will need to consider the following:

- Determine your preferred communication outcome.
- Determine your desired communication outcomes when communicating with colleagues, managers and/or external people.
- Ask outcome-based questions.

Determine your communication outcome

An outcome is an observable and measurable result.

Go into every workplace communication with a clear outcome in mind. A key element in effective communication is to pre-plan using outcome-based thinking. This means knowing your objective before communicating. It is difficult to communicate effectively if you do not know what you want from the communication. Avoid communicating without an endpoint in mind.

For example, if you need to give instructions, the outcome should be a correctly completed task. If you are going to explain your disappointment in a team member's actions, then you want to confirm they understand you and ensure they feel as if their side of the situation has been heard.

Outcome-based thinking means being able to answer a set of questions.

Questions may include:
• What do I want to get out of this communication?
• What does the other person want? (If you do not know, you can anticipate.)
• What problems could come up in the process?
• How can I deal with problems to ensure a successful outcome?

Determining the outcome of a communication can require some previous preparation. A reliable strategy is to align your desired outcome to existing organisational policies and procedures. For example, if you need to communicate with a team member about performance issues, make sure your communication outcome is based on the policy for managing performance.

In other situations, if you are unsure about what a desired outcome of communication might be to resolve an issue, you can seek advice from an experienced manager or colleague.

Some situations may have multiple outcomes that you would like to achieve. For example, you may want a team member to have an exact understanding of the task they must complete, gather feedback on workplace processes they would like improved and gain information about a recent customer interaction. Your communication should be geared toward meeting these desired outcomes.

Plan your outcomes

Be prepared with clearly defined outcomes prior to communicating.

Before you communicate, identify and understand your desired outcomes. If the situation is complex or involves several people, and the outcomes include major decisions (such as changes to organisational policies and procedures or disciplinary measures), you need to carefully plan your communication.

Evaluate options	Take time to carry out this form of disciplined thinking that is clear, open-minded, rational and informed by evidence. It will allow you to objectively analyse and evaluate a situation so you can consider your audience and decide on what outcomes can be achieved by effective communication.
Create a communication checklist	From your evaluation, ensure you know the: • purpose of your communication • audience • communication methods you are going to use • factors that could impact the communication.
Rehearse	Use the plan to go through the communication exchange in your mind. Observe the potential pitfalls and how hard or easy it could be to reach your desired outcome. Consider the communication from a range of perspectives.

Identify communication outcomes specific to your audience

Communication outcomes should be specific to your audience.

Develop a pattern where you identify what you want to achieve from a communication prior to it occurring. You can do this by writing records or making mental notes. The outcome should be audience specific. Each audience will have different skills, interests and focuses that you need to adjust your communication to account for.

Another advantage of this process is that it makes you more aware of the needs and wants of others. It is important to consider the desired outcomes of your audience as well as your own before communicating.

If you get the response you want, this indicates you have communicated effectively. For example, if you are preparing to run a brainstorming session to identify improvements to team processes, the desired outcomes may include innovative ideas and suggestions for implementation.

Using outcome-based thinking helps you to be clear from the start. The outcomes you are looking for become a reference point for you to evaluate your communication during and after the exchange. You can adapt and adjust your message throughout the process.

Below are some examples of desired outcomes that are based on the likely audiences of your communication.

Team members	• Agreement with safety protocols • Confirmation they understand workplace processes • Provision of availability information
Managers	• Confirmation of meeting time and place • Agreement on safety rules • Determination of training needs
Customers	• Complaints are resolved • Information about a product is provided • Personal contact details are gathered for marketing purposes
External contractors	• Confirmation of repayment schedule • Provision of information about workplace entry requirements • Updates to external contract work

This list is not exhaustive. Specific outcomes are based on the type of workplace and purpose of communication with these audiences. Each of these groups have different interests; for example, customers have little interest in break policies that apply to your staff, and many team members will not be concerned with how staff perceive marketing. Adjust your desired outcomes according to who you are communicating with.

Example

Identify the desired outcome of the communication

Jane is a customer service team manager at a retail company, and Sally has been her second-in-charge for 18 months. Sally usually pays close attention to detail and completes tasks in allotted time frames. Lately, however, there have been errors in Sally's reports and she frequently asks for extra time. Because of this, Jane's work is suffering. She is getting behind in the strategic planning process for the new year.

Sally's performance review is coming up and Jane is pondering what the outcome of this meeting should be. A possible outcome is that Sally reconsiders her suitability for the role. Another outcome is that Sally agrees to a performance contract that stipulates she will be moved on if/when she makes another error.

After considering this issue rationally, Jane determines that Sally is a quality employee who has provided skills and value to the business over a long period; she just needs her focus to be recalibrated. Jane decides that the outcomes of the meeting will be to:

• ensure Sally understands the specific areas where she is underperforming by providing feedback based on observations and data

• agree on strategies to improve these weaknesses.

The meeting will be used to help Sally get back on track. Jane needs Sally to go back to producing the quality work she had previously been doing. Jane wants to find out if there is anything going on outside work that may be affecting Sally's work. She wants to offer Sally any support she needs.

Practice Task 2

Question 1

For each communication situation in this table, identify the desired outcome that aligns with the purpose and audience.

Communication situation	Purpose	Audience	Desired outcome
A team leader is leading a discussion in a meeting about recent customer complaints related to orders being sent out incorrectly	To explain the reason for the complaints and to improve the process to minimise incorrect orders	Team members	
A team member is talking privately to their team leader about issues they are having with the increased amount of work being allocated to them, saying they feel overwhelmed	To hear the team member's concerns, discuss the workload and seek solutions to reduce stress due to the workload	Individual team member	
A senior manager sends an email to all staff in the department congratulating them on 100 days without an incident in the workplace	To motivate staff and congratulate them on the achievement	Staff	
A frustrated customer makes a telephone call to the workplace to provide feedback on the service they received during their last visit	To respond to the situation and resolve the issue to the customer's satisfaction	Customer	

1C Evaluate communication methods

Choose the most appropriate communication method to help you achieve your desired outcome.

Once you have identified the audience for your communication, settled on a purpose and noted the desired outcome, you must decide the communication method you will use. There are many ways to communicate, including face-to-face in a group or individually; electronically using email, social media or Skype; or through documents such as meeting minutes, reports, notices, survey forms and newsletters. Each method has positives and negatives and will be best suited in different situations.

As communication passes from sender to receiver, there are many opportunities for the original message to change. It is important to choose a communication method that helps the message get to its receiver as intended and ensures the desired outcome. The method needs to suit the communication needs of the sender and receiver and be appropriate for the context.

Choosing wisely increases the likelihood of the communication being successful. Using appropriate communication methods also improves your ability to perform effectively as a team leader and develop a rapport with your team members and other managers. You should consider:

- different communication methods
- the suitability of digital communication
- the suitability of written communication
- the suitability of verbal and nonverbal communication
- policies and procedures that impact communication
- evaluation of communication methods.

Communication methods you can use

There are four main categories of communication method: verbal – written, verbal – spoken, nonverbal and digital.

Each of the four categories includes specific methods you can elect to use depending on the purpose of and audience for your communication, and the policies and procedures in your organisation. Some situations will require you to use multiple communication methods from these categories.

Verbal (written) communication	Written communication is any type of interaction that uses the written word to convey a message. Examples of written communication are:
	• agendas and meeting minutes
	• letters
	• feedback
	• proposals
	• reports
	• signs and notices
	• newsletters
	• policies and procedures, guidelines and training materials.
Verbal (spoken) communication	Verbal communication is any type of interaction that uses the spoken word to convey a message. Examples of verbal communication are giving and receiving information through:
	• attending one-on-one and group meetings
	• providing training, coaching and mentoring
	• making a presentation
	• participating in formal or informal discussions
	• giving verbal feedback.
Nonverbal communication	Communicating a message through body language is referred to as nonverbal communication. It is often ambiguous, as it can have different meanings depending on the user's personality, background and culture. When your nonverbal signals match the words you are saying, they increase trust, clarity and rapport. Examples of nonverbal communication include:
	• facial expressions and gestures
	• how close we stand and how much eye contact we make
	• posture
	• touch.
Digital communication	Digital communication is the use of software, smartphones and technology to communicate. Examples of digital communication include:
	• text messages
	• emails
	• group chats
	• videoconferencing
	• telephone calls.

Suitability of verbal and nonverbal communication

Verbal and nonverbal communication methods rely on personal interaction between the communicator and receiver.

Interpersonal communication not only includes the actual words you say; it is also about the unspoken messages you express nonverbally. This extra layer makes communicating verbally more appropriate for situations that involve relationships, because the sender has a multitude of signals they can use to get their message across. Nonverbal cues can provide valuable information that allows you to modify or adjust your verbal communication. As a result, you can make sure your message has been received in the way you intended.

The table below shows some examples where nonverbal communication can be helpful.

Loud workplaces	Some workplaces have a level of noise that prevents accurate verbal conversation. In these situations, hand gestures are very useful to communicate information.
Training	Team managers who need to train team members find nonverbal gestures – such as hand gestures, demonstrations and a guiding physical touch – to be useful.
Morale building	Nonverbal gestures – such as 'thumbs-ups', smiles and other positive gestures to acknowledge quality work – are appropriate in building morale.

There are many situations where verbal communication is the most appropriate method. Verbal communication differs from nonverbal communication because words are used, and they are less likely to be misunderstood or misinterpreted.

The table below shows some examples where verbal communication can be the best approach.

Seeking input	Verbal communication allows you to transmit emotions and receive immediate feedback. This form of communication is effective for any situation that requires the input of others.
Establishing relationships	Face-to-face verbal communication using effective body language is best when your communication requires you to establish a professional relationship based on trust and openness. This includes inductions, first-time instruction, coaching, counselling, delegation and conflict resolution.
Dealing with urgent matters	Urgent information is best handled in person to ensure full and immediate attention, or by telephone for an immediate response.
Solving problems	Any situation that needs brainstorming, problem solving, consultation or negotiation is best addressed using verbal communication.

Suitability of written communication

Written communication is used for more formal situations that require detailed communication.

Written records are permanent and, because most people can remember more through visual recollection, putting your communication in writing can leave a more lasting impression.

If you want to deliver a precise, carefully thought out message, it may be more effective to choose a written communication method. This allows you to write, edit and rewrite your words until they say what you want them to – accurately and comprehensively. This process also allows you to add visual aids such as pictures and diagrams to help with understanding.

Many organisations have policies and procedures that require some communication to be written. For example, you may have to present written quotes to the financial manager if you are seeking funding to purchase new equipment. This is because a written quote will provide the financial manager with accurate pricing and quantity details and allow them to consider their decisions. This information can be remembered incorrectly if it is provided to the finance manager in verbal form.

The table below shows some other advantages to choosing written communication.

Advantages of written communication
Written communication can follow up verbal communication, to reinforce or confirm something.
If you want your message to be authoritative, putting it in writing can help.
Written communication is useful for sharing factual information.
Written communication helps convey the same information to many people.
Written communication is useful as a reference; for example, when introducing new systems or procedures, providing written material means you have something to refer back to.
Written communication can be used to provide reference materials (e.g. training guides) so team members can review them later when necessary.
Written communication such as incident reports and risk audits are crucial for maintaining compliance with work health and safety (WHS) laws.
Some team members or customers may have undeveloped listening skills, so they require information in written rather than verbal form.

Suitability of digital communication

Digital communication is a modern way of interacting that team leaders should become skilled in using.

Digital communication has radically changed how team members, managers and customers interact with each other. Traditionally, for example, a customer service agent would speak face-to-face with customers about their complaints or try to resolve issues on the telephone. Now, many customer service agents communicate via email or social media.

There are numerous benefits to using digital communication technology:

- It is suited to modern, busy lifestyles. For example, mailing a letter can take days to reach its destination, while a scanned copy can be emailed and received instantly.
- It offers a faster transfer of information compared to many forms of written or even verbal communication.
- It allows interaction across distances. Many organisations have worksites spread across cities or even countries. Setting up a web conference on Zoom or Teams allows immediate communication, and is more efficient than other forms of communication.
- It can present a modern and dynamic image of both your organisation and yourself. Because an increasing number of customers prefer the use of digital technology to engage with businesses, using it effectively provides a reputational benefit.

A key focus of team leaders should be training team members in using digital communication technology effectively. There are many risks of using this technology: for example, sensitive information can be inadvertently sent to customers, key emails or messages can be deleted, or account passwords can be forgotten. It is important to provide clear guidelines to team members about how to use this communication technology appropriately.

Using digital methods to communicate
• Ensure your organisation has the required equipment to communicate digitally, such as laptops, scanners and smartphones.
• Obtain the necessary software and make sure you can access accounts with appropriate passwords.
• Use digital technology to hold work meetings rather than demand that staff attend a common site (this also reduces or eliminates travel time and expenses).
• Use social media to advertise products and services.
• Use group chat applications (apps) to provide immediate communication when confirming the completion of work tasks or requests for assistance.
• Ensure team members have highly developed written skills so they can communicate accurately using digital methods.

Select the best method of communication

A team leader is expected to select the most appropriate communication method.

Select the best method for communicating by evaluating each method against the specific task requirements. Use a set of criteria to evaluate the different methods.

The criteria below provide guidance on selecting communication methods.

Situation

Is the context a regular meeting, report, presentation, or group training or counselling session? The context may clearly dictate the method of communicating, such as a verbal and electronic presentation; a written annual report; a demonstration using written documents, body language and verbal instructions; or a face-to-face, private individual performance appraisal or counselling session.

Priority

How urgent is the information? If it is high priority, it may need to be handled with a telephone call or face-to-face conversation with key people, followed up by a clearly written email or memo to others who need to know. If the information is incidental or not critical, a non-urgent email or even a chat in the lunchroom may be appropriate.

Time

How much time do you have to prepare the communication? Do you have time to prepare a full written report?

How much time does the receiver have to attend to the communication? Will the receiver have time to read a full written report, or is a written or verbal summary more appropriate?

How quickly do you need to communicate this message? If the other person needs to have the information immediately, then a telephone call or urgent email may be appropriate.

Audience

Who needs to get the information? Is it just one person or a group? It is best to communicate with groups of people at a meeting.

What is the audience's preferred way to receive communication? Consider their access to different communication mediums available, their language and literacy skills, and their role in the organisation.

Response

Do you need the receiver to respond immediately? What action needs to happen as a result of the communication? For example, replying to an email or telephone call can be immediate, and face-to-face training gives you the opportunity for immediate verbal feedback. If the response is not needed immediately, a written feedback survey may be appropriate.

Availability

What is your availability? Will you be available to respond to a query or report? It is not advisable to email someone an urgent request if you will not be available to read their response. However, if a team member is located away from the office, using Skype when you are both online makes communication easy and instant.

Follow appropriate policies and procedures when communicating

Be familiar with rules and regulations prior to communicating with others.

There are a range of organisational policies and procedures and government legislation that outline rules and regulations you must follow when communicating. Following these policies and procedures is important; they are in place to ensure all customers and team members are respected and will contribute to the financial success of the business.

Organisations outline their expectations of how, when and why communication is to take place. Because effective communication is vital to the success of a business, all team members will be reviewed on their adherence to communication expectations. These expectations apply to all communication methods, but many organisations will inform team members of specific expectations related to certain methods. For example, you may be asked to sign an agreement regarding appropriate use of digital communication technology.

In your role as team leader, there are protocols you will need to comply with. You are expected to choose the most suitable communication method when interacting with team members, customers, suppliers and other managers. The language you use when communicating must be appropriate for your audience and their linguistic skills. You must communicate professionally using respectful language that meets reputational standards. You are also expected to evaluate existing communication procedures and make decisions about improvement suggestions.

Communication policies and procedures you must follow
- The *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) is federal legislation that forbids the use of discriminatory communication in the workplace. The understanding of this Act has evolved to include racist jokes, bullying and statements not meeting the requirements of the Act.   - Many organisations have style guides that outline how written documents are to be formatted and presented.   - Privacy policies prevent you from sharing information that should be known only by team members and their relevant line manager.   - Conflict resolution procedures require details of any conflict to be recorded in written form. All participants involved in the dispute will need to explain their understanding of events.   - Safety issues must be recorded. All organisations should have risk assessment forms, and audit and incident report templates, to be completed when necessary and stored securely.   - Organisations will have codes of conduct that outline the expectations of communication in the workplace. These codes may describe expected language standards, expected time frames for replies to customers and customer service standards.   - Task requirements can set communication expectations, for example, in employment contracts, task overviews and organisational memos.

Consider organisational context when evaluating communication methods

Identifying the context of the communication situation will provide you with information about which method to use.

Effective team members can evaluate the context of the workplace they will be communicating within. Context refers to the specific social, cultural, physical and situational circumstances in a workplace. Combined, these contexts establish how communication occurs between all team members. These contexts can have a positive or negative impact on communication: it can be made easier or more difficult. It may be challenging for a team leader to immediately identify the existing contexts in a workplace and how they impact communication.

Every workplace will have different contexts. For example, some businesses have a high percentage of team members born outside Australia, requiring team leaders to use different communication formats. The temporal (situational) context of a workplace will demand use of personalised communication formats if team members have been made redundant or had their working hours reduced, for instance. A key skill of a team leader is identifying the context of a workplace and adjusting communication accordingly.

Below are some examples of contexts relevant to organisations.

Temporal (situational)	The temporal (situational) context requires the adjustment of communication methods based on key events occurring in the organisation at any given moment. For example, communication will be conducted differently when discussing allegations of improper workplace conduct compared to chatting informally about sporting events during lunch breaks. Team leaders should be in contact with other managers to stay informed about any situations they need to be aware of.
Social-psychological	The social-psychological context recognises the social familiarity of team members in the workplace. This can include recognising which team members have strong working relationships, verbal and nonverbal cues that are used and conversational norms. In all likelihood, team members will communicate differently with each other than they do with managers or company directors.
Cultural	The cultural context refers to the beliefs, lifestyles, values and behaviours of team members in a workplace. For example, some workplaces have behavioural norms that include resolving workplace issues via face-to-face meetings, as this matches their values of personal engagement. In this context, formal emails to communicate key expectations would go against these values.
Physical	The physical context can refer to the dimensions of the workplace, the event or function in which the communication is occurring, and the physical proximity of team members to each other.

Evaluate communication methods according to task requirements and organisational policies and procedures

The communication method you choose should aid you in meeting task requirements and complying with organisational policies and procedures.

As a team leader, you need to have a working understanding of your organisation's policies and procedures that guide what communication methods you should use and when. These policies and procedures may provide you with specific guidelines you must follow or with suggestions you should consider utilising.

Some organisational policies require you to choose a written communication method in identified situations, for example, when you need to communicate with a team member about formal issues such as performance shortcomings, discipline issues or safety incidents. Also use written communication methods when organisational policies and procedures recommend you document responses for later reference.

Some organisational policies and procedures require team leaders to provide training or guidance to team members. This is usually best facilitated by spoken communication methods that allow the team member to ask questions and seek clarification, and so you can provide follow-up responses. Nonverbal communication methods can help you comply with these training and guidance policies and procedures by affirming that a team member has completed the task successfully.

Task requirements are the specific standards by which a work project must be completed. As team leader, you will need to select the appropriate communication method to support your team in meeting task requirements. Below are some questions to consider when evaluating communication methods to help your team meet task requirements.

Choosing the best communication methods to help your team meet task requirements
- Which communication methods will help team members complete the task to the required standard?   - Which communication methods will allow time objectives to be met?   - Does the task brief, memo or summary specify which communication methods are to be used?   - Do we have the appropriate hardware and software to meet task requirements using digital communication?   - Does my work team have the required language skills to understand task descriptions?   - Will written communication about task requirements be tailored to my team members and their language skills?   - Are nonverbal communication methods sufficient to meet task requirements or will other methods have to be used?

Example

Evaluate methods of communication

On Monday morning Dean realises that he needs to inform his team that there will be an emergency evacuation drill on Friday afternoon between 1 and 3pm that everyone must participate in. He thinks about the different communication methods available and the specific communication requirements. He quickly evaluates each method in terms of how it can meet the purpose of the communication (inform team about emergency evacuation drill) and the desired outcome (all team members complete the drill correctly according to guidelines).

Dean dismisses the idea of a sign on the noticeboard or a post on the intranet, as he will not be sure everyone has read it. He decides to send a group email to inform the team about the evacuation drill and to include an attachment that explains the process. Dean asks his team to respond to the email so he knows who has received the information. He then organises a group meeting for Wednesday morning so he can go through the procedure and ensure everyone will be in the office at the necessary time.

Dean makes sure an experienced employee writes down what was discussed in the meeting (these are called the meeting minutes) so he can send a copy to team members not in attendance. These minutes can also act as a reference to team members if they need information about the safety procedures.

Practice Task 3

Question 1

List three advantages of written communication.

Question 2

Identify at least two benefits of using digital communication technology in an organisation.

Read the case study then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

In a team meeting, team member Sarah expresses her opinion about new staff member Yoko, which sounds derogatory towards her cultural background. Yoko did not respond to these comments, but kept quiet and did not contribute to the meeting discussion. Matt is a new team leader and does not have experience in dealing with similar situations promptly.

Question 1

What communication method should a team leader use to address this situation?

Question 2

Identify organisational policies or procedures that the team leader should refer to, to deal with this situation. Select yes or no for each one.

a) Organisational privacy policy » Yes » No

b) Conflict resolution procedures » Yes » No

c) Work health and safety (WHS) procedures » Yes » No

d) *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) » Yes » No

e) Code of conduct » Yes » No

1D Identify and minimise communication barriers

Barriers can prevent your work team communicating effectively.

A communication barrier is anything that gets in the way of the message being understood. Barriers can be objects, processes that do not work or skill deficits. A communication barrier can prevent the message from being delivered at all, or it can obscure the communication. As a result, the message can be misunderstood or misinterpreted by the receiver. The message is not received exactly in the way the sender intended. This breakdown can be due to a range of events or situations that block the communication process.

As a leader you need to be able to identify existing and potential barriers to communication in the workplace. There are various methods you can use to identify barriers; because communication is vital to managing an efficient work team, you need to know how to identify them.

Communication barriers can have widely differing impacts on your work team. Some can be catastrophic and lead to potential injuries, while others can create minor workflow interruptions. A key role of a manager or team leader is being able to identify the impacts of communication barriers.

Team leaders are expected to devise solutions that minimise the potentially harmful impact of communication barriers. You need to know these appropriate minimisation strategies, and the steps required to properly implement them.

This section will cover:

- the types of communication barriers
- how to identify communication barriers
- the potential impacts of communication barriers
- minimisation strategies.

Types of communication barriers

Every workplace will experience a range of potentially harmful communication barriers that have varying impacts.

There are several barriers that may affect communication, depending on the type of organisation you work at, products and services produced, task requirements, physical workplace layout and team members' skillsets.

Below are examples of typical communication barriers identified by workplaces.

Language	Communicating with someone who speaks a different language can create a barrier. Using technical jargon and abbreviations unfamiliar to the receiver, even if they speak the same language, can lead to communication breakdown.
Physiological	Communicating with someone with a sensory dysfunction – for example, a hearing impairment, speech disorder or vision impairment – can make it difficult for you to be understood.
Psychological	It is common for team members to experience psychological issues that may impact their ability to communicate. Examples can include stress, anxiety and depression. This may cause them to withdraw from meetings, avoid conversations or be absent from work.
Physical	Communicating with people who are not in the same location can limit face-to-face communication, which can impact effectiveness. Inappropriate room layout and privacy levels can create communication barriers. Noisy workplaces can hamper communication.
Attitudinal	Communicating with someone who has a negative perception that prevents them from taking part in the communication process effectively can limit success. If afflicted with a negative mindset, some team members can be predisposed to reject any communication they perceive to be critical.
Cultural	Different cultural groups have different communication customs. Because Australia is a multicultural country with a diverse workforce, these customs can sometimes act as barriers to effectively understanding each other.
Inadequate communication procedures	Often a workplace designs work tasks that do not account for effective communication, for example: • Sender-orientated barriers: lack of planning, improper choice of words and unjustified assumptions • Receiver-orientated barriers: poor listening, lack of interest and bias • Method-orientated barriers: poor selection of communication method not appropriate for the purpose or issues with technology that prevent communication

How to identify communication barriers

Review key organisational documents to help identify potentially harmful barriers.

Systematically gather information by consulting key workplace documents that describe previous barriers. All businesses will have encountered barriers that have had a negative impact on their communication and resulted in key work requirements not being achieved. They will have systems in place to document these communication breakdowns for further review.

Recorded documentation is the most reliable source for researching which barriers are impacting your work team. You can look to past incident reports, financial reports, performance reviews and customer feedback; however, you should also set time aside to review these documents as the processes are performed in future. For example, last year's performance reviews may have identified physical space as a barrier, while the upcoming year's performance reviews may identify different barriers.

Team leaders may have access to some or all of these documents, depending on the documentary procedures at the workplace. In all likelihood, you will have access to documents that are focused on members of your work team. Speak with your manager if you believe access to them will help identify relevant communication barriers.

The table below lists key workplace documents that can help you to identify communication barriers.

Incident reports	These written documents detail the facts of a mishap, usually safety-related. Incident reports can discuss communication barriers that led to the critical safety incident. Because these incidents have resulted in injury or potential injury, identifying any communication barriers that were contributing factors is a vital task.
Financial reports	Financial reports can include budgets, sales figures, balance sheets or petty cash logs. They will provide valuable information about the performance of departments or employees. You can identify communication barriers from weaknesses recorded in the reports. For example, a high product return rate can indicate team members are providing inaccurate information to customers.
Performance reviews	Performance reviews can provide some insights into the communication weaknesses of your team. These weaknesses can result in team members not meeting performance expectations, which will be identified in the reviews. Because effective performance reviews are based on employee feedback, as well as an assessment of their performance, you can engage them in conversation about any communication barriers they have identified.
Customer feedback	Customer feedback can come in the form of surveys and questionnaires or information conversations. This feedback can identify communication barriers in the customer service team, in instructions or manuals provided by your workplace, or that prevent marketing information from supporting customers effectively.

Potential impacts of communication barriers

Barriers can impact workplaces in varying degrees of severity, depending on the barrier and organisation type.

Any communication barrier has the potential to cause communication breakdown. The impact could vary from a small misunderstanding to a major conflict with long-term repercussions.

Communication barriers that are not dealt with have the potential to lead to long-term financial consequences for the organisation and may negatively impact the wellbeing of team members. For this reason, even seemingly innocuous barriers should not be ignored. For example, if one team member claims they are not consistently receiving digital copies of their task overviews, it is likely that other team members are not either. A team leader should ensure that seemingly minor barriers are not having major impacts on the organisation or its team members.

Below are some potential impacts of communication barriers.

Potential impacts of communication barriers
• Team members are unclear about their task responsibilities.
• Customers receive incorrect information about product return or refuse to buy from your organisation in future.
• Team morale declines as workplace relationships are not developed.
• Staff feel isolated and unable to ask others for assistance.
• Key policies and procedures are ignored.
• Important deadlines are missed.
• Information provided to suppliers and outside contractors is incorrect.
• Marketing information is inaccurate and must be republished.
• Individual team members feel they are being ignored and their views are irrelevant.
• Team members do not have appropriate communication forums to share ideas to improve operations.
• The organisation develops a poor reputation for customer service and attention to detail.
• Absenteeism rises as some staff avoid turning up to work.
• Skilled and experienced team members may seek employment in other organisations.

These impacts vary from minor to severe. An effective team leader will attempt to 'quantify' and 'qualify' the severity of the impacts of communication barriers.

Quantifying the impacts of communication barriers means gathering numerical data; in a business, this is likely to be financial. This can require coordination with a member of the financial department, but determining the financial impact of a barrier is a useful exercise. For example, you could calculate the cost of travel and petrol vouchers provided to employees to attend meetings.

Qualifying the impacts of communication barriers means gathering feedback about how they affect communication quality. This information can be discerned from conversations with team members and will include anecdotes and examples of how the barrier harms their ability to communicate.

Minimise the impacts of communication barriers

Identify and implement solutions that reduce the negative impacts of communication barriers.

It is difficult to eliminate all barriers in every communication context. However, you can take steps to minimise their impact. This may not completely eradicate all effects but can at least prevent severe impacts on the organisation's performance or team members' wellbeing.

Here are some strategies you can use to minimise the impact of communication barriers that were discussed previously.

Communication barrier	Minimisation strategies
Language	- Provide written documents and images where possible. This allows team members with language difficulties to process information at their preferred pace. - Use clear, direct language and avoid jargon.
Physiological	- Check for understanding to make sure the team member understood. - Communicate individually in quieter rooms. - Regularly provide written documents and instructions.
Psychological	- Offer one-on-one communication with the team member. - Communicate through a team member they trust. - Refer them to specialised support services.
Physical	- Use videoconferencing to overcome distance barriers. - Communicate at times and places where noise is not an issue. - Use a designated communication room.
Attitudinal	- Remind the team member of requirements to communicate effectively. - Communicate via a team member they trust.
Cultural	- Use interpreters where possible. - Use clear, direct language and avoid cultural jargon.

Communication barrier	Minimisation strategies
Inadequate communication procedures	▪ Have detailed communication plans that you stick to. ▪ Ensure the listener is engaged and listening through repeated questioning. ▪ Choose the appropriate communication method based on audience and purpose. ▪ Ensure availability of staff for team meetings.

Example

Identify barriers to effective communication

Hayden works as a team leader at the local council. His team is made up of nine members. Two of them work part time at a different location to the rest of the team. Hayden has been told by his line manager that there are some major changes at the council coming in the new financial year. It will mean significant changes to the way Hayden's team operates.

One team member, Brendon, has worked at the council for many years. He has seen many changes in his time, and he is usually quite resistant. Hayden needs to carefully plan how he is going to communicate this information to his team. He knows there are numerous potential barriers to the communication and if he wants it to be successful, he needs to develop solutions to minimise their impact.

Hayden considers the two contingency questions he always uses when planning how he will complete a project assigned to him.

What can go wrong with this communication?

- Team members are not all together to receive the message; this could lead to the initial message being passed on incorrectly.
- Brendon could react negatively to the information; the other team members could follow his lead.
- Team members could be concerned about the security of their positions.

What can I do to prevent this communication going wrong?

- Check everyone's calendar and ensure the meeting is called when everyone is available.
- Organise a one-on-one chat with Brendon to ask his advice on how to present the information, as he has had a lot of experience.
- Make sure I have all the facts so I can honestly answer people's questions and address their concerns.

Hayden feels better about the upcoming communication after identifying the potential barriers and coming up with solutions.

Practice Task 4

Question 1

List five types of communication barriers and give examples.

Question 2

Complete the table by identifying barriers to effective communication in each situation and developing solutions to minimise the impact.

| Situation	Potential barriers	Possible solutions
A client has a complaint and asks to speak to the manager. However, the manager is just about to go to a board meeting and is unavailable for several hours. The client becomes abusive.		
Ahmed needs all team members to work overtime that night because an emergency order has come in, and it needs to go out first thing in the morning. Ahmed sends an email to everyone telling them they need to make themselves available.		
Jillian is conducting interviews for a new position. She is not able to book a quiet space, so she must conduct the interviews at her desk, which is in an open office. She also needs to stay close to her computer because she is expecting an important email from a client that day and she cannot afford to miss it. She notices that one of the applicants has a slight hearing impairment.		

Summary

- Identifying the context of communication involves determining the purpose of the communication and the forum it will be held in.
- Identify the people or groups (audience) you need to communicate with.
- The purpose of and audience for your communication will likely differ in your role as team leader compared to when you complete routine tasks.
- Communication outcomes are the workplace achievements you identify prior to communicating with managers, team members, suppliers or customers.
- The communication methods you choose will depend on the type of organisation you work at and the language skills of team members.
- The communication methods you choose, and the content of your communication, must comply with existing organisational protocols.
- Written communication is most appropriate when large amounts of formal information need to be communicated.
- Verbal communication is comprised of spoken conversations and meetings and is appropriate when face-to-face interaction is necessary.
- Nonverbal communication can provide valuable information that allows you to modify or adjust your verbal communication. As a result, you can make sure your message has been received in the way you intended.
- Digital communication methods include emails, videoconferencing and software apps; use them when real-time communication is required.
- Communication barriers prevent messages being received accurately; team leaders should identify and minimise them.

Learning Checkpoint 1
Prepare for communication

Part A

1. List key steps a team leader needs to take to prepare to communicate effectively in a team meeting.
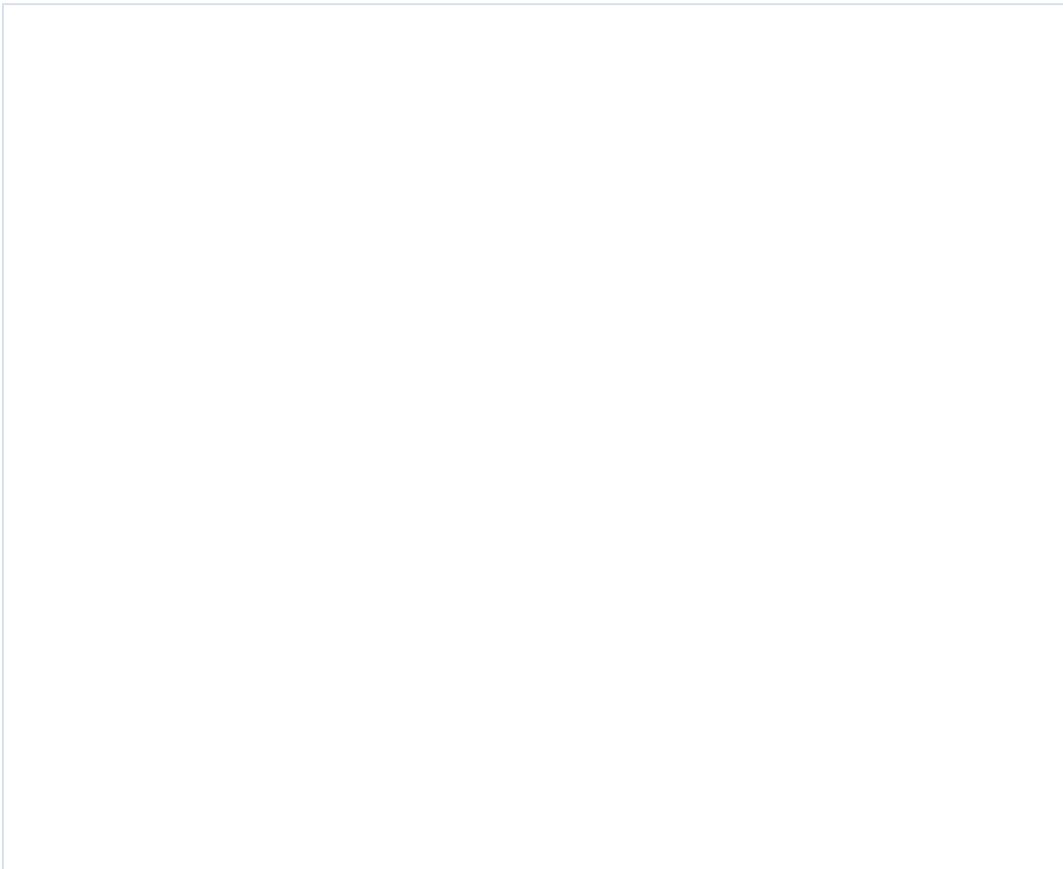
2. Recommend a communication method to communicate the results of a workplace safety audit to national senior managers in different states. Justify your recommendation.
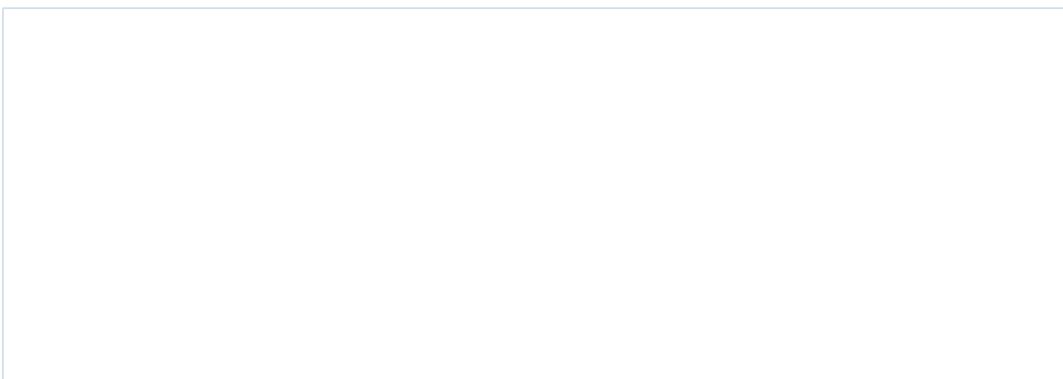
3. Provide two examples of how you can incorporate workplace policies and procedures into communication processes.

4. List three potential barriers to effective communication that could exist during a performance review meeting. Suggest actions to minimise the impact of these barriers.

Barrier	Action to minimise the barrier

Part B

Read the case study then complete the tasks that follow.

Case Study

Tim is a project leader at building company Designbuilt Pty Ltd. Designbuilt is a long-time customer of Rightlights. Last month Tim ordered 500 light globes for a large building project. Kostas, the sales representative, agreed to give Designbuilt a discount of 30 per cent because it was such a large order. Tim requested a quick turnaround because of the tight time lines on his building project.

The correct number of globes as per the order was sent; however, the order was four days late. This caused a hold-up on the building project, which resulted in loss of profit. The finance department also informed Tim that the account did not reflect the 30 per cent discount.

Tim decides to respond and write an email to Rightlights. He needs to be professional and careful to maintain a good working relationship with the supplier.

1. Identify the purpose and the desired outcome of communication. Also determine who Tim should communicate with.
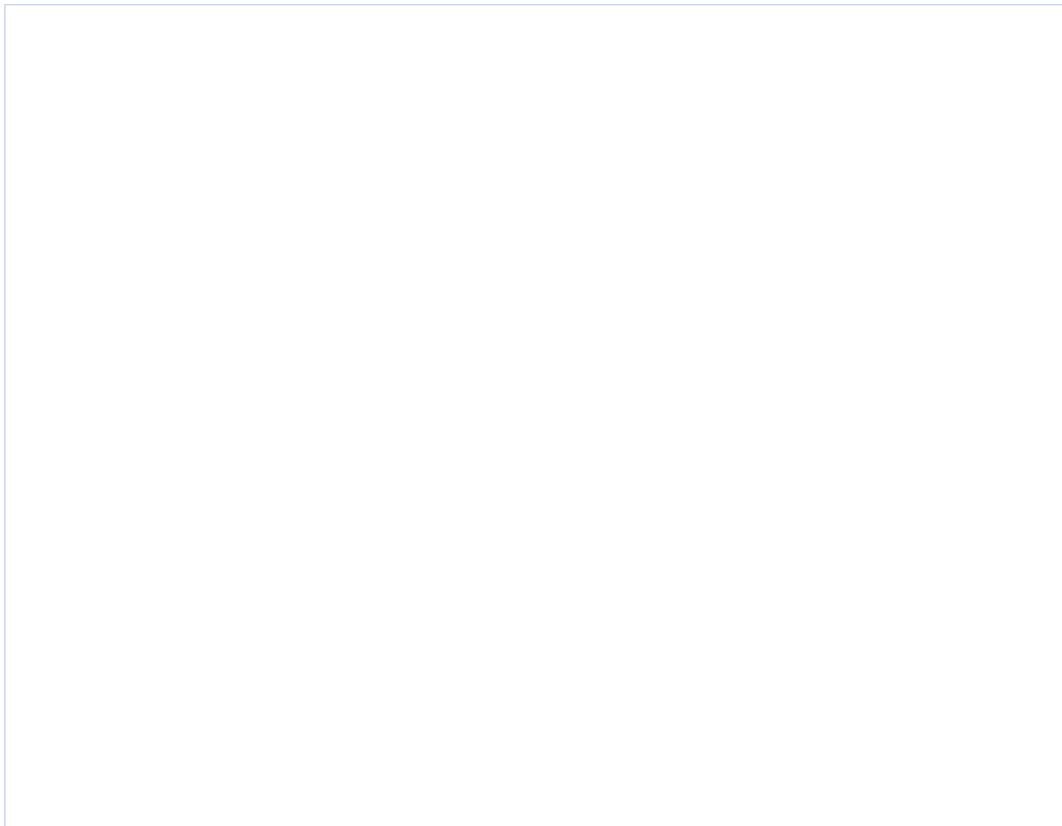
2. Create a draft email that Tim could send to Rightlights.

3. Is email a suitable method for communication in this organisational context? Explain why or why not.
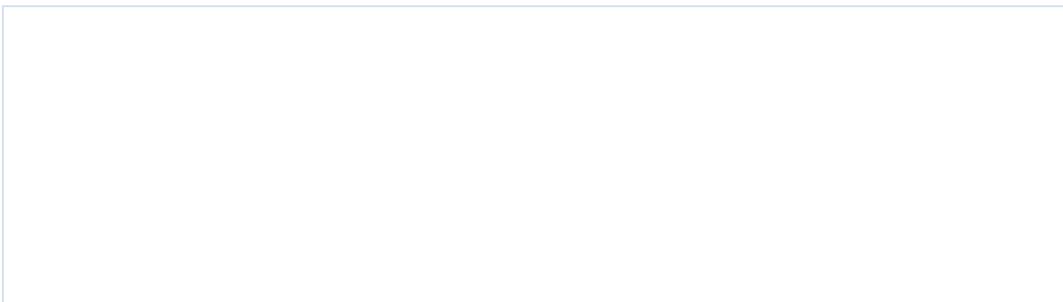
4. What is Tim's leadership communication responsibility relevant to in this situation?

5. After Tim has sent his email to Rightlights, he decides to follow up in person to maintain the professional working relationship with the supplier. List four effective leadership communication characteristics that Tim should be aware of.
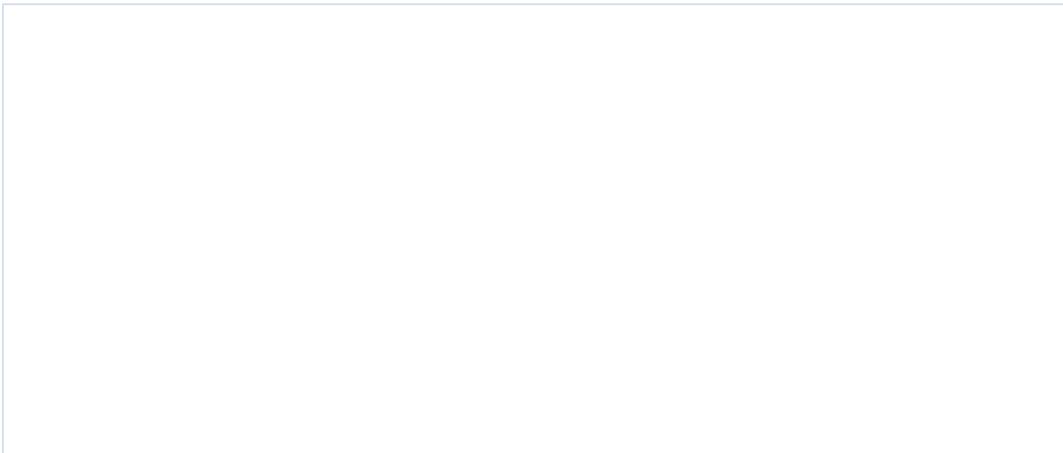
Topic 2 | Engage in communication

2A Communicate using media and format

2B Use respectful and positive communication

2C Use two-way communication

2D Provide opportunities to confirm understanding

2A Communicate using media and format

Choose the appropriate medium and format to ensure your communication is understood and acted upon.

Selecting the right medium and format for your message can mean the difference between effective and ineffective communication.

'Media' means the medium through which you choose to communicate your message. Examples include social media platforms or advertising. 'Format' means the way you lay out or design the information for presentation in the medium you have chosen.

No matter what media you choose, you need to decide how to format your message. Some media, such as email, come with a pre-set format. Others require you to make all the decisions about how you will format them. For example, if you are going to deliver your message through a verbal presentation you need to determine how to organise and structure the presentation.

Your choice of words must fit with the purpose of the communication and the expectations of the audience, as well as be appropriate to the medium you have chosen. It is important to present a consistent message that aligns with the overall purpose of the medium used.

Always follow organisational procedures, which may require you to use a particular format or medium.

Different media suit different circumstances better than others. Once the method has been decided on, identify the format you will present the information in. You should consider:

- factors that determine the medium and format you should use
- the context of the communication
- how to present your message clearly.

Factors to consider when choosing appropriate media

Elect which medium to use after evaluating various factors.

Depending on the organisation you work at, you may have a wide variety of media to choose from when communicating. For example, as telecommunication becomes more common, using digital broadcast media can improve communication in remote work teams. Social media platforms offer a chance to communicate with external stakeholders as well as team members. Shared network drives are a medium to dispense information as are other communication media such as email accounts, smartphones and report templates.

Consider the context, purpose and intended audience of your communication before choosing the medium you will use. Different media are appropriate for different situations; avoid always using the same medium. Individuals who use appropriate communication media are effective communicators.

Consider the following factors to help you make the right choice of media.

Media richness	'Richness' is the media's ability to convey a message through more than one cue (visual, verbal and nonverbal) and to reproduce the information sent over it without loss or distortion. Media is also considered rich if it allows for immediate feedback. In contrast, the 'leanest' media do not provide the opportunity for feedback and are not personalised for the audience. Use the richest media for more complex messages, to help communicate emotions and to facilitate feedback. In contrast, leaner media are more suitable for sending simple, routine messages.
Message formality	Your media choice can govern the style and tone of your message. The degree of formality you should use depends on the purpose of your message and the relationship you have with the audience.
Media limitations	Every medium has its limitations. This is because the sender and receiver must be in the same place at the same time. Digital media such as Skype can be used to overcome this barrier.
Desired communication outcomes	What do you want the audience to think about you after they have received the communication? If your desired outcome is that the audience sees you as approachable, you may choose a different medium than if you wanted them to see you as an authority.
Audience preferences	Consider how your audience likes to receive messages, or which medium they would expect in a given situation. For example, some cultures emphasise written messages, while others prefer oral communication.
Urgency and cost	Various media have different costs and time requirements. Consider these factors when choosing communication media. An email may be quick and inexpensive; however, it may not be the best option for the message, context or audience.

Examples of communication format

Consider specific formats to use in different contexts and workplace situations.

The examples below are typical communication formats that rely on the media identified previously. Each has its own advantages, potential drawbacks and contexts for when it is appropriate to use. As a team leader, you will be expected to use the appropriate communication media formats and to guide team members when they must communicate.

Team meeting	• When to use: situations that require collaboration and team input, such as brainstorming new ideas, gathering feedback and making decisions • Advantages: information can be received by the whole team at the same time; the team leader can expand or clarify ideas; team ownership of decisions • Disadvantages: team members who lack social confidence may not contribute; verbal discussions can be misunderstood; can be mentally draining without a clear focus; times and venues can be difficult to organise so all can attend
Text message/ group chat	• When to use: situations that require short, succinct messages and quick responses from individuals or groups in different locations, such as scheduling or confirming appointments • Advantages: information can be sent and received efficiently; a prompt reply can be made; a record is created • Disadvantages: reliant on technology that can fail; can use jargon and lingo which not all team members understand; not all team members may be included in the text or chat chain
Business email	• When to use: situations that require longer messages, such as responding to a customer or team inquiry, collecting and providing feedback and giving instructions • Advantages: electronic records can be created; attachments can be included; there is a record of message date and time for follow up • Disadvantages: compiling and proofreading emails can be time consuming; requires developed writing skills; does not allow direct and immediate feedback
Business letter	• When to use: situations that require a formal response and a professional image, such as introducing an organisation to new clients or responding to a customer complaint • Advantages: use of template saves time; a style guide provides information about formatting and layout; a written record can be retained and referred to by the recipient • Disadvantages: may need to be drafted and reviewed by multiple managers; requires highly developed writing skills; does not allow immediate response or feedback

Report	• When to use: situations that require research information to be presented, data to be analysed, and proposals and recommendations to be made in a formal setting • Advantages: different software applications (apps) can be used to graphically present information; structured for ease of reference • Disadvantages: not all recipients may be able to understand reports; time consuming to prepare; difficult to summarise for all team members
Presentation	• When to use: situations that require verbal explanations combined with visual aids, for example, inducting new team members or introducing a new product • Advantages: verbal communication supported by written and visual communication; use of multimedia adds interest and variety; the presenter can observe the audience response and modify accordingly • Disadvantages; time consuming to prepare; digital presentations are reliant on software and technology which can fail; can require organisation of audiovisual resources

Choose media and format based on communication context

Identifying the context of the communication situation will provide you with information about which medium and format to use.

The medium and format you choose will largely depend on the context of the situation. To effectively communicate with your team and stakeholders, you must align the medium and format to the specific circumstantial context of the work team and task.

Consider the following information when evaluating media and formats based on relevant context.

Context	Media	Format
Temporal (situational)	Choose a medium that meets the demands of a situation. If you need to record information for future reference, for example, ensure your medium has this capability. Consider aspects such as team member availability; media such as telecommunication broadcasts should be used when working remotely.	The specific situation that needs to be communicated will require you to format your communication appropriately. For example, performance issues related to a team member will need to be formatted in a formal report.

Context	Media	Format
Social-psychological	Determine what media your work team and stakeholders will be comfortable with. They are more likely to engage in the communication process if asked to communicate in a medium they are familiar with.	Use communication formats that support the psychological wellbeing of those you are communicating with. If communicating via reports, ensure information is clearly set out using subheadings. If communicating via verbal media, format to allow clarification of questions. Seek a format to inform rather than confuse your audience.
Cultural	Choose a medium that suits the cultural values of the work team. This may mean determining what media are widely accepted among the work team, and that meets the inclusivity and language requirements of the workplace.	Format your communication so it uses language that meets the linguistic abilities of your audience. The format you use should avoid discriminatory language and be accessible to all.
Physical	Choose a medium that you have the resources to implement. Some media require specific hardware and software to be used effectively.	Ensure the format you choose is able to be distributed as needed, for example, via the internet or photocopied for all audience members.

Example

Use media formats relevant to context

Anna has a busy week ahead. She needs to write her quarterly report, organise performance review meetings for her team, collate safety audit data to present to the safety manager and reply to a new customer's request for information on her company's product range.

Anna accesses a template from the intranet and uses it to write her quarterly report. Next, she decides to email all team members about the performance reviews. She attaches a booking sheet to the email and asks each team member to choose a time. She uses a software app on her computer to collate and analyse the data for the safety manager. Finally, she does some research on the new customer's business and tailors the product information sheets to suit the nature of the business. She then formats the information into a brochure and writes a letter to the customer that specifically addresses their request.

Practice Task 5

Question 1

List three factors to consider when choosing appropriate communication media.

Question 2

Compare two communication formats and identify their advantages and disadvantages using the table below.

Communication format	Advantages	Disadvantages

Question 3

Draw a line to match each term about communication context to its definition.

» Temporal (situational) context

» This context refers to the values, beliefs, lifestyles and behaviours of a group of people. For example, physical proximity is the distance between a speaker and receiver – an American may be put off by a French speaker they perceive as invading their space.

» Social-psychological context

» This context is related to the concrete environment, for example, a professional event, business dinner or team building retreat. Each atmosphere has its own set of rules for how to communicate and a manner of talking.

» Cultural context

» This context involves group norms in a particular situation, including the familiarity or formality of verbal or nonverbal exchange. There are certain conversation norms, for example, the manner of conversation with friends is different to a formal dinner with the company's directors or partners.

» Physical context

» This context is about modifying communication mode, message and topic depending on the sequence of conversational events. For example, the conversation is carried differently when someone admits they were made redundant or when a colleague announces being promoted.

2B Use respectful and positive communication

Communication in the workplace should be courteous and constructive.

The way we communicate can play a major role in the success of our professional relationships. Words are often a small part in the message we communicate. Other factors – like the media we use, the tone of our communication and our body language – all have a significant role in how we come across to others.

Effective communication is respectful. You respect others when you treat them as having true value in their own right. Effective workplace leaders communicate positively; they consider the other person and their point of view and listen to them attentively.

Modern businesses now regard the maintenance of relationships as a vital practice to ensure organisational success; the use of respectful and positive communication will support this. These organisations not only seek to practise positive and respectful communication – they also document the processes for implementation in key organisational documents.

To further facilitate positive and respectful communication in the workplace, team leaders should:

- consider the principles and practices of respectful communication and how to implement them
- use positive communication
- consider their leadership responsibilities in maintaining respectful and positive communication
- use effective listening techniques to maintain respectful and positive communication
- use effective conflict resolution techniques.

Principles and practices of respectful communication

Respectful communication rests on the principle that all team members are equally valuable to the organisation.

Communicating respectfully means you are willing to show consideration or appreciation to the person you are communicating with. As all communication begins within the sender, you have the power to choose to be respectful. You can therefore plan your communication in such a way that shows others you care. This requires understanding what respect entails; while it has a variety of meanings, in a workplace setting the term rests on some core principles.

Respectful communication principles
• All team members are valued parts of the organisation.
• Communication should seek to improve the processes of an organisation.
• Communicate as transparently as possible, and provide reasons for decisions about workplace processes.
• Base assessment of workplace performance on evidence, delivered in a rational manner and with a focus on how to improve.
• Accept that everyone is different and has the right to be so.
• Be attentive to the needs of others you communicate with.

These principles should be the bedrock of policies and procedures established to ensure respectful communication in a workplace. Organisations have different forms of communication and implement these principles differently. Below are some examples of what form they may take in a workplace.

Respectful communication practices
Be mindful of team members by using appropriate tone and language.
Listen attentively to other team members' points of view.
Use polite, formal language that acknowledges their circumstances.
Use common courtesies, such as 'please' and 'thank you'; know and use the other person's name.
Encourage differences of opinion in meetings to facilitate new ideas.
Provide forums for team members to express opinions and share ideas.
Allow team members to discuss any feedback or performance reviews.

Communicate positively

Discuss workplace issues constructively, focusing on what can be achieved.

Positive communication is about choosing words and phrasing that communicates and frames issues in a constructive form. The goal of positive communication is to deliver a message in an uplifting and constructive manner, so others feel empowered. Workplaces are increasingly busy; team members can come to view their time at work as overly intense, confusing and miserable. Nobody wants to be overwhelmed with consistently negative information.

The benefits of communicating positively at work include:

- Team morale is improved as workplace relationships are healthier.
- Employees have a clear understanding of their task expectations.
- All team members feel empowered to discuss important issues and share ideas.
- Empowered workers perform to a higher standard.

Incorporating positive communication techniques into all your messages, no matter if the receiver is going to like them or not, helps ensure you achieve the outcome you are looking for without damaging the relationship.

If you make a habit of always communicating positively and respectfully, you minimise misunderstandings and continue to build and maintain effective working relationships. Team members will have the confidence to raise workplace issues if they know their communication will be treated in a positive manner.

Below are some strategies you can use to improve positive communication in the workplace.

Acknowledge success

All team members get a morale boost from having their positive contributions to the organisation acknowledged. These positive reinforcements can confirm that team members are doing the right thing and provide an example to others. Acknowledgements can be made in a formal setting, such as a team meeting, or can be delivered informally, such as verbal encouragement while team members work.

Be constructive

Focus on how performance can be improved, rather than fixating on weaknesses in performance or failures. Team members prefer to be told or given a demonstration on how to improve their performance so they can develop their skills. Criticising without being constructive will lead to a loss of morale among team members and can harm workplace relationships.

Engage with team members on a personal level

Team members are individuals with a wide variety of interests, hobbies and passions outside their jobs. Engage your team members with positive communication about these outside interests. Getting to know others supports relationship development and allows your collaboration as a work team to improve.

Team leader responsibilities to ensure positive and respectful communication

Ensure task requirements are designed to improve the communication of your team.

As a team leader, your task expectations are geared toward supporting your team to achieve improved production efficiency. A vital requirement to meeting these expectations is creating a positive and respectful workplace communication style in your team. This is a challenge; being positive and respectful in your communication as an employee requires practice. Therefore, being responsible for the communication of an entire work team can be time consuming and may force you to develop new management skills.

These skills do not come naturally to all team leaders. You may have never needed them or filled a role as a team leader in an organisation that already communicated respectfully and positively. Knowing how to make your work team's communication more constructive and uplifting is a valuable skill in modern workplaces that emphasise the need for collaborative work and decision making.

Below are some of your responsibilities in regard to positive and respectful communication, as well as how you can meet them.

Be accountable	Being accountable means that you take responsibility for the communication standards of the team you lead. Provide clear expectations to your team regarding their communication, monitor it and take corrective actions when necessary. Ask to be reviewed by your manager regarding your performance in managing your team's communication standards.
Facilitate two-way communication	Two-way communication generates respect as the team leader and team member can engage in conversation that demonstrates mutual regard. Establish an 'open door' policy where members of your team are free to engage you in conversation at appropriate times. This allows you to listen to others as well as to direct team members.
Model appropriate communication standards	Modelling appropriate communication methods means you demonstrate the standards of respect and positivity in your personal communication that you expect from your team. You can accomplish this by acknowledging to your team where you failed to meet personal communication standards.
Follow policies and procedures	Policies can include codes of conduct that stipulate the communication standards your team is expected to follow. As a team leader, make these expectations clear to team members by providing them with policy documents and ensuring they understand them.

Utilise appropriate nonverbal communication	Team leaders should monitor the nonverbal communication of their team to ensure it is respectful and positive. This includes gauging team members' tone of voice, facial expression, eye contact, gestures and body movement, as well as inconsistent or erratic behaviour.

Use effective listening techniques

Being attentive to others is a principle of respectful communication that contributes to a positive workplace.

Listening enables you to build productive relationships. Effective listening is a way to show respect for another person. It is about trying to understand how other people see situations and events so you can respond appropriately.

Active listening shows the person you value their view and respect their opinion. Listening is essential in gathering and providing sound information. It breaks down communication barriers and establishes and maintains relationships.

Here are some effective listening techniques.

Face the speaker	Put aside papers and the telephone, and look away from your computer screen and other distractions. Give the speaker your undivided attention.
Be attentive	Be present in the moment, and screen out distractions such as background activity, noise and your own thoughts. Focus on what the other person is saying.
Keep an open mind	Listen without judging or mentally criticising the things being said. Avoid jumping to conclusions.
Listen	Focus on what is being said. Let the words create a mental picture in your mind. If your thoughts start to wander, refocus immediately. Do not interrupt as this sends a message that you believe your view is more interesting, accurate and relevant. Remain tuned in to the other person until they finish what they have to say.
Ask clarifying questions	If you are unsure of anything, wait for the speaker to pause before asking for clarification rather than interrupting. Do not ask questions that will take the speaker off on a tangent. If you notice your question has led the speaker away from their topic, take responsibility for getting it back on track.
Give the speaker feedback	Show you understand where the speaker is coming from by reflecting their feelings. You can also paraphrase the content to show you are listening, or you can simply use nods and smiles to show you are with the speaker and understand them.

Pay attention to what is not being said	Take notice of nonverbal cues like tone of voice, posture and facial expressions. Remember, words only convey part of the message.
Summarise to confirm	Conclude conversations with a summary statement that accurately captures what you have heard and understood so the speaker can confirm you are correct.

Resolve conflict in the workplace

Resolve workplace disputes according to organisational policies and procedures.

A workplace dispute is where team members become involved in a verbal or physical clash that impacts their ability to work productively in a safe work atmosphere. These conflicts can begin in the workplace and be triggered by a difference of opinions, harassment, disrespectful comments or personality clash.

In some cases, a conflict may begin because of an issue that occurs outside the workplace. Regardless, any conflict that hurts the standard of work and negatively impacts the ability of team members to communicate effectively, or that results in physical or verbal fights, needs to be resolved by a team leader.

Approach these situations in a respectful, positive manner. Focus on finding a solution that all parties can live with by exploring options until you find one that is acceptable. During this process, think from the other person's point of view, listen to them attentively and maintain open, positive body language. Consider their feelings and how you want the relationship to continue. Always be professional throughout the communication process no matter which role you take. Refer those involved in the conflict back to organisation requirements to communicate positively and respectfully.

Below are some strategies you can use to defuse and avoid workplace conflicts.

When you are the sender	When you are the receiver
▪ Consider your audience and use respectful language. ▪ Clarify your thoughts, ideas, purpose and desired outcomes. ▪ Plan your communication to convey the content positively and respectfully. ▪ Avoid nicknames and discriminatory language. ▪ Focus on providing solutions or assistance rather than criticising.	▪ Attend to the other person. ▪ Minimise external and internal distractions. ▪ Listen attentively and paraphrase to show you have understood. ▪ Do not interrupt; make sure you hear the entire communication of the sender. ▪ Maintain eye contact. ▪ Use positive nonverbal gestures such as smiles.

Example

Respectful and positive approaches to communication

Kyleigh has been asked to mediate for two team members who have been having an ongoing conflict. Jamie feels annoyed and upset because he believes Shelley takes all the credit for the projects they work on together. Shelley does not understand the problem, as she believes that people should be more like her and just get on with the job.

Kyleigh wants Jamie and Shelley to reach a win–win solution to the problem. She has worked with them both for a long time and knows that they view things quite differently. Shelley is confident and task orientated. Jamie, on the other hand, needs recognition to help with his confidence and he tends to dwell on things.

Kyleigh wants to ensure her communication is respectful and positive to both of them. She knows that this issue has caused tension in the team and it needs to be resolved to the satisfaction of both parties to get the team back on track.

Kyleigh decides to use a process she learnt about recently called collaborative problem solving. She is confident that by using this process the relationship between Jamie and Shelley will be stronger because they will learn more about how the other person sees the world.

- Kyleigh asks each person to share their thoughts and feelings on the issue.
- She encourages both of them to actively listen to each other by not interrupting and keeping an open mind.
- When each person has expressed their views, the other person summarises what they have heard and understood.
- This process continues until each person confirms that the other person has understood their viewpoint.
- They brainstorm solutions and Kyleigh facilitates a discussion that leads to a win–win solution.

Practice Task 6

Read the case study then complete the tasks that follow.

Case study

Vesna has scheduled a meeting with Travis, the newest member of the team at Anytime Catering. One of the team's objectives is to maintain a high level of customer satisfaction with the sales force. Vesna has received several complaints from clients who feel that the catering package they purchased did not suit their needs. In each case, the clients had purchased a combined food package from Travis. They feel that a different package (at a lower price) would have better suited their needs. One client was particularly annoyed, as he claims the full terms and conditions were not made clear when he agreed to this food package.

Other team members did not mention this during their team meeting, but Vesna noticed a different vibe in the meeting room when customer satisfaction survey results were discussed. She gets an impression that the relationship between Travis and other team members is dwindling.

Vesna is concerned that Travis has pushed the most expensive package without fully understanding the clients' needs. She knows that bad news travels fast. If these clients tell their colleagues about their poor experiences, the result could be further loss of business.

Question 1

What nonverbal cues should Vesna look for to understand her team's interpersonal interactions?
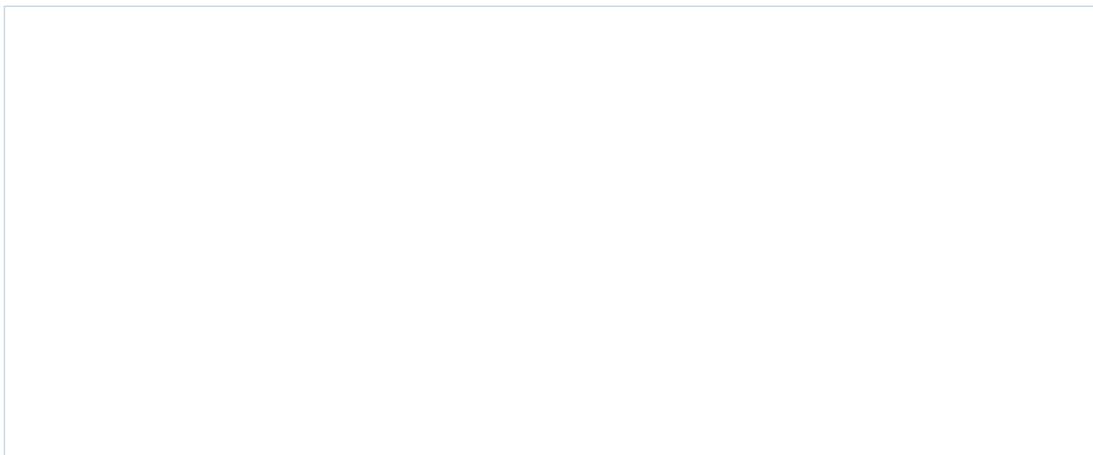
Question 2

How can Vesna conduct a meeting with Travis so that she communicates in a respectful and positive manner which would help to build rapport and team collaboration? Give examples to support your answer.
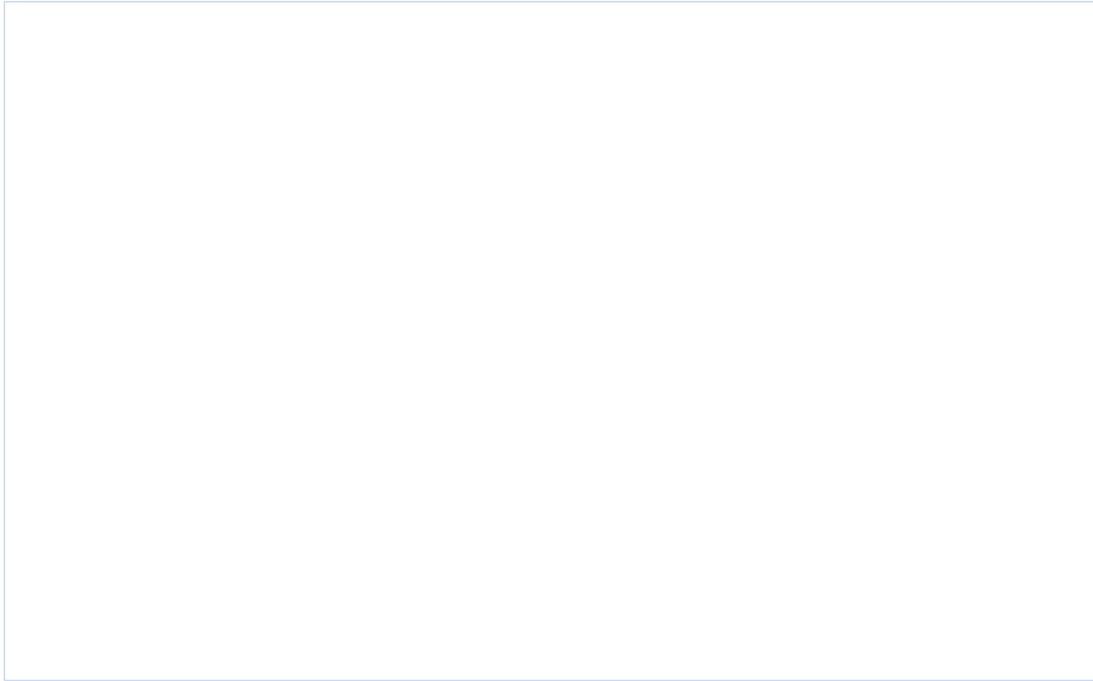
Question 3

As a team leader, what effective listening techniques can Vesna use to improve relationships and collaboration in the team?

2C Use two-way communication

Communication in a workplace should be a free-flowing exchange of ideas between all team members and managers.

Two-way communication means both parties transmit information. One person or group expresses an idea; the other person or group receives and understands the message. Two-way communication includes feedback from the receiver. This feedback information informs the sender that the message has been received as the sender intended.

Effective two-way communications are circular. The sender sends a message and at the same time pays close attention to the messages coming back to them. They use this information to adjust their communication as needed.

Communication is negotiated. The intent of both the sender and receiver is mutual understanding. Both sender and receiver listen to each other, gather information and are willing to make changes to ensure the other party understands. It is a reciprocal process, with both parties being prepared to give and take. To effectively utilise two-way communication in the workplace, consider:

- the purposes of using two-way communication
- examples of two-way communication
- acknowledging communication
- the role of team leaders in facilitating two-way communication.

Purposes of two-way communication

Two-way communication helps create an engaged and productive work team.

Modern workplaces focus on collaborating as a team. All team members offer a range of specific skills and knowledge, and it harms the organisation if that base of skills and knowledge is not utilised to improve business operations. In order for team members to contribute to production processes, there must be an open exchange of ideas between all staff in an organisation.

Two-way communication is cyclical. The sender of a message provides information to the receiver, who then confirms their understanding. Both parties are involved in the communication and can exchange ideas.

Some businesses have found that the main reason for their production standards stagnating is a lack of two-way communication and communication 'silos'. In situations where team members' only interaction with managers is being reprimanded for performance issues, they can become disillusioned and not seek to improve. Some

businesses have found a lack of clear directions and feedback has led to tasks being performed incorrectly. Information 'silos' form where departments store information about how they operate but do not share it with other aspects of the business. In all these examples, a stronger two-way communication process would improve operations.

Below are some specific scenarios that show why your communication should be two-way.

On-boarding new employees	- New employees can seek assistance from other team members. - They can engage in conversation about existing processes. - They can suggest new ideas from their previous role.
Clarity of instructions and task expectations	- Team members can clarify their exact task requirements. - They can request materials and resources to complete their tasks. - Team members can work confidently knowing their tasks.
Compliance with organisational standards	- Consultation expectations can be met. - Meetings can be held as required to discuss process changes. - Required training can be conducted.
Collaboration	- Ideas can be generated in a work team. - Opinions of others can be sought to improve work processes. - Constructive criticism of team leader decisions is allowed.
Improved team morale	- Team members feel they can express their opinions and suggestions. - All members of the work team feel valued for their contributions. - Any required assistance or clarification can be provided.

Examples of two-way communication

Be prepared to utilise numerous two-way communication methods.

In your role as team leader, provide as many forums for two-way conversation as possible. Your expectation of improving the production and efficiency of your team will be made easier if you can engage your team members in open and ongoing communication.

Depending on your workplace, certain forms of two-way communication may be more logistically suitable than others. For example, if you manage a team spread across multiple work sites, face-to-face meetings may not be possible. Instead, you may have to use emails to facilitate two-way conversation.

Below are examples of how you can utilise existing methods to generate two-way communication. All these methods are used for more one-way, instructional communication, but are becoming redundant as businesses find that team members work more effectively when communicated with as valued contributors rather than workers waiting on direction for what task they are to complete next.

Staff meetings	Staff meetings are where a team leader provides instructions to their work group. While there is undoubtedly a requirement to provide direction to team members in a meeting, you should also seek their input. You can ask for new ideas about how to complete a task, gather immediate feedback, encourage team members to share experiences from completing work tasks and clarify any questions they may have.
Individual meetings and performance reviews	In your capacity as team leader, you will be asked to hold individual meetings and performance reviews to assess how team members are progressing. There is a tendency to speak 'to them'; ensure you set time aside to speak 'with them'. Ask the team member questions, enquire about whether they think the review is fair and seek their opinions on how you can improve your managerial performance.
Working in proximity	As a team leader, endeavour to work in close proximity with your team. This enables you and your team members to communicate regularly throughout the workday. They can ask you questions as issues arise.
Email, text messages and group chat	Be willing to converse with your work team via digital communication devices. Check your email and text message accounts regularly so you can respond to any questions or clarifications. Ensure all team members have your contact details. Information can be summarised on the telephone or via email.

Acknowledge communication from team members

Always recognise communication from members of your work team.

Acknowledging any communication from team members is central to maintaining a two-way exchange of ideas. To acknowledge a message means you allow the other person to have their view, and you recognise and appreciate their perspective. After acknowledging a message, you can respond appropriately. This process demonstrates your commitment to understanding the other person's point of view without judgment.

Team members find it frustrating when they take time to communicate with a colleague or manager and do not receive a response. They have engaged in the communication process, but that willingness has not been reciprocated. In future, they may not bother to communicate and this can have consequences for work production.

Acknowledge every communication as soon as possible. If you are currently unable to provide a detailed response, inform the person that you do not have time to respond in length but will do so later. This demonstrates that you respect your colleague and the communication process.

You can acknowledge a message in different ways.

Nonverbal

A smile or nod sends a clear signal to the other person that you have received their message. As you become more familiar with your colleagues, you can develop other nonverbal cues the receiver will understand.

Verbal

Demonstrate to the sender your intention to understand by asking a question to clarify, paraphrasing what you have heard back to the sender or summarising the main ideas presented. On some occasions, you will receive communication from a team member who does not usually participate in this process. Ensure you thank them verbally.

Written

Including words from the sender's email in your reply shows you are aware of their perspective; it demonstrates you have read and understood their written message. Press the 'reply' icon when responding so their original email is included in your reply. Be willing to forward their email if they request this.

Action

Taking action to complete a request in a designated time frame demonstrates your understanding of the message.

The role of team leaders in facilitating two-way communication

Facilitate forums so team members can engage with you in two-way communication.

As a workplace leader you need to be accountable for the success of your communication. You should have full control over your message, the communication channels you use, and the amount of time you allow for the receiver to clarify and confirm their understanding.

Included in these responsibilities is the expectation that you will support two-way communication. You must participate in two-way communication processes with other managers and your work team, and also train your team in how they should engage in these processes. As a team leader you must engage in two-way communication with managers above you on the organisational chart and with those under your direct leadership.

Be willing to review two-way communication processes in your team. Analyse how successful you and your team are in sending and receiving messages in written, digital, verbal and nonverbal forms. Investigate weaknesses in your communication processes and implement improvement strategies.

Check that you understand your communication responsibilities.

Two-way communication responsibilities
▪ Communicate clear instructions to team members.
▪ Listen to team members' feedback.
▪ Encourage open communication among team members.
▪ Strive for team consensus and win–win agreements.
▪ Communicate team views to upper management.
▪ Motivate and inspire your team.
▪ Provide opportunities for team members to clarify and confirm their understanding.
▪ Provide constructive feedback to your team on how they may improve.

Example

Use two-way communication processes

Simon asks Melissa to write a press release about a new product. Melissa nods and smiles. Simon takes this feedback as an indication that she understands his message. However, he decides he wants to double-check. He has had issues in the past with assuming people have understood, only to find out they have gone down a different track.

Simon continues the conversation by asking Melissa the following question: 'What ideas do you think should be included in the press release?'

Melissa responds with ideas that suit the correct product. Simon concludes the conversation with Melissa, knowing that she has understood his message.

Practice Task 7

Read the case study then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Jackson is part of a team investigating a new software program that his department is going to use for managing projects. He needs to get three quotes from different software companies. Jackson receives one quote by email. He responds to the email by the end of the day. In his email, he thanks the company for the information and tells them he will get back to them within two weeks.

Jackson receives another quote over the telephone. He concludes the call by summarising the information provided by the sales representative, asking them to confirm all the inclusions, and giving them a time frame for when he will let them know if the quote has been accepted.

The third quote is received in writing during a face-to-face meeting with a sales manager. Jackson notices an installation fee, as well as an ongoing maintenance fee, are included in the written quote. He asks the sales manager to clarify the charges. Jackson did not ask for this service to be included when he made his original inquiry. The sales manager tells Jackson he will prepare a new quote immediately so Jackson can present it with the other quotes.

Question 1

Identify three two-way communication processes that Jackson used.

Question 2

Explain how effectively Jackson used two-way communication when completing his task.

2D Provide opportunities to confirm understanding

Provide communication channels for team members to clarify their task expectations.

Our jobs are becoming increasingly complex. We are required to perform a wide range of tasks, and to complete them in less time and to high standards. The globalised economy means our organisations are competing widely for consumer spending. Consequently, we must learn more skills, follow more instructions and understand a larger quantity of directions and expectations.

A key role of a team leader is to provide opportunities for team members to confirm they understand their expectations and directions or ask clarifying questions if they are not certain. This is particularly necessary if you lead a team of colleagues who are inexperienced in their roles. They may be asked to perform duties they are unfamiliar with or have worked in a job that had different task expectations.

If the instructions and expectations placed on team members are not confirmed, they may complete tasks incorrectly, provide customers or suppliers with incorrect information or not work according to vital safety protocols.

To effectively accomplish this, you should consider:

- the methods you can use to confirm understanding
- providing forums to confirm and clarify instructions and expectations
- your responsibilities as a team leader to confirm and clarify work expectations.

Utilise methods to confirm understanding

Use verbal, nonverbal, written and digital methods to confirm understanding.

Providing an opportunity for the receiver to clarify or confirm information is another part of the communication process that needs planning and consideration. Effective communication is not based on assumptions. You need to take deliberate action to allow the receiver to confirm they have understood your message. There may be a breakdown in communication if the receiver does not have the opportunity to clarify and confirm their understanding.

You can use different methods of communication to clarify and confirm understanding and avoid a communication breakdown.

Methods to confirm understanding	
Verbal	Check with the receiver by asking open questions that encourage them to provide their complete understanding of your message. Ask open questions such as 'What do you think about that?' or 'What can I clarify?', rather than a closed question such as 'Do you understand?'.
Nonverbal	If you notice nonverbal cues indicating the receiver does not understand, change the way you are communicating, reword your message and/or ask a question that encourages the other person to share their perspective. Communicate nonverbally by leaning slightly forward and using pauses to encourage the speaker to continue.
Written	Conclude written communication with a line such as 'Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further clarification'. Follow up written communication with a face-to-face meeting or telephone call to provide an opportunity for the receiver to demonstrate their understanding.
Digital	Some forms of digital communication allow you to automatically confirm if a message has been received. For example, you can request a receipt to confirm that a receiver has opened your email. This indicates they have read your email but you should still ask follow-up questions to ensure they understood the instruction or expectation.

Provide forums to confirm and clarify instructions and expectations

Provide opportunities for team members to ask questions about their roles.

There will be many times in a workday where you must instruct team members about their job roles or outline job standards. These communications can be highly detailed and require high-level listening or reading skills.

As a team leader, be proactive in providing forums where team members can ask you further questions or discuss issues. You need to be proactive as some team members will be reluctant to initiate a conversation about not understanding an instruction or expectation. They may feel it demonstrates a lack of knowledge or creates a negative impression of them in the minds of their managers. However, if you outline a range of forums where team members can contact you to ask relevant questions, they will be more willing to seek help. The benefits of team members knowing when and where to ask questions include improved team efficiency and morale.

Below are some forums you can use to clarify issues.

Actively monitor your email	Many team members will ask you questions via email. It is a format many prefer as it allows them to be more accurate in asking questions by being precise in their wording. Check your email regularly throughout the workday to answer any questions, especially if you work in a separate workplace to your team members.
Provide your telephone number when appropriate	Telephone calls are usually used by team members to ask questions about urgent issues such as safety protocols, aggressive customers or information required immediately. Provide your telephone number to team members so they can contact you in urgent situations. If you are unwilling to provide a personal contact number, request a work telephone to use in your role.
Work among your team	Your presence in a workplace in close proximity to your team members can be a useful forum to answer questions. It gives them a chance to ask you verbal questions that you can answer. Also, you have an opportunity to demonstrate how to complete work tasks when required.
Have an 'open door' policy	An 'open door' policy means you are available to answer questions from team members at any time. This gives them confidence that they can get assistance and clarify issues as they arise. If this becomes too demanding, provide specific times and days when you can be contacted.
Provide written manuals and instructions	Some tasks need to be completed according to a multi-step process. These tasks can be confusing for some team members. If you anticipate some team members will have difficulties, provide a written document that explains the steps. Some effective managers provide laminated guides with images and illustrations that team members can refer to.

Team leader responsibilities to confirm and clarify work expectations

Hold regular discussions with team members to support them in meeting work expectations.

Your role as team leader requires you to provide guidance to team members in meeting their task expectations. You need to be effective in gathering and responding to team members' questions and ensuring they have been answered conclusively.

This responsibility can take time to properly organise. However, the benefits of having a team that has full clarity about what they are supposed to do and how they are supposed to do it far outweighs the time spent clarifying issues.

Below are some tasks you can complete to meet this leadership requirement.

Strategies to confirm and clarify work expectations
• Provide clear instructions to team members about performance standards and task expectations.
• Organise one-on-one interviews with team members to provide them with an opportunity to ask questions in a personalised forum.
• Draft and reword communications if some employees express confusion about your message's purpose.
• Ask team members to recite the steps to complete a task rather than simply confirm their understanding.
• Be willing to ask and answer follow-up questions from team members.
• Follow up a verbal clarification with a written summary of what was discussed.
• Send a memo to all team members encouraging them to contact you with any questions and provide your contact details.
• Create surveys to collect information about how much your team knows about existing work processes.
• Hold regular meetings with team members and discuss issues which may prompt questions.
• Avoid assuming that your team knows all aspects of their instructions and expectations and be proactive in asking questions.
• Hold demonstrations that show your team how to perform a task that some may find difficult.

Make decisions to improve communication processes

Support communication in your team by making key decisions.

Communication in the workplace can be a complicated process. You may often lead a work team that includes inexperienced team members who are either new to the organisation or new to the workforce entirely. Some team members may be regularly absent or unable to understand previous communications. In some situations, a workplace may have ineffective communication processes.

A team leader plays a lead role in resolving these issues by making decisions after gathering relevant information. This information may relate to:

- the success rate of communication being understood by team members
- the volume of communication
- the method, media and format of communication being used
- feedback from team members about communication processes.

Analyse this information to determine if there are trends in communication processes that indicate underlying problems. Gather this information over a sustained period of time so you have a considerable sample size to make determinations.

Once you have gathered accurate information, you can make decisions that improve communication processes. These decisions can change the method, media and format of communication used in workplace situations; the amount or regularity of communication; and the methods used to determine if communication has been successful.

Refer any changes you decide to make to your own manager. Avoid making changes without seeking approval as the improvements you want to implement may contravene workplace policies and procedures.

Example

Provide opportunities to confirm and clarify issues

Ryan is a team leader whose role is to manage the reception staff at a large hotel chain. After recent restructuring, all of his team have worked in their roles for six weeks or less. This highly inexperienced group of staff has been making mistakes in checking guests in and out, providing accurate information to guests, organising room service, and logging and following up maintenance requests. This has led to a decline in bookings as the organisation has developed a worrying reputation for mismanaging guests.

Ryan realises he was not proactive enough in anticipating these issues and decides to improve his support of the team. He resolves to:

- install his work email app on his telephone so he can access email questions immediately rather than only being able to respond when in his office
- provide laminated charts that explain how to log maintenance requests and check guests in and out
- have a 15-minute meeting at the beginning of his shift to provide clear task instructions to his team and answer any questions they may have
- get access to a mobile telephone owned by the hotel and to provide his team with the telephone number so they can ring him with any urgent matters
- provide weekly training sessions where he demonstrates how to accomplish tasks that his team has had difficulties with in the week prior.

Practice Task 8

Read the case study then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Grant is a sales manager who works for a manufacturing company. Recently, there were changes in the ordering system and teams undertook training on the new procedures. However, there are inconsistencies between different teams in understanding how the process works. Grant checks the company's intranet and notices that not all changes have yet been uploaded on the portal. There seems to be a communication breakdown.

Grant takes responsibility for any communication related to the changes. He decides to investigate if all teams have had enough time to participate in any training on the new procedures, and whether all team members understand the new process or would require support in using the ordering system.
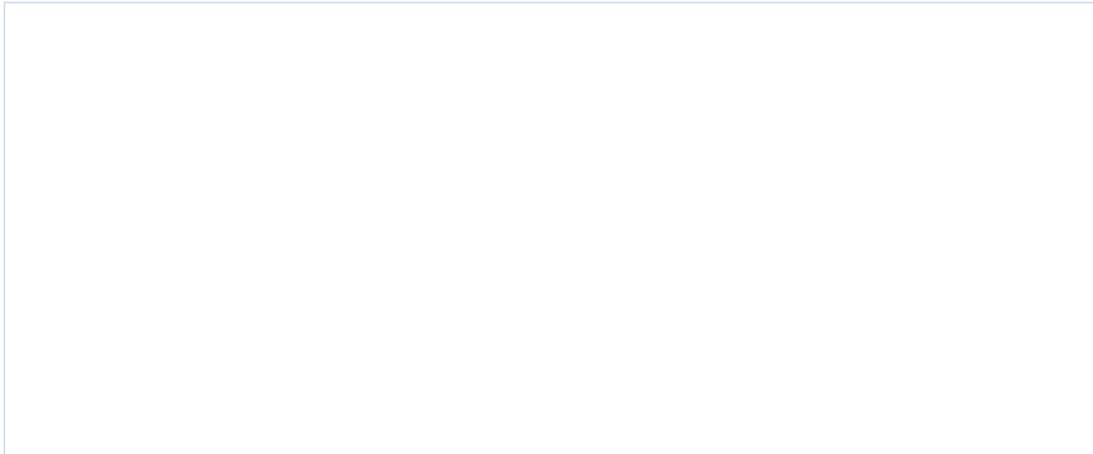
Question 1

What are Grant's leadership communication responsibilities in this context?

Question 2

How can Grant identify the communication breakdown problems and provide opportunities to clarify team members' understanding of the new system?

Summary

- Ensure the media and format you use are suitable to the purpose of and audience for your communication.
- Examples of appropriate media include team meetings, digital presentations, emails and reports.
- The communication format you choose must suit the context of the organisation.
- Any communication between team members should respect each other's ability to contribute to business operations.
- Communicate positively by focusing on constructive solutions rather than criticisms.
- Monitor communication in your work team to ensure it meets standards of respect and positivity.
- Provide avenues of communication that allow ideas and opinions to be freely exchanged.
- Always set aside time in your role as manager to acknowledge communication from team members.
- Provide regular forums so team members can clarify their instructions and task expectations with you.
- Use verbal, nonverbal, written and digital communication methods to confirm team members' understanding.

Learning Checkpoint 2
Engage in communication

Part A

1. List five factors to consider when choosing communication media and provide examples.

2. Recommend a communication format for these contexts and justify your recommendations.

Communication task and audience	Context of communication	Recommended format
Set up an urgent meeting with four people	The four managers work in different locations and one of them is overseas	
Negotiate a new business proposal with an overseas client	The company has not met this prospective client before; English is not this person's first language	
Reorder equipment from a supplier	This is the company's preferred supplier and the order is a routine process	

3. Explain how effective listening techniques enable respectful and positive communication.

4. Two-way communication is cyclical. Explain what this means.

5. Provide one example of how you could ensure the receipt and acknowledgment of the sender's message in each of these situations.

Situation	Ways to acknowledge the sender
A team member shares personal information about family circumstances affecting work	
A customer has emailed expressing concern about a missing invoice	
Your manager telephones and asks for a detailed status update on the current project you are working on	
Your work health and safety representative asks for space on your next meeting agenda to discuss an upcoming audit	

6. A team leader briefs a team member on a task and asks the team member to complete it. The team member completes it incorrectly. Explain who is responsible for the communication breakdown and how to overcome it.

Part B

Read the scenario then complete the tasks that follow.

Scenario

You have just finished interviewing applicants for a short-term internal position. The vacancy is for a project manager to implement a new marketing campaign across the whole organisation. There were two applicants for the position. They both had to address the following selection criteria in writing.

Demonstrated ability to:

- support teams in the development and delivery of new products
- develop campaign strategies
- prepare and manage detailed project plans
- create and manage a large program of work across multiple teams
- communicate complex issues clearly and concisely to senior management and a variety of audiences.

The written applications showed that both applicants were suitable, so you decide to interview both.

Steven is the first applicant. He has all the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to meet the criteria and presents very well in the interview. In a previous role, part of Steven's responsibility was to present reports at the monthly senior managers meeting.

Michael is the second applicant. He does not have any experience in communicating with senior management and other audiences. In the interview he finds it difficult to discuss his experience clearly and concisely. Michael has similar skills, knowledge and experience to Steven when it comes to the other criteria; however, he does not appear able to present his ideas effectively.

You decide to appoint Steven to the position because he meets all the selection criteria.

When communicating to unsuccessful applicants, you know that you need to follow the relevant policies and procedures. Part of the internal recruitment procedure states that unsuccessful applicants must be informed of the selection decision in a positive and respectful way. They need to be given the opportunity to clarify and seek feedback on their performance during the recruitment process via email.

1. Which organisational policies/procedures or legislation requirements would need to be observed in responding to job applicants?

2. Using the following format, write an email to Michael informing him that he is unsuccessful in his application to be the project manager for the new marketing campaign.

From: david@msg.com.au

To: michael@msg.com.au

CC:

Subject:

Message:

Kind regards,
David Madison

Topic 3 | Review communication

3A   Maintain record of communication according to policies

3B   Identify and communicate follow-up actions

3C   Seek feedback about communication processes

3D   Opportunities to improve leadership communication processes

3A Maintain record of communication according to policies

Team leaders should record and retain key communications.

Successful organisations design processes for recording key communications that take place between team members, managers, customers and suppliers. They design a system that gathers records of communication, stores them in a manner that provides easy access and allows for review at later dates.

Organisations that do not record key communications find they are unable to meet compliance requirements, provide adequate details about team member performance or maintain accurate records of stock and supplies. On a day-to-day level, businesses that do not maintain records of communications have great difficulties in organising and completing regular tasks.

As a team leader, you will be asked to produce accurate records of key communications relevant to your work team's tasks. Following this, you will need to devise methods for retaining these documents, and meet organisational requirements in the manner you do it. To successfully record communication according to organisational policies, consider:

- the types of records you will keep
- the reasons to maintain records
- relevant legislation you must follow
- how records will be stored effectively
- relevant organisational policies.

Types of communication records to retain

Keep records of communications that are relevant to business operations.

Records provide information that can be acted upon to improve organisational outcomes at all levels. Retain copies of any communication and documentation designed to make a business more efficient, safer or supportive of team member development.

Here are some examples of the types of communication records to keep and an explanation of their purpose.

Meeting minutes

Meeting minutes record main points of discussion and action to be taken, who is responsible and the time frames for the actions to be completed.

Performance management

Performance review records detail a person's performance discussion, future training and development to be undertaken, and career planning.

Work health and safety (WHS) consultation and incidents

It is a legislative requirement for management to consult workers about matters that affect work health or safety. Records of WHS consultation provide evidence that consultation has taken place and what action needs to be taken to address issues. All workplace incidents must be reported and recorded.

Workplace training, coaching and mentoring

Training records provide information on what was covered in the training, who participated, assessment results and evaluation. The records act as a planning tool for future sessions by detailing successes and issues that need to be addressed. This includes key information about the recruitment process such as minutes of applicant interviews and decisions made.

Grievance procedures and complaints

Records from grievance discussions provide a record of who was involved, the action taken, the results of the action, and recommendations.

Feedback

Analyse feedback from customers and use it for continuous improvement. Keep a record of the action taken to address customer feedback. Gather data from team members by asking for feedback on team performance.

Resource requests

Always keep a record of who asked for a resource, when it was requested and why it was needed. Also keep a record of the resources agreed to.

Project updates

Summary reports show the progress of a project in relation to the time lines set out in the original plan. These reports also provide a record of any issues and how they were dealt with.

Record actions as a result of workplace communication

Document any follow-up actions that are required after communication.

When you engage in a work communication process with a team member or other stakeholder, it is likely that actions will need to be performed as a result. These actions can resolve the issue or lead to further important information being gathered. For example, you may communicate to your team members about the importance of identifying safety hazards in the workplace.

You must record these follow-up actions. Many organisations have policies and procedures mandating that team leaders must record actions as a result of workplace communication. In any event, a conscientious team leader should record these actions to retain relevant information that will help them improve future communication.

Below are some examples of actions you need to record as a result of workplace communication.

Record actions as a result of the following workplace communications:
- Managing risks and hazards as a result of issues identified in safety meetings   - Adjusting workloads or shift times as a result of communication from team members about work–life balance   - Scheduling a formal meeting after being informed about a team member's conduct or lack of performance   - Organising a training program or professional development after being told by team members that they require updated skills and knowledge to complete their tasks   - Documenting purchases in a purchasing book/petty-cash log after being told by a team member that extra resources or materials need to be purchased   - Changing workplace policies or procedures after being asked to do so by your manager

Record the actions you take. Document what you did, when you did it, how long it took and any money or materials you needed. Add any other relevant information. Provide a thorough description of the actions so you can refer to them if asked to demonstrate your compliance with workplace procedures, to use for your own reference or development, and to help with daily task management within your role.

Purposes of retaining records of communication

Recording communication will make your organisation more efficient in managing staff and meeting customer demands.

Records of communication processes and outcomes provide you with a reference point to go back to when you take follow-up action. Rather than relying on memory, written records provide a valid, reliable and acceptable representation of events and discussions. They are precise and easily retrieved by all relevant parties for future reference. Written records can help to build common understanding by clearing up any confusion.

Many workplaces have a steady turnover of staff. This means that team members do not stay for long in their roles before moving on to new roles or employment outside the organisation entirely. For organisations like this, recording key communication is essential. Rather than rely on 'word of mouth' for vital information and workplace processes, team members filling new roles can refer to communication records.

An organisation that records key communications in a clear format that can be reviewed by team members provides a range of resources that can be used to improve efficiency. For example, a team leader can use recorded performance reviews to identify training needs for their team.

Businesses that record key communications are more organised and present an image of quality that instils confidence in existing team members and is recognised by new employees and customers.

Below are some examples that show why recording communication is important.

Communication records may be kept to:
• meet safety legal requirements
• provide an easily accessed record all team members can refer to
• monitor the success and failures of major projects
• assist managers to make informed decisions about items such as pay rises and promotions, and to arrange staff in roles that suit their skillsets
• provide team leaders with a reference point
• allow team leaders to monitor the performance of staff
• provide an accurate representation of what occurred
• follow up staff training requirements
• assist team leaders to use disciplinary action and warnings to manage staff
• monitor stock purchases to gather information about financial efficiency
• escalate customer complaints to managers
• clear up confusion by recording common agreements and understandings
• allow managers to make staffing decisions on the basis of conflict resolution meeting records
• assist team leaders to use suggestions and ideas from team members to improve operations
• record what issues a team leader must follow up.

Store records of communications

Retain records of key communications so they are always easily accessible by relevant staff.

Records management is the practice of maintaining records from their creation to their eventual archival or disposal, so the required information is available for the right person at the right time to address their needs.

Records of communication processes can be stored using print-based or electronic files. The type of storage method used will depend on several factors.

Appropriate storage methods	
Purpose of the record	What is it being kept for and who needs to use it?
Nature of the record	Does the record contain sensitive or confidential information that needs to be stored securely?
How often the record is used	Is the information needed daily, weekly, monthly or yearly?

Appropriate storage methods	
Storage methods available	Does the workplace have space for paper-based files, or are electronic files more appropriate?
Retention needs	Does the record need to be kept for a specific length of time due to legal or organisational requirements?

Most organisations now prefer to maintain digital records of communication. These records are more accessible. They can be shared in digital folders all in one location. This is a preferable system to keeping paper records in multiple locations in a workplace. Digital records, if properly backed up, are less prone to being lost or damaged. Also, digital records do not contribute to the sense of physical clutter in the workplace. They can be updated as required and shared immediately without needing to be physically transported.

When storing digital records, ensure only those who are required to access them can do so. You may need to speak to your information technology (IT) manager to set this up. Use shared folders on a business network drive for those who need access. Name your files accurately and use different folder names to differentiate file types.

Relevant legislation and organisational policies

Comply with protocols when recording and retaining records of workplace communication.

Communication policies must comply with relevant legislation. For example, the *Privacy Act 2014* (Cth) states that the personal information of employees must only be disclosed for business or taxation purposes. Key communication records – such as incident reports, risk assessments and safety audits – must be retained to comply with the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Cth). All communication must comply with the requirements of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth); communication that discriminates on the basis of racial or cultural background is in violation of the Act. The *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) includes anti-bullying provisions that must be complied with.

Most organisations have policies and procedures that relate to the production and storage of all communication records. These provide guidance on what information to record, when to record it and how to record and store it. Because organisations keep different records in a variety of ways, policies will be unique to each organisation.

Always follow your organisation's records management policy or procedure to ensure the consistency, quality and usefulness of the communication records kept. These policies and procedures can also be used to contest any allegations of legal or regulatory infringements, as they can provide proof of intent. They also help to make the records easy to retrieve by the appropriate person, and can instil a sense of confidence in the team, as they feel assured information about them remains secure and confidential.

Below are some examples of policies you may need to monitor when recording and storing key communication records.

Examples of records management policies
• Staff must create records of all decisions and actions taken in the course of their official business duties.
• Use organisational templates for letters, emails, reports and proposals.
• Store formal records electronically using the file naming convention in the organisation's style guide.
• Include a reference file number in all outgoing communication as prompted in the template.
• Store hard-copy records with access restrictions as outlined in records management procedures.
• Record and update the location of each record with every movement of the record.
• Store files in the appropriate shared drive folder, and review for deletion or retention after a specified amount of time.
• Provide a list of staff with access to shared drives to the human resources (HR) manager.

Example

Maintain records of communication processes and outcomes

Jeff holds team meetings on the first Wednesday of each month. Each person in his team takes turns chairing the meeting and taking the minutes. Jeff provides training for all team members on minute taking. He provides the following template that meets the requirements of the organisation's records management policies and procedures.

Minutes of team meeting held on:
Meeting location:
Chairperson:
Minute taker:
Present:
Apologies:
Meeting focus areas:
Key points:
Action required:
Who by?
Associated time line:
Any other business?

All team members know that minutes need to be emailed to the team by 5pm the day after the meeting. A hard copy needs to be placed in the team meeting folder and an electronic copy filed on the intranet in a folder titled 'Team Meeting Minutes'. These minutes provide an effective written record of team activities, achievements, issues and concerns. They are often referred to when planning new projects.

Practice Task 9

Question 1

Which of the following types of communication process records are covered by organisational policies and procedures for records management? Tick all that apply.

○ Grievance sessions and results records

○ Meeting minutes

○ Recruitment process and results records

○ Audio recordings of employee telephone conversations

Question 2

List three actions to maintain the security and confidentiality of communication records.

Question 3

During a team meeting, the team leader congratulates the team for achieving a monthly sales target. Should this communication be recorded? Why or why not?

3B Identify and communicate follow-up actions

An effective team leader needs to resolve all communication issues.

Follow-up actions refer to the sequence of steps that need to be taken, or the tasks that must be completed, for an activity to succeed. After an initial communication, follow-up actions describe what is to be done, who will do it and by when. Follow-up actions are often required to achieve a designated outcome.

The sender of the message is responsible for seeing the communication process through to the end. This includes identifying the required follow-up actions and communicating them to relevant people.

As a team leader, you will be expected to perform most or all of the follow-ups required to support the communication of your work team. This will place demands on your capacity to communicate accurately and organise documents. Depending on the types of follow-ups, you may have to set up separate meetings or speak to other managers.

To effectively follow up and resolve issues, you should consider:

- the reasons to follow up with others
- identifying issues to follow up
- following up from meetings
- the relevant people you may need to follow up with
- using email to follow up
- the importance of timely follow-up.

Reasons to follow up with others

Following up will help resolve ongoing issues and make operations more efficient.

Communication in modern workplaces is constantly increasing. Work hours are extending as customers demand more and more service from team members. The need to develop new skills has increased the number of tasks we have to complete and coordinate. And digital communication means we are all contactable at most times.

As a result, the increased volume of communication at work means that team leaders will have more to follow up. There are many tasks or issues at work that cannot be resolved via a solitary email, conversation or telephone call. Some issues will require monitoring and multiple follow-ups with numerous team members. An effective manager is willing to thoroughly follow up issues to ensure they are resolved.

Below are some examples of reasons you should follow up on unresolved tasks and issues.

Purposes of following up
• Many workplace tasks are completed over long periods of time.
• You may be leading a team of staff who are highly inexperienced and require extensive follow-up to check for understanding.
• Team members can be preoccupied with other tasks; they may have forgotten your instructions, and a follow-up can remind them.
• Follow-ups open communication between yourself and your staff and can lead to productive conversations about work.
• Many customers request follow-up information.
• It helps clarify important information for others.
• It can lead to tasks being completed more efficiently.
• Following up can help your organisation meet compliance standards.
• Your organisation may have specific protocols about how and when follow-ups should occur.

Identify issues that require follow-up

Team leaders will need to follow up with team members in a variety of ways.

Follow-up actions are those tasks that arise out of the communication process. The specific follow-ups you perform will depend on the needs of the organisation you work at. Below are some examples of different communication situations and the follow-up actions that may result.

Team meetings	Actions required as a result of group discussion on flexible working hours during a team meeting. **Example:** 'Joe will survey staff and collate information before the next meeting' is written in the meeting minutes.
Requests from others	Actions required as a result of requests from customers, team members, senior managers and external organisations such as banks, government departments and professional networks. **Example:** A customer requests information on the new product range from the sales representative, who then puts time aside in his diary to source the information and send it to the customer the following day.

Performance reviews	Actions required as a result of completing a performance review.
	Example:
	A manager agrees to a team member attending a training program on project management within the next three months. The manager adds the task of researching suitable programs to his monthly planner and sets a reminder in his electronic calendar to get back to the team member within a month.
WHS meetings	Actions required as a result of completing a safety audit.
	Example:
	WHS representatives for each work group are asked to conduct a training needs analysis for their team in the areas of first aid and manual handling before the next meeting. The representatives set another meeting for the following week to devise the strategies they are going to use to complete the task on time and develop their own action plans.
Change management	Actions required after the implementation of a change initiative.
	Example:
	A team leader communicates proposed changes to records management that have come from senior managers. The team leader follows up the initial information session with an email the following day to ask each team member how they feel about the changes and to provide them with the opportunity to express any concerns.

Communicate follow-up actions from meetings

Meetings result in numerous instructions that will require later follow-up.

Follow-up actions often result from meetings. Everyone involved needs to respect and observe the actions requested, and the deadlines set, in order to achieve the required results. All meeting documents – including agendas, minutes and supporting documents – should be stored together for future reference.

Follow-up actions can be documented in meeting minutes. They may involve a range of tasks, such as gathering further information, sending information to specific people, arranging further meetings, collecting quotes or preparing reports.

Most templates for recording minutes include a heading for items to be followed up later. This section may be called 'actionable items', 'unresolved issues' or something similar. It will usually identify who is responsible for following up each item and outline an expected time line to follow it up.

Ensure the minutes are produced and distributed to all attendees by the next day. Clearly identify who is responsible for each action, as well as the deadline for completing the actions.

Check to ensure actions are taking place as agreed. This could mean checking progress between meetings by sending an email or making a telephone call to individuals who agreed to take follow-up actions.

Most meetings include a section where the follow-ups from the previous meeting are discussed and updates are provided. Ensure you record details of the follow-ups so you can present them to colleagues at the next meeting.

Meeting follow-up checklist
▪ Use a meeting minutes template that clearly labels required follow-ups.
▪ When running a meeting, set time aside to discuss the required follow-ups from the previous meeting. Seek updates and results of the follow-ups, as well as any further action that is required.
▪ Ensure the meeting minutes are distributed to all relevant personnel via email.
▪ Clearly identify which team member is responsible for each issue that requires follow-up.
▪ Seek confirmation from staff in attendance that they understand which issues are to be followed up.

Communicate follow-up actions to relevant people

Team leaders may need to communicate follow-up actions to a variety of people.

Most formal workplace communication results in follow-up actions being taken. Always follow up any communication you have made to ensure the process is finalised and outcomes are achieved. Identify people you need to contact; this may be to gather further information from them or to provide them with documentation such as results, minutes or reports.

Part of your responsibility and accountability as a team leader may be to inform others of the follow-up actions they need to take, and then to monitor them to make sure the actions happen. In your role as team leader you may be required to follow up with a variety of people.

People you may have to follow up with:
▪ Members of your work team
▪ Other department managers
▪ Customers
▪ Suppliers of products or services your organisation needs
▪ External contractors such as plumbers and electricians
▪ Company directors
▪ Government employees regarding compliance issues

Communicate follow-up actions using email

This form of digital communication is an efficient and formal method of following up important issues.

Email is a convenient way to communicate. Messages move quickly, and information can be readily shared in the body of the email or through attachments. Emails are also easily archived and searched. They can be sent to multiple people and groups for use as a collaboration or project management tool. Emails maintain a record of communication for future reference. Follow-up action can be documented.

Written text can sound harsher than the spoken word. You should not write an email when you are upset; you may later regret it and there is no way to take it back.

Here are some guidelines for preparing emails that clearly identify follow-up actions.

Write a good subject line	Think of your subject line as the summary of your email; add as much context as possible. For example, instead of writing 'Meeting Notes' in the subject line, write something more descriptive like 'Meeting Notes from strategic planning meeting 10 August'. Alternatively, you could use categories; for example, a subject line like 'Action: Complete survey by Wednesday' alerts the reader that there is an action associated with the email.
Highlight actions	Clearly articulate follow-up actions. If actions are hidden in text, they may be missed. Clearly identify all action items by noting who is responsible and include a deadline. You could put this information in a table in the body of your email. Anyone who has an action item assigned to them should be added to the 'To' field on your email. Do not include individuals who are not involved in the message.
Be brief	Be brief and to the point. Read through your email before you send it and ask yourself: 'Is there any way I could make it shorter?'. In some cases, you may want to attach a document to the email that provides more details.
Divide into sections	If there are multiple parts to the email, divide it into sections. You could use the ABC approach: • Action summary – a brief summary of what you expect the reader to do based on the email • Background – this is the body of your email; use dot points or numbers to focus on key points • Close – this is where you can add incidental notes and highlight next steps
Consider timing	Consider timing when sending emails. For example, important emails sent on a Friday afternoon may be missed by the receiver on Monday morning. Call-to-action emails are best sent earlier in the week and early in the day. Add an automatic reply if you are unable to respond in a reasonable time frame. This enables the sender to contact someone else if they need a quicker response to keep the flow of work going.

Importance of timely follow-up

Complete follow-up as soon as possible so operations remain efficient.

Timely follow-up helps detect any problems early and ensures time lines are met. It reduces the likelihood and consequences of something going wrong, as it allows time to solve issues or adjust plans. It is a proactive way to ensure goals are met and objectives achieved.

Timely follow-up means you know where each person is up to in their assigned tasks and where to put extra resources if required. An effective workplace leader takes responsibility for tracking the progress of any assigned task. Never assume a follow-up will be completed just because you have provided instructions. Be proactive in monitoring a task to ensure it has been suitably followed up.

Use a range of strategies to track tasks and plan for timely follow-up.

Use a journal or diary	Set a reminder in your calendar, diary or other planning tool so you will not forget to follow up. Note the date and name of the person responsible for the task, the specific actions they must take and the date/s for completion.
Use email folders	Create a folder called 'Work in Progress'. Put a copy of the email that covers the task in the folder. Set reminders to follow up before the due date. You can then forward the original message as a reminder and ask for a progress report. When the task is completed, you can delete it from the folder.
Organise progress meetings	Organise brief progress meetings on a regular basis, either daily or weekly, for people to report on where they are up to. Use the information from these meetings for any re-planning and adjustments. Keep those who need to know informed of any changes to the original task or time line.
Provide sufficient time	Give people an appropriate amount of time to respond to the follow-up action. Some actions may be immediate, but some may take time and effort to complete.
Utilise digital technology	Smartphones have a range of diary functions, such as digital notepads and alarms, that allow you to monitor required follow-ups. Use them, as well as chat applications (apps), to stay updated on the progress of follow-up requirements.

Example

Communicate follow-up actions to relevant people

Rali organises a lunch meeting with his team. He discusses some improvements his team needs to make in order to build their customer base. Rali explains some strategies he believes will allow the business to identify and appeal to new customers. He outlines each strategy, who is responsible for completing it and expected due dates.

The meeting takes place at a local restaurant. It is noisy and there are some distractions. Rali wants to make sure that each staff member is aware of what they need to follow up. When he gets back to his office, he sends the following email.

From: rali@energyplus.com

To: linda@energyplus.com; rebecka@energyplus.com; john@energyplus.com

Subject: Actions: Team meeting 5 November

Good afternoon,

Thanks for the productive lunch meeting. Here are the follow-up actions we agreed on.

Action	Owner	Due date
Prepare sales presentation for customer meeting on 17 November	Linda	15 Nov
Investigate options for video streaming	John	10 Nov
Finalise customer case study	Rebecka	15 Nov
Identify five potential new customers	Rali	7 Nov
Send invitations to customers	Rali	12 Nov

Yours sincerely,

Rali Thirthica

Team Leader Customer Service

Practice Task 10

Read the case study then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Stephanie is team leader of a customer service department for an electrical wholesaler. She holds a team meeting on 2 July to discuss an increase in customer complaints being received about incorrect accounts. The team discusses the problem and decides that they need to investigate further.

- Jillian suggests it would be a good idea to review accounts for the last three months to analyse the types of errors. Stephanie asks Jillian to contact the accounts department and request the information.
- Tim suggests reviewing the workplace procedures they follow related to data entry and accounts. Stephanie asks Tim to investigate and get back to her with any suggestions.
- Dwayne talks about checking with the sales team to get an idea of how they record sales information from clients, and Stephanie asks him to action this.

Stephanie advises the team that she must report to senior managers on 14 July and provide recommendations for improvement. She asks all team members to report their findings and ideas by 10 July so she can review all collected information in time.
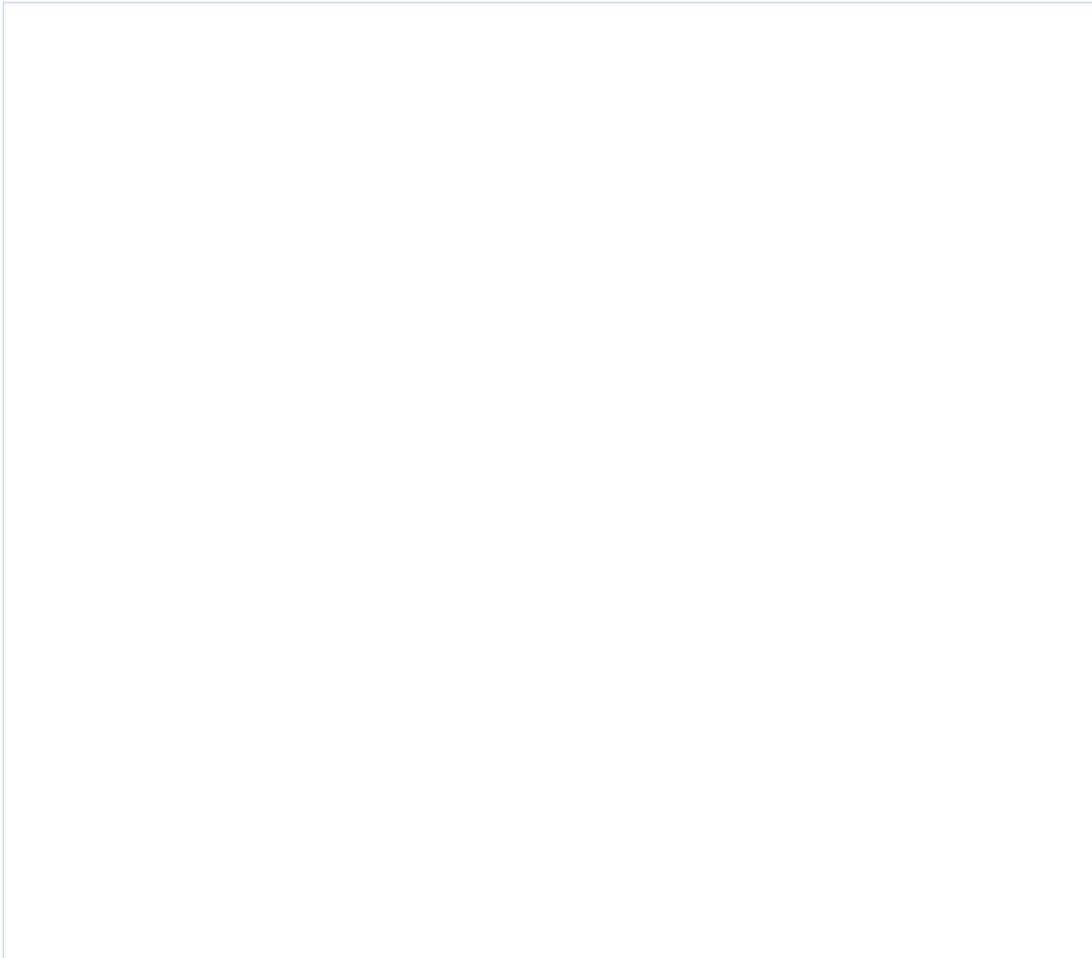
Question 1

List the follow-up actions Stephanie needs to identify, and explain whom she needs to communicate to.

Question 2

Explain Stephanie's communication responsibilities applicable to her team leader role in this situation.

3C Seek feedback about communication processes

Successful workplace leaders know the importance of reviewing their communication in order to improve it.

Feedback is used to both monitor and assess the communication processes we use in the workplace. Objective feedback is not biased, nor is it changed according to personal views, value judgments or personality-related factors. Objective feedback tells you what you have done well and where you can improve your performance.

To reflect on the way you communicate, it is important to include all parties and consider their views when identifying areas for improvement. Feedback provides useful data and information on the effectiveness of any communication.

Asking for feedback on your communication sets a good example for your team. It shows them that you are accountable for your communication and genuinely interested in their views. Gathering feedback from all parties gives you a range of perspectives to draw conclusions from. You can learn more about how others see things and use this information to tailor future messages.

Being proactive means taking charge of your communication and not leaving it to chance. This process increases your self-awareness. It helps with future decision making and improves your communication skills.

Purposes of gathering feedback

Use feedback to assess and improve workplace communication processes.

Feedback provides you with an accurate assessment of how well you are communicating in your role, and the communication standards reached by your work team. You might receive feedback from colleagues throughout the day as you work on various tasks. For example, someone might express gratitude for your clear communication, such as: 'I really appreciate you emailing me summaries of the tasks I need to complete. It helps me work more efficiently because I have a guide I can refer back to'. This helps you monitor your communication performance as you go.

Feedback of this type reinforces your confidence in your communication skills; however, more specific or formal feedback will help you assess your overall performance and indicate areas of improvement to focus on.

At the end of your work year, you will be given a performance review. This is a formal process that provides an assessment of how you have performed according to the communication expectations of your role.

If no feedback is offered, ask for it. Feedback designed to monitor performance and assess performance are both useful if you use them effectively to improve future performance.

Below are some purposes for gathering useful feedback about communication processes.

Purposes for gathering feedback
- It is a leadership responsibility to seek feedback about communication processes.   - Gather feedback to find out whether your communication has been understood by members of your work team.   - Seek feedback to open the channels for two-way communication.   - Open and productive feedback can result in effective collaboration.   - Feedback allows you to identify and review areas of weakness in communication processes.   - Feedback affirms effective communication processes.   - Use feedback to assess specific team members' or departments' contributions to organisational communication processes.

Use different feedback methods

Utilise a wide variety of feedback methods to assess communication processes.

There is no single method of feedback that is applicable to all situations. Use formal and informal methods to gather feedback from a wide variety of sources.

After gathering multiple sources of feedback using various methods, analyse them as a whole to obtain accurate insights into communication processes. Below are some methods you can use.

Ask questions	Asking questions is a useful informal tool for obtaining feedback. Focus your questions on how well you are communicating and any areas where you could improve. Either plan the questions you want to ask, or allow them to come up in the moment as you perform a work task. Planned questions are usually worded better to get the most useful feedback, but spontaneous questions are suitable when unusual occurrences happen in our workday. You can provide prompts; for example, you might post copies of proposed work procedures on the intranet and ask for comments.
Conduct performance interviews	Performance reviews involve a team leader/manager sitting down and talking to an employee about communication processes over the last few months. Such assessments are usually conducted at six-monthly or yearly intervals. These interviews should be two-way conversations between team leader and team member. Communication performance can be assessed, and suggestions debated about how to improve. Exit interviews can also be conducted with team members leaving the organisation to ascertain their opinion of communication processes.

Use surveys and questionnaires	Various digital tools allow you to design online surveys that gather opinions from team members about the communication processes at your workplace. Microsoft Teams and SurveyMonkey are examples of software that enable you to send questions, collate answers and analyse responses to improve communication processes.
Observe	Ask a colleague to observe you when you deliver presentations, run meetings or conduct performance reviews or exit interviews. They can summarise your tone of voice, body gestures and the clarity of information you provided.
Conduct focus groups	Focus groups are large group meetings where you probe people's opinions about how your workplace communication operates. Focus group participants could be team members or customers; if they have some experience with your communication, they can provide adequate feedback.

Seek feedback from relevant personnel

Seek feedback from all parties, focusing on those who have a good working knowledge of your communication processes.

Not all feedback is equally valuable. Some colleagues in your organisation may not have a working knowledge of your communication processes – they may work in a different department or have minimal contact with you during the workday. Feedback from these people may be useful; however, it may also be misinformed. They may provide feedback about an aspect of your performance without realising it is not your responsibility. For example, they may claim you never circulate meeting minutes despite it being a different team member's responsibility.

Identify those personnel who are directly impacted by your communication processes, and those who have knowledge of what standards you are expected to reach.

Relevant personnel to seek feedback from
Your manager/supervisor. They establish your leadership responsibilities and the communication standard you are expected to reach. They are tasked to review your performance in this area so their feedback is valuable.   **Other department managers.** You are likely to communicate with another department in the business. For example, you may work as customer service team leader, but must collect customer information for the finance department. You should seek feedback from them about your communication processes.   **Your team members:** You work with other members of your team daily, and they are in an informed position to provide useful feedback. Much of your communication will be directed to them, and they can assess how clear you are, your timeliness and your willingness to engage in two-way communication.   **Customers:** They may not know exactly what your communication standards are but have a general idea of customer service principles. They can provide constructive feedback about the accuracy of information, timeliness in responding to questions, and how both you and your team manage complaints.

Base the feedback methods you use on which personnel you decide to seek feedback from. For example, it is unlikely that customers will be willing to be part of a lengthy interview about communication processes. Instead, many businesses provide customers with digital links where they can complete a survey if they choose. A focus group is a suitable method to gather feedback if you lead a large work team.

Communicate appropriately when gathering feedback

Use appropriate speaking and listening techniques when gathering feedback from relevant personnel.

The feedback process rests on communication: clear, direct discussion will produce constructive and accurate feedback. Using effective listening and speaking techniques will help you contribute to a feedback process that is valuable for improving not only your own, but also the organisation's, communication performance.

As team leader, it is important to model effective communication techniques. You will be expected to consistently use core communication techniques, such as those in the table below.

Use active listening	Make an effort to understand what the speaker is saying. Ask clarifying questions and confirm your understanding.
Use engaged body language	Maintain eye contact with the speaker and do not allow yourself to be distracted. Face them and do not use distracting gestures. If possible, use a quiet room free of distractions.

Speak to your audience	Use terms and language your audience will understand. Only use technical jargon about your job role with those who are likely to understand, such as your manager.
Use written cues	When you need to provide formal verbal feedback, write down some key points so you do not forget them. Also write down key areas of your communication processes you would like feedback on.

When participating in the feedback process, use these speaking and listening techniques, as well as the following key communication principles:

- Be constructive: All communication you participate in should be designed to support the feedback process. Your contributions must support yourself and others wanting to improve workplace performance.
- Be respectful: Use language that is inclusive and non-discriminatory. Avoid using slang and be mindful of reacting emotionally to constructive feedback.

How to interpret feedback

Once feedback has been gathered, determine what conclusions you can make about the quality of your communication processes.

Businesses have recognised how useful feedback is – it helps individual employees and the organisation to improve their communication processes. Because gathering feedback is an ongoing process, there will be a large amount of information to sift through to make accurate conclusions. Some team leaders may claim they have too much feedback to make any real use of it.

Below are some guidelines to use when analysing feedback.

1. Categorise feedback

Separate feedback into categories. This helps make the feedback more specific. For example, you should put feedback about your verbal communication skills and your written communication skills in different categories.

2. Use positive and negative feedback

Both are useful. Feedback is not just a code word for criticism; positive feedback should be used to continue and refine existing strong performance.

3. Look for trends

Trends are observations about communication processes that arise commonly in feedback. For instance, feedback may indicate your communication is clearer during quieter periods of the day compared to when customer volume is highest. This may happen as a one-off event, but if the feedback indicates it happens regularly over months, then it is a trend.

4. Compare related information

To properly analyse feedback, compare similar information. For example, you may want to gather all the feedback about your use of digital technology to communicate, or how informative and engaging your meetings are.

5. Record data

Record the data you gather in a document. Analysing from memory will lead to errors. An example of data you can record is ratings of your communication clarity gathered via online surveys.

Example

Gather feedback about communication processes

Isaac is a team leader who wants to gather feedback about how he is managing communication among his team. He has recently received a few customer complaints and is questioning how clear his communication has been.

Prior to discussing these issues with team members in personal conversations, Isaac designs a survey. He wants to gather some feedback that is presented in a formal manner as it can provide some objectivity. Below is an example of the document Isaac asks all team members to complete.

My comments:

Team, in order to improve our communication, you are required to complete this survey about the communication processes of our work team. Please answer honestly and return this survey to my office.

Communication skills	Strongly disagree	Partially disagree	Partially agree	Strongly agree
Meetings are engaging and informative				
I have a clear understanding of my role at all times				
My team leader always responds to my questions in a timely manner				
All communication from our team is respectful and positive				
My team leader speaks to me positively and respectfully				
I have the opportunity to provide suggestions to improve the work team				
I have been trained to use the email system and staff intranet				

Practice Task 11

Question 1

Which of the following statements relate to methods for seeking feedback on communication processes? Tick all that apply.

◯ Post draft copies of procedures or guidelines for completing tasks on the intranet and ask for comments

◯ Conduct one-on-one interviews with team members to discuss your communication style

◯ Ask a peer to observe you making a presentation and then to email you key ideas from the presentation

◯ Review exit interviews to pick up any patterns that link communication to reasons for leaving

Question 2

Which of the following statements are correct? Select yes or no for each one.

a) Seeking feedback on communication processes from all parties is a team leader's communication responsibility. » Yes   » No

b) Not everyone can provide specific feedback. » Yes   » No

c) Specific questions are unnecessary when seeking feedback. » Yes   » No

d) Observation is an effective feedback method in communication. » Yes   » No

e) Supervisor feedback is more important than feedback from peers or colleagues. » Yes   » No

Question 3

How can feedback on communication be used to improve team collaboration?

3D Opportunities to improve leadership communication processes

Identify improvement opportunities that will facilitate more effective communication processes.

Effective leaders take responsibility for improving their communication. If there is a communication breakdown, they reflect on how they planned the communication, how much they knew about the audience and their choice of communication channel – then follow up to see if there is any area they can improve on. If the communication process was successful, they identify what helped to make it so and ensure they transfer this to similar communication situations.

There are many reasons to identify areas of improvement and implement strategies to improve communication processes:

- The impact on operations will be positive.
- Tasks will be completed more efficiently and to a better standard.
- Compliance requirements will be met more reliably.
- The organisation's image will improve among customers and suppliers.
- Team morale will improve as members have clearer understandings of their role and will be spoken to respectfully.

To improve your communication processes, you should consider:

- specific improvement strategies
- incorporating improvement strategies into existing operations
- using digital technology to improve your communication.

Identify opportunities to improve communication processes

Utilise a range of opportunities to fix the weaknesses in your communication strategies.

Continuous improvement is an approach that systematically seeks to achieve small incremental changes in processes to improve results. Familiarise yourself with a range of methods to identify and incorporate opportunities to improve leadership communication processes.

Below are some examples of opportunities you can utilise to improve communication strategies.

Communication log	• Keep a record of your communication over a set period of time. Document the different communication situations you find yourself in, including: date; purpose; channel; receiver; whether it was effective (why or why not).
	• After the set time period is over, analyse the data you have collected and use it to identify areas for improvement. Then ask yourself how you are going to improve and write an action plan. Implement the plan and review the results when you have completed it.
After-action review	• This is a structured review process for analysing what happened, why it happened and how it could be done better. You can complete an after-action review (AAR) by asking either yourself or your team the following questions after the completion of a project or the implementation of a communication plan:
	– What was supposed to happen?
	– What did happen?
	– Why did that happen?
	– What are the lessons learnt?
	• This debriefing procedure can lead to identification of areas to improve and communication process changes to implement.
360-degree feedback	• 360-degree feedback is a process by which team leaders receive confidential, anonymous feedback from a range of people who work with them. This usually includes a line manager, team members and peers.
	• Those providing the feedback respond to questions that are measured on a rating scale and also provide written comments. The data is collated and organised to show strengths and weaknesses.
	• This process can provide team leaders with an insight into how others perceive their communication processes, as well as an opportunity to develop skills that will improve their performance.
Mentoring	• Mentoring is a relationship between two people. The mentor passes on valuable skills, knowledge and insights to another person to help them develop as a leader. You can use a mentoring relationship to improve specific leadership communication processes; for example, you may ask a mentor to help you improve your presentation skills.
Training	• Formal training is structured and provided by your organisation or an external provider. Some training leads to nationally recognised qualifications or statements of attainment. For example, if you identify that you need to improve your business writing skills, you may decide to find a suitable formal program you can attend to learn the skills required to present professional business documents.

Journal writing	• At the end of each day, set aside 15 minutes to reflect on the leadership communication processes you have used. Identify communication barriers you encountered, reflect on what led to the barriers and ask yourself if you could have done anything to prevent or minimise them. As a result of this reflection, decide on action you can take in the future. These notes will become a valuable resource for the continuous improvement of your leadership communication processes.

Incorporate improvement strategies into existing communication processes

The strategies you use should make communication processes more effective.

Effective leaders are aware of the steps that make up the communication process and commit the appropriate time and effort to get it right. Improvement strategies should seek to make leaders' communication clear, concise, accurate and courteous.

Communication improvement processes should result in:
• team members aligning themselves with the organisation's vision and values • efficient meetings being run and results being achieved • engaged staff who feel connected to their team and organisation • high-performing teams that work collaboratively to achieve team goals • low staff turnover because people have high levels of job satisfaction.

Avoid radically changing business processes to incorporate communication improvements; these changes may create more problems than can be foreseen. Incorporate improvement strategies in communication processes in consultation with other managers. Ensure they comply with organisational policies and procedures. Also, senior managers can guide and assist you in incorporating these strategies.

Below are factors you should consider when incorporating improvement strategies.

Incorporating improvement strategies
• Base improvement strategies on the information you gathered from feedback. • Ensure the improvement strategies meet the communication needs of your audience. • Design a communication plan based on the organisation's goals and business strategies. • Seek regular and ongoing feedback about the strategies you implement from relevant personnel. • Be willing to analyse your own role in the improvement strategies in your personal reviews. • Ensure all team members are made aware of any changes: inform them via a meeting and update any documents. • Provide training as required in how to use any new media or formats when communicating.

Use digital technology in your improvement strategies

Technological devices and software can dramatically improve communication processes.

Team leaders should utilise the many advantages of digital technology when incorporating improvement strategies in communication processes. Modern customers, suppliers and applicants all expect that communication will be improved using software and technological devices. You can use a range of digital technologies to both improve communication processes and notify others of improvements.

As a team leader, you may want to advance your career in coming years. These digital technologies are likely to become more entrenched in business operations. Knowing how to use them to improve your communication processes is an attractive skill to add to your managerial repertoire.

Below are examples of digital technologies that can help improve your communication processes.

Shared folders

Details of improvement strategies can be uploaded to shared folders on the organisational intranet so team members can access them.

Email

Documents that outline communication improvements can be sent as email attachments to relevant staff. You can also email these documents to a manager for their review.

Teleconferencing

Teleconferencing can be used to streamline meeting procedures or gather feedback from team members at different worksites about how to improve your communication processes.

Social media

Social media sites such as Facebook or LinkedIn can be used to research improvement strategies. Both platforms provide valuable information and case studies which you can adapt to your organisation.

Software apps

Software apps such as group chats and digital calendars can support you in implementing improvement strategies. For instance, if you identify the need to communicate in real time more often, digital chat apps can help you achieve this.

Documents/spreadsheets

Digital documents and spreadsheets allow you to show your improvement plans to relevant team members. For example, feedback about your communication may identify lack of documentation of key information as a weakness. Providing documents that include this information can support your communication.

Practice Task 12

Read the case study then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Jayden is a new team leader in a busy retail organisation. Recently, his team expressed dissatisfaction that they were not informed of operational changes that impacted their performance targets. As a result of that communication, Jayden decided to put more effort into keeping the team informed. He has recently started a mentoring program, with experienced regional manager Peter as his mentor.

Jayden and Peter get together for their second meeting. Jayden shares with Peter his ideas for keeping the team informed. He tells Peter that he believes all his team members need to be informed of all organisational issues to avoid a breakdown in communication. He always passes on emails from his supervisor and other departments. In the subject line Jayden notes 'For your information', but he does not include his comments, explanations or follow-up actions.

Peter asks Jayden, 'How do you think your team feels about receiving lots of emails with information that does not concern them directly?'.

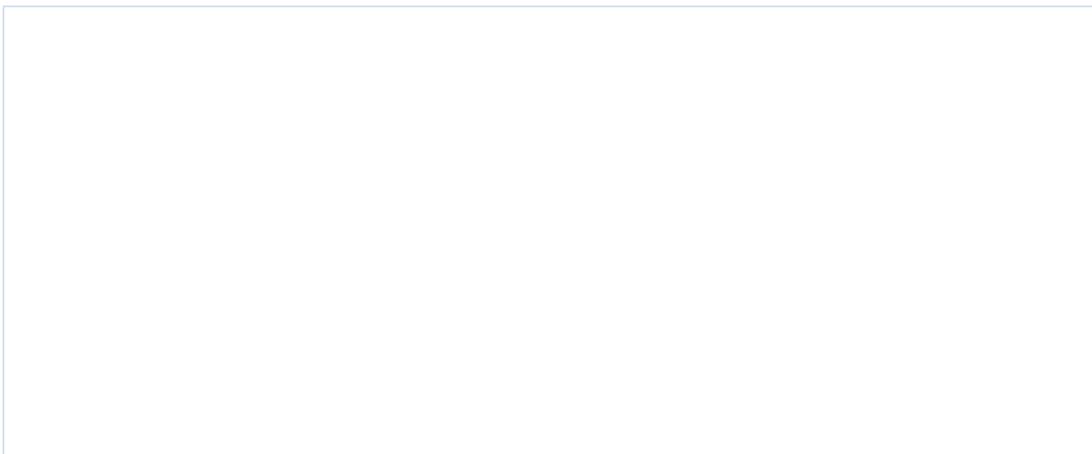'I don't know,' replies Jayden. 'Maybe I need to ask them.'

Question 1

List three actions that Jayden could take to improve his leadership communication processes.

Question 2

Identify a specific opportunity Jayden can utilise to improve his leadership communication process with his team.

Summary

- Records of communication processes and outcomes provide a reference point to go back to when you take follow-up action.
- Follow organisational policies and procedures to ensure consistency, quality and usefulness of communication records.
- The sender of the message is responsible for seeing the communication process through to the end, including managing all follow-up actions.
- Communication plans provide a visual representation of the complete communication process and help to identify follow-up actions.
- Team leaders are responsible for communicating follow-up actions to relevant people in an appropriate way.
- Systematically identify and act on any opportunities to improve leadership communication processes.
- Document all key communications to provide a reference for other team members.
- Store documents digitally and with appropriate labels for efficient retrieval.
- Improvement strategies for communication processes should fit with existing organisational processes.
- Gather feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of existing communication from relevant personnel.

Learning Checkpoint 3
Review communication

Part A

1. Identify three reasons why it is important to maintain records of the communication process and outcomes according to organisational policies.

2. Identify the purpose of each of the three records listed and the relevant legislation that impact this type of workplace communication. Write in your answers in the table below.

Record of communication process	Purpose	Relevant legislation
Hazard forms completed during a safety inspection by all team members		
Minutes from a meeting to deal with a formal grievance involving racial abuse		
Anecdotal records kept by a team leader about workplace incidents involving specific team members		

3. Identify three ways that establishing effective communication processes in a team helps to ensure follow-up action is completed in a timely manner.

4. Identify two methods that can be used to identify opportunities to improve leadership communication processes.

Part B

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

Case study

Steve, the team leader, is having a busy week. He has had numerous informal discussions with team members about their project tasks, and he wonders what they have implemented during the last couple of weeks.

In their catch ups, Mark mentioned he wanted to do an advanced computer course next month. Steve thought this would be great and could be organised, so he asked Mark to find out more about the time and cost of the training from the Learning & Development team manager.

Jill is concerned about the time frame for the new product launch. She asks to organise a review meeting to go over the time line that Steve has agreed to. Peter overhears the discussion and asks if he can attend the meeting, as he has similar concerns. Steve agrees only forgets to mention that to his admin assistant John who prepared meeting agendas.

Sarah and Bill have new ideas on how to increase sales. They want this to do a presentation to the team to get their feedback, so they ask Steve when he would be available to attend. Steve needs to check his calendar and respond with the date.

Steve struggles to remember everything and he feels under too much stress to respond to and action all requests. The team is enthusiastic about their project; however, they are anxious they are not moving forward due to delay in actions that they discussed with Steve.

1. Identify the outcomes of Steve's previous communication with his team members and follow up actions that are required.
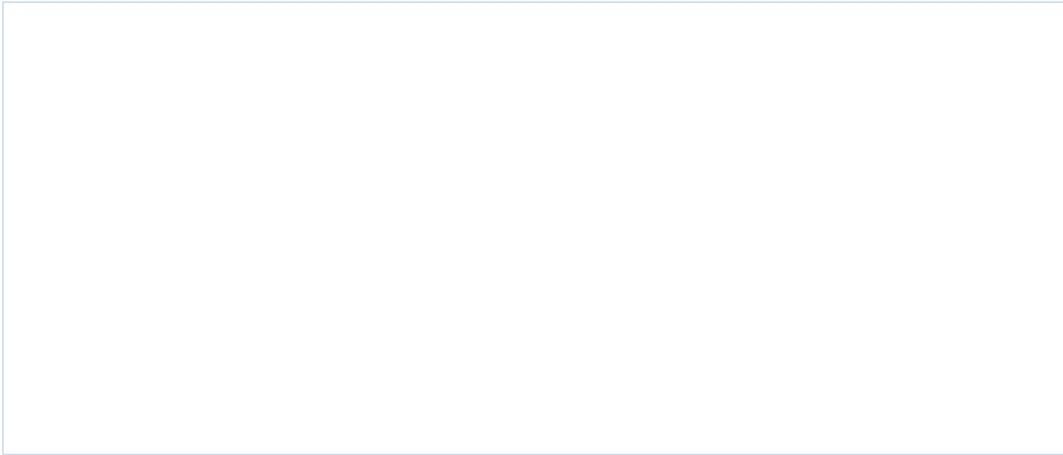
2. What communication leadership approach could Steve take to manage communications processes more effectively? Suggest two options of what Steve could do.
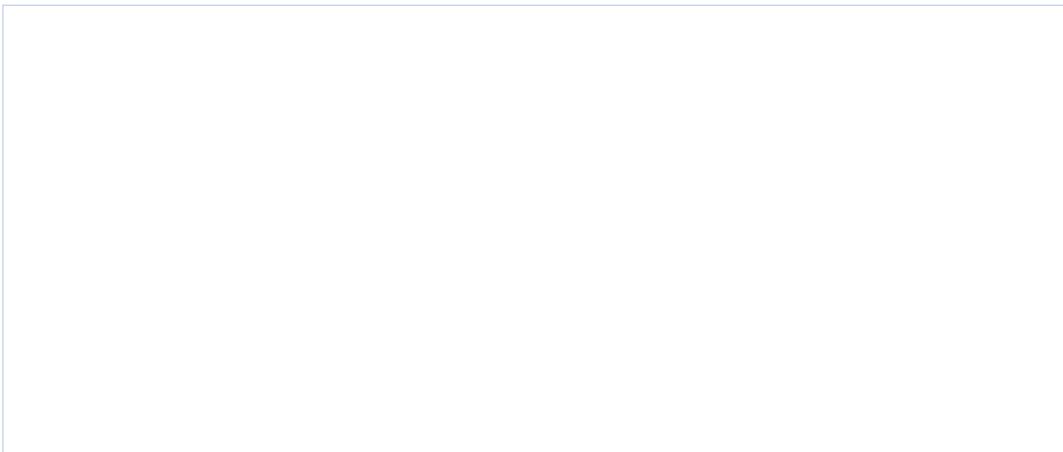
3. How can Steve seek feedback and from whom?

4. Give two examples how Steve could improve his communication with the team