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Privacy

Privacy Act 1988

If your organisation collects information about customers or clients, its operations come under the auspices of this Act. The Act deems personal information about individuals to be sensitive, such as information about:

- criminal record
- health
- membership of a professional or trade association
- membership of a trade union
- political affiliation or opinion
- racial or ethnic origin
- religious affiliation or belief
- sexual orientation or practices.

This information about a person could be used by others to discriminate against them or to identify them. Your organisation should inform you of your responsibilities regarding your customers' privacy. It should also inform you of its responsibilities with regard to your privacy. It is always advisable to consider any information provided to you about any individual confidential.

People generally have a right to see and correct, if necessary, files of personal information kept about them by organisations. Individuals are usually only denied access to files about them if their own or another person's safety is at risk, or if there are other legalities involved.

State and territory anti-discrimination legislation

Anti-discrimination legislation varies between states and territories.

The agencies that deal with anti-discrimination legislation in Australian states and territories are provided below.

State/territory	Agency
Australian Capital Territory	Human Rights Commission
New South Wales	Anti-Discrimination Board of New South Wales
Northern Territory	Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commission
Queensland	Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland
South Australia	Equal Opportunity Commission
Tasmania	Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner
Victoria	Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
Western Australia	Equal Opportunity Commission

Identify external information sources

Some ideas for identifying external information sources are outlined below.

Types of information

Managers need to keep themselves informed of external issues and developments that affect decision-making and work performance.

Information you may need to source externally includes:

- industry-related data and market intelligence
- legislative and regulatory changes that impact on organisational policy and procedures
- work health and safety requirements
- developments in equipment and technology
- news items, feature articles and general information relevant to the organisation's operations.

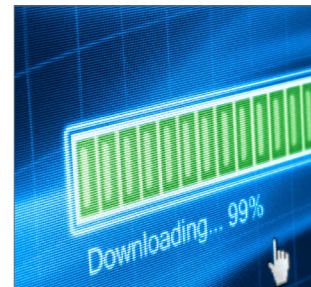
Sources of information

Sources of external information include:

- government departments and agencies
- industry or professional associations, unions and employer bodies
- public libraries
- literature available from customers, suppliers, competitors and other organisations
- directories
- your contact network
- the internet.

Use the internet to source external information

Downloading up-to-date material directly from the internet is often the most efficient way of carrying out research. However, internet research can sometimes eat up hours of time with minimal results. Stick to your research aims and move on when a website doesn't meet your research needs. Bookmark useful websites or add them to your 'favourites' folder so you can refer back to them quickly if the need arises.



You can use the internet in a variety of ways, including:

- seeking information about businesses, government agencies, guidelines, regulations, people and trends within particular fields

Confidentiality, timing and distribution

Be aware of confidentiality or privacy issues for both staff and external customers when reviewing or handling information. Some information needs to be viewed as commercially or politically sensitive. The ability to treat certain matters with discretion is one of the traits of a successful manager. You may be entrusted with confidential or highly sensitive information.

There is more information about confidentiality and distribution of information below.

Privacy standards

Refer to your workplace policies and procedures if you are unsure about how to handle particular information, or ask your supervisor. You must comply with all Commonwealth, state or territory privacy legislation that governs the use of personal and client information.

To read more about privacy standards, visit the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner at: www.oaic.gov.au.

Releasing information

You need to make judgments about when to release certain information, taking into account its possible impact on employee morale and productivity, and the potential for leaks to the external marketplace. Timing may also have implications for how you decide to distribute the information.

Open communication

Some managers decide not to share information and ideas with their colleagues; or information may be released on a need-to-know basis. Once considered a shrewd approach, keeping information secret is not consistent with current management thinking, which supports open communication, transparency, accountability and staff development.

Disseminating information

The way you disseminate information depends on the type of information. For example, a change of government policy that does not affect staff members individually may simply require a memo, notice or announcement at a staff meeting. Alternatively, you may need to organise an information or training session to inform team members of a new health and safety requirement.

**Verbal – individual**

Examples: face-to-face contact; telephone conversation

Advantages:

- Clear message
- Direct and instant
- Provides opportunity for interaction

Disadvantages:

- Inconsistency of message across similar exchanges
- Message may be misunderstood if communication skills are poor
- Time-consuming

**Verbal – group**

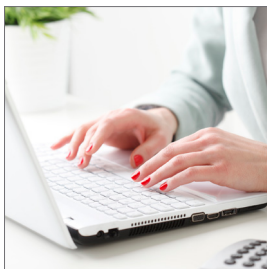
Examples: meeting; discussion group

Advantages:

- Sends consistent message
- Provides opportunity for questioning and sharing
- Provides chance for agreed approach

Disadvantages:

- Time-consuming
- Can be hard to organise
- Different personality types can dominate or withdraw

**Written – electronic**

Examples: emails; intranet posting

Advantages:

- Quick and efficient
- Sends consistent message
- Visually effective

Disadvantages:

- Cannot be sure message is read
- Message may be misinterpreted

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Be wary of patronising a person by extending sympathy or assuming their disability is a major problem.

Check the confidentiality status of the disability, taking into account the person's privacy rights and any safety concerns. Always check first with the person concerned.

Non-discriminatory language

Using non-discriminatory and inclusive language in workplace communication means that what you say includes everyone regardless of their gender, status, race or ability. For example, 'parental leave' describes entitlements to both maternity and paternity leave.

Exclusive language leaves people out. This discriminatory language is often subtle; for example, assuming a manager of a business is male rather than female by always addressing letters to 'Sir' when the receiver's gender is unknown.

Here are some tips for avoiding discriminatory language.

Tips for avoiding discriminatory language

Revise wording to avoid gender reference; for example, 'Staff members should sign time sheets' rather than 'The staff member should sign his time sheet'.

Try not to use broad categories. Terms such as 'the blind' and 'Asians' exclude the possibility of differences within these groups.

Do not place undue emphasis on differences; for example, avoid phrasing like 'male nurse' or 'We recruited four engineers, including one Hungarian'.

Avoid expressions that treat people unevenly, such as 'men and girls' – use 'men and women'.

Never use language that denigrates or stereotypes people. Discriminatory pranks or comments are not acceptable, even in jest.

Share professional development

Ask employees to share their professional development, conference information or research findings with the team and let employees know their contributions are appreciated.

Follow through

Always follow through on ideas from your team and let them know the outcome of any contribution they have made. Make sure your team knows you take their contributions seriously and encourage them to use their initiative. This can be as simple as saying, 'I'm really glad you brought that up' or asking, 'What do others think about this?'

Staff meetings

Meetings provide an ideal forum for two-way communication of information and ideas. But meetings can also be frustrating, unproductive and a waste of time. Meetings need to be well run if they are to fulfil the goals of effective two-way communication.

Below are some tips for productive staff meetings.

Determine time and purpose

Determine a time and purpose for the meeting. Ask yourself 'Why are we meeting?' and 'What do I want to achieve?' If the goal is non-specific, such as sharing general information, reporting on progress or generating ideas, you should set clear guidelines.

Limit the meeting time

Limit the meeting time and don't let discussion stray too far from the set topics. The meeting chairperson should guide the agenda and only give as much time to each item as is appropriate.

Prepare an agenda

Even for informal meetings, a simple agenda is essential to set out an order of reporting or discussion, and to keep everyone focused on why they are there. If there are papers to be discussed, circulate them in advance. Allow for general business and informal contributions, but don't let the meeting be too open-ended.

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1D**Seek out internal and external contributions to concept development**

Your team cannot work in isolation. It is essential to seek out and value contributions from both internal and external sources in developing and refining new ideas and approaches. For example, a production department may be unsure about the direction to take with revisions to a product line. By speaking with a sales consultant who has just completed a field trip, the production team can assess the feedback from customers who are actually using the product. The department is then able to tailor its product design directly to market requirements.

Benefits of contributions outside your team

Gain input into issues from the point of view of the operations and experience of others and provide fresh ideas and insights or expert advice.

Avoid duplication across departments.

Reduce costs and improve the smooth running of the organisation.

Identify customer feedback, so you can enhance the products and services offered by the organisation and keep ahead of competitors.

Gain new suggestions from contractors, consultants and advisers.

Ensure your team's work fits in with other teams or departments, so everyone is working cooperatively towards the organisation's overall objectives.

Example: empathy in practice

External customers tend to look well on organisations that show empathy towards their staff. Lack of empathy is a common complaint directed at a range of industries today, and both external customers and potential employees are increasingly likely to select organisations based on ethical grounds.

Here are two examples where empathy and sensitivity has been exercised in the workplace.

Showing understanding for a contractor's situation

Tamar is a communications manager for an educational organisation. She is responsible for the production of the quarterly course guide, which she prepares with the help of Ray, an external designer. Ray has produced the last 12 course guides and has completely revamped the publication style to make it much more user-friendly.

Tamar becomes aware that Ray is suffering from a serious illness that requires weekly medical treatment. He is unable to do all the work required for the course guide production but, as a small business manager, he is anxious not to lose the contract. Tamar speaks to her colleagues and asks them to take on additional tasks such as proofreading until Ray recovers and is able to resume his normal function.

Tamar's willingness to modify her expectations of Ray while he deals with a personal crisis shows him that he is valued and appreciated by the organisation. In future, the organisation's loyalty will be repaid with increased commitment from Ray, who will be more likely to make an increased effort to accommodate the organisation's needs.

Showing sensitivity towards others during difficult times

Brian has received a directive from senior management to retrench three of his staff members. He realises that, no matter how this is done, the staff members concerned will be severely affected. However, he goes out of his way to ease the impact. He puts a lot of thought into the way he notifies each staff member, gives them sufficient time to finish up their work and leave their offices, organises a farewell event with other staff members and undertakes to be a referee for each on an ongoing basis. After their departure, he keeps in touch with them from time to time and encourages other staff to do the same.

Brian's approach ensures the exiting employees hold no grudge against him or the organisation. They are less likely to speak negatively about the organisation to potential customers or release confidential organisational information to competitors. Also, Brian can bring ex-employees into his circle of contacts and perhaps employ them for projects at a later date.

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Code of conduct

This covers employee behaviour and workplace processes such as:

- work hours and rosters
- acceptable behaviour
- social inclusiveness and respect for individuals
- work environment (formal/informal, etc.)
- dress code
- workplace maintenance, security, signing on, etc.
- honesty and cooperation between staff
- confidentiality and intellectual property.

Employment policies

Documented policies may cover areas such as:

- recruitment and promotion
- equal opportunity
- rewards and recognition for high-performing staff
- profit sharing and other staff benefits
- education, training and development
- performance review and grievance processes
- leave arrangements
- use of vehicles and staff travel arrangements.

Ethical standards

Organisations and their employees rely on outsiders for business and support. They are required by the wider community and by governing bodies to operate responsibly, demonstrate acceptable values and show respect to those affected by the work they do.

Many organisations willingly develop a set of business ethics that governs the way they operate for purposes of best practice, philanthropy and a desire to be good corporate citizens.

Two features of effective coaching are shown below.

Coaching creates challenges

Coaching challenges the learner to take an active part in the process and to ask questions as necessary. The learner is then able to:

- clarify the current situation
- identify their own skill gaps
- link business and individual needs by focusing on current workplace challenges and the skills and attributes required to meet these challenges
- establish a time frame for acquiring the necessary skills or knowledge
- identify and resolve other issues that are raised through the coaching process.

Coaching creates an environment conducive to learning

An effective coach creates an environment conducive to learning and has a positive effect on morale and productivity. A good coach is motivated to take on the role and must believe that another person can benefit from their assistance. As a manager, you may not need or be able to coach every team member, but you do need to provide the support mechanisms for others to do any necessary coaching.

Mentoring

The Macquarie dictionary defines a mentor as ‘a wise and trusted counsellor’. A workplace mentor is someone who is considered to have sufficient experience or expertise to assist others less experienced. The role of a mentor is to lead and act as a role model. The mentor provides informed advice, and encourages and supports the individual over the longer term. The mentor needs to respond to the employee’s needs and treat them with respect and patience.



Mentoring is particularly useful for inducting new members into an existing team and is equally important for increasing skill levels and modelling behaviour required from team members. The mentor may also offer emotional support to someone who is having difficulty fitting into the team, by listening and providing encouragement and support.

Topic 3

Develop and maintain networks and relationships

A network is a system of interconnected people and organisations. The key to establishing beneficial networks lies not so much in being well connected, but in understanding the way professional relationships work and knowing how to build and use a network. The ability to build and maintain productive relationships is vital in the business world. The contacts you form not only benefit your organisation, but also have the potential to enhance your personal career prospects.

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 3A Use networks to identify and build relationships
- 3B Use networks and other work relationships to provide identifiable benefits for the team and organisation

3B

Use networks and other work relationships to provide identifiable benefits for the team and organisation

Used effectively, networking has a significant impact on almost every aspect of business operations.

Here are some benefits of networking.

Benefits of networking

Networks provide sources of information about developments in the industry, marketplace, wider community and general business world, both nationally and globally.

Networks offer opportunities to do business with a broader circle of customers, in new regions and in different ways.

Networks tap into ideas about new services, products and ways of doing things.

Networks grant access to industry expertise, new contacts and information not easily obtained.

Networks provide support and assistance on issues you or the organisation are grappling with.

Networks present opportunities for beneficial partnerships and supply arrangements with other organisations or groups.

Rather, it should stem from a desire to give and receive support. Developing rapport and establishing goodwill are essential first steps when you are introduced to someone new. You should try to get to know your contacts on a personal basis. Be prepared to spend time interacting with others and always offer help when you can.

Simple ways of building and extending your contact circle

There are many simple ways of building and extending your contact circle. Every time you meet someone, you are provided with a networking opportunity, so make the most of it. Chat to people at sports games, in your exercise class, at your library or at stores you frequent, and get to know more about them and their acquaintances.

Here are some ways to build your contact circle.

Friends and activities

- Ask your friends if they can refer you to any relevant people.
- Develop a broad range of activities in your personal and professional life.

Colleagues

- Get to know your colleagues more closely.
- Reach out to more people within your workplace by attending company functions and taking part in working groups, committees and training sessions.

Collect details

- Develop lists, databases or other records of contact names and details for easy reference.
- Ask your supervisor or colleagues if they can share their contact lists with you for a particular purpose.
- Collect business cards and write key information on the back of the card, such as where you met the person and who they are connected with.

Talk to people and remember their details

- Adopt the habit of talking to people you come into contact with, anywhere, any time, and take a genuine interest in their work and activities.
- Make a concerted effort to remember people's names and details such as where they work and what their interests are.

4A

Identify and analyse difficulties and take action to rectify the situation

Problem-solving and decision-making – ask anyone in the workplace if these activities are part of their day and they will almost certainly answer yes. But while people know these skills are critical to their daily work, many people do not know how to resolve work difficulties effectively and so avoid dealing with them.

When faced with a problem, it is common for people to:

- do nothing, hoping the problem will resolve itself
- apply a quick-fix solution that doesn't address the problem
- blame themselves and develop a cycle of worry and inaction
- blame others and expect others to accept responsibility.

Reasons people tend to see problems as insurmountable difficulties

There are several reasons that people tend to see problems as insurmountable difficulties, as shown below.

Reasons that problems are seen as insurmountable

Many people are conflict-averse; that is, they are uncomfortable with addressing problems with other people directly due to a fear of confrontation or hostility.

Others would like to be able to solve the problem, but simply don't know how to approach it.

Some are unhappy that the problem has arisen and try to distance themselves; they may think it will reflect negatively on them or that their involvement will cause more problems.

A person may be inclined to see problems as bigger than they are and the resultant anxiety can lead to inaction and hostility.

Identify the extent of the problem

There are many simple problems, such as a malfunctioning printer, and much more complex problems, such as a culture of bullying or harassment, that can arise in a workplace. Your goal should be to accurately identify the extent of the problem using the guidelines below.

Guidelines for accurately identifying the extent of the problem:

- Gather the facts.
- Do not act purely on hearsay.
- Speak with relevant people.
- Establish the causes.
- Avoid making assumptions.
- Analyse the problem before taking action.

Gather the facts

What is the problem? The answer to this question lies in gathering details about the issue, both objective and subjective details. It can be easy to jump to conclusions and base your response on incorrect information, so you should make the effort to gather as much information about the problem as possible.

Aim to establish the facts by referring to any available data or written records, as well as employee comments. Base your knowledge on information that has been relayed to you and on your own observations. Always focus on the facts rather than relying on guesses, opinions and second-hand reports.

Depending on the extent of the problem, you may need to make notes about the known facts based on verifiable information before speaking to the people involved. The questions below will help you ascertain the background and circumstances surrounding the problem.

Questions to help gather the facts

- How long ago did the problem arise?
- When and where does it occur?
- Who is involved?
- Who else is affected by the problem? In what ways?
- Is the problem temporary or long term?
- What are the symptoms of the problem?
- What evidence do you have of the effect it is having?
- What are the likely consequences if the problem is not addressed?

Methods of defining and evaluating your options

Some methods you can use to define and evaluate strategies to solve problems are outlined below.

Trial and error

Once you have identified some options for solving the difficulty, try one option and then, if necessary, another, in an attempt to solve the problem. Trial and error can be an effective way of approaching some problems, such as administrative processes or minor technical problems, but it can be risky and time-consuming. Those involved need to carefully consider the potential implications of each approach at the outset.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming promotes creativity. Collaborative problem-solving encourages lateral thinking and helps people accept compromises and work with the solutions devised. Remember to welcome all ideas without judgment. Evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of each solution should only be carried out after all the ideas are on the table. Make the session action-based, rather than focusing on the symptoms of the problem.

Consulting experts

Consult with experts such as a human resources officer, industrial relations adviser or safety consultant to discuss possible courses of action. Depending on the issue and any predetermined processes, you may need to ask the people at the centre of the problem whether they are comfortable with involving others. Remember to respect the person's confidentiality and trust.

Choose a strategy to suit the situation

While reviewing the options for solving a problem, keep an open mind and choose a strategy that is appropriate for the specific situation. There are a number of factors to consider. Weight these according to their relative importance.

Factors to consider when choosing a strategy are whether:

- the proposed solution is possible to implement
- the solution will be enough to effectively solve the problem

4B

Guide and support colleagues to resolve work difficulties

It is not a manager's responsibility to solve every problem that arises within the workplace. In fact, it is sometimes inappropriate for the manager to step in when an issue could be dealt with by the individual or people involved. An organisation operates more effectively if all parties are encouraged to resolve issues openly, directly and with the aim of a positive outcome for the employees and the organisation.

As a frontline manager, it is your responsibility to take the lead in training your staff members and other colleagues in effective problem-solving techniques. You can do this by guiding and supporting those who are experiencing difficulties; establishing an environment conducive to positive communication and cooperation; and encouraging assertive rather than aggressive approaches to communication and dispute resolution.



Train colleagues in effective problem-solving

Team members should be informed of the expectations that you and the organisation have with regard to effective problem-solving and dispute resolution.

You can inform team members of expectations through the following methods.

Use effective interpersonal skills to manage performance

Your interpersonal skills are very important when dealing with someone who is not working to the standard of the team. The person may realise they are letting others down, so you must be sensitive in your approach. Never single anyone out in front of others or make them the centre of unwelcome attention. Speak to them privately so they have every opportunity to discuss their performance or behaviour.

If the problem continues and the employee fails to attain the required level of performance, you should manage the situation in accordance with the organisation's processes for dealing with unsatisfactory performance. These may include formal discussion between the supervisor and the individual; a series of warnings after which the organisation can institute dismissal processes; maintenance of precise records; notification of the employee's rights including any avenues for appeal or review; giving the required period of notice; arranging for an appropriate payout; and independent assessment.

Conduct successful performance interviews

Some tips for conducting successful performance interviews are shown below.

Focus on improvement

Describe what the person does best, as well as what they need to do better. Give specific examples. Emphasise avenues for improvement, not blame or failure. Explain any implications in terms of cost, timeliness and the importance of the function to the team and the organisation. Be clear and specific about your expectations and the performance standards required.

Outline performance gaps

Outline any performance gaps or inappropriate behaviour as you perceive them. Base your comments on your own observations and demonstrable facts, rather than rumour, guesses or generalisations. Avoid quoting others.

Avoid judgmental comments

Avoid any judgmental comments about the person's personality traits or circumstances. Focus on the work, rather than the person.

Provide feedback

An important step in the process of managing work performance is to give feedback to the relevant parties when required. One of the most challenging areas for a manager is being able to deliver constructive negative feedback in relation to individual or team performance.

For many people, delivering a message that is likely to be negatively received is so uncomfortable that they tend to avoid it altogether. This is not appropriate management behaviour. If you have trouble giving negative feedback, prepare yourself with a written list of the problems you have identified and all the ways they affect you, the team and the organisation.

Some ways to deliver effective feedback are shown below.

Deliver feedback in person

When delivering feedback, which should always be done in person wherever possible, refer to a list to remind yourself how important your feedback is. It is your responsibility as a manager to address problems that interfere with the team's work and sometimes you have to make tough decisions. If your negative criticism is also constructive, in that you try to help improve performance, you will be repaid with team loyalty and increased productivity.

Present the facts assertively

Be prepared to present the facts assertively as well as responding to your employees' concerns. A commitment to consultation includes explaining to employees how decisions that affect them have been made and how their views have been taken into account. Always be prepared to provide reasons for any decisions that affect individuals and the team as a whole.

Arrange mediation if necessary

In the case of a dispute between two team members, arrange for a mediation session and discuss the situation with others on staff to see how they might resolve the situation. Give feedback with all parties present so it is fair and impartial.