

**Professionalism vs Unprofessionalism (Lecture 7)**

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**In small groups, examine each “case” and determine the following:**

1. Define the **rhetorical situation**: Who is communicating to whom about what, how, and why? What was the goal of the communication in each case?
2. Identify the **communication error** (poor task or audience analysis? Use of inappropriate language or style? Poor organization or formatting of information? Other?)
3. Explain what **costs/losses** were incurred by this problem.
4. Identify **possible solutions** or strategies that would have prevented the problem, and what benefits would be derived from implementing solutions or preventing the problem.
5. **Present your findings in a brief, formal presentation to the class.**

**CASE 1: The promising chemist who buried his results**

Bruce, a research chemist for a major petro-chemical company, wrote a dense report about some new compounds he had synthesized in the laboratory from oil-refining by-products. The bulk of the report consisted of tables listing their chemical and physical properties, diagrams of their molecular structure, chemical formulas and computer printouts of toxicity tests. Buried at the end of the report was a casual speculation that one of the compounds might be a particularly effective insecticide.

Seven years later, the same oil company launched a major research program to find more effective but environmentally safe insecticides. After six months of research, someone uncovered Bruce's report and his toxicity tests. A few hours of further testing confirmed that one of Bruce's compounds was the safe, economical insecticide they had been looking for.

Bruce had since left the company, because he felt that the importance of his research was not being appreciated.

**CASE 2: The rejected current regulator proposal**

The Acme Electric Company worked day and night to develop a new current regulator designed to cut the electric power consumption in aluminum plants by 35%. They knew that, although the competition was fierce, their regulator could be produced more cheaply, was more reliable, and worked more efficiently than the competitors' products.

The owner, eager to capture the market, personally but somewhat hastily put together a 120-page proposal to the three major aluminum manufacturers, recommending that their regulators be installed at all company plants.

She devoted the first 87 pages of the proposal to the mathematical theory and engineering design behind his new regulator, and the next 32 to descriptions of the new assembly line she planned to set up to produce regulators quickly. Buried in an appendix were the test results that compared her

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regulator's performance with present models, and a poorly drawn graph showed how much the dollar savings would be.

Acme Electric didn't get the contracts, despite having the best product. Six months later, the company filed for bankruptcy.

### **CASE 3: The instruction manual the scared customers away**

As one of the first to enter the field of office automation, Sagatec Software, Inc. had built a reputation for designing high-quality and user-friendly database and accounting programs for business and industry. When they decided to enter the word-processing market, their engineers designed an effective, versatile, and powerful program that Sagatec felt sure would outperform any competitor.

To be sure that their new word-processing program was accurately documented, Sagatec asked the senior program designer to supervise writing the instruction manual. The result was a thorough, accurate and precise description of every detail of the program's operation.

When Sagatec began marketing its new word processor, cries for help flooded in from office workers who were so confused by the massive manual that they couldn't even find out how to get started. Then several business journals reviewed the program and judged it "too complicated" and "difficult to learn." After an impressive start, sales of the new word processing program plummeted.

Sagatec eventually put out a new, clearly written training guide that led new users step by step through introductory exercises and told them how to find commands quickly. But the rewrite cost Sagatec \$350,000, a year's lead in the market, and its reputation for producing easy-to-use business software.

### **CASE 4: One garbled memo – 26 baffled phone calls**

Joanne supervised 36 professionals in 6 city libraries. To cut the costs of unnecessary overtime, she issued this one-sentence memo to her staff:

"When workloads increase to a level requiring hours in excess of an employee's regular duty assignment, and when such work is estimated to require a full shift of eight (8) hours or more on two (2) or more consecutive days, even though unscheduled days intervene, an employee's tour of duty shall be altered so as to include the hours when such work must be done, unless an adverse impact would result from such employee's absence from his previously scheduled assignment".

After the 36 copies were sent out, Joanne's office received 26 phone calls asking what the memo meant. What the 10 people who didn't call about the memo thought is uncertain. It took a week to clarify the new policy.

### **Case 5: Slow computer**

"A guy worked with an ad agency, was always complaining that his computer was way slow. An I.T. fellow came to his office to see what the problem was, and he was shortly thereafter escorted out of the office with cardboard box of personal items in hand. Turns out his computer was so slow cause he jammed it completely with games and series!!".

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### **Case 6: Paycheck**

“I saw someone open someone else’s paycheck from the mail slot to see what they got paid...”