


COM310-902

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# Chapter 2



Understanding Ethical and Legal Obligations



A brief introduction to  
ethics



Your ethical and legal  
obligations



The role of corporate  
culture in ethical and  
legal conduct



Understanding ethical  
and legal issues  
related to social  
media



Communicating  
ethically across  
cultures



# What is ethics?

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Ethics is the study of the principles of conduct that apply to an individual or a group.



# In thinking about ethical dilemmas, four moral standards are useful:

- ***Rights***—individuals' basic needs and welfare
- ***Justice***—how the costs and benefits of an action or a policy are distributed among a group
- ***Utility***—the positive and negative effects that an action or a policy has on others
- ***Care***—the relationships we have with other individuals

# You have four sets of ethical and legal obligations:



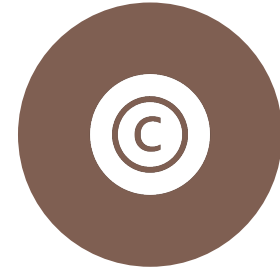
TO YOUR  
EMPLOYER



TO THE PUBLIC



TO THE  
ENVIRONMENT



TO COPYRIGHT  
HOLDERS



# You have five obligations to your employer:

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Competence and  
diligence

Generosity

Honesty and  
candor

Confidentiality

Loyalty



# Courts consider four factors in disputes over “fair use”:

- the purpose and character of the use, especially whether the use is for profit
- the nature and purpose of the copyrighted work
- the amount and substantiality of the portion of the work used
- the effect of the use on the potential market for the copyrighted work



# Adhere to these four guidelines when you use material from another source:

- Abide by the fair-use concept.
- Seek permission.
- Cite your sources accurately.
- Consult legal counsel if you have questions.
- It is ethical to reuse information already produced at your company.  
Ask your supervisor if you have concerns about doing that.



# Four elements of an organization's culture encourage ethical and legal behavior:



Ethical leadership



Supervisors setting  
ethical examples



Peer support of  
ethical behavior



Organization using  
informal  
communication to  
reinforce the formal  
policies  
  
(ex: company code  
of conduct)

An effective code of conduct has three characteristics:


It protects the public rather than members of the organization or profession



It is specific and comprehensive



It is enforceable



Follow these  
nine  
guidelines for  
using social  
media ethically  
and legally in  
the workplace:

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**1. Keep**

your private social-media accounts separate from your company-sponsored accounts.

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**2. Read**

the terms of service of every service to which you post.

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**3.  
Avoid**

Avoid revealing unauthorized news about your organization.

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(*cont.*)

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**4.**  
**Avoid**

self-plagiarism

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**5.**  
**Avoid**

defaming anyone (making  
statements that are false and  
harmful)

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**6. Don't**

live stream or quote from a speech  
or meeting without permission

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(*cont.*)

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**7.**  
**Avoid**

false endorsements

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**8.**  
**Avoid**

impersonating someone else online

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**9.**  
**Avoid**


infringing on trademarks by using  
protected logos or names

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# Companies have obligations when communicating across cultures:

- They must not reinforce patterns of discrimination in product information.
- They are not obligated to challenge the prevailing prejudice directly.
- They must adhere to other countries' federal and regional laws when exporting goods and services.



Follow these ten  
principles  
for ethical  
communication:

- 1.** Abide by copyright laws
- 2.** Abide by your organization's professional code of conduct
- 3.** Abide by your organization's policy on social media.
- 4.** Take advantage of your employer's ethics resources.
- 5.** Tell the truth



*(cont.)*

**6.**

Don't mislead your readers

**7.**

Use design to highlight important ethical and legal information

**8.**

Be clear

**9.**

Avoid language that discriminates

**10.**

Cite your sources and your collaborators





## Avoid four common types of misleading technical communication:

- false implications about products
- exaggerations about product specifications
- legalistic constructions
- euphemisms