

Sligo, F., & Bathurst, R. (2005). *Communication in the New Zealand workplace: Theory and practice*. Wellington, New Zealand: Software Technology New Zealand.

Reviewed by: [Jacquie LEtang](#)

Blending theoretical and practical perspectives, this volume sets out to provide a tertiary level introduction to the field of business communication. In this it succeeds. The editors have brought together a range of authors at different life stages who together provide a rich, multi-faceted view of the field. Particularly useful are those chapters which provide overviews of theory which are economical but effective. A wide range of topics within organisational communication is covered including interpersonal and professional communication, international and inter-cultural communication, conflict and change, persuasion and resistance, gender, ethics, discourse and rhetoric, technology, transactional analysis, public relations and media relations and rather more didactic chapters on meetings and writing.

The book begins with an excellent introduction well-grounded in the history of communications, methodological considerations in researching communications and defining levels of possible analysis. Arguably this chapter could perhaps have contextualised the rest of the book to follow in an explicit way, but the chapter is certainly important reading for students new to the field.

I particularly enjoyed the chapter on communicating change which skilfully uses ethnographic data to construct an entertaining and highly illustrative vignette which incorporates metaphorical approaches to organisational analysis and concludes with some sharp analysis. Likewise the chapter on managing conflict ranges effortlessly from theory to practice in a useful and interesting way. The chapter on organisations and communications begins with a brief review of the history of management thought (restricted to scientific and classical perspectives) but does a particularly good job of explaining communication audits and methodology in a couple of pages. Chapters on visual, interpersonal communication, assertion, professional presentations, writing, and meetings are economical and will be rightly popular with students. Possibly these applied chapters could have been given some greater theoretical focus by linking their areas of interest to the domains of professional communication and impression management.

There are, of course, some criticisms. The book is clearly situated within communications but perhaps more could have been done to map out the field in its current state, possibly graphically, especially in relation to areas such as organisational communications, especially culture and climate, psychology, media relations, public relations, international communications, political communications, and, as mentioned above, professional communication and impression management. Some practical chapters could have included more references to theory, for example, the chapter on public relations lacked references to the now substantial literature in the field. On the other hand the fascinating chapters on interpersonal communication and transactional analysis could possibly have been enlivened by hypothetical stories.

The chapter on ethics could have specified the deontological requirement to treat people as an end in themselves and not as an end to a mean and possibly highlighted the importance of Aristotelian 'flourishing'. It could also have been useful to define the distinct areas of media management (understood in the UK as management education for those working in media institutions), public relations, and 'spin doctoring' (pejorative term usually used by news journalists about political communicators). This is one example in which some cross-referencing between chapters might have been helpful.

In some areas I was left wanting to learn even more, for example about the history of Maori communications and the influence of Maori culture on Maori organisational structures and communication practices.

To conclude: this book provides an excellent and very well written introduction to workplace communication. Contributions are well-written and provide an excellent resource for students and lecturers. I will certainly be recommending it to postgraduates who are new to the field of public relations. My only regret is that this book may not achieve the sales it deserves due to its title which suggests that the content is very specific to the New Zealand workplace. This is not really the case and certainly, for the UK market, this book has considerable value. While most of the authors are based at Massey University, Wellington, and some chapters clearly focus on the New Zealand context, the cultural bias is subtle and the book is certainly highly useable elsewhere. After all, the numerous US textbooks do not specify their own cultural bias in this way!

Jacquie LEtang

About the reviewer:

Jacque has directed the M.Sc. in Public Relations at the University of Stirling since 1991 and is a member of the Stirling Media Research Institute. She has co-edited (with Magda Pieczka) and co-authored Critical Perspectives in Public Relations (ITBP, 1996) and Public Relations: critical debates and contemporary practice (LEA, forthcoming) and is author of Public Relations in Britain: a history of professional practice in the 20th century (LEA, 2004). Her interests are currently focused on public relations in sport, health and tourism.