

Social Media Scenarios and Discussion Questions

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Why use scenarios?

Scenarios allow us to apply knowledge and skills in situations that simulate those we encounter in real-life situations. Working with social media scenarios gives us opportunities to:

- Practice in a safe, non-threatening environment;
- Work alone or in small groups which helps us to be comfortable trying out new approaches;
- Receive targeted feedback after each scenario;
- Ask questions and reflect on the factors at play in different situations;
- Compare our social media choices with those in the scenarios; and
- Become confident using the social media guidelines.

The scenarios below illustrate some fictional-but-plausible situations. They can help readers reflect on social media choices in a more contextualized way. We hope these scenarios will serve as a starting point for considering a range of social media choices that we as individuals might make in a given situation, as well as the possible consequences of those choices.

The scenarios can be used both individually, to promote learning and self-reflection, and in a group discussion setting.

The steps below describe a process for using the scenarios as the starting point for group discussion about social media guidelines. If your group is large, we suggest dividing into smaller groups of four to six.

How to use the scenarios – steps for a group discussion

1. Choose a facilitator for the discussion of the first scenario.
2. Everybody reads the scenario silently. (The facilitator may also read the scenario aloud.)
3. The facilitator asks participants to put the problem(s) embedded in the scenario into their own words: “How do you read the situation? What might be the underlying issues or problems?”
Note: This step is important. The group may want to dive immediately into deciding what the outcome should be; however, resisting that temptation long enough to discuss the problems first will yield a richer conversation in the following steps.
4. When the group has reached a shared understanding of the problem(s), the facilitator asks the discussion questions.
5. Through discussion, the group may or may not come to agreement. The response sheet has points which must be considered, so is a useful check to ensure the group hasn't missed any key points. This may be handed out to participants or the facilitator can share the points with the group in the discussion.
6. The group may choose to go on to another scenario (and take turns facilitating).

Scenario: “Passion and Posting”



Jeanine is a passionate anti-poverty advocate. On her personal Facebook page, she posts criticisms of what she sees as her ministry’s inaction. Her profile identifies her as a “sometimes reluctant employee of a certain very large BC government ministry.” She also posts angry comments in response to BC government ads and press releases.

Questions for Discussion

1. **Is this an issue? Why or why not?**
2. **How can we remain true to ourselves and adhere to our duties as public servants?**
3. **What information might you provide to Jeanine as a friend and colleague?**

“Passion and Posting” Responses

1. Is this an issue? Why or why not?

Jeanine’s criticisms of her ministry and her angry comments in response to BC government ads and press releases are an issue. These actions aren’t consistent with the [Standards of Conduct for Public Service Employees](#) which all employees must follow as a condition of employment. Jeanine needs to understand the expectations that all employees must:

- Instill confidence and trust and not bring the BC Public Service into disrepute.
- Be loyal to the government as their employer.
- Act honestly and in good faith and place the interests of the employer ahead of their own private interests.
- Not jeopardize the perception of impartiality in the performance of their duties through making public comments or enter public debate regarding ministry policies.
- Not use their position in government to lend weight to the public expression of their personal opinions.
- If engaging in political activities, separate these activities from activities related to their employment.

It’s a significant issue that Jeanine is publicly criticizing her ministry’s policies and operations. Her posts are likely to undermine public trust and confidence in how the ministry operates. They also may cast doubt on her own impartiality in the performance on her duties. While Jeanine does have a right to her opinions and be an active member of the anti-poverty community as a private citizen, there are limits if her activities are connected to topics related to her public service employment. She needs to stop posting critical comments and talk to her supervisor about how to avoid these errors in her future social media activity.

2. How can we remain true to ourselves and adhere to our duties as public servants?

There may be times when our personal beliefs and values or political position will conflict with the work we’re being asked to do in our jobs or with the direction our organization is following. During these times, we need to remember what we swore or affirmed in the [Oath of Employment](#) – to do our work impartially and act with integrity, putting the interests of the public and the public service above our own. Each of us, from time to time, may find we need some support in meeting this obligation. Employees should check in with their supervisors if this happens. If you’re in a job where you often or always feel conflicted between personal interests and professional responsibilities, you may want to consider moving to another role or organization where you don’t feel conflicted.

3. What information might you provide to Jeanine as a friend and colleague?

You can encourage Jeanine to read the social media guidelines and reflect on the [Standards of Conduct](#) and [Oath of Employment](#). You can also encourage her to speak with her supervisor about the actions she's taken so far and any steps she should take going forward.

If Jeanine wishes to continue being active in online conversations about anti-poverty causes, she needs to carefully consider what is appropriate to post about her ministry's actions, and be cautious about what she posts, how she represents herself, and how she asks her friends to represent her. For example, Jeanine's activity is a problem partly because people could easily infer she works for the public service and for her particular ministry. Here are some steps she should take:

- Jeanine should refrain from posting certain types of content, such as criticisms of her ministry and angry comments on press releases.
- If she's going to continue being active in these conversations, it's a good idea for Jeanine to also update her profile to remove reference to her employer.
- She should also instruct her friends not to refer to her as a ministry employee when they repost or comment on her content.

Scenario: “Here but not Here”

Paul feels strongly that it’s important to be responsive on his personal social media accounts, and when his phone goes off with an alert from his Twitter or other social media accounts, he checks it and responds pretty quickly. Even in a meeting, if it’s something quick, he’ll respond. He always gets his work done, but other people on his team have noticed and don’t always think he’s paying attention or being courteous.



Questions for Discussion

1. **Is this an issue? Why or why not?**
2. **How might Paul’s behaviour impact the workplace?**
3. **What strategies could be used to address the issue?**

“Here but not Here” Responses

1. Is this an issue? Why or why not?

There are several issues in this scenario. First, the time spent on his personal social media is time that is taken away from work. As with personal telephone calls or other personal errands such as online banking, these activities are personal activities, not work activities.

Paul’s choices also suggest that he is easily distracted by the alerts he receives. When Paul chooses to check and respond on his personal social media accounts every time his phone goes off, his focus on work is interrupted. As a public service employee, Paul is responsible for providing service in a manner that is efficient and effective. Even though he gets his work done, Paul may not be delivering service that’s as efficient and effective as it could be because he’s distracted at work by his personal interests.

Paul’s actions also create a perception that he’s not paying attention to others. His coworkers sometimes feel his responses to his phone going off demonstrate a lack of courtesy and attention, and therefore Paul’s actions may be undermining the team’s ability to work together.

Limited and reasonable use of personal social media accounts during work hours should be discussed with your supervisor to ensure the activity is consistent with the [Oath of Employment](#), [Standards of Conduct for Public Service Employees](#), [Appropriate Use Policy](#), [BC Public Service Corporate Values](#) and other policies and guidelines.

2. How might Paul’s behaviour impact the workplace?

Paul’s behaviour can interfere with his ability to meet established service standards or provide a level of service that is expected of him, as well as disturb his colleagues. Paul may not be fully “present” when he needs to listen attentively to capture important information and act on an issue.

Paul’s distracted behaviour may cause members of his team or clients to lose trust and confidence in him. Even though Paul may not realize the impact of his behavior on the workplace, his personal social media use may have larger unintended consequences for his work environment that could undermine the public’s trust and confidence in how the ministry operates.

More broadly, sometimes colleagues have concerns about how others behave in meetings with them, such as doing work email on phones during meetings, lateness, or having side conversations. Maintaining an open dialogue in the workplace and listening to feedback will also help employees address concerns that their colleagues may have. It is up to employees to

be respectful of others in the workplace.

3. What strategies could be used to support Paul in avoiding overuse of personal social media at work?

Employees should talk to their supervisors for guidance on limited and reasonable use of personal social media accounts at work.

Paul needs to be conscious of whether the time used for social media during the work day is his own time or the employer's and correct his conduct as necessary. He also needs to consider how people in his social networks will perceive his personal social media activity during the work day.

Some strategies Paul can use to support his reasonable use of his social media at work include:

- Minimizing temptation:
 - Changing a device's alerts and settings to silent mode;
 - Putting the device out of arm's reach;
 - Signing out of personal social media accounts while at work; and/or
 - Not taking the device to meetings.
- Setting expectations with social media contacts:
 - Letting friends or family know that when he's at work, he won't be checking social media or responding except at set periods during the day.
- Finding an appropriate time and place to check and respond to social media.

Scenario: Gary's Frustration

Gary is part of an ongoing investigation about a complaint he launched about another employee, and he's frustrated with the perceived lack of results. He starts venting about his frustration on his private Facebook account, sharing details of the complaint he launched. Some of his Facebook friends are also work colleagues and one of them notifies Gary's supervisor about the posts.

Questions for Discussion

1. **Is this an issue? Why or why not?**
2. **What could Gary have done instead?**
3. **Who should Gary's supervisor contact for help?**



“Gary’s Frustration” Responses

1. Is this an issue? Why or why not?

This is a serious issue. Complaints and investigations are confidential, which Gary would know from clear instructions provided by investigators. Gary is not permitted to share this confidential information even in a private conversation with friends. Gary’s disclosure constitutes a government information incident that must be reported immediately.

In addition, sharing it with colleagues is likely to damage workplace morale and jeopardize the investigation. What is more, Gary has put his colleagues in an uncomfortable position because employees have a responsibility to report information incidents. The fact that Gary’s work colleagues are Facebook friends makes this situation worse – but it would still be a problem if they weren’t.

What could Gary have done instead?

Gary’s need for emotional support and an outlet for his feelings is natural but doesn’t justify his revealing confidential information. Gary could take advantage of other supports to manage his emotions without breaching confidentiality or putting an ongoing investigation in jeopardy. For example, he can talk with his supervisor about how he is feeling. He can get support via confidential short-term counselling from [Employee & Family Assistance Services](#). During or following an investigation, employees who can also contact their union or the Excluded Employees Association, if they are a member, for assistance.

Gary should have faith in the process and understand that just because he hasn’t heard anything doesn’t mean nothing is happening. Read [Sharing the Results of Misconduct Allegations](#) on MyHR to understand more about privacy during and after investigations.

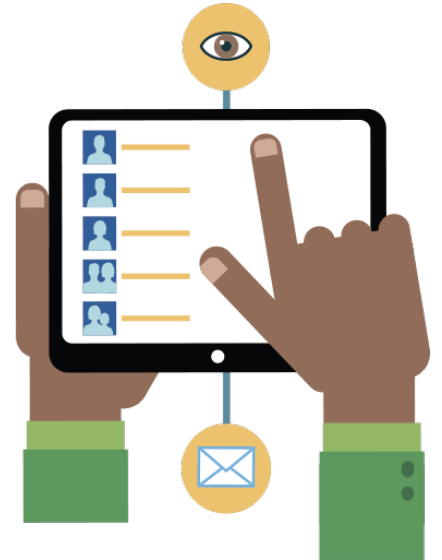
Who should Gary’s supervisor contact for help?

Gary’s supervisor should contact [MyHR](#) for guidance and ask to speak with a human resource advisor.

The supervisor should also initiate the information incident management process without delay, to address the fact that sensitive government information (e.g. personal information or confidential business information) has been shared online. To initiate this process, call 250-387-7000, option 3, and ask for an “information incident investigation.” Learn more at www.gov.bc.ca/privacy_breaches.

Scenario: “Overeager Oliver”

Oliver is connected with his colleague Kim on social media and sees some photos and exchanges between her and other friends that make him think Kim is in a conflict of interest because of the activist group she’s part of. He takes screenshots of her photos and exchanges and sends them to his supervisor as a heads up.



Questions for Discussion

1. **Is this an issue? Why or why not?**
2. **What do we need to pay attention to in this scenario?**
3. **What should Oliver’s supervisor do?**

“Overeager Oliver” Responses

1. Is this an issue? Why or why not?

There are privacy-related issues with Oliver’s actions in this scenario.

Oliver should not take screenshots of Kim’s activities and share them with others, even his supervisor. Government has to follow privacy rules under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPPA). Under FOIPPA, government has special responsibilities regarding the personal information it has. If the supervisor accepts the screenshots without going through proper procedures, government is collecting personal information (such as information about Kim’s personal activities and potentially about her friends) improperly.

It’s important that any potential investigation that might need to happen regarding employees’ behaviour be done the right way, following the rules that have been set up.

2. What do we need to pay attention to in this scenario?

In this situation, Oliver makes assumptions about Kim’s personal activities on social media and what they mean about his colleague. Assumptions about what we see online can be problematic – not everything may be as it seems. Oliver doesn’t talk with his colleague Kim to check if his assumptions are true. It would be helpful for Kim to know that her personal activity on social media is creating a perceived conflict of interest and to give her a chance to respond to these concerns.

It’s quite possible that Kim has already disclosed her membership in the activist group to her supervisor, and that together they’ve put a plan in place to mitigate any conflict of interest. If so, Oliver’s concerns suggest that those mitigations may not be effective and might need to be reviewed. If Kim hasn’t disclosed the real, perceived, or potential conflict of interest to her supervisor, then she should do so right away.

Since Oliver and Kim know each other, a helpful course of action would be for Oliver to share the [conflict of interest guidelines](#) with Kim. Talking with his supervisor about his concerns is fine too, especially if he thinks Kim won’t take action once informed. However, he can and should share his concerns without passing on screenshots.

3. What should Oliver’s supervisor do?

Oliver’s supervisor should let Kim know that a perceived conflict of interest has come forward, inform her that all employees must avoid conflicts of interest under the [Standards of Conduct](#), and direct her to the guidelines and her own supervisor to discuss the perceived conflict of interest.

Even if Kim thinks that she is not in a conflict of interest, she must work with her supervisor to mitigate any possible issues which may exist.

Oliver's supervisor also needs to instruct him not to share any further screenshots of Kim's social media activity unless instructed by an investigator to do so.