

TEAM LEADERS DEVELOPMENT CHECKLIST



AI is changing how communications work gets done. Drafting, summarising, monitoring and reporting can now happen almost instantly. While this brings real efficiency, it also removes many of the tasks that traditionally helped early career communicators learn the craft.

If you lead communications teams, this checklist is designed to help you ensure that learning, judgement and professional development don't get lost as productivity increases.

1 MAKE ANALYSIS MANDATORY, NOT OPTIONAL

If AI produces the first draft, learning will only occur when critical thinking is deliberately required. Without structured analysis, speed replaces judgment.

Action: Require early career staff to submit a short critique alongside any AI-assisted draft. Creates an opportunity for early-career communicators to undertake analysis. For leaders, assess the quality of their reasoning in the critique, not just the final copy.

Give your staff member some prompts to help their thinking:

- What is missing from this draft?
- What assumptions has the tool made?
- What risks are there?
- What would change for a different audience or channel?
- What would you remove and why?

2 SEPARATE SPEED FROM JUDGEMENT

When output and turnaround are rewarded above all else, early career staff focus on efficiency rather than strategic thinking. Do not reward rapid turnaround. Build structured review conversations before sign-off.

Action: Ask the communicator to explain their work and why they made the decisions on the approach before providing your feedback.

Probe for why, not just what. Provide a clear expectation that speed is useful but judgement is essential.

3 MAKE YOUR THINKING VISIBLE

Much senior decision-making is instinctive. If that reasoning remains unspoken, junior staff cannot learn how judgment is applied in practice.

Action: Narrate your decision-making in real time. Turn instinct into teachable reasoning. In meetings, don't just outline progress or outcomes, talk about the context of how you got there and why you made decisions.

- What was your gut feeling?
- What risks did you weigh up?
- What past experiences are informing your view?
- Why are you choosing to wait, escalate or reframe?

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4 DESIGN EXPOSURE TO COMPLEXITY

Judgment develops through proximity to real decisions, not just through producing content. Shielding juniors from complexity delays their growth.

Action: Intentionally involve early career staff in higher-level discussions. Include them in client briefings, executive meetings where possible, crisis simulations, and strategy conversations.

Debrief afterwards

- What did you notice
- What surprised you
- What trade-offs were being considered

5 SHIFT FROM DRAFTING TASKS TO THINKING TASKS

If junior roles remain focused solely on execution, AI will increasingly replace the most formative parts of their development.

Action: Reframe tasking briefs for junior staff.

Instead of asking them to write a media release, try asking them to think about the task and present outcomes first:

- Define the audience and what they care about
- Identify the reputational risks
- Outline three framing options and their implications
- Recommendations for distribution and journalists to target it.

6 SET UP FORMALISED REFLECTION SESSIONS

Experience builds judgment when it is examined. Without reflection, successes and failures pass without learning.

Action: Set up a post-mortem after every major delivery, campaign or announcement.

Ask junior staff to lead a discussion:

- What worked and why
- What did not work and why
- What did we miss
- What would we do differently next time

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7 PAIR EXECUTION WITH ACCOUNTABILITY

Judgement strengthens when communicators see the real world consequences of their work, both positive and negative.

Action: Ensure junior staff see the outcomes of their communications work but proactively sharing with them the outcomes in public and private forums.

- Share media coverage outcomes
- Discuss stakeholder reactions
- Review social engagement, including negative responses
- Take them to client meetings

8 REDEFINE YOUR PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

People develop the capabilities that are recognised and rewarded. If metrics focus on volume and speed, your early-career professionals will not grow or build the skills they need. The biggest shift in communicators' capabilities is you.

Action: Review how you evaluate early career communicators.

Balance your expectations of:

- Speed versus judgement
- Risk versus innovation
- Audience insights versus volume of output
- Analysis versus technology proficiency
- Delivery versus contribution in discussions

In performance conversations or feedback conversations, ask yourself:

- Have I required them to explain their reasoning?
- Have I shared my own thinking?
- Have I exposed them to the context behind this decision?
- Have I reinforced judgment, not just output?
- Am I clear about my expectations of their performance?
- I am demonstrating the behaviour I want to see.

Ultimately, this shift will not happen on its own. AI is changing the shape of early-career work, whether we respond or not. If leaders do not redesign roles, expectations and development pathways, capability gaps will widen over time. The responsibility sits with those who hold experience and influence. By making judgment visible, creating structured exposure to complexity, and rewarding critical thinking over speed, leaders ensure that communicators build the depth of skill required to navigate risk, advise confidently, and lead as they progress through their careers.

Without intentional leadership, efficiency will increase but professional maturity will not.