

# The Impact of Policy Changes on Legal Communication Strategies

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## ABSTRACT

Over the past three decades, advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), evolving technologies, and shifting policy landscapes have significantly reshaped legal communication strategies. This paper examines how legal communication is adapting to regulatory and policy reforms, particularly in light of increasing technological integration and societal expectations. Using case studies from governmental and educational institutions, including the City of Toronto and OCAD University, this research examines the tangible effects of policy changes on legal discourse, advocacy roles, and communication frameworks. It also highlights the growing influence of AI and digital tools, as well as the ethical and cognitive challenges associated with legal language and abstractness. A special focus is placed on the *Roe v. Wade* decision as a lens through which cognitive-communication models of law are understood. The paper concludes with recommended best practices for legal professionals navigating dynamic policy environments while maintaining ethical standards and effective communication.

**Keywords:** Legal Communication, Policy Reform, Artificial Intelligence in Law, Legal Ethics, Social Media and Law, Legal Technology.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last 30 years, there has been significant growth in data-driven and AI-assisted programs that predict lawful behavior and convey this information. Some applications function as informational resources, while others resemble chatbots for dialogue and addressing communication errors. A key aim is to navigate law and government through technology. The more interactive AI tools are still underdeveloped, and questions remain about their accuracy and acceptance compared to traditional indexes. Despite limitations, these tools show promising performance that encourages ongoing use. The rise of AI in law and communication could greatly impact how legal responsibilities are understood. As AI actions become routine, scrutiny will likely increase regarding legally relevant behavior. Furthermore, as these tools become integrated into daily life, they may reinforce the idea that communication is merely a product of processing inputs into grammatical outputs. How the legal system adapts to these innovations while ensuring compliance with defined responsibilities will be a significant historical development. The AI revolution embodies a tension between its potential and its constraints [1, 2].

### Understanding Legal Communication

Legal communication encompasses a diverse array of types, leading to a wide range of views, pressures, and challenges that can vary significantly across contexts. This complexity necessitates careful consideration of multiple factors and thorough analyses that take into account the varied perspectives involved. The challenge presented by law lies not only in the burdens imposed by communication but also in the distinct impacts that legal discourse can have on different individuals, which may arise from numerous sources and contexts. It is crucial to acknowledge that both law and communication practices are inherently multi-faceted, exhibiting different dimensions where they can fluctuate and vary significantly. Legal English tends to be more abstract in nature when compared to non-legal English, which can potentially render it more difficult for individuals to read and fully comprehend. This increased abstractness, characterized by less concrete propositions, poses challenges for understanding and invites further research into the disparities present in levels of abstractness across different types of legal

language. Natural languages display varying degrees of abstractness, and legal English is no exception to this observation. It is comprised of three formal registers: the formal, informal, and colloquial registers, each of which serves distinct purposes and audiences. Often, the more formal registers include terminology and expressions that are more complex and harder to understand than their informal equivalents, which are typically much more accessible to a broader audience. The phenomenon of legalese is expected to impose greater demands on cognitive resources when it comes to external representation. Audiences generally find it more cognitively taxing to effectively organize and group legal concepts, as opposed to non-legal concepts, leading to increased cognitive load and potential misinterpretation. The intricate relationship between law and communication necessitates ongoing examination and adaptation to ensure clarity and accessibility for all individuals involved [3, 4].

### **Overview of Policy Changes**

The 2001 Amendment significantly changed the Human Rights Commission, abolishing the advocacy role of the race relations conciliator and creating a race relations commissioner. This new role involved expanded information and education functions to shift the Commission's focus from complaints resolution to advocacy. The Human Rights Procedures Group was established, separating complaints resolution from the Commission's advocacy and policy functions. This group took on the administrative tasks of the former complaints division, except for determining the representation of complaints in the Human Rights Tribunal. Key recommendations from the Re-evaluation Report emphasized restructuring the Commission to create an independent Human Rights Procedures Group with in-house counsel and professional investigators. It also highlighted the evolving nature of race relations in New Zealand, stressing the importance of recognizing other ethnicities alongside Māori and Pākehā relationships. These changes profoundly impacted the Commission's work, shifting emphasis away from Māori issues, even as it acknowledged the Treaty of Waitangi's role in addressing historical grievances. The Commission must now consider collective Māori rights, which have gained significance in political and economic discussions. Criticism had arisen from Māori regarding the Commission's handling of colonization impacts and its defense of the Treaty, which guarantees equal rights for Māori. The focus has shifted towards collective rights and sovereignty, reflecting current political and economic realities [5, 6].

### **Influence of Policy Changes on Legal Practices**

Major changes in social policy alter law's communication structures, leading to shifts in perceptions of legal cases with broader social implications. The *Roe v. Wade* opinion serves as a case study for these changes in legal communication. A cognitive-communication model has been developed to define best practices for legal communication policy, promoting the importance of these practices and exploring their implications within the legal communication system. When society undergoes significant change, the communication supports that represent cognitive frameworks of social reality also change, affecting how they interact. Legal systems, as communication systems, experience two main impacts from major social change: first, modifications to the communication supports that reflect legal case cognitions and social realities; and second, a substantial change in those cognitions. The evolution of law's communication system influences its cognitions, causing significant differences in the frameworks attached to various communication supports, particularly in specific cases. Thus, changes in law's cognition cannot simply reconnect to original communication surfaces and must adapt throughout the broader understanding, impacting perceptions broadly and fostering feedback from social changes. The analysis of *Roe v. Wade* illustrates the interconnection of social and legal transformations, emphasizing that both require adjustments in the legal communication network and suggesting methods for achieving such changes [7, 8].

### **Communication Strategies in a Changing Legal Landscape**

Today's legal landscape is rapidly evolving, affecting how lawyers and law firms communicate with clients, the public, and the media. Lawyers now utilize social media platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn, along with video chat applications, which were not traditionally part of legal practice. As more legal professionals adopt these tools, new legal, ethical, and professional issues emerge. This article discusses recent changes that impact lawyer communication, focusing on two areas: (1) communication issues regarding social media, videoconferencing, and advertising in the media; and (2) the educational implications for upcoming lawyers navigating these venues. The first communication challenge stems from the increasing use of social media by clients and lawyers, with platforms including Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn becoming prevalent. This rise has led to a growing body of case law addressing the legal and ethical considerations lawyers must keep in mind when using these platforms for interactions. Most legal ethics opinions about social media focus on litigation contexts, especially concerning jury

intimidation and witness investigation, but also have broader implications for various situations lawyers encounter. Accrediting bodies for law schools can leverage these opinions to prepare students for the ethical challenges posed by social media. The second significant communication challenge comes from emerging technologies, particularly videoconferencing tools that lawyers, judges, and clients are increasingly using. While videoconferencing has existed since the 1960s, its use before the pandemic was largely confined to larger firms and clients. The pandemic shifted this trend, allowing lawyers working from home and courts to operate continuously, thus opening new operational avenues. However, this enhanced reliance on technology has brought increased concerns regarding security, privacy, and competency, leading to new ethical dilemmas for lawyers, particularly regarding client confidentiality and effective communication. Upholding traditional ethical standards regarding confidentiality and competence remains essential as lawyers increasingly use web-based videoconferencing platforms to interact with clients and the public [9, 10].

### CASE STUDIES

This section outlines three case studies of recent policy changes affecting legal communication strategies, including two public sector and one private sector example. 6.1. The City of Toronto: Code of Conduct Adaptation during Pandemic. On February 23, 2020, COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic, prompting the City of Toronto to declare an emergency on March 17, 2020. The City Council adjusted its meeting schedule to virtual formats and discussed COVID-19 impacts. The City Clerk noted that the existing Code of Conduct for Members of Council, written before 2020, didn't address such circumstances. Following Council direction, the Clerk engaged legal counsel to review the Code for necessary updates. After a survey and consultations with a Council working group, recommendations were presented and adopted, outlining interim misconduct instances for Council members. This process drew significant public interest and media scrutiny. 6.2. OCAD University: Expenditure Policy Update. On May 29, 2020, OCAD University's Board of Governors adopted a revised Expenditure Policy after extensive review by the audit and risk committee. The old policy was nearly 20 years old and was no longer suitable for the institution's growth. The updates included standard revisions and structures to mitigate misconduct risks. As a significant Canadian institution, the policy update sparked public discussions during the Board meeting, leading to questions from Board members regarding its application. This prompted media interest and protests from student organizers seeking accountability from the Board regarding expenditures. OCAD U responded to all inquiries from reporters and undertook a thorough independent investigation to ensure proper procedures were followed [11, 12].

#### Challenges Faced By Legal Professionals

The increasing complexity of legal regulations has led to a rise in new legal service providers and delivery methods in many countries. Non-traditional law firms often adopt a 'top-down' approach, establishing concepts and implementation rules that local offices adapt. However, this strategy frequently results in sub-optimal outcomes due to competing demands within the delivery structure, causing gradual idea loss and unnecessary processes. This raises concerns about the ability of the Czech legal profession to adapt to emerging corporate patterns within its less complex, high-context framework. Although globally similar legal service formats exist, significant functional variations depend on the local context. Traditionally, legal services in the Czech Republic have been conservative and relationship-driven, focusing mainly on basic issue identification. Higher-value tasks, like compliance-related work, were historically performed by smaller local firms in an outsourcing model. Consequently, these traditional offices struggle to compete with more technologically advanced entrants. Additionally, the high costs associated with these services pose risks to sustainable delivery and professional cohesion, threatening the long-term competitiveness of the Czech legal industry [13, 14].

#### The Role of Technology in Legal Communication

When implementing a policy change, lawyers must consider how it impacts all legal communications, often involving technology. Such communications should express the firm's decision, analyze relevant factors, and persuade non-decision-makers to support the choice. While common communication aspects apply, specific issues in written, live, and firm-wide communications are essential. After a policy change, a strategic communication plan for the decision-maker should be developed, considering medium, timing, content, and audience. Persuasiveness from the audience's perspective is crucial. Initially, communications should clarify the policy decision, noting that multiple acceptable choices exist. Thus, it's beneficial to present considered options with a recommendation, summarizing the choice, analyzing factors behind it, and concluding with a strong recommendation, especially highlighting compelling considerations for the choice [15, 16].

### Best Practices for Legal Communication

Legal communication strategies during a compliance crisis must align with assessment and remediation actions. Policy interventions should be evaluated for supervision and compliance monitoring effectiveness, adjusting as necessary. If changes to acts, rules, or guidelines complicate assessments, they should be clarified or reverted. Public communication about interventions should withstand constructive criticism or be amended if perceived as unfair or inappropriate. These strategies are nested within organization-level concepts, which manifest in various instances at lower levels. Communication implementation can range from small adjustments to complex actions, with impacts considered at the organizational level. Most agency actions regarding legal communication are informal and intuition-based. Noise, bias, and omission often obstruct public consultation. To mitigate these issues and based on New Institutional Economics principles that highlight control reliance by industry, a more formal management intervention process is recommended. Formal decision processes and predefined 'rules of thumbs' help actors adhere to their actions, broaden assessment criteria, and reduce the consequences of individual errors. This can enhance perceptions of fairness in decisions. Formalizing communication strategies should involve evaluating existing practices, identifying effectiveness metrics before reforms, and outlining regime-specific remediation and assessment plans [17, 18].

### The Future of Legal Communication

Over the last fifty years, technology has significantly transformed legal communication. Improvements in typing, word processing, and printing emerged alongside email, text messaging, video conferencing, social media, and AI. These advancements altered how, with whom, when, and why lawyers communicate. Driven by client demands and competition, early litigation relied heavily on letters and court reporters for depositions, with transcription services still unknown. Initial communications began with pleasantries before addressing the matter at hand. As technology evolved, old methods were rapidly supplanted. Client emergencies meant lawyers often worked incessantly, sending emails day and night, diminishing the relevance of time-stamped letters. New technologies raised significant concerns about confidentiality and the risk of inadvertent disclosures of privileged information, prompting revisions to ethical guidelines without providing substantial guidance. Lawyers adapted by being more cautious with their communication. Ideally, client communications would occur via private email, minimizing potential pitfalls. Yet, unprofessional communications persisted among attorneys. Technology fostered various families of legal communications, including those between clients and involved parties, as well as materials related to cases such as drafts, notes, and outlines. These communications can be categorized into technical types like emails, faxes, letters, and memos, ranging from plain documents to those with metadata and complex formatting. Text messages have also evolved uniquely. Overall, millions of individual communications are exchanged monthly in modern legal practice [19, 20].

### Ethical Considerations

Improving a communication strategy often raises ethical questions when considering new software or technology. This may stem from positive initiatives, like gathering client intelligence or tracking competitors, or from negative events, such as data breaches. Anticipating questions about legal and ethical implications during implementation is essential. Companies should clarify their compliance with legal obligations surrounding client and attorney communications and address technology-related issues. Effective responses should be flexible and relevant to the specific communication improvements being made, accommodating diverse concerns based on the nature of the platform and the information utilized. Key considerations include adherence to confidentiality and privacy obligations, compliance with regulations, and accountability within the firm. The attorney-client privilege and the assurance of confidentiality are vital, prompting firms to carefully evaluate how a new platform will protect these obligations. Companies must not only address these ethical concerns but also convey their decisions effectively to varied audiences. Legal communication professionals seeking to improve their strategies should contemplate how to address the questions raised by implementing such changes [21, 22].

### CONCLUSION

Policy changes are profoundly altering the landscape of legal communication, influencing how laws are interpreted, conveyed, and operationalized in both public and private sectors. As demonstrated through various case studies, legal communication is increasingly situated at the intersection of evolving technology, regulatory complexity, and shifting societal values. The transition from traditional legal discourse to digitally mediated communication requires a recalibration of ethical, strategic, and educational frameworks. Tools like AI are expanding the reach and efficiency of legal communication, yet they also introduce concerns regarding transparency, cognitive accessibility, and professional integrity. Legal professionals must navigate these changes with a balanced approach that integrates technological innovation with steadfast adherence to legal principles and clear communication. In this evolving context,

the development of formalized, adaptable, and ethically grounded communication strategies will be essential in sustaining public trust and legal efficacy in a rapidly transforming legal ecosystem.

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CITE AS: Asiimwe Kyomugisha T. (2025). The Impact of Policy Changes on Legal Communication Strategies. IDOSR JOURNAL OF CURRENT ISSUES IN ARTS AND HUMANITIES 11(1): 30-35. <https://doi.org/10.59298/IDOSRJCIAH/2025/1113035>