

# Business Communication & Analysis 2023-24

## Assignment 1

**Total Marks: 15**

**Read the following case and follow the instructions given below:**

Sofia Torres just wanted to grab her pasta salad from the communal refrigerator and eat at her desk, but instead she got sucked into another exchange with Jim Miller. Since she'd joined ByteForge as a software developer, six months earlier, every conversation with Jim had been about what a hindrance the company's project-management system was. On her very first day—in a roomful of new colleagues—he'd asked whether her former employer had used Scrum. When she'd said no, he'd chuckled and said, "You might regret leaving to come here!"

Now Jim shouted a greeting: "Hey, Torres, how's your sprint going?" He and his tablemates—Adnan Persaud, and Wai Quon—burst into laughter. "Fine," Sofia replied, smiling and grabbing her lunch. As she left the room, she heard Jim whisper, "I know she hates Scrum as much as I do."

Sofia didn't love Scrum, but she did enjoy working at ByteForge. Her prior employer, Ambitious Computing, a start-up focused on artificial intelligence, was more technologically advanced, and her colleagues had been happier, but ByteForge was one of the three leading hardware and software companies in the world. It had been in business for 40 years, and it paid her almost 50% more than Ambitious had.

The hardest change had been to go from working in a much quicker, more loosely structured manner to adjusting to ByteForge's more methodical and deliberate pace. Sofia's nine-person team included developers in India, Australia, the UK, and the United States. They operated on a follow-the-sun model that maximized productivity by ensuring that work proceeded continuously, with team members in one-time zone handing off work to colleagues in another from day to day. Clear cross-team communication was essential.

Following the Scrum process, each ByteForge software team's work was divided into two-week sprints with a major code release each quarter. The code would be tested and integrated with clients' real-time critical systems—such as military equipment, satellites, autonomous vehicles, and medical devices—that had to perform with zero failure.

At the end of each two-week sprint Sofia would send a batch of code to a testing team and gather her own team to reflect on how things had gone and what they

would like to change for the next sprint. She would also review the backlog— a prioritized list of projects that the testing team had identified for her team to work on next, such as features to support or bugs to fix. The list and the associated product road map were generated and approved by a management team high above her pay grade. Sofia’s team typically completed 10 stories (or tasks) during each sprint. ByteForge wanted everyone to complete at least 12. Despite his complaints, only Jim Miller ever hit that quota.

Sofia, Jim, Adnan, Wai, and the other “Scrum masters” reported to Emma Burger, the manager responsible for gathering detailed user requirements from the business side and conveying them to the software teams. Emma reported to Chris Patrick, the director of manufacturing, who supervised 34 reports, including technical project managers, software development engineers, and release managers in the United States and around the globe.

Sofia enjoyed working for Emma and wanted to make her life easier, not harder. But she agreed with Jim: ByteForge’s processes were too cumbersome. That’s why, when Jim followed her out of the canteen to her cubicle, sat on her desk, and asked her to help him change things, she listened and ultimately agreed to meet with him later to discuss a plan.

## **Jim’s Request**

“I’ve been waiting for someone like you to join ByteForge,” Jim said. “They’ll listen to you.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“Working in small batches, with these tight cadences, limited by management in what we’re able to do, we’re never going to be as productive as they want us to be,” he said. “It takes so damn long to finally release even the smallest update. We need a different system. Have you used Flow? My daughter is a software developer too, and that’s how her team works.”

Not only had Sofia used Flow analytical tools and techniques when she was at Ambitious Computing, but she’d earned a diploma in the method. She hadn’t really wanted to take the course, but her boss and mentor at the time had insisted. “This is where the industry is headed,” she’d said.

“I used Flow at Ambitious,” Sofia told Jim.

“So you know it’s better,” he said. “There’s no continuous and unnecessary starting

and stopping, no siloed workflows, more freedom. No more redundant daily 9 AM stand-up meetings that my team in Mumbai has to join at 6:30 PM their time. We set the release date. We leverage predictive analytics, using AI rather than asking for extended deadlines.”

Sofia agreed with Jim on those points, but she also knew that not everyone liked working with Flow. For example, the AI-based tools Jim referenced were great for predicting errors and impediments to the smooth flow of work, but that was only because all work was being monitored and managed transparently in real time. Teams working in Flow—and their managers—could see the development process laid out on digital screens in their offices—which was maybe great for collaboration in distributed teams, but nerve-racking for less-confident developers.

Furthermore, ByteForge was a technology stalwart, one of the first companies ever to produce commercial software. Sofia wasn’t sure that after only six months at a company that had been successful for 40 years she could ask its leaders to change the way they were doing business.

“How can I help you with this?” she asked.

“I want you to pitch Flow to the higher-ups,” Jim said.

## **A Pilot Project**

Against her better judgment, Sofia agreed to attend a meeting with Emma and Jim. He did most of the talking, explaining his vision for what a pilot program would look like and how he thought Sofia could present it to Chris Patrick at the annual process-improvement review.

Emma was skeptical. “Sofia, what do you think?”

“Flow worked very well at Ambitious,” Sofia said. “I’m not sure it’s what we need here, but I’m happy to help pilot it.”

“Would you be willing to present the results to the board?” Emma asked. Sofia shrugged.

“Sofia has an Ivy League degree,” Jim said. “She worked for a future unicorn. She has a diploma in Flow. If anyone can demonstrate and communicate the need for this change to Chris, it’s Sofia.”

Sofia was taken aback by how much Jim knew about her but also pleased by his

esteem. Since joining ByteForge, she'd kept her head down and tried her best to hit the unrealistic deadlines set for her by her supervisors. Maybe it was time for her to speak up and take a risk.

“OK, as long as you all meet your quotas, I don't care how you do it,” Emma said. “But if there are any signs of problems, I'm going to shut it down.”

Over the next few months Sofia reviewed academic research papers and consultancy reports to compare techniques and challenges in Flow with those in Scrum and other software development methods such as Extreme Programming (XP) and feature-driven development. She reread *Stop Starting, Start Finishing* and similar books. She then told Emma she was ready to work with a vendor to launch a pilot project on its AI-powered Flow software, which, unlike their current system, had digital Kanban Board functionality for better team communication and could automatically generate metrics, such as cycle time and lead time, which teams in Scrum needed to log and track themselves.

In sprint planning meetings, now scheduled for half a day rather than squeezed into an hour, Sofia's team discussed the product backlog, divided projects into tasks, and planned for future sprints to deliver on prioritized requirements. In some instances, Sofia had to devise a combination of Scrum and Flow techniques, especially at the beginning of projects. The frequent-delivery approach of two-week sprints was a ByteForge requirement. That rule couldn't be changed until everyone was working in Flow.

The pilot was a hot topic in the canteen. On the day Sofia announced that her team would be experimenting with Flow coordination, Wai spoke to her directly for the first time. “Thanks for doing this!” he said. “I can't wait until we all get it!”

## **One Year Later**

After the pilot had run for a year, Sofia was proud of the results. Her team had maintained its 10-story-per-sprint production but was now continuously deploying code with no critical errors, and team morale had improved. Jim had cheered her on the whole way.

“You really did it,” he told her. “We've got AI choosing and prioritizing your projects rather than some corporate nitwit who has never written a line of code. It's catching defects and bottlenecks before your people do. The bosses can see exactly where the team is in its projects and exactly how little time they're giving you!”

But Emma soon burst their bubble. “I previewed what we're doing for Chris,” she

said on a video call with Sofia and Jim from London, where she'd traveled for a senior planning meeting. "We got into a big argument. He's never used Flow. The first thing he asked was how many stories Sofia's team averaged each sprint. When I told him productivity basically stayed the same, he rolled his eyes."

"So is that it?" Sofia asked. "Do we still present to the process-improvement board? Can we keep the pilot going?"

"Chris said it was our decision, but he's confident that we're going to get roasted by the committee—especially the older members, who don't have a software background. Honestly, Sofia, you have the expertise, and you ran the pilot, so it's your call. Do you believe this will improve our productivity in the long run? And are you strong enough in that conviction to stand up in front of these guys and say so?"

That night, as she was leaving the office, Sofia ducked into the canteen to grab her unopened Tupperware container. She hadn't been hungry for lunch that afternoon. Her stomach had been tied up in knots. Wai, Adnan, and Jim were leaving the office for happy hour and asked if she was ready to present Flow. She said she had a bad feeling.

"Don't worry, Torres," Jim said. "You'll do great."

***Assignment Question:***

As Sofia Torres, you find yourself in a scenario where your colleagues are urging you to deliver a presentation to the senior Managing Committee. Despite the encouragement, you harbor reservations, being aware that Emma Burger is similarly uncertain about the way forward. Craft a decision report, using the BCA framework, addressed to Emma Burger, outlining your recommendation on the course of action ByteForge should take.

The report should start with a Situational Analysis and end with a recommendation.

**PLEASE NOTE: No cover page, Letter of Transmission, Executive Summary, or Action Plan required for this assignment.**