

***FIND IT, FRAME IT, FIX IT:***

***DIAGNOSING, ANALYZING, AND SOLVING  
(COMMUNICATION) PROBLEMS IN THE  
WORKPLACE***

*Critical Thinking, Problem-Solving, Ethics, Written and  
Oral Presentation Skills Assignment*

# For Instructors-only: Assignment Context

- Critical thinking and communication identified as two of the key skills employers seek ([https://parade.com/538769/scott\\_steinberg/2017-job-trends-15-skills-employers-are-now-looking-for/](https://parade.com/538769/scott_steinberg/2017-job-trends-15-skills-employers-are-now-looking-for/))
- Research shows university students in the U.S. continue to either lack these attributes, or show deficiencies across industries (*Fast Company, 2016;* <https://www.fastcompany.com/3059940/these-are-the-biggest-skills-that-new-graduates-lack> )
- In response to this, I created an individual course assignment that touches on critical thinking skills (problem identification, analysis, recommendation development) audience awareness and engagement, and written/oral presentation skill development
- *The following slides can be tailored to present to the students, so they understand the parameters of the assignment instructions*

# Mini-Consulting scenario

- Congratulations! You are a junior-level strategic communication Consultant who has been assigned to work with a client
- The Client is experiencing some significant organizational/*communication*-based issues, and your Boss wants you to partner with them to improve their situation
- The role of the Consultant is to 1) find what those issues are; 2) frame them by analyzing key facets of at least 3 issues; and 3) fix the issues with specific recommendations
- The Consultant must then prepare a
  - 1) written report (2-3 pages, incorporating pre-designed table/template) and*
  - 2) recorded video presentation (5-6 minutes) to the Client, explaining the above*
- You will need to use your critical thinking, analytical, writing, and presentation skills

# Assignment Instructions (1)

“You are a strategic communication consultant. You’ve been working in this role for 2 years, for a consulting firm that analyzes organizational “competencies”, including opportunities and challenges in internal communications.

Your boss assigns you a project with a prospective new client / stakeholder. You are serving as a junior consultant in this role.

The client is experiencing organizational/communication and some ethics issues. They want you to tell them what top 3 issues are (find), conceptualize them clearly (frame), and help solve them (fix).

The client has just hired a new CEO and President, and she wants to see what internal business processes (financial, communication, employee engagement, teamwork, leadership, etc.) need to be improved.

# Assignment Instructions (2)

- “You will need to prepare a report (hardcopy) and an online presentation to this client (they are your ‘audience’).
  - *Your boss wants this written report delivered **hardcopy** (typed!) and **via video recording presentation** (xxx system) format as a presentation to your client. You are to create a report describing the main business/communication issues (FIND/FRAME), and how your firm would address them (FIX).*
- You can make up any details about yourself and the client (i.e. your company’s name; their company’s name; industry; size, location, etc.). However, you should refer to and use the details outlined in the assignments as the client’s “situation”.
- You will have the benefit of having conducted an organization (climate) survey and interviews with employees (*note: these are both fictitious; assume that they have already taken place and you have both survey findings and interview feedback from the employees.*)”

# Step 1: The Client Situation

- Here's what you know about the Client (*NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS: YOU CAN ADAPT THESE AS NEEDED TO EMPHASIZE MORE/LESS COMMUNICATION-RELATED ISSUES*):
  - √ *Their workplace doesn't provide balance/equity. They are overworked, underpaid.*
  - √ *There is a lack of internal supportive messages from superiors. There is a lot of criticism, typically delivered in front of others during meetings.*
  - √ *You have heard stories of some classist, racist, and sexist remarks made by employees to other employees.*
  - √ *Their employee turnover is high: 32% vs. their 'average' competitors' (17%)*
  - √ *There are no regular employee surveys asking for feedback (your consulting firm's was one of the first)*

# Step 1: The list (cont.)

- √ *There is a company website that is updated with current news about the company/media/the press. It also mentions special employee recognition/achievements.*
- √ *Standard communication takes place via email and attachments.*
- √ *Meetings sometimes have agendas, but not always.*
- √ *There are performance evaluations/feedback given annually, but they are informal (not written). However, they influence employee bonuses by as much as 25% annually.*
- √ *Payroll systems are upgraded/current. Technology is strong overall. Employees have access to current technology/databases/systems.*
- √ *The organization is quite profitable. They are well-regarded in their industry. Good cash-flow, solid assets/investments.*
- √ *Consumers seem to be happy (based on consumer surveys conducted for the past three years)*

# Step 2: Employee Survey/Interviews

- You have already conducted an Employee survey and interviews:
  - Note: the survey and interview is fictitious. It is assumed that it has already taken place, and you as a consultant are able to follow-up on their “survey results” with their client. As the consultant who did the surveys/interviews, you can and should refer to your “findings” in your report.
  - Get creative and describe in a paragraph:
    - 1) *who you interviewed; how many employees;*
    - 2) *who was surveyed via the employee survey – how many employees?*
    - 3) *what were the top issues identified in the survey/interviews?*

*These should link back to the list of “Client Issues”, and the numbers/findings can be as creative as you would like, but should be realistic.*

# Step 3 - Written Report to Client

- Part 1 – Now, you will need to construct your Report to your Client
  - *Written report (2-3 pages), Memo format (To “Client”)*
  - *Remember: you are using critical thinking and analysis to diagnose what you see as the top 3 issues, how those issues are impacting the organization, and generating concrete recommendations to address them*
  - *Report outlines (using Table provided in Assignment Instructions)*
    - Introduction
      - *Who you are, Credibility statement*
    - Survey/Interview results (1 Paragraph)
    - What is going well with the Client
    - Frame the top three problems (using terminology from class, such as employee retention, employee satisfaction, internal communication flows, leadership, teamwork...)
    - Possible detailed solutions for each problem (must include some credible research)

FIND IT

FRAME IT

FIX IT

# Step 3 – Written Report Example (1)

## Survey/Interview Example (Jr., Finance major):

*“In order to understand what is going on in your company, I interviewed 50 employees which equals about 30% of total employees. 40 of them were mid-tier and entry-level employees, and 10 were upper management. I talked to them during their lunch time and after work, between April 1 – 11, so it took me 10 days to have reasonable idea of what is going well and what needs to be improved in the company.”*

# Step 3 – Written Report Example (2)

## Diagnosis of top three issues Example (Jr., consulting major):

*“First of all, your company’s financial situation, market status, and consumers’ satisfaction are all great. I have discovered that you make \$10 million in profit every year, have good cash-flow and solid investments. In terms of profit, you are ranked in the top 10 in your industry, and considering the cash-flow and the investments, I cannot tell how you could do even better. Your financial situation is very strong.*

*Second, your company is also very well-regarded in the industry. Based on consumer surveys conducted for the past 3 years, your consumers seem to be happy, and your company is consistently ranked at the top of companies in the industry.*

*Internally, technology used for work is strong overall. Employees have access to current databases easily and efficiently, and this has increased the productivity and effectiveness of work.*

*However, my analysis has discovered there are three serious problems regarding your employees and negatively impacting their performance. These are 1) limited or non-existent internal communications from leaders/managers; 2) a need for increased employee engagement; and 3) a lack of clear communication channels... “ (then expand)*

# Step 4 – Online recorded Presentation to Client

- Part 2 – Finally, prepare, practice, and record your online Report/Presentation
  - *Formal online recorded, 5-6 minute presentation (To “Client”)*
  - *Highlights key aspects of the report*
    - Introduction/Greeting
    - 3 problems **FIND IT / FRAME IT**
    - 3 recommendations (must include some supported research) **FIX IT**
    - Conclusion (“thank you”, “next steps”)
  - *Business professional dress*

# What are you graded on?

## ■ Presentation – 30 points

- *Organization/Structure: Introduction (compelling attention-getter, credibility), Uses Client information (survey findings, company clearly defined, evidence that consultant has “researched” the client); Problem-identification/Analysis (3 issues, at least one ethical), Recommendations (clear? Supported with research? Realistic?); conclusion/next steps; well-structured*
- *Delivery/non-verbals: flow, audience orientation in tone, engaged, eye contact, pace, pitch, volume; is not a regurgitation of written report*

## ■ Written report – 20 points

- *Organization/Structure: clear introduction, body (use of template/columns), memo format; closing, next steps; formatting, grammar, syntax, word selection, overall formatting*

**SEE GRADING RUBRIC FOR SPECIFICS**

# Example of online video

<https://steamboat.youseeu.com/external-player/556413/aa7ff01271c5b94bc577fee59ac50eaf/styled>