

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/)
- 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>