



Moderator's Assignment Feedback – Strategic Communications and Leadership

After each series, we ask our moderators to provide a report on each assignment-based unit to identify:

- Any questions which were usually answered particularly well, including main points and qualities that characterised good answers.
- Any questions which were usually answered badly and main weaknesses in candidates' answers.
- Common errors or misconceptions made by candidates.

We hope that this will be of assistance when completing your Strategic Communications and Leadership assignment.

General feedback to candidates

A good cohort of responses for this series with demonstration of understanding of a range of communication and leadership theories. Most were able to apply their findings to the strategies of their organisation.

However, the leadership subject was generally less well answered than the communications subject, with a number of candidates relying on subjective consideration of leaders rather than using reliable theories and mechanisms to measure outcomes. Candidates who were able to take their findings and use them to consider the impact of leaders on performance in their own organisation or case study, did well.

The strongest papers were able to take their learned theories and apply them in a workplace context and in the format required within each task. In contrast, the candidates who simply wrote all they knew about the subject without applying this to answering the questions asked, did less well. Some candidates slipped into providing a lot of process detail rather than summarising the needs and impacts. This used valid wordcount that could have been used for more analysis or evaluation adding value to the task response.

Analysis ranged from basic identification of findings through to more thoughtful assessment of results. Few strongly evidenced involvement of stakeholders. There was some good referencing which demonstrated wider reading, but candidates are encouraged to use Harvard style referencing as outlined in the Level 5 Learner Guidance.

Further reference to the Learner Guidance should be made to ensure appendices are used correctly. Although the word count can be ignored in appendices their purpose is not to be used as an extension to the task response. Appendix items themselves do not attract marks. Their purpose is to provide evidence where appropriate to the content of the task response.

It should also be noted that the 'suggested areas for consideration' are there to guide the candidates toward potential subject areas and candidates are not expected to write everything they know about each suggested area in a separate document. At this level, candidates are expected instead, to select the relevant areas and adapt them to specifically answer the task given them.

Feedback for each assignment question

Task1. Using a range of relevant academic theories, evaluate the effectiveness of departmental communication with internal and external stakeholders.

T1 – Almost all candidates were able to identify and describe several recognised communication theories and techniques. Some candidates did little more than explain what each theory or technique could do, which limited the opportunity for marks. Others spent time assessing the viability of each method, and those that used this to assess and evaluate these within their organisation, in line with task requirements, gained the highest marks and grades.

Task 2. Working with relevant stakeholders, create a proposal to improve communications to achieve positive outcomes in line with strategic objective. Support your answer with a plan of improvement in an appendix. Refer to your plan and your findings to justify your proposal and approach.

T2 – the starting point of this task are any communication issues identified in Task 1. This quality of responses in this task are, therefore, conditional on how well candidates have evaluated communication techniques of their own organisation or case study in the previous task. A careful review of Task 1 before attempting Task 2 is, therefore, a clear recommendation.

Most attempted to develop ideas into a plan for improvement with a link back to business strategy. Most managed to justify their plan effectively but some slipped into process reviews rather than evidence and analysis particularly in being able to evidence their work with relevant stakeholders.

It must be remembered, as stated in the general feedback, that the improvement plan in the appendix will not in itself secure any marks. The contents of the plan should, of course, be referred to in the main response.

Task 3. Assess how leadership helps teams achieve organisational goals and objectives. Use both academic theories and practical examples in your answer, to illustrate how leaders can impact a team's performance.

T3 – This task requires candidates to research academic theories and using practical examples apply these to candidate's own organisation or case study. Use of referencing is, therefore, important. Some candidates provided a good bibliography but did not link these clearly in the main response. This referencing requirement applies to all tasks in all CICM assignments. Where there is doubt in referencing technique, candidates should refer to the Learner Guidance.

Better responses used the theories against 'real life' or case study examples to demonstrate the efficacy of the leader. A few went on to use these examples to assess the impact of leaders on teams. The best of the responses focused on how this affected the meeting of organisational goals and objectives. In other words, they met the task requirements.

Most candidates were able to identify common leadership theories although several simply described the theories rather than using them to answer the task. The actual area of leadership styles and their impact seemed to be widely overlooked with either a fleeting description or a tentative link.