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BBA | Semester II | UK2DSCMGT104

Business Communication

Course Code: UK2DSCMGT104 • Module 4 Notes

Module 4: Spoken Communication, Presentations and Group Dynamics

Course: Business Communication (UK2DSCMGT104) • Semester II • BBA FYUGP Kerala University

1. Oral Presentation Engineering and Narrative Architecture

In modern corporate enterprise, executive leadership is fundamentally communicated through the spoken word. Whether pitching a multimillion-rupee venture capital investment, presenting quarterly financial earnings to Wall Street institutional analysts, or unveiling a strategic corporate restructuring to five thousand employees, an executive's capacity to deliver compelling, persuasive oral presentations directly dictates institutional influence and career trajectory.

Pioneering presentation scholars emphasize that a successful business presentation is not an uncontrolled download of technical data; it is an engineered psychological journey designed to inform, persuade, and inspire a specific audience to take concrete commercial action.

The Three Pillars of Presentation Engineering

- **1. Deep Audience Analysis:** The presenter must forensically profile the audience prior to drafting content:
  - *Demographic Profile:* Age distribution, educational attainment, technical specialization, cultural background, and organizational seniority.
  - *Psychological Baseline:* What are their current attitudes toward the topic? Are they hostile, neutral, receptive, or uninformed? What are their hidden anxieties, financial priorities, and personal stakes?
  - *WIIFM (What's In It For Me?):* Every corporate audience evaluates a presentation through a lens of self-interest. The speaker must answer the WIIFM question within the first ninety seconds of taking the stage.
- **2. Defining the Core Thesis (The Headline Message):** A presentation must coalesce around a single, memorable, core thesis statement—termed the "Elevator Pitch" or "Headline Message"—that can be stated in one clear sentence (e.g., *"Migrating our core enterprise databases to a unified hybrid cloud architecture will reduce operating expenses by 32% while eliminating ransomware downtime."*). Every subsequent slide, chart, and case study must serve exclusively to validate this central thesis.
- **3. Structuring the Narrative Flow:** Professional presentations follow Aristotle's classic tripartite structure, refined for modern corporate boardrooms:
  - **The Introduction (10–15% of Time):** Hook the audience immediately with an arresting opening (a startling empirical statistic, a provocative rhetorical question, a compelling case vignette, or a forward-looking vision). State the core thesis clearly; preview the structural agenda (three main points); and establish speaker credibility.

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- **The Body (70–80% of Time):** Limit the body to three to four major structural points, organized logically (chronological, problem-solution, cause-effect, or comparative advantage). Each point must be validated with concrete empirical data, verifiable business metrics, and concrete customer illustrations. Transitions between points must be seamless.
- **The Conclusion (10–15% of Time):** Signal the conclusion clearly; synthesize the main points into a memorable conceptual summary; restate the core thesis; and conclude with an unmistakable, decisive **Call to Action (CTA)** detailing the exact next steps required from decision-makers.

2. Mechanics of Vocal Delivery, Body Language, and Stage Fright

The substantive quality of presentation content is rendered useless if delivery is undermined by monotonous vocal acoustics, erratic body language, or paralyzing performance anxiety.

Vocal Mechanics and Acoustical Mastery

A professional speaker treats the human voice as an acoustic musical instrument, modulating several distinct physical variables:

- **Pitch Modulation:** Avoiding the lethal trap of a flat, monotone delivery that induces audience cognitive sleep. Vocal pitch should rise to convey excitement or pose questions, and drop into lower, resonant frequencies to convey authority, seriousness, and finality.
- **Pacing and Tempo:** The optimal conversational rate for professional business presentations is between 130 and 160 words per minute. Skilled speakers accelerate their tempo during exciting narrative passages and slow down deliberately when explaining complex financial formulas or strategic principles.
- **The Strategic Power of the Pause:** The absolute hallmark of an experienced master speaker. Pausing for two to three seconds before delivering a critical insight generates dramatic anticipation; pausing immediately after a crucial statement gives the audience cognitive time to absorb its implications. Strategic pauses also completely eliminate the need for irritating vocal fillers (*"um," "uh," "like," "you know"*).
- **Vocal Projection and Diaphragmatic Breathing:** Speaking from the diaphragm rather than the shallow chest or throat, projecting acoustic sound to the rear wall of the auditorium without shouting or straining vocal cords.
- **Articulation and Enunciation:** Crisp, clear pronunciation of consonant sounds, avoiding mumbles or swallowed word endings.

Non-Verbal Stage Mastery: Body Language and Kinesics

- **Eye Contact:** The speaker must maintain direct, sustained eye contact with individual audience members for three to five seconds at a time across all quadrants of the room (front, middle, back, left, and right). This creates intimate psychological connection and allows the speaker to read audience facial feedback in real time.

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- **Open, Grounded Posture:** Standing tall with feet shoulder-width apart, weight evenly distributed, shoulders relaxed, and arms comfortably open. Speakers must strictly avoid defensive non-verbal ticks: the "Fig Leaf" posture (hands clasped defensively over the groin), hands buried in pockets, tightly folded arms, or pacing back and forth like a caged animal.
- **Purposeful Stage Movement:** Movement on stage must be intentional. Speakers should move toward a specific quadrant of the room when making a key point, pause there while delivering it, and move intentionally to another quadrant when transitioning to the next topic.

Conquering Glossophobia (Speech Anxiety)

Glossophobia—the psychological fear of public speaking—is one of the most prevalent human phobias, activating the primitive autonomic nervous system's "fight-or-flight" response (surging adrenaline, racing heart rate, trembling hands, dry mouth, and shallow breathing). Professional speakers do not eliminate adrenaline; they channel it into focused performance energy through proven cognitive and physiological techniques:

- **Cognitive Reframing:** Shifting the internal mental dialogue from *"I am being judged and evaluated by a hostile audience"* to *"I am a generous expert sharing valuable insights to help my colleagues succeed."*
- **Deep Diaphragmatic Box Breathing:** Inhaling deeply for four seconds, holding for four seconds, exhaling for four seconds, and holding for four seconds to activate the parasympathetic nervous system and instantly drop cortisol levels.
- **Over-Preparation of the Opening 90 Seconds:** Memorizing the opening hook, thesis statement, and agenda transition flawlessly. Once the speaker navigates the first ninety seconds with composure, physiological panic subsides organically.

3. Audio-Visual Aids and Executive Slide Mechanics

Visual aids are designed to amplify, clarify, and reinforce the speaker's message—never to serve as a teleprompter or replace the speaker.

Executive Slide Design Principles (The Death by PowerPoint Antidote)

- **The Assertion-Evidence Architecture:** Developed by Penn State engineering communications scholars, this model abandons useless, vague slide titles (e.g., "Quarterly Financial Overview") in favor of a clear, bold **Assertion Headline** at the top of the slide (e.g., *"Cloud Subscription Margins Expanded to 68% in Q3, Offsetting Hardware Revenue Declines"*), supported visually by clear empirical evidence (a single elegant graph or visual diagram).
- **Visual Simplicity and White Space:** Eliminating dense bulleted text paragraphs. Adhering to the **6 × 6 Rule**: no more than six lines of text per slide, and no more than six words per line. High-contrast color palettes (dark navy text on crisp white background for bright conference rooms; crisp white text on deep charcoal backgrounds for dark auditoriums).
- **Data Visualization Best Practices:** Selecting the correct visual chart for the underlying data relationship:

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- *Line Charts:* For demonstrating continuous time-series trends (e.g., five-year revenue trajectory).
- *Bar / Column Charts:* For comparing discrete categories (e.g., market share across competing brands).
- *Pie Charts:* Deployed sparingly, only for displaying simple proportional components of a whole (limited to maximum 4–5 slices).

- **Boardroom Projection Etiquette:** Never turn your back on the audience to read text off the projection screen. Look at the audience 90% of the time, glancing only momentarily at comfort monitors. Always prepare for catastrophic technical failure by carrying printed hard copies and offline PDF backups.

4. Professional Employment Interview Dynamics

An employment interview is a high-stakes, two-way formal evaluative interaction wherein an employer assesses a candidate's technical competence, cultural fit, and leadership potential, while the candidate evaluates whether the organization aligns with their long-term professional aspirations.

Taxonomy of Professional Employment Interviews

Interview Typology	Structural Format & Methodology	Core Evaluative Objective	Candidate Navigation Strategy
1. Structured Interview	Standardized; every candidate is asked the exact same predetermined questions in identical order, scored against a formal grading rubric.	Ensures legal compliance, eliminates interviewer bias, and enables objective comparative benchmarking.	Provide precise, structured answers directly targeting the evaluative criteria outlined in the job description.
2. Unstructured Interview	Conversational, open-ended, free-flowing dialogue where questions emerge organically from the candidate's responses.	Evaluates interpersonal chemistry, conversational agility, cultural alignment, and spontaneous intellectual depth.	Maintain professional discipline; steer the conversation toward core strengths; do not become casually over-relaxed.
3. Behavioral Interview	Operates upon the foundational premise: *"The best predictor of future performance is past behavior in similar operational circumstances."* Questions begin: *"Tell me about a time when you..."*	Evaluates real-world behavioral competencies: leadership under pressure, conflict resolution, analytical problem-solving.	Deploy the **STAR Method** (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to construct crisp, quantifiable historical case vignettes.
4. Panel Interview	Candidate is interviewed simultaneously by three to six	Conserves executive time; tests composure	Make direct eye contact with the person who

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	corporate stakeholders (e.g., HR Director, Technical Lead, Department VP).	under multi-directional questioning; evaluates cross-functional appeal.	asked the question, but sweep your gaze across the entire panel while answering.
5. Stress Interview	Interviewer deliberately creates acute psychological tension through aggressive interruptions, long awkward silences, skeptical body language, or challenging questions.	Tests emotional stability, poise, professional composure, and self-control under severe workplace pressure.	Recognize it as an intentional simulation; maintain calm emotional detachment; pause before speaking; never become defensive or hostile.

The STAR Behavioral Response Architecture

The universal gold standard framework for answering behavioral interview questions:

- **S - Situation (15% of Time):** Set the contextual stage clearly and concisely. Describe the specific corporate organization, operational challenge, crisis, or project context.
- **T - Task (15% of Time):** Clarify your specific personal role, responsibility, and objective in resolving the situation.
- **A - Action (50% of Time):** The absolute core of your answer. Detail the exact strategic steps, analytical methodologies, leadership interventions, and tools *you* deployed to address the challenge. Use "I" rather than vague "We."
- **R - Result (20% of Time):** Quantify the final outcome with measurable business metrics (e.g., *"This reduced supply chain processing latency by 18%, saved ₹42 lakh annually, and won the Chief Executive's Operational Excellence Award"*). Reflect briefly on what you learned.

5. Group Discussions (GD) and Boardroom Debates

In executive recruitment and business school admissions, the **Group Discussion (GD)** serves as a powerful evaluative tool where eight to twelve candidates are given a complex commercial topic or case scenario to discuss for fifteen to twenty minutes without a designated moderator. GDs evaluate how an individual functions in dynamic, competitive peer group environments.

Core Evaluation Parameters in Group Discussions

- **Substantive Knowledge and Analytical Depth:** Demonstrating nuanced understanding of macroeconomic, corporate, and technological issues; providing verifiable empirical facts rather than superficial emotional opinions.
- **Communication Competence:** Clear articulation, appropriate vocal modulation, concise phrasing, and active listening to fellow participants.

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- **Leadership and Group Facilitation:** The ability to steer a chaotic, drifting discussion back toward core strategic issues; summarizing emerging consensus points; and graciously bringing quiet, introverted participants into the conversation.
- **Emotional Poise and Teamwork:** Disagreeing agreeably without shouting, interrupting, or displaying condescending non-verbal body language.

Strategies for Constructive Participation

- **Initiating the Discussion:** Initiating the GD provides high visibility, but is advantageous *only* if the candidate can define the conceptual terms clearly, establish a structured analytical framework for discussion, and pose insightful questions. Initiating with superficial platitudes damages credibility.
- **Intervening and Managing Disruptive Participants:** When aggressive participants dominate the discussion or shout over others, a skilled leader intervenes with polite, firm diplomacy: *"Rohan, you have raised an excellent point regarding digital marketing. Let us now hear how Priya views the supply chain implications so our team can develop a comprehensive solution."*
- **Summarizing the Discussion:** Delivering an objective, balanced synthesis in the final two minutes that captures all divergent perspectives and highlights group consensus areas.

6. Strategic Negotiation Dynamics and Persuasive Spoken Communication

In executive management, few spoken communication competencies rival the strategic importance of **Negotiation**. Negotiation is the interactive spoken communication process through which two or more parties with both shared and conflicting interests seek to reach a mutually binding agreement.

The Harvard Principled Negotiation Framework (Fisher and Ury)

Formulated by Harvard Law School scholars **Roger Fisher and William Ury** in their landmark treatise *Getting to Yes*, Principled Negotiation moves beyond traditional hard-bargaining positional warfare through four foundational pillars:

- **1. Separate the People from the Problem:** Human beings possess emotions, defensive egos, and perceptual biases. Skilled negotiators address substantive commercial issues with uncompromising rigor while treating human negotiation partners with profound personal respect, courtesy, and empathy, preventing personal resentment from derailing commercial agreements.
- **2. Focus on Underlying Interests, Not Entrenched Positions:** A *Position* is what a party demands (e.g., *"We will not pay a single rupee over ₹500 per unit"*); an *Interest* is the underlying operational need, anxiety, or desire that drives that demand (e.g., the need to keep total annual inventory carrying costs within a board-mandated threshold). Exploring underlying interests reveals creative, flexible solutions that rigid positions conceal.
- **3. Invent Options for Mutual Gain (Win-Win Brainstorming):** Expanding the pie before dividing it. Parties collaborate to brainstorm creative value-tradeoffs across multiple variables

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(e.g., offering longer payment terms, bulk volume guarantees, or co-marketing support in exchange for price concessions).

- **4. Insist on Objective Criteria:** Anchoring agreements to fair, transparent external benchmarks rather than subjective stubbornness (e.g., prevailing market commodity spot prices, independent third-party asset valuations, or standardized government trade indices).

Core Analytical Metrics in Negotiation Architecture

- **BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement):** The most advantageous course of action a party can take if negotiations collapse and zero agreement is reached. Your BATNA is your true source of negotiation power; a negotiator with an exceptional BATNA can walk away from bad deals with total confidence.
- **Reservation Price (Walk-Away Price):** The absolute worst contractual term or maximum dollar figure a negotiator is willing to accept before walking away to execute their BATNA.
- **ZOPA (Zone of Possible Agreement):** The intellectual and financial overlap between the buyer's maximum reservation price and the seller's minimum reservation price. If the buyer is willing to pay up to ₹1,200 and the seller is willing to accept ₹1,000, a positive ZOPA of ₹200 exists, making a successful agreement mathematically feasible.

7. Robert Cialdini's Six Principles of Persuasive Communication

Dr. **Robert Cialdini** conducted extensive behavioral research mapping the universal psychological heuristics that govern human compliance and persuasion:

- **1. Reciprocity:** Human beings possess an overwhelming psychological urge to repay debts, favors, and concessions. When a business leader provides valuable assistance, unprompted market intelligence, or an initial concession, the other party feels compelled to reciprocate.
- **2. Scarcity:** People assign dramatically higher value to opportunities, commodities, and information that are perceived as rare, declining in availability, or time-restricted (e.g., *"This introductory pricing is locked strictly for the first five enterprise partners"*).
- **3. Authority:** Individuals defer to credible, knowledgeable experts. Persuasive spoken delivery projects authority through deep technical knowledge, displaying third-party certifications, and authoritative non-verbal presence.
- **4. Consistency and Commitment:** People strive to align their current actions with their past public statements and commitments. Getting a client to agree to small, initial micro-commitments makes subsequent major contractual approval psychologically natural.
- **5. Liking:** People prefer to say yes to individuals they like, admire, and perceive as similar to themselves. Cultivating genuine interpersonal warmth, finding common background interests, and offering sincere compliments lubricates persuasion.
- **6. Social Proof (Consensus):** When facing uncertainty, people look to the actions and decisions of others to guide their own behavior. Citing case studies of industry leaders who have already adopted the solution disarms client anxiety.

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8. Executive Meeting Leadership and Group Decision Dynamics

Corporate managers spend upwards of 20 to 30 hours per week in committee meetings. Effective spoken facilitation distinguishes high-performing leaders:

- **Pre-Meeting Architecture:** Enforcing the "No Agenda, No Meeting" rule. Distributing comprehensive pre-reading documentation at least 24 hours in advance so meeting time is dedicated 100% to debate and decision-making rather than passive informational reading.
- **Managing Pathological Group Dynamics (Groupthink):** Formulated by Irving Janis, **Groupthink** is the dangerous psychological phenomenon where the desire for group harmony and conformity overrides realistic appraisal of alternative courses of action, resulting in catastrophic decisions. Astute leaders eliminate groupthink by appointing a designated **Devil's Advocate** whose explicit mandate is to challenge consensus assumptions, and by deliberately withholding their own executive opinion until all junior members have spoken.
- **The "Parking Lot" Facilitation Technique:** When passionate participants derail a focused meeting by introducing off-topic or tangential issues, the meeting chair respectfully captures the topic on a whiteboard "Parking Lot" to be addressed in a subsequent dedicated session, keeping the current agenda strictly on schedule.

9. Advanced Spoken Rhetoric and Persuasion in Boardroom Governance

In executive boardrooms and high-stakes stakeholder forums, senior leaders must master classical rhetoric to persuade skeptical directors, institutional investors, and sovereign regulatory committees:

- **Inoculation Theory in Persuasive Speaking:** Pioneered by social psychologist William McGuire, inoculation theory posits that a speaker can dramatically strengthen audience resistance to opposing counter-arguments by proactively introducing a mild, weakened form of the opponent's counter-argument and refuting it before the opponent can speak (e.g., *"Our competitors will argue that this technological upgrade requires significant upfront capital; however, an analysis of five-year total cost of ownership demonstrates that maintenance savings exceed initial costs by 45%."*).
- **Handling Hostile Cross-Examinations:** During aggressive media press conferences or contentious shareholder meetings, executives deploy the **Bridging Technique**: acknowledging the question graciously, transitioning smoothly using a verbal bridge (*"That is an important operational concern; however, the fundamental strategic issue our board is addressing is..."*), and steering the response back to core corporate message points.

10. Virtual Presentation Mastery and Hybrid Video Delivery

Delivering spoken presentations across digital videoconferencing platforms requires specialized technological and behavioral adaptations:

- **The Eye-Contact Illusion:** The natural human tendency is to look at the video thumbnail of the audience on screen. However, to the audience, the speaker appears to be looking down. Master

virtual presenters look directly into the **camera lens** 80% of the time, creating the powerful psychological illusion that they are making direct, personal eye contact with every individual viewer.

- **Lighting and Acoustic Staging:** Positioning soft, diffused primary lighting (key light) directly in front of the speaker slightly above eye level, eliminating harsh shadows. Using professional external condenser microphones positioned 6 inches from the mouth, eliminating echo and room reverb.
- **Interactive Digital Engagement:** Virtual attention spans decay rapidly after seven minutes. Presenters re-engage cognitive attention every five to seven minutes through interactive digital polling (Slido, Mentimeter), chat prompts, and structured breakout room exercises.

11. The Elevator Pitch Architecture: The 60-Second Venture Formula

An indispensable spoken communication competency for entrepreneurs and corporate innovators is the **Elevator Pitch**—a concise, compelling 60-to-90-second spoken summary of an innovative commercial venture designed to secure a follow-up meeting with venture capitalists or C-suite executive sponsors. Structured into six sequential components:

1. **The Hook (First 10 Seconds):** An arresting opening statistic or provocative problem statement capturing immediate attention.
2. **The Problem:** Clearly articulating the acute, expensive, unsolved commercial pain point experienced by a large target customer demographic.
3. **The Proprietary Solution:** Describing your technological innovation and its unique value proposition.
4. **Market Opportunity and Total Addressable Market (TAM):** Quantifying the commercial market scale in verifiable figures (e.g., an ₹8,000 crore market expanding at 18% CAGR).
5. **Competitive Traction:** Verifiable empirical proof of momentum (active enterprise pilots, paying customer growth, patent approvals).
6. **The Clear Ask:** A specific, unambiguous request (e.g., *"We are raising ₹5 crore in seed capital to scale our engineering team, and would love to schedule a twenty-minute meeting on Tuesday to walk you through our operational pilot metrics."*).

12. Rhetorical Devices and Strategic Metaphor in Executive Speeches

To transform abstract commercial strategies into vivid, unforgettable mental models, master business orators deploy classical rhetorical figures of speech:

- **Metaphor and Analogy:** Comparing complex corporate transformations to familiar physical concepts (e.g., describing a corporate turnaround not through accounting jargon, but as *"repairing an aircraft's jet engine mid-flight while accelerating to maximum cruising altitude"*).
- **Anaphora (Repetitive Cadence):** The deliberate repetition of a key phrase at the beginning of successive sentences to build emotional crescendo and institutional resolve (e.g., *"We will build with speed. We will build with integrity. We will build for future generations."*).

- **The Rule of Three (Tricolon):** Structuring ideas, product features, and strategic pillars in rhythmic sets of three (e.g., *"Simpler, Faster, Stronger"* or *"People, Products, Profit"*), exploiting the human brain's natural cognitive affinity for tripartite rhythm.

13. Boardroom Q&A Session Mastery and Managing Hostile Audiences

A presentation does not conclude when the final slide is delivered; the subsequent Question-and-Answer (Q&A) session frequently makes or breaks the presentation's ultimate commercial success:

- **The Five-Step Q&A Response Architecture:** 1. Listen actively without interrupting; 2. Pause for two seconds to compose thoughts; 3. Paraphrase or reframe the question to ensure audience-wide comprehension and neutralize hostile wording; 4. Answer concisely with verified empirical data; 5. Verify satisfaction (e.g., *"Does that clarify our risk mitigation strategy?"*).
- **Managing Hostile Hecklers and Disruptive Directors:** Refrain from defensive counter-aggression. Disarm the questioner with unflappable calm: *"Vikram, you have highlighted a vital operational risk. Let us examine the three specific stress-testing scenarios our risk committee conducted to insulate the portfolio."*
- **Handling the Unanswerable Question:** Never fabricate speculative answers. Maintain absolute credibility through professional honesty: *"I do not have the exact Q2 regional breakout figures at hand, but I will deliver that audited data to your office by 10 AM tomorrow morning."*

14. Designing and Delivering Technical Product Demonstrations

In modern B2B enterprise software and high-tech manufacturing, spoken communication frequently takes the form of the **Technical Product Demo**. Demonstrators must avoid the catastrophic trap of the "Feature Dump"—clicking through dozens of menu options without context.

- **The "Day in the Life" Narrative Demo:** Structure the demonstration around a realistic, high-stakes persona scenario facing the client's business (e.g., walk through how a warehouse manager resolves a sudden shipping bottleneck in three clicks).
- **The Rule of Anticipated Failure:** Live software and hardware demos inevitably glitch. Professional presenters maintain calm humor, never apologize profusely, seamlessly deploy pre-recorded offline video fallbacks, and continue the narrative without missing a beat.

15. Logical Fallacies in Boardroom Debates and Critical Thinking

In strategic boardroom discussions, executive decision-making is frequently corrupted by deceptive **Logical Fallacies**. Skilled business communicators identify and neutralize these cognitive errors in spoken debate:

- **The Ad Hominem Fallacy:** Attacking the personal character, educational background, or age of an executive rather than addressing the substance of their financial proposal (e.g., dismissing an AI proposal by saying *"What does a young junior manager know about our thirty-year-old business model?"*).

- **The Straw Man Fallacy:** Deliberately misrepresenting, exaggerating, or oversimplifying a colleague's proposal to make it easier to attack (e.g., claiming that a proposal to optimize supply chain inventory is a reckless plot to starve factories of raw materials).
- **The False Dilemma (Bifurcation):** Artificially reducing a complex multi-dimensional strategic problem to two extreme binary choices (e.g., *"Either we acquire this high-risk startup immediately, or our firm will face complete bankruptcy within two years"*), ignoring moderate, balanced middle options.

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