

Individual Project Assignment:  
“If you’re so smart, what are *you* going to do about it?”

The good news is that, upon graduating from MIT, you have landed a job in just the sort of large organization where you can both advance your own career and maybe—if you play your cards right—made a difference in this world. The bad news is that, great prospects notwithstanding, right now you’re still a peon. For example, it’s one thing to say that the U.S. government should be doing more about climate change; it’s another thing entirely to say what you, a junior atmospheric model-builder at the Environmental Protection Agency, can do about it. How will you get from point A to point B? What obstacles will you face on the way? How much can you rely on your own skills, and how much will you need allies to achieve?

Your assignment is to think through how you would get from your starting position to a position of some influence. You need to think about what *needs* to change, in your organization and elsewhere; and then think about what contribution *you* can make to changing things.

1. Pick a challenge facing organizations and society today that will require a combination of scientific, technical and managerial/organizational knowledge and skills to solve. Below is a sample list of such challenges and organizations that are trying to deal with them (you can—indeed are encouraged—to suggest other ideas to the instructors). The deadline for picking a topic is **Session 9**.
2. Think *practical*: Consider and anticipate what political, cultural, financial and organizational obstacles you will encounter and have to overcome.
3. Think *personal*: Right now, you have little or no influence, even within your organization. How will you get the leverage you need to make progress on this issue, either by yourself or with the help of others?
4. Draft a two- to three-page memo roughly outlining what you would do in the first ten years of your career to address your chosen challenge. The memo is due on **Session 16**.
5. One of the instructors will return your memo by **Session 18**, with feedback about other problems or complications you are likely to encounter in pursuing your plan.
6. Taking that feedback into account, expand your memo into a more detailed plan, of no more than ten double-spaced pages. The plan is due on **Session 26**.

Challenge

Climate change  
Electoral reform  
Worker rights  
HIV/AIDS  
Immigrant rights  
Overfishing

Organization

Environmental Protection Agency  
Staff of the U.S. Senate; Staff of the EU Parliament  
Wal\*Mart’s Human Resources Department  
United Nations Development Program  
Dept. of Homeland Security  
United States Trade Representative