

Emotional roller coaster

Level: Intermediate upwards

Timing: 90 minutes plus

Material needed: One copy of the student worksheets and Vocabulary record per student

Group size: Any

Overview

This lesson plan for both pre-experience and in-work business students is based around an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* Issue 4/2010. The article discusses making difficult business decisions and suggests reasons why a situation may seem more difficult than it really is. It then looks in some detail at the personal conflicts two managers faced as they took the most difficult management decisions of their careers. For the purposes of this lesson the article has been divided into three parts: What makes a decision difficult? (page 2 of the student worksheets), Dilemma 1 (page 3 of the student worksheets) and Dilemma 2 (page 4 of the student worksheets).

The tasks in the student worksheets will encourage the students to learn and use new business vocabulary and functional language and to develop and practise (new) skills that could be useful in business situations, especially those involving management and social issues.

The teacher's notes provide suggestions for teaching and learning strategies as well as ideas on how to present the tasks in the classroom, any necessary answer keys, extension tasks and lesson plans.

Key words and expressions

These key words and expressions will help the students understand the article. By pre-teaching them in this way, you are enabling them to read the article without interrupting the flow to look up words essential for the comprehension. Encourage students to do this in pairs or small groups so that there is also a speaking element involved in the task.

Key:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. <i>trigger</i> | 8. <i>asset</i> |
| 2. <i>struggling</i> | 9. <i>bully</i> |
| 3. <i>administrative</i> | 10. <i>determination</i> |
| 4. <i>neglect</i> | 11. <i>inspiration</i> |
| 5. <i>viable</i> | 12. <i>narrow-minded</i> |
| 6. <i>agonizing</i> | 13. <i>bureaucratic</i> |
| 7. <i>freehold</i> | 14. <i>upset</i> |

Headings

Distribute a copy of page 2 of the student worksheets to all the students. Explain that they should write the headings above the corresponding sections in the box titled: *What makes a decision difficult?* In order to do this, they will have to read each section/paragraph.

There is a mini-glossary at the end of the page which gives definitions of some of the more tricky vocabulary used in the article.

Key:

1. *Personal conflicts of interest*
2. *Organizational conflicts of interest*
3. *Indirect conflicts of interest*
4. *All your choices are bad*
5. *Passing the hat*

Reading and exchanging information

This is a two-part reading, discussion and information exchange activity. Divide the class into students A & B. All student As should get a copy of Dilemma 1 and all student Bs should get a copy of Dilemma 2.

Part 1: As should sit together to read and discuss Dilemma 1. They should discuss the situation and what advice they would give to someone who found themselves in this situation. Bs do the same with Dilemma 2.

Part 2: The students should now work in pairs or small groups. Each pair should consist of a student A and a student B. In their A & B pairs the students should exchange information about the dilemmas they have read about and the advice they would give in these situations. At the end of this task each student should get a copy of the opposite dilemma for their reference.

Teaching tip: Information exchange activities

In information exchange activities, the students are given only part of the information they require. In order to be able to successfully complete the task they have been set they will need to talk, and listen, to other students who have the information they are missing. It will very probably help if they make notes during this information exchange task too.

The main reason for integrating information exchange activities into a lesson plan is to encourage students to practise their English communication skills such as summarizing, rephrasing, paraphrasing, concept-checking, and asking and answering questions.

"Exchanging information is one of the key functions of language." Scott Thornbury, *An A-Z of ELT*, Macmillan Books for Teachers, 2006

Emotional roller coaster

Expressions

Before they move into a group discussion the students could look at these expressions from the articles. They should match the expression with the explanations and then find them and look at how they are used in Dilemmas 1 and 2.

Key:

1. c; 2. a; 3. d; 4. b

Meeting

The students should have a meeting in which they discuss the three situations outlined in the task.

First decide who should chair the meeting and who will be taking the minutes. Then allow the students five to ten minutes to read through the three situations and make notes.

Tell them that they have to make a decision on how to deal with each situation before the end of the meeting. Setting a time limit on the meeting will place them under more pressure and encourage them to reach their decisions quickly.

Discussion

This personalization task allows the students to bring their own experiences into the class. Tell them that they don't have to restrict themselves to talking about past situations. If they find themselves in a current business dilemma, they could use this opportunity to talk about it and get some advice.

More on this topic

For follow-up lessons on the same or related topics, go to the following lesson plans in the Business tasks series on onestopenglish:

Business tasks: Decisions

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=59913&docid=156460>

Business tasks: Problems and difficulties

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=59913&docid=157200>

There are many information exchange activities on onestopenglish. Typing 'information exchange' into the search will produce a long results list, including many worksheets with a business context, such as:

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?docid=150486>

Emotional roller coaster

1 Key words

Write these key words into the gaps below.

viable neglect asset determination struggling agonizing trigger upset
narrow-minded administrative inspiration bureaucratic freehold bully

1. a verb meaning *to cause something to happen* _____
2. A company that is _____ is experiencing difficulty, especially financial difficulty.
3. an adjective relating to the management of a company _____
4. a verb that means *to fail to do something that you should do* _____
5. A _____ business is capable of producing a profit.
6. intense worrying _____
7. an arrangement in which someone completely owns a building or a piece of land

8. An _____ is something such as money or property that a person or company owns.
9. A _____ is someone who uses their influence or status to threaten or frighten someone else in order to get what they want.
10. _____ is the refusal to let anything prevent you from doing what you have decided to do.
11. _____ is a feeling of enthusiasm or a new idea that helps you to do or create something.
12. Someone who is _____ dislikes or is not interested in ideas or cultures different from their own.
13. Something that involves a lot of complicated rules, details and processes can be described as _____.
14. When you are _____, you are very sad, worried or angry about something.

Emotional roller coaster

2 Headings

Write the headings above the corresponding sections (1-5) in the box titled: *What makes a decision difficult?*

- All your choices are bad
- Organizational conflicts of interest
- Personal conflicts of interest
- Passing the hat
- Indirect conflicts of interest

Emotional roller coaster

by Vicki Sussens-Messerer

Making tough decisions is part of the job of being a manager. Some decisions, however, will send even the most experienced of managers on an emotional roller coaster.

But first, let's take a look at the question, 'What makes a decision difficult?'

"Difficult decisions are usually those that trigger strong emotions," says US management expert Rick Brenner, head of Chaco Canyon Consulting in Cambridge, Massachusetts. "The dilemmas often have very little to do with the problem itself but come from personal conflicts."

What makes a decision difficult?

A key to making the right choice is being able to see the situation clearly. But this is harder than one might think, as Rick Brenner explains.

When deciding is easy, we decide so quickly that we hardly notice we have made a choice. When we struggle with a dilemma, then it's usually because of a difficulty that can seem unconnected to the decision. Finding out what the real source of the difficulty is can help to solve it. Here are some situations that make deciding tough:

1 _____

We may fear being accused of favouritism, unfairness or even corruption. If we take these worries out of the process, the decision itself is usually clear. The real problem then becomes dealing with those personal consequences.

2 _____

There might be a history of conflict between parts of the company, or you may prefer one department over another. In cases like this, it is better to represent the whole organization rather than certain interests.

3 _____

The decision might involve a conflict of interest for someone close to you. For example, you may want to promote the person you think is best for the job, but your immediate boss does not like him or her. Or, you might have difficulty making a choice that will benefit a colleague who, in the past, harmed you in some way.

4 _____

Even when all the options are bad, deciding is not the hard part. Your job in such cases is to accept that there is no good result and to live with whatever you have opted for.

5 _____

At times, we react negatively to certain people – not because of who they are, but because they remind us of someone. For example, your boss might remind you of a former boss you didn't like, so you unfairly "pass the hat" of the old boss on to him. You can solve this problem by reminding yourself of the differences between the two people.

Glossary

dilemma – a situation in which you have to make a difficult decision

favouritism – the unfair practice of giving someone help or advantages that you do not give to others

corruption – dishonest or illegal behaviour by officials or people in positions of power, especially when they accept money in exchange for doing things for someone

consequences – the results or effects of something

conflict of interest – a situation in which someone cannot make fair decisions because they will be affected by the results

© Business Spotlight, 4/2010, www.business-spotlight.de

Emotional roller coaster

Dilemma 1

Emotional roller coaster

by Vicki Sussens-Messerer

The firm you started with a friend is in financial trouble. She no longer believes that the business has a future. Is she right?

- 1 Jenni Camplin, a psychotherapist who owns a successful counselling centre, now has trust in her abilities to manage a business. But 13 years ago, when the centre was struggling, she had a hard job believing she could make a success of it.
- 2 It began as a dream in 1997. Camplin and a colleague, Mary Smith (name changed), decided to start their own counselling centre. Both had jobs, Smith in public relations and Camplin teaching counsellors at the local college. They found a building that was for sale and decided to buy it for the centre. Camplin let Smith, who was more business-minded, deal with finances and with the administrative side of the project. "That was a mistake," she says.
- 3 After a year and a half, things started to go wrong. Smith's marriage broke up, she lost enthusiasm for the job and she increasingly neglected the finances. These were early days, and the business was not making money. "We only had two counsellors. I was running courses but not getting paid for them," says Camplin. They had also made some bad financial decisions, including not having organized enough finances to keep the project going.
- 4 Smith's father, who had helped to renovate the centre, offered to solve their money problems by buying the freehold of the building. "It sounded like a good idea, but he offered a ridiculously small amount. The freehold was our most valuable asset, so I refused." But Smith put Camplin under huge pressure to sell. "She said the centre would never succeed and that it would just cost money, which we would never get out again," says Camplin.
- 5 At the time, Camplin was under a great deal of stress. Her husband, who once had a top position in a large company, had recently lost his job and had also started a business. It was not yet making money, and they had three small children to support.
- 6 Camplin was in a dilemma. Was Smith right? Was it a viable business? "I didn't know at this point," she says. After months of agonizing, she decided to trust her instincts that the centre could work and buy Smith out. The result was a terrible legal fight, in which Smith's father tried to get as much money from Camplin as possible. "He was a bully, just like my father had been. So dealing with him was a huge trigger for me," she says.

7 Her energy was low at a time when both her clients and her children needed her. The fight was becoming traumatic. She was also worried she would not be able to run the business on her own. "Without Mary, I would have to do everything: see clients, teach the courses, run the business and deal with the bank. One Saturday, as I cleaned the toilets myself, I thought: 'Am I crazy?'"

8 In the end, it was the right decision. The centre, which now has 16 counsellors, has been a great success. And owning the building means that, when Camplin stops working, she will get an income from the flats. "What I learned from this is to believe in myself," says Camplin. "If you do that – and if you have determination – you can succeed at whatever you do."



JENNI CAMPLIN is head of The Centre for Counselling in Bromley, south-east England.

© Business Spotlight, 4/2010, www.business-spotlight.de

Emotional roller coaster

Dilemma 2

Emotional roller coaster

by Vicki Sussens-Messerer

You have invested your heart and soul in your job, but your bosses don't like your ideas. Do you sacrifice your management convictions and remain in the job?

- 1 Pierre Casse is an internationally respected leadership professor and author who has taught at many major business schools. In the 1980s, he had a secure job at the World Bank. His wife and three teenagers were happy living in Washington, DC. Casse's large salary was tax-free, and he got to travel round the world in great comfort meeting interesting people. The problem was, he says, that he was more enthusiastic about his job than the large and bureaucratic bank was ready for. He had started management training at the bank and had gone on to develop his expertise in leadership and intercultural communication outside of it. He taught at a university in his free time and wrote books. Filled with inspiration, he tried to introduce new ideas to the bank. But his bosses, whom he calls "narrow-minded", were not interested in any of his ideas about doing things differently.
- 2 One day, his boss called him in and told him that he had to stop his outside activities or lose his chances of a career with the bank. "I told him I was doing this in my free time, but he said my free time belonged to the bank. He said that time was for me to recharge my batteries so that I could work well."
- 3 Now, he faced a dilemma. Was this the life he wanted: to be in a job where he had little say either at work, or outside of it? "I didn't want this life. I decided to leave," he says. But that was the easy decision. "In a difficult situation like this, there is never just one decision," he says. The next question was: "What job?" He decided on a radical change: to move from the corporate world to academia, where he believed he would have more freedom.
- 4 Casse knew the dean of the IMD business school in Lausanne, Switzerland, who offered him a one-year contract, but no more. "I was confident I would renew that contract, but I decided not to tell my wife about the risk I was taking – she was already upset about having to leave America," he says. But the most traumatic part of the whole decision was the effect on the family. The children (then aged 12, 15 and 17) were very upset about the change. "When we got to Switzerland, my daughter said: 'I hate this place, I hate everything here.'" But in the end, it was the right decision. Casse went on to renew his contract and have enormous academic success. And his children are now living and working successfully all over the world.



PIERRE CASSE is the author of several books on intercultural communication, an associate professor for leadership at the Kellogg School of Management in Chicago, a dean emeritus of the Berlin School of Creative Leadership and a former World Bank staff-development officer.

© Business Spotlight, 4/2010, www.business-spotlight.de

Emotional roller coaster

3 Reading and exchanging information

Student A: Read and discuss Dilemma 1.

Student B: Read and discuss Dilemma 2.

In A & B pairs, exchange information about the dilemmas and the advice you would give in these situations.

4 Expressions

Match the expressions from the articles on the left with their meanings on the right.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1. to have little say in something | a. to purchase or buy full ownership of something (especially a business) from someone |
| 2. to buy someone out | b. to let the negative feelings you have about one person affect the way you think about someone else |
| 3. to recharge your batteries | c. to have little opportunity to offer spoken contributions or opinions about a topic |
| 4. to pass the hat on to somebody | d. to rest in order to get back your strength and energy |

5 Meetings

Have a meeting to discuss the following situations. Decide what action, if any, should be taken.

Situation 1: You have known for a long time that a well-liked and long-serving member of your office staff does volunteer work at a local charity in her spare time. However, you have recently discovered that she has been producing a monthly newsletter for the charity during her working hours, using your office equipment.

Situation 2: One of your best sales managers is being taken to court by his wife. She claims he has been hitting her for years. She was recently in hospital for injuries your sales manager said she got from a skiing accident. She says he caused them. The case is soon to be made public in the local newspaper.

Situation 3: Two of your secretaries have complained that the new trainee has been sexually harassing them. He is the Managing Director's nephew.

6 Discussion

What was the most difficult business decision you have ever had to make?

- What was the situation?
- How did you deal with it?
- With hindsight, should you have dealt with it differently?

