

Far from home

Level: Upper intermediate upwards

Timing: Approx. 90 minutes

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

Group size: Any

Overview

This lesson plan is based around an article first published in *Business Spotlight* Issue 6/2011. The article discusses the difficulties employees may encounter when they go on a foreign assignment on behalf of their company. The author talks about the way culture shock may manifest itself and what support and advice employees in this position can hope for from their company and other people, as well as ways to lessen the negative impacts culture shock may have.

Although more relevant for those in steady employment, the article and lesson plan can be used with both pre-experience and in-work business students. The first task will need to be adapted for trainees or business students so that the answers are suppositional.

The tasks in the student worksheets encourage the students to learn and use new business vocabulary and functional language and to develop and practise skills that could be useful in business situations.

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 and extension tasks (for in class or as homework).

Warmer

The flow chart questions are intended to introduce the topic and to give you an idea of how much pre-knowledge the students are able to bring to the lesson. The students should first work through the chart by themselves, making notes of their answers, and then sit with another student to exchange experiences and opinions.

Teaching and learning strategy:

Flow charts

Flow charts provide a structured way of getting the students to answer the questions you would like them to answer. You may want to do this to limit the time spent on a task or, as is the case here, to provide information and notes for a follow-on exercise, e.g. the discussion task.

Getting the students to make flow charts of their own on other topics will practise open and closed question formulation and sequencing and help them to visualize their aims while leading to a clear outcome.

Students could try typing *flow chart* into a search engine and looking at the images given. This will give them ideas for how they could design their own charts.

Scan reading

Before scanning the article, the students should first read the questions and suggest possible answers. Then they should scan the article and make notes about the answers to these questions. The answers can all be found in the article but may differ slightly in their interpretation from student to student.

Key (suggested answers):

1. *You would be having difficulties as outlined in the six bullet points of section 1.*
2. *The author could mean countries engaged in war or countries where the culture is completely different to the person's home country.*
3. *because they were not used to seeing / experiencing such things*
4. *what happens when someone returns to their original culture*
5. *see Elizabeth Marx's list of ten ways to minimize culture shock in section 5*
6. *co-workers and family members; companies / organizations may have support structures set up for staff*

Nouns

These words can all be found in the article. They are used to describe possible symptoms and manifestations of culture shock. The students will need to use them again in the Summarizing task.

Key:

1. *shock*; 2. *strain*; 3. *stress*; 4. *confusion*; 5. *anxiety*; 6. *fear*; 7. *anger*; 8. *depression*

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Collocations and expressions

This is a matching exercise in which the students complete collocations and expressions from the article. Point out that although there may be other possible answers such as *honeymoon advice*, the answers they are looking for can all be found in the article. This language will also be useful for the following task.

Key:

1. d; 2. k; 3. g; 4. c; 5. a; 6. j; 7. b; 8. f; 9. e; 10. h; 11. i

Summarizing

Using the answers from the previous two tasks, the students should summarize the article in their own words. This can either be done in spoken or written form – or first in spoken and then in written form.

Discussion

This task personalizes the topic for the students and their work situations. They should try to base their discussion around the information in the article, plus their answers and information they found out from each other in the Warmer task.

Vocabulary record

Here, students should be encouraged to record all the new and useful vocabulary they have learned during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

Related topics on onestopenglish

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

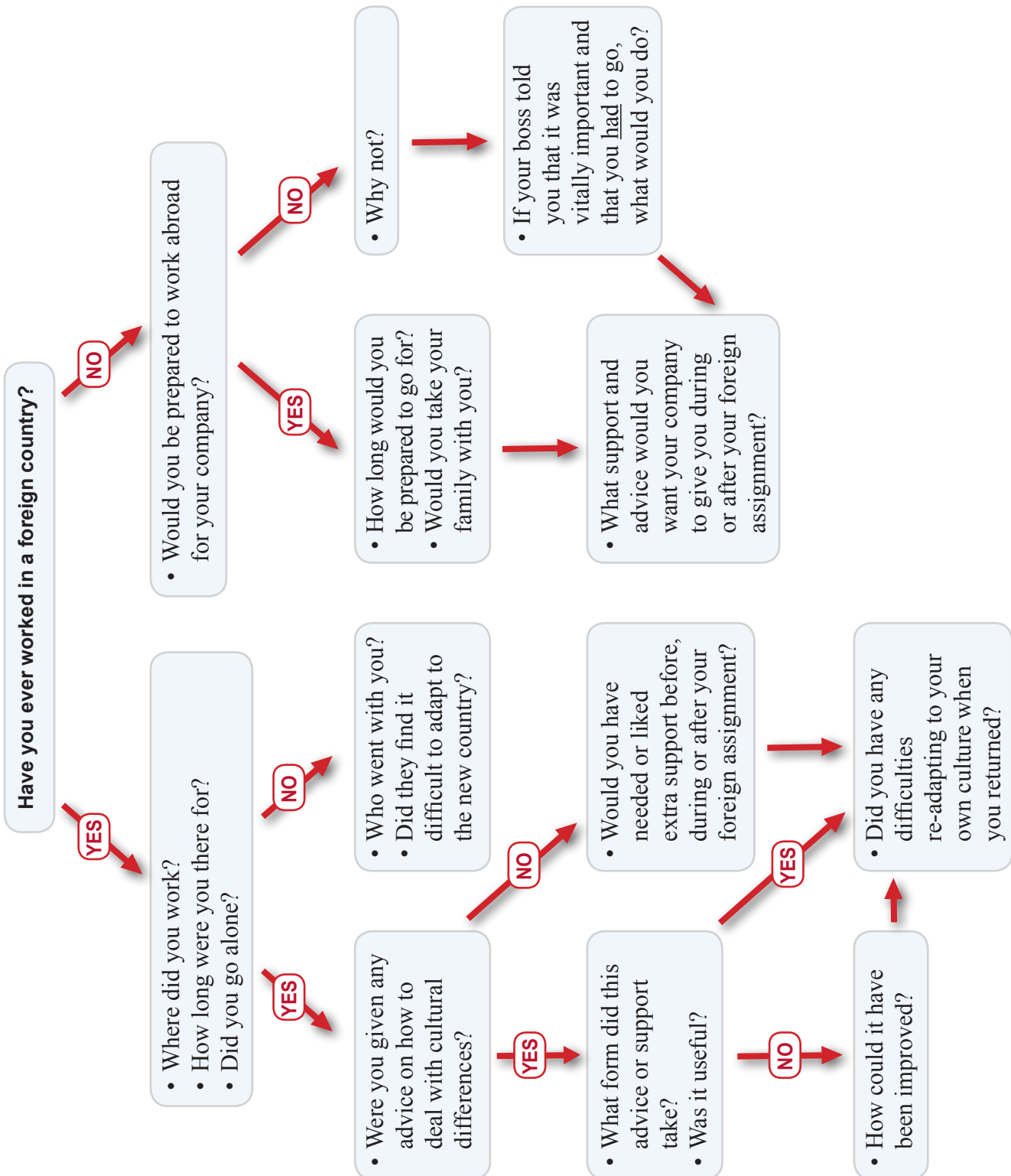
Business Spotlight: Moving down under
<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/moving-down-under/157595.article>

Business Spotlight: Great expectations
<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/great-expectations/550766.article>

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1 Warmer

Follow the flow chart and answer the questions that are relevant to you. Make notes and then discuss your answers with a partner.



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2 Scan reading

Scan the article to find answers to these questions.

1. How would you know that you are suffering from culture shock?
2. What is meant in the introduction by 'difficult countries'?
3. Why were the situations in section 2 stressful for the people who experienced them?
4. What is meant by 'return culture shock' in section 4?
5. What can you do for yourself to lessen the effects of culture shock?
6. Who can help you minimize the effects of culture shock and how?

by Robert Gibson

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Different countries, different customs – this is easily said but can actually lead to physical and psychological problems for employees who are working abroad for long periods of time. Robert Gibson describes how these problems manifest themselves and how people can deal with them.

Although the term 'culture shock' has been around for over 50 years and is more relevant than ever for international business people. As globalization spreads, psychiatrists and company doctors are reporting a growing number of patients suffering from the psychological and physical effects of travel as well as from encounters with other cultures.

The exact extent of these illnesses is difficult to determine because many sufferers deny their condition or are unwilling to admit that they don't have everything under control for fear of damaging their career prospects. In international companies, frequent travel to 'difficult countries' and extended assignments abroad are often a requirement.

Although working internationally can be a very enriching experience for people, it is clearly time to wake up to the stress



Image: Up the resolution

put on them by the global workplace. Above all, we need to find ways of protecting the health of individuals, in addition to promoting the legitimate international business interests of the companies they work for.

1. What is culture shock?

Canadian anthropologist Kalervo Oberg (1901-73) was the first to use the term 'culture shock'. According to Oberg, culture shock has six main aspects:

- strain caused by adapting to the new culture
- a sense of loss of friends, status and possessions
- being rejected by people from the new culture
- confusion about roles, expectations, feelings and identity
- fear of cultural differences
- a feeling of not being able to cope

Oberg wrote that people suffering from culture shock feel anxiety over the loss of familiar signs and symbols. "These signs or cues include ... when to shake hands and what to say when we meet people, when and how to give tips, ... how to make purchases, when to accept and when to refuse invitations, when to take statements seriously and when not." He observed that, in our own cultures, we grow up with these signs and take them for granted. In a new culture, the social cues are different.

2. Stressful situations

Depending on who you are and where you come from, you might find some situations in different cultures extremely stressful. Here are some examples provided by employees of an international company:

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by Robert Gibson

- “While I was driving to work in Nigeria, I had to drive past the site of a car accident. The driver had been killed, but no one removed the body. I had to drive past there twice a day.”
- “We were meeting in a luxurious hotel in India – the food was excellent, but there was simply too much for us to eat at the lunch buffet. It was terrible to see the waste and then go outside and see the extreme poverty in the slums.”
- “We were called in to plan an infrastructure project in Iraq. The meeting was going well until we heard some explosions. We quickly moved into the bombproof ‘safe room’. The next day, I heard that several people had been killed in the bomb attack, just a few hundred metres from our compound.”

3. What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of culture shock can vary from simple anger over delays to serious depression or even thoughts of suicide.

4. The phases of culture shock

There are several stages of adaptation to foreign cultures. Most simply, this begins with a honeymoon period, when everything is interesting and exciting and new, followed by culture shock, when the realities of living in a foreign culture become clear and you start to miss things from home. If culture shock is severe, it can lead people to end their foreign assignment and return home prematurely – a difficult emotional decision for individuals and a costly one for the company, because foreign assignments are expensive and projects will suffer if the person responsible has to be replaced.

For some people, “return culture shock” can be even more serious than the initial culture shock. This term refers to what happens when you return to your original culture. You may have had exciting responsibilities while away and, when you return home, you may find that people are not really interested in your experiences. At the same time, your company may be struggling to find you a suitable position. Although many experts talk about this problem, few companies actually invest time and energy in making sure that there is a smooth transition back to the home country.

5. What can you do?

Of course, to make an assignment abroad successful, employees need to take responsibility for their own well-being. It is important to keep in touch with trusted individuals at home, to discuss your fears openly, to avoid abuse of drugs and alcohol and to take time to prepare yourself and your family for the experience of living and working in an unfamiliar environment.

Elisabeth Marx lists ten ways of minimizing culture shock:

1. Don't let culture shock take you by surprise. Allow time to find out about it before you leave for your assignment.
2. Expect culture shock to happen irrespective of location.
3. As soon as you arrive in your new location, identify all the opportunities for building support networks.
4. Fight culture shock – don't give in to it.
5. Ask others with international experience for guidance.
6. Give yourself time to adapt and don't rush into too many work-related projects at the start.
7. Don't hesitate to seek professional help if symptoms persist.
8. Expect the same symptoms to recur when you return home.
9. Think about the positive aspects of culture shock – people who experience it adapt better to their new environment than those who do not.
10. Don't lose your sense of humour.

6. How can others help?

Co-workers and family members play an important role in helping someone suffering from culture shock. Once signs of culture shock are apparent, managers may need to reduce the workload of these employees. In serious cases, they may need to consider whether the employee should end the foreign assignment early and return home.

Companies and organizations with operations in different countries need to set up support structures for their staff. This should include providing easily available and confidential advice from specialist doctors and therapists.



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Note: This is an abridged version of an article originally published in *Business Spotlight* 6/2011.

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3 Nouns

Fill in the missing vowels to make nouns from the article which describe symptoms of culture shock.

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. sh <u>o</u> ck | 5. _nx_ _ty |
| 2. str_ _n | 6. f_ _r |
| 3. str_ ss | 7. _ng_ r |
| 4. c_ nf_ s_ _n | 8. d_ pr_ ss_ _n |

4 Collocations and expressions

Match the words and sentence fragments on the left (1-11) with the words on the right (a-k) to make collocations and expressions from the article.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. psychological and physical | a. period |
| 2. extended assignments | b. transition |
| 3. familiar signs and | c. granted |
| 4. take them for | d. effects |
| 5. honeymoon | e. environment |
| 6. foreign | f. individuals |
| 7. smooth | g. symbols |
| 8. trusted | h. networks |
| 9. unfamiliar | i. advice |
| 10. support | j. assignment |
| 11. confidential | k. abroad |

5 Summarizing

Summarize the article in spoken or written form using the words and expressions from the previous tasks.

6 Discussion

What can companies do to better prepare their employees and their families for extended trips or assignments abroad?

7 Webquest

Search for the words *culture shock* + *business*. Report back to the class with your findings.

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Vocabulary record: Far from home

verb	noun	adjective (+ opposite)	adverb (+ opposite)
confuse			
	anxiety		
		luxurious	
			physically

Vocabulary record

