INTOUCH

THE CRUCIAL 30 SITUATIONAL LEARNING CASES FOR COMPETITIVENESS

European report

Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

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Labour Market in Touch

New non-routine skills via mobile game-based learning

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WP2: SKILLS FOR NON-ROUTINE TASKS RESEARCH

European Report

"THE CRUCIAL 30 SITUATIONAL LEARNING CASES FOR COMPETITIVENESS"

Report produced by CIAPE, with contribution from EXEMPLAS and CFL on behalf of the Project consortium.

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Introduction

“The crucial 30 situational learning cases for competitiveness” is a report describing the most crucial non routine tasks for competitive employees within business service SMEs.

For each of the top 10 skill identified in the report “The top 10 European skills for competitiveness”, 3 non routine tasks crucial for employees’ performances have been identified.

The top 10 skills under analysis are as follows:

1. Communication;
2. Planning;
3. Conflict management;
4. Openness to change;
5. Decision making;
6. Team work;
7. Flexibility;
8. Strategic thinking;
9. Initiative;
10. Learning, improvement.

For each of them, the three most common non-routine tasks associated, e.g. unusual situations requiring problem solving ability, were described. Research was based on the information contained in the mentioned report “The top 10 European skills for competitiveness” and on further desk investigations.

For each task, readers can find a specification of: 1. the situation; 2. the objective that a business services SME’s employee should meet; 3. five good solutions that could be of help in solving the non conventional situation.

For more information, please refer to CIAPE for the skills n. 1-2-3-4-5-6, to EXEMPLAS for the skills n. 7-8, and to CFL for the skills n. 9-10.

The information contained in this document represent the critical areas that will be focused during the calibration of the m-learning games.

Skill 1: Communication

Ability to express ideas and reflections clearly, make contact easily and quickly with others and maintain relationships, to provide feedback, be tolerant to different customs and cultures

Task 1: Leading a meeting session that is becoming chaotic.

Situation:

You are leading a meeting session in your company. While you are speaking, you notice that your colleagues are not concentrated, and they are chatting about one thing and another. The meeting becomes chaotic, and you don't know how to proceed.

Objective:

You must keep the situation in hand.

Solutions:

1. Dazzle. Be enthusiastic and share your passion or belief in the task or goal. Enthusiasm is contagious and engages the attention of participants. Wake people up by doing the unexpected: play a game, switch visual media, solicit audience participation, tell a joke, funny story or personal experience related to the meeting topic.
2. Engage participants. Encourage and solicit the views and discussion of all participants. Use eye contact to draw people in. Toss a Nerf ball around the room. The person who catches the ball must offer a comment or suggestion before tossing it to another participant. Have participants show agreement or disagreement by holding thumbs-up or thumbs-down.
3. Stay on track. People lose interest when a meeting veers off-track. Stick to your agenda and meeting timeline. Changing presentation media or tactics periodically will help meeting participants refocus on the agenda. Keep a running list of off-task ideas or questions in a "parking lot" so you can continue with the agenda without losing useful ideas that can be addressed later.

4. Pose a question. Ask a question early in the meeting, but tell participants you don't want an answer until the end. To encourage active listening, offer a small prize (quarters for the vending machine or a Starbucks coupon) for the first correct answer.
5. Unlock the mystery. Abstract concepts and statistics can cause people's eyes to glaze over. Provide an understandable comparison or explain the real world implication. When possible, relate the numbers to the participants' personal lives.

Task 2: Providing feedback to others.

Situation:

You are the coordinator of a project involving foreign partners, located in different parts of Europe. The main communication means are the emails. After some months from the project beginning, you notice that partners' activity decreased, works were delayed, and quality of the works wasn't the best.

Objective:

You must keep works going at best, on time, and according to quality standards.

Solutions:

1. Provide performance evaluation and feedback. Provide a quick answer to all partners' email, although not all very significant. Demonstrate interest in the results achieved, praise good results achieved. Create a forum for your partnership to communicate, i.e., Blackboard, Moodle, Angel, or WebCT. A supplemental means of group communication includes the use of Skype for periodic live video chats regarding coordination, concerns, and questions regarding the project.
2. Getting to know each other is central to collaboration. The role of each partner must be clearly defined and posted in the group forum. This avoids confusion regarding what each group member is responsible for project completion.
3. Listening is an important characteristic of successful group dynamics. All partners work in isolation, which increases the need to pay attention to anxiety, concerns, and questions others may have within the group. Also, this is an essential skill needed in the work place – the ability to listen.
4. Clearly identify what must be accomplished in the project. Along with establishing who will complete specific tasks, guidelines are needed for each task completion. Each member of the work group needs to clearly understand how their work integrates and contributes to the final project. This avoids a perception of busy work for some and overload of work for other group members.
5. Establish procedures and dates for sharing progress updates via the forum. This ensures everyone is working towards the common goal and avoids the temptation to wait until the last minute. Last minute contribution by a group member is a leading contributor of group failure, along with a

middle-of-the-road online learning project submission. Moreover, simplify complex project tasks into manageable steps. This relieves group stress and potential conflicts between group members, along with eliminating concerns some members may have regarding equal sharing of project work load.

Task 3: Handling productive working relations with a client speaking a foreign language.

Situation:

You have been assigned to a task: you must support an important client located in a foreign country, who speaks a foreign language that you don’t know very well. Your client always handles emergency situations, requiring immediate responses from your company. He uses to give you phone calls in order to ask for intervention, but you cannot understand clearly what he’s saying.

Objective:

You must find a way to be able to understand properly the requests of your client, and provide services required.

Solutions:

1. Ask to your colleagues if there is someone who knows the foreign language better than you. In case, ask him/her to support you during the phone calls.
2. Never accept to start working without a written order, even in case of emergency.
3. After each phone call, write an email to your client in which you summarise the work order, clearly specifying all budget – time – performance related issues.
4. In the email, ask to your client to provide a feedback. Find out an agreement.
5. Start working/ allocating tasks only when you receive a formal written approbation.

Skill 2: Planning

Ability to define priorities, anticipate trends, and recognize key stages that one should pass and methods that should be applied

Task 1: Defining your working priorities.

Situation:

You have "too much to do" at work. A lot of colleagues have entrusted many things to your care and have confidence in you. Every priority claims itself as the most urgent and crucial thing in the world screaming for your immediate attention. The problem is: you can only do one thing at a time. And you are stressed.

Objective:

You must find a polite solution for defining priorities and schedule your time.

Solutions:

1. Schedule Daily Planning. You should set aside at least 30 minutes each day for Daily Planning. You’d make up a list of things for the next day that includes not only all the items I "have to" do, but, more importantly, the items I "want to" do.
2. Putting it all down in writing is vital because if you want to manage it, you have to measure it. This will tend to overload your next day, which is useful because it permits you to take advantage of Parkinson's Law, which says, in part, that a project tends to take as long as the time allocated for it. If you give yourself one thing to do, it will take all day to do it. If you give yourself three things to do, you get them all done. If you give yourself twelve things to do, you may not get all twelve done, but may well accomplish nine. Having a lot to do, being a bit overloaded, creates a healthy sense of pressure on us to get through our list.
3. Review each item and ask, "Is this the best use of my time?". There is a lot of difference between "I do it" and "It gets done". Which is more important? "It gets done". Sure, it's great to

accomplish things ourselves but we only have 168 hours per week to accomplish results. (And if we take away 56 hours per week for sleep, that only leaves 112 hours!) So, each day during Daily Planning, you should review each item on your list and ask, "Is this the best use of my time?". If it is, you will plan to work on it and if it is not, you will try to find a way to delegate it to someone so that it gets done.

4. Prioritize the list. Typically, our "To Do" lists will contain "crucial" and "not crucial" items. Some items will be more important, some not so important. Typically, the "not crucial" items are quicker and often more fun than the "crucial" items, which tend to take longer and are generally less fun. So what happens for many is that without prioritizing our list, we have a tendency to do the "not crucial" items first, substituting the quantity for the quality.

   You have to take a moment and decide how you define the following terms:

   • urgent

   • important

   Urgent is defined as any activity that is immediately life-threatening to you or a loved-one. Important is defined as something that has eternal significance. The intensity of those definitions is important because it helps you make clear distinctions between your activities.

   Now, label them: #1 – Important and Urgent; #2 – Important and Not Urgent; #3 – Not Important and Urgent; #4 – Not Important and Not Urgent.

5. Identify the most important "crucial" item on your list, the one you would want to tackle if you could only work on one item tomorrow and then label that as "#1". Next, identify the second item you would work on, if time permits, and label that as "#2".

   Continue prioritizing the entire list in that fashion and tomorrow start with #1.

Task 2: Planning risks inherent in a project.

Situation:

You have been assigned to a very important company project. You are the project coordinator, and you are responsible for the budget, for the quality of the outcomes, for the activities performed by the other partners. You cannot risk failing.

Objective:

You must develop a project “risk management plan” that helps to understand the risks inherent in the project, as well as giving a way of mitigating them. This reduces their impact should they happen.

Solutions:

1. You must know how much risk the project is carrying. This enables you to determine and detail all the relevant risks, categorise them, score them and then finally devise an effective course of action to them.
2. Risk Identification. This is best carried out via a risk workshop where all the team leads and interested parties ie business stakeholders are invited to identify potential risks the project faces. These can vary from business risks through to operational risks. Either way you need to find a way to categorise them and then try to get rid of as many of the "fluffy" ones as possible via the next stage.
3. Risk Quantification. This basically consists of two levels: the probability of the risk occurring and the impact the risk will cause once it has occurred. Try to focus on these two items.
4. Risk Response. There are 4 things you can do once a risk has been raised. These are: 1. Accept the Risk: the risk is so low that even if it happened, its impact on the project would be minimal; 2. Mitigate the Risk: find ways to reduce the impact of the risk should it occur; 3. Transfer the Risk: make someone else responsible such as another project or a 3rd party supplier; 4. Refuse the Risk - it is either so way out or so unlikely to happen that there is no point including as a project risk.

5. Risk Monitoring and Control Assessment. This involves keeping an eye on the risks and getting regular updates on them from the assigned risk owners. Obviously the less risks you have raised, the less work you need to do in managing project risk.

Task 3: Distributing tasks and resources fitting the available skills and proficiencies.

Situation:

You are managing a new project, and you need to allocate tasks among the members of your staff. You don't have too much time for choosing the employee who will perform each specific role. The selection process also involves deciding the responsibility of each team member, based on the employee's skill, experience, and the likely opposition that the team will face.

Objective:

You must select the right people for the right jobs, and assign them tasks that fit with their skills and proficiencies. To field a project-winning team, first you need to understand the work that has to be done and the skills and abilities required to perform it. Then you have to place the correct person in the correct position. Mere common sense, you would think – but then, as the old quip goes, "common sense is often quite uncommon".

Solutions:

1. Break down the broader project goals into specific, individual tasks. List all tasks, and then rank each task in terms of importance;
2. Analyze and list the competencies required to perform each task;
3. List the competencies of each staff member;
4. Match individuals to task competencies. An easy way of doing this is to write down the competencies needed for each task on one colour of Post-It Note, and the competencies of each team member on another colour of Post-It Note. You can then move these around as you match people to roles.

   This is great as a starting point, but in the real world you'll most-likely find lots of overlaps and lots of gaps. In such cases you have to take considered decisions.

   Where you have overlaps, you have two choices: Either allotting better qualified individuals to more important tasks, or allocating the task to the person at the lowest organizational level who is qualified to do the job. Both approaches have their virtues, but in different situations: One allows you to do the job with a higher level of certainty, the other allows you to do it more efficiently and at a lower cost.

Where you have a gap, you may need to train existing team members, or recruit to fill the gap. Often, training is the best option: not only is it usually cheaper, you also know more about the individual’s talents and working methods. On the downside, a newly trained person usually has plenty of theory, but lacks the experience of putting that training into practice. Recruitment often takes a very long time (time to agree the role internally, advertise it, screen resumes, interview candidates, select, wait for notice periods to be served, train the individual in organizational methods, and so on) and can be very expensive. It is also risky: Even using the best interviewing and testing methods, it’s possible for candidates to cover up failings that only become obvious once someone’s been in a role for several months.

5. Briefing Each Team Member. Having decided which project team member will fill each role, you have to communicate the decision to your team. Each team member should know his or her position within the team. The roles of each person should be clearly defined, with individual responsibilities, authority and accountability clearly spelled out (it’s often best to do this in writing).

A hint to remember is that no member of your team should be thinking: What are we here for? What are we supposed to do? What part can I play?

And finally, keep your team lean, but make sure you have back-ups or substitutes for key roles. It is important to have ‘a few good people’ rather than have ‘too many people’. But remember to have back-ups in case you lose key people.

Skill 3: Conflict Management

Fairness and objectiveness in conflict situations, ability to act as a mediator in conflict situations and resolve conflict.

Task 1: Acting as a mediator in a conflict situation.

Situation:

Your manager assigned to you the responsibility for a project lasting two months. In order to work properly at the project, you have been allocated to another department, and asked to cooperate with a very difficult person known by all the company members for his bad manners.

Objective:

You must become adept at dealing with your difficult colleague and avoiding conflict.

Solutions:

1. Keep conversations neutral. Avoid discussing divisive and personal issues, like religion and politics, or other issues that tend to cause conflict. If your colleague tries to engage you in a discussion that will probably become an argument, change the subject or leave the room.
2. Accept the reality of who he is. In dealing with difficult people, don’t try to change the other person; you will only get into a power struggle, cause defensiveness, invite criticism, or otherwise make things worse. It also makes you a more difficult person to deal with.
3. Know what's under your control. Change your response to the other person; this is all you have the power to change. For example, don’t feel you need to accept abusive behaviour. You can use assertive communication to draw boundaries when the other person chooses to treat you in an unacceptable way.

4. See the best in him. Try to look for the positive aspects of your colleague, and focus on them. The other person will feel more appreciated, and you will likely enjoy your time together more. Work to maintain a sense of humour. Difficulties will roll off your back much more easily.
5. Let go or get space if you need It. Know when it’s time to distance yourself, and do so. If the other person can’t be around you without antagonizing you, minimizing contact may be key. If he’s continually abusive, it's best to cut ties and let him know why. Explain what needs to happen if there ever is to be a relationship, and let it go.

Task 2: Being fair and objective in a conflict situation.

Situation:

Your team made a mistake with a client. Because of the mistake occurred – wrong birth date in his visa-, the client couldn't flight back to his city. He was blocked at the airport of a foreign country. He had a very important meeting fixed, and he couldn't reach the meeting place within timetables.

Objective:

You must talk to him via phone explaining the situation and apologizing for the inconvenience.

Solutions:

1. Building Rapport. On the telephone rapport is based on 84% tonality. In other words your attitude comes across in the tone of your voice. People are going to make their minds up quickly mainly based on your voice tonality. Your voice tonality is made up your volume, speed, pitch and your Timbre (the quality).
2. Match the voice tonality of the person on the other end. The easiest way to do this is to match the tempo/speed of their voice. Don't match their aggression, just the speed! By doing this you are sub-consciously saying "I am like you. You can trust me because I am like you". This is because the person we trust the most in the world is ourselves.
3. When you are bringing up the problem, be sure to also bring ideas for a solution. Don't just bring up issues to get them off your chest or to complain, but rather come with either a request for help or possible solutions.
4. Seek to understand the other person, whether you or the other person is bringing the conflict to light. How do his personal energies and styles differ from yours? How is he emotionally or rationally engaging with you? What are his perspectives? What are his perceptions?
5. Use a simple model to help unravel the situation. Be sure you focus on the goal of the interaction, the facts leading up to the situation, the possible solutions, and the decisions you will make. Decide who will do what, and when. Enlist others as needed to complete the action plan. Follow-up to see that what you agreed on happened.

Task 3: Resolving conflicts between people.

Situation:

You are sharing a working task together with two colleagues, who behave very differently. Conflicts often occur between them, and when a mistake is made, they look for the scapegoat. Time is passing by, and they spend most of it quarrelling instead of working. The deadline is near, and you need to report to your manager the results achieved during the last month.

Objective:

You have a week to create a positive working climate enabling you and your colleagues to reach the aims.

Solutions:

1. Admit there is a problem. The very first step in dealing with any problem is to acknowledge that there is a problem. Surrendering to the idea that control is an illusion allows one to be proactive rather than reactive which creates opportunity for solution.
2. Analyze the situation to determine the cause. Where did you drop the ball or where could you have handled the situation differently? Look for specific situations, especially those where you can see you were part of the problem and not the solution. The question to ask: 'Have I truly set my people up to succeed in every area of their responsibilities?' Look for consistent patterns in which you are the liability. Remember, if it begins with you, it can end with you.
3. Create a successful plan of action with another person. An objective view eliminates blind spots and also brings attention to what we do not see ourselves. This step must be taken with someone with integrity and who is concerned about both the business success and your success and has a proven track record of creating results.
4. Be entirely ready to implement your plan of action. Be committed to resolving the situation. Any second-guessing or conflicting intentions should be discussed and put to rest. Willingness is a state of being, not just an attitude. It may sometimes be necessary to modify your plan of action if you are not getting the results you looked for, but don't quit before the miracle.

5. Lead by example. Be an active part of the solution and admit your piece of the problem. Show up as a leader who accepts personal responsibility and earn respect. You don't need to demand it. People will go where you lead them, so lead by example.

Skill 4: Openness to change

Ability to take challenges, initiate and implement changes, be able to adapt your behaviour to the changing environment by, and take responsibility for change

Task 1: Realizing the need for change, and the possibility to implement it in your working environment.

Situation:

You are always complaining that you're overworked, the phone is ringing off the hook and that there is no one to help you. Your first thought might be that your company needs to hire another person to help out. But for your company it's hard to find the extra money in the budget to hire another person. Plus, you're back to expecting someone else to solve the problem.

Objective:

You need to find a way to change your negative work environment.

Solutions:

1. Positive energy can spread just as quickly as negative energy. You just need to start the ball rolling. People get trapped in the victim mode and feel that there's nothing they can do. If you start to see that changes can happen you may be more willing to come up with your solution.
2. A good way to start is to come up with solutions to solve some of the problems you see occurring. It's really important for you to try to find the root cause of the situation and not get caught up in fighting just the symptoms.
3. Track the phone calls. What are most of the calls in regards to? Are most of the calls related to the hours that your business is open, people unable to find the product information they need, people trying to book appointments?
4. Once you know that, try to find alternatives for people to get the information they need without having to make a phone call. For example, could the information be posted on a web site, are there

brochures you could give people, is the information people are receiving too confusing and just needs to be re-written?

5. Try to determine if there are things you can do to alleviate the real problems. Can processes be streamlined, can procedures be made more efficient? It's amazing how much difference even one little change can make to improve a situation. You just need to start looking and figuring out some possible answers.

Task 2: Initiating and implementing change within your working team.

Situation:

Your manager asked you to initiate a certain important organisational change within your work team. Workers feel attacked and betrayed by changes announced. They are caught off guard, not really believing that "my company could do this to me." Many respond with resistance, anger, frustration and confusion. Their response can solidify into a wall of "retirement on the job." They become afraid to take risks, be innovative or try new things.

Objective:

You must initiate and implement change within your working team, as required by your manager.

Solutions:

1. Truly believe in the change. Do you believe in the possible outcomes of the change or are you resigned to a mediocre solution? Are you a neutral believer or a power believer in the change? On a scale of 1- 5, are you a 3? If you do not have internal belief and faith in the change, it will be difficult if not impossible to share the change with others in a positive, inspirational manner.
2. Be energetic and enthusiastic. If you want others to be enthusiastic, demonstrate enthusiasm. Show your beliefs and your heart. Optimism is infectious. Be the role model for the glass half-full of positivity with ice-cubes of encouragement.
3. Share the story. People prefer to know the "why" of change. You can move their hearts with personal belief and passion, but you can move their heads with the data. What is the rationale for the change? What are the hard facts? What is current state? What are consequences of inaction?
4. Acknowledge and expect difficulties. Generally, there are difficulties in every change, large or small, and that is a truth that needs to be shared. Change agents must anticipate some level of road block or barriers because change involves human beings and their individual natures and personalities in accepting change and moving forward. As a leader, communicate and acknowledge there may be difficulties but share the support structures you have in place to manage those roadblocks.

5. Ask for help. Demanding change will get you as far as one linoleum square in moving your plan forward. Plan A - ask for help, and then take it a leap forward - state you need your team's help for success to occur.

Task 3: Adapting to new approaches, initiatives, methods and technologies.

Situation:

You are experiencing change while on the job. Your company is converting from one software system to another; change is inevitable, and you are worried about the situation, because you fear that this could damage your working performances.

Objective:

You must learn how to use the new software system, setting aside your frustrations and anxiety to adjust to challenging new situations.

Solutions:

1. Identify exactly what you are losing. You might fear a loss of control or might be threatened by a loss of status. Once you understand the source of your resistance, you are better able to manage it and proactively move forward. Define and acknowledge what is over and what is not. Honour those feelings of loss. Face them and do not deny any emotions that might surface. At the same time, identify what is not changing.
2. Look for the pony. Remind the joke about the quintessential optimist who jumps into a pile of manure, certain that there must be a pony in there somewhere. No matter how tumultuous the change, there are opportunities available if you are open to looking for them. Identify the positives for yourself and the company, and then set your focus on them.
3. Jump on the bandwagon early. Once change is inevitable, you can choose to accept it or actively resist. Whatever you choose, the change will take place. Those who engage sooner, rather than later, will be noticed and remembered, and so will those who go kicking and screaming.
4. Acquire new skills and knowledge that change necessitates. Be clear about what you need to learn in order to implement the change and take the initiative to do so. Read, take classes and seek opportunities to learn on the job.

5. Share with colleagues why the sudden change presents opportunities. Support peers by exploring with them ways that they can benefit from the change and help them take advantage of potential opportunities. They will appreciate your efforts, as will management.

Skill 5: Decision Making

Ability to take responsibility for decisions taken, their timeframe, consequences and risks, also to take and defend complex decisions and gather and assess relevant data

Task 1: Taking creative decisions in non routine situation.

Situation:

You have an important meeting scheduled Monday that covers more than 1,000 pages of material. You are scheduled to work Saturday morning and Sunday afternoon. Your employer asked you to work during the weekend, in order to close another project. You have had very little time to review, and if your performance is poor on this meeting, you will lose an important career opportunity.

Objective:

You must take the right decision assuring the best for you.

Solutions:

1. Identify the decision to be made together with the goals it should achieve. Determine the scope and limitations of the decision. Is the new job to be permanent or temporary or is that not yet known (thus requiring another decision later)? Is the project to be presented to the evaluating agencies or just into a test market? How might the scope of the decision be changed--that is, what are its possible parameters? When thinking about the decision, be sure to include a clarification of goals.
2. Get the facts. But remember that you cannot get all the facts. Get as many facts as possible about a decision within the limits of time imposed on you and your ability to process them, but remember that virtually every decision must be made in partial ignorance. Lack of complete information must not be allowed to paralyze your decision. A decision based on partial knowledge is usually better than not making the decision when a decision is really needed. The proverb that "any decision is

better than no decision," while perhaps extreme, shows the importance of choosing. When you are racing toward a bridge support, you must decide to turn away to the right or to the left. Which way you turn is less important than the fact that you do indeed turn.

3. As part of your collection of facts, list your feelings, hunches, and intuitive urges. Many decisions must ultimately rely on or be influenced by intuition because of the remaining degree of uncertainty involved in the situation. Also as part of your collection of facts, consult those who will be affected by and who will have to implement your decision. Input from these people not only helps supply you with information and help in making the decision but it begins to produce the acceptance necessary in the implementers because they feel that they are part of the decision making process. As Russell Ackoff noted in The Art of Problem Solving, not consulting people involved in a decision is often perceived as an act of aggression.
4. Develop alternatives. Make a list of all the possible choices you have, including the choice of doing nothing. Also be sure to think about not just identifying available alternatives but creating alternatives that don't yet exist. For example, think not only of you, but also to your colleagues to whom you might ask a support for closing the project.
5. Rate each alternative. This is the evaluation of the value of each alternative. Consider the negative of each alternative (cost, consequences, problems created, time needed, etc.) and the positive of each (money saved, time saved, added creativity or happiness to company or employees, etc.). Remember here that the alternative that you might like best or that would in the best of all possible worlds be an obvious choice will, however, not be functional in the real world because of too much cost, time, or lack of acceptance by others. Rate the risk of each alternative. In problem solving, you hunt around for a solution that best solves a particular problem, and by such a hunt you are pretty sure that the solution will work. In decision making, however, there is always some degree of uncertainty in any choice. Will Bill really work out as the new supervisor? If we decide to expand into Canada, will our sales and profits really increase? If we let Jane date Fred at age fifteen, will the experience be good? If you decide to marry person X or buy car Y or go to school Z, will that be the best or at least a successful choice? Risks can be rated as percentages, ratios, rankings, grades or in any other form that allows them to be compared. See the section on risk evaluation for more details on risking.

6. Make the decision. If you are making an individual decision, apply your preferences (which may take into account the preferences of others). Choose the path to follow, whether it includes one of the alternatives, more than one of them (a multiple decision) or the decision to choose none.

Task 2: Making good decisions in complex situation, presenting logical, reasoned, constructive critical comments and arguments.

Situation:

You are the responsible of a department in your business. An employee asks you for permission to work from home a few days a week. In order to provide an answer, you should ponder impact of this decision on the rest of your staff.

Objective:

You should provide a justified and reasonable answer.

Solutions:

1. Determine who should be involved. During the first stages of the decision-making process, you should determine who should be involved. This lets you know whether or not the problem would best be solved by forming a team to examine the facts. If so, the team can make recommendations based on those facts. Decisions in the workplace are commonly done as a team. It can be a powerful way to make efficient and expedient progress. The greatest benefit is the combination of talent and creativity that exists when joining heads. When everyone contributes to effective brainstorming, the ideas are compared and different perspectives are examined. A team is far more likely to discover more creative and innovative solutions than one would individually.
2. Evaluate the alternatives. When you evaluate the alternatives, consider how the making the decision (or even not making the decision) is going to impact any future objectives. Things to consider are whether or not the workload can be done from home, and whether the same permission can be granted to the other employees. Some possible alternatives could be as simple as shortening the workday on Fridays. To do this, you could require that the employees, as a team, meet certain stated objectives during the week in order to work fewer hours on Friday.
3. Examine the pros and cons. What are the positive and negative results associated with the decision and the related alternatives.

4. Making the final decision. A large part of making the final decision will be your ability to address the needs of the organization. There will be short-term needs and long-term needs. What are the expectations of the company administrators? The final decision should be in line with the company goals and objectives. In other words, the final decision has to be supported by a solid purpose. Consider this: You don’t make a decision that will cut production by half, if the original mission (purpose) was to increase sales by 30%. Be sure that your choice is based on more on company vision, rather than personal opinion. Narrow your information down to what is vitally important making the decision.
5. For any decision that you make today, always consider the impact that it will make on future objectives.

Task 3: Evaluating the consequences and risks, expected benefits and costs of decision taken.

Situation:

There is a question of whether or not to launch a new product at this time. Doing so could put the company ahead of the competition by at least 6 months. However, there could be a problem with quality if the production is rushed. There hasn’t been enough testing and documentation, so quality assurance is moderate at best. The benefit is that you’re outshining the competition, but the risk is that the company could suffer scrutiny for putting out a faulty, non-tested product.

Objective:

You must take a decision, describing it in a report to be submitted to your manager.

Solutions:

1. Stop seeking perfection. Many great leaders would prefer a project or report be delivered only 80% complete a few hours early than 100% complete five minutes late. Moral of the story: Don’t wait for everything to be perfect. Instead of seeking the impossible, efficient decision makers tend to leap without all the answers and trust that they’ll be able to build their wings on the way down.
2. Be independent. Good decision makers are “collaboratively independent.” They tend to surround themselves with the best and brightest and ask pointed questions. For instance, in a discussion with subject-matter experts, they don’t ask: “What should I do?” Rather, their query is: “What’s your thinking on this?” Waiting for committees or an expansive chain of command to make decisions could take longer. Get your information from credible sources and then act, swiftly.
3. Turn your brain off. Insight comes when you least expect it. Similar to suddenly remembering the name of an actor that you think you'd just plumb forgotten. The same happens when you’re trying to make a decision. By simply turning your mind off for a while or even switching to a different dilemma, you’ll give your brain the opportunity to scan its data bank for information that is already stored and waiting to be retrieved.
4. Don’t problem solve, decide. A decision can solve a problem, but not every problem can be solved by making a decision. Instead, decision making often relies more on intuition than analysis.

Deciding between new product lines, for instance, requires examining historical data, references and prices. But the tipping point often rests with your gut. Which feels like the right choice?

5. Admit your mistakes. If your feelings steered you wrong, correct the error and fess up. Even making the wrong decision will garner more respect and loyalty when you admit you’ve made a mistake and resolve it than if you are habitually indecisive.

Skill 6: Team work

Readiness to assist team members and nurture team spirit; ability to manage processes and people in teams, to coordinate general and individual goals and integrate differing opinions

Task 1: Working with others to achieve a goal.

Situation:

Your company must solve a complex problem concerning the ideation of a new way of providing services to a very important client. Team work is the methodology chosen by top managers in order to increase the range of ideas available. Actually, they believe that in order to solve difficult problems it is vital that a range of different perspectives and skills is available.

But you realise that emerging ideas are not discussed thoroughly by the team members, thus the team doesn't benefit from its potential.

Objective:

You must promote a full and balanced discussion of all suggestions, in order to allow completely new and alternative ideas to emerge.

Solutions:

1. List all new ideas as they are suggested.
2. Ensure all these ideas are tested.
3. Show interest in suggestions by commenting favourably. Ask questions to encourage the speaker to explore the idea more fully.
4. Encourage your team to make some outrageous or impossible suggestions as sometimes these will generate interesting new ideas.
5. If the background knowledge is missing, all team members may need to conduct further research to obtain ideas.

Task 2: Encouraging and facilitating cooperation in team working.

Situation:

In a context of restructuring, the organisation of the company has been changed. Thanks to a big development, the company has now many big clients. This new structure obliges the work to be organised in a different way, in a sort of “project team” able to answer effectively to the new clients demands. The manager decided to create project teams, and to specialise them in particular sectors with dedicated clients. The clients will so have the same team as interlocutor.

You are a member of a project team, but you are experiencing some problems because – in your group – only one person dominates the discussion, and other people’s ideas (yours included) are not valued. This problem is limiting the effectiveness of the team outcomes.

Objective:

You must increase the effectiveness of the team outcomes, creating a more balanced team spirit by avoiding dominating behaviours by some members.

Solutions:

1. Create time limits on individual contributions.
2. Ensure that each team member has a chance to speak.
3. Interrupt politely by saying 'as time is limited can we hear what other people say'.
4. Have a quiet word with the dominant person, suggesting that it is useful for him to listen to the ideas from other team members too.
5. Remind the team members that working in a team means that negotiation needs to occur.

Task 3: Integrating different opinions of team members.

Situation:

Today you must handle a team working session in front of the top management of your company. You know that management consultants look for people with strategic and problem-solving abilities. They expect from you that you effectively lead the team to solve a problem.

The members of your team start to quarrel: they disagree about a very important solution to a company problem.

Objective:

You must effectively lead the team to handle disagreements.

Solutions:

1. Get to the bottom of the argument, have only the involved parties (the ones arguing) present. Ask them to tell their views on the argument one at a time, no interrupting, no exceptions. Sometimes this will be a stopping point because they will both see that the situation was either misinterpreted or not worth arguing over.
2. You should never chose sides, no matter what.
3. Next, ask them what they think should be done (within reason) to fix the problem.
4. Now, sit all of the team members down in a circle. Have a "Speaking Stick" to pass around. A speaking stick can be any item, it is passed around the circle so that whoever is holding the item has the floor and others cannot interrupt or comment until they get the stick. There should not be any criticisms from other team members.
5. Listen to everyone's idea or suggestion. Write it down, show interest. Then either vote on them or speak with the coach/sponsor about them. Tell team members that their opinions are important, but they won't always be used. Be sure to use everyone's suggestion at least once during the session. This makes the members feel more involved- it helps to get rid of that puppet-on-a-string feeling.

Skill 7: Flexibility

Using a flexible (but not conformist) style when interacting with other people; taking into account the attitudes and views of others; being able to understand and adopt the position of others; adapting to changing demands and conditions

Task 1: Seeing the big picture/keeping a sense of proportion/being aware of the consequences (end game).

Situation:

Since the recession, the market for your company’s training programmes has shrunk considerably as client companies have reduced training as a way of reducing costs. Your boss tells you that you need to “change or die” and he wants you to offer coaching to small businesses and skills training to unemployed people, rather than the high cost training that you have traditionally offered.

You run the training department and you have to deal with a lot of able and gifted trainers who know what their real market worth is. You need to explain to them that they have to offer a more “dumbed down” service so as to protect your business during the recession. You know they will be upset, as you are yourself, and you are not even sure that your company is strong enough to survive these difficult and demanding times.

Objective

You need to be able to see the current changes within the context of the longer-term good of the business, and communicate this to others.

Solutions:

1. Distinguish between the area in which you are expert and the expertise of others. While You are a good training manager, you leave others to read and interpret the changes in the market and help to set the strategy for this company. While not accepting uncritically all they say, you

need to be ready to accept the value of their analysis, not least with regard to the future upturn.

2. Think through the impact on the department that you run. It is quite clear that these changes will have a detrimental impact on staffing levels within your department, and hence on your standing within the company. As best as you can, you need to identify the key individuals within the team and the right structure for moving forward into an uncertain future.
3. Understand how others are feeling. Staff in your department are anxious for their future, and express that anxiety in a series of appropriate and not-so-appropriate ways. You need to get them focussed on shaping a new future. The solution is to use your own anxiety to gain an insight into theirs and focus on areas of common concern and mutual support.
4. Take the longer term view. The changes you need to make now will only make sense if viewed over a 3-5 year horizon, when today’s investment in change will gain a return. The solution is to position all of your thoughts, anxieties and plans within the longer terms context, and use that context to validate today’s decisions.
5. Communicate the longer-term view to others. Your colleagues and staff will be more accepting of changes if they can understanding the longer-term perspective. Your strategy therefore is to seek as much clarity as possible from your boss as to the longer-term aim and targets along the way, and use this to give as much clarity as possible to your staff.

Task 2: Being capable of reviewing your own behaviour.

Situation:

As Head of Human Resources within a local authority administration, you have prided yourself on your knowledge of both employment law as well as how it is implemented within local government. Currently your sector is going through a lot of change, which means high volumes of redundancies, reduced staffing levels and a lot of cutting corners. You need to ensure everything is still done “by the book” so as to keep the authority out of the employment courts.

Your Chief Executive Officer, however, believes that you need to simplify and reduce, or even remove, a lot of your processes. You have tried to explain that those processes were developed for a series of very good reasons, but now he has told you that you are part of the problem and you are “yesterday’s man”!

Not only that, but he also says you are stopping others embracing the changes. Needless to say, you are very upset by his comments, but you are a professional and you won’t let him know how upset you are. When you are honest with yourself, you do recognise that there might be a grain of truth in what he says. But if you give a little ground, it could threaten the long-term well being of the authority.

Objective

You need to understand how open/resistant to change you are, and what the positive/negative impact of that is on others within the organisation.

Solutions

1. Try and focus on the facts and leave the emotion out if it. You need to concentrate on the actual changes that are planned and distinguish this from your fear that the whole organisation will be damaged. You need to know the detail of what is proposed and test the impact of that on the knowledge base that you have. You need to put your feelings onto one side.
2. Talk to other people in a similar situation. You will talk to colleagues in other authorities to see if they are experiencing similar challenges and how they are responding. You will try and make

an assessment of how your sense of mission compares with theirs, but also how rigid you appear to be in comparison with them.

3. Get the views of your colleagues and direct reports. You will ask your colleagues how inflexible they think you are, but you will need to find a way of asking that question so they give an honest response rather than simply politeness. You will do this by asking for examples of your behaviour and see how they would categorise these on a scale. You will also ask the Chief Executive Officer.
4. See how habit-bound you are in other parts of your life. You need to understand how far you are change-friendly or change-resistant as a person, as this will clearly have an impact on your working life. You will try and list your habitual behaviours, and list also examples of where you have successfully broken a habit. You will also think about times you have acted “out of character”.
5. Take a long cool look at the consequences of your actions. Within the work context, you are starting to identify the impacts of the actions that you take. The easiest way to do this is to keep a record of your key decisions and the outcomes of those decisions, but you will have to be ruthlessly honest. You will share it with your boss when it is complete.

Task 3: Creating new forms of behaviour/breaking habits.

Situation

A new partnership was signed between the company (private sector) and a national public body. Both sides have definitely different way of working.

The company had to be flexible to adapt to his new partner customs, by being able to accept some requirements but also by being able to keep one's positions by saying "no".

The private company was used to work as fast as possible in order to satisfy its clients' demands, whereas the public body was used to have long meeting and discussions before making a decision.

Thanks to dialogue and flexibility, the partnership was a success.

Objective

You need to be able to break established forms of behaviour and shape & pursue a new direction which is currently unformed.

Solutions

1. Engender a sense of common purpose and a common goal. The company and the public body need to build a strong sense of common purpose. This can be done by highlighting and sharing with one another the various reasons for signing the accord, as well as sharing what they hope to gain from the process of working together, and articulating the end point benefits.

2. Distinguish those differences of custom that are real barriers to the joint venture as opposed to those which are a mere irritation. Both parties need to be open about the difficulties caused by the culture clash. They need to share with one another any detrimental impact on the rest of their organisation as a result of changing their ways of working. Also they need to understand the negative impact on the joint venture of not doing so.

3. Gain agreement from colleagues as to where you will give way and where you cannot. Both parties need a realistic internal debate about what they cannot change and what they can, and

where it is matter only of culture clash rather than differences of process they need to recognise that. They also need to acknowledge what cannot be changed because its impact would be so profound on the rest of their organisation.

4. Find work-around to those customs that have been given up. Where previous customs have been changed or given up, the parties need to identify new ways of working to compensate. They will need to identify the most efficient new practices and map out surrounding practices and the consequences of the new practice.

5. Communicate and embed new working practices which facilitate the longer-term well-being and mission of the joint venture. New working practices will need to be communicated and embedded, before those responsible will be comfortable with them. Ideally they will have been involved in their design and development. It will also be important to monitor the impact of the changes and remain aware that they too may overtime need to be changed.

Skill 8: Strategic thinking

Ability to produce a clear and consistent picture of the long-term future; possessing a clear vision for the future; clearly defining key objectives; considering the company in relation to its external environment

Task 1: Reading the external environment and knowing your own organisation.

Situation

2009: Economic crisis that was not foreseen in the temporary work sector. This particular year was quite difficult for all the temporary work agencies.

The manager realized at that moment, the importance to be able to anticipate the future and to get a clear vision of the future, which is totally different of the daily work of a temporary work agency, which is always in the “hurry up” and short term emergencies.

Solution in that agency was to develop new kind of activities, diversify the scope of actions, in order to be able to better reacting in case of further unpredicted event in the future.

New activities, in addition to temporary work : recruitment for permanent worker, employment inclusion for job seekers, HR advices for companies, and try to get many clients to not become dependent of only a few big clients.

Objective

You need to be able to read and understand both the external environment and the capability of the organisation itself.

Solutions

1. Identify suitable source of information about the external environment and link into them. Brainstorm a wide range of sources of information about the performance of the market in

which the organisation operates, and the wider political, economic, social and technological contexts. Ensure that the organisation has access to these sources of information and is storing and analysing this data.

2. Compare information from external sources with anecdotal information from client-facing staff. Create a view of the key changes in the external environment. Brief client-facing staff with this information and equip them to discuss and assess this when in discussions with clients, partners, suppliers, distributors, etc. Identify and analyse the different views from different perspectives.
3. Evaluate the validity and weight/impact of external information for the organisation. Brainstorm the level of confidence that colleagues hold in the difference sources of data, and list and weight from least confident to most confident. Reanalyse the picture that they are painting in the light of the weighting. Repeat the exercise with weightings according to the likely impact on the organisation.
4. Gather and interpret information on the organisation's capabilities, and those areas which currently have spare capacity. Identify formal and informal ways to understand how the organisation is performing. Target those areas of the organisation which are underperforming and interview key staff to determine the precise nature of the underperformance, and the extent to which it is it is related to/affected by changes in the external environment.
5. Assess the extent of opportunities for the organisation offered by the current context. Identify new opportunities created by shifts in the external environment where the organisation's capabilities may be exploited. Look behind the immediate product suite to identify the core capabilities that the organisation has in these areas.

Task 2: Working out how a new strategic opportunity could fit with spare capacity within the organisation.

Situation

You work for a travel agency which has traditionally been successful in offering holidays to people looking for activity and adventure. Your clients are young and value the service you provide, including making all the holiday arrangements, which they lack the knowledge and confidence to make themselves.

The business has been struggling – initially because the internet made it much easier for people to create their own holidays without the need for the local planning and contacts you provided, and latterly because the economic recession has put pressure on prices, thereby squeezing our profit margin.

You need to take a long hard look at the market and identify and evaluate a new direction for the business. The obvious place to look is at an older market, who, with increasing health & mobility could value some of the turnkey adventure holidays you offer, and yet lack the easier relationship with the internet which cut away at the younger market. But is this a real fit to your capabilities?

Objective

To test the suitability of a new market for a niche provider of adventure holidays.

Solutions

1. Understand the market both now and in the future. The fist step is to ensure that your understanding of the market is a correct one and real opportunities exist where you think they exist. You then need to assess how sustainable this is into the future. This will be a combination of data-gathering and review, and reflecting in the light of experience on the weight and reliability of that data.
2. Match growing market needs with the capability of the organisation. The demands of a new market segment need to be assessed against the capability of the organisation. This takes place

at a number of levels. Firstly, at a simple level, it appears that the needs of the older age group fit very well with your capability – to make things easy on the ground through local planning and to offer a modified adventure holiday. But you need to consider other needs this group may have and our suitability to provide them. You also need to review the young image the company’s staff create, and the suitability of that to this market.

3. Create a new business proposition. A degree of formality is required in thinking through the strategic fit of the new business. It requires a business proposition with some idea of the size of the market and its propensity to pay, the cost of provision and the likely throughput volumes. This then becomes a document for colleagues and stakeholders in the business to consider.
4. Test this proposition in the market. It will be essential to test the new proposition in the market before the strategy is rolled out and embedded. There will be a degree of informality to this process as elements of the proposition are discussed with clients, partners, stakeholders, suppliers and competitors. Feedback needs to be aggregated and considered.
5. Amend and refine as necessary. In the light of market testing, the business proposition will need to be refined and remodelled. Once this is completed, it will then become a new strategic direction for the business.

Task 3: Identifying the impact of the strategic opportunity on the organisation, and planning.

Situation:

Looking at investing more money in the company to help grow the business.

When you were looking to expand the business you realized that you needed to invest in the business to help expand, and you had the money to do so. You carried out a review of the business as it stood, developed a plan of where we wanted to get to, and developed a strategy of how you were going to do this. As part of this you needed to priorities which areas of the business needed investment, for example, hardware, software, buildings, staff development etc.

Strategic thinking allowed you to come up with a robust plan of what you needed to do and budget for medium term investment.

Objective

To develop a plan to exploit a new strategic opportunity for the business and ensure it is adequately resourced.

Solutions

1. Identify the impact of the new strategy on the organisation and those parts of the organisation that will be most significantly impacted. The first step will be to list all departments/divisions of the organisation according to how much they are impacted by the new strategic opportunity. This will need to consider the past record and future direction of each department, the available human resource and the closest fit to the new opportunity.
2. Work out a detailed transition plan for each part of the organisation to be affected by the new strategic direction. Those parts of the organisation which are significantly impacted will each require a plan. Relevant staff will need to be informed and will work with the management to develop a transition plan which quantifies the opportunity in terms of the revenues it brings to the organisation, the costs of achieving those revenues and the displacement effect on other activities.

3. Identify areas for investment, including staff resourcing and development. The plan will need to highlight the resources which are required to realise and embed the opportunity. This will include in particular the human resources, for which not only the cost of those resources should be considered, but also the cost of acquiring and developing them.
4. Develop a communications plan for internal & external audiences. Internal audiences will want to understand the impact on their workload, as well as the shorter & longer-term opportunities that the new strategy gives to the business. The organisation will also want to shape the communication to support its longer-term messages for external audiences.
5. Set targets for the new business, including a target for return on investment. In order to maximise the beneficial impact of the opportunity, it will be necessary to set targets for the short, medium and longer terms and embed processes for monitoring performance against those targets.

Skill 9 – Initiative

Self-confidence in identifying new opportunities, seeking out and implementing new activities.

Task 1: Actively seeking out new information/precedents

Situation:

There are constant supplies of conferences, seminars, courses and so on, but how do you get your hands on this information and put it to good use in your organisation?

Objective

You have been allocated to an ongoing activity to scan and document the market for new opportunities and implement in the organisation.

Solutions:

1. Spread the opportunity to participate in conference, seminars, courses among the staff and hand out instructions that tells the participants what to be expected of her/him and also give the participant a form for documentation of the event.
2. The participants will present their findings and experiences no more than two weeks after the event for the rest of the staff. There will be opportunities for questions and discussions in small groups.
3. At the presentation, a list is made up with both actions that will be presented at the annual activity planning and actions that need immediately handling and decisions.
4. The text report is accessible on the Intranet connected to a search engine. A summary, year by year, of the reports and a list of opportunities, is also available.
5. At the annual activity planning seminar in the workplace, the texts are scanned for new opportunities.

Task 2: Actively seeking new activities and work challenges

Situation:

At the Intranet there is a lot of information from staff participating in conferences, seminars, courses and so on that needs to be transformed into different opportunities.

Objective

To refine the information into activities and goals.

Solutions:

1. At the planning of the annual activity seminar the text from the Intranet is organised by working field and printed for handouts.
2. The moderator is preparing key-not speakers and the planning process e.g. Open Space.
3. For every group, minutes will be taken down and be compiled into a final document.
4. A second round of Open Space process will finalise the document to a activity plan and a task list.

5. The results are published on the Intranet

Task 3: Actively seeking and identifying opportunities to achieve goals

Situation:

The annual activity plan and task list must now be put to work.

Objective

Every work team will process the activity plan and task list into goals. The goals are documented and made available on the Intranet for feedback and goal achievement.

Solutions:

1. Longer team meetings are organised were the team processes the activity plan and creates their own plan with activities, duration, goals, how is responsible and so on.
2. The team activity plan is made accessible over the Intranet for all teams to see.
3. At weekly or monthly team meetings the team activity plan is always on the agenda for feedback.
4. A feedback function on the Intranet shows when the activities are started and when goals are achieved.
5. When all goals are achieved there is a small festivity with cake for the team.

Skill 10 - Learning improvement

Ability to apply knowledge in practice, improve professional knowledge and personal behaviors, to strive to learn more and to learn from own experience.

Task 1: Learning from your experience

Situation:

Situations are coming and going and many of these situations need a deeper analysis.

Objective

Catch experiences of interest for processing.

Solutions:

1. Forms for documentation of experiences are accessible at the work station and used when an interesting situation appears.
2. Every week the documents are gadded and the situation is organised according to topics.
3. Weekly team meetings were every staff member takes a moment to inform the team members of positive and negative experiences during the last week. The experiences are discussed and feedback is given from the team to the staff member.
4. Important findings are documented and put in a process for actions and investigations.
5. The document with the gadded experiences organised by topics are added with the result of the team weekly meeting and published on the Intranet.

Task 2: Continually improving your professional knowledge and skills

Situation:

There are a lot of important findings from weekly team meetings that need to be refined.

Objective

To refine the information into activities and goals.

Solutions:

1. The result from the actions or investigations are reported back to the staff member and the team.
2. The staff member that first wrote down the experience prepares a presentation of the results for the team.
3. The team is discussing what of the results in the report will be implemented with activity lists and goals.
4. A priority list is discussed and decided with how is responsible for each activity.
5. The documentations are made accessible on the Intranet.

Task 3: Continually improving your personal behaviours

Situation:

There is a lot of documentation and examples of implementations that can be used for improvement of staff behaviour.

Objective

Every work team will be aware of the possibilities when it comes to enhance behaviours and efficiency.

Solutions:

1. A feedback on the implementations is reported to the staff together with a measuring of effects.
2. A decision on what improvements need to be done for the implementations to be permanent, improved or suspended.
3. The management is constantly having its eyes on seminars or conferences on this topic for participation with a workshop or just as a participator.
4. The documentation on the Intranet is gadded and processed for enhancing the content of the education that are given to new staff members.
5. The documentation is also gadded for a “book on good practises” published on the Intranet.