

Lesson Plan: Collaboration for creative business solutions

How creative are you? And more importantly, how creative are your students? When new and fresh ideas are needed, one way to help them become more creative is through collaborating on projects. Try this lesson plan on the collaborative way to work with ideas and tasks in order to come up with creative business solutions, taken from *In Company 3.0* Intermediate B1+ level.

Level: Intermediate / CEFR B1+

Time: Approx 60 minutes

How to use this lesson plan:

The lesson is more suited to whole class / group work use. Give students a copy of the Student's Book sample pages and download the unit audio.

Learning objectives

This unit is about the importance of teamwork. It begins by asking students to say how much of their own job involves teamwork and what qualities are needed to be a productive team-player. They read and discuss an article about creating team spirit in meetings, and then listen to a project team talking about a problem they are having. Finally, they work in teams to roleplay a project meeting in which they brainstorm solutions to business problems.

Warm-up

Focus attention on the title and ask students what they understand by the word **collaboration**. Ask them to suggest business situations where collaboration is important and those where they think it is better for individuals to work on their own.

1. Give students time to think about their jobs and decide what percentage involves teamwork. Ask them to put a mark on the scale and compare with other students. Encourage them to say what aspects of their work involve teamwork and how they feel about it.
2. Focus attention on the cartoon and explain or elicit that the point is that true collaboration means listening to everyone's ideas, and if one person – usually the most senior person – is making all the decisions and ignoring everyone else's ideas, this is not a collaborative situation at all. Make sure students understand the useful idiom *to keep something to yourself*. Here it refers to not putting your ideas forward in a meeting.
3. Read the instructions with the class and emphasize that all the candidates are equally professionally qualified to take part in the project, so what you are looking for now is personal skills that will make a good team-player. Ask students to work individually or with a partner to brainstorm the personal qualities that an ideal team-player would have. Then have a class feedback session.
4. Ask students to work individually to complete the sentences, then discuss as a class whether these cover the same ideas they came up with in 3. Ask them to say whether they know anyone with the qualities listed.

ANSWERS

a reliable b constructive c committed d supportive e flexible f engaged g co-operative

5. Give students plenty of time to read the article and answer the questions. When checking answers, encourage a class discussion of the last three questions.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS

- a T.E.A.M. = together everyone achieves more; P.P.R. = positives, possibilities, reservations
- b Teams obviously don't always function better than individuals. Pros: you can draw on a wider pool of talent; you can be more innovative; you can delegate more; you can work faster and accomplish more within a timeframe – as the Japanese say, 'none of us is as smart as all of us!' Cons: there can be personality clashes; some team members may not do their share of the work; some may not buy into the project as much as others; if the team is multicultural and/or virtual, there can be communication problems; some members may not have as much support from their line managers as others.
- c In a good team, synergy is created when people combine their efforts to be more effective than they are as individuals – 'the whole is greater than the sum of the parts'
- d People used to working on their own may find it hard to adjust to teamwork. This is especially true if they have a lot of personal ambition and a drive to compete rather than collaborate. Put two or more such people together and you have a battle of egos! And one way for them to do battle is to try to win arguments with each other and score points with the boss. Claiming group ideas as your own and saying 'I told you so' when things go wrong are common ways of scoring points.
- e Cultures which are described as collectivist (Geert Hofstede) or communitarian (Fons Trompenaars) tend to be more accustomed to working in groups and putting group needs first. This needn't just be a question of national culture, however. Many Asian cultures are quite strongly collectivist, but their corporate culture may also be rather hierarchical, with the boss very much in charge. On the other hand, corporate cultures where the hierarchy is flatter may be better suited to self-managed teams (SMTs).
- f P.P.R. is a good example of a communication technique that encourages collaboration even when there are disagreements and that values contributions from all team members.

6. (Audio track 2.42) Go through the instructions and the options with the class before you play the recording, so that students have some idea of what they are going to hear and what information they need to listen out for.

ANSWER

c

7. (Audio track 2.42) Go through the things students need to identify before you play the recording again. Make sure they can identify Elaine (the woman) and Rolf (the second man who speaks). Check answers with the class.

ANSWERS

a Go ahead with what's best, based on what's been agreed at the planning meetings with KNP, and just ask them to confirm those decisions.

b He likes the fact that KNP simply has to say yes or no to each decision because this will make replying easier for them. He likes the fact that knowing that the project team is going ahead as agreed will make them respond faster if they've changed their minds.

c KNP could be given more progress reports to involve them more in the project. Decisions KNP needs to approve could be given a priority-rating to make sure they notice the important ones. Elaine's idea could be combined with Kevin's idea of setting up a client extranet where KNP can check on progress at any time and approve actions simply by clicking on a button.

d Some decisions require such an investment of time and resources that they may need more client involvement before action is taken. KNP may sometimes feel that control is being taken away from them.

8. Allow plenty of time for this activity. Go through the instructions and the problems with the class, then ask students to work in teams. Make sure they choose someone to be the facilitator and that they swap roles for each problem. They may need time outside of class to think of solutions to the problems which they can put forward in the meeting and to prepare what they are going to say. When they hold their meetings, go around giving help and encouragement.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS

a Perhaps you could electronically tag the shopping carts so that they set off an alarm or lock the wheels when removed from the supermarket car park; provide a free service for those (such as the elderly or disabled) who are unable to carry their groceries home; hire contractors to hunt down abandoned shopping carts; produce a series of posters ridiculing cart-thieves; petition the government to increase fines for the offence of stealing shopping carts.

b Perhaps you could make it possible for customers to upload their photo to your website and superimpose the jewellery onto their picture; produce high-definition videos of all your products, so that customers get a more three-dimensional feel for what they are buying; set up customer feedback blogs for each product, so people can share views on products they've bought; pre-pay for return of goods and not invoice customers until their product orders have arrived and been tried on.

c Perhaps you could increase staff salaries in quarterly increments to reward loyalty; rotate staff so that they deal with different kinds of enquiry to prevent the boredom of routine; provide regular (and fun) training events; offer fringe benefits to long-term employees (health or social club membership, subsidized mobile phone accounts, a loyalty-points-based gift programme); give more experienced staff responsibility for training more junior members; give staff with the best customer feedback each year the opportunity to receive a management education and become a manager.