

The Request

Activity

This exercise can be used to explore assumptions and bias, especially in relation to hierarchy or organisational culture.

Split participants into 2 groups. Ask one group to work in a separate room (if possible). Provide each group with a brief, outlining a proposal that they put forward to senior management recently (make sure each group gets a different brief).

Then, provide each group with a response to that proposal.

They must then prepare a short (2-3 minute) team briefing to explain to the other group what has been proposed and the response. Allow 15 minutes.

Then, gather both groups together, and ask them to 'brief' the others.

Debrief

Afterwards, reveal that both responses were exactly the same (they both included a lot of neutral phrases) although group A were given a favourable view of the management committee, whilst group B were given an unfavourable view.

Highlight how vague language is open to interpretation and how it can lead us to see what we expect to see.

Case Study 1

A few weeks ago you put forward a proposal to the IT department. It was to ask for a 10-15 minute e-learning package including video to be created for the Contractors' and Visitors' Induction to your site. This has a number of benefits:

- It will make sure that everyone gets exactly the same information
- It will also free up time for the managers on site
- Contractors and visitors would have to log-in, providing an electronic record of them completing it
- A unique code could be produced when they have completed it that could be placed on a badge or swipe card and easily checked
- A list of contractors who needed to renew their induction (after 12 months) would be produced automatically meaning that no-one ever lapsed, and everyone would be covered legally

You appreciate that the development of such a system will take time and won't be cheap, but you see no business reason why this should be rejected.

The IT Director, though, doesn't live in the real world and you don't think that any of the IT department has ever visited the site.

In the past when you have asked for more up to date systems, you've always been given excuses about why it can't happen, and your systems have had to collapse before they have been replaced. The IT system currently in place was top of the range in 1988, but your needs always seem to be put to the back of the queue. Meanwhile, half the executive team have been given iPads so that they can stay in touch with the business 24/7. You know that budget is available, but expect that none of it will come to the site. After all, those IT people think all you need to keep the site going is diggers and cement.

Case Study 2

A few weeks ago you put forward a proposal to the IT department. It was to ask for a 10-15 minute e-learning package including video to be created for the Contractors' and Visitors' Induction to Your site. This has a number of benefits:

- It will make sure that everyone gets exactly the same information
- It will also free up time for the managers on site
- Contractors and visitors would have to log-in, providing an electronic record of them completing it
- A unique code could be produced when they have completed it that could be placed on a badge or swipe card and easily checked
- A list of contractors who needed to renew their Induction (after 12 months) would be produced automatically meaning that no-one ever lapsed, and everyone would be covered legally

You appreciate that the development of such a system will take time and won't be cheap, but you see no business reason why this should be rejected.

You have heard that the IT Director is very business focussed, even though you don't think that he or any of his team has ever visited the site. The Site Manager met him briefly and said that he is good bloke who would give things proper consideration, as long as they were well thought out.

You made sure that your proposal was thorough. In the past when you have asked for more up to date systems, they have been replaced when necessary. You have heard that recently members of the executive team have been given iPads so that they can stay in touch with the business 24/7, so you know that the IT Director is keen to move with the times. You know that budget is available, and expect that some of it will be directed to the site. Afterall, without the site, the whole business would suffer.



Response – Case Study 1

To: Site Managers

From: IT Director

Thank you so much for your proposal to create an on-line induction for contractors and visitors to your site. Your proposal was well thought out and made some interesting points.

Your suggestion is quite a good idea, and we can see how it could benefit the business, although we have to balance costs against benefits in these difficult economic times. Please be assured that we will try to implement as many projects as possible, and this idea has a good chance of moving forward next year. However, I can't promise anything at this stage.

I will put this on the agenda at the strategy meeting, and we will think about the best way to proceed, and get back to you soon after that meeting, next month. We aim to prioritise projects taking into account next year's budgets and the whole of the business needs. Hopefully I will be able to give you a firm decision later.

Thank you again for taking the time for recommending this action.

PC Guy

IT Director



Response – Case Study 2

To: Site Managers

From: IT Director

Thank you so much for your proposal to create an on-line induction for contractors and visitors to your site. Your proposal was well thought out and made some interesting points.

Your suggestion is quite a good idea, and we can see how it could benefit the business, although we have to balance costs against benefits in these difficult economic times. Please be assured that we will try to implement as many projects as possible, and this idea has a good chance of moving forward next year. However, I can't promise anything at this stage.

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Thank you again for taking the time for recommending this action.

PC Guy

IT Director



Response – Trainer's Version

Neutral/ambiguous phases are highlighted in bold. How were these interpreted by the groups?

To: Site Managers

From: IT Director

Thank you so much for your proposal to create an on-line induction for contractors and visitors to your site. Your proposal was well thought out and made **some** interesting points.

Your suggestion is **quite** a good idea, and we can see how it **could** benefit the business, **although** we have to balance costs against benefits in these difficult economic times. Please be assured that **we will try** to implement as many projects as possible, and this idea has a **good chance of moving forward** next year. However, I **can't promise** anything at this stage.

I will put this on the agenda at the strategy meeting, and we will **think about** the best way to proceed, and get back to you **soon** after that meeting, next month. We **aim to** prioritise projects taking into account next year's budgets and the whole of the business needs. **Hopefully** I will be able to give you a firm decision **later**.

Thank you again for taking the time for recommending this action.

PC Guy

IT Director