

“Defending management decisions”: introduction and communication mini game for phase 1

DEFENDING MANAGEMENT DECISIONS

This exercise can be used to introduce the game's universe to participants, while at the same time creating a space for reflection on communicating change to a group of employees who are not necessarily ready for that change.

TRAINING TARGETS

Experiencing and recognizing resistance to change. The participants try playing both the communicating role and the receiving role in a fictional communicational situation.

- Trying out and reflecting on the change message. Most likely good discussions will occur in the recap about what works well and what does not work when attempting to communicate a change effort.
- Experiencing how people react differently to being informed about a change effort. The exercise focuses on the differences between us as individuals, and our different preferences when a message is communicated, and how we receive the points of the message differently.
- In addition, participants who play managers will be challenged in terms of the tension arising between being honest and being loyal to the executive management's intentions in the actual communication situation. This can be brought out in the recap session, if relevant.

Some of you will play managers from different departments, who have to work together to plan and conduct the presentation of a major change to the rest of the participants, who will be playing the parts of employees from the previously mentioned departments.

Participants who play managers use preparation sheets presenting the case and the known facts about the change effort to prepare for the session.

In addition to their own presentation, they must incorporate the film featuring the company's CEO into their change announcement.

Participants playing the employees each receive an exercise sheet.

MATERIALS

Use the following material for the exercise:

Preparation sheet for managers

These describe the case and the task to the participants designated to play managers.

You will need one set per person playing a manager, i.e. two to four sets.

All print materials are found at

www.workz.dk/wallbreakers-materialer

The zip-file contains all materials relating to the mini game “Defending management decisions”.

Film featuring the CEO

This film should be used as part of the managers' instructions and be shown on a computer. Remember to make sure that a sound system (such as computer loudspeakers) is present so the participants can hear the sound. The film is made with an English voiceover in addition to Danish and/or Swedish subtitles as needed. The file is called *WBintromovie_ENG.wmv* and it can be played on Media Player (PC) or QuickTime (Mac), for instance. Alternatively, it can be played from PowerPoint by incorporating the film into the PowerPoint presentation.

Role sheet for the participants

These sheets describe the roles to be played by the rest of the participants. Make sure to include the following in your preparations: remember that the gender of the roles you print must correspond with the persons who will be playing them, and make sure that the roles are distributed more or less evenly so that there are an equal number of roles from both TLA and Nordicon. Also, make sure that there are roles from all four departments in the game. The game has a total of 40 roles, which equals 10 roles from each department. The role descriptions are in-depth descriptions of the roles included in the participant booklets.

HOW TO RUN THE EXERCISE

Preparation: It works best to select the people who will be playing managers beforehand. It also helps if this is a mixed group so that different perspectives come into play during their preparations.

Print the materials required: preparation sheets for managers, a selected set of role sheets, and these facilitation instructions for yourself (if necessary).

You should also have access to a preparation area for the participants who will play the managers.

This could be a separate room, but a sofa and chairs in a remote corner is also fine.

Start-up considerations

The exercise can be run at the outset on a training day. This means that you will start taking aside those individuals who will be playing managers as people arrive.

What effect will this have? It will provide a good, energizing introduction that will set the pace and make people feel that they are now starting to learn something.



RUNNING INSTRUCTIONS

- Hand out the preparation sheets to those participants who will be playing managers and send them to the preparation area to read and discuss the task described in their papers. Give them twenty minutes to prepare and tell them you will be over in a little while to give detailed instructions.
- Once you have got the manager team working, assemble the rest of the participants into two groups, one of which play TLA employees and the other Nordicon employees – but do not tell them this.
- Hand out the role sheets to the participants: TLA roles to TLA players and Nordicon roles to Nordicon players. Make sure that all four departments are fairly well represented in the roles you hand out. Make sure that female participants are given female roles and vice-versa.
- Remember that it takes less time to read the role sheets than it takes to prepare the manager assignment, so it will be best to start this part a little later.

- Pay a visit to the “managers” to make sure they understand the task described in their preparation sheets.
- Tell them that their employees are sitting in there waiting for them, divided into two groups.
- Also tell them that there is a message from the CEO, which they must present (if possible, give the “managers” an opportunity to watch the film during their preparations by bringing a laptop to the preparation room).
- Make sure that the “managers” realize they all must participate when presenting the change effort, and that they must have clarified their roles.
- When you think that the managers have had enough time to prepare, call them in and ask them to start their presentation.
- Remember: they have to incorporate the film into their presentation but it is up to them to decide when to show it during their presentation.
- Give the exercise time to get rolling. It often takes a little while for the “employees” to get into their roles and to start asking critical questions or make angry comments.
- You decide when the exercise should stop. When the questions asked by employees or the various resistance reactions expressed become repetitive, you can stop the exercise.

REFLECTION AND RECAP

The exercise will result in different areas of focus in your recap:

- Focus on how people felt about being a “manager” with insufficient information and having to communicate an unpopular message. What was it like to stand up there? How did it go? What did you focus on in your preparations? What did you think about not having more information to give to the employees?
- Focus on the gut feelings of those playing employees: what words, phrases and messages did you notice? What effect did they have on you? Did you recognize anything from your own experience of work?
- Focus on the reality: how has your company typically communicated messages dealing with change? What effect did they have? What should be done differently?

After the reflection session, you can choose to use this exercise to establish the point of departure for the game:

- Briefly present the three levels of resistance using a whiteboard or PowerPoint presentation and ask the participants to assess their role right now in terms of resistance.
- Next, ask the participants to find the playing piece which fits their role and ask them to move their playing piece out to the level of resistance where they feel they are after the managers' presentation.
- This provides a “resistance starting point” for the four departments for the rest of the game. It is worth noting that the various departments will be starting from different points, but that is also how things are in real life.