

Unit 2 Work & Career: evaluating explanations

Objective: to provide further practice of evaluating explanations, this time within the context of **Work & Career**.

The three-step strategy for developing this soft skill is:

Step 1: Understand the difference between correlation and causation. (Ex. A)

Step 2: Read facts presented by the media and advertisers carefully to see if they are implying that one thing causes another. (Ex. B, Ex. C)

Step 3: Evaluate explanations of the facts to decide whether claims of causation are accurate or inaccurate. (Ex. B, Ex. C)

You may decide to highlight this strategy at the beginning of the lesson, and to conduct a short discussion to check that the students understand the skill and why it is useful. However, if you prefer to teach this lesson without discussing the underlying soft skill, this is also possible. The lesson is designed to be engaging and successful either way.

For more information about teaching life skills and ideas for highlighting the soft skill, please refer to p. xi and pp. 18–19 of the Teacher's Book.

MATERIALS:

- board and markers
- copies of the survey results in Ex. C (one for each pair of students) (optional)

Lead-in

Write the following on the board:

A recent study found that during the month of August, employees of a company were late to work far less often than in the other months.

Ask the students to look at the statement. Put them in pairs and give them a few minutes to discuss the reasons for this. Elicit some ideas as a class.

Possible answers

There is much less traffic on the roads in August as schools and many people are on holiday. However, there are probably also fewer employees than normal in the office.

A

- Write the following sentence beginnings on the board:
Correlation is ...
Causation is ...
- Put the students in small groups and ask them to write a definition for each one. Elicit ideas and write the best ones on the board, e.g. *Correlation is when two things happen together. Causation is when one thing causes another thing to happen.*
- Remind the students that correlation does not necessarily imply causation, and remind them of the example from the *Lead-in*.

B

- Erase the board. Write on it the following facts and explanations from different work-related studies:
Fact 1: People who do marathons are more likely to have a salary in excess of £80,000.
Explanation: People who earn a lot can afford the expense of training for a marathon.
Fact 2: A company found that workers that are parents took more sick days than non-parents.
Explanation: Working parents get ill more often than non-parents.
- Ask the students to work in pairs to discuss how convincing they think each explanation is. Encourage them to think of an alternative explanation for each fact.

Possible answers

Fact 1: The qualities needed to have a successful career are the same as those needed to be a successful marathon runner (mentally tough and determined), so they attract the same kinds of people.
Fact 2: Working parents may have to take sick days to take care of children who are ill, although they may not be ill themselves.

C

- Ask the students to imagine they work for the Human Resources department of a company. Explain that the company is reviewing a number of policies, including working from home, holiday and coffee/tea facilities, and they have been asked to look at a summary of a number of studies and make recommendations.

- Ask the students to work in pairs, and give each pair a copy of the following survey results. Alternatively, you could write these on the board and ask the students to copy them:

Working from home

A recent study has shown that people who work from home do on average 10% more work than people who work in an office, suggesting that home is a more productive environment than the office.

Holiday

Studies show that workers who have only ten days holiday take on average 20% more sick leave days than those who have fifteen days holiday, suggesting that holiday time is important for maintaining health.

Coffee/Tea facilities

Studies show that people who work in offices without coffee or tea facilities report lower levels of job satisfaction. This suggests that employees work better when they can drink coffee or tea.

- Ask the students to work in pairs. Ask them to look at each study, pick out the fact and explanation given, and for each one, decide whether there is a better alternative explanation. Point out they can think of more than one alternative explanation if they wish.
- Write the following **How to say it** box on the board. Before they start, read the phrases aloud and encourage the students to use these in their discussion.

HOW TO SAY IT

This may/might/could actually be caused by ...
It's unlikely that ... is caused by ...

- When the students finish, put each pair with another pair to compare their ideas before discussing them as a class.

Possible answers

Working from home

Fact: People who work from home do 10% more work.

Explanation: Home is a more productive environment.

Alternative explanation: People who work from home don't have to commute so work for a longer period of time each day.

Holiday

Fact: People with fewer holiday days take more sick leave days.

Explanation: Holiday time helps prevent people getting sick.

Alternative explanation: People with fewer holiday days may feel resentful of this and take more sick leave days (even if they are not ill) to compensate.

Coffee/Tea facilities

Fact: People who don't have access to coffee/tea making facilities are less satisfied at work.

Explanation: Being able to drink coffee and tea makes people happier.

Alternative explanation: When people can make coffee and tea, they can take a break and chat to co-workers. Being unable to do this might actually be the cause of the dissatisfaction rather than the lack of coffee or tea.

Reflect

- Erase the board and write the following questions:
Are you naturally a critical person? Do you think you will be more critical about things you read in the future?
- Give the students time to read and reflect on the questions. Then put them in pairs to discuss their answers. Invite volunteers to share their thoughts with the class.

EXTRA: HOMEWORK

Ask the students to write a short report to their boss, using their ideas from Ex. C. Encourage them to make recommendations about each area, based on the likely explanation for each one. You may wish to point out that there are no right answers here since they do not have any further information about each study. Ask them to bring the reports to the next class to hand in for marking.