

Suggested activity

Business Ethics

Case studies: spot the justification

Indicative study duration: 60 min

Table of contents

Teacher instructions	3
Objective	3
Preparation	3
Implementation	3
Student instructions	4
Spot the justification: analysing moral disengagement	4
Handout materials	4

Teacher instructions

Objective

To guide students in identifying and understanding moral disengagement techniques used to justify unethical actions, using case studies of common business situations.

Preparation

- Prepare a handout with the case studies and a list of moral disengagement techniques (see below).
- Divide students into small groups (3-4 students per group).
- Arrange the classroom to facilitate both individual reflection and group discussions.
- Prepare a simple peer evaluation sheet (see handout section).
- Have flip chart or whiteboard available for class discussion.

Implementation

- 1. Introduction (5 minutes):**
 - Briefly review the concept of moral disengagement and its role in unethical decision-making.
 - Explain that they will analyze case studies to identify the neutralization techniques being used.
- 2. Individual analysis (20 minutes):**
 - Distribute the case study handouts and peer evaluation sheet.
 - Instruct students to read each case study carefully and individually identify the moral disengagement technique used.
 - Encourage students to use the description list in the handout.
- 3. Group discussion (15 minutes):**
 - Have students in groups discuss their analysis and clarify any points.
 - Guide them to reach a consensus on the most relevant technique for each case study.
- 4. Peer evaluations (10 minutes):**
 - Have students evaluate the performance of another group using a peer evaluation form.
- 5. Class discussion (10 minutes):**
 - Have groups present one case study and justify their answer.
 - Facilitate a class discussion to reflect the difficulty of spotting justification attempts in real life.
- 6. Conclusion (5 minutes):**
 - Summarize the key takeaways from the activity.
 - Emphasize that understanding these techniques is crucial for recognizing and avoiding unethical choices.

Student instructions

Spot the justification: analysing moral disengagement

Your task

You will work individually to analyse case studies and then together in groups to discuss the moral disengagement techniques used in each scenario. Then you will use a peer evaluation to give feedback to another group. The goal is to identify ways that people justify unethical actions, even if they don't want to admit their behaviour is wrong.

Steps to follow

1. **Read the cases:** Carefully read each case study provided and review the description of moral disengagement techniques provided in the handout.
2. **Individual analysis:** Individually identify which moral disengagement technique you think is being used in each case study.
3. **Group discussion:** Discuss your answers with your group, come to an agreement and write down your answer.
4. **Share and evaluate:** After discussion, your group will present one of the case studies and its solution to the class. The other groups will use a peer evaluation sheet to give feedback.
5. **Discuss:** Participate in a class discussion about the case studies and what you've learned.

Handout materials

Case studies: spot the justification

Instructions

Read carefully each case study. For each case, identify which moral disengagement technique (see list below) is being used to justify the unethical behavior. You can use the given list as a guide

Case 1: the "borrowed" funds

A cashier at a local shop occasionally takes small amounts of money from the cash register, with the plan to pay it back later when he gets more salary. He tells himself, "I'm not stealing; I'm just borrowing the money for a while, and I'll pay it back before anyone notices." He believes he deserves more money than he gets, and he will be able to use his bonus to pay back the money.

Case 2: the "unavoidable" overcharge

A market vendor overcharges a customer for some fruits. She claims, "I didn't want to do it, but all the other vendors do it; they would take all my customers otherwise."

Case 3: the "necessary" deception

a sales representative at a local company is told by his manager to exaggerate the benefits of a product in an upcoming advertising campaign. the sales rep tells his colleagues: "i have to do it, the manager wants me to. it's his plan, so it's not my fault".

Case 4: the "deserving" customer

A business owner sells a substandard product to a tourist, claiming: "These tourists are rich and come from rich countries; they've been taking money from us for a long time, so they deserve to pay more".

Moral disengagement techniques

- **Denial of responsibility:** The person claims they had no control over their actions.
- **Denial of injury:** The person minimizes or denies the harm caused by their actions.
- **Denial of the victim:** The person claims that the affected party deserved the harm.
- **Condemnation of the condemners:** The person attacks those who point out the unethical behaviour.
- **Appeal to higher loyalties:** The person claims their action was to fulfil a higher obligation.
- **"Everyone else is doing it":** The person justifies actions because others are doing the same.
- **Claim to entitlement:** The person thinks they are entitled to the unethical behaviour

Peer evaluation form

Please provide your feedback about another group's performance by filling in the form below.

Group number:

1. Did the group clearly identify the main techniques in the cases?

Not at all: 1	2	3	4	Very clearly: 5
---------------	---	---	---	-----------------

2. Did the group discuss the application of techniques in real life?

Not at all: 1	2	3	4	Yes: 5
---------------	---	---	---	--------

3. Did the group present their analysis in a clear way?

Not at all: 1	2	3	4	Yes: 5
---------------	---	---	---	--------

4. Was the group respectful and inclusive during the presentation?

Not at all 1	2	3	4	Yes: 5
-----------------	---	---	---	--------

5. Was the group respectful and inclusive during the presentation?

Not at all 1	2	3	4	Communication was very respectful: 5
-----------------	---	---	---	---

6. Do you have other comments?

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.