

Recordings

Business fundamentals

Company types and structures

 1:01–1:05

Mina: I'm a geologist with a well-known multinational corporation – maybe you even own shares in our company. Our core business is mining – gold, silver, copper, iron and so on. We have a complex structure; each geographical region has a local management structure, but individual product managers also report to different functional managers at HQ – R&D, finance, marketing, etc. It's a huge operation, so decision-making can be very slow!

Marty: I'm a freelance photographer, so I run my own business. I do a lot of weddings, parties and so on. Because I'm self-employed, I can do things my way, which is great; on the other hand, it's financially risky. For example, if the business got into trouble, I could lose my home.

Owen: We make furniture for firms like Ikea. I sort of supervise production, and my sister runs the office, but in fact my dad decides everything. He's the General Manager. It's a family business; there are six shareholders altogether, but we can't really do anything without Dad.

Isabelle: I share an office and an assistant with three other lawyers. I specialize in employment law, advising companies on HR issues. My partners each have their own specialization, and Sarah, our assistant, works for all of us. In theory, as managing partner, I'm the boss, but in practice we each look after our own clients. So it's a very flat structure, there's no real hierarchy.

Frank: I work for a hairdressing franchise – my job is to recruit and manage new franchisees; I report directly to the CEO. We help franchisees to set up salons, promote our products, and ultimately, increase our shareholder value. It's good business for them, but although they manage their own limited companies, they don't have any real say in how things are done; there's a procedure for everything – and I mean everything!

1 Corporate culture

1.1 About business Work culture and placements

 1:06

I got my first placement in a PR firm in Paris. Our teachers had told us to be careful about dress code, being on time, and so on. But I had a problem I really wasn't expecting.

The first day, I arrived at eight thirty and I was a bit surprised because I had to wait an hour and a half for my supervisor to arrive. In fact, most people came in at about eleven o'clock. But everybody was very friendly. They gave me a project to work on and I thought, great, I can really do a good job here and, you know, make a good impression.

Well, for the first two weeks I worked from nine in the morning to about seven in the evening. I didn't really have a social life because I only got home about eight, but, like I said, I wanted to make a good impression. But then gradually, people became less friendly, and stopped talking to me. I couldn't understand why they were giving me these

funny looks, especially when I went home in the evening.

Anyway, in the end, I went and asked my supervisor what I'd done wrong. And in fact the problem was that most people didn't go home until 9 or 10pm. So because I left at about seven, I was breaking the unwritten rules. They all thought I was lazy! I mean, I knew I was the first to leave, but I arrived at 9am, and I was working really hard, you know?! But as far as they were concerned, you couldn't do any real work before eleven, so arriving at nine in the morning didn't count!

 1:07

I'm a department manager in the civil service. The department's actually very informal and friendly – we're all quite young and everyone's on first name terms. We all have lunch together in the canteen and we often go to the pub for a drink after work. We have one or two interns per year. We try to make them feel at home and part of the team, and usually it's fine.

But, a year or two ago, I had a problem with an intern I was supervising. At first, everything was fine. Monica was very bright and friendly, and got on well with everybody. But then one day we had a crisis in the office. My manager needed one of Monica's files for an important meeting at 10am. We couldn't find it, and unfortunately Monica wasn't in the office; she wasn't answering her phone, and she didn't arrive until ten fifteen! In fact, she'd been to the dentist's, but she hadn't told me that she'd be late. Well, as you can imagine, I was stressed out and I made it very clear that this was unacceptable. And Monica just burst into tears, so I had to tell her that, you know, that was unprofessional too.

Anyway, after that, things were never the same. She stopped socializing with the rest of the team; she wouldn't say anything in meetings and she didn't even eat in the canteen with us any more. I tried to explain that it was my job to tell her when there was a problem, and that it wasn't personal. But she couldn't accept that. For her, a boss was a boss, and a friend was a friend, and you couldn't be a boss and a friend.

1.2 Vocabulary Work organization and responsibility

 1:08

Bertram: All right, Sam, welcome to San Antonio. Now, I just want to tell you who's who at Warndar, so you know who to go to when you have questions, OK?

Sam: OK.

B: Now, let's start here in Marketing; I'm the Business Development Manager, and I have a team of four reporting in to me; two salesmen, Jake Smith, our Art Director, and Saidah Hussain, who's our PR Officer. You'll be working mainly with Jake and Saidah in PR, but you're going to report directly to me.

S: All right.

B: As I told you, we're a small company, so the organization is simple for the moment, but we're growing fast, so that's going to change as we hire new staff. For example, right now we don't really have an HR department – Monica Overstreet, our Office Manager, takes care of HR.

S: Yes, I met Ms Overstreet last time I was here.

B: That's right. She also looks after finance, and she has two accountants working

under her. Now then, as you probably know, Warndar Technologies was founded by Marilyn Warner, our CEO, and David Darren, who's now COO.

S: COO?

B: Yeah. Chief Operating Officer. Basically, David runs the business on a day-to-day basis. Marilyn deals with strategy; she's often away at our parent company in Houston.

S: Uh-huh – so Warndar is a subsidiary of the Irysis group, right?

B: That's right. They took us over a couple of years ago. Anyway, there are three other department heads who all report to David. Roxane Pawle is our IT Manager in charge of IT and Technical Support. She's new – she joined six months ago when our old IT Manager resigned.

S: Really?

B: Yeah. He was appointed Head of IT in a big firm up in Washington. Nice job, but too much stress. They fired him after only three months!

S: Wow!

B: Yeah. Anyway, Roxane has a web developer and two support engineers reporting to her. OK? Now, the biggest department here is R&D. Doug Pearson has seven research scientists in the lab. Doug coordinates our development programs; so he liaises with me in Marketing and with our Program Manager, Herb Monroe. Herb manages the Engineering Department, and he's responsible for building our product package. He has a team of three: two software engineers and a technical writer.

S: OK.

B: All right, I think that's everyone. So, let's go and meet Saidah – unless you have any questions?

1.3 Grammar Past tenses and advice structures

 1:09

Do you know the one about the CFO and the crocodiles? Well, there was this CEO, who was giving a party for his executive team. Over the years, the boss had done very well for himself, so he was proudly showing the executives around his luxurious country house. Anyway, at the back of the house, he had built the largest swimming pool any of them had ever seen. Absolutely huge, you know? But the pool was full of very hungry crocodiles. So, the CEO said to his executives,

'The most important quality for an executive is courage. Without it, you will never become a CEO like me. So, this is my challenge to each of you: if anyone can dive into the pool, swim through those crocodiles and reach the other side, I will give them anything they want. My job, my money, my house, anything!'

Well, of course, everyone laughed at the challenge and nobody took it very seriously. Anyway, they had just started to follow the CEO towards the barbecue when suddenly there was a loud splash. Everyone turned around and ran back to the pool where the Chief Financial Officer was swimming for his life. The crocodiles had almost caught him when he reached the edge of the pool. He'd just managed to climb out of the pool when he heard the mouth of the biggest crocodile close shut – snap – behind him.

Well, the CEO shook the CFO's hand and said,