



SIMULATED CULTURE CLASH

This is a simulation activity in which the clients will form two groups representing different cultures. They will not be aware that they are operating under different rules. These contradictory rules will get in the way of their cooperating and arriving at a peaceful solution. Rules and guidelines are as follows:

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

Name tags (or other form of personal label) for everyone
One small, unimportant, inexpensive item for everyone (i.e. small toy, piece of food)
Two separate rooms or enclosures

PREPARATION

Explain to the clients that they will be learning more about how to resolve a conflict because they will be engaging in a simulation. They will split into two groups that have never seen each other. Convince the clients that in order to make things more realistic, they have to split up into different rooms so that it is like they are meeting each other for the first time. Designate one room as the “triangle” room and the other as the “square” room, and let them choose as they will, but try to keep the number of people in each room fairly similar.

SEPARATE GROUP BRIEFINGS

Brief each group separately. The groups will receive different instructions but should think that they are being given the same instructions as the other group. To achieve this effect, explain the following behavioral norms as if they were not special but absolutely natural and logical.

To the “Squares”:

Explain that they must follow these rules of the game

Behavior which is polite and respectful (always do these):

- Speak with a loud, clear voice
- Look directly at someone when speaking
- Call people either by their name or “Mr.,” “Mrs.,” etc.

Behavior which is rude and disrespectful (never do these):

- Calling someone by their shape (triangle or square)
- Looking away or not answering while someone speaks to you
- Touching someone who has not touched you first

Have the group interact for a moment with these behaviors so that they can learn them.

To the “Triangles”:

Explain that they must follow these rules of the game.

Behavior which is polite and respectful (always do these):

- Speak softly and using few words, or none at all.
- Call people by their shape (square or triangle)
- Touch peoples’ hands or shoulders while talking to them

Behavior which is rude and disrespectful (never do these):

- Making eye contact with people you are talking with
- Speaking loudly and often
- Calling people by their name or “Mr.,” “Mrs.,” etc.



Have the group interact for a moment with these behaviors so that they can learn them.

To both groups:

Give each person a name tag on which they should draw their shape and write their name beside it. Also give each person some small unimportant item; if possible, give each person some different simple food item, toy, or any other trinket which they might actually desire rather than an uninteresting, non-unique token.

Explain that they are all going to be trading. Anyone can trade with anyone else. The object is for the most people to be satisfied with what they get in the end.

CULTURE CLASH

Bring both groups back together when you are sure they understand the rules and have memorized the appropriate behaviors. Tell them they should act as if you are not there, and let the “trading” begin.

Observe behaviors closely, noting points of conflict and sources of resolution.

Do not intervene unless the simulation is on the verge of disaster. When the situation is about to break down, you can prematurely terminate the simulation.

DISCUSSION

When the simulation has been declared finished, tell everyone to take off their name tags and to forget their shape and others' shapes. Ask the clients what happened, how it happened, if they suspected that both sides had been given different rules. Then discuss what caused problems and how, if at all, these problems were settled. Allow the conversation to go where it will, but make sure to emphasize some key points:

Simple differences in behavior can cause major conflicts.

Communication about rules (i.e. personal beliefs and values) is vital in any interaction. An action has little meaning without a cultural context.

Resolving conflicts has many more advantages than living in isolation.