

Intercultural Workshop I IMPRESSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

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Objective: To gain an intercultural learning experience and understand the basics of culture concept.

The main goal of intercultural learning was seen as the development of intercultural competence, which is the ability to act and relate appropriately and effectively in various cultural contexts. We worked on issues how to deal with cultural differences and how to overcome them. In intercultural communication we can recognize six Stumbling Blocks: 1) Culture Shock, 2) Assumption of Similarities, 3) Language Differences, 4) Nonverbal Misinterpretations, 5) Preconceptions and Stereotypes and 6) Tendency to Evaluate.

Workshop had started with the simulation card game called “Barnga”. This game is useful to encourage participants to critically consider normative assumptions and cross-cultural communication, to learn to communicate effectively across cultural groups, to help people interrogate assumptions they may have about group norms and critically analyze where those norms have come from and whether or not they continue to be useful in new contexts and to interrogate what the role of communication is in helping us either be confused or understand one another.



This game was created by Sivasailam “Thiagi” Thiagarajan in 1980, while working for USAID in Gbarnga, Liberia. He and his colleagues were trying to play Euchre but all came away from the instructions with different interpretations. He had an ‘A-ha’ moment that conflict arises not (only) from major or obvious cultural differences but often from subtle, minor cues. He created the game to tease out these subtleties. In this activity, participants play a card game silently, each operating with a different set of rules, unbeknownst to them.

During the game participants experience the shock of realizing that despite many similarities, people of differing cultures perceive things differently or play by different rules. Players learn that they must understand and reconcile these differences if they want to function effectively in a cross-cultural group.

Participants play a simple card game in small groups, where conflicts begin to occur as participants move from group to group. This simulates real cross-cultural encounters, where people initially believe they share the same understanding of the basic rules. In discovering that the rules are different, players undergo a mini culture shock similar to actual experience when entering a different culture. They then must struggle to understand and reconcile these differences to play the game effectively in their "cross-cultural" groups. Difficulties are magnified by the fact that players may not speak to each other but can communicate only through gestures or pictures. Participants are not forewarned that each is playing by different rules; in struggling to understand why other players don't seem to be playing correctly, they gain insight into the dynamics of cross-cultural encounters.

Several major problems arose during the game: 1) each group did its best, but all had different sets of circumstances and ground rules, 2) most discovered different rules, but didn't know exactly how they were different, 3) even if you knew, it's not clear how to bridge differences, 4) communicating with others is difficult and requires sensitivity and creativity, 5) when the differences are hidden or few, it may even be more difficult to resolve them than if they were many and obvious, and 6) in spite of many similarities, people have differences in the way they do things...you have to understand and reconcile those differences in order to function effectively in a group.

After the game we had great discussion followed by questions as:

- What specific "real-life" situations does the game simulate?
- What does the simulation suggest about what to do when you are in this situation in the "real world"?
- What were the underlying causes of the problems that arose during the game?
- Have you ever had an experience where there was a rule difference that you didn't know about? How did your view of things change once you became aware of it? In retrospect, how would you do things differently if you knew in this game?
- When are you all likely to encounter situations in the real world like in the "Barnaga"? What would you like to have happen when you next experience 'rule' differences? How will you increase the likelihood of having a positive experience?

It was great experience for each participants and very useful tool for intercultural learning experience and understands the basics of culture concept. This workshop gave important impact to the ODDA project thus a part of a comprehensive capacity building for social behaviour and engagement, it contributes to fostering intercultural education and to reducing stereotyping and prejudices and to raising awareness of the cultural variety in the European countries.