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UPSIDE DOWN: A CROSS-CULTURE GAME IN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

UPSIDE DOWN is an experiential game designed to sensitize game participants to cultural issues that exist when groups with different backgrounds interact. This is a complete game that focuses on both individual and group behavior to achieve specific goals. The game has clear-cut rules, likely winners, and a definite ending.

UPSIDE DOWN

Objectives of the Game

UPSIDE DOWN has been designed to prepare the participants to confront, understand, and effectively overcome culture shock and cultural differences that exist when conducting international business (Terpstra and David, 1991). Several other valuable objectives are sought to be realized through this game. These include: enabling a participant to overcome his/her own culture shock; enhancing effectiveness in a culturally-alien environment; recognizing that seemingly minor cultural differences may have significant implications; realizing the need to and the time to compromise; handling the conflicts generated when values and behaviors clash with the need to compromise; being able to distinguish between behaviors and values; and realizing the limits and advantages of stereotyping.

Applications

The game is especially suitable for undergraduate and graduate courses in business. Specific courses that may be appropriate for using this game as a pedagogical tool are principles of management, international business, and organizational behavior. Given the nature and purpose of this game, it can also be used in college courses in other disciplines. Additionally, the game can be easily adapted for use in corporate training programs.

The game has been successfully used by the authors in an introductory management course and an international business course, as well as in faculty seminars in cross-cultural awareness. The effectiveness of this game as a pedagogical tool vis-à-vis the traditional lecture method was investigated and has been reported (Sanyal and Neves, 1990). The research results indicate that the game is an effective teaching tool.

USING UPSIDE DOWN IN THE CLASSROOM

Materials Required

The game involves exchange of "tokens" between the participants. The tokens could be pennies, paper clips, marbles, or any other small and numerous item. In determining the number of tokens needed for a game, a rule of thumb is to have seven tokens for every player. Small plastic or paper cups may be provided to the players to hold their individual tokens.

A copy of the rules describing a particular culture and the expected behaviors is provided to every player. Since the

game involves two groups, the instructions can be written on different colored paper.

Individual tags of two identifying players of should not display the information other than different colors are useful in the same culture. These labels names of the players or any the culture they belong to.

The game facilitator should bring with him/her a list of female and male names starting with both vowels and consonants. This list should be kept confidential throughout the game. The instructor will assign fictitious names as well as states of birth to the game participants.

Setting

The game is best played in a large room where the players can be segregated into two groups and allowed to interact among their own group. Alternatively, one main room with one or two adjacent rooms could be used to provide the space for each group to interact. Size of the rooms depends on the number of players since players move about to interact with one another.

The game can accommodate a variable number of players. The ideal size per game can range from 10 to 20. One game facilitator should be present at all times to assist the participants. Alternatively, the game facilitator may ask one of the persons in the class or room to assist him/her in conducting the game.

The game can be easily completed in an hour. The time can be reduced or increased at the discretion of the game facilitator.

Game Preparation

Participants are randomly assigned to two equal groups taking care to ensure a balance with regard to gender in each group. For one group, the game facilitator will assign fictitious names to each of the players. About half the names should start with a vowel. For the other group, the game facilitator assigns fictitious "state of birth" to each of the players. At least half of these states should be in a well-defined geographical area. For example, in the Northeast the states could be New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania. Enough copies of the instructions (see Appendix) should be provided to the players so that they can perform their roles as the game calls for.

Game Playing Procedure

After the participants are divided into two groups and each group is provided with its own unique role playing information, the game begins. In the first phase, group members interact among themselves (intra-group interaction) to internalize and familiarize themselves with their assigned patterns of conduct. In the second phase, the two groups meet to achieve group goals (inter-group interaction). The goals of the respective groups are not zero-sum, that is, both groups can realize their objectives at the same time. The intergroup interaction is affected by the culture and value system of each group and this will affect the ability of the groups to achieve their goals.

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The performance of the players are evaluated at two levels. At the group level, the extent to which the group goals were realized is determined. Comparing the performance of the two groups will indicate which group has functioned more effectively. At the individual level, the participants are evaluated on the number of tokens they have accumulated, made possible by the fact that tokens are in two colors.

The game facilitator assists in encouraging players to express their opinions and experience about the game. The emphasis is on determining to what extent the objectives of the game as set forth above have been recognized and realized by the players.

- The instructions for your group are as follows:

REFERENCES

- Sanyal, R., & Neves, J. (1990, March). Evaluation of an Experiential Exercise in Cross-Cultural Communication. Paper presented at the meeting of the north-east regional Organizational Behavior Teaching Association, Philadelphia, PA.
- Terpstra, V., & David, K. (1991). The Cultural Environment of International Business Cincinnati, OH: South-Western Publishing Co.

APPENDIX

A. INSTRUCTIONS FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS

Rules of the Game

This exercise is designed to sensitize participants to different cultural values and diverse norms of behavior. This is accomplished through role playing between two groups who have been instructed to adopt specific cultural traits. The exercise deals with culture shock, stereotyping, and the need for understanding and compromising in order to achieve assigned organizational goals.

Exercise

1. In the experiential exercise we are doing today, there are two groups representing two different countries: Utopia and Eldorado.
2. Each country has its own distinct cultural values and rules of behavior.
3. The exercise comprises of two phases:

Phase One

In the first phase the participants interact in their own group in order to learn and internalize that group's norms.

Phase Two

In the second phase, the groups interact with each other in order to accomplish a mission assigned by the instructor.

4. Procedures:
 - Participants are assigned to the two groups.
 - The instructor distributes colored tags for identification purposes to the members of each group.

Every member is provided with a certain number of tokens

The instructors for your group are as follows:

B. INSTRUCTIONS FOR CITIZENS OF UTOPIA (Material to appear on page 1)

1. For the purpose of this game, the state you were born in is-----
2. You are starting with----- prestige tokens.

Values

1. Honesty is the most valued and widely prevalent trait. Therefore, all questions must be truthfully answered.
2. Prestige tokens are visible signs of success in your society. Accumulation of tokens is a symbol of status and position. Every Utopia citizen seeks to acquire as many of these prestige tokens as possible.

Behavior

1. Utopia citizens are very friendly. They always begin and end a conversation with a **HANDSHAKE**.
2. Citizens of Utopia mingle with people of their **OWN GENDER**. For example, men will socially interact only with men, and women with women.
3. Utopians enjoy a good puzzle. They tell riddles all the time. When two Utopians meet, they shake hands and each asks the other a riddle in turn. For example, citizen A asks citizen B a riddle. If B gives the correct answer, he receives a token from A. If B fails to answer correctly, he/she gives a token to A. Now it is the turn of B to ask a riddle. If either of the two fails to ask a riddle, he/she must give a token to the other.
4. Each person can ask only one riddle of the other before moving on to interact with other Utopians.
5. You hold your tokens in a small cup in your hand

PHASE I

During this phase, the Utopia group, with the rules and you interact with other members of The intent is to make you familiar values of your culture.

You have ten minutes to play this exercise and accumulate as many tokens as you can.

(Material to appear on page 2)

Phase II

In this phase, your group will interact with a group from another country in order to accomplish an assigned mission.

1. **MISSION:** Find out the **NAMES** of the members of the foreign group in ten minutes.
2. **REWARD:** Your group will be rewarded with ten tokens on the successful accomplishment of your mission

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3. When you get the name of a member through conversation you MUST GIVE one prestige token to that foreign member.
4. STEREOTYPE: You have very little information about the values and behaviors of the other culture. Among the stereotypical information you have are the following.
 - a. They do not like to talk and they avoid physical touching when conversing.
 - b. They appreciate receiving tokens in exchange for providing information.
 - c. Their NAMES always start with a vowel.
 - d. It is best not to give them any information beyond what is being asked of you.

C. INSTRUCTIONS FOR CITIZENS OF ELDORADO

(Material to appear on page 1)

1. For the purpose of this game, your name is _____
2. You start with-----_ prestige tokens.

Values

1. Honesty is the most valued and widely prevalent trait. Therefore, all questions must be truthfully answered.
2. Prestige tokens are visible signs of success in your society. Accumulation of tokens is a symbol of status and position. Every Eldorado citizen seeks to acquire as many of these prestige tokens as possible.

Behavior

1. Eldorado citizens are very polite. They always begin and end a conversation with a NOD OF THEIR HEADS.
2. Citizens of Eldorado maintain a physical distance and do not touch one another when conversing.
3. Eldorado citizens always ask SHORT and PRECISE questions. They answer all questions with either "YES" or "NO" or "MAYBE". If a question is deemed to be too personal, the answer "MAYBE" terminates the conversation. You can, however, come back and ask questions after conversing with someone else.
4. Each participant in a conversation TAKES A TURN asking questions. You cannot ask two questions in a row.
5. If your question receives a "YES" answer, you receive a token. Similarly, if your question receives a "NO" answer, you pay a token. The answer "MAYBE" terminates a conversation without any tokens being exchanged. Remember: All questions must be answered truthfully.
6. You hold your tokens in a small cup in your hand.

PHASE I

During this phase, you interact with other members of the Eldorado group. The intent is to make you familiar with the rules and values of your culture

You have ten minutes to play this exercise and accumulate as many tokens as you can.

(Material to appear on page 2)

PHASE II

In this phase, your group is selected to interact with a group from another country in order to accomplish an assigned mission.

1. MISSION: Find out the names of the STATE of birth of the members of the foreign group in ten minutes.
2. REWARDS: Your group will be rewarded with ten tokens on the successful accomplishment of your mission.
3. You SHOULD give one prestige token in exchange for positive information regarding the place of birth.
4. If you cannot answer a question YES or NO, you must answer MAYBE.
5. STEREOTYPE: You have very little information about the values and behaviors of the other culture. Among the stereotypical information you have are the following:
 - a. They only care about accumulating more and more tokens.
 - b. They take tokens away especially when you are acting in a socially unacceptable way.
 - c. They like to laugh and ridicule other groups.
 - d. They are all from northeastern states like New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. (The game facilitator may assign other states or geographical areas.)
 - e. They like to touch each other.