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Simulation: Rockets and Sparklers

General

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Time Required

90 minutes (15 minutes to learn cultural rules; 10 minutes for visits and small-group debriefing; 15 minutes to play together; 15 minutes to describe the other culture; 35 minutes for large-group sharing and debriefing)

Objectives

1. To identify the different aspects of culture: values and behaviors
2. To explore the influence of culture on our interpretation of others' behaviors
3. To demonstrate the influence of cultural values on our own behaviors

Materials

- Copies of the Sparklers' Cultural Rules Handout and the Rockets' Cultural Rules Handout for each member of the assigned cultures
- Paper clips
- A breakout room for one of the cultures

Process

1. This activity offers participants firsthand experience with a "cultural encounter." After dividing the group in half, distribute the "Sparklers' Cultural Rules" handout to each member of one group and the "Rockets' Cultural Rules" handout to each participant in the other group. Give each group approximately 10 minutes to read over the characteristics of their culture and to practice the "Paper Clip Game," using their cultural rules to do so. Except for the scouts, groups should continue to play the game.
2. Ask each group to send 2 or 3 scouts into the other culture to observe their interactions. They are not to participate in the culture; they should only observe. These scouts spend approximately five minutes in the other culture. Upon returning to their home culture, they share what they have seen and describe what they believe to be the rules and values of the other culture.

3. After the scouts have briefed their own cultural group on the other culture, ask both cultural groups to meet in the same room and give them approximately 15 minutes to play the "Paper Clip Game" together.
4. After 15 minutes, separate the two groups again and give each culture 15 minutes with their group to prepare a description of the other culture, which they will be asked to share once they are together again. Specifically, each group is to respond to the following questions:
 - What behaviors did your scouts observe? What cultural values or rules did your scouts determine from these observations?
 - When you were first together as a total group and playing the game, what observations did you make? How accurate did you feel the scouts had been in describing what they saw? Were there differences in what the scouts described and your own experience?
 - Using descriptive words, how would you portray the other culture?
5. After 15 minutes, bring the two groups together again. Ask the Sparklers to share their descriptions of the Rockets' culture with the Rockets. Do not allow the Rockets to talk during this time—they are only to listen. When the Sparklers are finished, allow the Rockets to share their conclusions about the Sparklers. Do not allow the Sparklers to talk during this time—they are only to listen.

Debriefing Questions

1. How similar or different was each culture from the assumptions the other culture made about them? What might arise from these perceptions? (*Note: Look for both resources each might bring and conflicts that might occur.*)
2. How did you feel about being in your own "culture"? Why? If you were a scout, how did you feel about the behaviors of the other culture when you played in the large group? Why?
3. What personal values do you hold that made either of these cultures comfortable or uncomfortable?
4. Did you agree with the other culture's description of you? If not, what was your reaction?
5. What did you learn from this experience?
6. How can you apply what you learned to everyday life? Are there groups in your organization that might misperceive each other in the way the Sparklers and Rockets did? Why?

Debriefing Conclusions

1. We perceive and evaluate others from our own cultural perspective.
2. We tend to interpret or evaluate others' behaviors rather than describing them—and the interpretation/evaluation is from our own cultural perspective. This can interfere with our ability to learn about another culture.

3. Individuals within a culture may interpret cultural rules differently, leading to individual differences in behaviors.
4. If we are too rigid (stereotyping) in our expectations of another culture, we may miss individual differences and be less effective in our interactions with individuals from that culture.
5. Our personal values may lead us to be more or less comfortable with the behavior of others.

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