

A MANUAL OF STRUCTURED EXPERIENCES FOR CROSS-CULTURAL LEARNING

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Many of the structured learning experiences in this volume have had a long tradition in sundry use and, during this process, their exact origins have become obscured. Changes have been made by various people, and these exercises have undergone modifications for this volume so that they conform to a cross-cultural framework. In an effort to preserve knowledge about an exercise's origin and to extend our appreciation to those who contributed to this volume, we have endeavored to trace the genealogy of specific structured experiences and acknowledge those persons and organizations responsible for their development and for the overall development of this publication. Unfortunately, we have probably been unsuccessful in our attempts to credit all of the persons and settings that have had input in the development of the following exercises. We apologize for unintended omissions in this regard.

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PROS AND CONS OF USING STRUCTURED EXERCISES IN INTERCULTURAL GROUPS

by Paul Pedersen and William Howell

Every group is "intercultural" to the extent that members make different assumptions and value different goals as being most important. Groups where these value differences are most obvious, as in multinational or ethnic groups, are more likely to accommodate the value differences into the ways they all come from the same nationality or ethnic group. Subtle value differences have a potential for being overlooked and, to that extent, are perhaps even more likely to affect the outcome of a group than the more obvious cultural differences.

Each value orientation places its own restrictions on what is and what is not appropriate. In some groups the members may place a premium on frankness, openness and free expression of feelings, which have been associated with human relations training, while in other groups these very same behaviors might be considered offensive. For example, what should a facilitator do with a "silent" member from another culture? Perhaps the facilitator needs to be more aware of non-verbal communication especially by persons from cultures which place less emphasis on verbalization. A special difficulty of intercultural groups is the expectation that behaviors considered desirable by some members will almost certainly be considered undesirable by others. In addition to the value orientations of participants, the exercise or structure or procedure being used by the group brings perhaps still another value orientation with it; and finally, the setting or environment in which the group is meeting imposes its own assumptions of value orientation!

Research on the "contact hypothesis" has demonstrated that merely getting members of different groups together is not enough to produce understanding and harmony except under especially "favorable" conditions. Favorable conditions imply equal status contact between members of the different groups: when contact occurs between members of the majority group and higher status members of a minority group, when the social climate promotes harmony, when the contact is intimate rather than casual, when the contact is pleasant or rewarding and when members of all groups are working toward superordinate goals.

Social exchange theory assumes that the positive or negative consequences of intercultural exchange depend on how pleasurable or satisfying the contact becomes. For example, no participant should be forced to participate in a group exercise because non-voluntary

involvement is almost certain to result in bad feelings. Frustration will reduce the favorableness of intercultural contact even when neither side is at fault. In the same way pleasure will be generalized through a "halo" effect to increase the favorableness of contact. However, what is pleasurable to one person might be frustrating to another. The condition of "favorable contact" is not likely to occur spontaneously and will require some structured guidance by leaders of participating groups.

Attempts to design "culture free" group procedures have not been successful, or even desirable for that matter, given the intercultural complexity of most groups. Attempts to identify and specify the value assumptions of the members, the leader, the exercise and the setting have helped participants to understand one another better. Even being open about one's assumptions can impose its own values on an unwilling participant so that the larger responsibility for cultural sensitivity rests on the participants and particularly on the group leader in perceiving and appropriately accommodating the values of participants in an intercultural group. Finally, the appropriateness of interaction in a group depends on how participants are guided to relate toward one another. Almost any exercise or procedure has a potential for helping an intercultural group, even though the exercise was not originally designed to get at cultural values at all.

The structured experiences for cross-cultural learning have been either adapted from other popular exercises to emphasize value differences, or they have been designed within intercultural groups to meet a particular need at a particular time. Each intercultural facilitator has developed and designed favorites that work for him or her even though others might try the same procedure unsuccessfully. These previously unpublished structures might suggest adaptations for intercultural facilitators to complement their own collection of structures and intercultural resources. Each reader will no doubt find some more appropriate than others for his or her particular setting. They were selected from a large number of fugitive exercises, including those approaches that are adaptable to a variety of cultural value orientations and not exclusively or rigidly representing a particular culture. In all of them, the group leader must be sensitive to how this structure places a participant in an embarrassing situation or otherwise violates the value orientation of a group member. The group leader has an ethical obligation not to impose his or her values through any structure in an attempt to manipulate the group participants against their will. Even the most sensitive group leader will no doubt represent a particular value orientation as a result of his or her own cultural socialization, but it should be represented in a way that will help the group move toward its defined goals.

The first cluster of structures emphasizes ways of introducing participants to one another, suggesting both more direct methods such as introducing yourself to another culture, or less direct approaches such as telling about the group as though the session had already been completed. These three structures suggest some alternatives on getting a group started by getting them to know more about one another.

The second cluster of structures demonstrates the dynamics of communication processes. They are either tightly controlled, such as "Following Directions" and "Cross-Cultural Trade-Off," or more open-ended, such as "Rumor Transmission" and the use of taped excerpts from group interaction. The more ambiguous a communication exercise, the more skill is required by a group leader in appropriately applying the structure. At any point these exercises might reveal some important insight to the group and the group may abandon the structure and concentrate on the insight. The danger is that a structure might become more important than the insights it reveals. The trick is to keep that from occurring!

The third cluster of structures attempts to help a group clarify value differences. Some of these structures are related to the content of the discussion, such as "Critical Incidents," "Case Studies," "Value Statements Exercise," or the "Implicit Assumptions Checklist." Others are directed toward the process of working together, such as "The Parable," "Letters to the Editors," "Policy Statements," or generating "Cultural Value Systems with Conflicting Points of View." Still others are ambiguous, such as the "Free Drawing" and "Comparing People to Objects" approaches, which might result in surprising insights from the perspective of either content or process of value orientations. The more ambiguous and projective structures again will require a higher level of skill or training to be applied appropriately. When structures are used inappropriately, they may confuse rather than clarify knowledge about a participant's value orientation.

A fourth cluster deals with role identification within an intercultural group. Some of these structures require participants to role play in front of a group. This might be offensive to some more than others. These structures require the direct involvement of a participant, as in "The Situation Exercise," the "Orientation for a Cross-Cultural Experience," and the other three role playing exercises. To some extent "The Hidden Agenda" also requires that participants role play someone other than themselves. Other structures analyze the role relationships within a group, such as "The Fish Bowl," "Projecting into a Group," the "Personal Role Model" and the "Marital Roles Scale." This less direct involvement is probably less threatening to most participants and leads easily toward discussion about role identification.

A fifth cluster evaluates group processes or suggests ways that group

process could be facilitated. The structures which evaluate or measure the processes going on in a group include the "Group Function Review," the "Interim Objectives Assessment Scale," and the check lists about "How am I Doing" and the "Self-Discovery Test." These structures provide a way of feeding back information into the group on its own progress toward the group's defined goals. Other structures are designed to generate or facilitate processes, such as "The Moon Survival Problem," "Responsible Feedback," and the exercise which is perhaps the most controversial of all, the exercise on "Anonymous Feedback." The exercises generating group process, and particularly "Anonymous Feedback," should be used with caution, and then by trained facilitators.

A sixth cluster suggests structures for getting at feelings and attitudes of participants. Some of these require non-verbal modes of communicating feelings, which may be easier for participants not fluent in English but which may be more personal or intrusive for other participants. Examples of the non-verbal structures would include "Immediate Feelings," "Speaking Without Speaking," "Physical Communication," and "Role Playing Emotions." These are all more ambiguous and consequently less easy to control with regard to their outcome. The more analytical structures include "Cross-Culture Encounter," "We and You," "Perceptual Set Exercise," and "Stereotypes." Other structures are suggested which will generate a range of attitudes and feelings for discussion by the group, such as "Lump Sum," "Dialogue Within Ourselves," and "The Most Memorable Experience of Your Childhood."

A seventh cluster of structures relates to community interaction, either through direct involvement in the community or through discussion of topics describing the community. The structures requiring direct involvement also require closer supervision, guidance and skillful debriefing to make the structure valuable for participants and less intrusive for members of the community. The direct involvement structures include "No Questions Asked," "The Cultural Treasure Hunt," the "Community Description Exercise," "Community Exposure," "Community Exploration," "Two Audio-Visual Approaches," and "Community Involvement." These all demonstrate how everyday experiences can be instructive and are perhaps more "structured" than they would first appear. It is also designed to sharpen participants' skills to observe evidence of their own cultural values around them. Other structures are designed to facilitate discussion of the community, such as "The American Studies Exercise" and "World Picture Test," which require less risk and direct involvement by participants.

The final two clusters of structures suggest ways in which a group leader can facilitate feedback to the group by participants, as through "Force Field

Analysis," "Points to Consider," or "Culturally Mixed Groups." These exercises might be appropriate when a group has slowed down for some unknown reason and the participants need to specify possible sources of resistance. The "Creative Problem Solving" technique is also potentially useful in either diagnosing a problem within the group or generating new data through group participation in a joint task.

Following the suggested structures, there is a list of other publications that include structures or exercises appropriate for use by intercultural groups. Any number of other handbooks not intended for intercultural groups are available for adaptation by small group facilitators. None of these exercises will provide a substitute for skilled leadership, but having specific exercises available increases the options open to a facilitator at any given point in the group. Sometimes just knowing that several useful structures are held in reserve puts a facilitator at ease, even when the exercises themselves are seldom employed. In other cases, the facilitator proceeding without structures gets into more trouble than would have resulted even from a badly prepared structured exercise. Thus, the choice is not between using or not using structures. The choice is between organizing planned or unplanned intercultural groups.

The field of intercultural communication desperately needs to guide organization of an intercultural group experience. In an attempt to contribute to such theory, we will speculate about possible arguments for and possible arguments against the use of structured exercises in intercultural group work.

Arguments for structures include the following:

1. There is research available that supports the appropriate use of exercises as resulting in favorable outcomes for intercultural groups.¹
2. Structured exercises require less training and are able to extend the capability of intercultural group leaders who are just developing necessary group leadership skills.
3. Structured exercises can get a new group going more rapidly with less time required for warm-up when the group is meeting for a very limited period of time.
4. Structured exercises require less preparation time when they can be borrowed or applied from collections of already prepared materials.
5. Structured experiences define roles less ambiguously and may therefore be perceived as less threatening by persons from different cultures with more clearly stated expectations and more clearly

¹ See the bibliography in R. Brislin and P. Pedersen, *Cross-Cultural Orientation Programs*, New York, Gardner, 1976.

- defined appropriate behavior.
6. A great deal of progress has been made on specific structured exercises to match a desired response, outcome, or change with a particular set of structured circumstances for groups or individuals.
 7. Defining objectives is easier when the exercises are structured, and consequently, it is easier for participants to be articulate about the successful or unsuccessful results of the training.
 8. Structured exercises, as they are more widely tested, contribute to a system of bringing about specific and desirable changes through intercultural conflict in ways that can be experimentally replicated and contribute to an intercultural theory.
 9. Structuring an exercise forces both the facilitator and participants to be clear about their objectives, both individually and collectively as an intercultural group.
 10. There is an abundance of structured exercises available in small group research and training designs that can be easily adapted to intercultural education.

Arguments against reliance upon structural exercises include the following points of view:

The structured exercise is culture-bound. American students are trained and experienced in role-taking and game-playing for educational purposes from kindergarten through college, and after, in vocational training. American facilitators unconsciously assume that visitors from other cultures have had equivalent experiences, which is usually not the case.

Some cultures use "pretend" situations extensively for serious purposes, but most do not. When a representative of a culture which separates game-playing from serious business like education is pressured into participation in a structured exercise, significant stresses result. Then the painful side-effects may become more intense. It is particularly difficult for a representative of a self-effacing culture like the Japanese to openly confront and oppose their group. The reaction of many Japanese students, for example, is to feel that it is not fair that they are forced into game playing, but because refusing to do so would be grossly impolite, they go along and suffer in silence.

A strong argument against structured exercises in intercultural group work is the unspoken assumption among Americans that openness contributes to understanding and has positive social value. Hiding your feelings and not revealing your thoughts has a much higher value in many cultures. Associated with the value of keeping thoughts and emotions private is the preference for indirection in interpersonal communication. An Easterner communicating appropriately seldom says what he means directly, but talks about the topic, relying upon the other person to intuit or

guess his meaning. In this manner, two persons can explore a topic and open up new options, without commitment. To expect a person who has lived by indirection to "talk American" and "lay it on the line" is to place him in a state of tension that often generates a destructive emotional condition.

When we assume that openness is good, we violate a host of assumptions and values in other cultures that few facilitators think about. Americans assume that if we talk enough, the problem will be solved. Many cultures rely upon silence, and consider it more constructive and praiseworthy to refrain from speaking rather than to discuss the issue. When a person who *knows* that effective group work consists mainly of thinking together and picking up each other's thoughts through nonverbal cues is expected to talk his full share of time in a continuously verbal group, substantial psychic disarray is to be expected.

A byproduct of openness in structured exercises that has been too little discussed is the predicament of a person from a vertical society, one in which hierarchy and status are its main organizing elements. An individual from such a culture knows who he is and what he is expected to do by knowing who is above him in status, and who is inferior to him. Suddenly he finds himself in a structured exercise in which participants are divested of status. Everyone is assumed to be "as good as" everyone else, first names are used, and all talk to each other as equals. The vertical society person suffers a loss of identity. The only rules and procedures for talking with other human beings that he knows are arbitrarily abolished. When he is addressed inappropriately, he is shocked, and he finds himself unable to talk to others in his group in the specified open manner, for that would violate his life-long habits of politeness and civility. A facilitator might well try to understand the difficulties experienced by a person of some status in a vertical society who is expected to behave "like an American" in a structured exercise.

Many facilitators using structured exercises in groups of mixed cultures blandly take for granted that participants have superhuman abilities. For example, role playing the other person's culture, to be done profitably, would require many years of experience in and study of the other person's culture. As it is usually done, it is so superficial as to have little significance, and it is seldom if ever adequately debriefed. Further, many exercises assume that participants can explain their own behavior, and account for it. Most of the influences that shape the interpersonal interaction patterns of an individual are unknown to him, and the patterns themselves are largely out of awareness. If it takes a couple of years of psychoanalysis for a person to become slightly competent in describing his own normative behaviors, then the participant in an intercultural group should not be expected to reveal much valuable information about the ways in which his subculture

conducts its interpersonal transactions.

A popular rationalization for using structured exercises is the assertion that those dealing with situational, mechanical sorts of behavior patterns, such as greetings, table manners, introducing one person to another, making requests or expressing gratitude are safe to use with all cultures because basic value orientations are not involved. Quite to the contrary, these seemingly superficial "sets of expectations" express and evolve from fundamental assumptions and values of a society. Thus, there is no such category as "casual" or "unimportant" behavior that differs from one culture to another. When any appropriate interaction activity is contrasted to that in another culture, the value systems they represent are in conflict. Perhaps exercises dealing in sets of expectations could be useful, if the objective is to gain understanding of the underlying value systems. But becoming familiar with mechanical differences in handling situations for their own sake may well cause more confusion than enlightenment.

The arguments above which challenge the use of structured exercises with intercultural groups are theoretical and deal with fundamental variables important to the mixing of cultures. There are some more pitfalls that concern methodological problems confronting the facilitator. Perhaps the major hazard comes from availability and ease of use. Increasingly, the cumulative supply of structured exercises fosters a formula approach to the management of intercultural training. Instead of studying the particular persons in a group and devising ways to meet their unique needs, the temptation may well be to select from the wealth of available gimmicks the exercises that seem to fit the situation better than others. Ideally, the intercultural workshop or training program is a joint venture wherein facilitator and participants are free to modify plans and procedures as needs change and new needs are discovered. Structured exercises make this flexibility less likely.

Of course, the lazy or incompetent facilitator may be tempted to substitute structured exercises for skill. Actually, wringing maximum productivity out of a structured exercise requires the abilities of a highly skilled facilitator. The fact remains, however, that unskilled, inexperienced facilitators rely more on structured exercises than do their more talented and able colleagues.

We believe that a strong case can be made either for using or for not using structured exercises in intercultural groups. A collection of structures such as are provided in this publication, make available alternatives for stimulating and understanding the interaction of intercultural communication. The essential task will be to match favorable outcomes with those structures which, under certain conditions, facilitate progress. This collection of structures, used with discretion, provides a means for the intercultural group participant and leader to increase their learning and define favorable outcomes for themselves.

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INTRODUCTION

The primary theme underlying this publication is that persons of any ethnic background and identification benefit from a multicultural development. The need for this development is entailed in the contemporary interweaving of cultures which importunes that people's survival skills transcend the challenges of their native society. In the state of Hawaii, for example, immigrants from Pacific Basin countries who do not develop social abilities required by American society subject themselves to a host of failure experiences that makes their adjustment to American ways difficult if not impossible. The members of the host culture bear an equal responsibility for adjusting their life styles to the degree necessary to comprehend and accommodate any unfamiliar behaviors of the immigrant and any cultural shifts the interaction generates.

Successfully adjusting to the many complex demands of an unfamiliar culture is a significant achievement. Peter S. Adler of Hawaii's East-West Center has penned an exciting description of the sort of individual who is socially and psychologically a product of twentieth century cultural interchange:

"A new type of person whose orientation and view of the world profoundly transcends his indigenous culture is developing from the complex of social, political, economic, and educational interactions of our time... Multicultural man is the person who is intellectually and emotionally committed to the fundamental unity of all human beings while at the same time he recognizes, legitimizes, accepts and appreciates the fundamental differences that lie between people of different cultures."¹

There are presently several systematic means by which information about foreign cultures can be imparted to those who seek such knowledge. Historical records, ethnographies, hologistic studies and most recently culture assimilators are some of those means. The field of human relations