

Community Experience Exercise Facilitators Guide

Background Information:

The Community Experience is an experiential exercise designed to simulate a “have and have not” situation that results from uneven distribution of resources. It was created in 1984 by Deborah Plummer when she was a graduate student. It was first conducted with the clinical and counseling psychology graduate participants and psychology department faculty at Kent State University. Since that time the exercise has been used repeatedly in cultural competency training workshops and is part of the curriculum for the Diversity Management Program at Cleveland State University. It was copyrighted in 1997 when the use of the exercise extended to corporations, non-profit agencies and faith-based institutions, facilitated primarily by diversity and organizational development professionals. Deborah has personally facilitated the experience close to 100 times. The exercise is best used with groups of at least 20 participants and can be facilitated (with appropriate planning and some minor modifications) with as large a group as 200. It is best to have a full hour to complete the exercise; however, the exercise can be done in less time if necessary.

Exercise Objectives:

As a result of participating in this experience, individuals will:

1. Heighten their awareness of how social group identity impacts thinking and behavior.
2. Negotiate issues from a community perspective.
3. Practice handling interactions and reactions of diverse people in a group setting.
4. Develop insights that promote an understanding of advocacy.
5. Assess their ability to successfully manage competing social agendas.

Facilitator's Role

As a facilitator, you are a key ingredient for achieving success with this exercise. Your ability to track participants' responses, behaviors and emotions is critical to achieving the learning objectives. Your role is to observe and track behavior, provide structure for the division of the family groups and the small group selection process, and facilitate the debrief after the exercise.

This program requires a facilitative style that is process-oriented. This means instead of trying to educate, reason and sell the message of the experience, facilitators should lead the participants by joining in their discovery, processing their reactions and engaging in dialogue about the insights.

The Process

1. In lieu of money, vouchers will be used for collateral in the exercise. They will be passed out to participants as they enter the room. The vouchers will be numbered so we know exactly how many participants we have in the room.
2. Once exact number is determined, set membership numbers for 3 groups: sun, moon, stars (estimation with 80 participants: 8 Suns; 20 Moon; 52 Stars)
3. There can be signage for groups. Perhaps 3 easels with names on newsprint by the tables. Sun will be located at front in the right; Moon in the middle against left wall; Stars at the back against right wall.
4. Participants with vouchers from 1-8 will be named as Suns; vouchers 9-28 Moons; and 29-80 will be Stars.
5. If there are fewer than 80 participants (a probable scenario) we will remove one member from each group beginning with the stars and then moons, then suns and then back to the stars repeating that process.
6. With exact number of the participants in each family group, divide resources with roughly 5/8 to Sun; 2/8 to Moon and 1/8 to Stars:
For Group of 80:
 - Sun distribution: 2 bags chips, 2 bags pretzels, 50 waters, 35 forks, 27 cups, 16 plates, 10 napkins (8 people)
 - Moon distribution: 1 bag chips, 1 bag pretzels, 17 waters, 15 forks, 11 cups, 20 plates, 22 napkins (20 people)
 - Star distribution: 13 waters, 30 forks, 42 cups, 44 plates, 48 napkins (52 people)
7. Facilitators/observers are assigned to each family group. 1-2 to stars; 3-4 to Moons; 5-6 to Stars
8. The exercise begins with getting everyone's attention. Participants are given a copy of the exercise and asked to read along while the directions are read aloud.
9. After the reading, there will be 1-2 minutes for clarification questions while facilitators collect the vouchers from the participants.
10. The resources are then provided to each of the family group.
11. The action begins with groups taking inventory (2 minutes) then an announcement is made the market is open for exchange.
12. Facilitators observe and track comments during the 8 minutes that the market will be open.
13. Time is called and the participants will be asked to return to the family group and take inventory. (2 minutes)

14. Inventory for each family group is reported out and recorded on a flip chart. The winner is determined by who has amassed the most resources and they are given all of the vouchers.
15. Large group facilitation:
 - What was it like to be a sun? A Moon? A Star?
 - Facilitators/Observers will provide recorded comments. Your reactions?
 - What movement did you note of the family groups during the exercise?
16. Convene small groups through a quick self-selection/convenience/location process. Ask to go to table and form groups of no more than 8, mixing up the family groups (sun, moon, stars). We will have 10 tables with tent card numbers for groups 1-10.
17. Facilitators will be assigned to each group and process the following questions:
 - What parallels do you see—if any-- between this exercise and society in general?
 - What do you hypothesize might influence the health of a star? a moon? a sun?
 - How was your awareness of socioeconomic status as a determinant of health heightened?
18. Each group will be asked to report out insights. Participants will also be able to log on to a Google page and record their insights under their family group creating a Book of Learnings.
19. Facilitators make closing comments. Participants in family group that wins make final decision on voucher distribution.

Materials Needed

1. Easel, newsprint and magic markers
2. 3 bags of chips; 3 bags of pretzels; 80 bottles of water; 80 cups; 80 forks, 80 paper plates
3. Vouchers
4. Signage for groups
5. Community Experience Handouts
6. Two sets of tent cards:
 - a. 2 Sun; 3 Moon; 5 Stars
 - b. Groups 1-10