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« Practicing facework »

PREPARED BY: *élan interculturel*

TAGS (3 categorizations)

Is this activity focusing on one of the 3 steps of the method or tackling a transversal challenge facilitators may face?	Step of the method	YES	Decentering	Discovery of the frames of references of the other	Negotiation
	Sensitive zone	YES	Face		

Small Description

Please explain in a short paragraph (using grammatically correct full sentences) what your activity is about, why did you create it?

This activity helps to understand what happens during an interaction on the relational level. More precisely it explores what we do in each interaction to give appropriate recognition to the other person, in accordance with our relationship.

Quick info

TIME FRAME
30-60min

GROUP SIZE
2-10

FACILITATION LVL
Beginner

COMFORT ZONE
Safe

MATERIALS
Pen and paper
or a
computer/mobile
device.

30 min	6-18	Intermediate	Mildly challenging	2 chairs
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Preparations needed

This activity works better if the group already developed some trust and participants have already had some introductory communication activities (see the “demechanisation” activities proposed).

This sequence introduces the concept of facework and more particularly “face threatening acts”. We recommend that you put this concept at the centre of the debriefing discussion. As a preparation, get acquainted with the concepts of face, facework, face threatening act and also the dynamics of gift giving (see references under this section).

Instructions Step By Step

Please give step by step instructions of your activity, including debriefing. Be direct, address the reader as a facilitator directly: eg. ask your participants to stand in a circle...

The sequence below is based on theatre improvisation. It consists of three different contexts, where the exercise has the same structure. There are two chairs side by side. One occupied by a volunteer who remains there while we deal with the same situation and other participants come to interact with her/him. The instruction for participants will be the same for the three situations: we invite them to take turns and sit down in the empty chair and engage in interaction with the other person already on stage, each time presenting what one considers a “mistake” in communication.. The sketch is played as long as other participants identify what the mistake is, then they can stop the situation and say what they think the mistake was. At this point the participant playing the scene goes back to her/his place and a new participant can come to present a different mistake.

Step 1.

Tell the participants you're going to do theatre to explore some aspects of communication. Put two chairs side by side. This is going to be your stage. Ask for a volunteer, who'll have to play the same role all through the activity, with different participants as interaction partners.

Choose a specific context for the interaction. As a first situation we propose the following: you get on the tram and recognize another participant from a workshop you attended two weeks ago. Ask the other participants to take the free chair and show what could be considered as a "mistake" in communication.

Name the different aspects of verbal and nonverbal communication that were presented. Ask also why they feel that a specific behaviour was not appropriate. Ask participants whether they felt the second actor (presenting the 'mistake') gave sufficient respect to the other person.

Introduce the concept of "face threatening acts". The core idea is that to "respect" the other we have to follow the rules of "facework". We can make two types of mistakes:

Not giving enough attention / importance to the person with respect to the relationship and threaten his / her need for recognition. In the scenario 1 this would be for instance sitting down next to the other not saying hello to her.

Giving too much attention / importance with respect to the relationship and hence threaten his/her need of autonomy and freedom. In the scenario 1 this would be for instance sitting down next to the other offering her your sandwich or book as a gift.

Some questions you can use to debrief:

- Did the protagonist (person taking the empty chair) seem respectful to you?
- How did they try to show their respect to the other person?
- Where did they make a mistake?

Step 2.

The second situation could be very similar to the first one, with one difference: we can introduce an asymmetrical relationship. For instance, we can keep the context of meeting on the tram, but this time the person already on the tram would be the trainer. Other possibilities could be: meeting the head of an organization whom we met some days sooner because of a job interview, or meeting a person who benefits from services that our organization offers. Any scenario is interesting where there is an asymmetry in roles and status between the two people that meet, and that participants are likely to understand and know from experience.

Like before, name the different aspects of verbal and nonverbal communication that were presented. Ask also why they feel that a specific behaviour was not appropriate. Ask participants whether they felt the second actor (presenting the 'mistake') gave sufficient respect to the other person. Ask them, in what way this situation was different from the first one.

Step 3.

As a third scenario, we propose a “birthday” event, such as: it’s the birthday of a colleague who has worked with you for six years. The colleagues decided together to go down and have a drink. The occupied chair belongs to the colleague who has the birthday, and the empty chair is the colleague who is joining the celebration. Again, ask for all possible mistakes.

In this case the debriefing can center on the concept of gift:

- Why is giving too much (attention, closeness, gift etc.) a problem?
- What happens when you receive a very important gift from someone that you don’t know that much?

Hints for the facilitator

Participants may have different sensitivities concerning verbal / nonverbal communication. When choosing the ‘volunteer’ for the first chair, make sure to check that the participant won’t find it difficult to live through the different “communication errors” the other participants will display.

Be attentive during the improvisations of the types of mistakes that are displayed. Give importance to identifying and naming what was presented as a “mistake”. In an intercultural setting it may be interesting to address the question of cultural diversity: could that particular behaviour be considered as a “mistake” in all the cultures or would it be considered as polite behaviour in some cultural context?

Participants may not know about the concept of “face”, “facework” or “face threatening act”. The activity’s aim is precisely to share these concepts, be ready to offer the definitions during the debriefing of the activities. For a deeper discussion of the concept of “Face” see our “collection of sensitive zones”

This activity can be particularly useful as a lead up to practicing “negotiation”, as it gives visibility to how respect is negotiated.

Ressources (Who invented this activity or who inspired it)

If you invented it, please write the name of your colleague and institution as you’d like it to be referenced

If you used ideas /activities of others please put full reference as concretely as you can

Activity developed by Vera Varhegyi (élan interculturel, Paris)

To open up “facework” we rely on Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory (Brown P. Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage / P. Brown, S. Levinson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. 345 p) You can find an easy introduction in: <http://scodis.com/for-students/glossary/politeness-theory/>

For an introduction to the concept of Gift