

39

TWO LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION IN THE MILITARY CULTURE

Objective: To rehearse ways of managing conflict by identifying unspoken messages in military contexts.

TIME REQUIRED About an hour

RISK LEVEL Low

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED At least two role-players from different cultures in the military, with an "alter ego" for each, plus one facilitator

PROCEDURE Role-players will read the following scripts and continue spontaneously in a conversation, and the alter ego will participate in the script and provide feedback after the script ends.

Commander

Commander: Our unit has the best racial climate on the base, and I'm sure you'll agree.

Alter Ego: This should stop any further questions.

Second

Lieutenant (SL): That depends on how you look at it.

Alter Ego: Personally, I think it's the worst on base.

Supervisor

Supervisor: I talk things over with my people before I act.

Alter Ego: These people know nothing about management.

SL: That's a good procedure to follow.

Alter Ego: Then why am I here with a complaint in my hand?

Client

Client: This supervisor I work for is always on my back about something, like my work or my "looks."

Alter Ego: I know this guy is going to get me out of this.

SL: Why do you think he's always after you?

Alter Ego: OK, now tell me what you've done.

Two Social Actions Personnel (Captain and Master Sergeant [MSgt])

Captain: This Staff Assistance Visit will probably be a touchy situation. The Commander wants an in-depth report. Do you think you can handle it, or should I take it?

Alter Ego: I sure don't want this thing screwed up.

MSgt: Yes, I can handle it about as well as anyone else.

Alter Ego: The heck with it, you think I'm going to screw it up anyway.

DEBRIEFING

Some discussion questions may include the following:

1. Do you believe rank and service branch function like cultures?
2. How does reframing military communication into cultural categories facilitate interviews?
3. How accurate were the alter ego role-plays to the internal dialogue?
4. How will you use what you learned in this experience?
5. What are the possible negative consequences of this experience?

INSIGHT

Multilevel communication is particularly important in contact with people from other cultures.