



### ACTIVITY 3 **BUILDING BRIDGES – A game about dealing with cultural differences**

This exercise is a game that simulates a situation where different cultures meet and within which it is necessary to develop cultural awareness in order to work together successfully. Typical feelings of insecurity are experienced. Mistakes can be made in the game's space (this should also be clarified beforehand) and different coping strategies can be tried out. The subsequent reflection with the help of the observer group makes it possible to work out successful and less successful communication strategies in dealing with different cultures.

#### **MATERIAL:**

- Handout\_Bridgebuilding Role Cards
- Ideally 2 rooms
- Paper
- 3 Scissors
- 3 pens
- 3 rulers

**DURATION:** 1h/1h30

**PREPARATION PHASE:** The group is divided equally into three groups

- A group of engineers/experts in bridge building from your home country
- A group of members of the people of Veram
- A group of observers

Introduce the scenario to the learners, distributing the role cards to the observers, the experts and the Veram people and give them 20 minutes time for the preparation phase. After the 20 minutes preparation phase, ask the group to meet and start the bridge-building session.

The groups prepare themselves separated from each other by means of their role instructions (Worksheets for engineers and worksheet for Veram people). The aim is for the members of the Veram culture to learn a particular bridge-building technique from the experts. However, both groups speak the same language but the members of the Veram culture have different communication habits (explained in the role instruction), which are not known to the experts. The group of people from Veram needs to study their communication habits. The group of experts needs to study the bridge-building technique described in the role instructions during the preparation phase.

**PLAYING PHASE:** the groups will have 30 minutes to show the bridge-building technique to the people of Veram. After 30 minutes the game will be stopped even if the goal has not been achieved. If the goal is achieved earlier, you can stop it earlier.

**Hint for the facilitator:** In order to achieve the common goal (to build the bridge) successfully, both sides have to make adjustments. The cultural "codes" must first be understood before communication is even possible. Do not help to find this out but make the culture clash happen!

**DEBRIEFING PHASE:** Each group is asked to describe their feelings in the game from the respective position. The observer group can give feedback from an outside perspective. The trainer works together with the group to extract the most important findings from the game, such as:

- especially in an intercultural context it is important not only to concentrate on the pure factual level (task orientation), but also to deal with the “how” of communication
- in order for communication to succeed in an intercultural context, adaptation is necessary in the form of mutual “negotiation” of the rules of communication
- less successful is a strategy where both groups insist on one’s own habits, this can even lead to breaking up the interaction (ethnocentric approach).
- if communication in an intercultural context does not succeed, this often leads to the degradation of the other group (e.g. “they are rude / limited”) The exercise helps to reflect on the own way of dealing with cultural differences.
- it can be highlighted that intercultural conflicts arise most of the time from the way we interpret “the other” (interpretation as motivated by bad faith? or just different but without being evil/ rude/ignorant etc.?) than from the differences themselves.

Suggestions for the debriefing questions can be:

1. How did you feel during the game? (Start with the experts and then go on with the Veram people)
2. Why was the communication difficult?
3. Who caused the difficulties?
4. What did the observers perceive?
5. What kind of real-life situations are similar to the situation in the game?
6. How could frustration have been avoided?

Usually the groups tend to stick to their own rules and have a lot of difficulties to be flexible. They often focus on the tasks instead of on the “how” of communication. When the other group does not “function” and does not do what they expect, there comes up a lot of frustration and sometimes participants also give comments like “They are so stupid” or “They are impolite”. You as a trainer can work on where these feelings come from and how they could have been avoided.

The game is based on the publication by Kriz & Nöbauer (2002) “Teamkompetenz - Konzepte Trainingsmethoden, Praxis”.

A similar exercise can be found at: Learning from intercultural storytelling – The LISTEN Manual: [https://listen.bupnet.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/LISTEN\\_IO3\\_Training\\_Manual\\_EN.pdf](https://listen.bupnet.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/LISTEN_IO3_Training_Manual_EN.pdf)