

Activity Series 4: Group Decision-Making, Culture and Leadership

This activity series covers the following topics:

- How culture impacts our choices and shapes who we are
- Being leaders together: Group decision-making methods, barriers & breakthroughs for group decision-making leadership settings

Objectives: To understand further how culture impacts our actions and leadership styles, and how to work together as bridge builders in group decision-making situations

Time needed: 1.5 – 3 hours, depending on how many activities used, how long discussions go

Materials: Large body-size paper for tracing, markers for tracing (if doing Body Outlines activity). Pens and paper for brainstorming. Scissors and “sample cultural characteristics” slips of paper pre-cut up.

Handouts: Copies “Voice of a leader” page.

Introduce the activity:

Explain that we’re going to talk about how culture impacts leadership styles in individual and group decision-making situations.

Then, we’re going to play out some group decision-making situations and see how culture might affect our ability to have our voices heard and be seen as a leader when we’re making decisions as a group.

Follow the activities in this section, taking breaks or having discussions where needed.

Self-Reflection – Body Outlines (Optional Activity)

Based on the previous conversations, participants may be thinking about their own experiences.

At this time, have participants pair up and give each a piece of large butcher paper at least as tall as they are. Distribute markers. Have each person trace their friend on the paper.

Facilitator asks the group whether there were moments while we were talking about culture earlier that they were thinking about how their own cultures influenced them. Discuss. Facilitator can also ask, “What has made you who you are? What parts of that came from the inside, from your choices, and what came from the outside – your culture, your family, your friends, the places you’ve lived, and so on?” Discuss, individually or in pairs.

Then, participants have fifteen minutes to fill in their outlines with words or pictures – inside the outline, they should write or draw things about themselves that have come from the inside, from their own choices and development. On the outside, they should write or draw things about themselves that have come from the outside – culture, society, etc.

Bring the group back together to discuss.

Next, go back to the definitions of leadership we talked about earlier in the training. Ask them, “What kind of leader are you? What are things you do, or want to do, that are parts of leadership? How has your culture shaped how you think of being a leader?” Discuss.

Next, participants spend up to an additional ten minutes adding leadership styles to their outlines – inside the outline for leadership styles that come from the inside, and outside for leadership styles affected by culture, society, family, peers etc.

Outlines may be hung up, decorated more at another point, etc.



Fishbowl activity – “What’s happening under the surface?”

Helpful previous activity to warm up: Any kind of improvisation or theatre-sports games that involve making up and playing characters while thinking quickly.

Group decision-making: “What’s really going on?”

- I. What happens when we have different cultures within a group leadership or planning situation? *Use three leadership styles*
 - a. What styles dominate the group?
 - i. Who sets the mood/tone of how the group will work?
 - ii. How actively do members feel they can participate?
 - iii. Who sets the tone of what it means to participate?
 - b. What assumptions do group members make?
 - i. How do assumptions affect the way the group moves forward?
 - c. What are benefits to working in this situation?

Divide group evenly in half by counting off, etc. Organize the room or activity area so that half the group will be sitting in a circle on the inside, facing one another, while the other half of the group is sitting on the outside, observing the inside circle. The inside circle pretends they can’t see the outside circle. This is called a “fishbowl” because the people on the outside can observe the people on the inside.



Ask for an example of a situation where a group of youth might be planning an event together. Where would they be? How do they know each other? What is the event?

Distribute to each member of the inside circle one or two “cultural characteristics” on a piece of paper (see next page for ones you can use, or make up your own). Stress that they should not show these to others. Ensure you don’t give two characteristics that contradict each other to the same youth (e.g., “avoids conflict” and “appreciates conflict”).

Then, tell the inside circle that they are now that group of youth planning the event, based on the scenario the group came up with. Each of them must participate in the group decision-making process in a way shaped by what is on their papers.

Tell the group on the outside that their job is to observe how decision-making is taking place and to be thinking about culture and leadership styles. Their first job is to figure out what is going on “under the surface” in the fishbowl, especially when it comes to culture. Their second job is to figure out some ideas to help the group work together as well as possible. They can take notes if it helps them.

Allow about ten minutes at least for the inside circle conversation.

After the conversation, let the inside circle debrief first.

Ask them questions like: How did this go? How did you feel? How do you think others felt? Who was talking and who wasn’t? Why? What was it like playing your character? What was it like listening to the other characters?

They can read out loud what was on their papers. Let them take some time to write and reflect, or talk to a friend and reflect on what kinds of moments they saw affected by the cultural ingredients on their pieces of paper. Then, discuss this as a group.

Ask: How successful was your group at getting things done? At including everyone culturally? What were some great moments? How could it have been better? How did what was on your paper limit you or help you? Can you see this happening in real life?

Then ask the outside group: What did you observe? (you can ask some of the same questions you asked the inside group). What suggestions do you have for the inside group?

Rearrange seats so that everyone is back in a circle together. Ask: "Is the idea of what makes the group "more successful" also culturally-based? How?" If they are stuck, ask them what it means to be successful. Is it about everyone feeling included? Completing the task at hand? Would culture influence how you see what "success" means?

In pairs (person next to them or randomly selected):

Each person has three minutes to share an experience they've had in a group (class, youth program, etc) when they either felt really comfortable and culturally at-home enough to speak up when they wanted, OR when they felt like they didn't want to speak up and why. The other person listens in silence, hearing them, and then has one minute to respond, ask questions, or thank them for sharing. Then, they switch.

Discuss as a group:

- 1) How can we be bridge-builders in situations like the one we just played out? How do we keep ourselves from getting stuck?
- 2) What about when I'm the only one who feels like I'm not "part" of the mainstream leadership, and everyone else seems to share the same cultural assumptions – like they all got the same pieces of paper and I didn't?
- 3) What about when we have mainstream, traditional and cross-cultural/bridge builder leaders all making a decision together? How can we work together best? What are things we would do?

Sample cultural characteristics: Give each group member 1-2 of these characteristics to shape how they interact in the activity.

Cut along dashed lines

I avoid conflict at all costs.	I think having conflict is really important for getting all the information on the table and getting a solution.
We need to come up with new ideas.	What the whole group feels is important.
I don't want anyone telling me what to do.	We need to look at what ideas have been done in the past.
Our opinions as individuals are the most important ingredients in making this decision. I want my opinion heard.	It is not polite to disagree with others.
Hierarchy and respect are very important; I should defer to people older than me or who have been in this group longer.	People coming out of this conversation feeling good is more important than anything we decide.
This meeting needs to be over quickly – let's get to answers!	I don't want anyone in the room to feel embarrassed; I have to be careful if I correct someone.
We have all the time in the world.	I think looking at stories will help us find the answer we need.
I need to use as many big words as possible.	I don't want to make trouble.
Girls shouldn't talk as much as boys.	If we have trust in God, everything will be okay.
I talk very fast.	I talk slowly, and think about everything before I say it.
I like to keep some humor in meetings.	I have trouble speaking up in front of people who wear nicer clothes than I do.
I look more at people's expressions and body language than what they're saying. I won't tell how I'm feeling, but it will be written on my face or in my body language.	If you have a problem with something, it's your responsibility to speak up. I believe in personal responsibility!
I believe everything happens for a reason.	We need to have food at all events and meetings.
We need to vote to make decisions.	We need to make decisions by getting the whole group to agree.
It's important to me that everyone arrive on time.	If I see someone being quiet, I'll ask what they think, what their opinion is.
I'm pretty pessimistic. I think it's better to go in thinking, "This is probably not going to work."	I'm pretty optimistic. I tend to think, "This thing we're planning is going to be great!"
I think the easiest route is always the best.	I think we should always try the hardest and most challenging ways of doing things.
I love a good argument or conflict!	I'm very quiet

Cut along dashed lines