



Cultural Detective® Business Case
Public Relations Academy Singapore
Kathleen Curran

Overview of Client:

The Public Relations Academy is a department of the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts (MICA), Singapore. The goal of the Academy is to raise the professionalism of Singapore government communicators by providing professional development programs, workshops, seminars, and conferences in areas such as strategic communication, speechwriting, presentation skills, and facilitation skills.

Servicing primarily the public sector, the Public Relations Academy is structured similar to a corporate university in which workshops and events are scheduled for individual contributor sign-up and participation as well as customized for intact workgroups.

Opportunity/Needs:

The workplace in Singapore today encompasses a wide range of cultures: the ethnic groups native to Singapore, i.e., Chinese, Indian, Malay, Eurasian, as well as foreign talent from around the world, which the government is striving to weave into the fabric of the Singapore society.

On another level of culture, the Public Relations Academy provides skills training for civil servants from many Ministries and special Units, e.g., the National Heritage Board, National University of Singapore (NUS), the police force and other government bodies.

Recognizing this cultural diversity and complexity, the Public Relations Academy sought a workshop that would help enhance the skills needed to work across differences of all kinds, not just a specific culture.

Cultural Detective Solution:

The two-day workshop was designed around tools that participants could employ immediately in their workplace. The tools can stand alone; however, in this workshop, they were built in a developmental manner.

Tool 1: Appreciative Inquiry

First, the facilitator conducted a module entitled “Listening for Learning,” which used an Appreciative Inquiry approach. These listening skills were used, with reminders, throughout the workshop.

The facilitator then used experiential activities to introduce different aspects of the **Cultural Detective** Model, making each element a separate tool.

Tool 2: Subjective Culture

Each person chose ten values from a list of common values, then narrowed that down to their top four. Participants wrote each selected value on a separate slip of paper, then was asked to give one value away. The point was to see if they could choose, which one they would choose to give away, what it felt like to do so, if they or another accepted the new value easily or with difficulty. What were the circumstances that made this process easier or more difficult, (e.g., if the value was similar to their own, or if the new value was not one they had initially selected but was not contrary to their overall value system.) The participants were then challenged to throw a value away.

Next in this section of Subjective Culture was to help participants find value in merging/bridging their values in a collaborative way. Each “table culture” was instructed to develop a slogan or motto that represented them and all their values.

Using art would also be effective for illustrating Subjective Culture. The “table culture” could create an inclusive picture or image using drawing or other materials. As actual words would not be there, all would need to feel represented by imagery.

Tool 3: Cultural Literacy

Facilitator then told a story, based on a personal cross-cultural clash and debriefed it using the Cultural Detective Model—actions and cultural sense. From there, the facilitator led a discussion of the participants’ experiences of other

cultures, and their own organizations/teams/units. These activities were geared around understanding another in context—Cultural Detective’s Cultural Literacy.

Participants were then given a variety of cases; some included national cultural differences and others highlighted differences in work styles. Each table conducted their own analyses on flipcharts.

Tool 4: Bridge Building

The facilitator began this segment by brainstorming with participants what makes a good bridge. The list included, for example, touching and connecting both sides, a solid foundation, good quality materials, sound design and intentions, skilled craftsmen, able to withstand all kinds of weather, spans obstacles, and long lasting. The metaphor was so powerful that participants naturally started discussing their cases and naturally raised bridge ideas that might be effective in their cases as well as in some real work issues.

They then went back to their case analysis and developed bridges, with the list of bridging best practices in mind. The list became the criteria against which each suggested bridge was measured against. Each table developed their own list of bridges; following, all had the opportunity to review other tables bridges and add to the list ones they felt should be added.

Initially, bridges were very much “he needs to...” “she should...” - very much pointed to one side or the other of an issue. Through this exercise, everyone realized that connecting both sides was the most difficult, in the sense that they needed an overarching goal/vision that encompassed individual needs.

Tool #5: Strategizing for Effectiveness

The session concluded with a Strategizing Tool, based on each individual’s own upcoming intercultural needs, and designed to apply learning to real life.

Future Improvements

1. Following the Bridge Building segment, tables could discuss situations they have been in previously and together select one to develop and address using the same Cultural Detective process – Subjective Culture, Cultural Literacy and Bridge Building.

2. A generic piece on cultural differences should be introduced after Cultural Literacy, as participants now understood the interactivity of intercultural communication, and were curious about the dimensions of culture. Analyzing an event first clearly prevented stereotyping pitfalls. The cultural dimensions can be elicited from the context of the case and expanded on, rather than vice versa.

Cultural Detective Benefits and/or Measurable Results:

- Avoided stereotypes via an inductive approach.
- Enhanced effectiveness and competence rather than just knowledge.
- Created a hunger for further learning.

Client Testimonials:

“It takes a lot of constant effort and monitoring not to rely on assumptions.”

“This helps me be more objective, less judgmental.”

“The intention and purpose for working together must be clear to proceed effectively.”

“It starts with me.”