

Role Play: Training Rural Development Workers

Activity: Role playing for training rural development workers in skills for diffusing innovations.

Objective: Development workers will develop a greater awareness of the problems encountered when diffusing innovations. Emphasis is on the interpersonal communication skills needed for overcoming the obstacles commonly faced when introducing innovations in grassroots development programs.

Participants: A group of observers, one person to lead the debriefing sessions, and two people to play the roles.

Procedures:

Step 1: The facilitator asks for two volunteers for the role play. One will play the part of an extension worker in a rural village in a third world country. The other person will play the part of a farmer in that village. Select a person to lead the debriefing.

Step 2: The facilitator explains the roles to those involved. An overall explanation of the situation and the characters is given to the entire group. Those responsible for debriefing will be given instructions.

Step 3: The facilitator asks the two role players to begin while the others observe.

Step 4: After about 10 minutes, the facilitator stops the action and asks those doing the debriefing to begin a discussion of what has just taken place. This discussion will take about 15 minutes.

Special Instructions:

Agricultural extension worker. You work for an international development agency with responsibility to introduce high yield variety seed corn to this village. Your background is in agricultural extension in Midwestern USA. You want to convince the village farmer to adopt this seed innovation because he is seen as an opinion leader in the community.

Village farmer. You are a traditionalist. You are not open to new methods unless you perceive that the change agent is sensitive to the situation and its needs—and works to gain your trust.

Debriefing Guidelines:

1. Ask the role players about how they felt about what happened in the situation, gradually moving from an affective to an analytical mode.
2. Ask observers to comment on the effectiveness of the extension worker. How did the extension worker create “success”? What did the extension worker do or say that created difficulties in this situation? What alternate approaches are possible?