CULTIVATE CQ

MODULE 1

Effective Cross-Cultural Communication

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Module Overview

Cross-cultural communication is not just about language — it is about the hidden assumptions we carry into every interaction. In multicultural youth work settings, these assumptions operate mostly invisibly. When unchecked, they turn ordinary misunderstandings into barriers. This module helps youth workers slow down, question their first interpretation, and see communication through a different cultural lens.

Key skills and why this topic matters in youth work

What feels direct in one culture feels rude in another. What reads as cold or disengaged in one context signals respect in another. Youth workers who do not recognise this risk misreading participants and responding in ways that damage rather than build trust.

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When youth workers develop adaptability in cross-cultural communication, it:

1. Slow down automatic interpretations of confusing moments
2. Generate alternative cultural readings of the same situation
3. Question assumptions before acting on them
4. Turn misunderstandings into learning rather than conflict

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Learning outcomes

This module explores the gap between what is communicated and what is understood — and what happens when cultural assumptions go unexamined.



Through this activity, participants will learn to identify cross-cultural communication moments from their own practice and recognise how cultural assumptions shape who speaks, who stays silent, and why. By stepping into both sides of a miscommunication through role-play, they will practise responding with curiosity rather than judgment — and leave with one concrete change they will apply in their own work.

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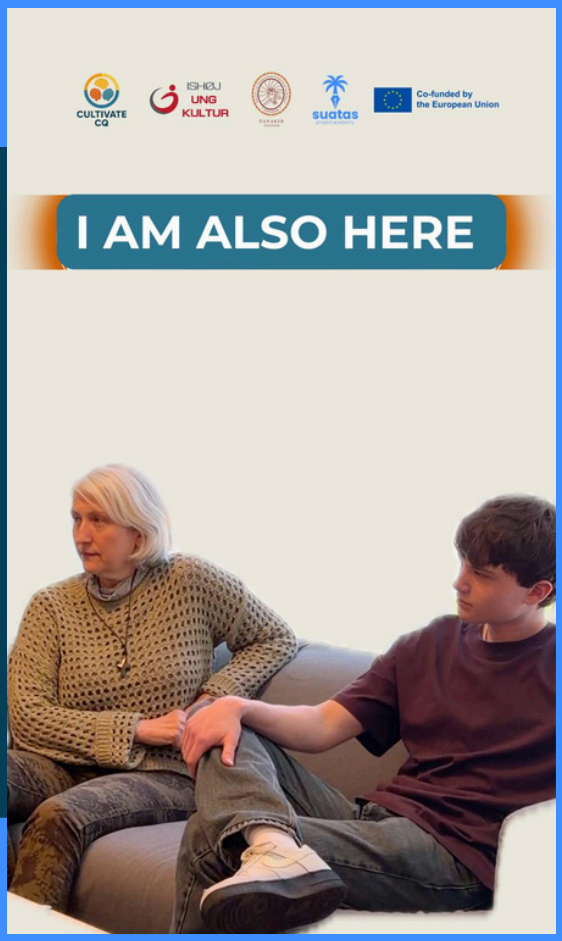
Activity title:

Role-Play “What Did You Actually Mean?” Exploration of Cross-Cultural Communication



Example real-life scenario:

I AM ALSO HERE

In this video, we explore cultural awareness through a scenario: one participant dominates the discussion while others stay silent - not out of disinterest, but out of respect.

Key message: What feels like natural conversation in one culture may silence others. True inclusion means making space for every voice.

WATCH HERE

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Description

Participants identify real cross-cultural communication moments from their own work - moments where something was said but something else was understood. They turn these into short role-plays, perform them for the group, and use them as material for collective analysis and dialogue. The activity builds adaptability by making invisible communication assumptions visible and practising more culturally aware responses.

Target Group

YOUTH WORKERS - VOLUNTEERS - TRAINERS



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As a result of the participation in this activity, participants will be able to:

- Identify a real cross-cultural communication moment from their own practice;
- Recognise how cultural assumptions shape who speaks, who stays silent, and why;
- Experience a communication misunderstanding from both sides through role-play;
- Respond to cultural miscommunication with curiosity rather than judgment;
- Name one concrete change they will make in their own communication practice

Learning Outcomes

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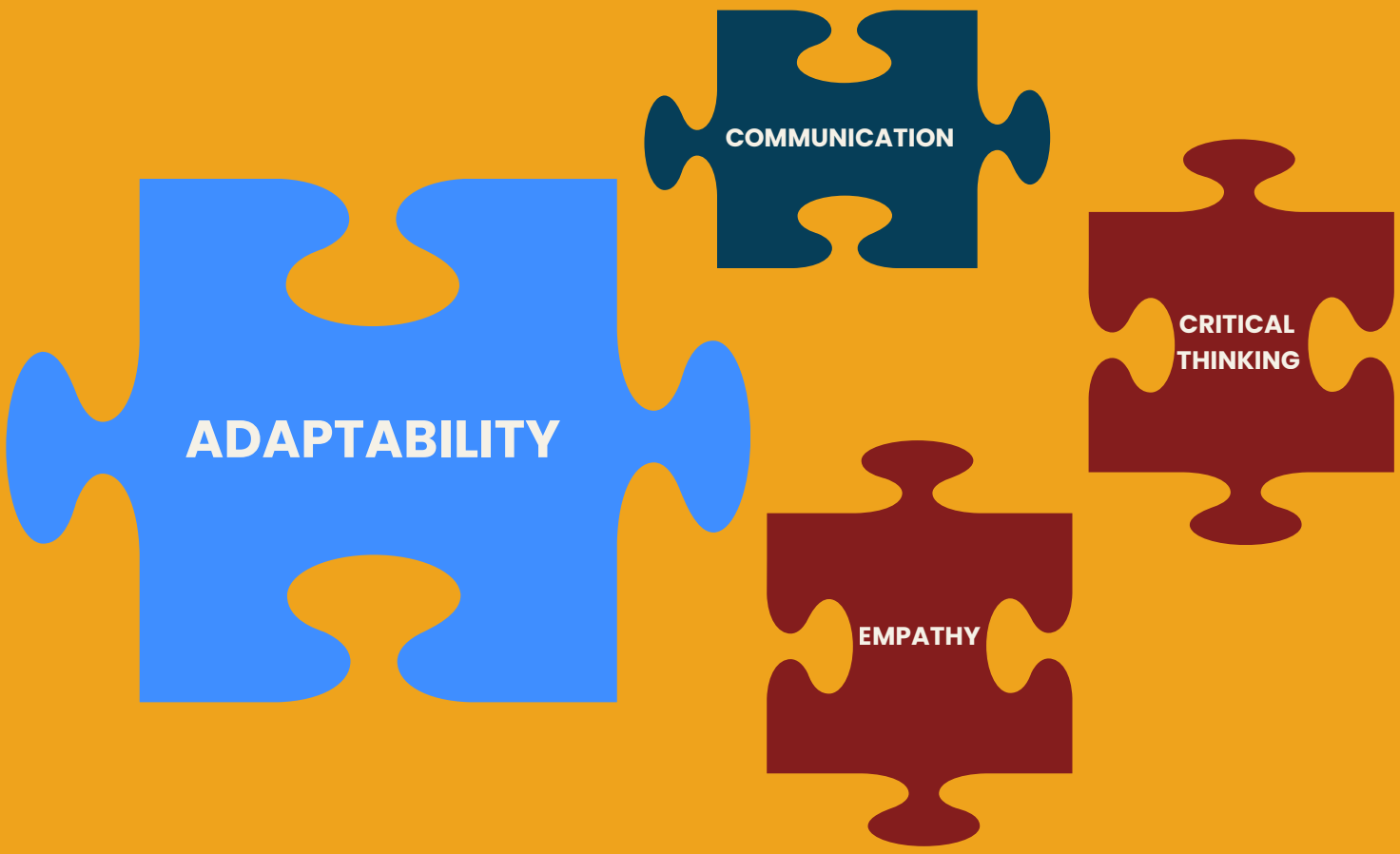
Skills Addressed



Materials Needed

- Scenario description template handout
- Blank paper
- Markers or pens
- Sticky notes
- Flip charts

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Step-by-Step Implementation

STEP 1
Opening & Safe Space Agreement

10 min

Welcome participants and co-create the Safe Space Agreement together. Ask: "What do you need to feel safe to speak honestly today?"
Suggested agreement points:

- We speak from our own experience — not for entire cultures or groups
- Silence is always a valid response — in the role-play and in the debrief
- We are curious, not judgmental
- What is shared in this room stays in this room
- The facilitator will name harmful dynamics if they arise

Opening question: Think of a moment in your work when you said something and it landed completely differently than you intended — or when you misread what someone else was communicating. Hold that moment in mind.

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STEP 2

Introduction

10 min

Introduce the idea that cross-cultural communication is about the invisible rules we follow without realising it — what counts as direct, warm, or clear is shaped by culture. Ask the group: "Can a misunderstanding be nobody's fault?" Take 2–3 responses and note key words on the flip chart.
You can also do a silent version: participants write their answer on paper and stick it on the wall. A short reflection follows.

STEP 3

Find Your Communication Moment

10 min

Each participant writes down a real cross-cultural moment from their work where something was misread or misunderstood. They note three things:

- What happened
- What I assumed the other person meant
- What they might actually have meant

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STEP 4
Build the Scene

10 min

In groups of 3–4, participants select ONE moment from their individual stories to turn into a short role-play. They have 5 minutes to prepare a 2–3 minute scene showing the misunderstanding as it happened — not the solution. The goal is to make the communication gap visible.
Key instruction: Play it natural. The misunderstanding should feel subtle and real, not exaggerated.

STEP 5
Role-Play Rounds

20 min

Each group performs while the audience observes in silence. After each scene, the facilitator asks:

- Where did the communication break down?
- What was each person assuming?
- What cultural norm might be behind this?

The performing group listens without defending.

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STEP 6

Constructive Dialogue

10 min

In small groups of 3–5, participants discuss:

- What would a more culturally aware response have looked like in one of the scenes?
- Not the perfect response — a realistic one. What could you actually do or say?

Each small group shares one suggestion with the full group.

STEP 7

Debrief

10 min

Full group reflection using the debrief questions below. Close by asking each participant to name one concrete thing they will do differently in their own communication practice.

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Debrief

Reflection Questions

- When you saw your scene performed and heard how others interpreted it — what surprised you?
- Where in your own work might a communication style that feels normal to you feel confusing or unwelcoming to someone else?
- What is the difference between a communication failure and a cultural difference? Does that distinction matter?
- What specific words, pauses, or behaviours could change the dynamic in one of the scenes we saw?

Tips for Learners

Stay in the role: the discomfort is part of the learning. Do not step out early.

When observing, focus on tone, pacing, and body language — not just the words. Cultural assumptions often live there.

Speak from your own experience during the debrief. Use "I noticed" rather than "they did."

Recognising your own communication assumptions is a strength, not a failure.

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Resources

CULTIVATE CQ Video — Module 1: I Am Also Here
https://www.instagram.com/reel/DX_tnwwNNFL/

T-Kit 4: Intercultural Learning — Council of Europe / European Commission
https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/t-kit-4-intercultural-learning

SALTO-YOUTH — Intercultural Communication Resource Pack
https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-1789/Booklet%20Intercultural%20Communication%20Resource%20Pack.pdf

Youth Connections — Training Modules for Youth Professionals in Multicultural Settings
https://www.youth-connection.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Training-Modules-for-youth-professionals-working-in-multicultural-settings-ENG.pdf



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