



Barnnga: A Simulation Game on Cultural Clashes

By Sivasailam Thiagarajan

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Wholly revised to celebrate its 25th anniversary, *Barnnga* is the classic simulation game for exploring communication challenges across cultures. While playing *Barnnga*, participants experience the shock of realizing that despite their good intentions and the many similarities amongst themselves, people interpret things differently from in profoundly important ways, especially people from differing cultures. Players learn that they must understand and reconcile these differences if they want to function effectively in a cross-cultural group.

The "game" is deceptively simple: participants, broken up into several small groups, play a simple card, never knowing that each group has been given a subtly different set of rules to play by, nor that those rules will change yet again as the game develops and groups of players are reconfigured. Conflicts quickly begin to occur as players move from group to group, simulating real cross-cultural encounters, where people initially believe they share the same understanding of the basic rules and learn to their dismay and confusion that they do not.

In discovering that the rules are different, players undergo a mini culture shock similar to actual experience when entering a different culture. They then must struggle to understand and reconcile these differences to play the game effectively in their "cross-cultural" groups. Difficulties are magnified by the fact that players may not speak to each other but can communicate only through gestures or pictures. In struggling to understand why other players don't seem to be playing correctly, and with the aid of the facilitator, participants gain insight into the dynamics of cross-cultural encounters.

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Review

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Thiagi's games provide powerful activities that are easily adapted to any learning environment. **Dr. Darryl Sink, President, Darryl Sink & Associates**

Thiagi's games are always ingenious, easy to conduct, and open to several learning points. **Mel Silberman, author of *Active Training* and *101 Ways to Make Training More Active***

Thiagi is a master in creating accelerated learning with simulations and games. **Boyd Watkins, President, Interel, Inc.**

There are two types of training-game designers: there is Thiagi and there is the rest of us. **Andy Kimball, President, Qube Learning, LLC**

When I want to create a learning environment or produce a thoughtful discussion, I turn to Thiagi's games. **Steve Sugar, author of *Games That Teach* and *Games That Teach Teams***

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About the Author

Dr. Sivasailam "Thiagi" Thiagarajan is the Resident Mad Scientist at The Thiagi Group, an organization with the mission of helping people improve their performance effectively and enjoyably. Thiagi's clients include AT&T, Arthur Andersen, Bank of Montreal, Cadence Design Systems, Chevron, IBM, Intel, Intelsat, United Airlines, and Liberty Mutual. In addition, Thiagi has worked with more than 50 other organizations in high-tech, financial services, and management consulting areas for whom he has consulted and conducted training in such areas as rightsizing, diversity, creativity, teamwork, customer satisfaction, human performance technology, and organizational learning. Internationally recognized as an expert in multinational collaboration and active learning in organizations, Thiagi has lived in three different countries and has consulted in 21 others.

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