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THE INVISIBLE BARRIER SIMULATION GROUP

VET design

1. AT A GLANCE

Activity title	*The Invisible Barrier Simulation*
Format	*Group*
Duration	*120 minutes (2 hiurs)*
Group size	*12-24 participants*
Challenge	*Identifying psychological and structural barriers for migrants and NEETs.*
Setting	*Physical room divided into "Silos" (stations).*
Method / framework	*Immersive Role-Play / Empathy Mapping.*

WHAT TEAMS WILL HAVE AFTERWARDS

- A first-hand feel for the emotional and structural hurdles learners face
- A colour-coded wall of at least 5 hidden barriers in their own processes
- One “Gatekeeper” rule they would remove tomorrow

DESIGN THINKING STAGE

Empathise | **Define** | Ideate | Prototype | Test

2. DESCRIPTION

This immersive simulation places VET professionals in the position of marginalized learners. Participants are assigned "Learner Identities"—such as a refugee with non-recognized degrees or a rural NEET with digital anxiety—and must navigate a series of stations to enroll in a course. At each station, they encounter "Institutional Friction," such as complex jargon, lack of translation, or rigid scheduling requirements. The goal is to move from a standard "top-down" institutional view to a human-centric perspective by experiencing the emotional and structural hurdles firsthand.

2.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Experience and internalize the emotional impact of exclusion and "wicked problems" faced by migrants and NEETs.
- Identify at least 5 hidden structural barriers within their own enrollment and marketing processes.
- Critique past VET models and prioritize impact-driven innovation over process-oriented bureaucracy.



- Encourage Frustration: Facilitators at stations should use complex "Institutional Jargon" to simulate the confusion felt by non-native speakers.
- Visual Thinking: Use colored sticky notes to represent different types of barriers (e.g., Red for Policy, Blue for Language) during the debrief to make patterns visible.

2.2 THE THREE STATIONS

📣 STATION 1 INFORMATION & MARKETING

Can the learner find and understand the offer?

Friction: jargon-heavy flyers, no translation.

📝 STATION 2 ENROLLMENT & DOCUMENTATION

Can the learner actually get in?

Friction: complex forms, non-recognised degrees.

🤝 STATION 3 COUNSELING

Does the learner feel welcome and supported?

Friction: rigid scheduling, “Gatekeeper” scripts.

3. PREPARATION

Set up three distinct stations in the room: Information & Marketing, Enrollment & Documentation, and Counseling.

Develop Identity Cards for participants based on real-world needs analysis data (e.g., personas of rural youth vs. newly arrived migrants).

Brief three facilitators to act as "Gatekeepers" who follow strict, jargon-heavy scripts.

3.1 MATERIALS NEEDED

- [ ] Persona identity Briefs
- [ ] Mock enrollment forms (intentionally complex)
- [ ] Flipcharts
- [ ] Multi-colored sticky notes
- [ ] Timers

3.2 ROLES IN THE ROOM

🎭 PARTICIPANTS	🚧 GATEKEEPERS (3)	⏱️ LEAD FACILITATOR
• Receive one Identity Card • Stay in role at every station • Note each moment of friction on a sticky note	• One per station • Follow the strict, jargon-heavy script • Never break role or “help” too much	• Keeps time at each station • Watches reactions and emotions • Leads the colour-coded debrief

🚧 Gatekeepers: stay strict – the frustration is part of the learning.

4. STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

Step	Time	What the facilitator does
1	*15 mins.*	*The Identity Draft: Assigns each participant a "Learner Profile" and a specific mission (e.g., "Find a course that fits a 3 PM childcare limit").*
2	*45 mins.*	*The Simulation: Participants navigate stations. Gatekeepers use "exclusionary language" and demand rigid documentation to create friction.*
3	*30 mins.*	*Friction Mapping: Participants step out of character to map their frustrations onto a giant "Wall of Friction".*
4	*30 mins.*	*Co-designing the "Golden Path": Teams brainstorm 3 "Quick Fixes" to eliminate the friction they just experienced.*

⏱️ **TOTAL: 120 MINUTES · 15 + 45 + 30 + 30**

5. DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- **Emotional Resonance:** How did it feel to inhabit a learner's identity and face repeated "Institutional Friction"? What was the specific moment you felt most excluded or demotivated?
- **Mirroring Reality:** Which of the artificial hurdles you encountered today (e.g., complex jargon, rigid documentation) exists in your own institution's current enrollment process?
- **Breaking Point:** At what point in the simulation would you, as that learner, have decided to give up on seeking vocational training? What could have changed that decision?
- **Systemic Critique:** If you had the power to remove one "Gatekeeper" rule in your organization tomorrow to favor inclusion, which one would it be and why?
- **Andragogic Check:** How did the simulation challenge the "Self-concept" as your assigned persona as a capable adult learner?
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5.1 KOLB EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE

Concrete experience	*Participants "live" the barriers of a migrant learner during the simulation.*
Reflective observation	*Discussion on which institutional rules felt the most exclusionary and why.*
Abstract conceptualisation	*Identifying common principles for making VET curricula linguistically and culturally accessible.*
Active experimentation	*Participants select one practical "Quick Fix" to test in their own institution*

6. WORKSHEET

Name: ..... Identity I played: ..... Date: .....

6.1 MY FRICTION LOG

Fill in straight after each station – stay in character.

Station	What happened to me	How I felt (1 🙂 – 5 😣)	🔴 Policy · 🔵 Lang. · ⚪ Other
📣 Information & Marketing			
📝 Enrollment & Documentation			
🤝 Counseling			

6.2 OUR GOLDEN PATH – 3 QUICK FIXES

✨ QUICK FIX 1

Barrier: .....

Our fix: .....

.....

Who: .....

✨ QUICK FIX 2

Barrier: .....

Our fix: .....

.....

Who: .....

✨ QUICK FIX 3

Barrier: .....

Our fix: .....

.....

Who: .....

🚧 THE ONE "GATEKEEPER" RULE I WOULD REMOVE TOMORROW

.....

🔁 Take your 3 Quick Fixes back to your institution and test one within a month.

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