



COLOR-CHAIN WARM-UP

A fun team warm-up which includes a lesson on communication.

Duration	The first time, about 12 minutes; after that, about 5 to 8 minutes
Physical requirements	Space for everyone to stand in circles of 6–12 people
Energy level	High
Researchers/Facilitators	1 for every 2–3 circles
Participants	Groups of 6–12 people
Expected output	Awake participants, fun, and a useful lesson in communication and group process

This warm-up takes a little longer, but gives teams a shared sense of accomplishment as well as something to think about. This is quite a simple warm-up which looks complex when written down. Try it!

Step-by-step guide

- 1** Have participants stand in circles of 6–12 people, and ask each team to choose a captain. The captain stays in the circle as a participant.
- 2** Build the color chain like this:
 - Ask the captain to give a color to a second person in the circle. It should be clear what the color is, and whom it goes to.
 - The second person will give a different color to a different person, and so on until everyone has a color. The last person gives a color to the captain. (It helps to have a visible sign that you have given your color; for example, folding your arms. You only need this sign in the first round.)
- 3** Now you have built a color chain. Ask the captain to give the same



► color to the same person again, restarting the chain. Group members don't need to fold their arms any more. When the chain comes back to the captain, he should start it again, and again ... Ask the group to keep running the chain, and get faster and faster.

- 4** Stop the chain. Tell people to remember their color. Debrief: "How many people should you be you listening to?" (Answer: "One." You don't need to listen to the whole chain.)
- 5** Ask the captain to build a new chain as in step 2, but with participants assigning one another animals this time. The chain should be different, so everyone should try to give their animal to a new person, not the person they gave their color to.
- 6** Run the animal chain a few times until it is familiar.
- 7** Stop the chain. Point out that the two chains are separate and could easily run at the same time ...
- 8** Ask the captains to run the color chain and the animal chain at

the same time. Suggest they start with one, then throw in the other after a few seconds so both are running. The chains should both run simultaneously but never mix – a color always leads to a color, an animal to an animal.

- 9** The two chains usually fail. Stop the chains.
- 10** Ask how many people they should be listening to now. (Answer: "Two.") Ask if this is possible. Point out that if Tom is trying to give "purple" to Sue, but Sue is busy with "antelope," she might not hear him. Whose problem is that? Can Sue listen louder? No, we have to take responsibility for our message until we know it has been received.
- 11** Ask the groups to run the chains again, with each participant taking responsibility for each message until they know it has been received. They will usually get more physical (leaning in and using hand movements – i.e., using more channels), will repeat the messages as necessary, and will wait for confirmation that they have been received.

- 12** The two chains usually run well now. Stop the participants, and ask them to remember their colors and animals.
- 13** Ask the captains to start a third new chain, perhaps of countries.
- 14** When the third chain has been learned, ask the captain to try all three chains at once. Tell the participants, "Remember, you can't listen to three people. But you can relax, if you trust the people around you to do their jobs; to take responsibility for reaching you. If you are busy, they will wait. Trust them." If any chain gets lost, the captain should just start it again.
- 15** Finish by physicalizing the chain – for example, by high-fiving on every handover. This gives a fun finish. Debrief the warm-up (see "Method notes").

Method notes

- Three chains is usually enough for a first time. With practice, move to four, five, six ...

- For slower groups, offer them objects to pass around for each chain. Later, take away the objects.
- This is a great model of communication and project processes. The fundamental process (the chain) is totally sound in theory, but it fails in practice on the handover. Only by taking responsibility for the handover can we make it work. This means we have to make sure to transmit on multiple channels, perhaps repeat ourselves, and especially wait for some sign that the message has been received. And if we trust our colleagues to fulfill their responsibilities, even a very complex process is manageable (even relaxed). ◀

- Ⓐ A player in the color chain gets more physical in his communication, and delivers his message more effectively. Behind him, a second group are playing.

