



Topic **Patterns (Relationships)**

Objectives

- Establish, recognize, and repeat a pattern.
- Observe individual reactions and group interactions.
- Relate objects and processes to the chosen topic.

Duration 10-15 minutes depending on group size and topic complexity

Assessment Type Diagnostic

This is a great icebreaker/name game that builds teams and encourages individual reflection by providing a common experience. It also provides a terrific springboard for introducing complex inter-relationships or non-linear processes that often overwhelm easily-distracted novices.

Materials

- Several (6-8) soft objects (koosh balls, beanie babies, etc.)
- Topic for discussion that can be described individually



Instructions

1. Ask everyone to form a circle, facing inward about elbow width apart, with their hands cupped in front of them. Tell them to keep their hands cupped in front until they have received and passed on an object. After that, it's important they place their hands behind their back in this first phase.
2. Tell them to pay close attention to the pattern that will be established by tossing a single item around the entire circle. Clearly state that the two 'rules' are to be nice and play safe.
3. Call someone's name and toss an object to him/her. Put your hands behind your back to indicate that you're already a part of the sequence. Ask the recipient to say "thanks <your name>" and choose someone else to toss it to, emphasizing the importance of gaining their attention before throwing anything. Ensure that the first recipient places his/her hands behind the back now.
4. Repeat the process until all participants have received the first (single) object and it finally returns to you. This establishes the pattern.
5. Note that "things aren't usually that simple, so let's try it again and see what happens". After the first object has been received and passed on to the second in the sequence, get the first person's attention again and toss another object. (This will cause some surprise, so make sure the rules are followed each toss!) Several objects should be moving along the pattern; get as many going as you can before the first object is about to return to you. Continue until all objects have been returned to you.
6. After the group has settled back down – and while you're all still in the circle – process the experience by asking the following questions:
 - a. If you happened to look into the center of the circle, what did you see?
 - b. As an individual, what did you do that worked or didn't work?
 - c. As a group, what did you all do that worked or didn't work?
 - d. With respect to the topic, what might these different objects represent?

- Reverse the sequence! With an object in your hands and the group back in 'ready position', ask participants to think about how they each deal with things that come at them from unexpected directions. Remind them that the group established a pattern. Ask them to repeat it backwards this time! After you make a point of getting the attention of the person who tossed the objects to you, toss one, then additional, objects. Continue until all objects are returned to you again.

Notes

Try to vary the colors, textures, and shapes of the objects to make it more interesting and real. Including a few that make noises when caught can be a really fun addition.

It's helpful to keep the objects in a shoebox. Placing the box at your feet allows you to quickly retrieve and replace items easily. It also adds an element of surprise as the students can't see what's coming next!

Participants will find a group rhythm; let it develop at its own pace. Hopefully you'll have some mid-air object crashes that will make for some interesting discussion. Notice how the group reacts!



Discussion Questions

- What can you do to balance your various priorities and numerous tasks?
- How do you react when someone else 'drops the ball'? How do you recover when you 'drop the ball'?
- Can you think about situations where others might feel overwhelmed by multiple "items" being tossed their way from different directions?
- How do we deal with the great numbers of options available to us in this "information age"?
- What implications does this activity have for non-linear processing, for example, using the Internet?
- How would things go if everyone who handled an "item" focused on that specific issue, taking into account the others' perspectives?

Reality Check! Evaluation

- Was each student included in the initial pattern?
- Did each student participate fully in the subsequent sequence(s)?
- Did students notice what they did to complete the patterns successfully?
 - Asked for names
 - Waited for attention
 - Picked up missed objects
 - Focused on source/destination
- Did students relate their individual experiences to the group experience?
- Did they identify similar processes/parts in a real-world example of a similar system?
- Did they grasp the implications for accomplishing a specific goal as a team?