

Chinese Whispers Activity

A popular and easy exercise that makes a good icebreaker

Time: allow approx. 10mins

Aim: to illustrate how easy it is to misinterpret or pass on only part of a message we hear.

In advance: prepare a short message related to your workshop topic. It is important the message is relatively simple and not too long to remember (i.e. 1 sentence or 2 short sentences).

Organisation: 10 or less participants work as 1 group, for larger groups work in smaller teams. Stand in a line(s) or sit in a circle.

Rules: each person can only say the message once and they must whisper so that only 1 person (the person next to them) can hear it.

Method:

1. Whisper the message to the first participant, that person then whispers the message to the next person.
 2. Each person listens in turn and passes the message on to the next participant.
 3. The last person in the group -
 - a. If you are working as 1 group ask the last person to repeat the message they received, write it on a whiteboard or flipchart, then add the original message.
- OR
- b. For multiple groups ask the last person to write the message down in large print and display each message alongside the original.
4. Read out the original message and invite comparisons - how close is it to the original?

Conclusions and feedback

If there are no changes at all congratulate the group, its unusual to get this result.

Explain:

If we don't hear everything, lose focus or forget something, we fill in the gaps which can alter meaning.

We often only hear key words which means we sometimes make assumptions about what is going to be said, which may not be accurate.

Sometimes we misunderstand because we think of the message in our own context and change what is said, to what we think we heard.