

Big Picture Facilitator's Handbook

Context

This exercise is meant to be run in meet-ups and other situations when you're time-boxed, but you still want to deliver a taste of what a real EventStorming feels like.

The exercise is a plausible low-fidelity simulation of a real business, detailed enough to kickstart an interesting discussion in minutes but simple enough to allow newbies to contribute.

Room Preparation

Make sure you have a long enough straight wall to allow placement of the paper roll. 8-10 metres is usually a good size for this simulation. The paper roll should be set up in advance: it takes time, and that time will be precious.

Make sure there is enough **walking space** in front of the paper roll: people need to be able to move around from one extreme to another.

Prepare a **legend** with the information needed for the kick-off. A flip-chart sheet would be great for that. Make sure it's visible but not an impediment to moving around.

The legend will serve as a reference for the notation used in the different phases of the workshop.

Make the sticky notes and markers available to everyone. A small table by the visible legend is usually the ideal location.



Phase 1: Exercise Kick-Off

Distribute the **role-playing game sheets**. A few domain experts will be in different roles inside the organisation and at the edges.

The E-Commerce scenario is designed for about 16-20 participants in different roles.

You can make it look like a recruitment round or a role distribution for a play. I like asking for volunteers because it primes people to imagine more about their role.

You'll also need a decent number of **explorers**. They won't have deep expertise but curiosity. You may want to boost curiosity by saying, "The explorers will be trying to understand the business quickly to start building the supporting software as quickly as possible."

Once recruiting is complete, 15-20 people should be standing by the paper roll.

Now, ensure everybody has orange stickies and markers and no impediments to contributing.

Then, ask everybody to start writing down everything that is supposed to happen in their timeline as an event (orange sticky note/verb as part tense) referring to the visible legend.

Then... **get out of the way!** You're not supposed to do their job. But to make it happen. The more you indulge at the centre of the stage, the more the audience will settle for passive mode. Not what you want.

Checkpoint 1: after the storm

In about 20-25 minutes, people should have been able to brain-dump their mental models in the events on a timeline format. Once they run out of ideas, they usually detach from the modelling surface and contemplate what others have done.

 - This may be a good moment to state that the interaction flow is happening in predictable steps:

standoff —> icebreaker —> quiet chaos —> contemplation.

Usually, a quick Q&A on the spot can help you highlight some achievements.

- 1) A feeling of "wow, this was quicker than we expected!" - especially if you delivered more than 80-100 stickies on the wall in this first round;
- 2) A feeling of "This is really messy!" You now have to mitigate that with your next step. **Locally ordered clustered events in an inconsistent whole** are the expected deliverables of the first round. Now, we need to improve that.

Phase 2: Enforce the timeline

Step one was easy. Now, you'll ask everybody to rearrange the events so that the timeline is consistently ordered.

Let them "suffer" a little. They'll quickly realise that they need to talk with other people to sort out the whole mess and that it will be hard without a strategy.

You can ask them for ideas about the strategy or provide one: **look for pivotal events**. Events that appear more important than others, possibly duplicated, or signal the end or the beginning of a given phase are good candidates¹.

You need 4-5 of them to speed up sorting inside the emerging boundaries you'll highlight with the yellow tape.

A few critical points may arise during the conversations. This is a good moment to start capturing them with magenta **hot spots**.

The model is becoming richer: orange events on the timeline, yellow boundary lines, and magenta hotspots to capture relevant annotations.

Checkpoint 2: Some emerging structure!

The discussion can take a long time, so it's up to the facilitator to enable it and call a time box. This is a time-boxed demo; a real workshop usually takes a full day. So **we won't be able to finish** the exploration.

However, a few things might have emerged.

- 1) The **timeline was an illusion**. It's a great conversation trigger, but you'll need something more sophisticated to manage alternatives, unfrequented scenarios and feedback loops.
- 2) **Conversations started where it mattered**. People started to learn a lot about why some things needed to happen before others or to discuss whether there were alternatives.
- 3) Some people would be **sucked into the discussion**. The domain isn't particularly exciting, but solving a large puzzle is more engaging than the domain itself. EventStorming thrives on it.
- 4) The **structure** may already be valuable per se: it may provide hints, leading to good model separation or Bounded Contexts if your audience is already into the DDD jargon.

¹ If you're really short of ideas, common pivotal events in this scenario can be: "Catalog Published", "Order Placed", "Payment Completed", and "Package delivered".



- 5) Not every discussion can be sorted out during the workshops, but **disagreements are valuable**. That's why we want to capture everything.

Phase 3: People and Systems

The next round will be shorter: ask participants to add **People** and **Systems** to the existing flow.

Add them to the **visible legend**, and be happy with **fuzzy definitions**:

- People are **whoever is involved in a given event**;
- Systems can be everything from software to an external organisation: **whatever we can blame**, including **BAD LUCK, BAD WEATHER**, or whatever comes to mind.

Checkpoint 3: Wrap-up!

Keep phase three short because there isn't enough time to finish how we'd like.

Point out that

- we should now see **a lot** of the system under investigation;
- the structure isn't validated, **we'll need an explicit walkthrough** for that;
- there are **more steps** to build upon regarding software structure, business validation and more sophisticated discussions.



What to highlight

A few common themes may pop up during the closing discussion.

- There isn't strictly **one purpose** for a Big Picture scenario. The beauty of the format is its versatility. Much of the structure is repeatable, but the way we close the workshop may take different directions.
- Possible closings may be:
 - Highlight **value** for different stakeholders and in different currencies, too. Steering towards a value stream mapping territory.
 - Highlight **problems** and **opportunities** and **prioritise** them with arrow voting. This can quickly build consensus and momentum towards attacking the system bottleneck.
 - Extracting information about **bounded contexts**.
 - Detect which **team** is in charge of which section. This quick activity can deliver critical information for a more meaningful team-organisation approach.
- **Inviting everybody** unlocks some interesting possibilities (see the whole; the bottleneck should be in sight; provide confidence for future changes). However, political blockers are real and may be addressed with tactical choices like **starting small** and scaling down promises.
- Big Picture works very well in **as-is** and **to-be** scenarios. The workshop dynamics are very different. An expert facilitator is recommended for politically charged workshops.

Shopping List

- For the whole workshop:
 - 1 Plotter Paper roll, 50m * 90cm.
 - 1 pair of scissors
 - Masking tape
 - Coloured tape
 - Regular square sticky notes: Orange, Magenta
 - Large rectangular stickies: Pink.
 - Small rectangular stickies: Yellow.
 - 1 Black marker for participant.