

Issue #38: 1 2 3 4 Question and Count Stakeholder Activity

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Question and Count Stakeholder Activity

An Interactive Process Discovery Workshop

Quick Overview

 Duration	45-60 minutes	 Participants	4-12 stakeholders
 Objective	Reveal hidden complexity in "simple" tasks while building team rapport		
 Key Insight	We systematically underestimate process complexity by 300-500%		

Activity Setup

Materials & Space Requirements

Physical Setup

-  **Space:** Room with moveable furniture for 3-4 stations
-  **Layout:** Stations arranged for easy rotation
-  **Timing:** Visible countdown timer at each station

Materials Checklist

-  Question cards (laminated for reuse)
-  Timers for each station (phone apps work great)
-  Sticky notes (3+ colors)
-  Flipchart paper for each station
-  Markers/pens
-  Results tracking sheets
-  Optional: Small prizes for "biggest surprise" discoveries

Activity Structure

Round 1: Icebreaker Questions

Building comfort with absurd detail

Question 1: "How do you make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich?"

The Challenge

List every single step, no matter how "obvious" it seems.

Typical Results

Initial Guess	Actual Count	Surprise Factor
3-4 steps	12-18 steps	 HIGH

What Gets Revealed

-  Getting ingredients from different locations
-  Cleaning workspace before/after
-  Opening jars (which direction? how many turns?)
-  Bread slice selection criteria
-  Cleanup and storage steps

Learning

We skip "obvious" steps in our thinking, but these steps still take time and can fail!

Question 2: "How do you send a text message?"

The Challenge

Document every tap, swipe, and decision point.

Typical Results

Initial Guess	Actual Count	Surprise Factor
2-3 steps	8-12 steps	 MEDIUM

What Gets Revealed

-  Phone unlocking sequence
-  App location and opening
-  Contact selection process
-  Keyboard switching/autocorrect handling
-  Message review and sending confirmation

Learning

Technology automates many steps we don't consciously think about - but they still happen!

Question 3: "How do you park at the grocery store?"

The Challenge

From deciding to go shopping to walking through the store entrance.

Typical Results

Initial Guess	Actual Count	Surprise Factor
3-4 steps	15-25 steps	 HIGH

What Gets Revealed

-  Route planning and navigation decisions
-  Parking spot evaluation criteria
-  Walking path optimization
-  Payment method selection (parking meters?)
-  Security considerations (locking car, valuables)

Learning

Routine tasks have layers of hidden decision-making and complexity

Round 2: Work-Adjacent Questions

Professional tasks we all recognize

Question 4: "Schedule a meeting with 5 people"

The Challenge

From initial idea to confirmed calendar invite.

Expected vs Reality

Initial Estimate:  (5 steps)

Actual Process:  (20+ steps)

Hidden Complexity Includes

-  **Planning Phase:** Agenda prep, duration estimation
-  **Stakeholder Management:** Identifying right participants
-  **Communication Loops:** Initial outreach, availability polling
-  **Logistics:** Room booking, equipment needs, catering?
-  **Iteration Cycles:** Rescheduling dance, compromise finding

Question 5: "Submit an expense report"

The Challenge

From business expense incurred to reimbursement received.

Complexity Multiplier

Most people estimate **5-8 steps**... reality is often **25-35 steps!**

The Hidden Iceberg

-  **Receipt Management:** Photo, organize, categorize
-  **System Navigation:** Login, form location, field mapping
-  **Data Entry:** Date formatting, category selection, description writing

- **Approval Chain:** Manager routing, department coding, finance review
 - **Exception Handling:** Missing receipts, policy clarification, resubmission
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Question 6: "Onboard a new team member"

The Challenge

From job offer acceptance to productive team contributor.

The Reality Check

- Manager's Estimate: 8-10 steps
- HR's Reality: 50+ steps
- New Hire's Experience: "It never ends!"

Onboarding Iceberg

- **Administrative Setup:** IT accounts, badges, paperwork
 - **Physical Integration:** Desk setup, key access, parking
 - **Social Integration:** Introductions, buddy assignment, team dynamics
 - **Knowledge Transfer:** Training materials, tribal knowledge, context building
 - **Performance Setup:** Goal setting, expectation alignment, success metrics
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Round 3: Project-Specific Questions

Tailored to your team's reality

Customizable Question Builder

Question Template

"How do you **[specific work task your team does regularly]**?"

Selection Criteria

Choose tasks that are:

- Done regularly by team members
- Seem "simple" on the surface
- Actually quite complex when examined
- Important to your team's success

Examples by Team Type

Team Type	Sample Question	Why It Works
Engineering	"How do you conduct a design review?"	Reveals coordination complexity
Research	"How do you publish a research finding?"	Uncovers approval and validation steps
Operations	"How do you respond to a system alert?"	Shows decision trees and escalation paths

 Administrative	"How do you process a procurement request?"	Reveals policy compliance complexity
 NASA Project Teams	"How do you update project status?"	Shows multi-stakeholder reporting reality

Station Rotation Process

Timing & Flow Management

Setup Phase (5 minutes)

1.  Create question stations around room
2.  Place question card and materials at each station
3.  Divide into groups of 3-4 people
4.  Assign starting stations

At Each Station (5 minutes per question)

Minute 1:  Read question aloud
 Minute 2:  Individual quick estimates
 Minute 3-4:  Collaborative detailed breakdown
 Minute 5:  Count, compare, record results

Rotation Schedule

Time	Station A	Station B	Station C	Station D
0-5 min	 Group 1	 Group 2	 Group 3	 Group 4
5-10 min	 Group 4	 Group 1	 Group 2	 Group 3
10-15 min	 Group 3	 Group 4	 Group 1	 Group 2

Energy Management Tips

-  Use fun sound for rotations (not harsh buzzer!)
-  Give 30-second warnings
-  Celebrate wild discoveries during rotations
-  Keep movement brisk and energetic

Results Tracking & Analysis

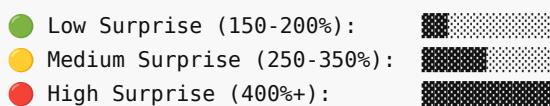
Sample Results Dashboard

Activity Results Template

 Question	 Initial Guess	 Actual Count	 Surprise Factor	 Key Hidden Steps
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 PB&J Sandwich	2-4 steps	16 steps	 400% MORE	Supply gathering, cleanup, storage decisions
 Send Text	2-3 steps	11 steps	 300% MORE	Unlock sequence, app navigation, contact selection
 Schedule Meeting	4-6 steps	23 steps	 400% MORE	Availability polling, room booking, rescheduling dance
 [Your Work Process]	— steps	— steps	—	—

Complexity Multiplier Patterns



Debrief & Discovery Session

Guided Discussion Framework

Results Celebration (3 minutes)

Start with positive energy and shared discoveries

-  "What was the most surprising result across all groups?"
-  "What's the funniest step someone identified?"
-  "Which process had the biggest gap between guess and reality?"

Pattern Recognition (4 minutes)

Help teams see systemic insights

Discussion Prompts:

-  **Blind Spots:** "What types of steps do we consistently overlook?"
-  **Automation:** "Where does technology hide complexity from us?"
-  **Exceptions:** "How do we handle when the 'normal' process breaks?"
-  **Handoffs:** "What steps involve waiting for other people?"

Work Application (3 minutes)

Bridge from activity insights to real work impact

Strategic Questions:

-  "If a sandwich is really 16 steps, how many steps is [specific work process]?"
-  "How does this change how we estimate project timelines?"
-  "What work processes need better documentation based on this?"
-  "How might this improve how we train new team members?"

🎯 Facilitation Excellence Guide

🔥 Creating the Right Atmosphere

📍 For Icebreaker Questions

- 🟡 **Encourage Ridiculous Detail:** "Do you twist the jar lid clockwise or counterclockwise? How many turns?"
- 🎉 **Celebrate Creativity:** "That's brilliant! No one else thought of checking bread freshness!"
- 💡 **Let Debates Flow:** "Is opening the peanut butter jar one step or five steps?"
- 😄 **Use Humor:** "We're up to 47 steps and haven't even touched the bread yet!"

💼 For Work Questions

- 🎯 **Stay Specific:** Focus on one concrete scenario, not general processes
- 🤔 **Probe Exceptions:** "What happens if the first person says no?" "What if the system is down?"
- ⌚ **Separate Wait Time:** Track steps that involve waiting or approvals separately
- 📝 **Document Variations:** "Sarah's process has 3 extra approval steps - why?"

⚡ Energy Management

- 🚀 **Keep Momentum:** Rotations should feel energetic, not rushed
- 🔍 **Highlight Discoveries:** "Group 3 just found something amazing!"
- 🏃 **Use Physical Movement:** Have people stand, move, point at their work
- 🌟 **Maintain Curiosity:** "I wonder what we'll discover next!"

🔄 Follow-Up Applications

🚀 Turning Insights Into Action

⚡ Immediate Actions (This week)

- 📋 **Process Audit:** Identify 2-3 critical work processes for detailed step analysis
- 📄 **Documentation Review:** Update training materials to include "hidden" steps
- ⏳ **Estimation Adjustment:** Apply complexity multipliers to current project estimates
- 🎯 **Team Awareness:** Share key insights with broader team in next meeting

📈 Strategic Applications (Next month)

- 🧐 **Deep Dive Analysis:** Apply same detailed counting to critical work processes
- 🏆 **Optimization Challenges:** Create "step count reduction" improvement initiatives
- 📋 **Requirements Gathering:** Use as template for more thorough requirements sessions
- 🎓 **Training Enhancement:** Build complexity awareness into onboarding programs

🎯 Ongoing Integration (Quarterly)

- 🔄 **Regular Process Reviews:** Make "step counting" part of regular process improvement
- 📈 **Complexity Metrics:** Track process complexity trends over time
- 🏢 **Cross-Team Sharing:** Share insights with other teams facing similar challenges

-  **Activity Refinement:** Evolve questions based on team's growing sophistication

Success Metrics

-  **Improved Estimation Accuracy:** Project timelines more realistic
 -  **Faster Onboarding:** New team members productive sooner
 -  **Better Documentation:** Processes captured more completely
 -  **Increased Process Awareness:** Team naturally considers complexity
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Key Takeaway

"Simple" is an illusion - but understanding true complexity leads to better planning, documentation, and realistic expectations.

Ready to discover what your team's processes really look like? 

 **Pro Tip:** The biggest learning often comes from the work-specific questions in Round 3. That's where teams discover the processes they thought they knew... they don't actually know at all!