

Matchbox exercise

The purpose of this exercise is to let you have a feeling for what it means to operate in a tightly coupled, time-boxed environment under different process conditions.

Read everything on this page before beginning!

Form groups of 5 persons sitting around a table. Appoint one of you as the first person in the group and the next person to the right as number 2 etc. around the table.

Pour out the matches and matchboxes supplied in a pile in the middle of the table. Take the only matchbox with a cross aside; it is the priority matchbox described below.

The instructions for the first round of work are as follows:

Person number 1 (planner): Open and empty 5 matchboxes (do it even if the matchbox is empty). If you find matches that are not of full size, discard them. Push all 5 matchboxes into the space between you and person number 2 – PROVIDED that there are no boxes there.

Person number 2 (developer): Pick up the matchboxes (to the left of you) one by one and put 5 matches in the bottom half of each box from the pile of matches. Make sure that the match-heads point in the same direction. When all 5 boxes have been filled push the open matchboxes into the space between you and person number 3 – PROVIDED that there are no boxes there.

Person number 3 (builder): Pick up the matchboxes one by one, take a match from the pile in the middle, break it in two, and put the half with the match-head in the bottom half of the box (discard the other half). Make sure that the match-head points in the same direction as the other matches in the box. Finally close each matchbox so that the match-heads in the bottom part, and the top of the head of the picture point in the same direction. Then push all 5 matchboxes into the space between you and person number 4 – PROVIDED that there are no boxes there. Make sure that the picture on the matchboxes turns upwards.

Person number 4 (inspector): You check whether the picture on each matchbox turns upwards. You then open each box to see whether it contains exactly 5½ matches; that all the heads point in the same direction; and also point the same way as the top of the head of the picture on the box. If everything is ok, you put the box in an OK pile to the right of you; and if a box is not ok you put it in a NOT-OK pile also to the right of you.

Person number 5 (tracker): You keep track of time and progress (use your phone or watch). You count every box that you find to the left of you. You keep a record of how many boxes are ok and how many are not ok. When you have counted a box you put it back into the pile in the center of the table (don't waste time emptying it).

The priority matchbox. When exactly 1 minute has passed, person number 5 (tracker) takes the matchbox marked with a cross and pushes it to person number 1. The processing of this special box must take priority over all the other boxes, e.g. it should be processed as fast as possible (but still in the batches of 5). When this box returns to person number 5 again, the time elapsed is recorded. When exactly 2 minutes have passed, person number 5 again pushes the priority box to person number 1 and the process is repeated.

Work stops: When exactly 4 minutes (in total) have passed, person number 5 (tracker) cries stop, and everyone in the group stops doing whatever they are doing. Person number 5 now counts how many boxes are in progress (e.g. not yet in his OK/NOT-OK piles). Person number 5 completes the records: boxes ok, boxes not-ok, boxes in-process, time for processing the priority box, and hands the results to me.

The instructions for the second and third rounds of work will be given orally at the proper time.