

Ground Rules & Decision Making

Time required

Typically 5-15 minutes

Materials Required

- Something big & visible to write decided ground rules on, like a flipchart paper

Purpose

- This is a workshop facilitation technique to be used at the start of a workshop to help the participant focus on the task at hand and also to commit to work together in the best possible way
- It also serves as a tutorial for the important “fist of five” decision making technique that all teams probably should master

How

Part 1: Intro

One more thing before we get started on today’s topics. We will all be investing a whole day working on this, and we all have other things we could do instead. So it’s very important that we make sure we get as much value of this day as possible. Agreed?

So, what I would like us to do now is to simply agree on a few ground rules for today on how we will work together to make this day the best possible. Let’s start with a quick pairwise discussion on what would be the most important ground rules for us to have a really productive and enjoyable day today? 3 minutes...

Give them a few minutes.

Ok, we will now try to make some decisions on rules that we can all agree to. Since there are quite a few people here it may not be so easy, but this is actually a really important skill to learn when working in an agile team. A team needs to be able to take a lot of decisions, making sure there is buy in from everyone and it can not take huge amounts of time.

There is a really nice technique to deal with this that is called “fist of five”, or “five finger voting”

When you do five finger voting we do not start with discussing a topic forever, instead we quickly move into voting on a concrete proposal instead. Each person can vote from 0-5 by holding up that number of fingers.

With your fingers, show them the most important votes:

3: I can live with this or I accept it

4: Good idea!

5: Best idea ever I will really support this!

2: I have something I want to say before we make the decision - Ask if someone can propose a ground rule for today that will help make the day really valuable. When someone suggests something, facilitate decision making. - If everyone votes 3 or more, it is decided. Celebrate how quick that was! With so many persons! Write it on the flipchart and repeat the procedure for some more proposals until someone votes less than 3 - If one or more persons votes less than three, ask one of them if they can enhance the proposal so that it may get more support. Then facilitate a new round of voting around the new proposal. Repeat until something that the group can accept is reached. Kill any discussions and focus them on the proposal-vote-proposal... flow - If you want to get an interesting vote, ground rules for phones and laptops on tables can sometimes trigger some good and useful voting rounds - If someone starts with suggesting no phones during the day, people will object until it usually ends up with that calls can be made on breaks, you can have the phone on silent and leave to answer family emergency calls etc - Once all participants (about 40) had laptops open at the start of a workshop. After some voting the rule accepted was: "If you close email, slack, turn off internet etc" then the others would trust you to "Only take notes" ;-) Nobody used their laptops during the day... ;-)

After a while just quit the exercise, make some points: - It is important to limit unproductive speaking and unstructured discussions if we are to be making quick decisions as a team. It takes too much time if everyone wants to speak and just repeat the point and explain why they agree. Really tough facilitation is needed, e.g. using "fist of five"

- The technique quickly brings up any differences and lets us focus on resolving them.
- By this technique you get "consent". This means people accept the group decision. This is not the same as unanimous decisions. People may have other ideas, but after being heard it is usually possible to get consent anyway. The power of this is increased buy in.
- Buy in is not equally important for all decisions. For way of working issues it is though. All need to consent for any way of working decision to be effective
- For other types of decision you can use other methods e.g. majority voting. But you need to decide on decision method before you start.