



High Performance Teams Game by [Mark Levison - Agile Pain Relief Consulting](#)
is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#).

Your team is working on the World's Smallest Online Bookstore, a site that provides the best results (just a few) for every search, not every result on earth. We're a vulture capital funded company, so if we don't deliver, our funding will be cut.

My goal is to help you see the effects of choices/tradeoffs on productivity and team cohesion. While some of the benefits of Agile happen at the individual level, there are many things that affect the relationships between team members, and therefore the overall cohesion and productivity of the team.

Ground Rules

- *Rounds represent 6 weeks or three 2 week sprints*
- *Our goal is to play 6 rounds == 36 weeks*
- *Each table will have 5 to 9 team members*
- *In each round you have budget for the amount of work/stuff you can do based on your team's capacity. Some of that budget must be spent on delivering features, otherwise the business will threaten to let you go. Some of it should be spent on growing the team and their engineering skills, otherwise you don't get more budget capacity.*
- *There is a risk of failure, and not all teams make it.*
- *There is a sense of risk and randomness. Every round, you roll two dice to see what gremlins will affect you. Human interactions are imperfect and the gremlins will simulate that.*
- *Once all the actions are committed for a round, I will tell teams of their effect and then you will roll to discover the number of stories you completed.*
- *In each subsequent round, all prior actions are still available.*

Title	Action Description	Cost	Round First	Benefit
	Commit to Stories	1 per Story	1	<i>Roll one die per story committed. 3 or higher and you met your commitment, i.e. 66% per story.</i>
Same Floor	Get all Team members on the same floor (can't be used with Team Room)	2	1	<i>Even if you can't create a team room, just getting people on the same floor reduces the cost of communication.</i> <i>This round, no effect. Next round, increases</i>

				<i>Capacity by one, accounting for face to face time. This continues to pay off for 5 rounds.</i>
Team Room	Set up a team room with walls	5	1	<i>This round, no effect.</i> <i>Next round, accounting for face to face time.</i> <i>Capacity +1.</i> <i>In future rounds, the team room pays off more.</i> <i>Capacity +2 per round hereafter, to a maximum of 11 total points.</i>
Protected from Outside Distraction	ScrumMaster protects the team from outside distraction	1	1	<i>This round, if your ScrumMaster protected the team from distractions, rolls of 2 or higher succeed, i.e. 83% chance of success for each story.</i>
Build Server	Setup build server and Continuous Integration	3	1	<i>This round, no effect.</i>
Working Agreements	Create Team Working Agreements	1	1	<i>This round, no effect. Next round, teams that have set up working agreements gain an additional budget point the round after they were established.</i>
Social Time	Promote some social time, i.e. common coffee breaks, team lunch, etc.	1	2	<i>Building Trust requires relationships beyond the work you do. Taking the time to socialize has helped your team. At the end of the round after it's established, Capacity +1</i>

Firefighter award	Offer an Firefighter award to any team member who solves	1	2	<i>Promoting a firefighter culture, promotes individual behavior and surprisingly the starting of fires.</i> <i>Capacity -1.</i>
Unit Testing	Introduce Unit Testing (can only be used if you set up a Build Server/CI system)	2	2	<i>This round, no effect.</i> <i>In two rounds time, increase the team's</i> <i>Capacity +1.</i>
Observe People + Relationships	ScrumMaster spends time observing people, how they interact, and the quality of their relationships.	1	2	<i>This round, no effect.</i> <i>In the next round, increase Capacity by 1 because you know where to put your coaching energy.</i>
One on One's	ScrumMaster meets with all team members for a regular one on one.	1 (once for establishing the habit, free in the long run)	2	<i>This round, no effect.</i> <i>Once 'Gremlins' start to popup, this action mitigates the worst of the effects.</i>
Move Water Cooler	Move the water cooler/coffee near the team space.	1	2	<i>We're creating greater social opportunities and therefore building trust.</i> <i>Capacity +1 this round and the next.</i>
Personal Productivity Bonus	The company will offer anyone who exceeds their performance goals an extra \$5,000.	3	3	<i>Personal Productivity Bonus increases individual focus on achieving the goal.</i> <i>Unfortunately teamwork suffers. This time they deliver 2 more stories.</i> <i>Capacity -2</i>
New Specialist	Hire a new specialist for the team. This	4	3	<i>Hire a new person, reduce the team's capacity for 2 rounds by</i>

	person will fill in missing pieces.			<i>3 points to allow for the effects of bringing a new person up to speed and damaging effects on existing relationships. Three rounds after doing this, roll one die – if you score 4 or higher this person is a boon to your team, your productivity is restored, and goes up by one. If not, oh well ☺</i>
Informal Cross-Training	Informal cross-training for existing team members in an area the team is weak. (Testing anyone?)	1	3	<i>Counts for the social cohesion of the team as well as improving the engineering practice.</i> <i>Capacity +1</i>
Overtime	Overtime for the whole team.	2	3	<i>You get an extra 2 stories done this time. However, you're tired now and have introduced messes into the code base.</i> <i>Capacity - 2.</i>

Formal Cross-Training	Formal cross-training for existing team members in an area the team is weak. (Testing anyone?)	3	3	<p><i>Will boost the technical skill of a team member – improving capacity – but doesn't help the social cohesion.</i></p> <p><i>Capacity +2</i></p>
Collaborate on Goal Meaning	Spend two to three hours as a team collaborating on what the CES goal means and what is important.	1	3	<p><i>Turned a meaningless goal into something that matters for the team. You have a more focused Sprint and achieve all stories committed to. (One time effect.)</i></p> <p><i>Teams see through artificial pointless goals that they're not involved in setting. If you didn't discuss the goal with the team, they're demotivated and not buying it and actually don't try as hard. All committed stories only completed this round.</i></p>
Pre-Allocate Capacity for fires	Set aside some of your team's capacity to deal with the fires as they come up.	2	4	
Sacrifice One Team Member	One team member deals with all the fires as they come up, allowing the others to stay focused on delivering new value.	2 (used with the pre-allocating capacity – combined cost is 3)	4	
Ignore Fires	Refuse to deal with fires until the next sprint.	2	4	<i>None. You get yelled at by Management. You still have to deal with the fires.</i>
Accept new Stories mid-Sprint	Either: Accept New Stories Mid-Sprint	0	5	<i>Teams that accept new stories lose the 3 stories this</i>

sprint				<i>round. Accepting change mid-sprint is very expensive. The team was focused on meeting the goal. In addition....</i>
Refuse new stories mid-sprint	Or: ScrumMaster and Product Owner work together to refuse new stories mid-sprint	2	5	<i>This costs you political capital, but helps the business see that making arbitrary changes mid-sprint is expensive.</i>

At the start, we're a brand new team who have never worked together before. We have no established relationships or history. We were hired by the company because our resumes say we're the best in the field.

Round I – Sprint 1:

"Team, welcome to the World's Smallest Online Bookstore. We hired you because you're the best individuals in your respective areas. Please remember that we're Vulture Capital funded and we have only a few months runway, so you must deliver. This first Sprint, the company really needs you to prove that you can deliver a working".

Initial Capacity: 10

Facilitator's notes

- *Force the team into storming.*
- *Ensure that few, if any, teams actually got their work completed.*
- *If your ScrumMaster protected the team from distractions, rolls of 2 or higher for Stories succeed.*

Round II – Sprint 4

"None of you met our expectations that you would complete 10 stories in the last round. Our vulture capitalists are becoming concerned and ask if you can really deliver."

Facilitator's notes

- *Teams that don't do something to improve their communication or teamwork (in this or the previous round) have their capacity reduced by 2. (Specifically Team Room, Working Agreements, Social Time)*
- *Teams that don't set up a build server by the end of this round reduce their capacity by 2.*
- *Teams that have set up working agreements gain an additional budget point the round after they were established.*

- *If your ScrumMaster has consistently protected the team from distraction for the previous two Sprints, grant them now a gain of 1 additional Capacity point forever, as many people outside the team are starting to appreciate the cost of actions.*

Round III – Sprint 7

“We must go live with an early version of the product this round, for CES. Due to your limited productivity in past rounds, management are prepared to offer some options to help you out. We will pay an extra ‘4’ points for anything that helps. Another team member? Overtime?”

Facilitator’s notes

- *Announce now that changes like team rooms take a long time to pay off – often as long as 12 weeks. Teams that took on the team room in round 1 now gain 2 additional budget points per round hereafter.*
- *In teams that made no changes to improve Engineering Practices, Technical Debt is starting to take hold. Reduce capacity by 1, and continue reducing by 1 every other round hereafter.*

Round IV – Sprint 10

“We’re live, congratulations. In addition, if we’re unlucky some teams will have to deal with a fire.”

Facilitator’s notes

- *Teams that do nothing to protect themselves from interruption due to fires automatically lose half their capacity this round.*
 - *Teams that pre-allocated time to deal with fires roll a die: 1-3 no additional losses; 4-5 lose one additional story; 6 lose two additional stories*
 - *Teams that dedicated one sacrificial team member roll a die: 1-3 no additional stories lost – same outcomes pre-allocating time to deal with the fires*
 - *Teams that pre-allocated capacity and sacrificed a team member, congratulations, you took care of all of the fires that came up.*
- *Teams that invested in Unit Testing two rounds ago gain 1 capacity.*
- *Check to see if anyone gains benefits from Team Room; Social Time; Moving Desks closer together; Working Agreements;*

Round V – Sprint 13

“Wahooo, we’re making money. We’re starting to get great customer feedback with all sorts of new ideas. Even though it’s mid-sprint and you’ve already committed, the company needs some changes.”

Gremlins or Chance Events

These can happen in any round. At the end of every round, roll 2 dice.

Event	Effect	Die Roll	Mitigating Factors <i>known only to the facilitator</i>
Team Member/Management Relationship	The team perceives their peer is being treated differently than they are and feel this is unfair. Capacity reduced by 2 points until something changes. If nothing is done in the next, reduce capacity by 1 more point.	2	Teams that have established social interaction reduce this effect to 1. Establishing one on ones reduces the effect by 1 point.
Management yells at a team member in public for not pulling their weight	The team member who was yelled at feels their personal status was reduced. The whole team fears they will be next. Capacity -2	3	Teams whose ScrumMaster has been protecting them from distractions may ignore this. Teams who've been working on cohesion reduce the effect by 1.
We've had an emergency on another team, we need your best tester for a while.	Capacity reduced by 3 for three rounds.	4	Teams whose ScrumMaster has been protecting them from distractions reduce the number of rounds by 1. Informal or Formal cross-training also reduces the impact by 1. These are cumulative effects.
One of the people on your team isn't pulling	The rest of the team is pulling	5	ScrumMaster who conducts one on

their weight - not even close. However, nothing seems to get done about it.	together and taking this person's work on, but it's harming morale and productivity. Productivity reduced by 2.		one's regularly spots this issue early and reduces the impact to 1. Informal or Formal cross-training also reduces the impact to 1. (note this is not cumulative).
One team member is consistently late or misses Daily Scrum. In addition, they do most of their work on their own.	Other team members are annoyed that this person feels that they're more important than the team. Reduce productivity by 1 point until something changes.	8	Any social action (Team Room, Social Time, Moving Water Cooler closer) mitigates this one round after the action is taken.



Team Games by [Mark Levison - Agile Pain Relief Consulting](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).