Remember that time you got stuck and couldn't move forward?

We Don't

wicked problem solving™

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Everyday collaboration is broken.

Communicating with all these virtual teams is becoming impossible

I can't break through these siloed teams.

Technology sprawl is becoming too much!

I'm dealing with a serious lack of participation from teammates.

Scope creep is ruining my life.

There are too many asks and too little time to do them.

I need support from people that are fearful of change

How can we deal with losing institutional knowledge when teammates leave?

I don't know what skills are needed for this team.

How can I lead this project with no blueprint?

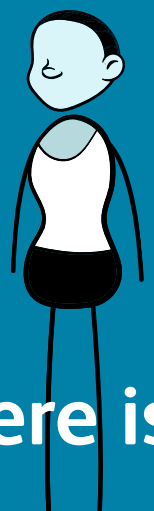
People are so bogged down in their biases. :(

We just can't seem to come to a consensus during meetings.

How might I balance short-term needs against long-term strategy?

How in the world can we align cross-functional teams that don't share a common way of thinking?

My dev team only wants to solve technical problems and not business problems.



But, there is a better way…

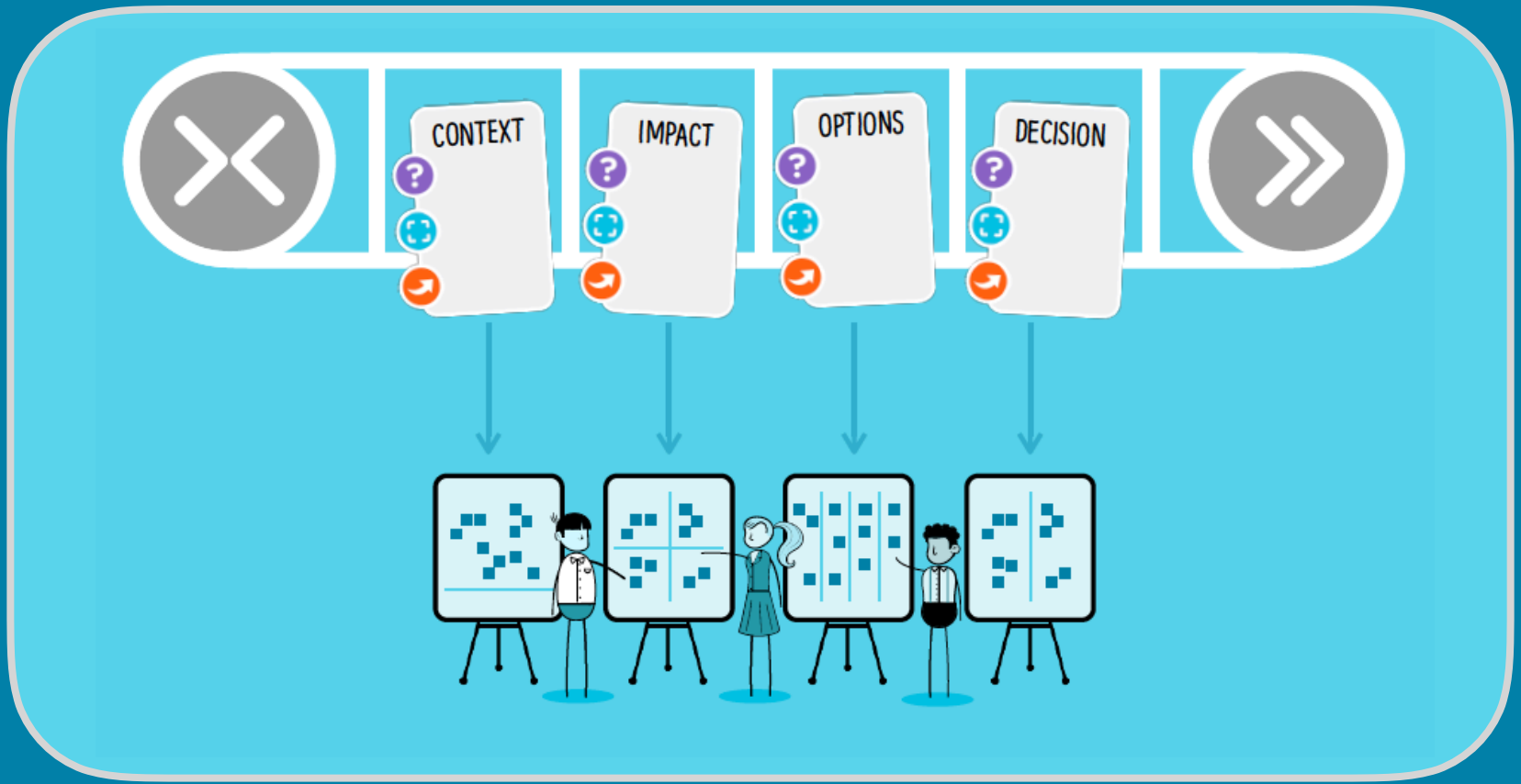
This is a *play*.

It is a time-bound course of action.
Each play has three parts:

1. Key Question →
2. Make Ideas Visible →
3. Engage with Forward Steps →

Irresolution

Resolution

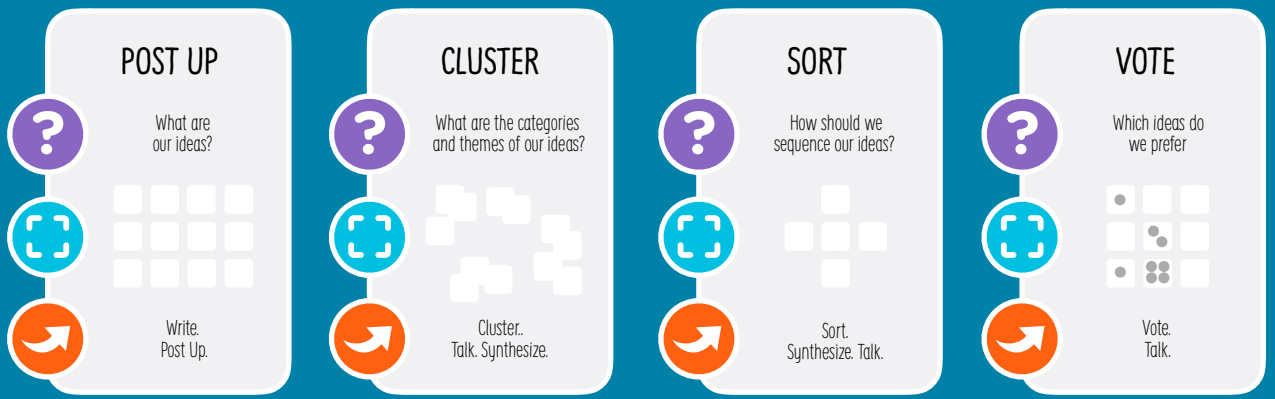


Use a single play to take a simple problem from irresolution to resolution.

For more complex problems, combine plays.

Here's a little starter pack for you.

*Use these four **essential plays** to confront a problem, enrich a conversation, or map a solution.*



You can use this series of plays by yourself or with your team to solve all kinds of problems including these:

Let's take a closer look at each one.
You can use them individually or sequentially, on your own, or with your team.

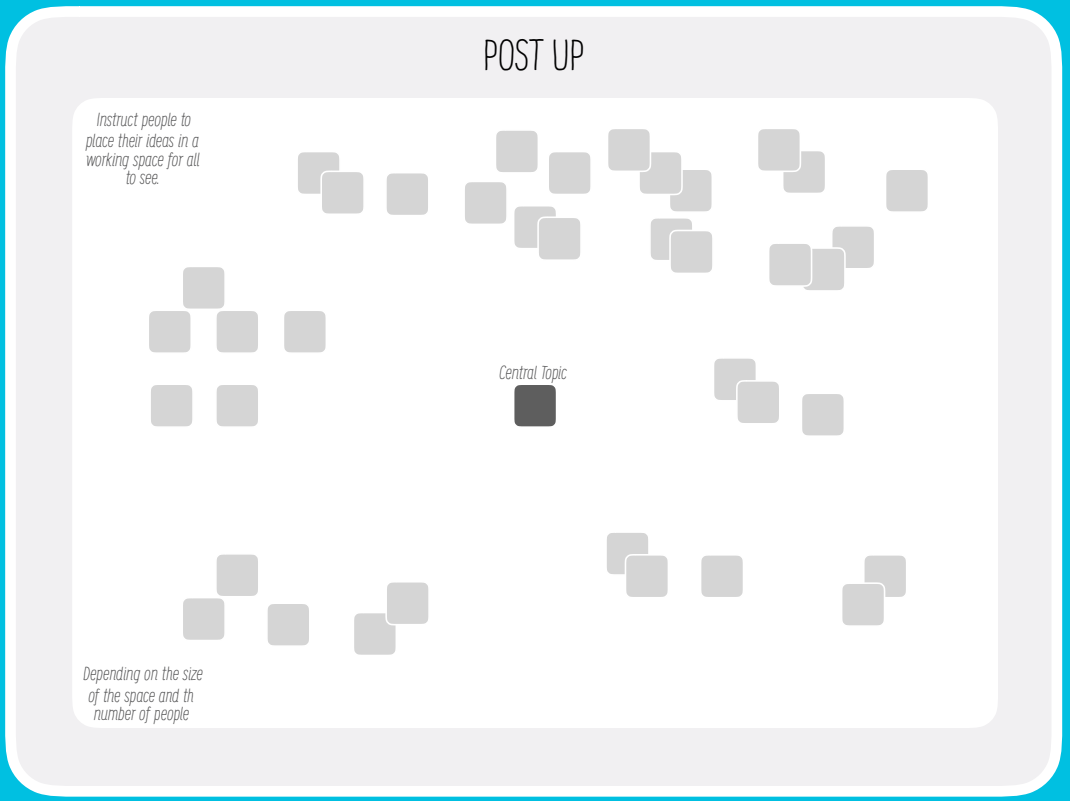
Use this series of plays to reach resolution in just a few minutes.

It's fast.
It's fair.
Everyone gets their say.

Post Up

Make ideas visible, one sticky note at a time, to see what everyone is thinking

5-10 minutes



THE PLAY

The Post Up is perhaps the most common group play. Simply invite people to silently write ideas on sticky notes and post them on a shared surface. Use these notes as a foundation for further discussion, clustering and analysis. Though simple, it's powerful, forcing people to collect their thoughts and enter them in a group space.

STEPS

1. **Define the Topic**
   Start with a framing question. This will define the topic the Post Up will explore. Pick a question that addresses a key pain or central issue.
2. **Invite and Post**
   Instruct each participant to generate several ideas that answer the question. Aim for complete thoughts, one per note, and place them on the working surface.
3. **Review and Discuss**
   Acknowledge each idea. Systematically review each note by physically pointing to it and reading it aloud. Seek clarification.
4. **Analysis**
   Often, you'll use this initial marketplace of ideas to feed into a subsequent play: a cluster, vote or sort play. It's worthwhile taking a snapshot of the pre-sorted notes with your phone.

APPLICATIONS

- The Post Up is a rapid ideation technique used in almost all playsets. The act of posting notes generates nodes in the systems model of the problem to be mapped.
- You can collect hundreds of ideas in 30 minutes or less.

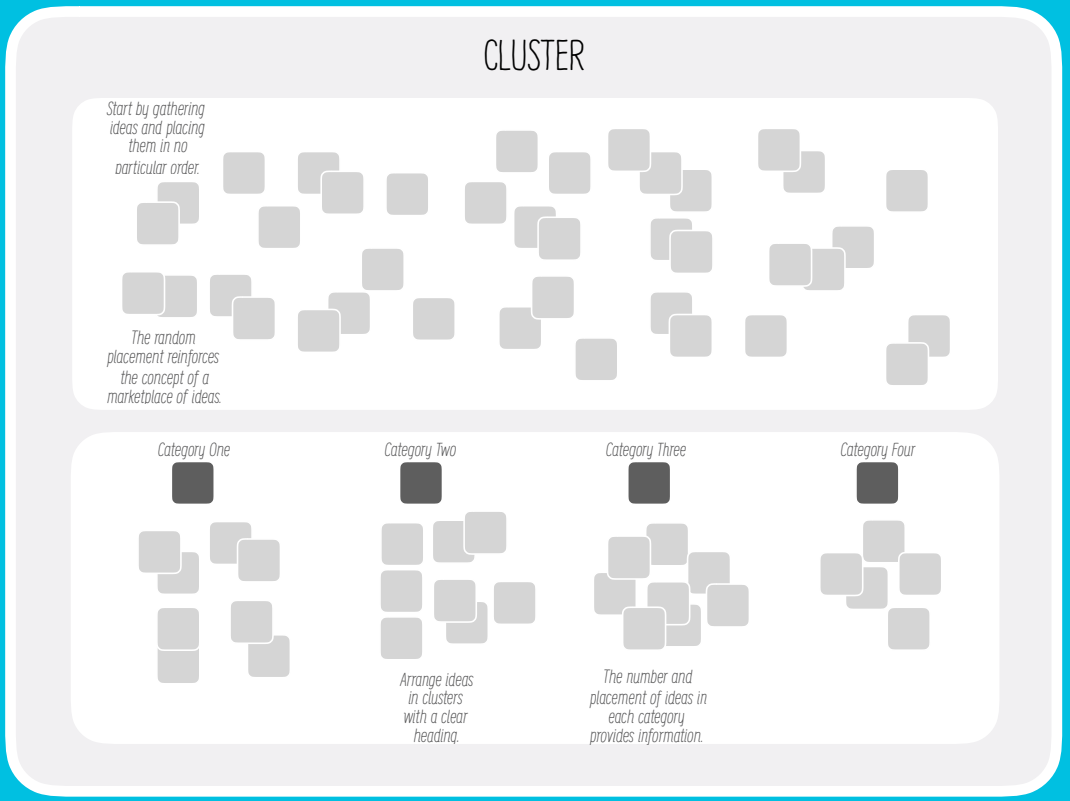
TIPS

- Get people to write on the same color of sticky note and weight of marker. This weights the ideas equally.
- Work in silence. Use silence as a tool to slow down the urge to talk out ideas and to gain status, connection and control through conversation. Instead, capture ideas visually.
- The more your team gets into the habit of posting up ideas, the more quickly they will adopt complex plays.

Cluster

Create clarity and order by arranging ideas into clear categories

5-15 minutes



THE PLAY

The Cluster play is also known as affinity mapping. It quickly gets people to arrange raw unfiltered ideas into simple categories that are discovered through the process of clustering. Use it when you need to simplify and collate a group's thoughts about a subject as well as find underlying themes and patterns.

STEPS

1. **Conduct a Post Up**
   Begin with a Post Up: instruct the group to write and places their ideas on a shared surface in no particular order. The goal in the Post Up is to gather all ideas.
2. **Cluster the Notes into Themes**
   Then, instruct participants to bring similar ideas together by moving notes with similar or related ideas close to each other. Through the process, watch as categories emerge, slowly at first, then more quickly. Whenever possible, cluster in silence. In silence, people pay closer attention to the meaning of each note.
3. **Label and Discuss**
   Once the clustering is complete, add additional sticky notes in a different color to label the category. Then discuss the meaning of the clusters.

APPLICATIONS

- Clustering is a staple design-thinking activity. It's used to find the common overlaps and big ideas. It can be used to generate topics and agenda items, problems to be solved, customer feedback, potential solutions and much more.
- You can cluster by yourself. Just write down everything on your mind in a mind dump, then cluster the ideas together into the categories that make sense to you. It's a great way to free flow your ideas.

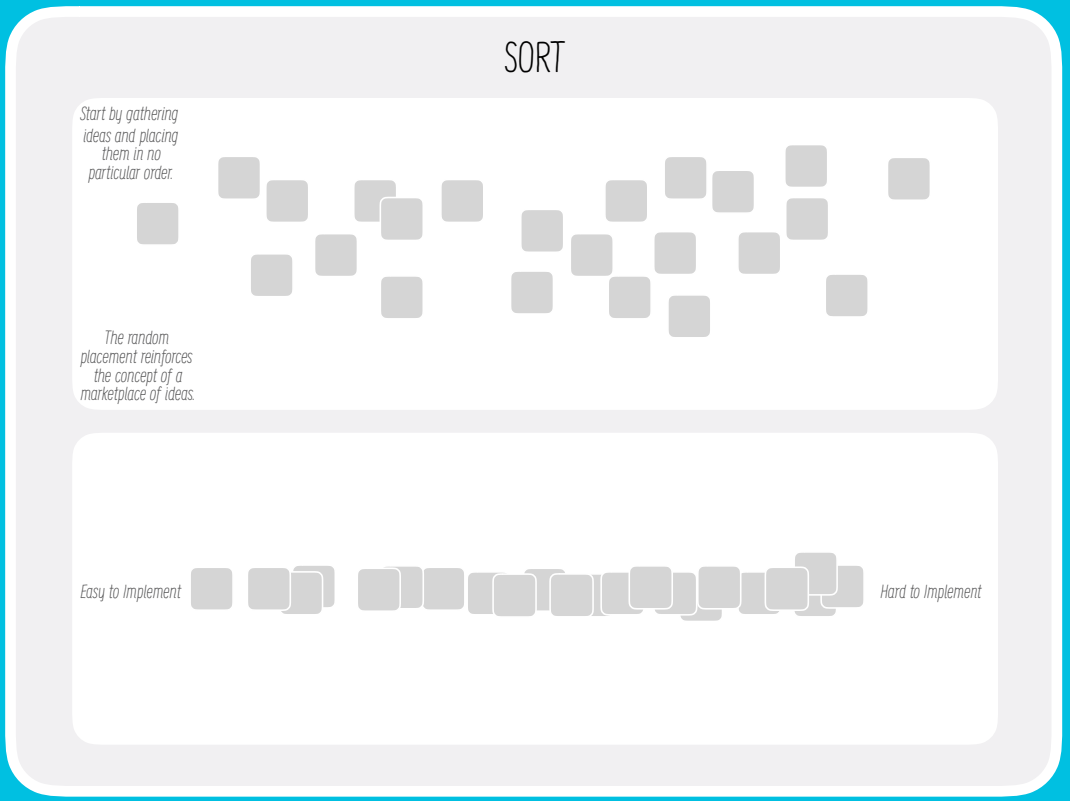
TIPS

- Use the silent sort wherever possible. The act of silently clustering ideas force people to pay closer attention to what others have written, increasing the team's cohesion and willingness to empathize with the ideas of others.

Sort

Prioritize ideas by moving them into defined territories

3-10 minutes



THE PLAY

Once ideas are posted, they often need to be prioritized. Use the Sort play to arrange notes along a gradient: importance, relevance, urgency, cost, desirability, and so forth. Sort plays are often enhanced when performed in silence. Once completed, discuss the ranking, seek explanations, if necessary, and decide if any changes need to be made.

STEPS

1. **Post Up**
   Start with a collection of nodes—cards or sticky notes—that describe a topic.
2. **Sort Along a Quality or Quantity**
   Instruct participants to rearrange the cards into an order that relevant to the topic your exploring. Common qualities include cost, importance, priority, among others. But you can pick any sorting criteria.
3. **Review the Impact**
   Once the notes are arranged, discuss the implications of the new arrangement. How do the participants feel about the sequence? Continue to iterate until the team or decision-maker is comfortable with the result.

APPLICATIONS

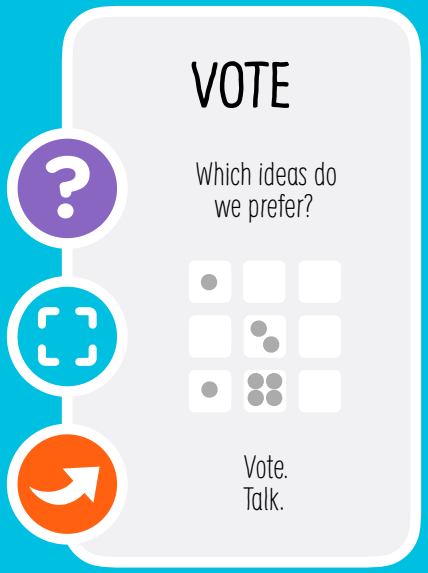
- The Sort play can be used anytime you have many nodes to be organize. It takes more effort than a simple clustering play because when sorting, participants must evaluate each node against the others.
- Sorting can take place along a line, or within groups or clusters in a complex map.

TIPS

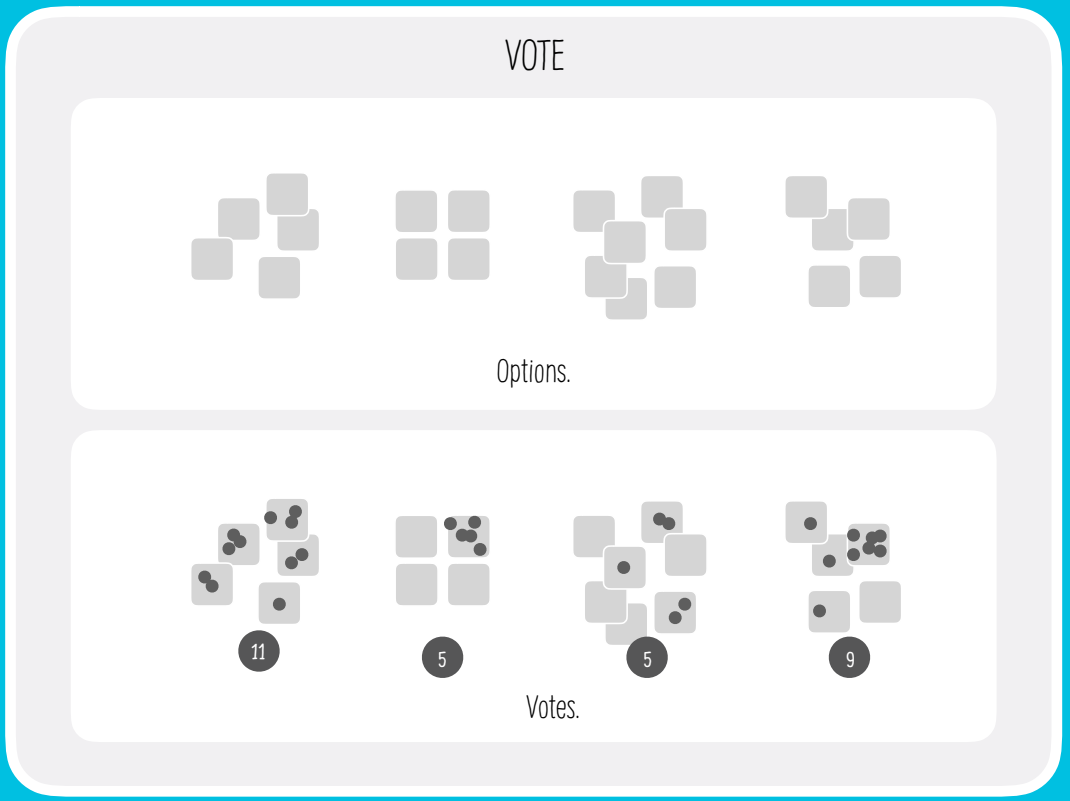
- In a physical card sort, cards are generated in advance. Give pre-made cards with words—for example, values, principles, emotions, superpowers—and direct the participants to place the cards into piles that answer the question.

Vote

Identify preferred options by highlight the nodes that make sense



3-10 minutes



THE PLAY

Dot Voting guides a team to quickly prioritize and converge on the preferred options. The play makes idea selection transparent, collaborative and democratic, building on the collective wisdom and experience of the team.

STEPS

1. **Display the Options**
   Begin by ensuring that each participant can see the options and that they understand the meaning of the options. Set a clear voting space for each node.
2. **Distribute Voting Dots**
   Ensure the participants have an equal number of voting dots. Typically, five dots work for many scenarios, but select what makes sense for your issue.
3. **Vote Mentally. Vote Physically.**
   Instruct the participants to make their selections. Once everyone has made their selection mentally, instruct them to place their dots on the voting spaces.
4. **Review and Discuss**
   After the voting is completed, tally up the totals, write the number of votes for each option and discuss the impact moving forward.

APPLICATIONS

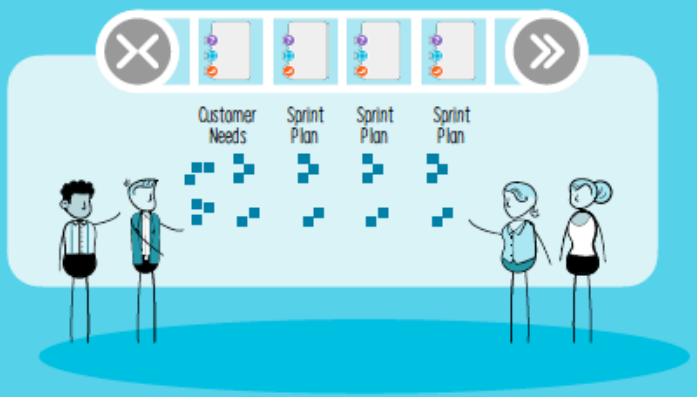
- Generally, when generating ideas and options, there are too many for a group to move forward with. To pare the number down, use the Dot Vote play for the group to collaboratively agree on the ideas to continue to work with.
- The Dot Vote can be used in many situations such as selecting meeting topics, key problems, break-out sessions, ideas to pursue, preferred logos, among others.

TIPS

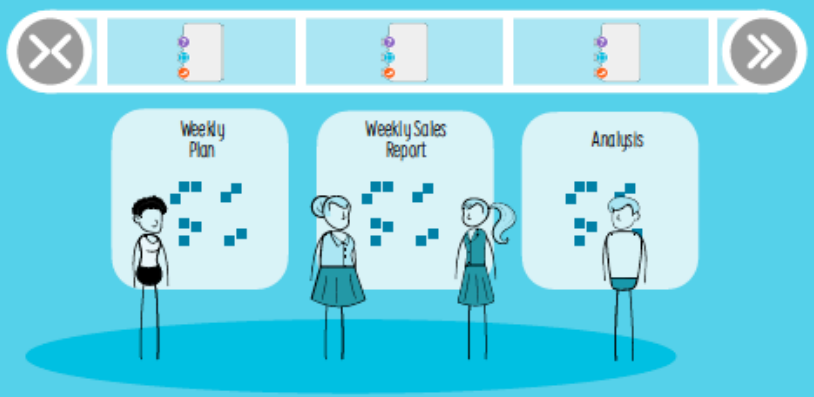
- Avoid the bandwagon effect by getting people to make their choices before placing of their dots. Without this instruction, people will often build on others votes.
- You may give special instructions such as don't vote for your own idea. Or you can place as many dots on an idea as you'd like if you feel especially passionate about it.

A Common Operating System of Collaboration

Once you know the principles and plays, you can apply them to countless situations.



Agile Planning Session



Marketing Review

Strategy Update

Project Management

Wicked Problem Solving is:

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A movement

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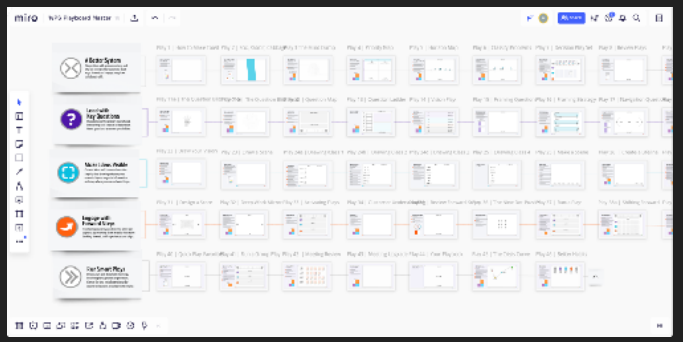

Miro board with 46 plays for you to work through your own problems

Workbook

Playbook

4 decks of cards

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