

Extracted from:

Liftoff, Second Edition

Start and Sustain Successful Agile Teams

This PDF file contains pages extracted from *Liftoff, Second Edition*, published by the Pragmatic Bookshelf. For more information or to purchase a paperback or PDF copy, please visit <http://www.pragprog.com>.

Note: This extract contains some colored text (particularly in code listing). This is available only in online versions of the books. The printed versions are black and white. Pagination might vary between the online and printed versions; the content is otherwise identical.

Copyright © 2016 The Pragmatic Programmers, LLC.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior consent of the publisher.

The Pragmatic Bookshelf

Raleigh, North Carolina

The
Pragmatic
Programmers

Liftoff

Second
Edition

Start and Sustain
Successful Agile Teams



Diana Larsen
and Ainsley Nies
edited by Katharine Dvorak

Liftoff, Second Edition

Start and Sustain Successful Agile Teams

Diana Larsen

Ainsley Nies

The Pragmatic Bookshelf

Raleigh, North Carolina



Many of the designations used by manufacturers and sellers to distinguish their products are claimed as trademarks. Where those designations appear in this book, and The Pragmatic Programmers, LLC was aware of a trademark claim, the designations have been printed in initial capital letters or in all capitals. The Pragmatic Starter Kit, The Pragmatic Programmer, Pragmatic Programming, Pragmatic Bookshelf, PragProg and the linking *g* device are trademarks of The Pragmatic Programmers, LLC.

Every precaution was taken in the preparation of this book. However, the publisher assumes no responsibility for errors or omissions, or for damages that may result from the use of information (including program listings) contained herein.

Our Pragmatic books, screencasts, and audio books can help you and your team create better software and have more fun. Visit us at <https://pragprog.com>.

The team that produced this book includes:

Katharine Dvorak (editor)
Potomac Indexing, LLC (index)
Eileen Cohen (copyedit)
Gilson Graphics (layout)
Janet Furlow (producer)

For sales, volume licensing, and support, please contact support@pragprog.com.

For international rights, please contact rights@pragprog.com.

Copyright © 2016 The Pragmatic Programmers, LLC.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior consent of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN-13: 978-1-68050-163-6

Encoded using the finest acid-free high-entropy binary digits.

Book version: P1.0—June 2016

Design a Great Liftoff for Your Team

As each development effort is unique, every liftoff is unique. As a planning-group member, design your liftoff for the combination of attributes at hand. Consider the nature of the product, the nature of the work, and the people. Take into account the knowns and unknowns. Think about the work environment and the circumstances driving delivery.

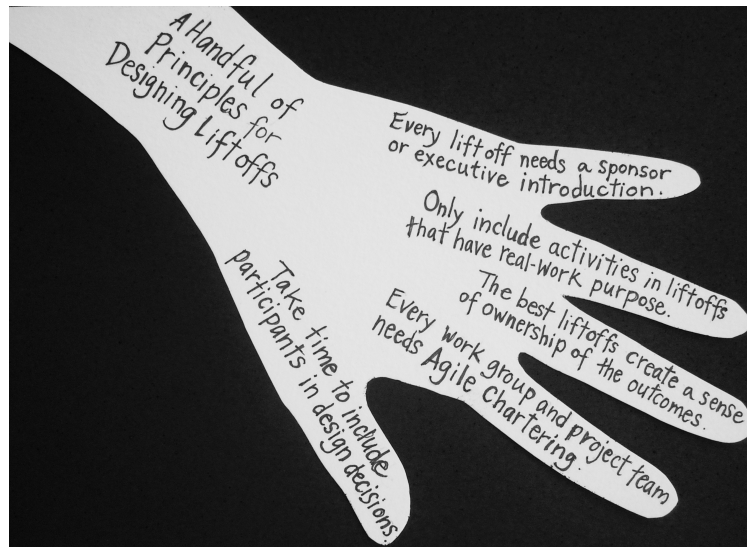
Here's where it gets tricky and you'll get agile when you're working on a liftoff design. There's no cookie-cutter approach, standard recipe, or best-practice template. Your team characteristics will drive many of the design decisions.

In this chapter, you'll find effective (not best) practices. We've included practices based on our experiences of what's worked for many teams, including the five most important design principles that any planning committee should follow to design a great liftoff:

- Every liftoff needs a sponsor or executive introduction.
- Only include activities in liftoffs that have real work purpose.
- The best liftoffs create a sense of ownership of the outcomes.
- Every work group and project team needs agile chartering.
- Take time to include participants in design decisions.

Initial Design Considerations

In [Chapter 1, *Plan for a Successful Liftoff*, on page ?](#), you spent time planning your liftoff. You considered what you want to achieve. When you design a liftoff, your planning outcomes guide format choices. Planning influences how you develop the flow. You design how to start and end, and make other format choices that fit in between.



Deciding on a Format

Keeping the [The Five Rules of Learning, on page ?](#) in mind, select a format for your liftoff. An effective format depends on the combination of attributes you'll need to manage. The number of teams and size of the stakeholder group have a primary influence. Commonly used liftoff formats include:

- A single meeting lasting from a half day to two days
- A series of events spread over a week or more, usually including training or coaching sessions, as well as initial project information and chartering
- A meeting focused solely on building a draft charter, which can occur in a single day-long session or be broken into several parts over a few days

Design Principle



The best liftoffs create a sense of ownership of the outcomes. Create a liftoff design in which all participants engage as owners in the process. Their sense of ownership helps sustain commitment to outcomes. It influences the work until final delivery.

Developing the Agenda

Your agenda should include a good mix of informational topics, activities, and social events. Create a smooth sequence of events. Each agenda item should build on the information and understandings that emerge from the

previous one. Understanding the relationship among liftoff agenda items helps ensure that the agenda sequence works. It establishes tone, creates good information flow, and prepares everyone to begin work.


Select design elements to establish a rich atmosphere for effective communication. Base your selections on your planning group’s intention for the liftoff. Review your answers to the planning questions in [Planning the Liftoff, on page ?](#) before beginning a detailed design of your liftoff activities. Your answers to those questions will provide direction for your design. They’ll give you ideas for how to handle aspects of your agenda.

Table 2 maps the planning questions to each aspect of your liftoff agenda. You’ll include content topics and activities to start and end the liftoff. Add activities for team chartering, training, and work planning. Also include team building and social events, as needed.

These Planning Questions Affect...	These Liftoff Design Decisions
Is this a single-team product or service, single team project, or a multiteam program or initiative?	Starting
	Ending
	Logistics
What will create the best starting point for everyone involved?	Setting intention
	Design flow
	Content topics
To start well, what will the team (or teams) need?	Content topics
	Participants
	Logistics
Whose support is essential to the success of our effort? Which key stakeholders should we invite?	Participants
How much of the liftoff will the executives and sponsors attend?	Starting
	Ending
How will I bring all the team members together for the liftoff? If I can’t, how will I come as close as possible to meeting face-to-face?	Participants
	Logistics
	Technical support
Will the team need new skills?	Training
Will the team need new knowledge?	Content Topics

These Planning Questions Affect...	These Liftoff Design Decisions
Where do we anticipate challenges in communication and information flow? How can we begin to address those during the liftoff?	Activities
Have we identified all the right team members for cross-functional work?	Participants Activities
What are the known issues or constraints? What are the known unknowns?	Activities
What tone do we want to set?	Facilities Social time Behaviors to model
Is it likely that new information or ideas will emerge during the liftoff? If so, how open should we be to adapting our plan for the liftoff?	Activities

Table 2—Design Decisions

Design Principle	
	Only include activities in the liftoff that have a real work purpose. Liftoff participants engage best when they focus on relevant activities. Choose agenda items related to achieving the liftoff intentions and outcomes.

Designing the Start

Begin your liftoff with an introduction. Welcome participants and reiterate the reason everyone is present. Review the meeting agenda. Describe meeting norms for the event. Show support with statements from executives and sponsors.

Establish the tone with activities that reinforce your intention right from the start, and maintain a consistent tone throughout the event. For a mission-critical effort, you might want to start with a serious, no-nonsense approach. Alternatively, a product or service that relies on innovation or disruptive technologies needs people to think in new ways. For these liftoffs, use a playful, creative tone.

You affect tone in several ways. The way you frame the invitation, the way you introduce the various topics and activities, and the activities you choose all affect the tone. The following sections describe various activities that set the tone from the start.

Introductions

The people attending your liftoff need to get to know one another to work together. If everyone is well acquainted, you won't need introductions. When people don't know one another, small groups or pairs can exchange names and job titles. Find an introduction activity that fits the tone you want to set. Relevant icebreakers that relate to the matter at hand can work well here. You don't need to do a deep dive, because people will get to know one another more through the other liftoff activities.

Sponsor Statement of Support

Ask your executive and business sponsors to say a few words. They can describe their support for the liftoff and why it's time to do this work. They can also emphasize why it's important to the business and its internal functioning or customers. Their presence underscores the importance of the work. Executives' expressions of appreciation for those who will do the work can have a powerful impact.

Design Principle



Every liftoff needs a sponsor or executive introduction. Every team needs to hear directly and unambiguously from the top. Team members need to know they have organizational support and commitment for their effort. If your sponsor can't make time to show up, maybe the product launch isn't a top priority, after all. Their presence or absence sends a message.

One Word Check-In

Ask each person to say a word or short phrase that summarizes that participant's state of mind or attitude at the beginning of the liftoff. For example, you might hear them say things like "concerned," "excited," "still tired from the last project," "waiting to hear more," or "enthusiastic!" This works best with groups of fewer than twenty people.

Speaker Q&A

Bring in a domain expert or a customer expert to give a short briefing. That briefing tells the team how this work fits within the business direction or customer use. Plan to follow it with a few minutes of clarifying questions and answers.

Graphic Check-In

Use a graphic check-in to gauge team members' assumptions at the start. Here's a sample activity: cover each table with white or light-colored paper (nonsticky flip chart pages will work). Provide a set of colored markers or crayons, stickers, and other drawing supplies for each table group. As people enter, ask them to create a graphic image of what they currently know (or think they know) about the product and how they'll approach the work. Generally, people have a difficult time recognizing their assumptions. Asking about what they *know*—instead of assumptions—makes it easier to have a discussions about the lists in their heads, even if their understanding is based on rumors or hearsay. Allow a short time for table groups to work together. After other introductory activities, ask each group to show its drawings and explain them. You can also organize a 3D check-in, using modeling clay, pipe cleaners, building toys, or other supplies to create three-dimensional models.

Retrospective

One way to start the liftoff is by looking back. Retrospectives can provide an effective way to start a new effort. Often, we enrich the liftoff agenda with an initial retrospective. We gather the wisdom from past efforts with the focus of making this team the *best* so far.

Retrospective activities work for newly formed teams, too. Members draw from a considerable body of collaborative experience. These team members can compare experiences and choose the new team culture they'd like to cultivate. When most team members don't know one another (or haven't worked together), they can still share past experiences. They can still learn from one another's history. It can help strangers become better acquainted and begin team forming. If all the team members are new to the organization or the area of practice, they may have fewer relevant work experiences to share.

What Is a Retrospective?

An agile retrospective is a group process in which participants review their *past* through the lens of their *present* understanding to influence their *future* behavior. Agile teams rely on retrospectives as a primary continuous learning and improvement technique. Retrospective leaders guide a team through a series of group processes or activities. They gather data about the past, generate insights to make meaning of the data, and then make decisions about the team's actions going forward. For more on leading retrospectives with agile teams, see [Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams Great \[DS06\]](#) by Esther Derby and Diana Larsen.

Futurespective

Another way to start a liftoff is to look forward—far forward. In futurespective activities, participants imagine a desired future in detail. Then they work backward to identify behaviors and actions in the near term that would get them there. A futurespective activity is described in *[The Retrospective Handbook: A Guide for Agile Teams \[KL13\]](#)*.

.....