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The Dream Team Nightmare

Boost Team Productivity Using Agile Techniques

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The
Pragmatic
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The Dream Team NIGHTMARE



Boost Team
Productivity
Using Agile
Techniques



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To Snow Dragon

For making dreams come true

Think Negative

The first exercise is to collect data. “We want to know, what sucks about this project?” you ask out loud.

Rebecca lets out a gasp, while Matt chuckles. “Where do I start?” he replies.

You hand out packs of red sticky notes, asking everyone to write down one answer per sticky note. Using red sticky notes is an easy and explicit way of distinguishing problems from tasks.

“Retrospective best practice says that we should always start with positive comments,” interjects Roger.

You smile and suggest that everyone make this an exception. “You’ve got two minutes. Ready, steady, go!” You ding the bell, and the race toward continuous improvement begins.

The reason you’ve chosen to begin by brainstorming negatives about the project is because the negatives are clearly at the forefront of most people’s minds. Externalizing the negatives early on in the process frees up people’s minds to think creatively about the future.

Continue with the adventure [on page 7](#).

True Lies

After some rapid brainstorming, everyone, including Jason, has a pile of sticky notes with scribbles in front of them. Next, everyone takes a turn coming to the front of the room to read out his or her sticky notes and then stick them up, one by one. Duplicate sticky notes get stacked together as they appear.

After twenty intense minutes, the team takes a step back. For once, everyone is silent as the team contemplates the red collage and what it represents.

“This project really sucks,” says Ben quietly.

“It’s what I’ve been saying all along!” says Roger with a sigh of relief. During his one-on-one with you, Roger had mentioned his frustration at being part of a failing project. Now that that frustration is clearly visible and shared by others, the team can choose to do something about it. Or not.

“Most important of all, those red pieces of paper combine to tell our team’s story,” says Nancy. It seems Nancy’s nostalgia has the last word on this occasion.

Continue with the adventure [on page 8](#).

Think Smart

It's time to move on to the fun bit. You ask people to form pairs, ideally with someone they don't know very well.

"That's stupid," says Jason, "we've been working together for over a year—for some of us, almost a decade."

"Never mind. I want to get to know you better," says Rebecca. You recall Rebecca had mentioned that she'd known Jason for some years now, and it seems that she and Jason are already good friends.

You continue. "Your mission as a whole team is to ensure there's at least one improvement action for each problem or complaint," you say. "In pairs, select someone else's problems to solve. Pick any problem, so long as it's not your pair's. Then write down one improvement action per green sticky note," you say while handing out packs of green. "Put the green sticky note next to its corresponding red sticky note when you're done."

You give the team fifteen minutes. To pace the exercise, you will ding the bell every five minutes.

"What if a problem's not solvable? There are plenty of those," says Jason.

"Come with me. My son says I eat impossible for breakfast!" says Rebecca as she takes Jason by the arm.

"Ready, steady, go!" you say. Ding! goes the bell.

"That must be the sound of continuous improvement," says Matt to William with a chuckle.

Continue with the adventure [on page 9](#).

Time Out

The bell rings. Time's up for identifying improvement actions. For each problem sticky note, there's now at least one corresponding green improvement sticky note on the board. And there are a few more smiles around the room.

You suggest a ten-minute break. The group disperses. Most people head over to the water cooler and coffee machine. Matt stays behind.

"You're doing a good job," he says. Matt tells you that the team's tried doing retrospectives themselves, and even got people from other teams to help facilitate. Yet no matter how hard they tried, the improvement actions never got done. That's why they stopped doing them altogether.

You nod and then say, "Thanks for the feedback and information, Matt. Meanwhile, I need a break!"

Do you:

- [get yourself a coffee from the break room on page 10,](#)
or
- [head over to the water cooler, and then return to tidy up the room on page 11?](#)

Treasure Map

People begin to return from their break. Ash, Roger, and Rebecca are exchanging ideas on how they can reduce the number of defects.

“Who’s going to make all the improvements happen?” says Jason, wedged firmly in his seat, arms crossed.

“That depends,” you reply. “We don’t have to decide yet.”

To complete sorting through the sticky notes, you co-create a process map with the team. You ask the team to describe the different steps a requirement goes through from idea conception to reaching the end user.

You write down each step on an index card as the team describes the process, and you stick them up in a horizontal row to visualize the current process. You then add arrows to link the steps together. Here are the process steps:

1. Requirements gathering
2. Production of test scripts
3. Design and architecture
4. Development
5. Dev testing
6. Sys testing
7. User acceptance testing
8. Release preparation
9. Release sign-off
10. Release

Then you ask the team to sort the problem-improvement clusters by problem according to the corresponding process step. This will show everyone where the problem hotspots are and how improvements can impact the existing process. The team has ten minutes.

Ding! goes the bell.

Continue with the adventure [on page 12](#).

Visible Impact

The team steps back to take a good look at the latest incarnation of their collage. It's so quiet you can hear a pin drop.

You ask the team to describe what they see.

Jason is the first to speak. "It hasn't reduced the number of things we need to fix."

"Jason's right. But arranging the sticky notes by the process steps helps us to more clearly see the dependencies and the impact of the improvement actions on the process itself," says Roger.

"It's also a better-looking piece of modern art now that it has a splash of green on it," says William. His comment reminds you of your conversation about his favorite hobby, painting with acrylics and using recycled materials.

Then there is an unexpected pause as Matt shuffles his feet. He coughs and then says, "It's the first time we've all worked as a team for a long time."

Continue with the adventure [on page ?](#).