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## Scrum Trainers Gathering (2/4): The Ball Point Game

Posted by Kane Mar on April 6, 2008 at 9:00 p.m.

In part <sup>1</sup> of my report on the Trainers Gathering, I gave a summary of the events that occurred. In this post, I'd like to discuss one of the exercises that was demonstrated. Boris<sup>2</sup> Ball Point game is a fun and exciting way to explore process flow. The rules are quite simple and the more people you have, the more exciting it can be. We played with about 25 people, but it would be an excellent game for large groups up to approximately 50 people.

The objective of the Ball Point game is to get as many balls through the team as possible within two minutes. Each ball must be touched at least once by every team member and must end with the same person with whom it began. After two minutes, the team is allowed an additional minute to discuss the process and how it could be improved. The game is played a total of five times.

Initially, we (the Scrum Trainers) had difficulty getting a single ball through the system, but, after adapting our process, the interactions became more predictable and we started to make visible progress. It took four cycles for us to reach a point where we were both productive and having fun.

The fifth (and final) iteration was a challenge Sprint. Boris challenged us to get as many balls through the system as possible. In order to fully optimize the process, we rearranged the team and gave it a try. The final number was suitably impressive, given that only 15 minutes before we had difficulty getting a single ball through the system.

This rearrangement of the system leads to one of the more interesting points that Boris makes when running the game. That is, all systems have a natural velocity and if we want to increase this natural velocity, we need to change the boundaries of the system.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://danube.com/blog/nickw/report\\_from\\_the\\_scrum\\_trainers\\_gathering\\_1\\_4](http://danube.com/blog/nickw/report_from_the_scrum_trainers_gathering_1_4)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.scrumalliance.org/profiles/30-boris-gloger>

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## Playing the Game

In order to play the Ball Point game, you'll need a large open space with enough room for everyone to stand. You'll also need about 20 brightly colored tennis balls and you may want a whiteboard to do the debriefing. We play the game in the following way:

1. Provide an overview of the game and the rules.
  - o Everyone is part of one big team.
  - o Each ball must have air-time.
  - o Each ball must be touched at least once by every team member.
  - o Balls cannot be passed to your direct neighbor to your immediate left or right.
  - o Each ball must return to the same person who introduced it into the system.
  - o There are a total of five iterations.
2. Allow the team two minutes of preparation time to determine how they will organize themselves.
3. Get an estimate from the team of how many balls they can pass through the system.
4. Run a two-minute iteration.
5. Allow the team one minute to discuss how to improve the process.
6. Repeat for five iterations. Make the fifth iteration a challenge. If you need to, make up some ridiculous statistic such as "The world record is 150 points. Can you beat that?"

At the conclusion of the exercise, debrief for five to ten minutes. There are a number of interesting points that are worth talking about. Firstly, it's worth mentioning the Deming Cycle<sup>3</sup>. Secondly, it's worth pointing out that every system has a natural velocity. And finally, it's worth discussing "flow"<sup>4</sup> and the necessary criteria for it. Boris' full documentation of the game can be found here:

<http://kanemar.files.wordpress.com/2008/03/theballpointgame.pdf>.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PDCA>

<sup>4</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flow\\_%28psychology%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flow_%28psychology%29)