The Silence of Agile

Protegra

Agile2012
The Silence of Agile
Silence of the Agilists

“I didn’t think you could silence those types...”
Think about what you already know about brainstorming.

As a group:

1. Choose a scribe.
2. Write down what you know about brainstorming.
3. Write down questions you want answered about brainstorming.
Steve Rogalsky

@SROGALSKY

WINNIPEGAGILIST.BLOGSPOT.COM

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At Protegra we employ agile and lean techniques to give our clients an advantage – to leap out of the bowl.

info@protegra.com
blog.protegra.com
www.protegra.com
Most Brainstorming sessions start with sincerity

“I just want to get feedback, how is it going, is there a better way to do this?”
Most Brainstorming sessions assume...

- ‘Throwing ideas around’ will help generate even greater and more innovative ideas.
- Brainstorming = Innovation
Most Brainstorming sessions assume...

- If you have an idea you’ll say it.
- Attendance = Participation
Most Brainstorming sessions assume...

- If you ask people to give their ideas, they will.
- Inviting Responses = Collaboration
Are those assumptions correct?
Some People Participate Actively
Some don’t
If that is the case...

“Any time people come together in a meeting, we’re not necessarily getting the best ideas; we’re just getting the ideas of the best talkers” – Susan Cain
what about Idea Generation?

An Experiment
Learning Outcomes

1. New Pet Peeve
2. Why/How Silence?
3. New Ideas
Why do we brainstorm?

1. To Innovate
2. To Create Great Teams
Stepping Back

If that is what we believe, is brainstorming by the loud & few acceptable?
Stepping Back

If that is what we believe, is restricting our ideas to pink elephants acceptable?
“Turns out the way your team is brainstorming is probably all wrong!”

- BusinessInsider.com referencing a joint University of Texas and Texas A & M University Study from 2010
The Science

(Number of Ideas Generated)

4 Individuals working separately
4 Individuals working anonymously together

(from “Collaborative Fixation: Effects on others’ ideas on brainstorming”)
The Science

(Variety of Ideas Generated)

4 Individuals working separately
4 Individuals working anonymously together

(from “Collaborative Fixation: Effects on others’ ideas on brainstorming”)

Diagram showing the variety of ideas generated by individuals working separately and anonymously together over time.
“supports the notion that exchanging ideas in a group leads members to become fixated on their peers’ ideas, thus reducing the number of categories explored.”

(from “Collaborative Fixation: Effects on others’ ideas on brainstorming”)
CLASS of 1958

The Science

Crouse Romancier Uhr Farrar Rosentreter Vimmerstedt Haalck Weetman
Abarr Tagudar Stephens Barres Choong Kurmes Rogers Smith Johnston
Makel Knudtson Yoshimura Benseler Barker Hasso Brown
Lawson Keniston Darling Sonner Dowdle Bell
Brainstorming didn’t unleash the potential of the group, but rather made each individual less creative.”

Yale University – Study (1958)
The Science

Why the Fixation?

“The Emory University neuroscientist Gregory Berns found that when we take a stance different from the group’s, we activate the amygdala, a small organ in the brain associated with the fear of rejection. Professor Berns calls this ‘the pain of independence.’”

- Susan Cain
What about Group Think?

“The more charismatic the leader, the worse that Group Think is. No one wants to contradict the leader”

- Dr. Jason Ediger - psycologist
The Science

What about Debate?

(2003 Study at the University of California by professor Charlan Nemeth)
The Science

What about Debate?

- Teams that were instructed to debate the ideas ... “were the most creative – generating nearly twenty percent more ideas”

(2003 Study at the University of California by professor Charlan Nemeth)
The Science

Why is debate useful? Consider this free association example:

- Say the first thing you think of when I say...

GREEN

- Nearly everyone says...

(2003 Study at the University of California by professor Charlan Nemeth)
The Science

How do we get past this layer of predictability?

(2003 Study at the University of California by professor Charlan Nemeth)
The Science

“being exposed to [alternate views] expands our creative potential.”

“After hearing someone shout out an errant answer, we work to understand it, which causes us to reassess our initial assumptions and try out new perspectives.”

(2003 Study at the University of California by professor Charlan Nemeth)
“Decades of research have consistently shown that brainstorming groups think of far fewer ideas than the same number of people who work alone and later pool their ideas.”
- Keith Sawyer – psychologist at Washington University about Brainstorming

“This finding mirrors patterns found in previous research (Coskun, Paulus, Brown, & Sherwood, 2000) and suggests that brainstorming sessions might be optimal if a group session follows an individual session.”
- (from “Collaborative Fixation: Effects on others’ ideas on brainstorming”)

The Science
The Science: Summary

Individual > Group for Generating Ideas

- Ironic Process Theory
- Fixation
- Amygdala
- Group Think

Group > Individual for Processing/Expanding Ideas

- Debate spurs new perspectives
So?

How then should we brainstorm?

1. Think about this presentation.

Think about what you learned about brainstorming.

In silence, write down everything you learned about brainstorming (one item per index card).
So?

How then should we brainstorm?

2. Alternate reading your ideas out loud to your group. Place your idea in the middle once you’ve read it.

During this round, do:

• Ask questions.
• Write new ideas as you think of them.
• Remove Duplicates

Continue until all ideas have been read.
Comparing the Steps to the Science

Steps
1. Prompt (facilitator)
2. Gather (silence)
3. Process (out loud)

Science
1. Prompt w/o Fixation
2. Generate in silence
3. Process out loud
Stepping Back

Why do we brainstorm?
1. To Innovate
2. To Create Great Teams
The Science Just Might Be Secondary...
Silent Brainstorming encourages:

– Giving up power.
– Handing out ownership.
– Spreading around responsibility.
– Creating engagement.
– Building better teams.
Silent Brainstorming Encourages:

- Giving up power.
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The Silence of Agile

Back to our topic...
Retrospectives

1. Prompt
2. Gather *(silence)*
3. Discuss *(out loud)*
4. Vote *(silence)*
Speed Boat Exercise

1. Prompt
2. Gather (silence)
3. Discuss (out loud)
Agile Chartering

1. Prompt
2. Gather (silence)
3. Discuss (out loud)
4. Group (silence)
5. Name (out loud)
Risk Assessment

1. **Prompt**
2. **Gather** *(silence)*
3. **Discuss/Place** *(out loud)*
User Story Mapping

1. Prompt
2. Gather (silence)
3. Discuss (out loud)
4. Group (silence)
5. Name (out loud)
Generating User Stories in Silence

1. Prompt
2. Write a Story *(silence)*
3. Write part of a Story & Pass *(silence)*
4. Write part of a Story & Pass but in reverse *(silence)*
Planning Poker

1. Prompt
2. Vote \((\text{silence})\)
3. Discuss \((\text{out loud})\)
4. \(<\text{Repeat}>\)
Planning Poker Party

1. Individual Placement (silence)
2. Group Placement (silence)
3. Discussion
UX Design Studio

1. Prompt
2. Draw *(silence)*
3. Pitch / Debate *(out loud)*
4. <Repeat>
Lean Coffee

1. Prompt
2. Write Post-its (silence)
3. Discuss
1. Prompt
2. Build (individual)
3. Share / Discuss
Time to Practice

As groups, we’ll perform a brief mid-Conference Retrospective
Time to Practice

Prompt: Based on the conference so far, I wish the following could be done differently
Time to Practice

• Gather (silence)
• Discuss/Place/Group (out loud)
• Vote (silence)
In Closing

To innovate and build great teams, your technique matters!

1. Generate in silence
2. Process out loud

Steve Rogalsky

Thanks!
Questions?
Credits

• Collaborative Fixation: Effects on others’ ideas on brainstorming
  – http://articles.businessinsider.com/2012-01-04/strategy/30587996_1_brainstorming-creative-ideas-fixation

• The liberating role of conflict in group creativity: A study in two countries

• Susan Cain articles:
  – http://www.fastcodesign.com/1668930/the-brainstorming-process-is-bs-but-can-we-rework-it

• JFK Story

• Jonah Lehrer article:
  – http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/01/30/120130fa_fact_lehrer?currentPage=1

• Books:
  – Collaboration Explained – Jean Tabaka
Silent Examples

• Generic Silent Brainstorming
  – http://winnipegagilist.blogspot.ca/2012/01/silent-brainstorming.html
• Planning Poker
• Planning Poker Party
• UX Design Studio
  – http://winnipegagilist.blogspot.ca/2011/03/team-ownership-through-ux-design-studio.html
• Agile Chartering
  – http://winnipegagilist.blogspot.ca/2012/02/agile-chartering-agile-documentation.html
• Speed Boat
• Remember the Future
• Retrospectives
• User Story Mapping
  – http://winnipegagilist.blogspot.ca/2012/03/how-to-create-user-story-map.html
• Generating User Stories in Silence
• LEGO Serious Play
• Lean Coffee
  – http://wiki.limitedwipsociety.org/display/consortwiki/Running+a+Lean+Coffee