Shape Point Game

The purpose of this game is a drop-in replacement for the Ball Point Game when teaching Agile concepts in a virtual environment. It requires students to be able to use a common drawing tool to work such as the whiteboard in Zoom or a Google Jamboard.

Rules

Split the students into groups of at least 3, preferably 5-6.

The purpose is to make points by drawing a diagram as many times as you can in a minute. Each iteration will consist of 3 parts: planning, execution, and retrospective.

Planning: students in their groups (use Breakout room features if possible) discuss their plan for how to work together. At the end of each planning session they owe the instructor an estimate as to how many points they can get in a minute of execution.

Execution: during execution all groups work on the same board, divided into sections. Rules for execution are:

1. A different person must draw each of the three shapes in a diagram

2. 1 point for each diagram, consisting of the three shapes

3. You must draw the shape in your area of the board

4. Only free-hand tools are allowed
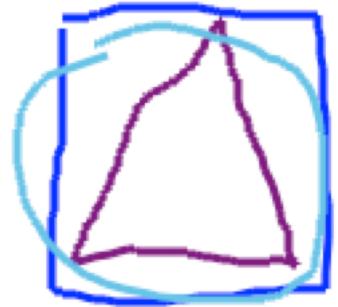
Teams get 1-minute to execute their drawings.

Retrospective: once execution is complete, have the teams discuss how they could improve in the next round.

Variations

I typically do 4 rounds:

1) Their first attempt. None are likely to do well. Make sure they understand the rules and haven't violated any of them during the demo

2) Give them a chance to improve

3) Introduce the idea that any incomplete shapes subtract from their point total

4) Change some of the team members

If you have an ambitious group you can also complicate the shape, change the order (e.g. circle on the outside), remove points for quality, etc.

Lessons

I use the Ball Point Game to cover the following topics:

1) Empirical process control: iterating and continuous improvement

2) Process over practice: you can only get so good at something, your process in the end is what causes real performance improvement (star-pattern passing vs gravity based)

3) Changing team make-up causes storming to re-appear (Tuckman's Model)

4) Miracle question: having large goals to work towards

The shape game allows you to cover #1 and #3 directly. Process over practice can be done by talking about what would happen if they were allowed to use shape drawing tools instead of just freehand. This allows you to approach the conversations about automation. Unfortunately, there is no grand improve like gravity-based mechanisms to have a big difference, but you can talk to it.

In running the game I have seen enough variation and improvement to talk about Empirical Process Control. I have not seen anyone come up with anything drastically better, so the Miracle Question conversation likely can't happen.

Teaching process over practice can be done by using an example after the game: what would have happened if you had a "shape stamp?" How much faster could you have gone. Would it be worthwhile to build such a tool even if it meant you couldn't deliver points for a sprint?

This game can be used to teach a concept that is harder in the Ball Point Game: Lean / Quality. By introducing the idea of losing points for incomplete items in the third iteration, you can have conversations about inventory management and just-in-time control.

Specific Tools

- Zoom:

  - Use Breakout rooms for the planning and retrospectives

  - Execution happens with annotating the whiteboard in the main session

  - Divide the board up into parts, one for each team

  - Make sure they don't use anything but the freehand pencil

- Jamboards

  - Jamboards allow you to have a different page for each team and don't have a shape tool, so they can't use a stamp

  - If you use different pages, keep an eye on them as you can't see everyone at once. Teams may not stop when you say "stop"