NAME OF THE ACTIVITY: LIGHTNING DECISION JAM

ACTIVITY 2 / Project-Based Learning

Content	Skills	Competencies
Project-Based Learning	- time-keeping, - planning - problem statement articulation	- team working - cooperative learning - time management - decision making - problem-solving

LIGHTNING DECISION JAM	
General Description	The problem with anything that requires creative thinking is that it's easy to get lost— to lose focus and fall into the trap of having useless, open-ended, unstructured discussions. Here's the most effective solution I've found: Replace all open, unstructured discussions with a transparent process. What to use this exercise for: Anything which requires a group of people to make decisions, solve problems or discuss challenges. It's always good to frame an LDJ session with a broad topic.
Materials	- Rectangular post-its - Square post-its (2 different colours, I like Pink and Blue) - Voting dots, 2 different colours - Sharpies, markers, or something similar - Timer that clearly shows the remaining time - A nice playlist of focus music
Duration	approx. 1 h
Feasibility	The activity is feasible for group implementation, preferably in-class.

Activity

0. Choose a moderator

An overlooked, yet extremely important step is choosing a moderator and time keeper. The first job of this person is to keep the discussion from breaking out and to keep time. Joining in on the process is allowed but secondary to their role of moderating the discussion and making sure that time is allocated among all participants.

1. Start with Problems —7 mins

Without prior discussion, everybody in the team spends 7 minutes writing about all the challenges, annoyances, mistakes or concerns that happened during the week (or since they started working on their project). Each problem is to be written down on a separate post-it.

2. Present Problems — 4 mins per person

The moderator now selects one person at a time to stand up and quickly explain each problem as they stick them to a wall/flipchart/whiteboard/a bigger sheet. Nobody else in the team is allowed to speak here. The moderator should give no more than 4 minutes per person. The goal is to only present the problems.

3. Select Problems to Solve — 6 mins

The moderator gives each member 2 voting dots. Using those dots, everybody must now vote on the challenges they consider to be the most pertinent to solve. This happens, again, without discussion.

You can vote on your own post-its here and you can put both your votes on one challenge if you feel strong enough about it. Once the 6 minutes is up, the moderator quickly takes the voted problems and arranges them in order of priority. The priority is determined by the number of votes each problem receives.

The rest of the problems that were not voted on are not discarded but simply put aside for now.

4. Reframe Problems as Standardised Challenges — 6 mins

Now, only focussing on the voted and prioritised problems—the moderator will rewrite each one as a standardised challenge, starting with the words "*How Might We*" (HMW). This will help with creating an array of solutions. Because of that it will be a little bit broader at the start.

Example:

"I have no idea what's happening on project X", becomes

"How might we make it so that you know what's happening on project X".

Rephrasing the post-it in a “How Might We” format allows us to make it solvable and standardise how the challenges are written.

The moderator should rewrite all the problems as quickly as possible, making sure they are still prioritised before moving on.

5. Produce Solutions — 7 mins

Now the top voted HMW problem will be used to produce solutions. If there are two top-voted problems, or three start with the one on the left first. Don’t worry about it and do not discuss it.

Each team member is given 7 minutes to write as many possible ways to tackle the HMW challenge without any discussion. The moderator needs to tell the team members that we’re aiming for Quantity over Quality. Later we can curate. For this reason, removing discussion here is crucial and ensures a variety of solutions.

Solutions don’t have to be written in any particular way– but they must be understandable to people reading. There is no individual presenting of solutions as this creates a bias towards the best presenters.

Once the 7 minutes are up, everybody sticks their ideas on the surface (wall, whiteboard, etc) as fast as possible – this should only require 1 minute.

6. Vote on Solutions—10 mins

Still working on the same problem, the moderator now gives each team member 6 dots to vote for the solutions they think would best solve the HMW.

7. Prioritise Solutions — 30 Seconds

The team now has 30 seconds to make a prioritised list of solutions—Ignore anything with less than two votes.

8. Decide what to execute on—10 mins

It is clear that some solutions are more popular to test out than others, but it's important to know how much effort is required to execute each of the solutions – so here we use a simple Effort/Impact scale
(E/I scale) to determine which solutions to try ASAP, and which should be added to a to-do list.

The moderator needs to be very proactive at this step, since he is the only one who has the means to open up a discussion. The moderator will now add each solution and add them to the effort/impact scale.

Effort, in this case, is how much we as a team think it will take to implement a solution. Impact is the degree to which we think it would solve our problem.

And here's what the moderator needs to do: Take the top voted solution, hover it over the center of the E/I scale and ask "higher or lower", to determine the impact of the solution. Once the impact is determined, the moderator uses a similar drill for effort - "Further or Closer", moving the solution right or left. Usually some small discussions break out here, so the moderator has to be diligent in finding a consensus and stopping any conversations extending past 20-30 seconds.

You repeat that process for the rest of your voted solutions.

Once that's done, you will have a clearer overview of the impact and effort that each solution requires. The moderator should now quickly mark all post-its in the sweet spot with a contrasting dot so we can identify them later.

9. Turn Solutions into Actionable Tasks—5 mins

The moderator now takes the "Sweet Spot" solutions off the E/I scale and asks the person who wrote the solution to give actionable steps toward testing it. Depending on the size and time for the project "actionable" could mean 1-2 hours, days, or weeks. A good rule of thumb is to take that number down in half and consider the solution as an experiment (the degree to which this is possible, naturally, depends on the solution itself).

Tips/suggestions for the activity

If you want to learn more about the activity and how to apply it online, check out the following video: How to Run a Remote Lightning Decision Jam Workshop