The Mindset of an Effective Big Room

"THE MAN WHO WILL USE HIS SKILL AND CONSTRUCTIVE IMAGINATION TO SEE HOW MUCH HE CAN GIVE FOR A DOLLAR, INSTEAD OF HOW LITTLE HE CAN GIVE FOR A DOLLAR, IS BOUND TO SUCCEED."

| Henry Ford |

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References/ Sources

*The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* - Patrick Lencioni
1.0 Why

An Effective Big Room supports Collaborative Behavior. It is flexible, practical, and has visual information.

An effective Big Room supports cross-functional team collaboration by advancing work and bringing the larger team up to speed on the activities of other groups or individuals. It allows teams to understand their impact across clusters or work groups. The Big Room also provides teams with the time to discuss project-wide concerns like budgets, hot topics, or global changes. The term Big Room refers more to the behaviors and actions of the team than the physical space. The Big Room is more than co-location of people; it is about collaborative behavior and the work they are producing.

2.0 When

The behaviors and activities of the Big Room environment should begin as early in the project as possible even if the whole team is not yet formed. The frequency of Big Room sessions varies from project to project and within different phases of the project. The team must therefore continuously determine the right frequency and duration of sessions. For example, a half-day per week may be appropriate for a very small project. A complete co-location might be suitable for other situations. Again, the demands of each project will determine the frequency, duration, and location of sessions.

Over the course of the project, the key participants in the Big Room should and will change according to the type of work being produced and the type of team members who add value to each phase of the project. It is important that the team include the right people at the right time having the right information to do the right work. It is important to discuss regularly this value proposition. Along with smaller monthly changes, the entire nature of the Big Room will change several times throughout the project life.
3.0 How

The Big Room is about fostering behaviors that lead to high levels of collaboration and thus to high-performing teams. Although forming a Big Room requires a significant investment of time and money, when conducted well the Big Room adds value to the project and drives down the overall project cost. Teams rapidly advance work in a relatively short amount of time with less rework because they have the collective brainpower in the room working together.

Having a well-established, effectively facilitated agenda is crucial to a Big Room’s productivity and efficiency. The team should collaboratively create the agenda well in advance of the Big Room session. This ensures that all team members are prepared to advance the work. A good agenda has an expected outcome for the agenda items, timeframes, and required key participants. While it is important to have an effective agenda, it is equally important to have it be well facilitated.

Potential Big Room Venues:

- Co-Located: Participants continuously located together with continuous collaboration
- Recurring: Participants meet in person on a regularly scheduled, recurring basis
- Hybrid: Combination of in-person and virtual attendance by select participants

Elements of the Big Room environment include:

- Rules of Engagement (no stripes, stay focused, etc. in Facilitation).
- Participants who are prepared to advance work while in the Big Room
- Dedicated time to learn together
- A focus on improving the process (retrospectives, plus/deltas, declaring/fixing breakdowns, etc.).

- Onboarding
- Team building activities
- Positive reinforcement
- Coaching and mentoring environment
- High-energy, dynamic, and challenging atmosphere
- Team members who contribute (They should be encouraged to step out of their comfort zones.)
- Effective visuals on walls to keep team informed (dashboards, budgets, CoS, etc.)

- Effective agenda that is collaboratively established and effectively facilitated
- Collaborative planning (Last Planner® System).
- Collaborative problem-solving and information-sharing

- Cluster groups forming/dissolving.
- Collaborative conversations (talk before draw)
- Sound decision making (Choosing By Advantages)

Considerations for the physical space of the Big Room include:

- Large room supported by break-out areas
- Lots of wall space and/or portable walls
- Dedicated space (ideally)
- Access to coffee, water, snack, restrooms, etc.
- Technology to support team’s activities (Smart board, videoconferencing, whiteboards, printers/plotters)
- File and information sharing structure
- Connectivity (company servers, internet, email, etc.)
- White board, sticky notes, markers, flip charts