

Running with the Mob

Extreme collaboration with Mob Programming

What is it?

"All the brilliant minds working together on the same thing, at the same time, in the same space, and at the same computer" - We call it "Mob Programming". With dual projectors, one computer, two keyboards, and a very collaborative approach we use this practice to super-charge our development efforts and deliver high value software quickly.

— Woody Zuill

Scheduling and advance preparation

- Book a meeting room to take the team out of their normal environment.
- There will only be one computer in use so a projector will be needed. Two projectors connected to the same laptop would be even better.
- Lots of whiteboard space is recommended as the team will likely want to do a lot of brainstorming.
- Tell all attendees to decline all other meetings during those days.

Mob Programming

A Whole Team Approach



By Woody Zuill and Kevin Meadows

leanpub.com/mobprogramming

Mobbing Ground Rules (to be shared with the team)

- Only the one laptop connected to the projector is open. All others are closed.
- Set your Out of Office reminder if you are mobbing for an extended period of time. For example, a full day or two.
- If you anticipate emergencies, feel free to tell people where you are. They can come and knock on the door if they really need you and that has happened a couple of times for us.
- We rotate the keyboard every 15 minutes so everyone gets a chance to type. Note that everyone is expected to think and contribute, regardless of who is on the keyboard.
- We work on real stories, not fake examples.
- Only one story is in progress at any time.
- Have some fun with it.

"First time" rules

When we facilitate mobbing with a team for the first time, we insist on some extra rules. This is to ensure that they get the best first experience they can - for subsequent sessions, we're willing to relax any of the rules at the teams request.

- We request two full days for mobbing. We've repeatedly seen teams complete stories part way through their second day and we want them to hit this point. Less than two days might not give them enough time for this success. On the other side, more than two days is hard to schedule. Many teams aren't willing to commit that much time with no meetings.
- We want to start a new story at the beginning of the mobbing session. We've had cases where the mob attempted to pick up a story that had already been started and that was disastrous. We spent most of the time undoing the work that hadn't been done with the techniques we were trying to teach. If the story you want to do has already been started, pick a different one.

Facilitation notes

- Occasionally, other non-driving team members may open their laptops to do research for the current story. Be careful if you allow this as many team members lack the discipline to stay on topic and will drift into reading email, checking IM etc.
- It's common for ScrumMasters and Product Owners to be reluctant to take a turn on the keyboard. We don't force them to take a turn and yet we find that by the end of the second day, almost all of them have volunteered on their own.
- It's important to enforce the switching of keyboards every 15 minutes. There will be a tendency for everyone to want to finish what they're doing and that can stretch into hours if not watched.
- Most teams will bring poorly written stories and/or acceptance criteria into the mobbing session. There will be a tendency to dive right into code but don't allow this until the story, with acceptance criteria, has been fixed. It's important to stress that without clear stories and acceptance criteria, we don't really know what we're supposed to be working on.
- Allow the team to decide when they want to take breaks although we ensure they don't go more than 90 minutes without one. Mobbing, like pairing, can be draining and we need an explicit break.
- While we do rotate the keyboard, it's preferable to have the less experienced people on the keyboard more often. There's often a tendency for an experienced person to just do the work instead of explaining their way through it.
- If there is one person who is clearly more experienced than everyone else, you may want to completely exclude that person from the rotation. It's very easy for that one person to just do the work while on the keyboard without sharing what they know with the others.
- The nature of mobbing requires everyone to be in the same room although it's worth noting that we have done it with teams split across timezones. While we certainly don't recommend this, we've proven that it is possible.

Your facilitators



Ellen Grove is an Agile coach & trainer with Agile Partnership based in Ottawa, Canada. Ellen helps teams and organizations do better work through coaching them in creating the circumstances in which they can work effectively while having fun. Ellen is a StrategicPlay certified facilitator in Lego Serious Play methods, a Training from the Back of the Room trainer, an Open Space facilitator, and a serial organizer of Agile events, most recently Agile Coach Camp Canada, Agile India and Play4Agile North America

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Mike Bowler is an Agile and technical coach and trainer who has been writing code for over thirty years and has been an active member of the Agile community for the last fifteen. He blends his strong technical background with a deep understanding of Agile methods to help teams consistently improve how they deliver value to their customers.

Mike is a trained LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitator and is one of the lead organizers of Play4Agile North America (Sept 2015). He's used Mob Programming with over thirty different teams at multiple clients and considers this to be one of the most effective techniques he has to help teams.

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