Escape Facilitation Concept

Overview

[Escape](#) is a multi player [cooperative board game](#) by Kristian Amundsen Østby. Based on experience in the conferences Play4Agile 2015 and Agile Coach Camp Germany 2015 as well as multiple facilitation session across Europe the game acts as a good facilitation tool for Team Dynamics and Process Improvements.

For facilitation purposes it is split into multiple sessions with only the game introduction being mandatory at the beginning (yet heavily relies on the facilitators observation).

The maximum number of players is 5 at the same time, so for a maximum team size of 10. In case you buy the 6 player expansion this would increase to 12.

Game introduction / First play

Goal & Setup

The goal for the game introduction session is to make every member of the team familiar with the game mechanics. This is a preparation step for the follow up sessions on team dynamics and process improvement and should be played in a large group, potentially with members from multiple teams.

Using members from multiple teams for the introduction is especially useful in case the focus is on team dynamics as the team members will not have played the game before in this constellation before. Furthermore it allows for building connections within the company.

In the beginning the maximum 10 participants is split into two roughly equal sized groups (A+B). Both will play the game and both will act as observers. No focus for observation is given to the team.

In case no follow up session is schedule, two facilitators are needed to run the session

1. Running the game facilitator: Actual game introduction and ensuring rules are followed
2. Observational facilitator: Observing the participants, taking notes (see Things to look for)

Timeline (60 Minutes session)

1. Game introduction and Rule explanation (10-15 Minutes)
2. Play with group A, have group B observe the game (10 Minutes)
3. Change groups, reset the game (5 Minutes)
4. Play with group B, have group A observe the game (10 Minutes)
5. Discuss observations with a focus on game mechanics (10 Minutes)
6. Feedback for the facilitators (10 Minutes)
    a. How did you like the game
    b. How did you feel while playing / observing
    c. Would you be interested in follow up sessions (and if not, why)

Things to look for as a facilitator

- How do players play the game
- What are team dynamics, especially if the groups are shuffled across multiple teams as suggested.
- Will group B come up with strategies from their observation and will they be able to act according to them

Scrum Trainings

Goal & Setup

You can run the First Play session on the 2nd day of the Scrum Master Training as a recap exercise. This could be done after the lunch break or any convenient time when you have covered the basic elements of Scrum.

Instead of the Feedback for facilitators session you delve into the Scrum Related questions

1. What do the following represent (and my suggestion)
    a. Rooms - Epics / User Stories
    b. Diamonds - Business value OR technical dept
    c. Rooms without diamonds - Infrastructure Stories, Epics without immediate business use
    d. Rooms with multiple choices of diamonds - De-Scoping of large Epics. Shows how much effort you must put into this.
    e. Flames / Keys / Runners - Tasks of a certain type
    f. Black masks - Impediment
    g. Golden Mask - Impediment resolution
    h. Start Room with need to go back - Retrospectives
    i. End room with the necessary keys to throw - Technical debt
    j. In case one person walked around and just explored rooms - Product Owner
2. Raise typical Scrum questions and how they would relate to the game
    a. What if the team is not sitting in the same room - Try playing the game without talking to each other / on a table further apart
    b. We have very specialized people in the room - Remove on of Flames / Keys / Runners from one person's inventory, they need to reroll and have others help them to get in a different room
    c. Why should we deal with technical debt first - If you use the diamonds at the end as technical debt it shows what happens, as you can't ship the product

Team Dynamics

Goal & Setup

Due to the timeboxing (10 minutes) and the ambient soundtrack the game is well placed for observing team dynamics in a stressful situation.

This session works well with a small group (along with video documentation) or a larger group with observers.

Small group with video (max. 6 participants)

The small group approach with video documentation allows participants to review their own behaviour in addition to the assigned focus area, resulting in a more involved and potentially reflective observation. This should happen in a safe environment for the group, therefore it is best used for a small group which works together in a regular fashion.

To set this up, a room with video camera and TV screen is needed. If one facilitator is available,the camera should be positioned at one end of the desk, showing both the board as well as the players involved. This will give the facilitator the option to observe the game, check rules and identify things to focus on during the review session. In case two facilitators are available one facilitator can take the video with the camera from different angles, allowing for a broader experience, though a steady cam in this case is highly suggested (or experience in shooting videos with steady motions to avoid sea sickness during the review session). Or you use a GoPro Camera with extreme wide angle.

Larger group with observers (max. 12 participants)

The larger group approach allows the observers to observe the team playing. This is very useful in case the group is made up of one team (split into two for playing the game), as it allows participants to review the behaviour of their teammates and get a friendly competition going between the two sub-teams.

Alternatively, if played with a group of people from multiple teams, the two groups A & B should be cross team. In this session it shows how well members from multiple teams can work together in a stressful situation, which happens regularly in the last stages of a project. Running this session in advance with the participants will allow them to reflect how they can make their collaboration under stress work smoothly.

To set this up, the participants are split into two groups (A+B) which will play and observer respectively.

Observation focus

In contrast to the game introduction session each of the participants will be given a specific focus area to look for.

- Player communication flow
- Player observation skills (looking for others in trouble) - Push vs. Pull, Provide help vs. Ask for help.

- Development of the board, including collecting diamonds

Timeline

Small Group	Large Group
1. Rule Recap + Handout observation focus (10 Minutes)	
1. Play with the whole group (10 Minutes) 2. Setup TV + Handout observation focus (5 Minutes) 3. Observe the video (10 Minutes)	1. Play with group A, have group B observe the game (10 Minutes) 2. Change groups, reset the game (5 Minutes) 3. Play with group B, have group A observe the game (10 Minutes)
• Discuss observations with a focus on team dynamics (20 Minutes) • Feedback for the facilitators (5 Minutes)	

Process Improvement

Goal & Setup

The focus of this session is on using experiences gained in the game to act as bridges to identify areas for improvement in the current processes.

This session makes more sense in a larger team, where the participants will be split into the playing group (A) and the observing group (B). The observing group should focus on how well the playing group was managing to implement the game strategies discussed. Additionally one observer needs to keep a minutely track of the rooms detected (aggregate) and the number of diamonds left on the diamond plot.

After the session the group probably has a couple of ideas burbling in their mind with regards to process improvements. Therefore a follow up session a few days later brainstorming about those process improvements will be helpful.

Timeline

1. Game strategy - What are tactics how the game can be won (10 Minutes)
2. Play & Observe (10 Minutes)
   a. Have the observer draw a burnup chart for the rooms and the burndown chart for the diamonds.
3. Success Retrospective (5 Minutes)
4. Transformation exercise (30 Minutes):
   a. What does … stand for in Scrum / Kanban?
   b. Is the effect of … comparable to real life?
   c. Which game measures would help in real life?
5. Feedback & Next steps (5 Minutes)

Scaling (multi team simulation)

Goal & Setup

The focus of this session on highlighting collaboration across more than one to make the teams aware of the need for collaboration and the benefits of cross pollinating teams from time to time.

This session needs at least two teams of 5 people and two boards. Observers are possible and encouraged if teams are bigger than 5. For each team you need to have one board. All teams need to have gone through the initial first play session.

1. Perpare the room with a number of tables and boards equal to the number of teams to play. Set the tables apart as far as not to make it obvious (have it make sense in the room)
2. Have each team decide who will be players and who will be observers. For the observers hand out the guidelines what to look for from above.
3. Explain the two additional rules

a. Offer one Golden Mask to negate one Black mask of the other team (1:1 Ratio). This action is not allowed if you are cursed with a 1:1 ratio.
b. When you have successfully left the temple you can give one dice to the other team (instead of a member of your team)

Timeline (90 Minutes)

1. Rule Introduction (see above) - 5 Minutes
2. Play & Observer (10 Minutes)
3. Success Retrospective (3 Minutes internally in the team) + 2 Minutes exchange with other team / implement measures like
   a. Move tables closer
   b. Use at least one observer to act as an intermediary to look out for the other teams
   c. Exchange team members
4. Play & Observe (10 Minutes)
5. Success Retrospective II (3 Minutes internally in the team) + 2 Minutes exchange with other team
   a. If no real collaboration measure has been thought of, provide a suggestion (e.g. from the list above)
6. Play & Observe II (10 Minutes)
7. Success Retrospective II (3 Minutes internally in the team)
8. Discuss potential measures and how the teams feel about each of them. Have them implement any measure suggested they agree upon (7 Minutes)
9. Play & Observe III (10 Minutes)
10. Success Retrospective III (5 Minutes internally in the team)
11. Discuss learnings and findings, how this is applicable to inter team work in real live (20 Min)

Add-Ons

If you have played the game with a team a few times things can be extended and made more complicated by adding expansions. Two of these expansions are useful for facilitation

Hidden findings

Using the curse and treasure module you can simulate hidden findings within the game. Turning up a card can either curse the player who is turning it or provide the ability to gather a treasure. Typical translation from game to reality is if a product owner is adding an item to the backlog and the team starts working on it, there are sometimes curses, where a small idea from the product owner has huge consequences for the developer working on it. Recommendation is not to work with the treasure part for facilitation :-).

Different Roles

Escape knows Characters as part of many extensions. These have special skills that help escaping the temple. Using characters you can mimick roles in your organization and provide the players with special skills. As a preparation though I would go through the characters and decide how to implement their special skills in the context of your team and the participants.