

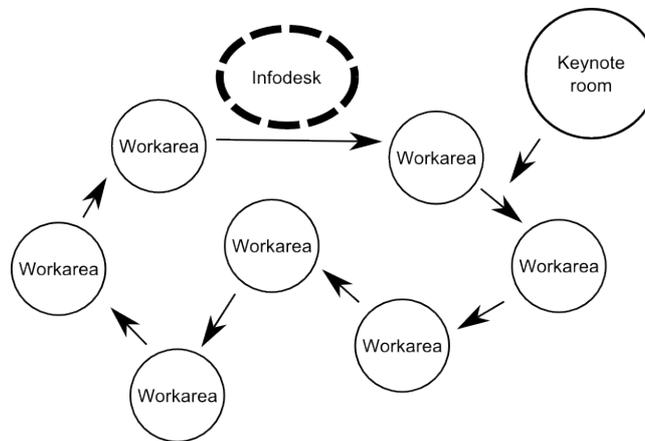
The Socialist group forming process

The past years at the Nordic Game Jam (NGJ) the way of forming groups had evolved into a stressful stampede of trying to find a group to work in. These unfortunate symptoms started to show themselves when the event crossed the 100 participants mark. We as organizers experienced this ourselves when participating, but also through complaints from individuals that fell out of the system and left the jam on the opening night. This was a big problem to us.

To elevate this Dave Mariner and Jesper Taxbøl started working on a more, people-centric group forming process. We call it the **Socialist method** and refer to the old method (<http://globalgamejam.org/wiki/group-forming>) as the **Capitalist method**.

The Socialist Method

This socialist method focuses on the people involved instead of the idea. It aims to establish functioning groups before real work begins. The method is based on a one-way circular path that visits all work areas, and is connected to the big room, where the keynote is held.



In our case we used paper arrows on the walls to indicate the path, and we gave each area a distinct name. The number of work areas was adjusted so there would be 6 participants per work area.

This path is used throughout the jam.

The group forming process

After the keynote all participants are given a brief introduction to the Capitalist method and the Socialist method. Preferably by different people representing the different paths.

The Capitalist introduction just outlines the old way of doing business.

The Socialist introduction is given, with a brief outline of its qualities and end with an outline of the rules which are.

1. You must follow the path in the direction of the arrows.
2. Walk the path until you find a work area with less than three, to you, unknown participants.
3. Wait for further instructions.

Then people are instructed to walk the path.

When participants are settled, instructions are placed at the work areas:

Take turns answering the following three questions.

- 1. Who are you and what do you contribute to the jam?**
- 2. What are your expectations of the jam, and what is your commitment to the jam?**
- 3. How do you see yourself fit into this group in relation to the answers to the previous questions?**

When you hear a short signal find a new table following the same rules as before.

When you hear a long signal open the envelope at the work area.

After 15 minutes a short signal is given to trigger participants to leave their work area and find a new table. We continue this process 3-4 times so all participants have been introduced to at least nine, for them, unknown participants.

After that the long signal is sounded and participants open the work area envelope. It contains instructions and 3 randomized themes chosen by the organizers.

Start brainstorming on one of the following three themes:

- Betrayal**
- Airplanes**
- Empathy**

Any participant can leave their group, and follow the path to join the next group unconditionally.

No limits to group size, and no one can be rejected.

You are encouraged to try at least three groups before you settle.

After 30 minutes the groups should be settled and the organizers take a round getting a feel of how the groups are settled and possibly give advice to individuals. When the organizers have visited all groups and they are settled the real theme is distributed in an envelope and real work can begin.

The trick here is that the path is kept functioning throughout the jam. This means that anyone can leave a group at anytime throughout the jam and join a new group. Only criteria is that groups must accept a participant to be able to enter. If a participant is rejected by all groups, organizers will find them a group and force them to accept. This is theoretical, and has not happened at the NGJ before.

It is encouraged to expand the path on day two so Capitalists can work in work areas along the path. This also helps the mingling process.

The path is also used to distribute late arrivals and volunteers that are not in for the full jam. This is usually industry professionals lent out by companies or just people that want to contribute without having to put in 48 hours of work. Some of the organizers also do this to help out and get a feel of the jam.

The info desk

Alongside the path we also establish an info desk in a central area. We place the info desk near the coffee machine and sell drinks and candy to keep people near it.

The info desk serves many purposes:

1. It is the organizers headquarter and its manned at all times.
2. People sign in to the jam there
3. Give access to showers
4. Lend out equipment
5. Messages on billboards
6. The menu is posted here
7. Lost and found service
8. General advice
9. Socializing
10. Ant other questions or issues can be solved here

Conclusion

The first year we tried this method was in 2010, where the NGJ had 297 paying participants. We split the participants up in two groups and had both the Capitalist and Socialist method.

We think that the Socialist method has some vast advantages over the old Capitalist method.

- It is less stressful for the participants.
- It gives a safety net so no one is left out. Even dropouts from the Capitalist track.
- We have a mechanism to send out helpers.
- We feel that people get more networking out of the Jam

We have had some criticism as well.

- Capitalists get the theme earlier and get to start working around 2 hours earlier.
- Some people like the rush of the Capitalism method
- A lot of ideas are generated using the Capitalist method and the Socialists will not get this inspiration.

In the light of our experiences from 2010 we plan to offer both again in 2011, as we aim at 300 participants. We think, that offering the two methods actually adds a level of good spirited competition to the jam. So offer both methods if your site has more than 100 participants. If not - just implement the Socialist model.

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