**Timing**:

Teaching Risk Management – 60 mins

Conducting a risk assessment – min 60 mins (depends on the project and how steady your team’s hands are)

**Materials:**

1 – Jenga game

Flip chart paper & markers

**Instructions:**

Teaching risk management:

If you have a team who needs to learn about risk management I have some fun with the game. I tell them we’re going on an interior canoe trip to Algonquin Park (Ontario), and we need to conduct a risk assessment. Usually very few people in the room have been on such trips so the example provides for a wide variety in the perception of risk. For example, someone who hasn’t been on a canoe trip will pull a block from the bottom identifying a risk a bear may come through our site.  I would take a block closer to the top as I see the risk of bears ruining my trip as low.  I respect bears but don’t fear them, so therefore I know how to live in their home without creating a problem.

Conducting risk assessments:

Running this game with a project vs. during training doesn’t change the approach. If you’re running this game on a real project, make sure you have the team present (including your customer).

If you’ve never played Jenga the basic idea is you remove a block and put it on top of the stack. Eventually if you’re not careful, or you have removed too many blocks the tower becomes unstable and falls.

To run this game:

1) Place the stack of Jenga blocks at the front of the room on a table (preferably one no-one is sitting at to avoid accidents)

2) Everyone is encouraged to come up (one at a time), identify a risk the project is facing and remove a block commensurate to the degree of risk. If it’s a minor risk the person might remove a block from the top of the stack.  If it’s a big complex risk the person might remove the block from the bottom middle of the stack.

3) On the flip chart paper record each of the risks identified and a ranking for the risks. When ranking I usually record it as high, medium or low (the ranking is relative to where the block was removed from the stack).

4) Participants can ask clarification questions regarding the risk and ranking. At this stage I usually don’t allow for risks to be discounted. However I encourage people to discuss where the block was pulled from (remember my bear example above).

5) The game ends when you run out of risks to discuss or the stack falls

As a team you then need to debrief the results regardless of the state of your stack. Leave the stack where it is during this time:

*A few big risks* resulted in too many blocks being removed from the bottom causing the stack to fall relatively quick.   In this case you may consider things like:

* + Do we have so many big risks the project may not be viable?
  + What is causing the number of big risks (ie. new technology, etc)?
  + How can the team respond to this situation to reduce the risk profile

*Too many small risks* accumulated to cause the stack to fall (even if you didn’t identify any big risks)

* + Do we have so many small risks you project could suffer death by a thousand cuts

*The stack still stands* after you run out of time or risks to discuss

* + Is the risk profile manageable?
  + Is the project taking enough risks? Are you being innovative enough?
  + Are there things your project could do to increase the innovation and value of the project?

***IMPORTANT!***When you’re using this game to facilitate risk assessments, make sure you’re identifying an action plan. If you leave this step out you’re wasting your team’s time. The action items need to be prioritized and included in your backlog based on the ranking the team assigned them.

**Learning Points:**

* Teach the importance of risk management
* Facilitate the discussion to identify the risks on your project (without dying of boredom)
* Rank the risks without getting bogged down in trying to quantify them (I find quantifying risk rankings in software development is as useful as estimating … it’s often a waste of time!)
* Facilitate team discussion regarding the risk profile of the project