

SPRINT: AN ALTERNATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING MODEL

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WHO LOVES WORKGROUPS?

Time spent in collaborative activities has ballooned by 50% or more.¹ Workgroups and committees that meet regularly are the primary model research administration uses to facilitate team collaboration. Yet, staff turn-over, committee burnout, lack of balance between outspoken and quieter staff, the length of time between meetings, and a lack of shared understanding and safety often hinder the success of workgroups. Additionally, studies have shown that brainstorming, a common workgroup tactic, does not yield high quality ideas.²



SPRINTS

Sprint sessions are used in software and manufacturing fields to move abstract concepts into prototype and testing in just five days.³ This study attempts to modify the typical format of a sprint session to accommodate research administration. Those unique needs include a reduction from the recommended 5 hours for 5 days.

1. Cross, R. R. (2016). Collaborative Overload. *Harvard Business Review*.

THE 5 DAYS OF A SPRINT

- 1** Developing a Shared Understanding: experts speak to the team. Individuals make notes on "How Might We..."
- 2** Mapping the Existing Process: team explores the notes from Monday and maps the existing process.
- 3** Sketching Solutions: individuals individually sketch pieces of the solution in quick sessions. Individuals vote on useful solution pieces and the team discusses the solution pieces.
- 4** Mapping a New Process: team uses shared understanding, notes from day 1, and solution sketches to map a new process.
- 5** Designing Materials: team uses this last day to develop tools and materials to support the new process and to discuss how to test the process in the coming months.

2. Deihl, M., & Stroebe, W. (1987). Productivity loss in brainstorming groups: Towards the solution of a riddle. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61, 392-403.

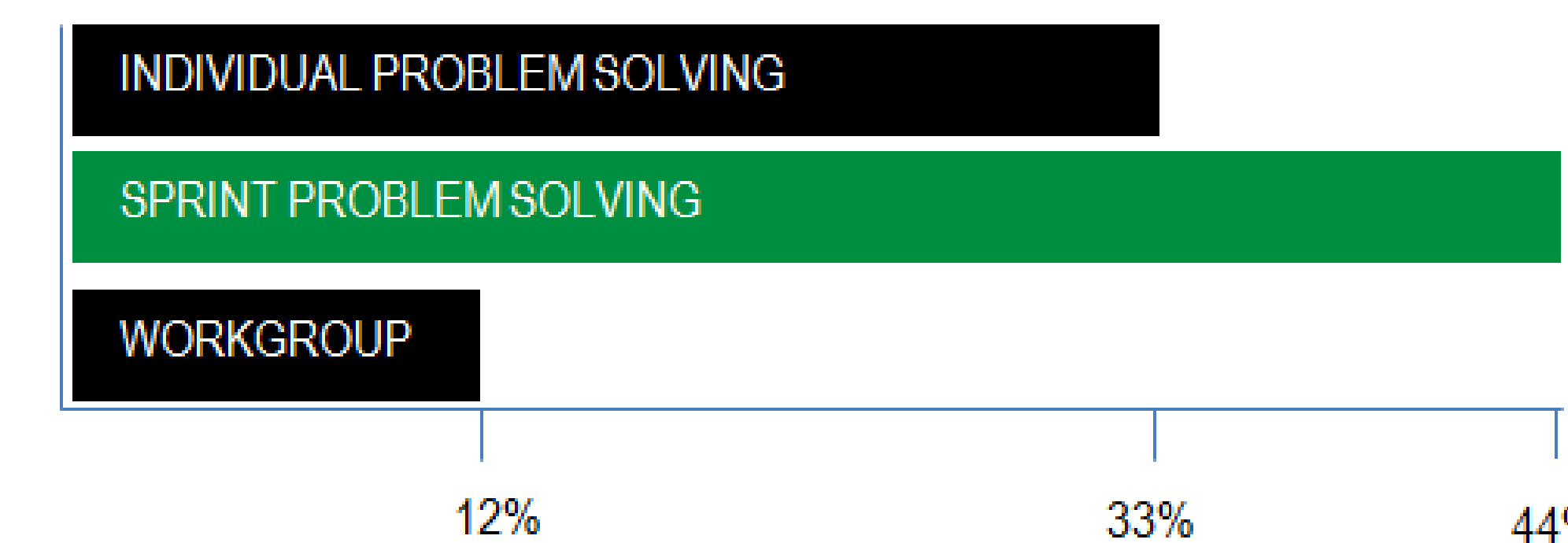
FINDING 1

Increased sequential time dedicated to solving a single, complex, problem yielded high quality results and increased team satisfaction with the process.



FINDING 2

Strong preference for sprint problem-solving model over conventional department workgroups in our survey.



FINDING 3

Deadline-driven collaboration constraint helped motivate the team to stay on task for the week, drive towards solutions, and push for shared understanding of the problem.

3. Knapp, J., Zeratsky, J., & Kowitz, B. (2016). *Sprint: How to Solve Big Problems and Test New Ideas in Just Five Days*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

FINDING 4

Positive feedback from the team on the use of individual sketching sessions within a shared group collaboration. This may indicate an opportunity to incorporate individual problem-solving concepts into team meetings or other workgroup sessions to increase team success.

CONCLUSIONS

By learning from outside industries and modifying their problem-solving techniques, the team was able to increase understanding of a complex problem and develop a new solution more quickly and successfully than would have been possible in a workgroup setting. Research administration teams should continue to look to fields like software development and other tech industries where process improvement is key. We may be able to adapt those processes to make our own systems more nimble.

