THE MUST ★ HAVE GAME

Learn how to apply the Moscow Principle

FACILITATION GUIDE

SimuLearn

this page is intentionally left blank

The Must Have Game

A game to learn the MoSCoW principle

Table of Content

1. Version history

Version	Date	Changes
1.0	2023-03-04	Initial version

2. Why?

You may have heard it several times - I definitely did: "We already had to drop all the Should Haves and Could Haves, we only have Must Haves left in our backlog". That always made me frown, because then someone did not understand the meaning of the MoSCoW principle. If you only have indispensable backlog items left, then you lose your buffer and there is any slip in the timings - there always is - then you certainly have an impact on the value you deliver. You have nothing left that can be dropped - for now - so you can only delay…

That made me think: why not make a game to experience the impact of these decisions in a safe way? And that is now The Must Have game:

- A game about the Must have in MoSCoW (but also should have, could have and won't have)
- But also with a wink, an indispensable item in your training or coaching backpack

3. What?

The Must Have game is a card game. The aim of this game is to experience the impact of the interpretation of the MoSCoW score. If you only keep the must haves, you will run into trouble with the least slip. Besides, a high level feature may be a must, but that does not mean that every aspect (every user story slice of that feature) is a must too.

There are 2 types of cards:

Features	User stories
MUST ★ HAVE	MUST ★ HAVE
FEATURE 1 WORKLOAD 37 VALUE 430	STORY 11 WORKLOAD 5 VALUE 90
ESTIMATION	ESTIMATION

These types of cards can be used for different variations (see Aim of the game). As you can guess, features need further refinement (which is 1 variation).

4. Aim of the game

The aim of the game is two-fold:
- experience the impact of only choosing must-have requirements
  If you only select must-haves and some backlog items require more work, then this will immediately impact your release.
- experience the effect of further slicing larger requirements
  It is not because a high level backlog item is a must-have, that automatically all refined user stories are must-haves too.

5. How the game goes

You start with a predefined capacity. With that capacity you need to select the backlog items you want to implement (workload must not exceed your capacity), trying to maximize the delivered business value. Make sure the entire deck is mixed up, so that you don't have must-haves, should-haves, could-haves and won't-haves grouped together. This should

make the prioritization exercise a bit more challenging. And to distract the participants even more, the monetized value of each story is based on the business value and a multiplicator based on the MoSCoW value:

MoSCoW value	Monetized business value
Must have	business value x 2
Should have	business value
Could have	business value : 2
Won't have	0

You play the game in 3 rounds:
- Round 1: only stories, maximize value, no explanation
- Round 2: only stories, maximize value based on what you now know about the MoSCoW principle (with the buffer of should-haves and could-haves).
- Round 3: features and stories
  Features need to be refined, to reveal the detailed stories. Then select which stories you will to with the foreseen capacity

5.1. Round 1

Round 1 only deals with the deck of user stories. We leave the features out for now. The team has a capacity of 100 units of work and needs to select user stories that will maximize the value creation. There is no explanation at all about the MoSCoW principle. They will just have to experience the consequences of their choices. The sum of all effort must not exceed the capacity of the team.

Once the team has selected their backlog, they will have to put them in the order they want them to be implemented. How, that is entirely their own responsibility, but each card had a MoSCoW value, a business value and a workload, so this should be enough to order the backlog.

MUST ★ HAVE

STORY 11
WORKLOAD   5
VALUE   90

ESTIMATION

MUST ★ HAVE

STORY 11
WORKLOAD   6
VALUE   90

REALITY

Front - during planning   Back - implementation reality

After this has been done, they need to flip the cards, in order to reveal what happens during implementation. Some workloads can be more than expected, some lower. So according to the order of their backlog they will have to sum up the delivered business value, until they reach the maximum capacity.

What do they experience? Worst case they experience that they don't manage to deliver the non-negotiable, indispensable items of their backlog, because all items were must-haves. And that means that they don't deliver any value at all. See how the participants react when you tell them that they delivered nothing off value! They may start arguing that they delivered a large number of must-haves. But that's not the point: they chose to deliver only must-haves and then it is all or nothing…

5.2. Round 2

Now is the time to explain how the MoSCoW principle really works. As described on the website of the Agile Business Consortium (formerly known as DSDM - Dynamic Systems Development Method):
- At most 60% of your scope are Must-haves
- At least 20% of your scope are Could-haves
- Which means on average 20% of your scope are Should-haves
- Won't-haves are out of scope

Must-haves are indispensable items: your system won't work without them. Should-haves are important, but it does not hurt if not all are implemented. Could-haves are the bells and whistles. And won't-haves will not be implemented this time. This does not mean that you will never implement them, but **not this time**.

So with this knowledge you can do a new round of the game, with the same principle as before: with only user stories, try to create as much business value as possible. Flipping the cards will again reveal the actual implementation cost.

5.3. Round 3

Round 3 is about refinement of features. Again based on the MoSCoW value, business value and workload, participants choose the features they want to implement to maximize business value, without exceeding their available capacity. This time, for features, the limit is set to 150 instead of 100. But this time flipping the cards has a different meaning: the backside of the feature reveals the breakdown in stories for that feature. You will only get to see the ID's of the stories, not yet their value nor their workload or MoSCoW value. That's the surprise effect of the game.

In the stack of user stories participants will need to find the user stories corresponding to the selected features and then again see how that can prioritize to maximize business value. So their first choice on the level of features was already a first prioritization and elimination: what supposedly gives the biggest return?

While searching for the corresponding user stories for the refined features, participants will notice that not every story derived from a Must-Have feature automatically is a must-have story too. And that is exactly the lesson this round of the game wants to teach: even though you have (only?) must haves on a higher level, during refinement you can still split into stories where some are more necessary than others. So with this mixture of user stories of all kinds, participants still need to pick out these user stories that deliver the highest possible revenue.
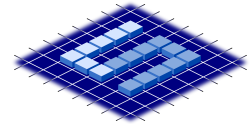
6. Thank you!

I want to thank the people who were willing to try this out and give their feedback, suggest improvements. I especially want to thank the people from the Agile Coaching Chat Whatsapp group. I am a lucky bum to be part of such a great community.

7. Contact information

The Must Have Game is a product of SimuLearn.

More information can be found on my website: http://www.simu-learn.net