

CIRCLES AND SOUP (extract from <http://www.gogamestorm.com/>)

Objective of the activity:

The goal of game, introduced by [Diana Larsen](#), is to efficiently form high-quality plans through retrospective analysis by recognizing factors that are within the team's control. During retrospective activities, it is easy to hit a wall of unproductive blame. The moment the group reaches this barrier, "someone should" and "if only you could" bounce around the room, knocking out any practical ideas for future advancement. Before determining what you can improve, you must first be clear on the dimensions you are able to regulate and what you need to adapt to. By identifying factors your team can control, influence, or cannot change, you can collectively discover how to respond to and overcome various situations.



Number of Players: 5 – 8

Duration of play: 1 hour

How to play:

1. Before your meeting, collect sticky notes or 3x5 notecards. In a white space (a poster, whiteboard, etc.), draw three concentric circles, leaving enough room between each one to place the notes. Each circle represents a different element:

- Inner circle: "Team Controls" – what your team can directly manage
- Middle circle: "Team Influences" –persuasive actions that your team can take to move ahead
- Outer circle: "The Soup" – elements that cannot be changed. This term — explained further by [James Shore](#) – refers to the environment we work in and have adapted to. Ideas from the other 2 circles can identify ways to respond to the barriers floating in our "soup."

2. Hand out the sticky notes to your internal team members and **describe the significance of each circle**. Issue raised or question posed must be specific

3. Allow time for each person to write their ideas on sticky notes for each of the 3 circles. Once finished, ask participants to place their notes into the respective circles.

4. As a group, collaborate to identify how each idea can be used to improve your project. Ask team members to expand on their ideas in order to further develop potential plans.

5. This exercise **does not replace an action plan** and should be followed up by such an activity. It is however useful to categorise ideas and how they can be implemented.

Strategy:

In earlier stages of your retrospection, it is best to concentrate on “Team Controls.” This allows you to identify immediate actions that can be taken.

A neutral facilitator is recommended to keep the activity from becoming too emotional. Evaluating negative aspects of your project is a sensitive but necessary exercise, and can leave people feeling upset or hopeless. Avoid any discussions about blaming people or wishing something would happen. This frame of mind places the control out of the team’s hands, both halting all forward motion and creating a negative environment. Keep the atmosphere fun and enjoyable so people will feel comfortable sharing their ideas.

Suggestions:

- The activity provides a good opportunity for brainstorming and a first classification of potential actions. However it doesn’t include an action plan and extra time needs to be planned for.
- The meaning of the 3 circles should be discussed and clarified with the team.
- Ideas from each circle should be written on sticky notes of different colors (one color for each circle). This way, when notes are transferred to the action plan they retain the classification done during this exercise.
- The circles could be inverted (“soup” inside and “team control” outside in order to provide more space for the latter)

