Implementing a Learning circle

By Atlassian

The best teams are always learning. Adding structure to learning activities improves the team's ability to use the knowledge immediately to improve team performance. It's easy to get caught up in executing and forget to keep learning. We've all heard of 20% time and self-driven development, but it can be hard to find the time to keep your team growing while you're focused on executing. And that's just learning your craft. Add on gaining insight into what other teams are working on and it can feel like an insurmountable challenge.

You keep meaning to read that article or watch that video. If you've found time to get through that, how do you get a broader perspective? Where would you apply your new knowledge? T eaching is one of the most effective ways to deeply learn and understand a topic.

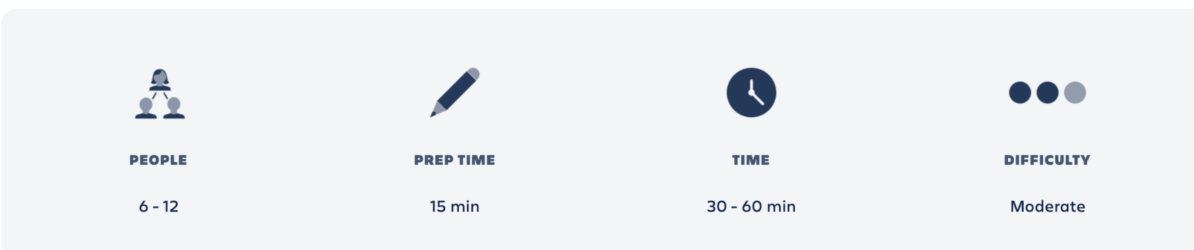
For new or experienced team members, providing structure and a safe space is crucial to ensuring that learning happens, and it sticks. Use this play to help everyone grow together

USE THIS PLAY TO: Encourage continuous learning across and between teams.

Provide structure for sharing cross-team updates and lessons learned. If your team is struggling with shared understanding , velocity , team cohesiveness , managed dependencies or effective partnerships on your Health Monitor, running this play might help.

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED: **A facilitator or expert on a chosen topic**

Team members interested in taking an active role in their own learning and growth.



Running the play: Choose a facilitator and 1-2 presenters to lead the group. The facilitator can be the person who is initiating the learning circle (probably, you!) or the subject matter expert.

Materials
Pen
Paper
Presentation (optional but recommended)

PREP: Selecting topic(s) and presenter(s)

The group should select topics based on what challenges the team is facing, or what growth areas are of interest. Topics can include anything from general development topics (e.g., confidence, negotiation, etc.) or team-specific improvements (e.g., "What lead to the last outage?", "How we can incorporate greater customer insights into our work", etc.).

Presenters should be selected for their expertise where necessary (e.g., lead SRE for a discussion of causes of outages and best development practices, etc.) or presenters' desire to learn and share (e.g., professional development topics, etc.)

Presenter prep: The presenters should come prepared with in-depth research on the topic they are sharing. Make sure to come prepared with materials to answer why this topic is important to the audience and how the audience can benefit from improving in this area.

Facilitator prep: The facilitator should book a conference room and video line (if there are remote team members). Include a link to this play in the invite for context, as well as background information on the topic and names of the presenters.

If you're focused on teaching a particular skill, don't forget about your teammates! Interviewing experts already at your company is a great way to build your expertise and bring in relevant content for your presentation.

STEP 1: Set the stage (10 min)

Explain the purpose of the session: to provide structured, dedicated time for your team to learn so each attendee walks away with new tactics to improve their work. The facilitator should set basic ground rules, and explain how they are put in place to create a safe environment for learning.

We recommend the following rules:

- No interruptions.
- What's shared in the session may be shared externally, but not attributed (Chatham House Rules).
- All comments and input should be focused on behaviors or impact, not focus on personal characteristics.
- (Optional) Clarify whether presenters are comfortable with real-time questions or prefer to do Q&A at the end.

Everyone quickly introduces themselves, sharing:

- Their name
- Role and/or team
- Their previous experience with the topic or what they hope to learn

The facilitator should keep notes regarding what people would like to focus on to help guide the discussion.

STEP 2: Presentation, activity, or exercise (20 min)

The presenters share what they've learned about the topic in question, and the sources of their information. You might consider small group brainstorm and share-outs, "What's wrong with this example?", or other activities to make the session more interactive. We find presentations that include an activity for the group get the best feedback.

STEP 3: Questions for presenters (5 min)

Give the room 5 minutes to ask questions of the presenter. Make sure you time box this so you have enough time for discussion!

STEP 4: Discussion (20 min)

The facilitator should guide the discussion, positioning the presenters as experts and encouraging other team members to bring in their own questions and expertise.
If the discussion stalls out, try one of these questions to bring it back to life:

- Does anyone have any other experience or expertise to share on this topic?
- Are there aspects of the topic or considerations we've left out that are important?
- How might you incorporate this information into your day-to-day work, or do you have an example of you doing that?

STEP 5: Reflection (5 min)

Allow attendees to reflect on whether they got what they wanted and needed from the session. This is a great time to collect ideas for future topics, too!