Activity: People Polling

Two heads are better than one, but a team is even better!

Time Required
10 Minutes

Great For…
- Engaging large groups
- Adding variety without draining time
- Groups with
  - Space and set-up constraints
  - Minimal resources and preparation time

Materials
- A good-sized group: 10 or more (the bigger the better)
- Pens and paper for all
- A small prize (optional)

Useful for very large groups:
- Computer with Excel
- Projector

The Activity

Process

1. It is best to sneak this exercise in when it is least expected (i.e. in the middle of a team meeting).
2. Ahead of time, select something in the room that is not easily counted or estimated. Write the exact number down and keep it hidden.
3. Start by announcing that you want to perform an experiment together.
4. Have each individual quickly and privately write down their own estimate of the item selected.
5. Gather all of the estimates and calculate the average. Reveal the average to the group.
6. Unveil the number that you wrote down earlier. It should be relatively close to the group average.

Things You Can Estimate

- Number of words on a page (handouts, etc.)
- Number of times "the" or any other common word appears on a page
- Number of steps it takes to walk from one side of the room to the other
- Number of books available on Amazon.com
- Number of jelly beans in a jar (a twist on an old favorite)
- Get creative and think outside of the "room"

Helpful Hints

- To keep things quick, open a spreadsheet to type in everyone's estimate as they turn them in. This also makes it easy to calculate the average in front of everybody using a projector.
- Analyze the data further. You will likely get a wide variance.
- To make it more interesting, give a prize to the person that has the most accurate estimate.

Key Points for Discussion

- Often, no individual estimate is as close to the actual number as the average is. This speaks to the "wisdom of the crowd" and of the importance of diversity in a team. The accuracy of the group's collective idea is usually stronger than any one individual's.
- The larger and more diverse the crowd is, the better the estimate. This principle connects to the importance of involving the whole team in the planning process and encourages the creation of cross-functional teams.