The Team Onion

A model to keep teams small, break down silos and create shared responsibility across team boundaries.

teamonion.works

Usage of this board

The Team Onion © 2022 by Emily Webber is licensed under Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 4.0

You can edit this board as you need, but always credit the use of the Team Onion to Emily Webber and link to teamonion.works

For help with introducing the Team Onion, you can also Download the Google Slides

Google Slides

About the Team Onion

A lightweight yet powerful visualisation tool created to keep teams small while delivering in the context of a larger organisation. It helps to break down silos, surface assumptions and build empathy. It facilitates meaningful conversations about the **capabilities**, time **commitment**, **collaboration** and **communication** patterns needed for teams to be successful.

At the end of this workshop or series of workshops, you will have the first version of your Team Onion and a plan of how to put it into action.

The Team Onion was first introduced by Emily Webber on her blog as the Agile team onion in May 2016.

Website at teamonion.works

Workshop Agenda

A. Introduce the Team Onion

B. **Building your Team onion:** Mapping out the layers of your Team Onion

C. **Prioritising your engagement:** Agreeing who you need to talk to next and what you need to say

D. **Actions and owners**: agreeing who will do what and when you will revisit your Team Onion

After the workshop

Engage your wider team
Turn your workshop into actions by agreeing on who will engage with each person. Set some time aside to talk to them.

Review and iterate
Your Team Onion is a living artefact. Revisit your Team Onion regularly to keep it up to date and uncover any emerging assumptions.

The Team Onion Layers

During this workshop you will be adding names to each of three layers

Core

The full time multi-disciplinary delivery team, working towards a common goal to deliver against a need.

Collaborators

The people who bring in specialist information to assist the team, assurance as needed, reduce dependencies and blockers.

Supporters

People and teams who provide alignment with organisational goals and other parts of the organisation.

B

Building your Team Onion

Each of the onion rings represents a different type of team member; each has different attributes of purpose, time commitment, collaboration, communication and feedback frequency

Each ring also has a guide size against it, loosely based on Dunbar's Number; this helps keep teams as small as possible and reduce cognitive load.

Start with the Core and go through each ring. Add as many people as you want; then, you can discuss and reduce the list before agreeing and moving to the next ring.

Capabilities, Commitment, Collaboration and Communication

When considering the people in the rings, add the capabilities (**knowledge, skills and experience**) needed rather than roles and match people to those capabilities. Then you can agree on the time commitment you want and effective collaboration and communication patterns for each member.

The Core Team

The full time multi-disciplinary delivery team, working towards a common goal to deliver against a need.

Time commitment: Full time

Collaboration, communication and feedback: Daily

Size guide: 5-9 people

~5mins **Instructions**
Think about what capabilities you need and the people with those capabilities who should be full time members of the team.

Write the names along with relevant capabilities on yellow stickies and add to the Core ring.

~10mins Discuss and agree, highlight any gaps, challenges or blockers.

The Collaborators

The people who bring in specialist information to assist the team, provide assurance as needed, reduce dependencies and blockers.

Time commitment: Regular, varying by collaborator and stage of delivery

Collaboration, communication and feedback: Regularly to collaborate, build trust and enable the right conversations.

Size guide: 4-12 people.

~5mins **Instructions**
Think about the people who the core team needs to collaborate with and what they bring to the team. Write their names on the blue stickies and add to the Collaborator ring. Try to add names rather than teams.

~15mins Discuss and agree, highlight any gaps.

The Supporters

The people who want the team to succeed, providing support and alignment with organisational goals.

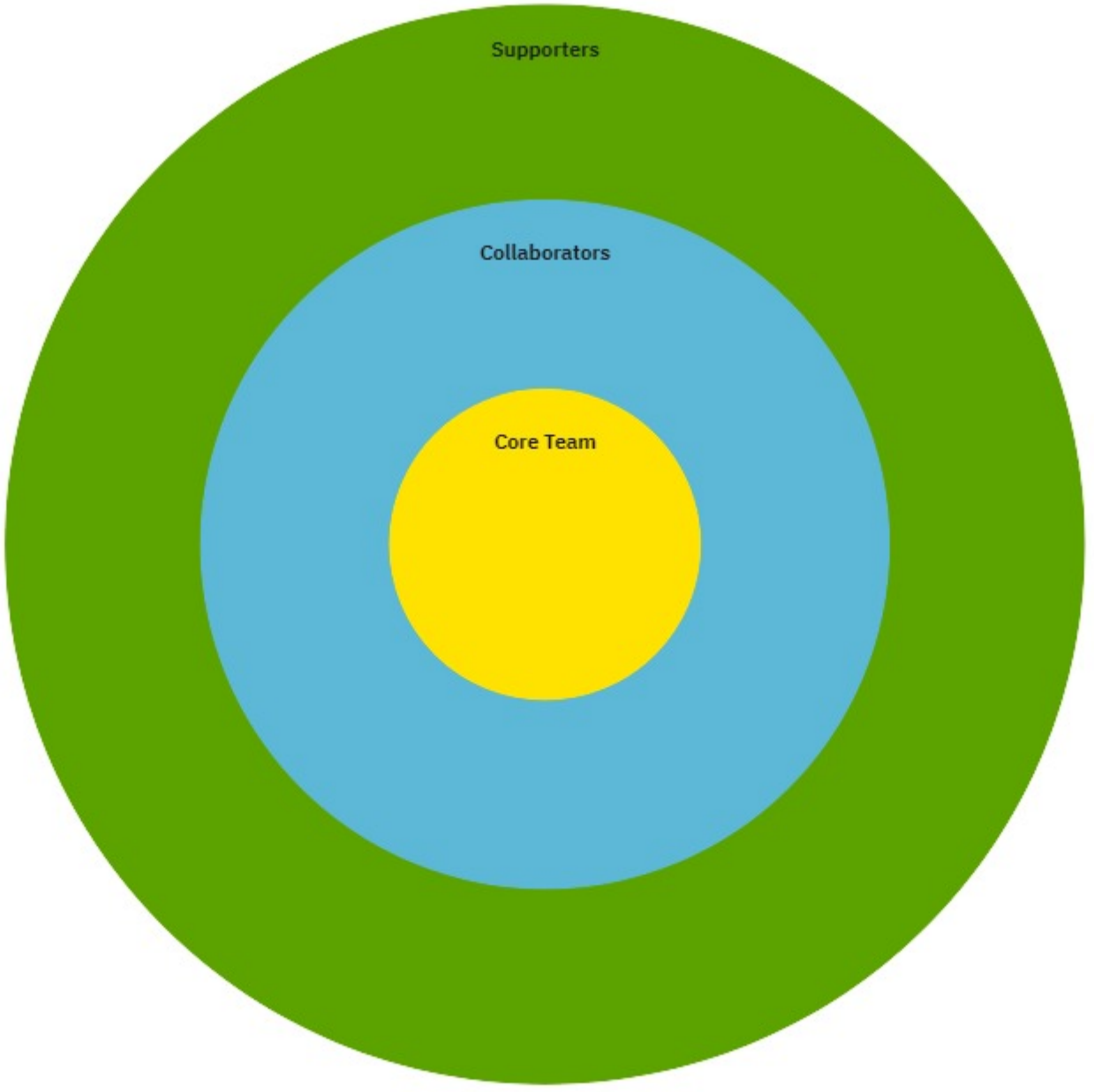
Time commitment: Attending alignment meetings, demos and show and tells.

Collaboration, communication and feedback: Every fortnight as needed, supported with asynchronous updates.

Size guide: Up to 30 people or teams.

~5mins **Instructions**
Think about the people and teams that the core team need to communicate with regularly, write their names on the blue stickies and add to the Supporter ring.

~10mins Discuss and agree, highlight any gaps, challenges or blockers.



miro

C

Prioritising your engagement

Start with any **core** members not already committed, add them to your actions.

Then think about the **collaborators**. Who do you need to work with immediately? Who will have the most significant impact on delivery, and who is the easiest or hardest to engage.

Finally, think about your **supporters**. Spend some time agreeing on the time commitment you'll need from the people at the top of the list and what role you'd like them to play.

Think about communication patterns for your supporters. For example, will you have a regular show and tell, weekly email updates or something else?

1

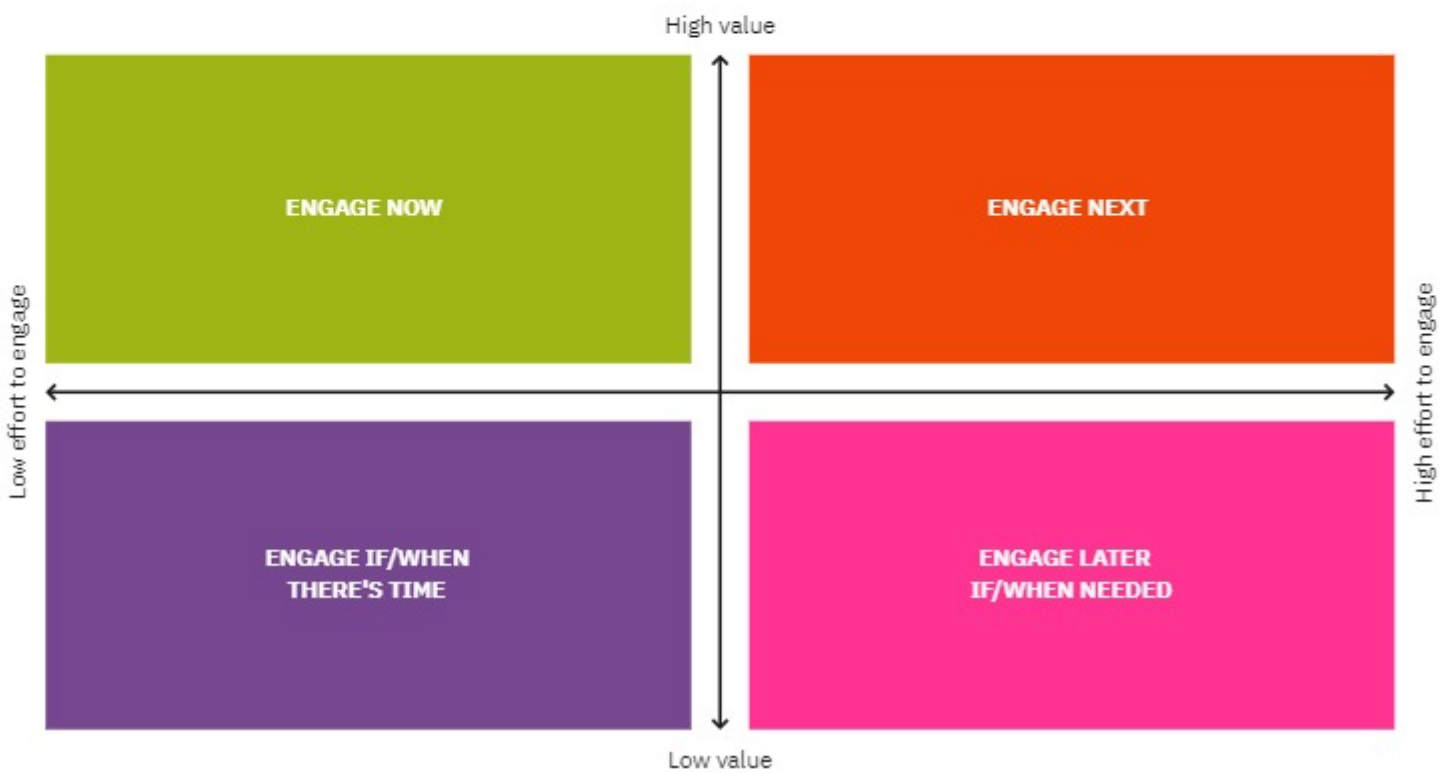
The Collaborators

Now you have agreed who your current collaborators are, you should prioritise the need for engagement with them

Instructions

1. Copy* your collaborator stickies over from your Team Onion
2. Agree where each of them goes in the prioritisation grid
3. Take the ones in the "Engage now" box (top left) and one at a time answer the questions for them. You can use the question list here, add or remove any questions that are relevant for your situation

** keep the originals in place so you can more easily update your Team Onion again*



Agree these together

Some example questions
Amend this list of questions to suit your situation

1. Do they know about your team and its purpose?
2. What time **commitment** is needed?
3. How will you **collaborate** and **communicate**?
4. What decisions will they need to make? Or what assurance can they provide?
5. Are they empowered to make those decisions?
6. What's the impact of them not collaborating?
7. What will they get out of collaborating?
8. Who from this group will engage with them?

2

The Supporters

Now you have agreed who your current supporters are, you should agree how you will engage with them

Instructions

1. Copy* your supporters stickies over from your Team Onion
2. Agree how you and when will communicate with them
3. Highlight anyone you need to follow up with individually or meet with outside of regular comms

** keep the originals in place so you can update your Team Onion again*

Supporters list (copied over from your Team Onion)	We will regularly communicate by (when and how)	Anyone we need to engage with differently (how and when)

miro

D

Agreed actions and owners

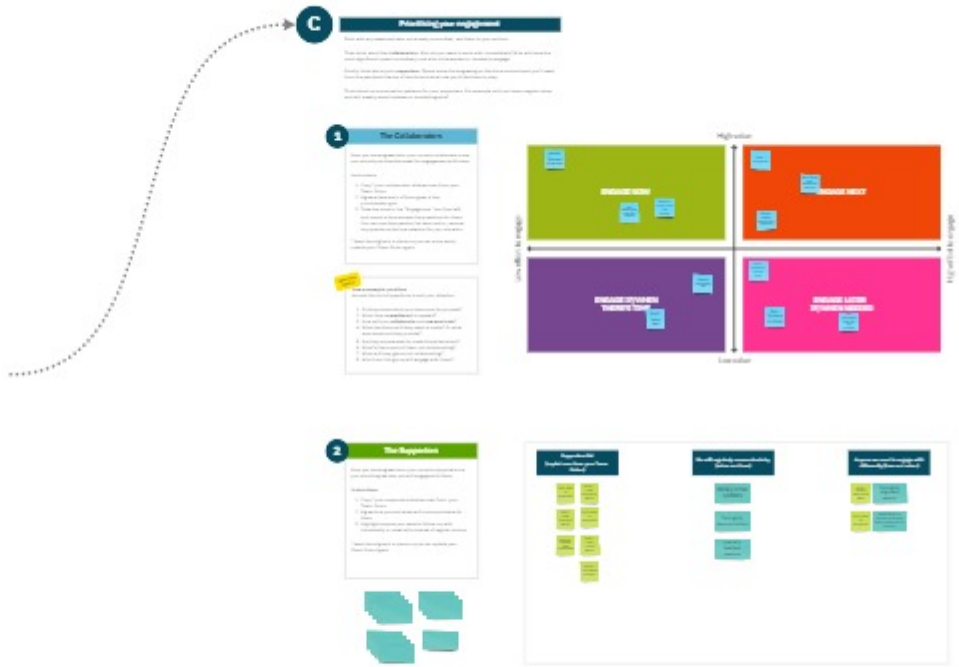
Use this space to add what you will do next, who will do it and when you will revisit your Team Onion

Date to review

Add the date to next review your Team Onion

miro

B
The Core Team
The Collaborators
The Supporters
Supporters
Collaborators
Team


C
1
The Collaborators
ENGAGE NOW
ENGAGE NEXT
ENGAGE LATER
2
The Supporters

D

miro