

HOW LONG DOES A COLLABORATIVE DESIGN SESSION NEED IN ORDER TO BE EFFECTIVE?

The length of a design session should correspond with what a client is seeking to accomplish.

Clients often make the initial request for a session with a pre-determined view of how long the session should be—"We need to set up a two-day session to do X, Y, and Z"—before taking the time to engage with a designer to scope out their real needs, expectations may have been set on a specific number of days. This is often to the client's detriment.

Complicating matters, most clients have rarely experienced truly breakthrough collaborative sessions. Too often their experience has been limited to ineptly designed and poorly-run PowerPoint fests with unsatisfactory results. Few have had direct experience with our kinds of 3- or 4-day design sessions that regularly accomplish many months worth of work in a matter days—and even accomplish the impossible!

The length of a session is determined by several factors. The more the following conditions are present, the longer the session will need to be to accomplish its objectives:

- Low level of initial alignment among participants
- Low level of comprehensive understanding of the issues or problems
- General complexity of the problem
- Number of participants required/desired (which is also related to the number of break-out teams and the length of reports)
- Participants have little experience in working together collaboratively or successfully
- Range or number of options to be explored or created (developing options from scratch usually takes longer than testing a straw case developed in advance)
- The degree of change represented by potential outcomes (which is related to the time-tested "Sleep-On-It-At-Least-Twice"

rule, described below)

- Level of detail needed in the final action plan

1-Day Sessions can accomplish the following:

- Generate a set of ideas on a particular topic, issue, or problem
- Help a group develop a baseline understanding of a topic, issue, or problem—that is, help them "get on the same page."
- Demonstrate best practices (and our capabilities to deliver against these best practices)
- Achieve alignment/consensus for a single defined issue or narrowly defined problem.



Examples of actual, successful 1-Day Sessions include:

- Generate or build out ideas as input to a longer session
- Vet and prioritize pilot projects for a larger global initiative as input to a 3-day DesignShop
- Develop the new long-term vision for the capabilities needed in a new front-of-store system for a global retailer

- Articulate operating or design principles for a re-organization (but not finalize the new organization itself)
- Revitalize or redirect a project team that has already been working together
- Create a single-frame graphic that shows how Supply Chain Excellence affects share price for a specific global company
- Develop specific IT requirements for 1-3 business processes
- Redesign five screens for website

Risks related to 1-Day Sessions

Clients often end a one-day session with a partially empty stomach, as in "We got a whole lot done, but...." Client sponsors often realize at this point that with a bigger "ask" of participants they would have achieved disproportionately larger results.

One-day sessions are also trickier than longer sessions. There is no time to recover from ambush problems and the client will have 'alignment' or 'familiarity' around the solution instead of the solution 'ownership' a longer session produces. Finally, clients who have experienced only one-day sessions find it hard to imagine the exponential lift they would get from longer sessions.

All that said, the outcomes are still much, *much* greater than the typical one-day meeting.

2-Day Sessions can accomplish the following:

- Test multiple hypotheses regarding the way to proceed with some problem or opportunity
- Where there is already considerable alignment, drive to developing and evaluating multiple options around a set of issues (Warning: Declarations that "considerable alignment already exists" are frequently wishful thinking)
- Repackage existing ideas
- Identify issues for individuals and organizations and alliance partners around the most promising options for working together

Examples of successful 2-Day Sessions include:

- Explore the possibility of a joint venture or merger between two organization
- Leadership retreat with an executive team (N=8-20) to clarify and commit to a new organizational direction
- Develop a complete proposal for new work
- Develop specific requirements, process models, business rules, etc for 5-12 processes
- Generate action plans for a tightly/narrowly scoped project

Cautionary Note Regarding a 2-Day Events

Clients and engagement teams often end a two-day session with a sense of how much farther they could have gotten "if only" they had more time, more participants, wider representation, and more diversity of stakeholders.

Two-day sessions sound more appealing to busy executives than three-day sessions. The cost is more palatable. However, they will produce approximately one-fourth the output of a 3-day DesignShop. There is a major risk of disappointed expectations when clients and engagement teams try to do three days worth of work in a 2-day session.

A **3-Day Session** is by far our most versatile offering. It is ideal for handling highly complex, interrelated issues affecting large numbers of diverse stakeholders. This is the perfect vehicle for understanding and resolving difficult strategy, operational, market, or systems issues.



Furthermore, our experience has been that when the factors at play suggest a longer session, participants need to “*sleep on it twice*” in order to reach psychological resolution. Without sufficient time to discuss issues at length with their colleagues and come to terms internally with the significant change that their solution requires, shorter sessions leave participants feeling steamrolled into a solution about which they still have serious doubts. This only leads to implementation delays and resistance down the road.

3-Day Sessions can accomplish the following:

- Develop and confirm a new enterprise or business unit strategy
- Complete and validate the work required to close a phase of a major ERP project such as
 - Strategy
 - Requirements Definition
 - Gap Fit
 - Implementation Planning
- Redesign a number of interrelated business processes
- Develop understanding, alignment, and enthusiasm for carrying out an action plan in a group of diverse participants



Examples:

- Development of a global strategy for an enterprise, business unit, or function
- Develop new business models or operating footprints for complex businesses

- Launch a large systems project, resolving operational issues and getting business stakeholder ownership
- Establish detailed requirements for multiple business units looking to configure one instance of an ERP package with minimal modifications

Here’s how several previous clients described their experience with a three-day DesignShop® event:

“We accomplished in three days what otherwise would have taken three months – that’s all I have to say.”

-CEO of a leading global bank

“This three-day event absolutely exceeded my expectations – not in the sense that I had any doubt we would climb the mountain. What exceeded my expectations beyond my wildest dreams was the fun, the collateral learning, and the personal exhilaration I felt from the entire event.”

-Executive Vice President of a leading global automobile manufacturer

“This allowed us to achieve conceptual design four times faster than in the previous phase of this project.”

-Director of Operations of a leading biotech company

4-Day Session is used when the complex topic, issue, or problem requires a high level of detailed design then and there.

Examples:

- Develop a detailed operating model, business rules, and process designs for the global controllership function of American Express
- Redesign the process for designing new aircraft at Boeing
- Design the SAP global roll-out at Lilly
- Take the design of a complex global system for GE Capital to 75% of completion (120 use cases, etc.)

Four-day sessions may also start with a three-day session. The client program management

team and the engagement team may carry on for a fourth day to answer the question, "How do we turn the output from the large group into a project action plan?"

"The [four-day] DesignShop we did was responsible for getting our next aircraft into production two years earlier than we otherwise would have."

-Project Manager of a leading aerospace company