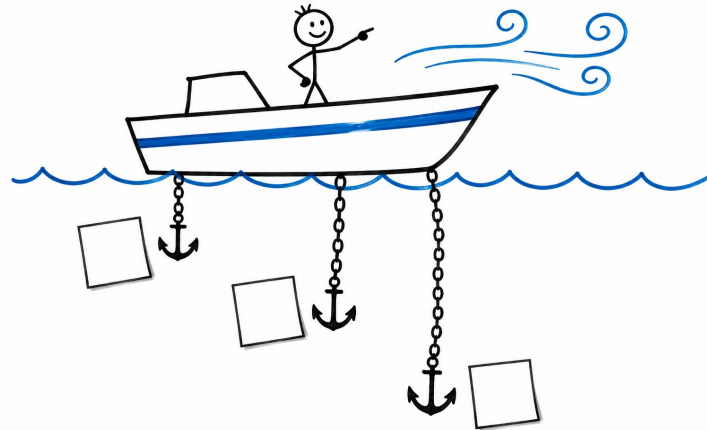


Speed Boat

FORWARD 

Collect and prioritize pain points from a group — without asking “what are your problems?”



Wind pushes the boat toward its destination · **anchors** drag it down — the deeper, the more painful.

The mechanic

Draw a boat on a water line. The boat is the thing the group cares about: their operations, their product, their team, their project. Participants write sticky notes and place them on the poster themselves.

- **Below the water line — anchors:** pains, frictions, risks, missing capabilities. One anchor per sticky. **The deeper the anchor, the bigger the pain** — placement is prioritization, no voting round needed.
- **Above the water line — wind:** what already works, what they would want more of. Tells you what not to break and what to amplify.

Why it works. Criticizing “the boat” is socially safer than criticizing the company or the vendor in the room — the metaphor gives permission. Reacting beats inventing: a board seeded with 3–4 known anchors removes the blank-page freeze. And unlike a survey, everyone reads everyone — momentum builds.

When to use it

Situation	Boat label	You harvest
Customer discovery with a group (event, user day, advisory board)	“Your operations”	Pain points ranked by severity, candidate discovery interviews
Product feedback session	“The product”	Frictions and valued features, from users’ own hands

Team retrospective	"The team"	Blockers and energizers, safely externalized
Kickoff / diagnostic with a client	"The initiative"	Perceived risks and assets before the work starts

Two formats

Table format — workshop, 30–45 min, up to ~10 people per boat.

- One boat per table. Silent writing first (5 min).
- Each participant places and explains their anchors; facilitator clusters duplicates.
- Close by reading the deepest anchors back: "which one would you cut first?"

Poster format — drop-in: event, booth, open space, 2 × 5 min bursts.

- One large poster (A0 or two flipcharts) in a visible spot.
- Short moments where a speaker points at the board and invites stickies; between bursts the board collects passively.
- A facilitator stays close, clusters duplicates, converts hallway conversations into stickies. Pairs well with an anonymous note box next to the poster.

Facilitation rules

1. One pain per sticky. Someone lists three: hand them two more stickies.
2. Ask "how deep?" and let the participant place it themselves. Their hand, their prioritization.
3. Never debate an anchor. Only allowed follow-up: "what makes it that deep for you?"
4. Seed the board before the session with 3–4 anchors you already suspect, at medium depth.
5. Two sticky colors only: red = anchor, green = wind. Thick markers, readable from 1 m.
6. With permission, write name + company on the back of a sticky. A pain with a name is a follow-up lead; without one it is just a quote.

Output

- Photo of the final board before teardown.
- Transcribe anchors into your interview-summary format; depth becomes the severity field.
- Deepest anchors with a name on the back = your next discovery interviews.
- Wind stickies = the "do not break, amplify" list.

Pitfalls

- **Debating instead of collecting.** The board collects; the debate happens later, with the photo.
- **Facilitator writes the stickies.** Then it is your prioritization, not theirs. Hand over the marker.
- **No seeding.** An empty board stays empty for the first awkward ten minutes.
- **Anchors only.** Without wind, the exercise reads as a complaint wall and the group deflates.

Credits: "Speed Boat", Luke Hohmann, *Innovation Games* (2006). Write-up and facilitation variants by Forward Partners.