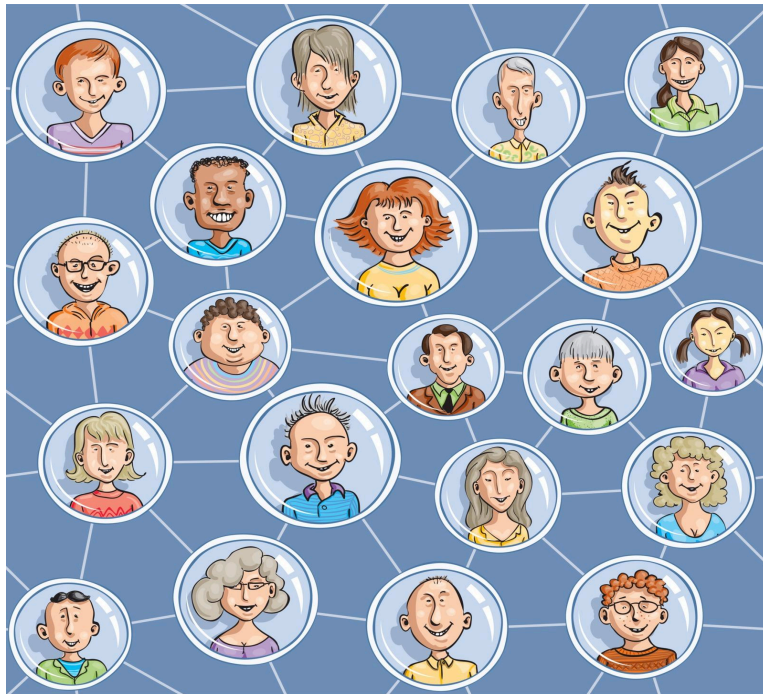


# Happiness Metrics

Disclaimer: Before reading the article, please do bear in mind that the context from which we draw inspiration is not limited to Scrum Teams only, rather we are gathering our insights from different team constructs. Our main intent is to express the value of Happiness Metric to a group of individuals working to achieve a common goal, simply known as a “team”.

## What Is Happiness Metric



Happiness Metric is one Scrum Pattern measuring how happy and engaged team members are with the environment, interpersonal relationships. This pattern influences productivity, sustainability of the team’s mood and their drive to deliver value. This pattern is often applied together with Scrumming the Scrum Pattern (Refer to Scrumming the Scrum [8]).

At first glance, one may deduce that this topic is quite easy. Why is it included as a Scrum Pattern? “Hey, this is too obvious! Why talk about it?” But then on thinking a bit more deeper, the topic is actually not considering individual satisfaction, but that of a conglomerate agreement of a group of people working on a single vision. This group of individuals otherwise referred to as a “team”, the Scrum team.

Happiness Metric, maybe one of the relatively sophisticated and abstract among the Scrum Patterns. Happiness Metric is an aspect that is hard to measure in an individual and much more for a team. Happiness fundamentally deals with people; their individualism first because they

are part and parcel of the teams' happiness. For any team to flourish, thrive and be effectively productive, each individual must be motivated, engaged and driven. Can these characteristics be considered the Happiness Metric for a team? Well, maybe.

People are social beings. Usually individuals strive to be a valued member in a team, expecting to be appreciated in return. Having this reciprocity will make the affinity of each member be more positive, reinforcing that good feeling in the team. This will bring a lot of benefits to the team, as each individual expresses their fondness towards the team and what it stands for. This, in turn, provides a boost towards the general well-being of the team, as well as to the prosperity of the organizational enterprise.

An example of a positive outcome for the progression of "*happiness degree*" in a team is the number of improvements. The improvements are being done constantly and incrementally. These improvement topics may not only deal with the business aspect of the professional individuals, but may even extend to the holistic improvement of the persons in the team. Happier people, happier teams just means more productivity. Based on the *Journal of Labor Economics*[3], happier people are about 12% more productive. This will be a positive reinforcement for the team to sustain being happy; if not, then to become even happier as individuals and as a team.

# Common Impediments or Challenges



*Scrum Mastery Community* Scrum team jointly identified what are the common impediments or challenges they had faced in applying Happiness Metric.

## **G**etting the team to agree on what makes the team content and happy

Scrum Team will consist of people of different age, sex, religion, ethnicity, etc., finding a common happiness indicator would be a challenge to the team.

As eating together is universally considered a way to strengthen camaraderie, take this scenario:

- A team is composed of two married gentlemen, 2 married ladies, 2 young individuals. The team also have different religions, where a subgroup is a vegetarian, one is vegan, and a couple of people are meat lovers. Planning a team lunch out will be a real challenge.

Given the simple scenario above, one can infer the difference in definition of “a happy dish” for each individual. This is just from the individual level. Now let’s take a look at the team level.

## **C**omparing one team’s definition with another team in the same organization

There is a real challenge within ourselves to always look out if the team we belong or represent is the best. We inherently have this competitive spirit and propensity to check how other teams are doing. More often than not, if the team considers its own process as inferior, each individual member may start to mimic the practices of other teams. While it might work in some scenarios, it is not always the case due to the uniqueness of each team dynamics. The interpersonal relationship of one team is hard to replicate and emulate in another team.

## **B**eing *too happy* and thinking only for the short term

From a famous Danish folktale by Hans Christian Andersen “Emperor’s New Clothes”, a not-so-direct analogy can be made where most of the team is focusing on trivial, inappropriate facets. Some members of the team may be unsure to speak out and avoid popping the *happy bubble*. While some of these topics are factual, they might not be effective points ultimately contributing to value delivery that stakeholders or customers expect. Some of them might be even detrimental to the team dynamics if left unchecked.

## **T**oo many issues, all issues are urgent

After having identified the common team impediments (Refer to Scrumming the Scrum [8] for examples), Happiness Metric can be applied to prioritise which team impediment to begin working on first. “So, which impediment should we work on first?” and silence would fill the room. This can be brought about by various reasons.

Several team impediments can appear to have very similar natures, and hence, be classified at the same priority level. This results in difficulty determining which should be worked on and removed first. If the team is unable to determine the different impacts of these impediments, there would be difficulty in reaching an agreement on which team impediment should be considered first.

Even though the highest priority team impediment has been identified, the inherent reluctance to change could result in the rejection of potential action items that can remove the prioritised impediment. Thoughts like “How will this be implemented? What kind of repercussions could/ would result from it? What happens if we fail?” could fill the minds of the team members. Reasons why we are reluctant to change are plenty, including but not limited to uncertainty, lack of courage, not understanding the change, not understanding the need for the change, as well as avoiding disagreements and failure. These reasons leave many with the desire for a seamless/ painless transition to the solution. If the solution could result in mistakes and failures, the team might decide to remain in their happy successful bubble and not pop it.

# Our Recommendation



To assist with the application of Happiness Metric for incremental continuous improvement, recommendations tackling the impediments faced can be implemented.

## **G**etting the team to agree on what makes each individual content and happy

The starting point to identify what happiness means to the team is to understand if team members are reluctant to open up. If there exists some level of uneasiness, one-to-one talks would help understand each person's pain points and establish trust. Creating a close door environment where no judgements are passed helps. Having a safe circle would promote transparency and honesty. The goal is to raise the awareness of the positive changes that could make the team feel more engaged and purposeful at work, so that next steps could be taken.

Conducting regular team building activities builds trust for teams. This helps to soften the ground to finding common topics to align on and to bring up difficult topics.

## **T**eam members to lead the definition of happiness metrics

Everyone's definition of happiness is different, hence, every team's definition of happiness would differ. Each member can ask the following questions to guide the team as a single unit to identify effective improvement actionables:

- What would make the team feel engaged?
- What would bring purpose to the team?
- What would contribute to the team's growth?
- What would increase a team's passionate level ?
- Is there any clarity in the work which the team is doing?
- Does the team know what their value is to the end customer?
- Does the team feel empowered ? If not, how would empowerment to the team be possible ?

The collection of the response to these questions may lead to increase of understanding among the team, which leads to defining the metric which will best tap into their collective passion or sense of engagement. The metric defined by the team will be acceptable by the team and recognised as a way to measure the team's happiness.

By understanding the root causes for the low metric scored by end of each sprint or whichever frequency determined by the team, the team can craft the next actionable steps. The actionable item could be user-story related issues such as the lack of clarity on the goal of user-stories or lack of a strong definition of ready. It's recommended to place the actions into the sprint / product backlog.

## **P**rioritizing and addressing important issues in batches

When quite similar impediments are present and the team has difficulty prioritising them, a facilitator can ask deeper questions. The intent is to assist the team in identifying which impediments have a larger impact on delivery of customer value and team engagement.

Here are some of the examples questions:

- How would this decrease team velocity?
- How would this affect the number of failed sprints?
- How could this affect the quality of work or definition of done?

These questions encourage thinking from different perspectives, kickstart discussions on prioritising the common team impediments<sup>[2]</sup>.

For teams which feel uneasy about the huge changes brought about by the actionables, incremental improvements should be applied rather than huge changes. Prioritise low-hanging, big impact improvements so that the team can view the positive impact to their morale. Get teams to commit to the actionable just as any story during the sprint planning by writing the actionable as a story with quantifiable acceptance criteria. This identified incremental improvements can be prioritised in the product backlog and one can be selected to be placed in the following sprint (Refer to Scrumming the Scrum[8])

There are times when teams are comfortable with the current state of things. It is necessary to pop the happy bubble to be aware of the deficiencies present and the improvements that could be made. Sharing of objective and factual data helps to reinforce the need for change. Teams need to be constantly challenged to push the boundaries of their performance and to continuously improve. This needs to be managed carefully as popping the bubble is likely to bring high amounts of stress and even animosity.



**“When I** took over as Scrum Master for a team, there was an air of uncertainty, as I sensed that the previous Scrum Master was well-liked by the team. Initial retrospective check-ins and discussions were lacking in candour and expression. This triggered one of my biggest fears-- of not being aware of the Happiness Metric of the team.

What I did then was to send out anonymous surveys to the team to gather feedback on their happiness, on key roles like Scrum Master, and events like retrospectives.

"What is a thing that can motivate you at work?", "How useful are retrospectives from 1 to 10?" Using the questions above, obtaining survey results and doing one-to-one sessions, I was able to appreciate the underlying feelings and started to work on addressing some feedback.

Having seen my earnestness to at least try to empathise with their concerns, the team members started to open up and trust started to form. Consequently the Happiness Metric became reliable. The team members started giving an angry emoji or a 10 telling the team why, instead of a mechanical 7 so that they won't be asked why.

It is important first to create a psychologically safe environment, conducive enough for the team to express their views and feelings. Doing this is half the battle won in achieving the Happiness Metric.” - Aloysius

**“Given the** high turnover rate in the software industry, one of the questions I pondered about a team which I used to lead was “what could I have done to get the team more engaged?”. I was inspired by Google’s use of allowing people time to pursue their passion projects. Passion projects are not a waste of time if it helps to further develop the talent and raise the quality of human capital. Tinkering is very core to the nature of an Engineer.

That gave me the idea to give the team a day every 2 weeks where they could experiment with different technologies and share their learnings with the entire team. By doing this, the team came back more energised in the following week. There were positive emotions from the experience. If you want a team that is high-performing, consider how to integrate experiences at work, which brings about positivity.” - Shalom

## **I**dentifying Purposeful Metrics

“When we had observed that *our team's* motivation level was decreasing, we brainstormed and decided to apply Happiness Metric into Scrumming The Scrum[8].

We shared the idea with the team and they collectively decided to identify the metric around the Scrum Values (Commitment, Courage, Openness, Respect & Focus). We did not apply scoring to the metric. Instead, these metrics were classified into 3 categories (What went well, What



went wrong & What to improve) as part of the sprint retrospective. Good progress was observed in the team - an increase in self commitment level, reduction in number of sprint failures. The team felt very happy that they received good feedback from their product owner on their deliverables.

The team found these effective and adjusted the metric according to the team dynamic, e.g. when a new team member joined the team, they would lower down the expectation to that member until the person had adapted to the team.” - Celine and Jaymie

“**Initially**, there was a lack of honesty when ratings were given during the session as *my team* was not comfortable with sharing their deepest thoughts and feelings. As a result, Happiness Metric could not be applied properly. With incorrect application, the team did not see why there was a need to do Happiness Metric and felt it was a waste of time.

After a few team lunches and getting to better understand their purpose and real thoughts and feelings about the project, the team finally opened up and started to be honest. The Happiness Metric could then be applied properly. The team provided and explained their ratings, eliciting sharings and discussions on why pace/load had to be set in a certain manner or why certain things had to be done. The “unhappiness” of developers was finally uncovered and hence discovered improvements topics of the team.” - Zhi Lin

## **E**mpathy

“**During** every retrospective, before I begin, I will ask for a Happiness Metrics Poll, where team members vote if they are *Happy, Very Happy or Sad*. Based on the results, I will ask them to openly discuss their feelings. After the retrospective is complete, I try to speak to each *sad* individual to help them.

By actively listening, the team members feel that they are heard, looked after and hence stay motivated. Staff retention rate is greatly increased after which. And the team is always open for new ideas to try and showcase the values of Scrum.

While the Happiness Metric works in a very subtle way, it plays a huge role in productivity as well.” - Jit

“**I do** believe that feelings play a crucial role in improving team productivity. Before the retrospective, I start by checking in with *my team's* feelings. Each of the members will share their feelings and why. From here, I can decide how to facilitate the retrospective based on the outcome. It can help the team gain focus on the discussions and not be clouded by feelings.

For example, if everyone shares negative feelings about the sprint, I usually focus on "What went wrong?" and "What can we improve on?". During this period, the team shares the problems and brainstorms ideas to improve. At the end of the retrospective, I guide them back to positive feelings by asking everyone, "What went well?". This way can help them to feel good and motivate them to do better.

With this approach, I often see the team members focus on solving problems and be more creative. The expression of one's feelings helps drive better discussions." - Jeanice

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