Team Health Check

by Scrum & Kanban

How to use the Team Health Check

There are lots of 'health check models' out there. Most of them attempt to summarise and visualise how teams are doing, and seek areas of improvements. They are sometimes run by managers, sometimes by coaches, sometimes by teams in workshops.

Over the years, I have discarded approaches that 'score' teams (either by numbers, letters, or traffic lights) simply because real life is not that simple. A team can be doing well and poorly in the same area at the same time. If, for example, a team is good at certain communication, but poor in others, would you score them 5 out of 10? Or would you give them an amber traffic light? Or a C grade? Although they look pretty and appear clear, I have never found such simplified visual cues really help me in any way.

What I have found very useful is taking some time to stand back and evaluate the situation, asking questions like "How often is the team disrupted? By whom? How important are the disruptions?" "Is the team running any analytics/follow-up activity after their work is delivered?" "When does the team start to get involved in discussing requirements?"

Let me make this very clear: this is not a method of rating the team. It is not meant as a comparative tool to judge the success of individuals or teams, and it should not be used to rank teams. It originated as a way for me, as a coach, to put down my feelings on how a team is doing and what areas we should be focusing on. It also allowed me see how a team was evolving over time and helped me provide feedback to teams. But I have also used it to mentor Scrum Masters and used it as a group exercise with whole teams.

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Individuals & Interactions		Actions to take to improve
How much face-to-face communication goes on within the team?		
Is the team self-organising?		
Does the team have a daily stand-up? Same time, same place each day? Who attends? Does everyone participate? Who runs it? Do they take discussions 'offline'? How long is it? Are problems/impediments raised?		
How does the team assign work to individuals?		
Does the team have a team goal? What is the level of commitment to the goal and in general?		
How does the team deal with impediments?		
Is the team co-located? Do people work from home? Is their environment conducive to efficient performance?		
Are roles within the team clear? Does the team have a dedicated scrum master / delivery manager and product owner / product manager? Is there a dominant leader in the team? How do they assert dominance? How are relationships between the team and scrum master / delivery manager, product owner / product manager?		
How often is the team disrupted? By whom? How important are the disruptions?		
How welll does the team communicate with suppliers / customers / related teams?		
Do members of the team trust each other? Do they display signs of vulnerability to each other?		
Is there a fear of conflict or does constructive disagreement occur? Is there 'artificial harmony'? Has the team formed cliques?		
Other comments about individuals & interactions		

Delivering value	Actions to take
How is quality measured? How is it benchmarked? What is the quality of the work produced by the team?	
Does the team over-work requirements? Do they focus on "maximising the amount of work not done"?	
What is the team's cadence for delivery?	
Are team members accountable to one another for the work they / the team has committed to do?	
Is there a pull or push system in place? Are WIP limits in place? Are WIP limits being adhered to?	
Does the team deliver what they forecast in their planning sessions? Does the team focus on results?	
How does the team communicate what they deliver? Does the team hold sprint reviews / showcases? How often? Who runs them? How interactive are they? Who attends?	
How does the team measure progress? Who does this? How often is it done? How productive is the team? What is the flow of work like? Are there any areas of concern?	
How is work approved before it is released? What is the approval process? Who is involved? Does the process affect rate of delivery? What caused the current processes to be put in place? What is the error rate of work deployed?	
Is quality clearly defined? Is the team delivering this quality? How does the team deal with differences in opinion over quality?	
Is the team delivering what the business needs most? How do they know?	
Is the team using any metrics (eg Kanban reports) or burn-ups/burn-downs?	
Is the team running any analytics/follow-up activity after their work is delivered?	
How sustainable is the pace at which the team works?	
Does the team understand its vision? Are there clear goals that relate to the vision?	
Other comments relating to the team's output	

Customer collaboration	Actions to take
How well does the team interact with 'the business'/ stakeholders? How often do they talk?	
How much face-to-face communication goes on with the customer? How often does user research happen?	
How are new requirements fed into the team? Are 'options' being generated?	
When does the team start to get involved in discussing requirements?	
Who is in charge of supplying requirements? How is that relationship?	
Are any of the following fixed: scope, time, cost? How is quality defined/measured?	
Is it clear what is in the backlog?	
Is the vision understood and visible?	
Does the product owner / manager have control of prioritisation?	
What is the team's cadence for bringing in new work?	
Does the team use explicit policies (eg classes of service, definition of done)?	
How does the team plan? Do they use estimates? What method do they use? Does the whole team contribute?	
What is the output of a planning session? Does the team buy in to the plan?	
Other comments regarding customer collaboration	

Dealing with change	Actions to take
How does the team deal with changes at each stage of their system?	
What is the team's cadence for bringing in new work?	
How would the team respond if the product owner / manager wanted a new requirement done immediately? What would the process be to fulfil the request?	
Does the team hold retros? How frequently? Does everyone participate? Are action points agreed (with people & timescale assigned)? Are previous retro's action points reviewed? Is the format varied?	
Is the team continuously evolving? Are there instances of revolution?	
How does the team deal with risks and dependencies?	
Other comments on how the team deals with change	

General	Actions to take
How motivated is the team as individuals and as a team? Are they happy?	
Does the team have the environment & support they need to do their jobs?	
How competent is the team? What are the skills within the team? Do they have an overlap of skills and/or any gaps?	
Is the team a nice place to work overall? What are the highlights and lowlights of working in the team? What hours do people work? Do people work late nights/weekends? If so, why? Is the team open with each other?	
Do members of the team trust each other? Do they display signs of vulnerability to each other?	
Are there signs of conflict? Has the team formed cliques?	
Does anyone on the team avoid being accountable for their own / the team's work?	
Other general comments	