



A Temperature Reading is an easy to adopt tool. It was created by Virginia Satir; A family therapist whose work is finding its way into software development and management. It offers a strong and solid way to receive and respond to information about a teams' functioning. Temperature Reading can help a team create a positive and safe atmosphere that is a joy to work in.

Introduction

Have you ever been in these situations?

*Bob: Hi Dave, you know that XML preset filter that has been giving me a headache for over the past four weeks? Last night, I finally nailed it. You know how the parameterization was all jumbled up when we ran it through DEFREZ? Well I got a great idea for a pre-serializer last night. I wrote a few tests. Did a spike on it and now I *know* we can make it work. It would just take three or four days to knock the code in and you could be releasing it in the next build. How's that?*

Dave: Was that the code that was driving the Melville EDI? To connect their legacy EDI interfaces to our XML back-office?

Bob: Yeah, that's the one.

Dave: Didn't somebody tell you? The deal fell through two weeks ago. They signed with our competitors. They used some fancy escape clause in the contract or something.

Bob and Dave are missing out on vital information. Bob doesn't know that the customer left. Dave doesn't know that Bob is still working on their account. Maybe if they had a Temperature Reading, they could have saved two weeks of Bob's hard work and put the effort into a customer account that was still with them.

Pete: You know Dave man? I know he is still offended by those bugs he found in the last release, even though we've worked our heads off to get them fixed and we still shipped the release on-time.

Pete is missing out on some important information too. Yes, Dave was annoyed finding two bugs in a release the team said was ready to ship. But he was proud and grateful when the team got their act together and still managed to ship the release, bug free, on-time. Dave is also missing out again, since Pete is voicing his misgivings to his team mates, resulting in unrest and dissatisfaction. Dave was hesitant about telling his team they did a great job. He doesn't want to reward them for making mistakes (they did leave two bugs in the system after all). Perhaps if they had a Temperature Reading Dave and Pete would have found a way to voice their complaints. Perhaps Dave would have found a safe place to show his gratitude and be specific in his appreciation.

We've all had similar experiences. Even in agile teams, when you do your stand-up every day, and when you do the planning game every week. Even when your team sits in the same room with the customer.

Important information is overlooked or not shared for perfectly good reasons. Misinterpretations and wrong assumptions because of unclear or ambiguous requirements happen, in agile teams too. Team members spend valuable energy on passionate and powerful debates about the intent (or lack of) to be shown in the code. Because they are afraid to look silly when they go and ask.

Temperature Readings can improve these issues, but most importantly it addresses respect. This is the newest and latest XP value. As seen in the second edition of eXtreme Programming Explained.

Structure

A Temperature Reading is a regularly held team meeting that is made up of five clearly defined parts. Each part has its own set of rules or a protocol to follow and serves as a stage to the participants to express themselves on. This helps participants to focus on positive and constructive feedback, boosting each others energy, not draining it.

Temperature Readings take time. From twenty minutes to up to several hours. The time taken depends on the situation and context. Sometimes the team has issues that it just needs to address and deal with. Rejoice that you've found them and brought them to the surface where they are there for the team to see and handle.



So it is a team meeting, but in a structured format that gives each person a stage to address key factors in a team or project. In this session you learn how to run one in your team yourself.

This is how we have structured the temperature reading:

- 1. Specific Appreciations**
- 2. New information**
- 3. Puzzles**
- 4. Complaints with recommendations**
- 5. Goals, Hopes and wishes**

You can adapt the structure of the temperature reading to fit your needs or wants. For this tutorial we will keep to the structure outlined above.

1. Specific Appreciations

This starts the meeting off on a positive ground. I used to have trouble telling people they did a good job, or if they did something that I liked or that I found valuable. They might feel I was kissing up to them. They might become over confident or behave self-indulgent.

This part teaches you how you can give an appreciation and make it specific:

Describe the situation. What were you doing? What were you trying to achieve?

Describe what the person you appreciate did.

Describe what that meant to you and why you feel it was important.

Example: Pete: I'd like to give an appreciation to Bob. Dave found two bugs in the latest release we shipped. I know Bob was crunching on his XML filter, still. He took the time to help me refactor the core database binding classes. For me that meant that I could remove the bug in the database connection. I feel that was important because that helped us ship the software on-time after all.

2. New information

Sometimes you are busy, sometimes not everyone is there. Sometimes people forget stuff. Sometimes you think people don't need to know. This part is about sharing information. Sharing information increases each member's sense of contribution and helps to grow a more general knowledge inside the team. It could also help to solve puzzles or resolve complaints. Therefore it is before those parts in the structure.

Examples: Dave: Melville canceled their contract. It seems their lawyer found an escape clause or something in their contract.

Pete: You'd better send Bob an email about that. I know he's been working on their EDI for the past 2 weeks.

Dave: I've been to the XPDays Benelux conference and I've attended a session about temperature readings which I think could help us improve communication.

3. Puzzles

Culturally we've been trained not to let on when we are confused. In some companies, letting show that you do not know can be hazardous. Your reputation could take a dent. If there is some savvy new software and you, the technical guru doesn't know about it, you must be losing your touch. Solving puzzles helps to resolve rumors. It can also be comforting to know that others have the same questions you have. If the puzzle can be resolved quickly do it at the spot. If not agree to take it up, right after the meeting is over. Follow up on that.

Example: Dave: Where is Bob anyway?

Pete: Bob told me he had a doctor's appointment this morning. He said he might be late. He tried to reach you, but your phone was busy.



Pete: I am wondering what is going to happen now that Jack has been promoted to division head. Are you taking up Jack's previous position? Who is going to take up yours?

Dave: Jack's promotion was a formality; he was already acting division head for quite some time now. He was already doing the work. There is no vacancy for his previous position. For us nothing changes except that Jack becoming the formal head of division may help us get in a stronger voice with upper management.

4. Complaints with Recommendations

People have the urge to be defensive. Most organizations choose to suppress or ignore complaints. This part explicitly asks for complaints. The rule is that you can only state a complaint if you also offer a recommendation or seek recommendations within the team. The combination of a complaint with a recommendation strives to achieve constructive criticism and to offer assistance in resolving problems quickly and without hurt to those involved.

Example: Dave: My complaint is that there were two bugs in the code you said was ready to ship. Do you have recommendations?

Pete: I recommend that we do an additional trial run before we mark the release to make sure we don't miss any in the future. Perhaps we could have an additional tester for a day or two, say the week before the release. That would help us capture any problems early.

5. Goals, Hopes and Wishes

Sharing hopes and wishes helps to end the meeting on a positive level. We have added goals here, which can help you make stuff more solid and concrete. A goal is something more than a hope or a wish. It is a measurable and acceptable result. If you plan on doing a temperature reading on a weekly basis, you could integrate the planning game into this section. Goals hopes and wishes look out to the future of the team and its people. It helps them see that much that they want to achieve is shared among them.

Examples: Dave: I hope we land that deal with Zatchtech. I know our system can improve their turnaround time by 50 percent or more.

Pete: Let's get the next release out bug free.

A facilitator can guide the group through the Temperature Reading, ensuring that adequate time is allowed for each part. Any member of the group can serve as facilitator. If you want, different team members can be facilitators each time so that each can gain experience at it. Later, you won't need a facilitator anymore.

Further reading

If you'd like to know more about Temperature Readings you can consult these on-line resources:

www.stickyminds.com/sitewide.asp?ObjectId=2535&Function=DETAILBROWSE&ObjectType=ART
www.chacocanyon.com/pointlookout/010829.shtml
www.dhemery.com/articles/temperature_reading.html
www.dhemery.com/articles/temperature_reading.pdf
www.satirworkshops.com
www.avanta.net
www.satirsystems.com

History

We, the presenters, have been running Temperature Readings in our company on a weekly basis. It has added significant value to our team. It has made our company a warmer and safer place to work. Temperature readings have given each and every employee the stage to voice their opinions and ideas. We have greater respect and understanding of each individual's needs, wants and drives. We have built a shared vision of the future of our company. We deal with problems and challenges more effectively without hurting each others feelings.