The Smiley Game v1.0

Introduction

The Smiley Game was created to let players experience the power of team self-organization and work interchangeability, while playing a fun and simple game.

This guide provides a detailed explanation of the game for facilitators and trainers. Players do NOT need to read this guide to be able to play the game. A short explanation by the facilitator or trainer will suffice as the game is pretty simple and self-explanatory.

Ideal number of players: 2-3 teams with 4-5 players per team.

Duration: about 30 min in total with two rounds of 6 min playing time.

Note: there is not one correct way of playing the game – several tactics will emerge from the self-organizing teams.

Game outline

The Smiley Making business

When you play the Smiley Game you enter the Smiley Making business.

Four types of Smileys are made with post-its and markers (see Fig.1 and Fig.2):

- Happy black
- Happy red
- Sad black
- Sad red

Fig.1: Examples of the four types of Smileys in the 4-player version

Fig.2: Examples of the four types of Smileys in the 5-player version

The teams playing this game need to make and deliver as many orders as possible. Delivery of orders is accomplished by pasting the correct Smiley post-its on the order sheets. Those orders consist of different amounts of the four types.

About the Smiley Game

The Smiley Game was created to let players experience the power of work interchangeability and team self-organization.

The Smiley Game lets players feel the difference between two organizational paradigms:

1. Managers determine what needs to be done and how it must be done. They give instructions to narrowly skilled people doing the work.
2. Managers still determine what needs to be done, but the how is determined through self-organization of the multi-skilled people doing the work.

The Smiley Game does NOT challenge the value of managers in an organization! It just highlights the difference between two paradigms. As such it is intended to make managers think about their current beliefs and assumptions.

The game is not only intended to make managers reflect on their way of managing. It is also intended to make everyone reflect on how work is organized. In many organizations strong focus on specialization and individual performance eliminates work interchangeability. By playing The Smiley Game, players experience first-hand the high price organizations pay for this choice.

When and how to use it

The game is most powerful for illustrating the effect of changing a system of processes. Most organizations can be seen as a system of processes. The two paradigms in the two rounds of the Smiley Game create two very different systems of processes. By experiencing these two modes of doing the same kind of work participants learn that how work is organized can have more impact on performance than how hard you work.

Initially Jurgen Denul developed The Smiley Game to be part of his courses on Lean, Agile and Flow. You can use it for similar courses. It can also be used for Scrum courses as it let's players experience the power of self-organizing cross-functional teams. As the game is explicitly built around self-organization instead of self-management, it is up to the Scrum trainer to frame this.

The Smiley Game can also be used as part of interactive workshops e.g. for working on continuous improvement or retrospectives of agile teams.

Ideally, this game is played with multiple teams competing as the competition spirit creates a similar drive for results as in most business contexts. In a competitive setting players also tend to have more fun, which is a primary goal of any game.

Learning objectives

The Smiley Game has been designed and optimized to achieve several learning objectives, which can be more or less emphasized by the trainer or workshop facilitator. Below, we describe the learning objectives from three perspectives:

- learning objectives for all players;
- learning objectives for players who are managers in real life;
- learning objectives for players who are not managers in real life.

General learning objectives

- Players have fun!!!
- Players become aware that how work is organized can have more impact on performance than how hard they work.
- Players can explain the impact of work interchangeability on how much work gets done.
- Players can explain the impact of self-organization (by people doing the work) on performance.
- Players understand the difference between determining WHAT needs to be done and HOW it needs to be done.

Learning objectives for managers

- Players (who are managers) become aware of their current beliefs and assumptions and how it affects the way they organize work.
- Players (who are managers) understand that a manager needs to focus more on determining WHAT needs to be done than on HOW it needs to be done.
- Players (who are managers) understand the importance of multi-skilled employees.
- Players (who are managers) understand that focussing on individual goals, targets, KPI's, … undermines work interchangeability.

Learning objectives for non-managers

- Players (who are not managers) become aware of their current beliefs and assumptions and how it affects their preference for organization of work.
- Players (who are not managers) become aware of the impact on performance of narrow specialization and strong individualism.
- Players (who are not managers) understand that they should help find ways to make work more interchangeable.

Setting up the game

Room and setting

All teams must have a big table with sufficient space for 4 or 5 players. This table must provide a surface area big enough for the individual work (of making Smileys), for stocks of half-products and products and for pasting Smileys on orders (= order fulfilment). The picture below (Fig. 3) shows the material typically needed for one playing table (= for one team).
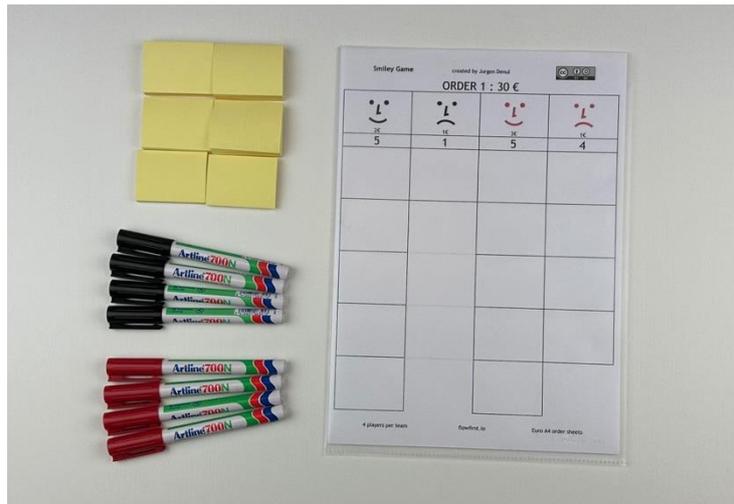
Fig.3: Example of material needed for one team

When there are multiple teams, the playing table should be arranged in such a way that the trainers / facilitator has a vantage point with an unobstructed view of all playing tables.

That vantage point is also an ideal spot for placing the flipchart score board.

There are two versions of The Smiley Game: one with 4 active players and one with 3 active players. These versions have been balanced in such a way that you can play with a mix of 4-player and 5-player teams. The only difference is in the types of Smileys to be made (see Fig.1 and Fig.2).

If the number of participants is not a combination of 4 and 5, then you can assign two secondary roles:

- Observer: ask one of the participants to observe and capture learning points, either per team or across teams.
- Management assistant: someone who can assist the manager – ideally this role is not needed as it will give an advantage to the team with such a management assistant.

It is highly recommended not to play the game with more than 4 teams if there is only one trainer/facilitator.

Materials

For each playing table of a 4/5 player team (see Fig.3):

- 300 Post-it notes type 653 (or similar from a different brand)
- 4/5 red markers (Artline700N, Sharpie, or similar from a different brand)
- 4/5 black markers (Artline700N, Sharpie, or similar from a different brand)
- 2 (identical) sets of orders sheet (for 2 rounds) – pdf downloadable from flowfirst.io – please, print on fully recycled paper

For the trainer/facilitator:

- Presentation slides
- Timekeeping device

Scoreboard on a flip-chart:

Team	Round	Money	# orders	# of top 3	WIP
team name	round 1				
	round 2				
team name	round 1				
	round 2				
team name	round 1				
	round 2				

Playing the game

Rules and flow of the game

A 4/5 player team is composed of:

- 1 manager
- 3/4 makers

There are two rounds based on two paradigms for work organization:

1. Managers determine what needs to be done and how it must be done. They give instructions to narrowly skilled people doing the work.
2. Managers still determine what needs to be done, but the how is determined through self-organization of all multi-skilled people doing the work.

General rules, which apply to both rounds:

- There are 18 orders numbered in decreasing order of customer importance.
- The goal is to make as much money as possible by fulfilling complete orders. Only the value of complete orders gets counted for the "money" score. Only the number of complete orders count for the "# orders" score.
- The third score ("# of top 3") counts how many of the first three orders have been completed.
- Orders are completed by pasting the right type of complete Smileys in the boxes on the order sheets (see Fig.4).
- In both rounds, only the manager determines the orders to be fulfilled.
- In both rounds, only the manager collects the completed orders and gives them to the referee at the end of each round.
- A round starts (and the timer starts) when the referee asks the managers to open the folder with orders on their table. This starts the 2 min preparation of a round.
- In each round there are 2 min of preparation and 4 min of production. NO production activities or "pre-production" activities may take place during the 2 min preparation time.
- After 2 min of preparation the referee will ask all teams to stop. When all teams are quiet and ready, the referee will start the 4 min production time.

Fig.4: Examples of a completed orders (for a 4-player team)

Specific rules for round 1:

- The makers are highly specialized and each maker can only perform one very specialized task (see Fig.5 and Fig.6):
    - One player draws only eyes
    - One player draws only noses
    - One player draws only mouths
    - (One player draws only the circles – only in the 5-player version)
- Managers are not makers.
- During the 2 min preparation the managers think about which orders to fulfil and how to fulfil them. Once they made up their mind, the managers can start giving instructions to the makers. The makers can NOT make anything during the 2 min preparation. The makers must NOT interfere with the preparation of their manager.
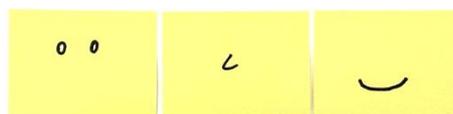

Fig.5: Examples of the three specialized tasks in the 4-player version
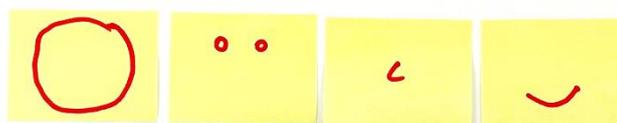

Fig.6: Examples of the four specialized tasks in the 5-player version

Specific rules for round 2:

- Everyone (makers and managers) has learned how to do every task required in making Smileys, so everyone CAN do any task in the Smiley production.
- How the Smileys are best made must be determined collaboratively by everyone performing production of Smileys. This is done during the 2 min preparation. NO (pre-)production activity is allowed during these 2 min!
- Still, only the manager is responsible for determining which orders to fulfil!
- Still, only the manager can collect completed orders!

Scoreboard

Three scores determine the winner of each round: "money", "# orders" and "# of top 3". The team that has the most high-scores in a round, wins the round.

The WIP is only counted for every team in every round as illustration of a secondary learning goal. WIP is counted as the sum of all fully or partially finished Smileys that are not part of a complete order. So any half or fully finished Smiley on the table or on incomplete orders counts as WIP.

<div align="center">

primary scores

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Team	Round	Money	# orders	# of top 3	WIP
team name	round 1				
	round 2				
team name	round 1				
	round 2				
team name	round 1				
	round 2				

Key attention points for referee (= teacher or facilitator)

- First of all, it is essential that the referee (= teacher or facilitator) has played the game several times (with friends and family) before using it in a professional setting! Especially with multiple teams, the game can get hectic and you won't be able to referee if you are a novice to the game.
- Foresee enough time in the training or workshop or other context where you use the Smiley game. Although, in principle, each round has only 2+4 min playing time, you must foresee more than enough time. Depending on how many teams play the game, you will need between 20 and 40 min.
- Bring examples of everything. You can make the instructions as clear as you want, but nothing is as clear as examples. Make examples of complete Smileys, partial Smileys, full orders, and partial orders.
- As teacher or facilitator, you need to decide in advance how to distribute the participants over the different teams. How many teams of 4 or 5? How many special roles to create 6 or 7 people teams?
- Put the score board on a flip chart in advance.
- Clearly separate the 2 min preparation and 4 min production time boxes. Especially with multiple teams, things will get hectic and fun!
- Next to questions linked to the learning goals, ask players how they felt in both rounds. Interesting insights might emerge on the advantages and challenges of self-organizing cross-functional teams.

License

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