

Healthy vs Toxic Metrics

Quick Reference Guide

From Chapter 3: *The Dark Side of Agile Metrics*

The same metric can help or harm — it depends entirely on **how you use it**.
Metrics should **inform**, not **control**.

VELOCITY

✓ HEALTHY USE

Team's internal planning tool; estimating capacity; identifying when something needs improvement

✗ TOXIC USE

Performance target; comparing teams; mandating increases; tying to evaluations

⚠ Warning Sign: Teams inflate estimates, maintain two sets of records, or work unsustainable hours to hit numbers

PREDICTABILITY

✓ HEALTHY USE

Team reflection tool; understanding planning accuracy; identifying systemic blockers

✗ TOXIC USE

Executive scorecard metric; equating with maturity; demanding 80-85% consistency

⚠ Warning Sign: Teams close incomplete stories early, remove items mid-sprint, or discuss tactics to game the metric

SPRINT VARIABILITY

✓ HEALTHY USE

Understanding responsiveness patterns; distinguishing healthy adaptation from chaos

✗ TOXIC USE

Penalizing change; treating low variability as discipline; discouraging mid-sprint pivots

⚠ Warning Sign: Teams treat responsiveness as a liability; rewrite backlog items to hide legitimate pivots

CYCLE TIME

✓ HEALTHY USE

Identifying bottlenecks, right-sizing work, improving flow, and team-owned improvement

✗ TOXIC USE

Performance evaluation, cross-team comparison, speed targets disconnected from value

⚠ Warning Sign: Teams fragment work into unnaturally small pieces; stories split into tasks that provide no standalone value

The Bottom Line

When metrics become goals, they cease to be useful. A team can look great on paper — green dashboards, perfect predictability, increasing velocity — and still be failing their customers.

The question isn't *"What metrics should we track?"* It's **"How will we use metrics?"**

Ask Your Team

"If we could only track one thing to know if we're succeeding, what would it be?"

From *Agile Meets AI: A Pragmatic Guide for Modern Teams* by Sheila Eckert
Download more resources at thesheilaverse.com/book-companion