Effective Retrospectives

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What is a Retrospective?

A meeting where a team looks back on a past period of work so that they can learn from their experience and apply this learning to future projects.
Why Retrospectives?

“Without retrospectives you will find that the team keeps making the same mistakes over and over again.”
Henrik Kniberg
Scrum & XP from the Trenches

Raise your hand if ..

• You have been in a retrospective?

• You have facilitated a retrospective?

• You’ve been in a retrospective that had made a difference to your team?

• You’ve been in a retrospective that had no positive impact?
Agile Retrospectives Timeline

- 2001: Retrospectives in XP teams
- 2003: OOPSLA workshop
- 2004: Scrum Gathering
- 2006: CSM
- 2009: Esther Derby / Scrum Alliance

In Scrum Lifecycle

- Sprint backlog
- Product backlog
- Product deliverable
- Capability deliverable
- Increased team capability
- Potentially shippable product increment
Challenge with Heartbeat Retros

- Short time to get actions done, hooked into sprint cycle with unclear priorities
- No professional “neutral” facilitator
- Following poor retrospective process

Sharing Some Stats

How long are your retrospectives?
How often are your retrospectives?
How many actions do you generate?
How many actions get done?
Work in pairs to write down an initial retrospective design

Warning! We’ll be “refactoring” your design so expect some critique of initial ideas with the aim of improving the design

Meetings require pre-work and follow up!

Hard to learn about creating effective retrospective by being a participant
Round 2

Swap your pair, now..

Add in checklists:
- for preparation before meeting
- follow up after meeting

Retrospective Smells
No time to improve!

Living in the past

Looking back into the past, no time to discuss future.
Judging

Went well? Do different?

Cloudy Thinking

Not clear on what to do, nothing happens
Fixing Symptoms

No root-cause analysis

Blaming

Criticizing others, not taking responsibility for solution
Unconnected Ideas

Team comes up with many ideas.
Lack of buy-in from team members.

Thinking too big!

Be realistic! How much can you really do?
When no one on team champions a change, it gets forgotten

Scrum Master takes on actions for the team.
Invisible Actions

Actions from retrospective not visible to team or Product Owner.

Summary of Retrospective Smells

• Same set of actions come up but not done
  – Vague, no owner, too big
• Not touching real issues
• If this continues then you waste time of participants!
Have you experienced any of these retrospective “smells”? Any more to add?

Additional ones listed at SPA2010:
• Silent team members
• Denial
• Lying
• Trivial
• Too big

Round 3

Back to original pair

Anything you want to change about your design?
Anatomy of Retrospectives

Bridge between Sprints

What happened?  What to change?

Retrospective

Sprint x  Sprint x+1
Balancing Conversation

Structure Flow of Conversation

From “Agile Coaching” book

And improved team working agreements
Incomplete Actions

Before creating any new actions, see if old actions are Done. Take time to understand why actions are not finished.

Slow Down!

- People will not talk if you do not listen to them
- Invite everyone to share what happened
- Take time to gather the whole story
- Involve each member of the team
- Forget about making lists of what went well, etc.
Gather Data in a Timeline

• To remember what happened
• To integrate different perspectives on events
• To find an area to work on
• Not to categorize and keep as a record

Create a Gallery

Ask team members to draw their own picture of what it felt like working on the last sprint

If pictures are too weird use a template
http://www.thekua.com/atwork/2008/04/
Agree a Focus

• Focus in on an issue that’s causing the most pain to the team
• Voting can help but beware of disagreements within the team

Make Time for Ideas

Encourage ideas from your team
Consider more than one solution!
Action Plans

What steps will be taken in our next sprint towards solving the problem? Who will check up to make sure the action is implemented?

Make actions visible during Sprint:
- Allow time in plan
- Put on team board
- Remember in daily standup meeting

Apply Agile Planning Techniques

• Break down into tasks small enough to fit in iteration cycle
• Prioritise along with other work, understand velocity (or level of service for process improvement) based on value
• Track and review progress same as agile work
Experiment with your Retrospectives!

• Retrospectives are about learning from experience
• Experiment and adapt the format to generate new insights

Round 4

Swap your pair

Apply “Half & Half” refactoring
Any further adjustments?
Feedback?

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References

- **Agile Retrospectives**: Making Good Teams Great by Esther Derby & Diana Larsen. ISBN 0-9776166-4-9
- **Collaboration Explained** by Jean Tabaka. ISBN 0-321-26877-6
- http://www.retrospectives.com
- http://retrospectiveswiki.org/
- http://www.retrospectivefacilitatorgathering.org/
Additional Refs from SPA Session

• “Facilitator’s Guide to Participatory Decision-Making,” by Sam Kaner

• “Innovation Games” by Luke Hohmann