

Retrospectives

What is a retrospective ?

A ritual in which the project community:

- Harvests the collective wisdom of the community
- Tells the truth without blame or judgment
- Identifies what to appreciate and improve
- Generates insights that could potentially benefit the product
- Commits to actions to improve, change, or try

The insights gained from retrospectives are the basis for starting again.

Applying retrospectives to timeframes like iterations in agile development was spawned at in an Open Space sessions at the 2003 Workshop Facilitators Gathering.

Value Proposition

Retrospectives: *your team's best (and least expensive way) to learn.*

You Have to Slow Down to Speed Up

Adults are pragmatic learners -- we learn best in supportive environments with our own experiences (e.g. act → reflect → integrate).

It is much easier to identify another's foolishness than to recognize one's own. This is the *Law of Wisdom Acquisition*. Humans need rituals to do this.

Retrospectives are not the classic "lessons learned". They focus on the big picture learning, address the "tough stuff" that really make projects successful, and generate actions for change.

Five Key Questions (adapted from Norm Kerth*)

1. What did we do well, that we might forget to do next time, if we don't discuss it?
2. What did we learn?
3. What should we do differently next time?
4. What still puzzles us?
5. What needs more discussion?

Kerth's Prime Directive

"Regardless of what we discover, we understand and truly believe that everyone did the best job they could, given what they knew at the time, their skills and abilities, the resources available, and the situation at hand."

Structure for a Retro

Set the Stage [Readying]: collect data prior to the retro, kick-off the session: define success, create safety

Gather Data [Past]: recreate the story, share a common pool of qualitative and quantitative data

Generate Insights [Present]: interpret the data, understand the big picture, answer the five questions, reflect on facts and feelings

Decide what to Do [Future]: select what to change, improve, or try—along with concrete implementation actions

Close [Retrospect the Retrospective]: reflect on the retrospective process, identify how to improve future retrospectives

Websites

<http://www.retrospectivefacilitatorgathering.org> / (scenes from some of the annual gatherings, since 2002).

http://agileretrospectivewiki.org/index.php?title=Main_Page agile retrospectives wiki

<https://retromat.org/en> home of "Retromat", with activities by retro phase

Websites

continued

<http://www.funretrospectives.com/> Retro activities

<https://spotifylabscom.files.wordpress.com/2017/12/retro-kit3.pdf> Spotify retrospective kit

<https://coalition.agileuprising.com/t/your-favorite-agile-retrospectives-post-them-here-and-lets-build-the-ultimate-list-by-troy-lightfoot/1016> Retro activities

When do Retros?

Interim and Ongoing Retrospectives provide the greatest payback. Types:

- “Heartbeat”: time-based, e.g. weekly, bi-weekly, monthly iterations, sprints
- “Work Chunk”: milestone-based, or other non-regular cadence
- “Custom”: event based, e.g. product launch, hypothesis test, merger, disaster

End-of-project or product retrospectives are for a project, program, product (retirement)

Books

Baldauf, Corina. [Retromat: Run Great Agile Retrospectives](#) (ebook and flip book)

Derby, Esther, and Diana Larsen. *Agile Retrospective: Making Good Teams Great*. 2006. Pragmatic Bookshelf.

*Kerth, Norman. *Project Retrospectives: A Handbook for Team Reviews*. 2001. Dorset House Publishing Company.

Goncalves, Luis and Ben Linders. *Getting Value out of Agile Retrospectives - A Toolbox of Retrospective Exercises*, 2014. LeanPub.

Selected Articles and Papers

Collier, Bonnie, Tom Demarco, and Peter Fearly, “[A Defined Process for Project Postmortem Review](#)”, Bonnie Collier, Tom Demarco, and, IEEE Software, July 1996, pp 65-71.

Desouza, Kevin, Torgeir Dingsoyr and Yukiki Awaza, “Experiences with Conducting Project Postmortems: Reports vs. Stories and Practitioner Perspective”, Proceeding of the 38th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, Jan. 2005.

Glass, Robert, “Project Retrospectives and Why They Never Happen”, IEEE Software, September/October 2002, pp. 111-112.

Gottesdiener, Ellen, “[Retrospectives Make Better Product Outcomes](#)”, EBG Blog February 2019.

Gottesdiener, Ellen, “[Team Retrospectives for Better Iteration Assessment](#)”, The Rational Edge, April 2003.

Kerth, Norman, “[The Ritual of Retrospectives: How to Maximize Group Learning by Understanding Past Projects](#)”, Sticky Minds, June 2002.

Larsen, Diana, “Embracing Change: A Retrospective”, Cutter IT Journal, Vol. 16, No 2, 2003.

Rising, Linda and Esther Derby, “[Singing the Songs of Project Experiences: Patterns and Retrospectives](#)”, Cutter IT Journal, Vol. 16, No 9, September 2003.

Virtual Retro Tools

<https://www.retrium.com/> | <https://www.scatterspoke.com/> | <https://funretro.io/#/>

<https://conteneo.co/> (find the retro frameworks) | <https://www.goreflect.com/> | postFacto.io

Online collaboration tools you can adapt for your retrospective needs, include:

<https://mural.co/> | <https://realtimeboard.com/> | <https://www.stormboard.com/> |

<http://www.ideaboardz.com/>
