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Agile Retrospectives

Making Good Teams Great

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Agile Retrospectives

Making Good Teams Great



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Introduction

Suppose you are a member of a software development team. You're doing good work, but not great work. You're starting to see signs of interpersonal friction on the team, and some people you would like to retain on the team are dusting off their résumés. You know you need to adapt your practices and ease the interpersonal tension before things get worse. You want to introduce retrospectives to your team.

Maybe you are a team lead, and you've heard about retrospectives but have never tried one. You've heard retrospectives can help teams perform better, but you're not sure where to start.

Maybe you've been holding retrospectives for months, and your team isn't coming up with any new ideas. You need a way revitalize your retrospectives so the team doesn't lose the gains they've made.

Whatever the reason you've picked up this book, we assume you think retrospectives might help your team. Whether you're a coach, a team member, or a project manager and whether you're expected to lead retrospectives after every iteration or are initiating retrospectives for the first time, you'll find ideas and techniques that you can apply to your situation.

Our main focus in this book is short retrospectives—retrospectives that occur after one week to one month of work. Whether you are using Agile methods or more traditional incremental or iterative development, your team has an opportunity to reflect at the end of every increment and identify changes and improvements that will increase the quality of the product and the work life of team members.

Retrospectives are a natural fit in an Agile work environment—Scrum and Crystal explicitly include “inspect and adapt” cycles for the methods and teamwork along with mechanisms to examine and improve the product. While continuous builds, automated unit tests, and frequent demonstrations of working code are all ways to focus attention on the product and allow the

team to make adjustments, retrospectives focus attention on how the team does their work and interacts.

Retrospectives are also a natural fit in a team environment—where there are less than ten in the team and the work is interdependent. Retrospectives help people improve practices, handle issues, and surface obstacles on a regular basis.

Iteration retrospectives focus on real problems that affect teams. During retrospectives, teams discover real solutions that they can implement without waiting for management's permission. Since experiments and changes are chosen, not imposed from above, people are more invested in their success.

When we started leading retrospectives more than a decade ago, most retrospectives looked at whole projects that had run for a year or more. In the past ten years, there has been a shift. More and more teams are working in shorter iterations and releasing software more frequently. These teams no longer wait until the end of a long project to inspect and adapt. They look for ways to improve at the end of every iteration. Team coaches, team leads, and team members now lead their own retrospectives.

Even if your team isn't using Agile methods, you can adapt the advice in this book to inspect and adapt your processes and teamwork before the end of a project: hold a retrospective every month or so or at project milestones.

You may need to convince your managers that this is a good use of your time and company dollars. A growing body of financial and empirical data shows that consistent retrospectives result in real savings and improvements.

In this book, we'll introduce a structure for retrospectives and walk through the process of planning, designing, and leading a retrospective. We'll supply activities and guidance on how to use them, and we'll share stories from real retrospectives.

We've also included a chapter on the role of the retrospective leader. We believe that most people can lead retrospectives with confidence and competence—and help the team achieve results—with a good structure and the right tools.

And, we've included examples of how you can adjust the basic retrospective structure for a three-month release or a yearlong project—and anything in between. Even if the team disbands after the release or project, the organization can learn from a retrospective, and individuals will take the learning with them.