Agile Retrospectives

Second Edition

A Practical Guide for Catalyzing Team Learning and Improvement

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Introduction

Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams Great [DS06] has been an enormously influential and popular book. It has sold over 60,000 copies and regularly shows up as a top recommendation for agile books. Scrum Masters, agile coaches, and team members have relied on the book as the guide to retrospectives for years.

Why would we mess with a good thing?

Two big reasons:

- The world has changed. Agile software development and agile retrospectives are no longer novel.

- Sadly, we've observed that for some teams and organizations, retrospectives still fail to deliver much in the way of useful results.

This second reason breaks our hearts!

So if you are a retrospective skeptic, or haven't gotten the results you desire, we feel you. That's why we've pooled our collective experience together in this second edition to share new ideas, approaches, and solutions with you.

Speaking of collective experience, we're thrilled that David Horowitz, CEO and co-founder of Retrium, an online platform for effective retrospectives, has joined us as a co-author. In fact, it was our conversations with David that pushed us over the edge to write this second edition. While we aren't endorsing any particular tool in this book, David and Retrium have been contributors to the retrospective community for many years and David's experiences with retrospectives have greatly enhanced the book.

This second edition includes a significant amount of new material. We've added more depth to existing chapters based on what we've learned since we published the first edition. We've also added brand-new chapters that expand the scope of the book. And interspersed throughout, we've included new stories from other practitioners—people who are out there holding retrospectives

every couple of weeks. These individuals have faced situations we haven't and come up with great ideas we didn't think of. They have generously shared their experiences, tips, and exercises with us, and by extension with you. Be on the lookout for them.

The rest of this introduction will provide an overview of what to expect in each chapter of the book.

In the updated and expanded Chapter 1, Help Your Team Inspect and Adapt, on page ?, we'll go over the fundamentals of retrospectives by describing the five phases of a retrospective from Set the Stage to Close the Retrospective. We'll show how a well-designed retrospective encourages participation. In the new edition, we've added depth about choosing data and choosing how to decide what to do.

In Chapter 2, A Retrospective Custom-Fit to Your Team, on page ?, we'll help you to ensure that your retrospectives match what your team needs right now.

For anyone who isn't an experienced "professional facilitator," check out Chapter 3, Leading Retrospectives, on page ?, for ideas on how to prepare for your role as a facilitator.

Chapter 4, Managing Group Dynamics, on page ?, dives deeper into the challenges of facilitating groups—so that people feel safe to participate creatively.

Chapters 5 through 9 describe various activities for each of the five phases of a retrospective. As compared with the first edition, we've added some activities and removed others. In particular, pay attention to the new activities in Chapter 7, Activities to Generate Insights, on page ?, which help you to identify small changes and experiments that the team can do without a lot of overhead.

In the new Chapter 10, Retrospectives for Common Scenarios, on page ?, we explain how we might design a retrospective in response to ten common scenarios teams face. Perhaps even more importantly, we explain the rationale behind our decisions. We hope that thinking aloud in this way will help you choose activities that best support your teams, too.

Chapter 11, Retrospectives When the Team Isn't Colocated, on page ?, deals with the reality that many teams aren't colocated. Unlike in 2006 when the first edition was released, colocation is neither assumed nor expected for many teams. We now know that excellent collaboration is possible with remote and distributed teams. This new chapter talks about the challenges of remote retrospectives and how to overcome them.

One of the most common challenges teams face is how to follow through on their retrospectives. We've written another new chapter, Chapter 12, Catalyzing and Sustaining Change, on page ?, to help teams catalyze change after the retrospective is over. It is not enough to say "make it so."

When teams struggle with problems they believe are outside of their control, helplessness can ensue. In the new Chapter 13, Elevating Issues Beyond the Team's Control, on page ?, we give you strategies to address these issues in a more productive manner.

If you face resistance to retrospectives from individuals on your team or in your organization, you will find the advice in the new Chapter 14, Overcoming Objections, on page ?, helpful. This chapter talks about how to graciously invite these individuals to give retrospectives another try.

Finally, Chapter 15, Continuing the Learning Journey, on page ?, provides additional resources and an invitation to join the broader retrospective community.

So, dive in! No more learn-nothing, do-nothing, change-nothing retrospectives. Join us in helping teams think, learn, decide, and act together.