

Different approaches to Sprint Retrospectives for Agile teams ¹

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Introduction

A sprint retrospective is a meeting held by an agile team at the end of each sprint to inspect and reflect on what went well, identify areas for improvement, and plan for the next sprint. It is an opportunity for the team to come together and discuss their experiences, identify what worked and what didn't, and make changes to their process for the next sprint.

Foundations of a Sprint retrospective practices:

- **Start with a warm-up.** The retrospective should start with a warm-up activity to get the team engaged and thinking about the sprint. This could be a game, a brainstorming activity, or simply a round of introductions.
- **Identify what went well.** The team should start by identifying what went well during the sprint. This could include anything from completing tasks on time to working well together as a team.
- **Identify areas for improvement.** Once the team has identified what went well, they should then identify areas for improvement. This could include anything from communication issues to technical problems.
- **Brainstorm solutions.** The team should then brainstorm solutions to the areas for improvement that they identified. This could involve changing the way they work, adding new tools or processes, or simply being more mindful of their actions.
- **Set goals for the next sprint.** Finally, the team should set goals for the next sprint based on the areas for improvement that they identified. These goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound.

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Involving the team to participate effectively in one of the Sprint Ceremonies like this Sprint Retrospective is important and some of the practices for enabling an active participation are:

- **Create a safe space.** The retrospective should be a safe space where everyone feels comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas. This means avoiding personal attacks and focusing on the process, not the people.
- **Encourage participation.** Everyone on the team should participate in the retrospective. This means giving everyone a chance to speak and listening to everyone's ideas.
- **Be specific.** When identifying areas for improvement, be as specific as possible. This will help the team to come up with more effective solutions.
- **Focus on action items.** The goal of the retrospective is to identify and implement improvements. Make sure that the team leaves the meeting with specific action items that they can commit to.
- **Follow up.** After the retrospective, the team should follow up on the action items that they identified. This will help to ensure that the improvements are actually implemented.

There are different styles/formats of Sprint Retrospectives that a Scrum Master should feel free to experiment with in order to not let the team suffer from Retrospective fatigue. They are:

- **What went Well (Basic)?** This format is the very basic format that captures what went well, what can be improved and what are some of the action items that need to be addressed.
- **Start, Stop, Continue.** This format is a simple way to identify areas for improvement. The team brainstorms three things they want to start doing, three things they want to stop doing, and three things they want to continue doing.
- **Good, Bad, Ugly.** This format is a more detailed way to identify areas for improvement. The team brainstorms three things that went well during the sprint, three things that didn't go well, and three things that were ugly (i.e., unexpected or unpleasant).

- **4Ls.** This format is a more comprehensive way to identify areas for improvement. The team brainstorms four things they liked, learned, lacked, and longed for during the sprint.
- **Sailboat Retrospective.** This format is a visual way to identify areas for improvement. The team draws a sailboat and labels the different parts of the sailboat with areas of the sprint process. They then brainstorm ways to improve each part of the sailboat.
- **Mad, Sad, Glad Retrospective.** This format lets the team reflect on the emotional aspect of the Sprint Journey. What made them feel emotionally Glad on a project progress or happening and what made them to be mad or sad. If this is accurately captured and an action item is recorded, then this will enable the team to address those action items.
- **Lean Coffee Retrospective.** This format is a more informal way to conduct a sprint retrospective. The team starts by brainstorming a list of topics to discuss. They then vote on the topics they want to discuss. The team discusses the selected topics and identifies areas for improvement.
- **Rose, Bud, Thorn Retrospective.** This format helps to identify the Painful areas (Thorn), Emerging ideas (Bud), Rose (Successfully implemented and functioning ideas).
- **DAKI Retrospective.** This is an acronym for **D**ropped, **A**dded, **K**ept, **I**mproved. Herer Dropped means the ideas that are not working well can be dropped. Added means that adds value to the project. Kept means what is working well and those practices to be preserved and kept. Improved means Things that need to be improved from its current state of functionality.
- **Thumbs up/down, Ideas & Recognition.** This format is a more collaborative than most of the other formats because it brings gestures into play. The team feels enjoyable to show a thumbs up or down as a non-verbal gesture even for any complex problem or decision that needs to be addressed. From this approach, it opens up various ways to follow up on every gesture or idea. Finally, the Recognition part helps to identify the person who was behind the tasks that had a thumbs up.

Conclusion

Sprint retrospectives are an important part of the agile process. By conducting regular retrospectives in an engaging way, teams can actively participate by identifying and addressing problems early on, which can help to improve the quality of their work and the overall success of their projects.

References

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About the Author



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Gopinath Venu has about 19 Years of experience in the IT Industry. He is certified in PMP, PMI-ACP from Project Management Institute (PMI), SAFe Advanced Scrum Master Certification from Scaled Agile Institute. He also holds a certification in AWS as a Certified Practitioner and Azure Certified from Microsoft. He has done multiple roles such as Project Manager, QA Manager, Scrum Master in his career. He is an active member of International Toastmasters. He has presented papers in PM conferences organized by local chapters of PMI. He presented a paper on Agile in the 15th Annual PMI Symposium organized by PMI Dallas and The University of Texas at Dallas. He also contributes to articles and discussions on www.projectmanagement.com.

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