RETROSPECTIVES

Lessons learned for continuous improvement every Sprint.

RETROSPECTIVE

BACKLOG PREPARATION	SPRINT PLANNING WHY	SPRINT PLANNING WHAT	SPRINT PLANNING HOW	DAILY SCRUM	BACKLOG REFINEMENT	SPRINT REVIEW	RETROSPECTIVE
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
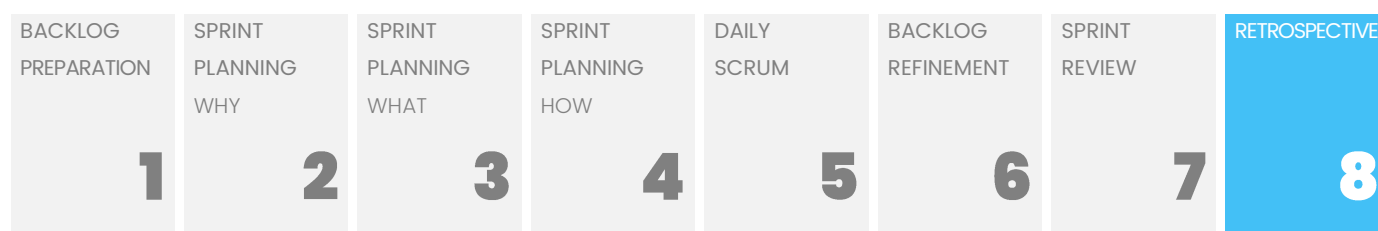
The Retrospective is one of five events in Scrum. It is designed to help Scrum Teams plan ways to increase quality and effectiveness of the Scrum Team. The Scrum Team inspects how the last Sprint went with regards to individuals, interactions, processes, tools, and their Definition of Done. Inspected elements often vary with the domain of work. Assumptions that led them astray are identified and their origins explored. The Scrum Team discusses what went well during the Sprint, what problems it encountered, and how those problems were (or were not) solved.

PURPOSE

Like all Scrum's events, the Retrospective is a mechanism of empiricism – inspecting the way the team works, collaborates and delivers its outcomes. The outcome of the Retrospective are actionable items that are added to the Sprint Backlog for the upcoming Sprint.

Time-box: Maximum of three (3) hours for a one-month Sprint for Sprint Planning. For shorter Sprints, the event is usually shorter.

WHO ATTENDS?

Role
Scrum Team – Product Owner, Scrum Master, Developers (people in the team developing the product)

AGENDA

Scrum Master

- Introduces the agenda and facilitates the event.
- Clarifies the rationale for the event.
- Indicates the time-box for the event.
- Encourages the Scrum Team to improve, within the Scrum process framework, its development process and practices, to make it more effective and enjoyable for the next Sprint.
- Reminds the team of the guardrails for self-management and what they are empowered to change and alter and what remains out of their control.

Scrum Team

- **Examines data from the Sprint.** This could include velocity trends, the quality of its work, cycle time, assessing whether estimations were accurate, team morale, customer satisfaction, or action plans for improvements from the previous Retrospective.
- Discusses behaviours that impacted the Sprint – both positive and negative.
- **Generates insights into** what happened during the Sprint, what the metrics really mean, and why.
- Identifies tangible improvements that it will implement in the next Sprint. Implementing these improvements in the next Sprint is the adaptation to the inspection of the Scrum Team itself.
- Considers plans ways to increase product quality by improving work processes or adapting the Definition of Done, if appropriate and not in conflict with product or organisational standards
- **Decides on actions** to create sustainable improvements.

KEY OUTCOMES

- Inspect how the last Sprint went with regards to people, relationships, process, and tools.
- Identify the most helpful changes to improve its effectiveness.
- The most impactful improvements are addressed as soon as possible.
- Improvements are added to the Sprint Backlog for the next Sprint.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Although improvements may be implemented at any time, the Sprint Retrospective provides a formal opportunity to focus on inspection and adaptation.
- Items for improvement must be actionable by the Scrum Team and in their power to influence.
- Action items should go into the Sprint Backlog and reflect the actual plan for improvements.
- Many Scrum Teams solely focus on improving their process for delivery. Sometimes the team's cohesion and its social fabric needs tending to.
- Great Scrum Masters continuously assess the Sprint and then research the best facilitation patterns to address issues they've seen in the Sprint.
- The Scrum Master is accountable for the Scrum process – the guide rails for self-management for the Scrum Team. The Scrum Team aren't empowered to make decisions that change Scrum. Their actions for improvement are confined to working within the Scrum framework.

KEY RESOURCES

- Agile IQ®for assessments and coaching - www.agileiq.com
- Zen Ex Machina - zenexmachina.com/tag/retrospective/
- Tasty Cupcakes - tastycupcakes.org
- Fun Retrospectives - funretrospectives.com
- Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams Great (2006) by Esther Derby and Diana Larsen.

COMMON OBSTACLES TO AVOID

- When delivery is at risk and deadlines loom, many Scrum Teams decide not to do a Retrospective. The result is they miss a critical opportunity to reflect on why delivery is at risk in the first place and take actions to ensure that this doesn't happen again in the future.
- When team's opinion of their capability exceeds their actual level of maturity, they often feel there's nothing to improve upon – they're perfect as they are. This is a warning sign of "groupthink". There is always room for improvement.

- Developers unanimously decide that they don't need a Retrospective and vote to remote it. The Scrum Framework outlines the rules by which the whole Scrum Team operate and self-manage. As such, Developers don't have the authority to remove any of Scrum's events. There is likely an underlying reason why they seek to do this. It is the responsibility of the Scrum Master to understand this motivation and help the Scrum Team improve the value they get from each of the events.
- Scrum fatigue. Putting every event at the end of the Sprint back-to-back can be overwhelming. Remember the agile principle of sustainable pace and ensure that the Scrum Team have frequent breaks. Mix up the format or pattern for Retrospectives to avoid Scrum fatigue.
- Avoid creating action items to have workshops next Sprint to examine particular issues or devise a plan for improvement.
- Avoid creating action items for improvement that are outside the control of the whole team.
- Avoid talking in generalities. Saying "we collaborated well" is great, but what did the team do, when did they collaborate well, and how are you going to ensure that the action occurs again?
- The actual plan itself, brain storming ideas, and creating actions, are all integral parts of the Retrospective. Avoid deciding on something to improve but then making a workshop in the following Sprint to come up with the actions.
- The Product Owner is a member of the Scrum Team. Ensure that they also attend and participate.
- Focussing only on process improvement and forgetting the "people" that might need attention.

ABOUT ZEN EX MACHINA

Zen Ex Machina (ZXM) provides independent and objective agile coaching and consulting, founded in organisational psychology, culture and change management, to help leaders succeed in their organisations. Ranging in scope from a short strategy session to full agile operating models, ZXM services connect you directly with experienced, certified agile practitioners who apply expert insight to your specific strategic and operational challenges.

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