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## Have a Toolbox of Retrospective Techniques

[April 8, 2013](#)

Reading Time: 3 minutes

### **New: Design your own Valuable Agile Retrospectives with the [Retrospective Exercises Toolbox!](#)**

Having a “toolbox” to do retrospectives helps you as a retrospective facilitator to deliver more value to a team. Team are different, and also the things that teams are dealing with can differ from sprint to sprint. Therefore it helps if you have [many retrospective exercises](#) that you can choose from. You can plan a retrospective meeting, and think about the technique that you want to use, but be open to change it on the spot whenever needed.



### **Why use different retrospective techniques?**

The purpose of selecting a retrospective technique is [to get more business value out of agile retrospectives](#), and use a technique that finds the most important things that teams can work on to improve their process (BTW: my definition of [a process is “the way we work around here”](#)). What is most important? It can be their biggest impediment that they have right now (where I would recommend to [do a Root Cause Analysis to understand it and define effective actions](#)), or something that is bothering the team but that they can't get a hold on, or the reason that the current sprint failed, or was a big success (where you could investigate how to [use the strengths which the professionals already have](#) to improve further). Retrospectives are used to [improve continuously](#), thus helping teams and organization [to become more agile and lean](#).

### **A day with retrospectives**

I remember a day where I had 2 retro's with teams that I hadn't worked with before. The first team a group of youngsters, who learned agile very quickly. They hated processes, and wanted to have a ..... \_

format as possible, they do things their way. Every retrospective that they had before was an unstructured discussion, but they always found some things to improve upon. When I started the retrospective, I checked how they wanted to do it, expecting that it would be a discussion with some questions firing it off. To my surprise, they asked me to do a sessions with sticky notes and questions, as they had heard from another team that they had gotten good results with it. I always carry my retrospective bag, so I got some pencils and sticky notes out, and wrote the retrospective questions on a flip-over (see [Which Questions do you Ask in Retrospectives](#) if you want to learn about questions that you can use) . In silence they noted their answers, clustered them, and found some new improvement points that they could work on as a team.

The second team that I did a retrospective with that day always did sticky notes. When I came into the room, I felt immediately that there was a serious problem that was bothering the team. Somehow you see or "smell" it, can't really explain how, but as an experienced facilitator [you can observe a lot by just watching](#). So I asked them to do a quick round before we would do the standard questions, where they would use 1 word to describe how they felt about the sprint. The first two team members used a somewhat neutral word, but the third one said that "the sprint really sucked". I asked him why, and after he explained it shortly, I finished the round with the remaining team members, who also made clear that they weren't happy how things had gone, and also the first two team members confirmed that there had been sever problems. I facilitated a discussion, which revealed the major problems that they had, and we got some great learnings. When we were almost at the end of the session, one of team members said: "shouldn't we use sticky notes, as we always do in retrospectives?". His colleagues interrupted him, and explained that they found the discussion useful, so we continued and wrapped it up by writing the main conclusions and actions on a flip-over. They learned a lot that day!

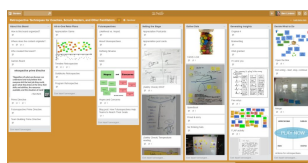
## Develop your toolbox of retrospective techniques

2 retrospectives on 1 day, where I used different techniques then the ones that I expected to use. My advice to a retrospective facilitator: Learn a many different retrospective techniques as you can, you may need them one day. And always take your toolbox with you, and use it wisely, so that you can bring value to your teams in retrospectives

Please see our [book about Valuable Agile Retrospectives](#) if you want to learn more about using different retrospective exercises.

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Retrospective Exercises Toolbox



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## 7 Responses to *Have a Toolbox of Retrospective Techniques*



[Corinna Baldauf](#) July 2, 2013 at 10:06 pm

Hi Ben!

Very nice story on how being able to react to the mood

As for learning techniques, maybe the Retr-O-Mat is helpful for your readers:

<http://www.plans-for-retrospectives.com/>

Cheers, Corinna

[Reply](#)



[BenLinders](#) July 2, 2013 at 10:22 pm

Hi Corinna,

It certainly is, highly recommended this one to my readers!

Thanks for sharing it

Regards,

Ben Linders

[Reply](#)

Pingback: [The Business Value of Agile Retrospectives | Bridge Global IT Staffing](#)

Pingback: [Designing Valuable Agile Retrospectives | Ben Linders](#)

Pingback: [Retrospective Benefits: Changes that Stick | Ben Linders](#)



[Saeavana Bharathi](#) March 30, 2015 at 5:43 pm

Great thoughts, I liked the toolbox idea. I come here often. Thank you Ben.

[Reply](#)



[BenLinders](#) April 4, 2015 at 10:13 am

Thanks for your kind words Saeavana!

Next to our book there's no a toolbox page where you can select exercises for designing your next retrospectives:

[Retrospective Exercises](#)

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Ben Linders – Independent Consultant Agile, Lean, Quality, and Continuous Improvement

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## News and Announcements

[Agile workshop in Istanbul, May 31](#)

May 1, 2017

I'm giving the public workshop Valuable Agile Retrospectives for Teams on May 31 in Istanbul, Turkey. Tickets are available. [More →](#)

[Version 1.3 of Agile Self-assessment Game released](#)

April 18, 2017

Version 1.3 of the Agile Self-assessment Game is now available. The texts on the cards have been updated based on my experience from playing the game and feedback from the agile community. [More →](#)

[Recommended books: Scaling Teams, Product Mastery, ScrumMasterWay, and Agile Engagement](#)

April 18, 2017

Here are some recently published books that I highly recommend on Scaling Teams, Product Mastery, Great Scrum Masters #ScrumMasterWay, and Agile Engagement. [More →](#)

[Agile Workshops in Budapest on April 25 and 26](#)

April 18, 2017

I'm giving two Agile Workshops in Budapest on April 25 and 26. Only some seats are left, so don't wait and get your tickets now! [More →](#)

[Join the 1st annual Agile Retrospectives survey](#)

April 16, 2017

Agile retrospectives are essential for teams to learn and improve themselves. Retrium is organizing the 1st annual Agile Retrospectives survey which I highly recommend. [More →](#)

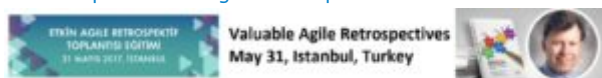
## Workshops, Training & Conferences

[Retrospective Facilitators Gathering 2017](#)



May 8, 2017 - May 12, 2017

[Workshop Valuable Agile Retrospectives for Teams in Istanbul](#)



May 31, 2017

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