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Getting Value out of Agile Retrospectives:

A Toolbox of Retrospective Exercises

Luis Gonçalves and **Ben Linders**

Foreword by **Esther Derby**, co-author of
Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams Great

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Getting Value out of Agile Retrospectives

A Toolbox of Retrospective Exercises

Luis Gonçalves and Ben Linders

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Wartościowe Retrospekcje Agile

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Contents

Valuable Agile Retrospectives

New: Available in print at Amazon, Lulu, and Barnes & Noble!

We present you: A new agile book with many exercises for facilitating retrospectives, supported with the "what" and "why" of retrospectives, the business value and benefits that they bring, and advice for introducing and improving retrospectives.

This is a book for agile coaches, scrum masters, project managers, product managers and facilitators who already have some experience with retrospectives.

If you want to learn more about the "why" and "how" of retrospective and are looking for exercises to spice up your retrospective then you can download the full book:

Download Getting Value out of Agile Retrospectives

You can also read the book on your Amazon Kindle.

With plenty of exercises for your retrospective toolbox, this book will help you to become more proficient in doing retrospectives, and to get more value out of them.

We are growing a small ecosystem around this book to release more exercises in the future, how-to´s, retrospectives advice, and many other things. Do you want to stay informed about retrospectives and future versions of our book?

Join us by subscribing to the **Valuable Agile Retrospectives mailing list**.

About the book

We publishing the first edition of Getting Value out of Agile Retrospectives as an eBook in December 2013. Since then much has happened. Many people downloaded the book and have been using it to do valuable retrospectives with their teams. In 5 months we reached 1000 readers on Leanpub and many more on InfoQ.

The second edition published in June 2014 is the first version that is also published in print via Amazon, Lulu and Barnes & Noble. The handy pocket format is easy to carry whenever you are doing retrospectives or preparing them.

Having a foreword by Esther Derby makes us feel very honored. With us, many have learned the why and how of retrospectives from the book *Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams Great* that Esther wrote together with Diana Larsen.

We thank the InfoQ staff for all their support while preparing our book for print. Since the content is the same you can use the print and eBook editions next to each other. You can download the full eBook at InfoQ and Leanpub.

The book has gotten fantastic reviews on GoodReads, Amazon, Lulu, ScrumExpert, Agile Consortium, SoftwareDevelopmentBooks, Scrumage and Techwell. The book is also available for review on LibraryThing.

We received many emails, tweets, LinkedIn comments and other feedback from our readers. It feels really good when people like your book and tell you what they got out of it. Thanks!

We started getting requests for editions of our book in other languages. To support that, volunteer teams in different countries

are translating our book into many languages. The retrospective books in local languages are distributed via Leanpub:

- Waardevolle Agile Retrospectives
- Obteniendo valor de las Retrospectivas ágiles
- Tirer profit des rétrospectives agiles
- アジャイルふりかえりから価値を生み出す – 日本語版
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- Khai thác giá trị Agile Retrospective - Phiên bản Tiếng Việt

A big thanks to all the translators, reviewers, and editors: you are helping us to make our dream to help teams all around the world to do valuable retrospectives come true!

When we started this, we didn't expect it to become so big in such a short time. Of course, this makes us very happy. We also think it confirms that retrospectives are important in agile. Every day, we hear about agile teams around the world that are regularly doing retrospectives. Our mission is to help as many teams as possible to get more value out of agile retrospectives.

About the authors

Luis Gonçalves is an Agile Coach, Co-Author, Speaker and a Blogger.

I have been working in the software industry since 2003, being an Agile practitioner since 2007. I have a lot of experience in integrating sequential projects phases like localization into an Agile Framework and pioneering Agile adoption at different companies and different contexts. I have a technical background yet my passion lies at the Management side where I am a Management 3.0 passionate.

I am a co-founder of a MeetUp group in Munich, Germany called High Performing Teams. Me and my colleagues created this group with the vision of "Define the future of Management and Leadership" . We are aiming to collaboratively generate several ideas/theories and try them out in our professional life.

I like to write and share ideas with the world and this made me a passionate blogger. I get inspiration from my professional life and from all books that I read every week. You can follow my blog here.

Ben Linders is an Independent Consultant in Agile, Lean, Quality and Process Improvement, based in The Netherlands. Author of Getting Value out of Agile Retrospectives, Waardevolle Agile Retrospectives & What Drives Quality.

As an advisor, coach and trainer he helps organizations by deploying effective software development and management practices. He focuses on continuous improvement, collaboration and communication, and professional development, to deliver business value to customers.

Ben is an active member of several networks on Agile, Lean and Quality, and a frequent speaker and writer. He shares his experience in a bilingual blog (Dutch and English) and as an editor for Culture and Methods at InfoQ. You can find him on twitter: @BenLinders.

Our blog's

We are both active bloggers at www.benlinders.com and lms-goncalves.com. On our blogs we share our experiences on several agile and lean topics including retrospectives.

Blogging is one way in which we share our knowledge, and it's a rewarding one. We like the comments we receive on our blogs when people share their own experiences, and we love hearing from people who have tried the things that we write about.

If at any time you want to know more about Valuable Agile Retrospectives, feel free to contact us. You can also subscribe to our Valuable Agile Retrospectives mailing list (URL: eepurl.com/Mem7H) to stay up to date.

Introduction

This book contains many exercises that you can use to facilitate retrospectives, supported with the "what" and "why" of retrospectives, the business value and benefits that they can bring you, and advice for introducing and improving retrospectives.

Agile retrospectives are a great way to continuously improve the way of working. Getting feasible actions out of a retrospective and getting them done helps teams to learn and improve. We hope that this book helps you and your teams to conduct retrospectives effectively and efficiently to reflect upon your ways of working, and continuously improve them!

This book starts with two chapters that provide answers to the questions What Is an Agile Retrospective? and Why Do We Do Retrospectives? These answers help you to understand the purpose of retrospectives and to motivate people to do them.

The chapter Business Value of Agile Retrospectives explains why organizations should invest in retrospectives and what they can do to get more business value out of them.

The Retrospective Pre-Requirements chapter describes how you can prepare your organization for doing retrospectives and discusses the skills that retrospectives facilitators need to have.

The chapter Designing a Retrospective explains why you need different exercises for retrospectives, how you can design a retrospective that is valuable for a team given their situation, and what you can do to develop your own toolbox of exercises.

The main part of this book is the chapter with many practical Retrospective Exercises that you can use to lead retrospectives with your teams. Any time you are running a retrospective and you do not know what exercise to use you can pick one of the many exercises from this chapter.

The chapter Benefits of Retrospectives gives you ideas about what agile teams can expect to get out of doing them.

Adopting Agile Retrospectives describes what you can do to introduce retrospectives in your organization and how you can improve the way that you do them.

In the chapter A Retrospectives Book in Your Language we have listed the different language editions of this book that are available to help teams all around the world to do valuable agile retrospectives.

The last chapter provides useful information if you want to stay up to date on doing Valuable Agile Retrospectives.

Getting Value out of Agile Retrospectives doesn't intend to teach you the theory behind retrospectives. For that purpose there are books like *Agile Retrospectives* from Esther Derby and Diana Larsen and *Project Retrospectives* from Norman Kerth (see the Bibliography for a full list of books and links).

With plenty of exercises for your personal retrospective toolbox, this book will help you to become more proficient in doing retrospectives and to get more out of them.

What Is an Agile Retrospective?

The agile manifesto proposes that a "team reflects on how to become more effective". Agile retrospectives can be used by teams to inspect and adapt their way of working.

At the end of an iteration typically two meetings are held: the sprint review (or demo) that focuses on getting product feedback and discussing how to proceed and the retrospective that focuses on the team and the processes that are used to deliver software. The goal of retrospectives is helping teams to continuously improve their way of working. This book is about performing and improving retrospectives.

An agile retrospective, or sprint retrospective as Scrum calls it, is a practice used by teams to reflect on their way of working and to become continuously better at what they do.

The twelfth agile principle states:

> At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly.

All team members attend the retrospective meeting where they "inspect" how the iteration has gone and decide what to improve and how they want to "adapt" their way of working and behavior. Retrospectives are an effective way to move toward short-cycled improvement.

The retrospective facilitator (often the Scrum master) should have a toolbox of possible retrospective exercises and should be able to pick the most effective one given the situation at hand.

Typically a retrospective meeting starts by checking the status of the actions from the previous retrospective to see if they are finished, and to take action if they are not finished and still needed. The actions coming out of a retrospective are communicated and performed in the next iteration.

To ensure that actions from a retrospective are done they can for instance be added to the product backlog as user stories, brought into the planning game and put on the planning board so that they remain visible to the team.

Sailboat

The reason why this exercise is so interesting is the fact of allowing a team to think about their own objectives, impediments, risks, and good practices, in a simple piece of paper.

(LG) I learned this exercise a few years ago when I worked with Vasco Duarte. Recently, I saw an upgrade on Pedro Gustavo's blog where I got the idea of the rocks(risks). From my experience, this technique is well received by teams due to its simplicity.

What you can expect to get out of this exercise

This exercise helps teams to define a vision. It helps them to identify risks in their path and allows them to identify what slows them down and what actually helps them to achieve their objectives.

When you would use this exercise

This technique is simple and does not require any special occasion. It might be interesting for retrospectives conducted with more than one team. *(LG)* I had a situation, not long ago, when two teams worked together. Because of their level of dependency on each other, they decided to conduct a common retrospective to solve some ongoing issues. Using this exercise, we put the names of both teams on the boat and we reminded everyone that we are on the same vessel, heading in the same direction.

This technique reveals all good things and less positive things. It allows the team to identify possible risks and reminds them where they need to go as a team.

The boat exercise is suitable for any team. It does not require any specific level of maturity.

As with many other exercises, this exercise does not require colocation of the team.

How to do it

Draw a boat, rocks, clouds, and couple of islands as shown below:

Sail Boat

The islands represent the team's goals/vision. They work every day in order to reach these islands. The rocks represent the risks they might encounter along the way. The anchor on the boat is everything that slows them down on their journey. The clouds and the wind represent everything that helps them to reach their goal.

With the picture on the wall, write down the team visions or goals. Start a brainstorming session during which the team dumps their ideas into the different areas according to the picture. Give the team 10 minutes to write their ideas down on post its. Afterwards, give each person five minutes to read their ideas out loud.

At this point, discuss with the team how can they continue to practice what is written on the clouds/wind area. These are good ideas that help the team and they need to continue with them. Next, discuss how the team can mitigate the identified risks.

Finally, let the team choose the most important issue that is slowing them down. If there is disagreement within the team about which topic to tackle, you can use vote dots. At the end the team defines the steps to take in order to fix the problem and concludes the retrospective.

A Retrospectives Book in Your Language

This book is being translated to many languages with teams of volunteers in different countries. Many translators, reviewers and editors are helping us to make our dream come true: to help teams all around the world to do valuable agile retrospectives!

Why do we work with volunteers in translating our book? Because we can! People started asking us if they can help with the translation (just as people volunteered to review the English version). When we reached out to ask for help, people let us know that they would love act on it. We ask them if they know other people in their network, and they invite them to join the team. It works!

Translating for us is another way to share knowledge and experience with agile retrospectives. Our volunteer teams consist of highly motivated driven people. They want to know about retrospectives and this is a way for them to learn the retrospective exercises and use them in their daily work. As authors we support them by explaining the exercises, answering questions and sharing our knowledge and experience. If you want to work with us in a similar way feel free to contact us via luis.goncalves@oikosofy.com or BenLinders@gmail.com.

Getting Value out of Agile Retrospectives is available in many languages. For an up to date list of the language editions that are available, please visit the English edition on Leanpub.

You can subscribe yourself to the books that are being translated on Leanpub to stay up to date and to become one of the first readers of this book about agile retrospectives in your language!

Develop Your Agile Retrospective Facilitation Skills

To get value from doing agile retrospectives they need to be done properly by skilled facilitators who are able to select suitable retrospective exercises, design and plan a retrospective, lead the retrospective meeting and follow up on the actions.

The authors Luis Gonçalves and Ben Linders offer workshops to develop your skills to design and facilitate effective retrospectives.

Agile Retrospectives workshop by Oikosofy - Luis Gonçalves

The Agile Retrospectives workshop is a one day workshop made by leaders, for teams, project managers, scrum masters and anyone who is involved in running a retrospective. The Agile Retrospective Workshop helps you and your teams to conduct retrospectives effectively and efficiently to reflect upon your ways of working, and continuously improve them!

For more information please see the workshop description on the Oikosofy website.

Valuable Agile Retrospectives workshop by Ben Linders

In the Valuable Agile Retrospectives workshop you will learn how to adopt and apply retrospectives in your own organization and how to provide retrospective facilitators with a toolbox with exercises enabling them to do valuable agile retrospectives with teams, which contribute to the goals and results of your organization!

For more information please see the workshop description on Ben Linders - Sharing my Experience.

Download the Full Book

Thank you for reading this sample of our book on Valuable Agile Retrospectives. If you want to learn more about the "why" and "how" of retrospective and are looking for exercises to spice up your retrospective then you can download the full book:

Download Getting Value out of Agile Retrospectives.

We are offering a half year of our work to the community to help teams improve all over the world. The **suggested price is $9,99 (Excl. VAT)**; this is what we think is the real value of this book. **We leave it up to our readers to decide what they would like to pay for the book**. You can download it for free if you want, pay the suggested price, or pay us more if you like; based on the value you expect to get from reading and using this book.

If you enjoyed reading this book sample or the full download version, please support the authors and InfoQ's book series by buying the print version:

Print version can be bought at Amazon, Lulu or Barnes & Noble.

Please help us by spreading the word: forward this book sample to your colleagues, friends, IT and R&D organizations or anyone that could benefit from it. If you want to tweet about it, please use #RetroValue to spread the word.

The book is the beginning of a journey. We are growing a small ecosystem around this book to release more exercises in the future, how-toÂ´s, retrospectives advice, and many other things. If you want to stay up to date, the best way is to subscribe to our Valuable Agile Retrospectives mailing list - URL: eepurl.com/Mem7H.

We are always looking for feedback. Feel inspired to write a Goodreads review or contact us via luis.goncalves@oikosofy.com or BenLinders@gmail.com. We love to hear from you.

You can read our blogs: lmsgoncalves.com and www.benlinders.com. If you are too busy to visit blogs, we can send an email when we have news for you. Add yourself to our mailing-lists: LuisÂ´s at (eepurl.com/JOTXL) and Ben's at (www.benlinders.com/subscribe/)

Now is time to say goodbye and wish you all the best.

Yours, Luis and Ben