

Valuable Agile Retrospectives

Ben Linders

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<http://leanpub.com/valuableagileretrospectives>

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Preface

This is not an everyday book about agile retrospectives. It's a book for people who truly believe that retrospectives can help to fine tune and continuously improve the way of working. For people who take facilitating retrospectives seriously and are always on the lookout to learn new techniques and formats and improve their facilitation skills.

This book intends to dive into advanced retrospective topics such as:

- Curing Retrospective Smells and Antipatterns
- Refreshing Retrospective Exercises
- Facilitating Remote Retrospectives
- Improving Agile Retrospectives
- Becoming a Better Retrospective Facilitator
- Beyond Retrospectives
- And more ...

This book is primarily aimed at retrospective facilitators, agile coaches, and Scrum masters. It helps them become better at facilitating retrospectives and supporting those who do them. I also recommend this book for agile teams, tech leads, consultants, developers and testers, project managers, line managers, and CxOs. It's a guide for anyone who wants to improve their agile retrospectives or support people in doing that.

This book doesn't intend to teach you what agile retrospectives are or how to do them. There are many great books available that do this, like *Agile Retrospectives* by Esther Derby and Diana Larsen and my own book *Getting Value out of Agile Retrospectives*. Instead, in this book, I'll dive deeply into practices for facilitating

agile retrospectives to help you make your agile retrospectives more valuable.

This book includes information about various Agile Retrospectives Tools like the Agile Retrospective Smells Cards, Agile Retrospectives Bingo, Agile Manifesto Retrospectives Questions Cards, and the Psychological Safety Cards. You can download these Agile Coaching Tools for a nominal fee in my [webshop](#).

Over the years I've facilitated many retrospectives and have trained and coached facilitators all over the world. I know how hard facilitation can be. But I've also learned how to improve it. This book is based on more than 25 years of my experience doing agile retrospectives and teaching them.

I want to thank the many reviewers of my book for investing time and coming up with ideas to improve it (in alphabetical order): (names to be added). Thank you for proofreading earlier versions of the book and providing many suggestions. Your feedback has helped me to make this a better book!

I love to hear about your experiences from facilitating retrospectives. Feel free to email me at benlinders@gmail.com!

Finally, I would like to thank all the people who invest time to read my blog and comment on the articles. Your feedback helps me to increase my understanding of topics that I write about and makes it worthwhile for me to keep blogging!

Ben Linders
November 2021

Introduction

We have been doing agile retrospectives for many years. I see teams doing them successfully. They use retrospectives to dig deep into their way of working and learn about their weaknesses and strengths. Next, they pull out actionable ideas for improvement.

I also see teams that are having problems with their retrospectives. They tend to go through the motions; their retrospectives feels to them as another meeting that they need to do. Seeing this makes me sad.

I know from experience that it can be tough when you're facilitating retrospectives. I also know that it's very rewarding if you as a facilitator are able to help teams truly improve.

Retrospectives shouldn't be boring meetings or a place where people blame other people for what happened. They can and should be a psychologically safe place where people reflect and learn. They should help people deciding on what to improve and take action.

This book aims to support teams in doing valuable agile retrospectives and help you to become better at facilitating retrospectives.

My Experience with Agile Retrospectives

I find it hard to say when I did my first retrospective. On my first job in 1984, I recall having discussions with colleagues about how we programmed an application for factory control in assembly. One of the outcomes was that we decided to experiment with rewriting parts that weren't time-critical in Pascal to generate assembly code. Officially we weren't allowed to use a high-level language but we worked around that. It saved us time and increase the quality of our code.

We also explored our debugging approach. We didn't have any tools like emulators so often the only way to find an error was to add breakpoints or print statements to track what was happening. We decided to try code reviews together with coding rules; they helped but it was still hard to prevent bugs or find those that slipped through.

After two years I decided to quit my job as we weren't allowed to invest 1000 Dutch Guilders in a debugging tool that would save us a lot of time. We had reflected, learned, and taken action within our team that helped us to do a better job. Taking it further we depended on the R&D manager to support us with tools. As I wasn't able to convince him, I gave up on this company and left.

In 1986 I was hired by Philips as a consultant to join the software group for CNC machines. It felt great to join an organization that had development teams and used practices like version control, nightly builds, and automated testing.

In my first team, we developed a new graphical user interface for programming the CNC. I recall having valuable discussions in the team, both on the product that we were developing and on the way we worked together as a team developing the product.

Was it retrospectives that I was doing in my first two jobs? We

were eager to find out how things were going. We did reflect and decided what we would do differently. We felt safe to try out new things within our team. We didn't call them "retrospectives" but somehow we did do what retrospectives intend to do.

Leading my first project I established a distributed team that delivered software in iterations. We took time to discuss how things were going. Looking back I concluded that [we were behaving like an agile team](#) although the term "agile" didn't exist back then in 1989.

(more to be added about my experience with agile retrospectives in the next versions of this book)



I'm an active blogger at www.benlinders.com. On my blog, I share my experiences on agile and lean topics, including how to do agile retrospectives, exercises for retrospectives, retrospective smells and antidotes, and more.

Since 2009 I'm providing services as a one-person company doing many different things to help people, teams, and companies become better in developing and delivering high-quality software products and services. I give workshops on agile retrospectives and I'm available as an independent facilitator.

In 2015 I published my first book *Getting Value out of Agile Retrospectives*. To date, more than 25.000 paperback and ebook copies have been distributed and downloaded.

I train and coach. I advise teams and organizations. I write books. I also speak and give workshops at conferences.



In my [workshops](#), I teach people how to design and facilitate agile retrospectives.

Finding out that there's a limit to how much traveling I can do, I

decided to go on my own “agile scaling and digitalization” journey.



My books, games, exercises, workshops and remote training, and other agile coaching tools that I use myself in my workshops and advice work are available as digital downloads for a nominal fee in my webshop at benlinders.com/shop/.

Reflecting back on doing retrospectives for more than 25 years I decided to write a book about facilitating retrospectives and improving them. This book, Valuable Agile Retrospectives, aims to help you to become better at facilitating retrospectives and supporting those who do retrospectives.

What's in This Book

This book provides practices and suggestions that can be used to improve agile retrospectives.

The chapter [Retrospective Smell](#) discusses how you can find out that something might be going wrong in your retrospective and explore what is going on. It provides you with antidotes to address the issue at hand.

In the chapter [Sharpen your Retrospective Facilitation Skills](#) I explore good practices for facilitating retrospectives. There's also information about workshops where you can learn about facilitating retrospectives.

(More chapters will be added)

The [Bibliography](#) provides an extensive list of books, articles, and links, that you can use to acquire in-depth knowledge for improving your retrospectives.

This is a practical book with many techniques and ideas to apply in your specific situations. It aims to support professionals that want to improve their retrospective facilitation skills.

Using the Book

There are many suggestions and pieces of advice in this book that help you to deal with impediments effectively. I marked them as tips with a key symbol:



Try those tips that look suitable and see if they work for you. If they do, great! If not, try another one.

I also share stories and cases from my own experience. They are from organizations and teams that I have worked with, as well as from my training and coaching sessions:



Stories, cases, and examples, have a user symbol. They inspire you to think about what you might do.

Reading suggestions for this book and information about additional tools, books, and services, are marked with QR codes or an exclamation mark:

(add QR code for registration)



Register your book today to get a discount on Agile Coaching Tools for retrospectives!

With plenty of ideas, suggestions, examples, and practical cases on retrospectives, this book will help you to become more effective in facilitating agile retrospectives.

Retrospective Smells

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at <http://leanpub.com/valuableagileretrospectives>.

What are Retrospective Smells

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Facilitation Practices

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Retrospective Workshops

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About the Author

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at <http://leanpub.com/valuableagileretrospectives>.

Bibliography

My Blog and Books

Ben Linders - Sharing my Experience - www.benlinders.com

Getting Value out of Agile Retrospectives - A Toolbox of Retrospective Exercise

What Drives Quality - A Deep Dive into Software Quality with Practical Solutions for Delivering High-Quality Products

The Agile Self-assessment Game - The Agile Coaching Tool For Improving Your Agility

Problem? What Problem? - Dealing Effectively with Impediments using Agile Thinking and Practices

Valuable Agile Retrospectives - ???

Continuous Improvement - A toolbox for Scrum masters and Agile Coaches to increase agility

Tools for Root Cause Analysis

Register your copy of this book at benlinders.com/valuable-agile-retrospectives/

Books (Ordered on Title)

Agile Retrospectives - Making Good Teams Great by Esther Derby and Diana Larsen

Links

Manifesto for Agile Software Development

Retrospectives Exercises Toolbox

Retrospectives Smells Cards

Psychological Safety Cards

Agile Self-assessment Game

Agile Coaching Tools