Table of Contents

Collaboration At Scale: Keeping Retrospectives Fresh 3
Premise 3
Presenters 3
Materials 3
Actions 3
Notes 4

Collaboration At Scale: Keeping Retrospectives Fresh

Premise

Scrum Alliance pitch

“Retrospectives are great … except when they’re not. Without care and attention, retrospectives become stale, boring, and ineffective. And this is especially likely with distributed teams, where it is easy to put yourself on mute and start answering email instead of focusing on your team. In this Collaboration at Scale webinar, we’ll explore how you can keep retrospectives fresh, engaging, and impactful. We’ll focus especially on helping distributed teams identify the frameworks that allow them to explore different ways they can improve performance.“

Interestingly I was asked about getting feedback from the pilots and was wondering if there anything I can learn.

Scrum centric with more than 10 teams. Interactive webinar.

Presenters

Ben Linders (consulting coach) Shahzad Zafer (internal coach)

Laura Richardson (sales, management)

Conteneo is co-presenter.

Materials

My version:

cas_webinar_03082017.pdf

Actions

- Idea: role of external coach as external facilitator to help teams and share / spread knowledge
- Idea: create list of exercise for retrospectives (and make sure people that people know this). See

Ben
- Linder’s site benlinders.com/exercises and /posts-retrospectives
- retrospectivewiki.org/index.php
- Idea: pilot retrospective (large team)

Notes

From the poll questions:

Summary we do it a lot, but not always effective. Therefore need to understand:

- Why do it?
- Want to find ways to improve
- Do it for the right reasons

Warning signs:

- Doing things is not the same as getting things done – are things getting done?
- Lack of ownership (great conversation but no clear ownership about what we are going do about it)
- Repeated root cause (rehashing the same problem)
- People not attending

Coaching questions to drive conversation about improving retrospectives:

- Are you doing them?
- Do you like doing them?
- Are you seeing the benefits?

Why are retrospectives less than effective?

- Overuse of the same facilitator (too much of the same perspective, same biases (especially wrt to how people work together) (one recommendation have external facilitate new teams else otherwise the internal facilitator is trying to do too much.)
- Overuse of the same goal – try to set different goals for different times. Not just “improve” but what are you trying to improve at the moment.
- Overuse of the same framework / technique (e.g. What went well, what can be improved, actions)

Who should attend

- Anyone who has involvement
- Also has benefit that in that it helps for social bonds
- Up to facilitator to ensure safe environment

How do we keep retrospectives fresh?

The key is variation

- Vary the goal
  - Find new technologies – what do we need to get to get in the future
  - Celebrate success – we've done really well – what did we learn from this
  - Share best practices
  - Mix up timing – don't always have to do at end
  - Varying goal also could mean bringing in other stakeholders
  - Goal will you set the cadence – err on the side of more frequent than less – idea is to focus on feedback
- Vary the framework (note: called framework rather than exercise)
  - Speed boat (nice metaphor). Add in rocks to represent risks, not just winds and anchors
  - Going well (why is it going well)
  - 4 box – happy, sad, ideas, kudos
  - Remember the future the retrospective (aka futurespective)
  - Start your day
  - Backpacking – new teams. You are on a journey. What do you take with you? What do you want to leave behind (things that we don't want to do going forward). Can only take 5 things (as hand baggage along metaphor) to help focus.
  - Make small tweaks to the base framework
- Vary the environment
  - Over lunch / coffee
  - Offsite happy hour
  - Outdoors
  - Where people feel comfortable
  - Bring in lunch
  - Length of time (e.g. Running retrospective)
- Vary the facilitator
  - A professional
  - A close friend
  - A scrum master from another team
  - Rotate roles with the team (especially if the goal relates to a specific area of interest for a team member) As much as possible should be independant (not involved in the topics) of the approach. Don't facilitate if you have a big stake in the outcome
- Vary the amount of negativity (problems vs learning vs successes)
  - What did we learn (not what went wrong) is primary focus
  - Some times need to vent (express pain)

Three key tips for distributed teams

- Vary The Who feels the pain
- Give the introverts a chance (e.g. Running retrospective)
- Use online tools (e.g. Weave, Retrium, Boardthing) as a way to level the playing field, and better than a conference call
- Leverage video conferencing (e.g. Google hangouts is free for up to 10 people)

Just because you have distributed people it does not mean you cannot do an exercise Use the same thinking for distributed teams as well and adapt to being distributed Vary exercise, environment, goal

How to deal with problems that team cannot deal with alone? Create large / multi team retro Note this

can be another reason that retros become stale

Add to the backlog (for the items that are bigger) For smaller items need to make it visible Don’t create the secret backlog Make the actions visible

Make results of actions visible

How do you deal with dependent teams? Make that the goal of the retrospective and pull in people to participate

How do you deal with technical retrospective issues? Perhaps make it a hack-a-thon to be the retrospective

Webinar, Ceremony, ScrumMaster, Video, Learning, Retrospective

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