TechWell Insights

Are Your Retrospectives Adding Value to Your Scrum Team?

By Steve Berczuk (/users/steve-berczuk) - October 14, 2019

"Inspect and adapt" is a phrase you often hear Scrum advocates use. Inspecting our processes and work and then adapting them as needed is at the heart of everything we do in Scrum, and there are two events that are explicitly about getting actionable feedback we can use to change our path.

The sprint review is where the team inspects the product work and adapts the plan.The sprint retrospective is where the team inspects and adapts the process.

However, retrospectives often receive less consideration than they should. They are frequently skipped, compressed, or organized in a way that may not provide the best feedback. (I've even been to retrospectives that were short *and* unstructured, a combination that almost ensures poor results.) This is unfortunate, as a well-planned retrospective is one of the most efficient ways to improve how you work, and every team can stand to improve their Scrum process.

A valuable retrospective captures the challenges and successes a team has and yields actions they can perform to improve the process. To have valuable retrospectives, you need an environment where everyone on the team feels open to participate and can filter topics so that you talk about the more important ones, rather than the first ones mentioned.

Like any good meeting, effective retrospectives follow a structure and have a facilitator. I like the five-part framework from the book *Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams Great (https://books.google.com/books/about/Agile_Retrospectives.html? id=zA5QDwAAQBAJ&source=kp_book_description)*:

1. Set the stage
2. Gather data
3. Generate insights
4. Decide what to do
5. Close

This framework helps create an environment where people feel engaged and comfortable participating, so the discussion leads to actionable items that solve the team's problems.

Whatever approach you use, it should have three key elements: a way to enable engagement and safety, a way to distill and prioritize ideas, and concrete action items.

Opening with rituals that encourage participation and emphasize a focus on improvement rather than blame can help create safety. Following a structured technique to gather group-related concerns and decide together what to discuss ensures that the group is able to address the one or two important issues that they can solve, rather than just chat. And concrete action items that are doable are the best way to guarantee that the team (and management) sees value in the time you spend. I also like the idea of ending with "appreciations" so that the team can focus on the value their colleagues add.

Managers often think that capturing feedback and developing plans for changing a process is easy, especially compared to the team's other, more technical work. But in reality, developing trust that the retrospective will produce meaningful, actionable change is hard.

A good retrospective requires more than simply asking, "What's up?" and letting people vent. Having some structure helps the team focus and be productive.

Building a good retrospective habit takes time. You need to commit to having a retrospective after each sprint to give the team and management a chance to see that they can be valuable.

Tags:

agile (/keywords/agile), process improvement (/keywords/process-improvement), scrum (/keywords/scrum), retrospectives (/other-keywords/retrospectives)

Up Next

7 Essential Quality Attributes for Your Test Automation Framework (/techwell-insights/2019/10/7-essential-quality-attributes-your-test-automation-framework)

October 11, 2019

GET TECHWELL INSIGHTS DELIVERED WEEKLY

ALL TECHWELL INSIGHTS BY THIS AUTHOR (HTTPS://WWW.TECHWELL.COM/USERS/STEVE-BERCZUK)

RELATED INSIGHTS (HTTPS://WWW.TECHWELL.COM/TECHWELL-INSIGHTS/2019/10/ARE-YOUR-RETROSPECTIVES-ADDING-VALUE-YOUR-SCRUM-TEAM/RELATED-INSIGHTS)

Login (/user/login?destination=node/199184%23comment-form) or Join (/user/register?destination=node/199184%23comment-form) to add your comment

About the Author

(/users/steve-berczuk)

Steve Berczuk (/users/steve-berczuk)

Steve Berczuk is a Principal Software Engineer with experience as a manager, Scrum Master and technical lead in Boston, MA. The author of *Software Configuration Management Patterns: Effective Teamwork, Practical Integration (http://www.stickyminds.com/s.asp?F=S541_BOOK_4)*, he is a recognized expert in software configuration management and agile software development. Steve is passionate about helping teams work effectively to produce quality software. He has an M.S. in operations research from Stanford University and an S.B. in Electrical Engineering from MIT, and is a Certified ScrumMaster. Contact Steve at steve@berczuk.com (mailto:steve@berczuk.com) or visit berczuk.com (http://www.berczuk.com/) and follow his blog at blog.berczuk.com. (http://blog.berczuk.com)

TechWell Insights To Go

Get the latest stories delivered to your inbox every month.

| Your email address | Please select your country ⌄ | SUBSCRIBE |

Conferences (/software-conferences)
Communities (/software-communities)
Subscribe to TechWell Insights (/subscribe-techwell-insights)

Join Mailing List (/join-mailing-list)
FAQ (/faq)
Speak at a Conference (/software-conferences/be-a-speaker)

Associated Training and Consulting (https://www.coveros.com/)

Advertise (/advertise-with-techwell)

About Us (/about-us)

Press & Media (/press-and-media)

Contact Us (/contact-us)

RSS (/rss)

(//twitter.com/TechWell)　(
https://www.youtube.com/user/SQEVideo)

(//www.linkedin.com/company/techwell)

(www.hub.techwell.c

Terms of Use (/terms-of-use)

Privacy Policy (/privacy-policy)

©2011-2023 TechWell Corp.

841 Prudential Drive | 12th Floor | Jacksonville, FL | 32207

Site Map (/techwell-sitemap)