

IterEx

# *Retrospectives – The Missing Practice*

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# *Agenda*

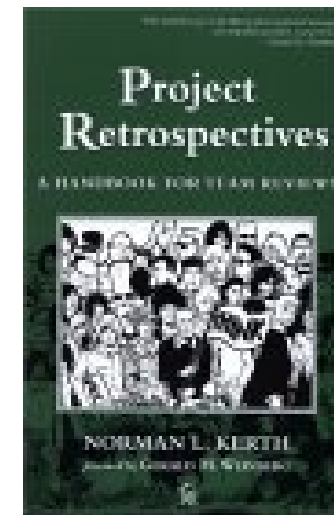
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- Retrospective basics (15 mins)
- Sample retrospective (40 mins)
- Meta Retrospective (5 mins)

## *What Is a Retrospective*

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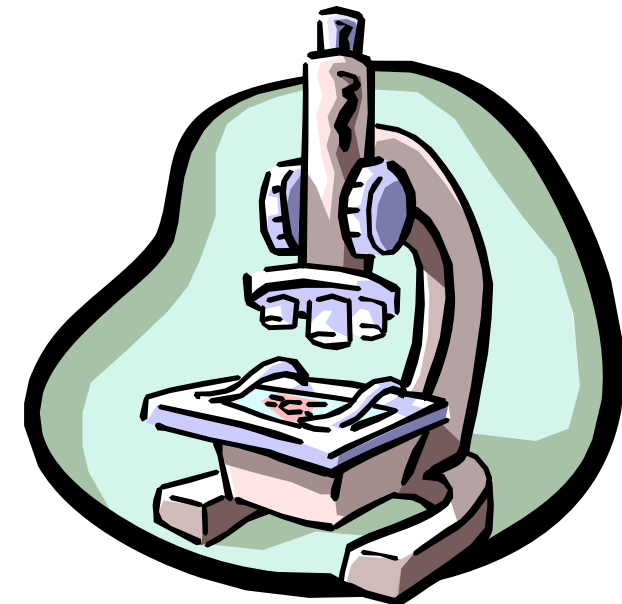
- retrospective (rèt´re-spèk-tîv) -- a ritual held at the end of a project to learn from the experience and to plan changes for the next effort.
  
- Much of this work was pioneered by Norm Kerth
  - Project Retrospectives: A Handbook for Team Reviews
  
- Also by E. Derby & D. Larson
  - Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams Great



# ***The Importance of the Prime Directive***

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- ***“Regardless of what we discover, we understand and truly believe that everyone did the best job they could, given what they knew at the time, their skills and abilities, the resources available, and the situation at hand.”***
- Understand this is not an opportunity to place blame
- Learn what went well so we can repeat it
- Learn what didn't go well so we don't continue doing it



## ***Creating Safety In The Retrospective***

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- To have an honest discussion, everyone in the room must feel “safe”
  1. No Problem, I’ll talk about anything
  2. I’ll talk about almost anything, a few things might be hard
  3. I’ll talk about some things, but others will be hard to say
  4. I’m not going to say much, I’ll let others bring up issues
  5. I’ll smile, claim everything is great and agree with managers
- Do a safety exercise to verify a level of 3+
- Also stress that all exercises are **optional**

## ***Key Questions To Be Answered***

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- What did we do well?  
(that if we don't discuss we might forget)
- What didn't we do well?  
(or - what should we do differently next time)
- What still puzzles us?
- What did we learn?
- Actions

# ***Choosing an Exercise from the Menu...***

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## ■ Starters

- I'm too busy
- Define Success
- Create Safety

## ■ Main Courses

- Artefacts Contest
- Develop a Timeline
- Emotions Seismograph
- Offer Appreciations
- Passive Analogy
- Session Without Managers
- Repair Damage Through Play

## ■ Desserts

- Making the Magic Happen
- Change the Paper
- Closing the Retrospective

## ***Sending out a pre-work Handout***

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- To help select the correct exercises use pre-work
  - Explain “what is a retrospective” and “how should I prepare”
  
- Ask the attendees questions like the following:
  1. For us to learn most about this experience, what topics need to be discussed?
  2. What reservations, concerns, or worries do you have about this retrospective?
  3. What else should I ask and how would you respond?



## *Trying The Timeline*

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- Lets try an exercise to see how a timeline works

**“Participating in X”**

## *Phase 1 - Events*

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- Put coloured stickies on the timeline to record the events
  - **Green** = successful event
  - **Yellow** = notable event
  - **Orange** = problematic event
  
- Note – the bottom 1/3 of the timeline is reserved for Phase 2

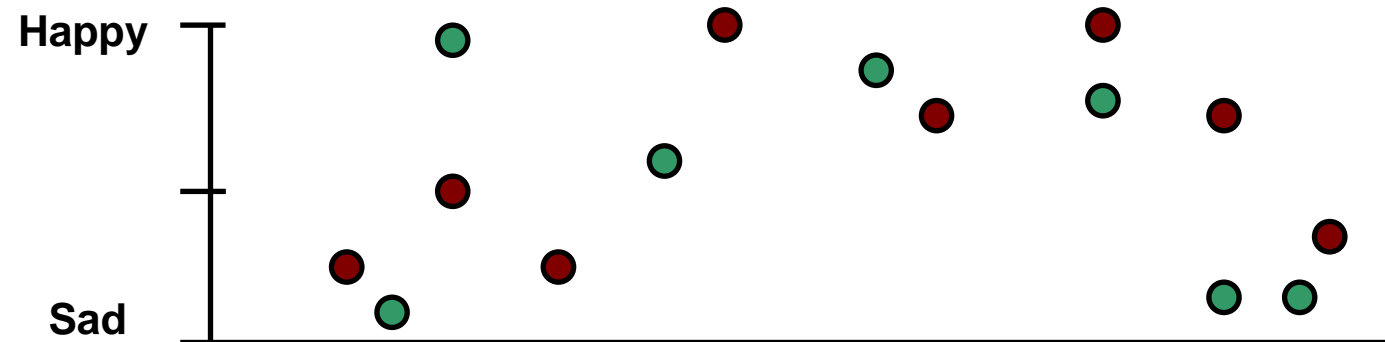
# “In-progress” Timeline

- The following shows the “in-progress” timeline
- Tip – use some yellow “post-its” at the top of the timeline to align everyone’s vision of time – record some months and some non-controversial events (e.g. Xmas Party). Remember to leave more space for critical time periods



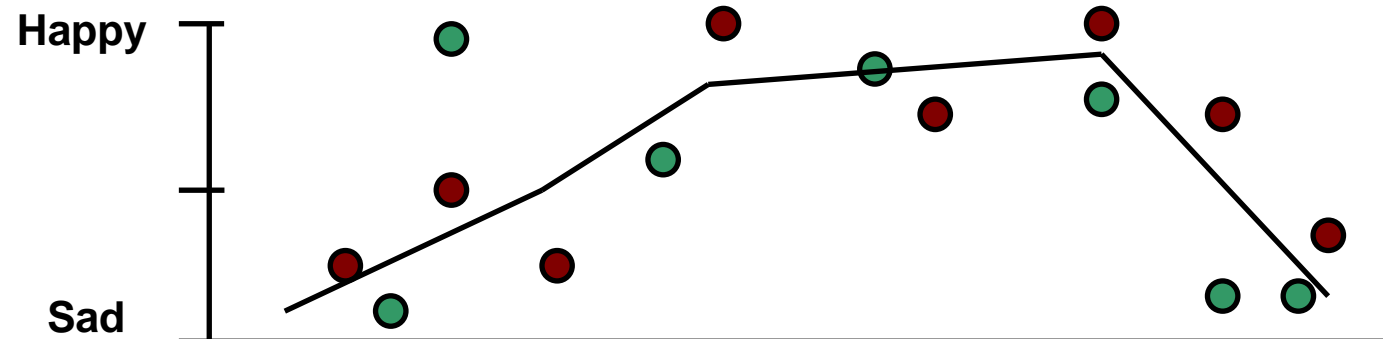
## Phase 2 - Feelings

- Ask the group to walk along the time line and mark a dot indicating how they each felt about each event



## Phase 3 - Studying

- Ask the group to stand back and look at the timeline
- With the group encourage volunteers to draw a line through the dots and explain their trend and feelings.
- Record main trends, and general observations



# A Resulting Timeline

- The following shows the results of a timeline for a 6 month project
- You can notice interesting contradictions – the area which has a lot of successful events was not unanimously viewed as a happy time by the team. This is something to discuss.



## ***Phase 4 - Mining***

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- Mining the timeline for captured information
  - What did we do well?  
(that if we don't discuss we might forget)
  - What didn't we do well – with a recommendation?  
(What should we do differently next time?)
  - What did we learn?
  - What still puzzles us?
  
- Ask everyone to visit the timeline and re-write 5 post-its that stand out for them for further discussion in the above categories
- Insist that “Not so well” items have a recommendation
  - Its easy to complain, but we are after improvements
- Round-robin ask each person to stand up and explain their “top” item – stick them on the wall and annotate any conversations

## ***Phase 5 - Actions***

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- Go through the Well, Not So Well, Puzzles lists and ask the group to rank the items High/Med/Low
- Take Highest ranked items and look for potential actions
- Caution the team about having too many actions that they are unlikely to achieve



## ***Closing Exercises***

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- Leave the retrospective on a “high note”
- Choosing 2 or 3 actions that are the most important to resolve for next time
- Perform a Hopes and Wishes exercise

## ***Retrospective Tips***

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- Vary the exercises – they can become stale
- Use a “Token” to allow everyone to talk
- Use a facilitator to improve safety
- It usually requires 2+ hours to do a simple exercise and mine information from it
- Appreciation exercises are the hardest to achieve but are a noble goal
- Think longer term – it may take a team several retrospectives to develop “higher safety”

# Summary

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- Retrospectives provide:
  - Feedback to the “development process”
  - An opportunity to talk about difficult issues that are impeding team performance
  - A chance to record what is working/not working that can possibly be shared with others
  - Good team building
  - An insight into potential team problems that can be acted on

**Speaker: Tim Mackinnon**  
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## *Special Thanks*

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- Most of this presentation is based on the work of Norm Kerth
- Attendees of the “Oregon Retrospective Gathering” provided the original idea of a coloured timeline