

## Retrospective Exercises

### *Interim vs. End of Project (EOP)*

*In parentheses: page numbers for Norm Kerth's book  
and supplies for each exercise*

### Preliminary

#### Conversations

The team lead, e.g. "What's the composition of the group: HW, EE, SW?"

The manager or supporter, e.g.

Brief history of the project

Future of the project

Specific issues to be addressed

Set expectations

Key team members

Invitation to all participants (example at end of this document)

#### Collect

Data

Artifacts

### The Readying

#### Introduction (100-03)

*Interim*: remind participants of goals and guidelines.

*EOP*: whatever it takes to:

Define the goal(s) – kickoff by high-level supporter.

Make the introductions.

Discuss the schedule and agenda, location of facilities.

#### Sample Ground rules (flip chart, talking stick)

Use a Talking stick – one person talks at a time – no interruptions.

The Prime Directive.

No cell phones.

Everyone's opinion is valued.

No one has to talk.

Ground rules can be amended after a break.

#### I'm Too Busy (103-05) (paper or index cards for each participant, large envelope to hold ToDo lists)

*Interim*: probably not appropriate, since retro is short.

*EOP*: use as needed.

**Art Gallery** (195-197) (paper, pens for each participant to draw)

*Interim:* Useful on occasion to see everyone's big picture of the project. Pictures could be displayed near the evolving timeline.

*EOP:* Useful to provide a temperature check.

**Create Safety** (108-16) (small pieces of paper, enough for several rounds for each participant)

*Interim:* Might be useful at first interim retrospective, then to remind participants of the ground rules at follow-on retros.

*EOP:* Can be done if earlier temperature checks suggest it.

### **Look at the Past**

**Define Success** (105-08) (flip chart)

*Interim:* Might be the primary exercise of the retro.

*EOP:* Good way to get participants thinking in a positive way.

**Time Line** (121-27) (wall or table space, colored and white index cards)

*Interim:* Create a continuing timeline throughout project. Use colored cards.

*EOP:* Finish the timeline. Use colored cards.

**Artifacts Contest** (116-21) (prizes for greatest number, most significant, most unusual artifacts)

*Interim:* Can be appropriate if artifacts are significant and discussion is kept short.

*EOP:* Useful exercise.

**Emotions Seismograph** (127-30) (sheets of butcher paper under TimeLine)

*Interim:* Only if there appear to be problems.

*EOP:* Can be useful as an addition to colored cards.

**Offer Appreciations** (130-34)

*Interim:* Do quickly, but always include.

*EOP:* Always important.

**Mine for Gold** (124-26) (three flip charts: Worked Well, Do Differently, Puzzles)

*Interim:* Part of Define Success exercise.

*EOP:* Use Timeline, results of Define Success, and brainstorm.

### **Prepare for the Future**

**Change the Paper** (157-63) (flip charts)

Two posters: Don't Do Again and Do Differently This Time – for every item on the first poster, participants list at least one item on the second poster indicating what they should do instead.

Could be used halfway through the project – to look at what they're doing wrong and to make suggestions for "fixing" these things.

**Closing the Retrospective** (163-65) (paper or index cards and pens for each participant, envelope to collect all information)

*Interim*: Informal verbal hopes & wishes. Go around the table.

*EOP*: Written hopes & wishes. Save for next retro.

**Do a retro on the retro.** Ask sponsors, others, yourself:

1. What worked well?
2. What should be done differently?
3. What puzzles you?

### **Example Interim**

1. Short Introduction.
2. Create safety exercise during first iteration retro – remind participants of ground rules after that.
3. Continuing timeline.
4. Define Success. Consider the result of the experiments in the last iteration and determine the experiments for the next iteration. Can be done on one sheet of paper.

### **New Exercises**

#### **Write a Letter**

When members of a team realize that they will not be involved in the next phase of the project. It's appropriate for planning for the future, since as far as the group is concerned, there is no future. Writing a personal letter allows each team member to share his or her lessons learned and can be therapeutic. It enables a connection even though none exists. Delivering the letters to the new team members starts things off with a "shadowy mentor" and helps alleviate feelings of jumping in without any real support.

#### **Mapping**

We all like a good story and pictures. This technique is used at HP with a lot of success. Team members hang up maps in their cubicles and team areas and use them to tell their story to visitors. <http://www.nbos.com/products/mapper/mapper.htm>

## Example Invitation

To all those who will participate in the <project name> Retrospective:

During this meeting, your comments on this project will be solicited. We will consider the questions: "What worked well that we don't want to forget?" "What should be done differently in the future?" and "What still puzzles us?"

I hope you will all be able to participate in the retrospective. Getting feedback from as many team members as possible will help everyone learn as much we can from your experience.

A retrospective is like an archeological dig, so in the spirit of excavation, I'm asking each of you to search for meaningful artifacts from the project to bring to the retrospective. By artifact, I mean anything that reminds you of what happened during the project. We will have fun while we learn, so there will be prizes for the person who brings (1) the greatest number of artifacts, (2) the most significant artifact, and (3) the most unusual artifact.

While we conduct this retrospective, we will constantly remind ourselves of what my good friend, Norm Kerth, calls the Prime Directive [Kerth]:

“Regardless of what we discover, we must understand and truly believe that everyone did the best job he or she could, given what was known at the time, his or her skills and abilities, the resources available, and the situation at hand.”

The retrospective is not held to pass judgment on what happened but to learn and grow from your collective experience. At the end of any multi-person project, there are important things that occurred that might not be widely known - positive things and negative things. No one knows all the stories, how all the pieces came together. The story of the project needs to come out in a forum where everyone can contribute."

We will try to capture this information in a meaningful way to remind you as you go forward to the next project.

Learning from the past requires taking time for reflection. You are fortunate that your management believes that this is a worthwhile activity and will support not only your time to reflect but will help ensure that lessons learned will not be forgotten.

I look forward to our meeting!

Linda

[Kerth] Kerth, N.L., *Project Retrospectives: A Handbook for Team Reviews*, Dorset House, 2001.