



Making Retrospectives More Actionable

Agile Carolinas

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Frank Wohlfarth

fwohlfarth@gmail.com

704-306-7704



Who am I?

- Name: Frank Wohlfarth, MBA, PMP, PMI-ACP
- Personal e-mail: fwohlfarth@gmail.com
- Work phone #: 704-306-7704
- Background: Recovered Waterfallaholic
- Employer: Vanguard
- Position: Agile Process Expert / Program Manager
- Role as the Agile Process Expert included:
 - Evangelizing / training / mentoring / facilitating / blogging / podcasting, ...
 - Creating / facilitating classes in the Agile / Lean space
 - Creating / Building out a CoP
 - ...
- Some of my favorite things to do:
 - @ Work: Learning, disseminating, facilitating, ...
 - Personal life: Anything outdoors (hiking, biking, ...), my kids, ...



Goals For Today?

- Simple:
 - Present some techniques I've used
 - Make it interactive
 - Learn from each other
 - Perform an actual retrospective today
 - Have fun!
- How about you? What goals do you have?



Quick Poll

- How often does your team perform a retrospective:
 - We don't
 - Only when we have to
 - Occasionally, but not every iteration (or defined time interval)
 - Every iteration (or defined interval)
 - Huh? What's a retrospective? I received a notification for free food and I showed up...



Typical Ground Rules

- This is a safe environment: Acceptance w/o judgment
 - Aka: Document, don't defend
- Stay in the present
- Everyone in the room participates
- Show respect: One person at a time speaks
- Communicate from your own perspective
- Feedback will be anonymous, where applicable
- Ground rules can/will be amended, if necessary
 - Ex. Talking "stick," "lock up" laptop/tablet/phones, etc.
- What happens in Vegas...
- What would you add to this list?



Ground Rules Continued...

- Suggested during the session by the participants:
 - Set the context up front:
 - As in, why are we here?
 - What does the future look like?
 - The focus should be on problem solving, not venting
 - Come with a positive attitude



The Typical Retrospective

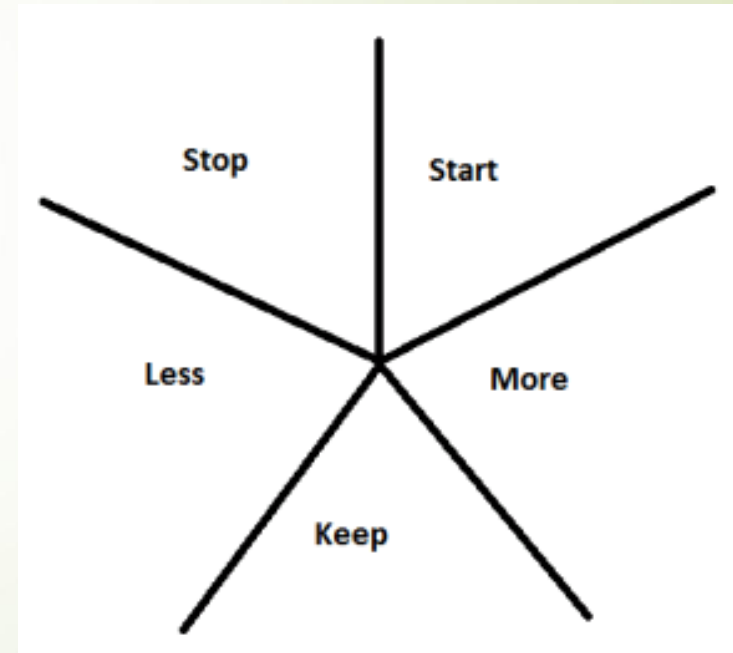
- Raise your hand: Can someone tell me the three standard questions?
 - What went well?
 - What could have gone better?
 - What are you going to focus on improving?
- Does anyone see any potential issues with this technique?
- Best practices:
 - Track the improvement items (story/card)
 - Didn't complete the improvement work? You didn't achieve the goal of the iteration...
- Has anyone used this before? How did it work out?

A Better Approach: The Starfish...

- Can anyone tell me the questions?

- What should we...

- Do more of?
- Do less of?
- Stop doing?
- Start doing?
- Continue doing?



- I like this approach much better... Why?

- All questions are action oriented...



The Sailboat approach

- Uses a sailboat as a metaphor:
 - Draw a sailboat on a flipchart or white board, with multiple “anchors” coming off the boat
 - Hand out sticky notes and pens to the participants
 - Participants document on sticky notes:
 - Issues (anchors)
 - Efficiencies gained (wind in their sails)
 - Have them place the sticky notes on the boat
 - Pick the top few items and discuss them...

Sailboat approach





Sailboat Retrospective on Steroids

- For additional clarity, consider the following modification:
 - Expand the feedback to four categories from two:
 - Wind: What propels you forward
 - Life preserver: What can save you (tools/techniques, stakeholders, white knights, etc.)
 - Anchor: What holds you back
 - Rocks: Where you may crash (laborious process steps, too many hand-offs, dependencies, etc.)



Controls Testing Overall – Sailboat Example

➤ Wind in our sails:

- Management support
- Knowledge of crew
- Team has great rapport

➤ Life preserver:

- Mentorship provided by coach
- Backlog management system

➤ Anchor:

- **Our sponsor**
- Product owner cooperation
- Missing documentation

➤ Rocks:


























- **Unnecessary hand-offs**
- SME access
- SME knowledge

Niko-Niko calendar

A simple way to capture employee engagement

- Niko means smile in Japanese... Niko-niko roughly translates to “Smiley”
- The Niko-niko calendar is an information radiator, commonly known as a “mood” board
- Capturing subjective “feelings,” it is a great way to measure team health (motivation, engagement, etc.) over time
- Critical tool to assist with innovation
- Process:
 - Team members record their “mood” on a frequent basis (ex. Daily, weekly, etc.)
 - 😊 ➤ : Pleasant/happy/good
 - 😐 ➤ : Ordinary
 - 😞 ➤ : Unpleasant/unhappy/bad/sad
 - Discuss the results as necessary
- Good HBR article to read:
 - <https://hbr.org/2016/05/why-john-deere-measures-employee-morale-every-two-weeks.com>

Niko-Niko calendar

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Bob					
Sally					
Jane					
Sue					
Jeff					



Retrospective Time!

- “Knowing is not enough, we must apply. Willing is not enough, we must do.” – Bruce Lee
- Let's put this into practice:
 - Consider your experience with Agile Carolinas overall:
 - Starfish
- Place them on the flipcharts on the way out...




Sad, Mad, and Glad...

- Another technique to gauge team health...
- Process:
 - Create three vertical sections via a white board/flip charts/etc. and label them: Mad/Sad/Glad
 - Hand out sticky notes and pens to the participants
 - On sticky notes, have them document items that made them:
 - Sad/disappointed
 - Mad/frustrated
 - Glad/happy
 - Have them place the sticky notes in the respective areas on the board
 - Group similar ideas (affinitize)
 - Discuss them and focus on corrective action...



4 L's

- This technique is a great way to gather insights while driving full-team interaction. Process:
 - Create four flipchart posters with a title on top of each:
 - Liked
 - Learned
 - Lacked
 - Longed for
 - Hand out sticky notes and pens to the participants
 - Participants document the 4L's since the last retrospective on sticky notes and place them in the respective areas
 - Divide the group into four teams each assigned to a "L"
 - Each team is responsible for:
 - Identifying themes for their chart
 - Reading out to the entire group
 - As a group: Discuss / determine focus areas



Having Trouble Determining Focus Areas?

- Dot voting is a great and anonymous way to select improvement ideas:
 - On a flipchart, place items that need to be voted on
 - Hand out a fixed # of dots (votes) per person
 - Everyone places their votes
 - Once complete, tally everything up
 - Read out...
- Any other suggestions?



Focus Areas Continued...

- Suggested during the session by the participants:
 - Utilize a ROI matrix or [Pick chart](#)
 - [Spotify health check](#)
 - Buy an improvement
 - Prior to formal retrospective: Log improvement ideas into “virtual tool” and allow voting. This can drive discussion...
 - Utilize the Fibonacci sequence



To Be Or Not To Be...

- Feedback for every technique reviewed thus far can be gathered through team interaction OR “anonymously” via sticky notes...
- I suggested an anonymous approach for all of them...
 - Do you agree? If so, why? If not, why not?



What Retrospective Techniques Have You Found?

- Suggested during the session by the participants:
 - Appreciate the team: Gratitude is an attitude
 - Play Agile games
 - Utilize virtual tools



One More: Pre-mortem

- This is an anonymous exercise that looks backward and is designed to accomplish two things:
 - Determine what failure looked like
 - Determine what success looked like
- Approach:
 - Round 1 - The project was an absolute failure:
 - Hand out sticky notes to the participants
 - Each person thinks through why the initiative failed
 - Reasons are documented on sticky notes
 - Data is affinitized and discussed
 - Top items receive mitigation plans, post meeting
 - Round 2 – The project was an absolute success:
 - Repeat the steps above, focusing on the reasons why the initiative was successful



Miscellaneous Tips

- Utilize good facilitation techniques – Ex. “Pull” participation from the crew
- P90X it!
- One of my favorite tips: Combine retrospective techniques!
- Develop a cadence **AND** stick to it!
- Call a meeting whenever a need arises
- Utilize different facilitators
- ScrumMaster? Don’t attend all the retrospectives...
- Ask management to skip the meeting...
- Don’t forget: What happens in Vegas...
- Any others?



Parting Thoughts - Quotes

- “Knowing is not enough, we must apply. Willing is not enough, we must do.” – Bruce Lee
- “Knowledge is of no value unless you put it into practice.” – Anton Chekhov
- Time to share: What are you going to apply?
- “Knowledge is power. Knowledge shared is power multiplied.” – Robert Noyce



Thank you!



Thanks for attending
today's session!

Frank Wohlfarth
fwohlfarth@gmail.com
704-306-7704