FACILITATOR GUIDE

Retrospective guide

A retrospective is a session where a team looks at how it worked, more than at what it built, and commits to changing one thing. This short guide gives pragmatic pointers on facilitating one. As a team we discuss three things about our most recent timebox (the fixed stretch of time we plan and work in; Scrum calls it a sprint), and we leave with one thing to do differently.

Version 4.2
30 to 60 minutes
One improvement

01

What went well?

For us as a team, in the context of our relationships, our collaboration and working together to create value.

02

What did not go well?

For us as a team, in the same context. We look at how we worked, more than at what we built.

03

The one thing we plan to do differently

In the coming timebox, to address the thing we agree has been hurting us the most.

HOW LONG

30 to 60 minutes

A retrospective can be anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes, depending on the number of people in the team, the context and nature of their work, and their maturity. If in doubt, book the hour and finish early.

NEW TO RETROSPECTIVES?

Start with the introduction at kubairshirazee.com/retrospectives, then come back to this guide.

A simple retrospective, step by step

Steps 1 to 4
8 steps in all

01 Set the stage — 2 to 3 mins

- Introduce the purpose of the retrospective, the period under review and the format.
- Emphasise confidentiality (the Vegas rule: what is said in the room stays in the room) and constructive feedback.
- Review the status of actions from the last retrospective.

02 Gather data — 5 to 7 mins

- Team members reflect in silence on what they observed, using “I observed X, which led to Y.”
- They write their top observations on sticky notes, one per note, under what went well and what did not.
- They post and share them on the wall under each header. For teams new to retrospectives: each person posts one prioritised note per column.

03 Review and group — 5 to 7 mins

- Group similar notes on the wall.
- Celebrate successes with a quick round of gratitude or high fives.

04 Generate insights — 10 to 12 mins

- Discuss root causes and patterns in the grouped notes.
- Encourage different perspectives with silent brainstorming or round-robin sharing (each person speaks in turn).

A simple retrospective, step by step

Steps 5 to 8
42 to 56 minutes as timed here

05 Prioritise — 3 to 5 mins

- Give each participant three votes and one to two minutes to vote.
- Briefly discuss and align on the top-voted issues.

06 Generate options — 10 to 12 mins

- Brainstorm actionable solutions for the top-voted theme.
- Make sure they are feasible and can be done in the next timebox.

07 Decide actions — 5 to 7 mins

- Select one action by consensus; dot voting (each person puts a sticker on their choice) works here too.
- Detail the experiment using SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound.

08 Close — 2 to 3 mins

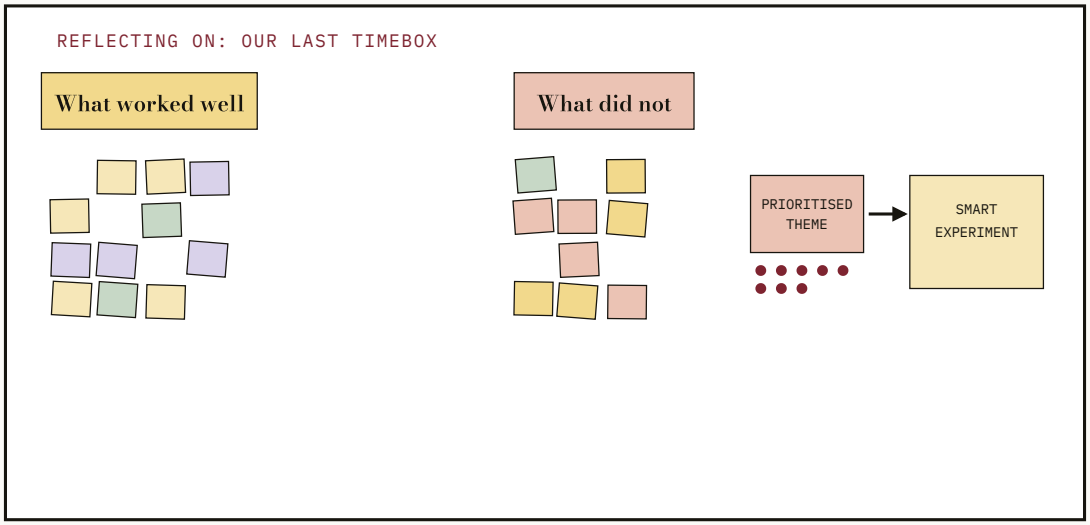
- Recap the key insights, decisions and the action.
- Celebrate the team's commitment and formally close the retrospective.

The step timings suit a team reflecting on a four-week timebox. Shorten them for a smaller team or a shorter timebox, and keep the whole session within 30 to 60 minutes.

IN THE ROOM

What the wall looks like

Sticky notes
Marker pens
Dot votes



01 The reflection period

State the timebox the team is reflecting on at the top of the wall.

02 Headers

What we are reflecting on: what worked well, and what did not.

03 Dot votes

Stickers that each person places on the theme they would tackle first.

04 Prioritised theme

The one theme to address with a SMART experiment in the coming timebox.

Reflective time frame: .....

What went well for us as a team

In the context of our relationships, collaboration and working together to create value.

What did not go well for us as a team

In the context of our relationships, collaboration and working together to create value.

One thing we want to do differently in the coming timebox

To address the thing we aligned on as hurting us the most in the timebox just gone.

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Relevant

Time-bound