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TEAM RETROSPECTIVE EXAMPLE LESSONS FROM AGILE

RETROSPECTIVE, AKA “RETRO”

A dedicated, planned time of collaborative reflection by a team about the team’s processes and work. There can be multiple goals of a retro, but usually these resemble the following:

PRIMARY GOALS

1. Identify things that worked well (for a pre-defined time range or event)
2. Identify things that did not work well (for a pre-defined time range or event)
3. Identify *and commit to testing out* iterative improvement idea(s) as a team (for a pre-defined future time range or event)

SECONDARY GOALS

1. Increased team communication
2. Team recognition of wins/kudos
3. Team ownership of improvement opportunities rather than individual blame
4. Better-quality teamwork
5. Elevated team trust
6. Improved employee experience

TIPS TO HOLDING A SUCCESSFUL RETROSPECTIVE

PRIOR TO THE SESSION

- Pick a time when everyone on the team can attend and encourage the importance of full attendance.
- Decide on a goal—this can be general improvement or something specific based on the team’s needs.
- Decide on approach/format.

STARTING THE SESSION

- Begin with a team agreement for full participation during the session (no distractions). If anyone has extenuating circumstances precluding them from full participation, ask them to acknowledge those now.
- Explain the purpose of the session, the time limit, goal, and approach.
- Expand on the team agreement for the session—have the team decide ground rules to establish trust. Write/type these live and keep them visible throughout the session, returning to them as needed.

A POTENTIAL APPROACH

Opportunities for creative retrospectives are endless, however here is a simple one to begin building the team's familiarity and trust of the session's value:

Stop/ Start/ Continue

Create three columns and give all team members a designated amount of quiet time to reflect on the previous period or event and fill in their ideas of what behaviors/processes to stop, start, and continue in order to improve upon the stated goal of the session. As facilitator, you can decide to have all three columns filled in at once by the team, or have each column filled one at a time. If the retro is done in person, team members can write their ideas on sticky notes and place them on a wall. If it is done remotely, a shared online platform can be used—there are several free ones online for use (IdeaBoardz, Trello, Miro, etc.).

Review the ideas shared as a team and ask clarifying questions as needed. If able, begin to physically cluster stickies based on common themes and define these themes as you go.

Ideas

Create a fourth column and ask the team to identify 1-2 improvement ideas based on the themes that were defined with the previous three columns. Review these ideas together as a team. Have the team select 1-3 improvements to commit to work on for a defined period (usually until the next retro). If it is hard for the team to decide, have team members vote for their top two favorite improvement ideas listed and select the team commitment(s) based on the most votes.

CLOSING THE SESSION

- Decide as a team the length of the iteration period for improvement ideas.
- Decide as a team how to keep accountable to the committed changes for the iteration period.
- If not scheduled already, make sure to schedule another retro to review how things went and continue testing new iterative improvements.
- Decide as a team what from this session should remain confidential and what information should be shared out--by and with whom.
- Retro your retro! Ask the team how this session went for them and if there was anything they would like to do differently next time.

OTHER

- Invest the time to do it right--if you have a large group, allot one hour or more to make sure even the quietest voices are heard and so the team can end with a commitment to an improvement idea to test.
- Pick improvements to test out that are ownable by the team, rather than those external to the team's influence.



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- Don't pick more than three improvements to work on in a period at once—this allows the team to focus and evaluate effects of the changes.
- Retrospectives work best with self-organized teams that are allowed the leeway to discuss what is working and not working and to decide how to attempt to fix these issues as a team.
- Unless the team is made up of managers/directors, avoid having them present for retrospectives. Having managers/directors present may inhibit the psychological safety for open and honest communication about what is not working for team members and/or inhibit the most creative ideas for improvement.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Good retrospectives are an invaluable tool for team and process improvement; however, it can take time for teams to become comfortable and build trust in the process and with each other. To build that trust, make retros a dedicated and regular practice. Doing so will enable a reliable channel of accountability to each other to continuously improve.