

Retrospective Ideas Collection

Formats to Prevent Stagnation and Spark Improvement

A companion resource from Agile Meets AI, Chapter 9

Success-induced drift happens when retrospectives become routine and generate few insights. Varying your format keeps retrospectives fresh and surfaces different types of learning. Rotate facilitation to build team capability.

THE SUSTAINABILITY CHECK

Best for: *Preventing success-induced drift; quarterly deep dives*

How it works: Add standing questions that force examination of current practices, even when things are going well.

Key questions:

- What are we doing simply because we've always done it this way?
- What would we do differently if we assumed our current success was about to end?
- What practice hasn't changed in 6 months—and should it?

START / STOP / CONTINUE

Best for: *Teams new to retrospectives; clear, simple structure*

How it works: Three columns. Team members add items to each. Vote on top items per column. Commit to 1-2 actions.

Key questions:

- What should we START doing that we're not doing now?
- What should we STOP doing because it's not helping?
- What should we CONTINUE because it's working well?

THE 4 L's

Best for: *Balanced reflection; surfacing both emotions and actions*

How it works: Four quadrants: Liked, Learned, Lacked, Longed For. Captures both feelings and gaps.

Key questions:

- What did we LIKE about this sprint?
- What did we LEARN (including from failures)?
- What did we LACK that would have helped?
- What do we LONG FOR going forward?

SAILBOAT

Best for: *Visualizing forces; engaging teams who prefer metaphors*

How it works: Draw a sailboat. Wind = what propels us. Anchors = what holds us back. Rocks = risks ahead. Island = our goal.

Key questions:

- What wind is pushing us toward our goal?
- What anchors are holding us back?
- What rocks (risks) should we watch for?
- Is our island (goal) still the right destination?

EXPERIMENT REVIEW

Best for: *Teams running improvement experiments; learning-focused*

How it works: Review experiments from last sprint. What did we try? What happened? What did we learn? What's next?

Key questions:

- What experiments did we run this sprint?
- What results did we observe (expected and unexpected)?
- What did we learn that changes our approach?
- What experiment will we try next sprint?

TEAM RADAR

Best for: *Tracking trends over time; quantitative teams*

How it works: Rate 5-6 dimensions (1-5). Plot on radar chart. Compare to previous sprints. Discuss biggest changes.

Key questions:

- Dimensions to rate: Collaboration, Quality, Learning, Pace, Fun, Customer Focus
- Which dimension improved most? What contributed?
- Which dimension declined? What happened?
- Which dimension needs focus next sprint?

GLAD / SAD / MAD

Best for: *Teams with emotional tension; creating space for feelings*

How it works: Three emotional categories. Surfaces frustrations that might not emerge in analytical formats.

Key questions:

- What made you GLAD this sprint?
- What made you SAD (disappointed)?
- What made you MAD (frustrated)?
- What patterns do our emotions reveal?

TIMELINE

Best for: *Long sprints or complex projects; reconstructing what happened*

How it works: Draw a timeline of the sprint. The team adds events, decisions, and feelings at each point. Identify patterns.

Key questions:

- What were the key moments this sprint?
- Where did energy/morale shift?
- What decisions had the biggest impact?
- What would we do differently knowing what we know now?

Facilitation Tips

- **Rotate facilitators** — builds skills and brings fresh perspectives
- **Vary formats** — same format every time leads to stale retros
- **Time-box discussions** — spend more time on actions than complaints
- **Follow up on previous actions** — start by reviewing what happened with the last sprint's commitments
- **Commit to a few** — 1-2 actions completed beats 5 actions ignored

Remember: The goal isn't the perfect retrospective format, it's continuous improvement that actually happens. If your retros generate insights but no changes, the format isn't the problem. If you have tools such as Miro or Mural, there are several retrospective templates available.

From *Agile Meets AI: A Pragmatic Guide for Modern Teams* by Sheila Eckert
[Download more resources at thesheilaverse.com/book-companion](http://thesheilaverse.com/book-companion)