Project Retrospectives
A tool for improving current and future projects

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What is a Project Retrospective?
Project Retrospective

A formal method for capturing and preserving the *lessons learned* from a recently completed project
Project Retrospective

Focused on identifying **mistakes or problems** that occurred in the project, to avoid repeating them in the future.
Project Retrospective

Also focused on identifying what went right, to encourage replication of these successes in future projects.
How Does It Work?
Retrospectives in a Nutshell

1. Prepare questions
Retrospectives in a Nutshell

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2. Get the project team in a room
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3. Discuss what went right and wrong
Retrospectives in a Nutshell

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4. Compile findings after the meeting
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4. Compile findings after the meeting
5. Edit and share the final report
Best Practices

• Create a “safe” space for participants to discuss their work
• Select an outsider as the facilitator
• Allocate enough time for the meeting
• Offsite meeting location is best
• Don’t allow the meeting to turn into a complaint session; keep it constructive
Case Study
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North Carolina Architects & Builders: A Biographical Dictionary
Welcome to North Carolina Architects & Builders

This biographical dictionary highlights architects and builders who have produced North Carolina's architecture for more than 300 years. A brief biography plus a building list traces each person's work in the state. This is a growing website, with many more entries still to be added. We invite users to send corrections and updated information to enhance the site.

Hicks, William J. (1827-1911)

William J. Hicks (February 18, 1827-January 14, 1911), millwright, builder, contractor, architect, and prison warden, began his career in the 1850s and became a prominent figure in North Carolina construction after the Civil War. He epitomized the practical, ambitious, and adaptable men who made their way in the unsettled times after the war. Hicks was born in Spottsylvania County, Virginia, the son of Martin (1797-1849) and Nancy Pendleton Hicks. William's mother died when he was three years old, and during his father's long illness he helped manage the family farm. Always attracted to mechanical work, Hicks went to work...
Project Context

- Growing collection of over 150 authored biographies of prominent individuals in North Carolina architecture
- Supports faceted search and browse of biographies by work locations, dates, and building types
- 8 person project team
- About 1 year to design and implement
Four Questions Before Meeting

1. What worked well in this project, that we would like to repeat again?
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2. Would you cite as your best personal lesson learned in this project?
Four Questions Before Meeting

1. What worked well in this project, that we would like to repeat again?
2. Would you cite as your best personal lesson learned in this project?
3. What did not work so well in this project, that we should do differently next time?
Four Questions Before Meeting

1. What worked well in this project, that we would like to repeat again?
2. Would you cite as your best personal lesson learned in this project?
3. What did not work so well in this project, that we should do differently next time?
4. What aspects of this project still puzzle us?
The Meeting Itself

Norm Kerth’s *Prime Directive*:

“Regardless of what we discover, we understand and truly believe that everyone did the best job they could, given what they knew at the time, their skills and abilities, the resources available, and the situation at hand.”
The Meeting Itself

- Thematic discussion questions
  - Planning
  - Resources
  - Scheduling
  - Technologies
  - Communication
The Meeting Itself

• Thematic discussion questions
  • Planning
  • Resources
  • Scheduling
  • Technologies
  • Communication

• Reflection questions
  • Best personal lesson learned?
  • What still puzzles you about this project?
After the Meeting

1. Summary report drafted
2. Retrospective participants asked to review and comment on draft
3. Final report edited and published on internal project website for posterity
4. Final report shared with relevant parties outside the project team
Reflecting on the Retrospective

- Meeting time should have been longer
- Interactive exercises would have made the process more fun and engaging
- Ideally the facilitator would be a complete outsider
- We should do more of these!
Summary of Benefits
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• Closure for the project team
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- Promotes a shared responsibility for project success and failure—we are all in this together!
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• Closure for the project team
• Inform planning for upcoming projects
• Promotes a shared responsibility for project success and failure—we are all in this together!
• Promotes a culture of continual improvement within the organization
Thanks!

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More Information

Project Retrospectives
A Handbook for Team Reviews
(2001)