

Balance between Introspection & Retrospection

A key factor for improved project performance

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The importance of delivering effective projects is a lifelong challenge faced by the project manager and his team. The key to deliver successful projects in a sustainable manner is learning the lessons from past and applying them in future. When it comes to implementation, lessons learnt process is easier said than done. The most mature project teams face challenges when applying lessons learnt. Two of the keys in the arsenal that the project manager and his team can use are introspection and retrospection. As we all know retrospection has been in use in agile environments in learning from the past. In this article let us explore the differences between introspection and retrospection and why a fine balance is required in applying both techniques to improve project performance.

Why are introspection and retrospection important to improve the lessons learnt process?

Working on projects with multiple constraints like time, cost, scope, quality and various other constraints keeps the team on the edge most of the time. It is very common for the team to get stuck in a repetitive cycle and keep doing the same things everyday which may not be producing the right results. The definition for insanity would be "do the same things and expect different results"! The key to project success is to develop commitment among the team members in what they do. Introspection and retrospection are great tools which can empower the team members to learn, apply and improve from their past experiences and projects and create a better future. Now let us explore some differences and characteristics between the two methods.

Some Key difference and Characteristics of Introspection and Retrospection

Both Introspection and retrospection refer to two different processes that should be done consciously by the team.

The focus while doing Introspection: The team member has to look at his feelings, thoughts, and emotions.

The focus while doing Retrospection: The team member looks at past events.

Examination and Analysis:

Introspection: In introspection, self-examination and self-analysis is important.

Retrospection: It is usually limited to a mere recollection of events

Time:

Introspection: In introspection, the focus is in the present.

Retrospection: In retrospection, the focus is in the past.

Now let us elaborate further on the above -Retrospection is to look at one's past actions and deeds. It is to reflect on something already done and examine one's actions carefully and deduce conclusions based on the observation. One can say that retrospection is a subset of introspection as one's past shapes one's future. Usually it is done at the end of each phase or iteration in projects.

During the retrospective, the team reflects on what happened in the iteration and identifies actions for improvement going forward. Each member of the team members answers the following questions:

What worked well for us?

What did not work well for us?

What actions can we take to improve our process going forward?

Introspection on the other hand - is more or less looking inside of us. It means to reflect upon one's own thoughts, feelings and the actuation of these feelings. In other words, it is a conscious cross examination of oneself. Introspection is knowing yourself. Knowing what you've done, what were faults with it, how you can improve yourself. How did you respond to activities in your past events in the project? It is about examining or observing your mental and emotional self. It should be combined with retrospection to make the lessons learnt process more effective. Real improvement is not just understanding past events but to improve oneself and learn lessons which can make real impact on the future project outcomes.

Key elements in application of introspections and retrospections during lessons learnt meetings

Lessons learnt meetings are made at the end of every phase of projects and better if done more frequently. This ensures that the project team is always improving the way it works.

Introspections and retrospection is a collaborative process among all members, including the project manager, his team and any other key stakeholders.

All participants identify what went well and what could be improved.

The participants discuss the process that they are following and give any suggestions for improvement.

The participants discuss any other ideas that could improve their productivity.

The participants should spend time in conscious cross examination of oneself to develop higher levels of self-awareness which increases emotional intelligence.

Self-improvement plans should be shared with rest of the team to have higher sense of ownership

Introspection and retrospection support team formation and bonding, particularly as any areas of conflict can be identified and dealt with.

Introspection and retrospection help build the team's sense of ownership and its self-management.

The project manager prioritizes actions and lessons learned based on team direction.

Based on the above - we can see that a fine balance between introspection and retrospection is important to make the lessons learnt process more effective. The better the lessons learnt process, the higher the chances of project performance improvement which in turn improves the business outcomes.

About the Author



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