

RetroLSP

The authorised guide to the framework

After in November 2017 Fabrizio Faraco and myself finalised our first MVP of ScrumLSP[®], we realised that we could do deeper than that, especially after the constant validation of the approach and of the framework itself.

Fabrizio worked on the “Lean Canvas” and “Design Sprint” side, requiring some help from me, while I focused on the “Scrum side of the Force”, heavily supported by him; my biggest concern was (and still is!) not to infringe any rights of LEGO SeriousPlay methodology, being absolutely sure I’m staying within the “open source” boundaries of it!

The first significant outcome of this evolution has been RetroLSP, which we decided to include as well in our open source oriented policy of Creative Common Share Alike.

After some time from that special day, the 19th June 2018 I decided to formalise those initial scribbled notes, that allowed me a successfully validation either in UK (at Wonga, June 2018) and in Sweden (undisclosed Client, July 2018).

RetroLSP is therefore our contribution to the Agile Community and to everybody who thinks it might bring value to the Organisation they care about, but PLEASE remember it’s copyright protected and, above all, it’s “share alike”, meaning that you cannot use “RetroLSP” if you are NOT using as is showed in the following instructions and recommendations. Thanks you for helping us to spread (another) amazing way to “Make Good Teams Great!”^{©AUG12*}

The story behind RetroLSP

Everything started when I bought and read “Agile Retrospectives” the famous book by Esther Derby & Diana Larsen (foreword by Ken Schwaber, co-founder of Scrum framework), whose *subtitle is above quoted.

It’s widely considered a good source of good practices, working examples or even just an inspiration to run an effective Retrospective.

Here’s what Ken Schwaber wrote in the foreword to the book: *“The natural rhythm of the iterative delivery of software in Agile projects provides such a breakpoint. These are chances for the team to improve what it is doing and how they feel about what they are doing. What an opportunity. Read Esther and Diana’s book and see how it works.”*

First things first!

What is a Retrospective?

The first, obvious reference is the Scrum Guide[®] (<https://www.scrumguides.org/scrum-guide.html>), the ONLY one official source of truth about Scrum:

“The Sprint Retrospective is an opportunity for the Scrum Team to inspect itself and create a plan for improvements to be enacted during the next Sprint.”

The guides goes on defining the rules and the core characteristics of this one-out-of-five Events (previously called *Ceremonies*).

I'm a convinced Agilist and a Scrum master, but I love the title of Scrum caretaker, as Gunther Verheyen calls himself.

In his great (though small in size) Scrum Pocket Guide, Gunther condensed his 20+ years of hands-on experience as it follows:

... The Sprint is concluded with a Sprint Retrospective in which the Scrum Team inspects, and reflects upon, the complete, well, 'process'.

The event covers all aspects of the work, i.e. release suitability of the product, technology, social aspects, the Scrum process, development practices, collaboration, product quality, etc. The event is basically about establishing what went well, where there is room for improvement and what experiments might be usefully conducted in order to learn and build a better product ...

... The event serves for the Scrum Team to inspect the Sprint that is ending and establish the way of working for the next Sprint.

... The team uses the Sprint Retrospective to improve itself ... as part of continuous improvement, the Scrum Team agrees on preservations, adjustments, experiments and improvements for the next Sprint ...

A Sprint Retrospective never takes more than three hours.

*(Extracted from 2nd Edition of "Scrum: A Pocket Guide - A Smart Travel Companion"
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Once I've been asked "what's the point in using LEGO bricks during a Scrum Event, especially the Retrospective?"

The answer came out spontaneously, exactly the way people express their thoughts using the bricks: "They don't use the LEGO bricks: they are used by them!"

The puzzled face of the person told me I had to rephrase the concept: "I mean, it's such a powerful way to let an individual to express the deepest thought in the simplest way and it's almost unconscious!"

Trust me, you have to witness with your own eyes an activity facilitated through LSP either the professional or the Opensource Editions: words can't explain it!

Why do we need a Retrospective?

Before moving forward it's important to understand that the outcome of a Retrospective - like any other Scrum Event / Agile ceremony- is more valuable to the team as much as it's tangible, measurable, agreed and committable.

It is very important that the facilitator is focused on the ability of the Team of producing a real *kaizen* (tangible outcome of the continuous improvement process)

Once formalised as a Story or Issue, the *kaizen* HAS to be added - as one of the highest prioritized elements - in the Sprint Backlog (in Scrum, or in the To-Do-List for the next Iteration).

This is crucial to show the Team (and the Stakeholders) that the energy, effort and dedication put in the Retrospective has a real value, that will contribute to the Increment and the global Company Value.

Now, hands on!

Getting back to “Agile Retrospectives” - the a.m. book that initially inspired me - I successfully (my Teams validated it) applied some of its “recipes” and I became familiar with the following “5 phases schema”:

1. Set the stage
2. Gather Data
3. Generate Insight
4. Decide what to do
5. Close the retrospective (AKA “Wrap-up”)

The Retrospective facilitator can choose whatever LSP visual constructive language they prefer to engage all the Team (PO included!) in a hands-on mind-on activity.

Phase 1 is important to help the people to switch the focus from the inspection of WHAT they have done to HOW they did it, as individuals; it’s also crucial to set the mood the right disposition.

Phase 5 – that should never be caxed – is crucial to leave a positive memory of the importance of the outcome (the *kaizen*) and brings “good fuel” for the next iteration (the *Sprint*, in Scrum).

These two phases would not benefit from the use of LSP and, IMHO would prevent to separate the “playing and constructive” from the “focused and committed” perception.

On the contrary, **phases from 3 to 4** require an open, frank collaborative and productive communication and not everybody is naturally ready to be SO OPEN with the others, especially when the subject of the inspection are behaviours or even worse, emotions!

That’s when LSP® approach can provide great help.

Phase 2 (Gather Data) can also be performed using one of the commonly used techniques (like “Mad Sad Glad”, “Team radar” or the simplest “dot voting” on issues on sticky notes) but sometimes letting the people play (seriously!) with LEGO bricks will help the emergence process, especially in the first times.

After this “data gathering” activity, the Team choose 1 (one) element to focus on (e.g. “faulty Communication”); a second one can be used as a spare one, in case the process is so efficient that the time-boxed event allows another iteration. (Though in our experience it never happened).

Remember that the final goal of an Agile Retrospective should ALWAYS be a *kaizen* and RetroLSP is making no difference, if not reinforcing the principle even more.

Phase 3 and 4 benefit from the continuous flow typical of LSP, so are usually done seamlessly.

Important: If a pause is needed it is suggested to have it before or after these two phases.

RetroLSP Step by step process

1. Focus switch via “Build your tower” (Set the stage)
2. Gather data
3. Individual and group Building activity (Generate Insight)
4. Individual and group Building activity & Kaizen formalisation (Decide what to do)
5. Wrap up and celebration (Close the retrospective)

Gather the players in a room, possibly without external interference (sound, staring people, on-th-street windows) to create an “intimate” environment. (Open workshops or Education environments are acceptable exceptions to this highly performing suggested mode)

Provide a table every 6/8 people, with one chair each.

Scrum teams three and nine, excluding the Scrum master and the Product owner, unless they are also executing the work of the Sprint Backlog.

The empirical evidence suggests that the entire Scrum Team should take part to the Retrospective and the role of the facilitator is not rigidly assigned to the Scrum master, though this role is typically more skilled to do it.

RetroLSP should always be facilitated by a Certified RetroLSP Facilitator or Certified LSP Facilitator or by a properly trained facilitator, with preference for experienced Scrum masters/Agile coaches.

Step 1 – Set the stage

Once the players sit in silence the Facilitator briefly illustrates the rules of the games, being more detailed if it's the first time, but always being sure that every contributor is aware and focused.

The facilitator might use some music to create an appropriate sound atmosphere or to provide a time measurement reference (songs usually don't last over 3 minutes).

Step 2 – Warm up (moving away from the daily routine) *3-8 minutes*

The facilitator can choose any suitable technique aiming to allow the player to articulate what are their expectations from the retrospective they are about to perform.

Asking to anonymously write down the answer to a simple question on a sticky note is a good and easy method.

(e.g. In a word or two what do you expect from this Retro? – If you were a plant/animal now, what would you be? – Write down the first word you can think of when you think of yourself now ...)

Stick the answers aside the wall/board, making them visible but not in the spotlight.

Step 3 – Building the tower *Instructions + 2 minutes*

If not done before, the facilitator gives to each players identical sets of LEGO bricks, with variable number of pieces no less than 6 (six)

The players are asked to autonomously build their own metaphor of a tower, within a RIGID 2 minutes time box, starting ONLY after the GO!.

The facilitator may define a DoD (e.g. “a self standing assembly with a green element on top”) but should keep it the simplest as possible, because it’s just a warm-up.

Everyone has to build something (at least 2 pieces connected) and the outcome must be DoD compliant.

If everyone has finished earlier, the facilitator can move forward.

Step 4 – Explain the meaning of the tower **60 seconds each (6-8 minutes)**

Every player has 60 seconds sharp (or less) to explain the meaning of the tower; if they manage to be quicker the next one can start the explanation.

Everyone has to provide an explanation, even a super concise one.

Step 5 Gather Data 5 to 15 max

This activity can be made without using LSP, since its goal is to focus on one or two elements to tackle, inspect and produce a continuous improvement commitment actionable, also known as “the kaizen”.

It can also be performed using one of the commonly used techniques (like “Mad Sad Glad”, “Team radar” or the simplest “dot voting” on issues on sticky notes.

The result has to be 1 (one) element to focus on (e.g. “faulty Communication”); a second one can be used as a spare one, in case the process is so efficient that the time-boxed event allows another iteration. (unlikely to happen).

Step 6 Issue/Opportunity shaping (Generate Insight + Decide what to do)

Phase 1 Individual activity

The facilitator tells the players to design a metaphor representing the spotted issue/opportunity (5 minutes max) and enforces the rule that during individual activities no talking or chatting is allowed and can use some music to create a sound atmosphere.

Each player illustrates it to the other members of the team (2 minutes or less)

Option A – The “quick one” for low complexity challenges

Working individually, each player add/remove pieces to represent the result (possible solution/outcome) (3 minutes max)

Then each player illustrate it to the other members (2 minutes or less)

Each team member can ask 1 question (30 seconds) for each metaphor created, to gather more details and raising their understanding.

The answer must stay within 60 seconds.

The Team can:

A. vote the best approach (Hand raise) 30 sec

Every player tells WHY they voted for THAT solution/expected outcome 2 minutes

or

B. build collectively AS A TEAM a new metaphor that includes (physically) pieces of (or even the full metaphor) the existing metaphors. 10 minutes

A spokesperson will illustrate the solution/outcome to the facilitator, that can ask any question is aimed to enrich the explanation.

Option B – The “long one” for high complexity challenges

Working individually, each player removes ONE parts of the metaphor that represents the most significant part of the issue/opportunity (30 seconds)

Then each members of the team explains why that section had been chosen (2 minutes or less)

Each team member can ask 1 question (30 seconds) about each element chosen, to gather more details and raising their understanding.

The answer must stay within 60 seconds.

The Team builds collectively AS A TEAM a new metaphor that MUST include (physically) all the remaining elements.

During this group activity the Team is allowed to communicate, collaborate and exchange opinions or impressions.

The facilitator reinforces the rules of the time box (between 5 to 15 minutes max depending on the complexity of the task) and having fun while playing.

Once finished, the team is given 5 minutes to discuss a final statement, illustrated by one or more spokesperson, that will illustrate the solution/outcome.

Step 7 – The Kaizen

Regardless if Option A or B has been chosen, remember that RetroLSP aims principally to create a kaizen as outcome.

The facilitator makes sure that the team concludes the activity by defining a feasible Story/Task to be added to the very next Sprint Backlog (or Agile Iteration if Scrum is not in place).

The facilitator also reminds the Product Owner to write down ASAP both the Definition of Ready and the Definition of Done of the kaizen, to be proposed to the rest of the Team, Scrum master/Agile coach included, in time to be added to the next Iteration.

Step 8 – Wrap up + conclusion of the activity used to do the Warm up.

The facilitator thanks the players for having played fairly and for the all the fun and the produced value.

Remind the Team that they had started the Retrospective with a Warm-up and takes the appropriate time to close the activity. (the given e.g. were *In a word or two what do you expect from this Retro? – If you were a plant/animal now, what would you be? – Write down the first word you can think of when you think of yourself now ...*)

The facilitator takes the stickers with the answers and put them in the middle of wall/board.

Each team member is asked to comment about the text they wrote on the sticky note.

(eg. The expectation has been met, the feeling has changed, the word no longer represent the current status...)

Step 9 Celebration

The facilitator chooses the most appropriate way to celebrate the entire team, or even a member who has shown a particular positive & constructive attitude, being careful not praising always the same one(s) and trying to leave a good impression about the time INVESTED Together.

The Celebration phase - like the wrap up – should not, by any reason, be skipped or cancelled.

Variations to step 6

If a team is well trained (or just to enhance the experience), it's possible to:

- the player can cheerfully "challenge" a fellow member to guess the outcome
- the players can dissent with the player and explain their consideration altering the original metaphor or building a differ one (very engaging, but time consuming)
- More to come, based on future validations



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