Retrospective and Feelings Meetings in Agile Software Development

Procedure and Practitioners' Perspectives at Plain Vanilla

Ásrún Sigurjónsdóttir

Perla Þrastardóttir

May 2016

Research thesis of 12 ECTS credits submitted to the School of Computer Science at Reykjavik University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Science in **Computer Science**

Supervisor:
Dr. Marta Kristín Lárusdóttir
Reykjavik University, Iceland

Retrospective and Feelings Meetings in Agile Software Development Procedure and Practitioners' Perspective at Plain Vanilla

Ásrún Sigurjónsdóttir
Perla Þrastardóttir
Reykjavik University, School of Computer Science, Iceland

Table of Contents

Abstract

Agile software development is getting established in the Icelandic software industry and the number of companies using Agile processes in their work is increasing. One approach in Agile is the retrospective meetings, where the whole team attends and inspects how the iteration has been going and decide what can be done to improve their future processes.

Retrospectives have always been a part of Agile processes, but they have not been considered to be the most important part of the processes. Still there are indications that the meetings are highly important and even the reason for success in many projects. On retrospective meetings the team members emphasize on the process and discuss how the iteration went and what procedures can be improved, what should be eliminated and what should be kept.

Feelings meetings are not an established Agile method but are originated from parts of Agile that have evolved into feelings meetings at the company the research study took place, Plain Vanilla. The feelings meetings are short meetings where the teams meet to discuss how they have felt in the last iteration, and give the members the opportunity to express their feelings to their teammates and also get the chance to hear how their teammates are doing.

This paper presents results from a research study based on observations and 11 interviews, eight structured interviews, as well as three semi-structured interviews. The main focus of the study is to give an understanding on the procedure and the practitioners' perspectives of the retrospective meetings and the feelings meetings in the Agile working environment. The observation, and all but one interview, were conducted in cooperation with employees at Plain Vanilla. One independent software consultant, an expert in Agile processes, was also interviewed, to gain insights from an outsider.

The results show the importance of retrospective meetings and the huge effect they can have on teamwork and team productivity. They also show how the meetings seem to be an highly important part of the software development process as they result in better overview and improvement of processes.

The feelings meetings are not as established as the retrospective meetings and the outcomes from those meetings are not as decisive. But overall these meetings result in tighter teams and better understanding between teammates. The results also show how important the role of the Agile coach is and how they are often the driving force the teams need to have successful meetings.

Keywords: *Retrospectives, Retrospective Meetings, Feelings Meetings, Check-In, Agile Software Development, Agile Coach, Software Development, Project Management, Product Management, Computer Science.*

Introduction

The use of Agile in software development has been getting increasingly popular over the last few years both in Iceland and internationally. Since the Agile Manifesto was published in 2001, work processes of software companies have been constantly evolving, and more and more companies use the various Agile processes to improve workflow, effectiveness and team spirit.

The software industry is a very fast pace working environment and the use of retrospective meetings in software development is a part of the industry requirement for continuous improvement. The use of Agile software development processes has been increasing in the Icelandic software industry for the last decade, and has been growing more popular in the recent years.

One of the strongest component of Agile are retrospective meetings. Like Henrik Kniberg states in his book Scrum and XP from the trenches: "*This is your best chance to improve!… And that's why the retrospective is the number-one-most-important thing in Scrum, not the second most important!*" [1]

An Agile retrospective is a meeting that is held at regular intervals, either at the end of an iteration or for example with one or two weeks apart, if the team does not work in sprints. The meetings are held at the end of iteration to recap how the iteration went, what could have been improved and what was done right, and how it can be improved in the next iteration. „*What is the improvement in the process that they, as a team, can implement right away?*" [2]

The feelings meetings are a new and less known addition to Agile working environments. There has been little research on feelings meetings and they are not formally a part of the Agile software development processes but have been used in various forms for some time. The feelings meetings are meetings where teams meet and talk about their personal feelings for the past iteration.

This report describes a research study conducted at Plain Vanilla in the spring of 2016. The goal of the report is to give the reader an insight on how the retrospective meetings and feelings meetings are conducted and how the conduction relates to the theory. Additionally, the report gives insights into the team members experience of the meetings, along with the effect of them on their work, along with experts opinion on the meetings.

The main research questions posed in this research project are:

1. Are retrospective meetings an important factor in the working processes of a company?
2. How are retrospective meetings conducted?
3. What are the employees perspectives towards retrospective meetings?
4. What are the employees perspectives towards feelings meetings?

Theory and Background

In the last few decades, software development methodologies have evolved fast, following the rapid changes in technology.

In 1970 the first formal description of the Waterfall model was published in an article by Winston W. Royce, although he did not use the phrase Waterfall model. In the Waterfall model one phase has to be finished before the next begins, which can lead to issues being found late in the process. Among other methodologies are Incremental and Iterative development, where the developers get feedback and learn from earlier iteration. In Rapid Prototyping the goal is to make sure the delivered product meets the client needs. Spiral development combines Waterfall and Prototyping and has high emphasis on risk control [3].

The Scrum methodology was described in 1995 in a paper by Jeff Sutherland and Ken Schwaber [2]. In Scrum there are certain roles, ceremonies and artifacts and teams self-organize to determine the best way to deliver the highest priority features.

Agile software development is not a methodology in itself but rather an umbrella term that describes several Agile processes. Agile was originally introduced in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but the turning point came in 2001, when a group of seventeen experts met at a ski resort in Utah with the intention of finding a common ground and discuss the growing field of what used to be called lightweight methods. They decided to use the term Agile to describe this new breed of processes.

These seventeen people were the leaders of different approaches of improving software development techniques. They were the creators of Extreme Programming (XP), Scrum, Feature-Driven Development and other Agile techniques and they joined together by the need for an alternative to document driven, heavyweight software development processes [4]. What emerged from this meeting was the Manifesto for Agile Software Development where the main concepts are the following, as published by the authors on their website in 2001:

> *"We are uncovering better ways of developing software by doing it and helping others do it. Through this work we have come to value:*
>
> ***Individuals and interactions*** *over processes and tools*
> ***Working software*** *over comprehensive documentation*
> ***Customer collaboration*** *over contract negotiation*
> ***Responding to change*** *over following a plan*
>
> *That is, while there is value in the items on the right, we value the items on the left more."*

Signed: Kent Beck, Mike Beedle, Arie van Bennekum, Alistair Cockburn, Ward Cunningham, Martin Fowler, James Grenning, Jim Highsmith, Andrew Hunt, Ron Jeffries, Jon Kern, Brian Marick, Robert C. Martin, Steve Mellor, Ken Schwaber, Jeff Sutherland, Dave Thomas [5].

Agile development has its origin from various of practices and covers aspects like requirements, design, coding, testing, project management, quality, etc. Some noted Agile practices include; backlogs, continuous integration, pair programming, test-driven development (TDD) and Scrum events, such as sprint planning, daily scrum and sprint review as well as the topic of this study; retrospective meetings.

The meetings play important role in iterative and incremental development as during the retrospective the team reflects on how their work has been going at that interval or iteration and identifies actions for improvement. As described in the Agile principles: "At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly." [5]

In the book *Agile Retrospectives - Making good teams great* the authors talk about following specific structure when conducting the meetings. Those are the 5 phases of retrospectives meetings:

> **1. Set the stage** - establish goals for the meeting up front helps keep the team focused on providing the right kind of feedback later in the meeting.
> **2. Gather data** - discuss what went well since the last meeting and what needs to be improved. White board is often used to write down the input from meeting attendees.
> **3. Generate insights** - take the information that was gathered and come up with ideas about how to make improvements for the next sprint.
> **4. Decide what to do** - the team determines which topics to choose from the white board and work further on, and decides upon specific actions to take to refine those topics.
> **5. Close the retrospective** - the team reiterates the plan of action for the next sprint and everyone is thanked for contributing to the meeting [6].

In phase 2, when the data is gathered, each team member silently writes down, on a sticky note, what he or she thinks went well and what needs to be improved. The notes are usually categorized and the most common categories are "start doing, stop doing, continue doing". Other common categories are: "highlights, lowlights and no lights", as well as kudos, which is a platform to give compliments to colleagues [7]. The meetings are driven by the team and the team decides the format of the meetings. The length of the meetings varies and depends on the length of the iteration, complexity of the work the team has been doing, as well as how many members are in the team.

In the book it is mentioned that an hour long retrospective can be enough for a one-week iteration and a half day may be enough for thirty days worth of work. The authors also state that shortcutting time means cheating results. Release and end-of-project retrospectives should last longer, at least one day and up to four days in some cases [6].

Feelings meetings are based on various formats of retrospectives, but the difference is that in the feelings meetings the participants talk about how they have been feeling in the last iteration, both personally and work related. In Iceland, these meetings are most likely originated from a company called Kolibri, which is a leading software company in Agile software development in Iceland. While the retrospectives focus on the work, feelings meetings focus on the emotions of the employees. One example of formats used in the feelings meetings are, the check-in format, where participants tell how they feel about the meeting and how they feel regarding the given context.

Another example is the mad, sad, glad and afraid format where participants express using those feelings or a combination of them how they have been feeling during the iteration. The meetings should be short and focused.

A recent phenomenon in the industry is the Core protocols. It is a set of protocols and tools for creating high-performance teams that deliver on time and where parties involved make commitments like: "Engage when present, to know and disclose what I want, what I think, and what I feel and to always seek effective help". There are 12 commitments in total. The Protocols are 11 in total, and example of those are:

> "**Pass** - to decline to participate in something
> **Check-In** - used to begin meetings, it is required that physical
> presence always signifies participants engagement
> **Check-Out** - participants must Check-Out when they are
> aware that they cannot maintain the Core commitments
> **Ask for help** - allows participants to efficiently make use
> of the skills and knowledge of others." [8]

There hasn't been measured how many companies in Iceland use the feelings meetings, but in this research, both types of meetings are observed at one company, Plain Vanilla. The conclusions will give better understanding on how the meetings, both retrospectives and feelings are conducted at that company and how the perspectives of the employees and specialists are towards the meetings.

Methods

In this chapter the research methods and participants will be described. The study is a qualitative study where the main methods used were observations and interviews. The study was conducted in February and March 2016. The participants are employees at Plain Vanilla and one independent software consultant.

The company

The study was conducted at a medium sized software company located in Reykjavík Iceland, called Plain Vanilla. There were in total 73 employees working at the company at the time of the research. Most of them worked at the headquarters in Reykjavík, but Plain Vanilla has also recently opened an office in the US. The company was founded in late 2010 and has grown really fast since then, especially after the launch of the popular mobile trivia game QuizUp.

Observations

The observations took place at Plain Vanilla's headquarters in Reykjavík over a two weeks period. Data was gathered by observing retrospective and feelings meetings in two teams. Two meeting sessions were observed in each team, four sessions in total. In team A the first meeting was a feelings meeting with seven participants and an Agile coach and the second meeting was a retrospective meeting with six participants and an Agile coach.

In team B both sessions were a feelings and retrospective meeting combined in one session. The first session was with five participants and an Agile coach and the second session with six participants and an Agile coach. While conducting the observations the researchers were silent guests at the meetings observing everything that came up in the meetings without any interruption of the teams. The meetings lasted from 15 minutes, when the meetings were separate, to almost an hour when the meetings were combined.

Interviews

The primary data collection method was interviews conducted after the observations. The interviews were 11 in total, eight structured interviews with members of the teams from the observations, four from each team, as well as three semi-structured interviews with two Agile coaches working at Plain Vanilla and one independent software consultant.

All interviews were conducted by two researchers interviewing one participant, were one researcher performed the interview while the other took notes. The interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants and then transcribed verbatim. The length of each interview was between 15 – 40 minutes. The quotations in the results chapter are not always verbatim but are slightly rephrased to be more readable and representative.

The questions for each meeting, feelings and retrospective, were identical and the interviewees were asked about their experience, as well as advantages and disadvantages of each meeting among other questions regarding the meetings and participants background. All the interviews were in Icelandic. The questions asked in the structured interviews were 27 in total and can be found in Appendix A. Those questions were also used as an guidance in the semi-structured interviews but in those interviews the experts also got the chance to say everything that came to mind regarding the meetings, without being interrupted.

The Interviewees Background

For the structured interviews four members from each team were interviewed, eight in total. Four of the team members were programmers and the other four members had different roles in the teams, like working with data or had product development or research related jobs at the time of the study.

The interviewees from the teams at Plain Vanilla had different backgrounds and different education. Four of them had a B.Sc. degree in computer science or software engineering and one had a B.Sc. degree in Engineering. One team member has a PhD in Mathematics and one had a B.Sc. degree in Mathematics. One has finished matriculation exam. The work experience of our interviewees at Plain Vanilla varies from three months up to four years.

The interviewees for the semi structured interviews were three Agile specialists, two Agile coaches working for Plain Vanilla and one independent software consultant. The Agile coaches had a M.A. degree in Philosophy and B.Sc. degree in Business Administration. One had been working for two years at Plain Vanilla while the other one has almost seven years work experience, both from Plain Vanilla and former workplace. The independent software consultant had 10 years of experience with Agile processes and had a B.Sc. degree in Computer Science.

Data Gathering

The first step in data gathering was to prepare the questions for the interviews and make sure they would cover every aspect of the meetings. The questions for each type of meetings, feelings and retrospectives, are identical.

Data Analysis

When analyzing the interviews thematic analysis was used for each question. Thematic analysis is a form of analysis in qualitative research, and emphasizes on examining and recording patterns or themes within data [9]. The answers to each question were gathered in one document for each question, and researched individually and analyzed by searching for themes. All the themes were collected and examined by two researchers working together to ensure quality of the data. The themes give better insight into the research topic. Examples of themes are: format, timefactor, meetings surface problems, communication, work related topics, follow up, actionables, interval of meetings and length of meetings.

Results from the Observations

In this chapter the observations on meetings with team A and team B are described as well as how the meetings have been conducted at the company for the last two years.

Retrospective Meetings at Plain Vanilla

Plain Vanilla uses various aspects of Agile techniques in their work processes, such as planning meetings, daily standups, backlogs and retrospectives. The retrospective meetings have been conducted at Plain Vanilla since spring 2014, when they got an Swedish Agile coach to come to Iceland and lead the implementation of the retrospective meetings at the company. He facilitated the meetings in the beginning and taught them different formats of the meetings. He also taught few employees at Plain Vanilla how to facilitate the meetings.

At first only few teams were using retrospectives, but soon the meetings started to spread into different divisions of the company. In the beginning they had quite a few but large meetings for large projects that the company had been working on but with time the meetings have evolved from being held with quite large groups of people to being held in smaller groups.
Today each team does retrospectives at regular intervals or even at irregular intervals, depending on what suits each team. They also use retrospectives when difficult issues arise or somethings goes wrong in their work process in order to learn from mistakes or to be better prepared next time challenging issues arise.

Feelings Meetings at Plain Vanilla

Approximately 18 months ago Plain Vanilla started improvising with the check-in format of retrospective meetings and started conducting so called feelings meetings to focus exclusively on how their employees generally feel. They had also been using the mad, sad, glad and afraid format where team members were encouraged to think and talk about their emotions, given those four emotions as a starting point. Some of them felt like those four emotions weren't enough to express how they really feel because human beings have more than four feelings. What if they felt worried for example, where would they locate that feeling?

One of the company's employee had been working at another company in software development and he introduced the feelings meetings to his team. The team really liked those meetings and in the following months more teams started scheduling feelings meetings.

These meetings usually take from 10 to 20 minutes. Each team member gets a chance to tell how his or hers week has been, uninterrupted. The topics people talk about vary from health issues, their children and communication with family members just to name few. Work related topics do also come up at these meetings. With time trust between team members did build up as they learned more about each other as our interviewees described in the interviews.

Procedure of the Meetings

Team A has separate feelings meetings and retrospective meetings. Feelings meetings are held every other week and retrospective every other week. Team B has both a feelings- and retrospective meeting in one session.

The meetings were held in one of the company's meeting rooms. Six to eight people were present at each meeting including the Agile coaches. The team members were sitting around a table at all of the meetings and the Agile coaches were standing. In team B one of the team members was connected to the meeting through Skype since he lives abroad. Team A had their meetings in Icelandic and team B had their meetings in English.

Team A: First Meeting - Feelings

At this first meeting eight people were present including the Agile coach. The meeting was in Icelandic and the coach started the meeting by sharing his feelings and then participants shared their feelings clockwise from him. Everyone shared a few words on how their week had been.

There was no structure on how people presented their part in the meeting and the topics were both personal and work related. Most of the team members began by talking about personal things but they all also talked about work related topics. The personal topics varied, like how their health or their children's health had been that week and some mentioned being tired. One example of personal topic is that one of the member spouse had birthday that day so he described his search for a birthday gift.

Few talked almost entirely about work related topics but those topics have in common that they were all quite positive. Among the topics they talked about were how happy they are being members of this team or how they figured something out this week that has been making things hard for them lately. It only occurred once that someone interrupted another person speaking.

In the end couple of the subjects that came up were discussed further. Few of those subjects were work related but at the end they talked for a while about their plans for the weekend, since the meeting was held on a Friday. The division of time between personal topics and work related topics was almost equal at this meeting, meaning work related topics do come up a lot on feelings meetings. But as mentioned before - those topics usually regard how the members feel at work or how things have been going for them at work. The meeting was in total just under 20 minutes even though the slot in the schedule for it was 45 minutes.

Team A: Second Meeting - Retrospective

At the retrospective meeting seven people were present including the Agile coach. The coach started the meeting by telling the team that they have four minutes to write topics on sticky notes. While they wrote the notes he drew columns on the board for highlights, lowlights, no lights and kudos. When the time was up the coach asked who would like to start placing notes. At this meeting it was the person sitting next to him clockwise who started.

Each team member placed the notes and explained really shortly what the note was about when categorizing it. An example of lowlights was communication issues, an example of highlights were

how positive the team members are, and an example of No lights were also communication related topics. All members gave kudos to someone that had been doing great work this week.

When everyone had finished placing their notes the Agile coach clustered together similar notes and suggested actionables based on them, after discussing each topic with team members. Actionables are specific items for the team to work on and improve, or even things the team will start doing. A single team member is responsible for each actionable. If someone came up with a topic that needed an actionable, either the one who brought up the topic, or another one who volunteered to take care of it, got his or her name on it so it was now their responsibility to finish it.

An example of an actionable from this meeting was to improve the communication within the team, assigned to all team members. Another actionable was to start the next meeting by meditating and one team member assigned to himself to go earlier to bed at night.

The Agile coach made sure that the person who got kudos received them. Team members could give kudos to someone that is not present at the meeting or from other teams within the company and they were available for everyone to see. The meeting lasted in total 28 minutes.

Team B: Feelings- and Retrospective Meetings

With team B, two sessions with one week apart were observed. Team B always starts with a short feelings meeting followed by a retrospective meeting. The feelings part took less than ten minutes. Team members started by writing on sticky notes the score they gave this week and then placed the note on their forehead to reveal. The one with the highest score started with his/hers feelings of the week and then clockwise from that person.

The Agile coach did not participate in the feelings part in this meeting since he was there as an Agile coach not as a team member. The things shared at this meetings were mainly work related but some team members shared something from their personal life.

In the first meeting all team members mentioned certain issue they all had been working on, and how that part had been going for them. Some also mentioned personal topics like housing purchase and surprise dates with spouses. Few members only talked about work related topics while others talked both about personal and work related topics.

In the second meeting work related topics dominated the meeting. One team member gave the week the score 10, because everything had been going great for him at work that week, and other team members mention that this is the first time they saw a 10 at a feelings meeting. Although this was a feelings meeting and he gave the week the score 10, he only talked about work related topics. Few personal topics came up, mainly health issues since few of them had been coping with cold or fighting the flu. Team members did not interrupt the person speaking, other than cheering and laughing when fun topics came up. Each team member spoke from one minute up to about three minutes.

When the feelings part was over team members started right away writing topics on sticky notes, while the coach drew a grid on the board with columns. The columns were named start, stop, continue, kudos and no lights. They had four or five minutes to write the notes and then a team

member volunteered to start placing the notes they had written and then categorized, up on the board. They did not discuss the topics while the person was placing them on the board, but sometimes the person explained the notes for the others so they would know what exactly he or she meant by that note.

Examples of things the team wanted to start doing were: making more efficient planning and start talking english all the time, since two team members do not speak Icelandic. In the stop column were only few notes and one example was to stop doing too many things at once. The Continue column contained notes on continue to work well together and continue improving certain things for example. In the No lights column there were a few topics the team members saw no point in doing and one example of a topic is that they ask themselves if certain service needs a database. Many people from the team and outside of the team got kudos for job well done.

When everyone, one at a time, had placed their notes, the Agile coach clustered together similar notes and then from that clusters and by discussing the topics on the board with team members, suggested actionables from those notes. One of the actionables from one of the meetings was to use the collaboration tool Trello more to help the team organize their work. The meetings lasted nearly an hour each as scheduled.

In Summary

To summarize, the feelings meetings in both teams have quite loose format and are effortless meetings where the team members do not have to prepare for the meetings in any way. They get the chance to talk about things they would perhaps not get the chance to talk about otherwise. Everyone listens while one team member speaks and the meetings build up trust between team members.

At retrospective meetings, team members get the chance to talk about things they find to be lacking in the team's work processes and to tell what they find great and should be continued. The meetings give a platform to look back and see how things have been going and give the team members chance to improve their work and learn from mistakes. They also give team members the opportunity to compliment their colleagues by giving them kudos. The result of the retrospective meetings are actionables for things the team will work on to improve their work processes.

Results from Interviews

In this chapter the results from both team A and team B have been analysed for each type of meeting. Thematic analysis was used for each question.

Feelings Meetings - Both Teams

None of the participants had any experience in taking part in feelings meeting concept prior to their work at Plain Vanilla. Feelings meetings have been conducted for approximately 18 months, beginning when an employee who had worked at another software company introduced the check-in format to the teams, which evolved with time to being the feelings meetings. The team members were not taught to participate in the meetings, it was more like "learn by watching". Some team members said they got a short introduction at their first meeting from the Agile coach. Those team members which have worked for more than 18 months at the company said they previously had been using the check-in format as well as the mad, sad, glad and afraid format, and one of them mentioned that having structured format of that kind, where you categorize what you're about to say, is perhaps easier to learn for new employees.

When asked what they think of the meetings, all of them were quite positive. They think the meetings have evolved to be very important, impressive and valuable meetings. At first, some of them thought the meetings were a bit odd but they have learned over time to really like those meetings. The meetings have gotten more efficient as people adapt and the meetings have increased understanding between team members as well as understanding in where people come from. They get to know each other better on a personal level and they think it is positive to have the chance to talk about how they feel.

Few said that they often get the missing puzzle on what has been bothering certain team members at those meetings, like one said: "It is so valuable to know how everyone is doing". Some mentioned that some people are more open than others, share everything while other hold it back. One mentioned that when new teams are formed it takes time to make feelings meetings work properly.

The main advantages of the meetings, according to our participants, are that the meetings build up trust between colleagues and team members get to know each other on a personal level. If something is bothering someone in the team, these meetings are a platform to talk about those issues. They also said that at these meetings, they get the chance to listen to each other and get the feeling of how people are feeling. The meetings are also a platform to communicate not only through the computers while working. Understanding between team members is better as well as this is a chance to realize how the mood within the team is. Like one said: "...They often surface up some underlying problems", although those problems should rather be talked about at retrospective meetings if these are work related problems.

When asked about the disadvantages of the meetings the main topic that came up was that these meetings are supposed to be on personal level, not work related, but sometimes people tend to start discussing work related issues too much, when the retrospective meetings are supposed to be the platform for that kind of discussion. In those cases feelings meetings become to much of a retrospective meeting and the personal factor gets lost. They also mentioned that it is important that the meetings are concise and people get the chance to say what they need to say

uninterrupted. Monologues from team members should be avoided and if the meetings gets too long, that is a strong sign that the number of participants is to high.

They also indicated that a possible disadvantage could be if some team members are shy and find it difficult to talk about their feelings and don't share with team members how they are feeling, or if a team member really has not much to say, it can be uncomfortable for that person. If this happens that could also be an indication that the meeting has too many participants as one mentioned. Few mentioned though that feelings meetings don't really have disadvantages and that they highly recommend feelings meetings for all kinds of teams in all kinds of companies, not only software companies.

When asked if it is ever tempting to skip the feelings meetings, three members said absolutely not, while the others said that it has occurred to them to skip the meetings. Usually that temptation has to do with tight schedules, perhaps deadline later that same day or reasons like that, and those who said it is tempting have in some way more responsibilities than the others who said it never occurred to them. But although some of our participants think about skipping those meetings they usually don't and when the meeting is over, they are happy that they went to the meeting. There also seems to be more temptation to skip the meetings when the team has separate feelings and retrospective meetings. Since the feelings meetings are perhaps looked at as not as necessary as the retrospective meetings, it can be tempting to skip the meetings, especially when the team is working under intense time pressure.

When asked if there is something unnecessary or superfluous about those meetings, the same topics came up as in the previous questions. The meetings should not take too much time, should not be too crowded and should be about feelings or personal topics and not work related topics. On the contrary they all think that those meetings are important for the teams.

Regarding if there is any need to improve the arrangement of the meetings one participant said that it would be good to explain both the purpose of the meetings as well as the format of the meetings to new team members. Few said it would be nice to switch between formats regularly - sometimes use the mad, sad, glad and afraid format and sometimes some other format. One of our interviewees had tried meditation before feelings meeting and missed that part, said it is a good way to start the meeting and to focus on being present at the meeting, not still thinking about what you were doing right before the meeting. Otherwise they liked that those meetings are quite loose and and do not require any preparation.

The participants were also asked if they think the feelings meetings improve productivity, enhance job satisfaction or improve their work in some way. They all agreed on that the meetings improve communication and build up trust in teams and therefore they feel better at work, like one said: "I think they enhance job satisfaction, if they directly improve productivity I am not sure, that is maybe not the goal of these meetings". All team members are "on the same page" and therefore the meetings enhance job satisfaction. One participant said the meetings are good way for people to figure out if anyone in the team needs help in some areas or if a team member is not happy in his role and perhaps needs a chance. One described the meetings as "social lubricant" - meaning the meetings help people feel more comfortable among their colleagues, and that same team member also described the meetings as an working hours alternative to going out for a drink.

Our interviewees were also asked if they consider these meetings as confidential meetings and none of them agreed to the meetings being avowed confidential meetings. They said that if someone shares something at the meeting he or she doesn't want people outside the team to know, that person usually asks the team not to talk about it to others. Some said they just assumed that the meetings are confidential and said that perhaps the rules should be clearer. One said that usually team members do not share things they think would be uncomfortable to be brought up in the cafeteria later in the day.

Regarding this topic, the company has it's own platform for employees called "What's not being talked about" where the staff can write anonymous questions on a whiteboard located in the cafeteria. Once a month the operations Manager answers these questions in an email sent to everyone in the company.

In summary

To summarize what the team members think of the feelings meetings, all team members were quite positive about the meetings and think that they are important. Most of them learned how the meetings are conducted just by attending them and they usually just need one or two meetings to be confident and participate fully in them. Team members think it is best to change the format of the meetings at regular intervals. They all agreed that the meetings should not take too much time and should not be too crowded. They also talked about how the meetings enhance job satisfaction and build up trust between team members.

Retrospective Meetings - Both Teams

The participants in the study, members of both teams and the Agile coaches, had experience with retrospective meetings from 3 months up to almost two years. The company started conducting retrospective meetings in some teams early 2014 and on a regular basis few months later.

Three participants mentioned having experience with retrospective meetings before they started at Plain Vanilla. Three participants mentioned learning about retrospective meetings in Scrum and Agile during their studies. The participants not working at Plain Vanilla when the company started introducing retrospective meetings did not get formal training or introduction to the meetings, but the process was either explained during their first meeting or the participants just "learned by watching" at the first meeting. The participants that were a part of the induction of retrospective meetings at Plain Vanilla mention it being done with a strict format in the beginning.

There was an external Agile coach who came and taught them and trained some employees to facilitate retrospective meetings. He facilitated the first meetings and since then they have been experimenting with the format. Couple of participants mention that maybe it is not necessary to get any formal introduction to the meetings as they are pretty self-explanatory.

All participants have positive experience with the retrospective meetings and every one of them talked about how important they are. As one team member described it: "I would say that these are the best meetings in the company". Another one describes the meetings as an "important tool to improve procedures and communication".

When asked about what affects the experience of the meetings, many responded that the interval of the meetings is important, the meetings can both be held too often or too seldom and it is important to find the correct interval for the team. The Agile coach plays a big role in keeping the meetings focused and half of the participants mention the actionables the team gets out of the meetings. As said before, the actionables are items that are drawn from the topics that come up at the meetings, and are assigned to a team member to solve or work on. The actionables show visible results from the meetings. Like one participant describes: "The main benefit is that you are constantly looking back and discussing things that can be improved, those things are then converted into actionables which are something you can actually work on".

In those meetings they also get an overview of what has been going well and what not been going so well. Some mention how they experience the retrospective meetings to be a platform where they can surface problems that would otherwise not be talked about. Most of the participants agreed on that the main advantages of the retrospective meetings was to get the overview and the platform they provide to discuss both the good and the bad things that have been going on at work. The meetings therefore give the team opportunity to understand and be reminded about the good things and to make necessary changes and improvements for the bad things.

The participants mentioned how important it is to remember the things that have been going well and how motivating it is to remember the good things. One participant did also mention that the meeting in general motivates him to work harder so he will be able to bring some topics he has been working on, to the meeting. Some of the team members also mentioned the benefit of knowing what the other members of the team have been working on and how they are doing. Two

participants mention that the retrospective meetings give the benefits of iterating protocols and continuous improvement.

When mentioning the disadvantages of the meetings, six participants talked about how the length of the meetings and interval between meetings play a big role along with number of participants in the meetings. If the number of participants in the meetings is to high they tend to get too long and they feel like they don't get as much out of the meetings as with fewer participants. And if the timeslot between meetings is too long there are some topics that might have been forgotten and if the meetings are held too frequently there might be less things to discuss and it might turn into micromanagement. They emphasize finding the balance for frequency of meetings for each team. As mentioned before, team A had weekly meetings and team B every second week.

When asked if it is ever tempting to skip the retrospective meetings three of the participants answer clearly "No" while three of them answer "Yes". Three of them mention the time factor, if the meetings tend to get too long it is tempting to skip them, also if there are too many people present. One mentions when the team for example has a project to ship or something urgent to finish "...there are more important things to do than talk about your feelings or hold a retrospective meeting." But over time the teams have learned that the retrospectives have become non negotiable meetings, since the meetings have proven their value within the teams. They have also learned that it matters at which time of the day the meeting is held as the results of the meetings are actionables, and if they are held too late in the day people might not have enough time to solve necessary things before they go home.

One participant mentioned that it matters on what day of the week the meetings are held and that they find it best to have the meetings on Fridays around noon. If they are for example held on a Thursday, the issues that might come up on a Friday might be forgotten at the next meeting. This applies to weekly retrospectives. He also mentioned that it is preferable to hold the meetings around noon as they can get heavy and difficult so it is good to give the participants in the meeting lunch break after the meeting or at least enough time to finish some tasks before they go home.

One participant mentions how important the role the Agile coach plays is in conducting the meeting, and how good it is when you find it tempting to skip the meeting to have someone to say to you: "Yes, we are doing this today". One of them adds: "...but always when you go to the meeting, you get so much out of it". All participants agreed that there is no unnecessary component of the meetings. But half of them mention how important it is to vary the format and how the Agile coach plays an important role keeping the format and preventing the meeting from going into discussions about things that do not matter.

When asked if there is anything that needs to be improved regarding the meetings, two participants mention adding meditation to the meetings again. The team once started the meetings by meditating, but they hadn't been doing that for a while and they missed it. Other things mentioned are that sometimes the meetings come to an end before enough discussion has taken place about how the processes can be improved. One team member also mentioned that issues that came up on the meetings sometimes do not get followed up on, but he adds: "...but I think it doesn't happen a lot nowadays, because we have become very aware that this was sometimes happening". Also one participants says that this question might have gotten a different answer a year ago, as they have been doing retrospectives on their retrospectives.

All of the participants agree that the results of the meetings are taken good care of, one of them though mentions that it can happen that the results are not being worked on enough, and then the purpose for the meeting is kind of gone.

Participants mentioned it can be hard to follow up on things that have to be solved outside the team. And many of them mention how the tool Asana is used to list the actionables and assign them to the ones responsible. They also mentioned that if the problems are too big to be solved between two meetings or if the problems are not defined properly in an actionable, they tend to come up again in the next meeting.

The participants agree on that the meeting results in something positive. Five of them mention how the meetings are a platform to discuss what is not going so well regarding teamwork, products and processes. They mention that on these meetings the problems that come up, would not come up on other meetings, and how they are good for clearing the air and discussing topics that else are not easily addressed.

The meetings result in a better whole for the team as well as improved processes. The team members all agree that the meetings result in higher throughput for the team and in that matter the actionables play a big role. Most agree that the actionables are also important for getting feedback, both good and bad feedback. And some mention especially how important it is not to forget the good things, and the kudos category they usually include in the meetings. It is both important and fun to hear that you are doing a good job.

In summary

To summarize the results on the retrospective meetings everyone of our interviewees thinks that the meetings are an extremely important part of their work process and think the meetings are indispensable. It is nevertheless important to find the correct interval for each team as the meetings serve the team. They also agreed on how big role the Agile coach plays in keeping the meetings focused. They talk about the main advantages of the retrospective meetings being the overview and the platform they give to discuss both the good and the bad things that have been going on at work.

The length of the meetings and number of participants in the meetings are also very important factors. The meetings should not be too crowded because then they can get too long and therefore not efficient enough. Our interviewees also said that the meetings should be held at the end of the week.

Separate vs. Combined Retrospectives and Feelings

The interviewees did not agree on which setting was better, having the meetings completely separate or having them combined but mentioned pros and cons of both methods.

The pros mentioned relating separate feelings and retrospective meetings where that the meetings were shorter and the topics from the feelings meetings are not included in the retrospective. Also you do not have to switch context in the middle of the session if they are separate as it is different to talk about your feelings than practical things. Some mentioned you can have longer and deeper discussions about the topics on separate meetings. They also mentioned that when the meetings are held in one session, the feelings meetings will be unavoidable for people to participate in.

Regarding cons of having the meetings separate, one mentions it might be good to have a short feelings session in the beginning of the retrospective meetings to help the participants being present and more open for the retrospective. When having the meetings in one session participants may focus less on the feelings part and want to get it over with to be able to start the retrospective.

The results are that one form is not necessarily better than the other and it depends on the team what form suits better but like one participant mentioned: "It is necessary to separate the feelings and retrospective meetings, but not necessarily by having them at different time slots, but just have some boundaries between the meetings so what was discussed on the feelings meetings does not get included in the retrospective and vice versa."

Expert Perspectives

In this chapter results from interviews with three experts in this field will be described, two Agile coaches and one independent software consultant.

Two Agile Coaches

The two Agile coaches both work for Plain Vanilla. One has experience in the Agile development field solely from his work at Plain Vanilla, while the other has several years of experience in the field, both from his work at Plain Vanilla and his previous workplace. One of the coaches is certified Scrum Product Owner and they both are certified Scrum Masters. They have different education and background but are both enthusiastic about Agile development. Outside of work they read books and articles about Agile so their ideas on how to conduct the meetings are constantly evolving. One describes it as through the years, he got the experience to judge if something is a good idea or not, by reading about and trying different formats of retrospectives.

When it comes to teaching new team members how the meetings should be conducted, one talks about that each new team member gets a "buddy", a fellow employee who helps them learn how things work at the company. New members usually get very short introduction on how the meetings are conducted and then they just learn by participating. It usually takes a new team member two to three meetings to be confident and fully participate in the meetings.

When asked about confidentiality on the feelings meetings they both mention that there are no specific rules regarding that, but both of them talk about that there is an unwritten rule, so to speak, that people don't talk about something they heard at a feelings meeting outside of the meeting - and by that show their team members respect.

The format of the feelings meetings is more casual. Both coaches talk about the mad, sad, glad and afraid format they have used and sometimes still use. One especially mentions how the feelings mad, sad, glad and afraid do not cover all the feelings the participants might have, so the format sometimes got distracted by the participants not knowing if they could describe feelings that did not exactly fit these categories.

The feelings meetings result in better understanding of the mood and feelings of other team members. It results in the team members trusting each other and being more understanding. There is no scheduled follow up on the feelings meetings, but both coaches talk about that if they find something on the meetings that is necessary to follow up on they do, and one says that he follows up on the case or gets someone relevant to take care of it.

When it comes to retrospectives, trust between team members is very important. In fact, they have a saying at Plain Vanilla; "What happens at retro, stays at retro". It is also important that team members can say what is on their mind, because the meetings are a platform to talk about things that need improvement. It is best if it's possible to solve things at the meeting or at least bring matters in the right direction making an actionable to work on.

The format of the retrospective meetings varies, and they have no protocol on how they should be conducted. The Agile coaches are the ones controlling the meetings. They set the time frame

for the team to write the notes and decide which categories are used to categorize the notes. They generally use the common categories; start, stop, continue or highlights, lowlights, no lights, and usually include the kudos category which is less known. It is fun to give someone kudos and one mentions that when it is hard to get people to write something down, it is often easier to get them started by writing kudos, and when they have started writing the notes there are usually some more topics that come to mind.

Sometimes the coach sets the stage for the meeting, like if they are addressing a certain topic or to get the participants in the right mood. They have both used meditation in the beginning of the meetings, and find it helpful to get people to be more present.
Retrospective meetings result in better processes and are a platform for the teams "to address the pink elephant in the room". It results in actionables that are then worked on or followed up on by someone from the team. It results in both problems being addressed and therefore worked on and solved and in kudos for the team, team members and other employees.

The coaches do not follow up on the actionables being addressed by the one they were assigned to. What might be called the follow up by the coach is taking down meeting notes and assigning the actionables to team members.

They agree on that is it necessary to vary the format on both retrospective and feelings meetings. The time of the meetings is not fixed, it just takes as long as necessary and if it happens for the meeting to be really short it is not stretched to reach a certain time limit. But they make sure the meetings are not too long either. It depends on the team and the size of the project how long the meetings should take, but with the teams at Plain Vanilla retrospective meetings should not take more time than an hour, and half an hour is usually enough for the feelings meetings.

The role of the Agile coach is to control the meetings, guide the discussion and make sure the results from the meetings will be worked on, by assigning actionables to team members, make tasks in Asana and make sure the kudos get forwarded. The coaches sometimes set the stage for the meetings, and use their knowledge to try to get the best out of every participant at the meeting. They use for example techniques to encourage people to speak during the meeting and keep people from zoning out. As an example, one coach mentioned that if a participant speaks in the first few minutes of a meeting, that same person is likely to speak again. That is why he always starts the meetings by having everyone say something, like how their week has been.

One coach talks about how it is sometimes easier to see upcoming problems when you are a part of a team. When you just meet the team to coach it through a retrospective meeting you are not able to be as involved as when you know the team. On the other hand one mentions boundaries, it can be difficult when you are a coach and a team member, as you might want to add something to the meeting as a team member but you cannot because you are coaching the meeting.

When it comes to organizing the meetings it is usually up to the team to decide what meetings they want to have. The meetings are to serve the team. They talk about the meetings as a tool that the employees can use to improve processes and make things easier. The meetings are constantly evolving and that applies to the format of the meetings and timing. The teams, in cooperation with the Agile coach, sometimes change the format of the meetings and the Agile coaches sometimes introduce new methods or ideas to the teams that they try out and see if fit the team.

The retrospective meetings are being used in all divisions of the company, for teams, certain projects, disciplines and even for retrospective meetings. The meetings are held at an interval decided by the team, by how frequently the meetings best serve the team as the preferred interval can vary between teams.

Both coaches talk about how flexible Plain Vanilla is towards how the teams want to conduct the meetings and it is up to them and the team to find the interval and format that serves each team best. Like one of them says: "We do experiments and we are trusted to be professional enough to say: "We are going to try this" there is constant evolution, else the company dies, that's just how it is in this industry".

Independent Software Consultant

The independent software consultant has been working in the software industry for 16 years, thereof 10 years using Agile processes, but had heard of Agile couple of years before he started using Agile in his work. He has been a part of "Agile Hópurinn" (the first Icelandic Agile user group which is an alliance of Lean and Agile focused companies), for 10 years and has held several events on Agile processes. He started teaching Agile processes nine years ago. His retrospective meetings experience spans 10 years, and for the last three to four years he has been using retrospectives on a regular basis.

In his work he has not used feelings meetings, he knows of companies using those meetings and has once participated in a check in meeting, as an consultant for a team but not as a team member. Since his knowledge of the feelings meetings almost solely comes from reading articles and other people's experience, his input on the meetings is based on that.

When discussing the feelings meetings he thinks they are originated from The Core Protocols, an open source and versioned protocol for individuals and companies to use to improve work processes [8]. In his opinion the companies using feelings meetings are „an example but not an cross section". He first heard of The Core Protocols six or seven years ago. He mentioned that the feelings meetings are not necessarily a part of Agile but possibly implemented as good practices.

When he first heard about feelings meetings, he doubted the meetings, mainly because he thought they were on a grey area, in the sense that companies cannot expect their employees to share feelings and things from their personal life with coworkers. He found it even a funny idea to let technical staff meet to talk about their feelings. It might not suit everyone and not function everywhere, but for companies that have success in introducing feelings meetings manage to create a tight unit, which can be good. He mentioned how that can have downsides too, as it can be harder for people to leave after getting that intimate with their colleagues and committing themselves to the company. On the other hand he mentions how it is good to work with people that knows you well and how you feel, he knows people that questioned the meetings in the beginning but were convinced after trying it.

The format of the feelings meetings varies and there are no rules when it comes to the format. The meetings result in a good atmosphere and he mentions that maybe the meetings should be

at the beginning of the week to set the stage for what is coming. When he tried one form of a feelings meeting he was a consultant for the team inducting the meeting and found it special to be in that role sharing personal things with the team. He thinks that with tight teams under a lot of stress this can work well. Feelings meetings are evolving and we do not yet have any protocol or much experience with them.

The interviewee has more experience with retrospective meetings and has been using them for a while and mentions the book Scrum and XP from the trenches by Henrik Kniberg where the author states that retrospective meetings are the most important meeting of them all [1].

There is no rule on how to conduct a retrospective meeting and most practises reference Knibergs book. Most practitioners agree that you should use the format that suits you and the interviewee thinks it is important to vary the format to refresh the meetings. The ideal format depends on each team, and the length also. It is more effective to use a board with notes rather than informal meetings and it is important for everyone present to participate in the meeting. He finds it most successful to hold the meetings frequently, as important topics come up between meetings if they are still a problem.

Where he worked before they varied the format and sometimes who controlled the meeting. They did not have an Agile Coach but he sees how it can be useful as not everyone can conduct a meeting and it can be hard for supervisors to conduct meetings as they can have dominating opinions. The results of the meetings is to improve processes and retrospectives and are in his opinion the main unit of all processes, like he says: "It is the motor for all improvement for a company".

For the retrospectives to be effective there has to be someone who makes sure the things that come up on a meeting are taken care of. He prefers only taking one or two items out of each meeting to work on and finds every item exceeding that number to be too many. Also, often it is enough for a topic to be discussed at the meeting to be improved. He never saw the positive topics selected to work on, as they were already in good process.

Retrospective meetings can be really effective and be the drive for all changes in his opinion. He says that it is possible to introduce any framework into software development at companies, but you should start the retrospective meetings right away. Retrospective meetings are a tool to improve processes and effectiveness.

Where he worked they used kudos and even had a software to manage them, but he wonders if everyone is getting kudos, or if it is always the same people.

In summary

To summarize the opinion of the experts who have experience in feelings meetings, they have positive experience from the meetings and the consultant has heard positive things about them. It is necessary for those meetings to be adjusted well to each team and be open to it maybe not working everywhere. The feelings meetings are a new addition to the Agile working environment and even though working really well for one company it has to be taking into account that it is not a cross section for all companies and the moral part of employees sharing their personal life at work is still a question.

All of the experts agree on the retrospective meetings to be a really important part of software development. They are the key to improve processes and give people a platform to discuss what needs to be improved. It is important to find the interval and format that serves each team and allow the meeting format to evolve with each team.

The Agile coach plays an important role in conducting the meetings and can result in more effective meetings where all team members regardless of position within a team can fully participate in the meetings. They provide the company with important development tools and are a source and inspiration for Agile working habits.

Discussions

In this chapter the results from the meetings and the interviews will be discussed. The results will be interpreted and looked further into.

Retrospective Meetings

The results from all interviews show how important the team members think the retrospective meetings are, both the results from Plain Vanilla and the results from the experts interviews. They all agreed on how indispensable the meetings are and some of them said those meetings are the most important meetings in the company.

This is consistent with the theory. In Henrik Knibergs book, Scrum and XP from the trenches, the author wonders if the sprint planning meetings are the most important meetings in a company [1]. In the second version of the book published in 2015 - which is an annotated version he calls director's cut, he has actually decided on what the answer is to that question:

> *"[Sprint planning meetings] Important? Yes. Most important event in Scrum? No! Retrospectives are waaay more important! Because well-functioning retrospectives will help fix other things that are broken." [1]*

He also states that "*The most important thing about retrospectives is to make sure they happen.*" [1] This fits with the results, team members think although how tempting it is to skip the meetings, because of the tight schedule, they always feel like this was a necessary meeting afterwards.

According to the interviewees one crucial thing regarding the importance of a retrospective meeting is that the meeting is supposed to serve the team first and foremost. If not the purpose is lost.

It is important that the results of the retrospective meetings are taken good care of, like one participant said: "because if the results are not being worked on, the purpose of the meeting is lost". So you might read from that answer that working well with the actionables or the results of the meeting is crucial for it to be effective. This relates to the independent software consultant opinion, he thinks that the actionables taken out of each meetings should only be one or two. He said that often it is enough to discuss a topic at the meeting for it to be improved, but bigger topics need to be fewer to result in improvement.

One of the interviewees thinks that retrospective meetings are very important and does not understand why these meetings are not used in all kinds of companies, like law firms for example, just to look back at period of time or a case, and look into how they could improve their work processes. Other interviewees mentioned how they have been using retrospectives in all kind of situations in their personal lives, even in their relationships and with their families. One participant was for example working on a art project outside of work, and decided to have an retrospective meeting afterwards to sum up how the project had been going, because the meetings deliver so much.

Those team members who had experience in working in non-Agile workplace said work processes often suffer from less follow-up on things when not using Agile. They also mentioned that in non-

Agile environment, employees often have less overview of what has been done and how it has been going. One participant talks about how well it suits him to have these meetings. This shows how important employees think it is to know what is going on and to have the overview. The retrospective meetings are, according to what all of our participants, very good way to fulfill those conditions.

The retrospective meetings seem to be getting more established and more and more companies are using them as a way to improve. The positive results from this research seem to prove what specialists think of the retrospective meetings, and how important retrospectives are in improving processes.

Feelings Meetings

It is interesting that the topics that come up at the feelings meetings are both personal and work related, while they talked about in the interviews that the meetings are a platform to talk about personal topics. This shows how much work progress affects the personal side of the employees.

When discussing the disadvantages of the feelings meetings no one mentions it to be uncomfortable to discuss personal matters at work. Some mention it felt strange in the beginning to open up to the team but got used to it. This is similar to what the software consultant had heard from people using feelings meetings, and what is interesting is that no one addressed the part of bringing personal topics to work meetings as something negative. Almost everyone talked about the feelings meetings should result in knowing the people you work with better.

Only one participant talks about the feelings meetings being too frequent and would want to have them at a longer interval than one to two weeks. The only concerns for the meetings being held in one session, was for the total time of the session being too long.

The feelings meetings, as new as they are, seem to have positive effect on software development teams and it will be interesting to watch how they will evolve in the future and if they will get more established within the Agile community even though there are still question on how much companies can intrude personal life of its employees.

Procedure

When discussing procedure of the meetings all participants agree on the importance of varying the format of the meeting, and to find a format and interval that best suits the team or the project. The preferred interval between meetings can vary a lot and for some projects there is only one retrospective meeting at the end of the project. Almost all participants were happy with the format and setting of the meeting, as they are conducted with their teams at the moment. Even though the two teams have different setting and interval of the meetings. Couple of them mentioned the setting being different before, so the meetings are constantly being adjusted to the teams need.

The format is under constant review since the team has to be happy with the format. If the meetings are getting less efficient, it's time to change the format to get everyone to participate fully.

Interesting point was that few of our interviewees mentioned how start, stop, continue focuses on the future but highlights, lowlights, no lights focuses on the past, what the team has been doing. When teams agree on starting something, that is something they will do in the future, while highlights is something the team has been doing in the last iteration. One participant specifically mentions how the categories used at the meeting affect the actionables, how the start, stop, continue format brings more focused actionables. This might come from it being easier to set goals for the future than fix something in the past.

One mentions it might be good to have a short feelings session at the beginning of a retrospective meeting to help the participants be present and more open for the meeting, it would though not replace the feelings meeting itself. That feelings session would then be like a short Check-in, to get everyone focused and present.

Agile Coaches

Participants agreed on how important the role of the Agile coaches is. It is important to have an coach to facilitate the meetings and keep the meetings focused. It varies whether the coach participates in the feelings meetings or not but at the retrospective meetings the coach solely facilitates the meetings and helps the teams find actionables from the issues that arise. In team B the Agile coach did not participate in the feelings meetings which is different from team A where the Agile coach began the meeting by telling the team how his week had been.

One of the agile coaches mentioned that there can be a conflict between being a coach and a team member, in cases where the team member has something to say but can't say it because he is coaching the meeting. This puts that person in the position of not being able to fully participate in the meeting. This corresponds to the independent software consultant experience of how the role you have within a team can affect how you conduct a meeting. This underlines the role the Agile coach plays for a team.

Also the software consultant mentioned how one time they started using retrospective meetings at his work but lost the rhythm, they did not have an Agile coach and took turns facilitating the meetings. You can assume there is less risk of this happening when there is an Agile coach as one interviewee specially mentioned, how good it is to have the Agile coach to call the meetings and make sure they are facilitated.

As different as the two types of meetings are, they have proven to be an important platform to discuss things and matters that else do not receive much attention but can have crucial effect on team progress. The results show that the meetings are not only important in theory, the team members also think they are one of the most important meetings in a company.

Conclusions

Our conclusion is that it is important that the retrospective and feelings meetings serve the team. The format has to be adjusted to the team needs and the meetings have to be agile. It seems like no one has found the perfect format for either retrospective or feelings meetings but the key is to allow the format to evolve with the team. The Agile processes seem to be a guide to what tools are available for teams to use in their work and an important source of ideas, and it is important for teams to allow the known processes to evolve in a way that best serves teams in each situation.

The perspectives towards the meeting was positive for all the participants in this study. That might be the result as the study was made at a company where the employees are provided with trust and environment to fully adjust the meetings to their needs. The retrospective meetings seem to be becoming an established part of software development. Both regular employees and specialist all agree on the importance of the meetings.The feelings meetings are on the other hand a very new addition to software development and it will be interesting to see how they will develop in the future and if they will get established within the industry, but the positive perspective towards them from the participants of this study might be an indication of the future use of some form of feelings meetings.

This study has shown how important it can be to foster the personal feelings of employees as well as work related problems to build strong teams that work well together and deliver well. As the communication is usually what breaks in teamwork, and software development depends on people, it is important to give the team members a platform to address problems and discuss what they have been doing.

Building trust within teams is the key to get people to fully participate in the meetings and to get them to express their opinions. When teams have built trust it is easier to "address the pink elephant in the room" and to work on problems as a team. When problems have been surfaced and discussed they can be improved, and improvement is the key to successful production.

Acknowledgements

References

[1] H. Kniberg, *Scrum and XP from the Trenches: How we do scrum, 2nd edition*. [Online].
Available: http://www.infoq.com/resource/minibooks/scrum-xp-from-the-trenches-2/en/pdf/
Scrum-and-XP-from-the-Trenches-2nd-edition.pdf. Accessed May 7, 2016, pp. 84, 16.

[2] J. Sutherland, *Scrum: The Art of Doing Twice the Work in Half the Time,* New York: Crown
Business, 2014, pp. 112, 30.

[3] C. Larman and V.R. Basili *Iterative and Incremental Development: A Brief History,* 2003
[Online] Available: http://www.craiglarman.com/wiki/downloads/misc/history-of-iterative-larman-
And-basili-ieee-computer.pdf. Accessed: April 6, 2016.

[4] Wikipedia. *Agile software development*, 2016. [Online]. Available
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agile_software_development [Last Modified: 12 May 2016, at
11:58]. Accessed: May 12, 2016.

[5] K. Beck, et, al. *The Agile Manifesto*, 2001. [Online]. Available: http://www.agilemanifesto.org/.
Accessed: February 13, 2016.

[6] E. Derby, D. Larsen, K. Schwaber, *Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams
Great*, Pragmatic Bookshelf, 2006, pp. 24-27, 17.

[7] L. Gonçalves. *Kudo Cards used in Agile Retrospectives,* 2015. [Online]. Available:
http://lmsgoncalves.com/2015/01/11/kudo-cards-used-agile-retrospectives. Accessed: May 10,
2016.

[8] J. McCarthy and M. McCarthy, *The Core Protocols V. 3.03,* 2011. [Online]. Available:
http://www.mccarthyshow.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/The+Core+Protocols+3.03.pdf.
Accessed: May 3, 2016.

[9] D. Ezzy, *Qualitative Analysis: Practice and Innovation,* Crows Nest, N.S.W:
Allen & Unwin, 2002.

Appendix A

List of question asked in the interviews:

Background

1. Hvað ertu búin að vinna hérna lengi?
2. Hvert er þitt starfssvið?
3. Hver er menntun þín?

Feelings meetings

4. Hversu mikla reynslu hefurðu af feelings fundum?
5. Hafðirðu prófað þetta áður en þú komst hingað?
6. Hvernig lærðirðu að taka þátt í fundunum?
7. Hvernig upplifirðu þessa fundi?
8. Hverjir eru aðal kostir fundanna?
9. Ókostir við fundina?
10. Er einhverntíma freistandi að sleppa fundunum?
11. Er eitthvað sem þér finnst óþarft á fundunum?
12. Mæti bæta fyrirkomulag fundanna?
13. Finnst þér fundirnir skila einhverju, bæta afköst, auka starfsánægju eða eitthvað slíkt?
14. En varðandi trúnað, er rætt utan fundarins það sem fór fram á fundinum?

Retrospectives

15. Hversu mikla reynslu hefurðu af retro fundum?
16. Hvernig lærðirðu að taka þátt í fundunum?
17. Hafðirðu prófað þetta áður en þú komst hingað?
18. Hvernig upplifirðu þessa fundi?
19. Hverjir eru aðal kostir fundanna?
20. Ókostir við fundina?
21. Er einhverntíma freistandi að sleppa fundunum?
22. Er eitthvað sem þér finnst óþarft á fundunum?
23. Mæti bæta fyrirkomulag fundanna?
24. Finnst þér nógu vel unnið með niðurstöðu fundanna?
25. Finnst þér fundirnir skila einhverju, bæta afköst, auka starfsánægju eða eitthvað slíkt?
26. Hefurðu prófað að hafa feelings- og retro fundina saman?
27. Eitthvað sem þú vilt bæta við í lokin?

1. For how long have you worked at Plain Vanilla?
2. What is your role at Plain Vanilla?
3. What is your education?

4. How much experience do you have with feelings meetings?
5. Did you have experience with feelings meetings previous to your work at Plain Vanilla?

6. How did you learn how to participate in the feelings meetings?
7. How do you experience the feelings meetings?
8. What are the advantages of the feelings meetings?
9. What are the disadvantages of the feelings meetings?
10. Is it ever tempting to skip the feelings meetings?
11. Do you find any part of the feelings meetings unnecessary?
12. What could be improved in the feelings meeting arrangement/layout?
13. What do you find to be the results of the feelings meetings? For example, improve productivity or enhance job satisfaction.
14. Regarding confidentiality, are the topics that came up during the meetings ever discussed outside of the meetings?

15. How much experience do you have with retrospective meetings?
16. How did you learn how to participate in the retrospective meetings?
17. Did you have experience with retrospective meetings previous to your work at Plain Vanilla?
18. How do you experience the retrospective meetings?
19. What are the advantages of the retrospective meetings?
20. What are the disadvantages of the retrospective meetings?
21. Is it ever tempting to skip the retrospective meetings?
22. Do you find any part of the retrospective meetings unnecessary?
23. What could be improved in the retrospective meeting arrangement/layout?
24. Are the results of the meetings well worked on?
25. What do you find to be the results of the retrospective meetings? For example, improve productivity or enhance job satisfaction.

26. Have you tried separate/combined feelings and retrospective meetings?
27. Is there anything you like to add?