

Retropoly

What is it?

This is a game to be played during retrospective meetings of Agile teams, based on the Monopoly game concept. It is mainly designed for Scrum teams, but it is suitable for any other Agile methodology. The game is basically offering a fun, yet practical, tool to apply the twelfth principle of Agile:

At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly.

Who can play it?

The game can be played by any Agile team with at least 5 members. Below this size of the team it is still possible to play the game, but the fun of it is partly lost due to the low number of retrospective cards.

There are three roles in this game: the Game Master, the Player and the Debate Facilitator.

The Game Master is a role played usually played by the Scrum Master / Retrospective Facilitator who organizes the game and serves as a referee. He/she is also representing the Bank.

The Player is also a role played by all the members of the team. On team request, relevant external persons might be invited to play the game.

The Debate Facilitator is a role which is played by one of the players. The Debate Facilitator acts as a moderator of the debates during one round of discussions. The Players are taking turns to play this role.

What do we need to play it?

To play the game you need the following materials:

- A room with at least one table and chairs for all participants
- A Retropoly board
- One pawn
- One dice
- A set of Stage Cards
- A set of Challenge Cards, consisting in Agile related questions with at least 4 possible answers (multiple answers are allowed and encouraged)
- A printed document with the correct answers
- Some paper notes to create the Retrospective Cards (not sticky, size of a business card, preferably 3 different colors)
- Poker chips (15 of 5€, 15 of 10€, 10 of 25€ and 10 of 50€ for each player)
- Fake money for the Bank (10 bills of 200€ and 10 bills of 500€)
- A score sheet
- Some flipchart sheets on a wall
- Some paper-based adhesive tape
- A scissor
- Markers

How do we play it?

The game has 5 steps:

Preparing → Rewarding → Remembering → Debating → Closing

Step 1: Preparing

This step is actually happening before inviting the whole team to the game. The Game Master prepares in advance the room where the game will take place. He/she will use the above list to check if all required materials are available. Then the following steps must be followed:

- Placing the Retropoly board on the table
- Placing the pawn on the Start square
- Placing the dice somewhere on the board
- Placing the Stage Cards on the Stage area, face down
- Placing some money in the Team Chest (5€ for each player)
- Selecting (randomly or previously prepared) a set of Challenge Cards and placing them on the Challenge area, face down
- Organizing a Bank area, preferably not on the same table with the board, with all poker chips and fake money – chips should be grouped in piles by value
- Preparing 3 flipchart sheets, sticking them to the wall (or similar) in a visible place and writing on top of them: Keep Doing on the first sheet, Doing Better on the second sheet and Stop Doing on the third sheet

Step 2: Rewarding

The first step of the game is to analyze which of the improvements decided during the last retrospective were implemented or not. Also the team must decide which of these improvements made a real difference in terms of team efficiency and efficacy.

The Players will explain to the Game Master what has been done for each decided improvement, demonstrating that it was fully implemented and beneficial. The Game Master must approve the successful implementation of an improvement or reject it with a proper explanation.

If all the improvements decided during previous retrospective were successfully implemented, the team is granted with a bonus of 1.000€ by the Bank. The amount of money is deposited in the Team Chest.

If only some of the improvements decided during previous retrospective were successfully implemented, the team will not receive any bonus.

In both of the above situations, the Players will then discuss briefly and decide by vote who are the Players that contributed decisively to the implementation of improvements, through their ideas, actions or behaviors. Nominations can be made by any Player, but not for himself/herself. Each nomination will also be accompanied by a strong argumentation.

The Game Master will then approve or not the nominations. Each approved nominations will be then submitted to a quick voting. Players must vote in favor or against each nomination, abstention is not possible. A Player can vote in favor of several nominations. The nomination having the maximum of favorable votes is winning. If there is no clear winner, the first two nominations are submitted to a second voting.

The winning Players will split among them a 500€ bonus paid by the Bank. It is possible to nominate all Players (the entire team) for a successful improvement, thus acknowledging the common effort.

If none of the improvements decided during previous retrospective was implemented, the team will pay a 1.000€ fine to the Bank at the end of the game, using the money collected in the Team Chest and/or money from each Player. Who is paying and how much is decided by the Players.

This step should last no more than 15 minutes.

Step 3: Remembering

The Game Master will ask each Player to tell to his/her colleagues which were the two events that happened during the last sprint – one event must be a positive one, the other a negative one. Each Player will use its personal perspective to decide if an event was positive or negative. Events may also be personal experiences. Players cannot repeat the same events described by another Player. The goal is to help the Players to remember as much as possible the flow of events during the last sprint.

Then the Players will create the Retrospective Cards. There are 3 types of Retrospective Cards: Keep Doing (green paper notes), Doing Better (yellow paper notes) and Stop Doing (red or pink paper notes).

The Players are asked to use the paper notes to write down the things that went ok and should continue (Keep Doing), the things that went not so great and need to be improved (Doing Better) and the things that should be stopped because they harm the Agile process, the product/project or the team (Stop Doing). Each paper note must contain just one idea. Give them enough time to think about it, but no more than 15 minutes.

When everybody finished, the Game Master asks the team member to pile their Retrospective Cards, face down, in the corresponding area of the board: Keep Doing area, Doing Better area and Stop Doing area.

This step should last no more than 15 minutes.

Step 4: Debating

Now you're ready to debate about the last sprint.

The Game Master will rapidly count how many Retrospective Cards are in total in all three piles, then he/she decides what is the duration of each debate timebox (there will be debates upon each idea, see below). The calculation is simple:

- calculate how much time there is available for debates by deducting from the standard retrospective duration (45 minutes for each sprint week) the minutes consumed in the previous two steps (Rewarding and Remembering) and the minutes dedicated for the Closing step (5 minutes) [Example: 3 weeks-sprint x 45 minutes – 25 minutes = 110 minutes]
- multiply the number of Retrospective Cards by 2 (to cover action points, challenges, stage performances, saying thanks and moments of truth) [Example: 15 cards x 2 = 30]
- divide the available time by the number of Retrospective Cards, round the result in a convenient way and set it as Debate Timebox for this game [Example: 110 minutes : 30 cards = ~3,5 minutes]

The team member who is closest to the Start square rolls the dice and then he/she moves the pawn forward to the n^{th} square (n is the number shown on the dice). The direction of moving the pawn is clockwise. After moving the pawn, the player will read the text in the square where the pawn arrived to determine what needs to be done and then executes the task. These are the possible situations:

Keep Doing

The Player becomes the Debate Facilitator and takes the next Retrospective Card from the Keep Doing pile and facilitates a timeboxed discussion about the idea written on that paper note. If there are no more Retrospective Cards on the Keep Doing pile, he/she advances the pawn with one more square and executes the corresponding task.

The Debate Facilitator starts by reading it loud and, if necessary, asking the author of that idea to give some more details about what it refers to. The objective is to decide if team agrees or not about that topic, so it can be considered as a Keep Doing thing for the future.

When a consensus was reached the Debate Facilitator takes the Retrospective Card and sticks it on the Keep Doing sheet, on the wall. Thus, the Retrospective Card becomes a Retrospective Topic. If the team agrees that the idea is not valid, the Debate Facilitator gives the Retrospective Card to the Game Master to be stored as a Rejected Topic.

The Debate Facilitator must focus on the following aspects:

- Everyone understands what the idea is about
- Everyone has the opportunity to talk
- Duration is no longer than the Debate Timebox decided at the beginning of the game
- The objective of the debate is achieved

When the discussions finished or the time is up, the Game Master is quickly summarizing the quality of the facilitation. If the Debate Timebox was respected and the objective was achieved, the Player is paid with 100€ for his/her facilitation services. If some of the team members did not understand what it was about or they did not get the chance to talk, the Game Master is allowed to decrease the payment according to his/her own perception about the quality of the performance. If the objective was not achieved, the Player does not receive any payment for his/her performance and the Retrospective Card goes back to the bottom of the corresponding pile on the board.

The Game Master should continuously assess the facilitation performance as the debates go on. The idea is to be as fast as possible in evaluating the performance of the Debate Facilitator and add as little time as possible to the actual duration of the debates.

Doing Better

The Player takes a Retrospective Card from the Doing Better pile. The rules are similar to the ones in Keep Doing. The objective is to collectively decide if this is something that must be improved in the future, not to find ways to improve. The Player that acts as Debate Facilitator must pay attention that the team does not accidentally slip into a solution-finding debate. This will be discussed separately, during an Action Point debate (see below).

Stop Doing

The Player takes a Retrospective Card from the Stop Doing pile. The rules are similar to the ones in Keep Doing. The objective is to collectively decide if this is something that must be stopped in the future, not to find ways to stop it.

Action Point

The Player that rolled the dice becomes the Debate Facilitator, looks on the three flipchart sheets where the Retrospective Topics cards are (Keep Doing, Doing Better and Stop Doing) and picks one that he/she thinks that needs some action points to be implemented. The objective is to decide if the Retrospective Topic is important enough to deal with during the next iteration.

If the Players decide that the topic is important they must formulate at least one SMART action that will implement it in real life. Also, they must decide where the decided actions are going: as a task on the next iteration backlog or as a new rule in the team policy. If it does not go in one of these places, it is probably not a valid action point.

If the Players decide that the topic is not so important and should not be implemented during the next sprint, action points will not be discussed.

Action points are suggested by the team and written by the Debate Facilitator as they are agreed. The Debate Facilitator can also contribute, but it is recommendable that he/she refrain from being the first one to propose an approach (because he/she might influence the team's debate).

The Debate Facilitator must focus on the following aspects:

- Everyone has the opportunity to talk
- Selected action points, if any, are supported by a consistent majority (number of voters in favor are more than half of team members)
- Duration is no longer than the Debate Timebox decided at the beginning of the game (if action points are defined, duration can be 50% longer than the regular Debate Timebox)
- The objective of the debate is achieved

When the discussions finished or the time is up, the Game Master is summarizing the quality of the facilitation. If the timebox was respected and the objective was achieved, the Player is paid with 50€ (If the decision was that it is not important and no action points are necessary) or 150€ (if action points were defined) for his/her facilitation services. If some of the team members did not understand what it was about or they did not get the chance to talk, the Game Master is allowed to decrease the payment according to his/her own perception about the quality of the performance. If the objective was not achieved, the Player does not receive any payment for his/her performance.

The Game Master should continuously assess the facilitation performance as the debates go on. The idea is to be as fast as possible in evaluating the performance of the Debate Facilitator and add as little time as possible to the actual duration of the debates.

Moment of Truth

The Player is requested to explain to the team about his/her weakest point during the last iteration (or since the last retrospective) and about what he/she intends to do to correct that aspect.

There is no payment for this situation. But, if the Player does not fulfill the request, he/she must pay a 200€ fine to the Bank.

If a Player gets a second time on this square, he/she is requested to find another personal weak point that needs to be corrected. If he/she does not fill the request, he/she must pay a 50€ fine to the Bank.

If a Player gets a third or more time on this square, he/she can be excused to fulfill the request without paying any fine. The dice will be forwarded to the next Player.

Say Thanks

The Player is requested to pick a team member and to thank him/her, explaining the concrete facts that he/she is grateful for.

There is no payment for this situation. But, if the Player does not fulfill the request, he/she must pay a 200€ fine to the Bank.

If a Player gets a second time on this square, he/she is requested to pick another person that he/she wants to say thanks. If he/she does not fill the request, he/she must pay a 50€ fine to the Bank.

If a Player gets a third or more time on this square, he/she can be excused to fulfill the request without paying any fine. The dice will be forwarded to the next Player.

Get on Stage

The Player is requested to pick the next Stage Card from the Stage pile and execute the task written there in maximum one minute. Since it is about performing something for the rest of the team (a short story, a poem, a song, a joke etc), at the end of the performance each Player may pay something as a "ticket fee" to the performer. The amount should reflect the appreciation of the performance. Not paying anything is also an option.

If the Player fails to fulfill the request, he/she must pay a 50€ fine to the Team Chest.

Take a Challenge

The Player is requested to pick the next Challenge Card from the Challenge pile and to answer the question. Four possible answers are offered, multiple answers are possible. There is a 1 minute timebox to answer the challenge. The Player cannot ask the colleagues for support, nor can he/she use external documentations.

If the Player answers correctly receives 50€. If he/she answers incorrectly, is not paid. If he/she does not answer at all, he/she must pay a 50€ fine as a deposit to the Team Chest.

Step 5: Closing

The game ends when no more Retrospective Cards are on the board and all Retrospective Topics were discussed to determine if actions are necessary or not.

Each Player counts the money he/she earned during the game and the total amount (sum of all Players earnings) is written on the Score Sheet. The goal of the team over several games is to earn more and more money together.

The Game Master announces the results of the retrospective and summarizes the action points that the team has committed to implement during the next iteration.

This step should not take more than 5 minutes.