



June 8, 2021

Finding Balance

PART 5: RETROSPECTIVE BALANCE

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We recently had a hiccup on one of our projects that resulted in a planned feature being delayed. This feature was an important component of the release, and the resulting delay was painful for the customer. Even though we identified that this delay was going to occur, and our team was transparent and honest about the impact as soon as we knew it was going to materialize, it left our customer in an uncomfortable spot and resulted in discussions that none of us ever like to have.

Software project development is a complex business with many factors contributing to the successful delivery of releases. Many of these factors are within the control of the team and many come from outside influences that need to be managed. Good teams continue to see the end goal and anticipate challenges in order to mitigate and manage risks. However, even the best teams can lose this perspective over the course of a project as they are consumed by the daily activities and tasks of delivery sprint over sprint.

When something like this occurs, we pull the team together for a retrospective. Often, we bring in others from the company to participate; knowing that perspectives from outside the project will generally provide some insight that the project team may have overlooked. We have found this brings balance to the conversation and allows the project team to hear from other voices. Every one of our teams have participated in these retrospective sessions and have embraced not only the process but the feedback that arises from the discussion.

We like to say that these discussions are a chance for the team to get pulled up from being “in the weeds” and reestablish the perspective of the overall project goals and how their work is driving towards them. Restoring the balance between tactical sprint delivery and overall release objectives is something we encourage each team to do at every retrospective. Sometimes, it requires a little nudge from outside the team to help them regain that balance.