

Four Questions to Fix Low Attendance at Your Sprint Reviews

by Mike Cohn • 10 Comments

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Have you ever fallen asleep during a sprint review? Me either. But I can imagine it happening. How about skipping a sprint review because you knew it would be boring? No, but I've been tempted. And I suspect you have been, too.

I want to share four questions you can ask yourself to ensure your sprint reviews are never the type to put people to sleep or make them want to skip the meeting.

Question 1: Do the Right People Know about the Sprint Review?

If your sprint review meetings are poorly attended, we need to start with the most basic question: Do the right people know about the meeting and when and where it is?

I was once invited to speak at a company meeting in Denver. My speaking slot was to be at 10:00 A.M. and I was told to show up you at the Hyatt hotel at 9:30 so I'd have time to connect my laptop before my talk.

I always like to be early, so I arrived at the Denver Hyatt at 9:00 to be safe. But there were no signs in the lobby about the meeting. When I asked about it at the front desk, they had no record of the event being scheduled at their hotel.

I stood there for a moment wondering what had happened. And then another hotel employee said, “Are you sure it’s this *Hyatt*? There’s another Hyatt around the corner from us.” Sure enough, I was at the wrong place. _

Is it possible you haven’t told the right people when and where to be? You probably have but it’s worth double checking.

Question 2: Are the Sprint Review Meetings Convenient?

Sometimes the reason people aren’t attending is because the meetings are inconvenient.

Maybe they’re at an inconvenient location. One of my former clients had a building that was only two floors but was very long. Meeting rooms could be as much as a ten-minute walk away and still be in the same building.

A ten-minute walk is a high hurdle if someone invited to a meeting is marginal on the benefit of attending. Teams there stopped holding sprint reviews in the nice, dedicated meeting space and instead held them in the open space around their cubicles. People had to stand for the meetings but attendance was much higher without the long walks.

Maybe it’s not the location but the day or time of the meetings. Check with those who have been invited but are not showing up to find out why.

Question 3: Are the Right Topics Being Covered in the Right Detail?

If the sprint review goes into too much detail, the meetings become tedious. If topics are covered too superficially, people stop feeling the need to attend because nothing important is ever discussed.

So you need to ask yourself if topics are being covered in the right level of detail. If not, start the next sprint review meeting by discussing it with participants. Ask them what level of detail would be most useful. Be sure to tell prior no-shows that you’ll be discussing this at the upcoming

meeting. Stress that it will be their chance to guide the meetings toward the right level of detail.

A Special Consideration for Multi-Team Projects

On multi-team projects, sometimes the meetings are at the wrong level of detail because each team is conducting its own distinct sprint review. If that's the case, consider merging some of the sprint reviews.

This results in fewer meetings. It also allows new functionality and progress to be discussed more holistically, which often leads to more useful meetings.

Question 4: Are Sprint Review Meetings Boring for Some Other Reason?

If topics are being discussed at the right level of detail, ask yourself if sprint reviews have become boring for some other reason. Sometimes this is because one participant dominates the discussion. Some people feel compelled to offer an opinion on everything. Others ramble on too long unchecked.

The Scrum Master is normally the facilitator of the review. Make sure your Scrum Master knows this and accepts the responsibility for keeping discussions lively and moving along briskly.

I like to apply the old show biz advice: Always leave them wanting more. If you are putting on a live performance, you'd prefer the audience to leave wishing there'd be just one more act or song rather than feeling the performance had gone on too long.

Err on the side of sprint review participants wishing the meeting had gone on five more minutes rather than that it was five minutes too long.

Engage Your Product Owner in Helping to Fix a Lack of Participation

A team's product owner can be a huge ally in both getting people to attend and in getting them

to participate once there. Product owners have more and deeper connections to the business-side stakeholders teams struggle to get to attend. So, solicit your product owner's help in solving problems related to low attendance and participation.

What Do You Think?

Have you ever suffered from low attendance at your sprint reviews? What have you done that solved the problem? Please share your thoughts in the Comments below.

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