

PM WORLD TODAY – CASE STUDY SERIES – JANUARY 2008  
Project and Program Retrospectives  
for Improved Business Results

Introduction to the Series

*By Debra Lavell & Russell Martinelli*

For learning organizations, post-project audits and post-mortems are an established means for capturing key learnings from their projects and programs. However, at Intel we are rapidly moving away from both the post-project audit and post-mortem methods of collecting our key learnings, and moving to a considerably more effective method commonly known as retrospectives. The primary reasons for this shift in methods and practice are two-fold: post-project audits occur too late in the program life cycle to effect changes on the current program, and post-mortems have a negative connotation – historically focusing on what went wrong on a program, thus heavy on blaming and finger pointing.

We are pleased to be able to present a series of papers for *PM World Today* focusing on program and project retrospectives, and how they are applied at Intel to capture key learnings and improve our program and project management practices. We begin the series by describing the retrospective methodology, differentiating it from other methods such as post-project audits and post-mortems, and presenting the benefits of using the retrospective method. We then describe what it takes to gain organizational buy-in for retrospectives, and provide a recommended process for introducing the method into an organization. Examples from our experience in moving organizations within Intel to the retrospective methodology will be presented. The third paper in the series will focus on the people side of retrospectives. We will describe how to deal with the human aspect of introducing change into an organization and requiring people to behave differently. We then discuss the nuances of conducting a retrospective for a highly distributed program or project team. Finally, we present two comprehensive case studies that present the process from beginning to end, and demonstrate the value obtained by the organizations and teams utilizing retrospectives to increase their organizational learning.

It should be noted that this series of papers is written from the practitioner's point of view. We work in industry, our experiences are first hand and real world, and the viewpoints we present reflect this perspective. Finally, we welcome your comments and feedback on the papers. We can be contacted at: [info@programmanagement-academy.com](mailto:info@programmanagement-academy.com).



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**Debra Lavell** works as a retrospectives expert in the Corporate Platform Office at Intel Corporation, and has delivered over 80 program and milestone retrospectives over the past 5 years. She also designed the “Facilitating Effective Retrospectives” training course which she has delivered to over 50 program and project teams. In addition to her work in retrospectives, Debra is also a recognized expert in requirements engineering, is a member of the Rose City Software Process Improvement Network Steering Committee, and president of the annual Pacific Northwest Software Quality Conference.



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**Russ Martinelli** is the Manager of Program Management Methods within the Corporate Platform Office at Intel Corporation, where he focuses on the implementation of program management practices across Intel. Additionally, Russ is the chairman of Intel’s global Program Management Community of Practice, an adjunct professor at the University of Phoenix, and co-founder of the Program Management Academy. Russ has held a variety of positions at Intel and Lockheed Martin in the areas of systems engineering, general management, operations management, and project and program management. Russ has recently published the book titled “*Program Management for Improved Business Results*” (ISBN: 0-471-78354-4). Contact Russ at: [russ.martinelli@programmanagement-academy.com](mailto:russ.martinelli@programmanagement-academy.com)