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3.3.2 Sprint Planning Summary Points

Sprint Planning has three key objectives:

- Product Owner presents the updated Product Backlog
- Development Team selects and refines User Stories
- Development Team is able to commit to the Sprint Backlog

However, to ensure the authenticity of those objectives are met the following must happen:

- All voices must be heard
- Team must review and elaborate all User Stories in the Sprint
- The Team must be able to size and select those stores within the timebox of the Sprint Planning!

The "timebox" for sprint planning is usually half a day for a two-week sprint, or a full day for a four week sprint. The same applies for Team Retro and Reviews. This allows for one day out of two weeks (1:9) ratio to be spent on planning and review.

To do this correctly, the team must avoid:

- Getting into long, drawn-out discussions on requirements

- Conflicts that can destabilize the planning meeting
- Not having the information needed to plan

The key to making a good Sprint Planning Work is two-fold:

- Great User Story writing by the Product Owner (and/or Development Team in variations of Scrum)
- Planning Games

Great User-Story writing means that the Scrum Master and Product Owner need to work together to ensure User Story quality. This is especially important when the team has a new Product Owner, who hasn't worked on a Scrum team or THIS Scrum team. Story writing is extremely cultural.

The use of Planning Games is essential because it helps to facilitate and elicit creativity from the team. Often this is when many teams will ask, "why not just talk about the stories?" The key reasons for NOT using unfacilitated discussion or "open discussion" is that it's NOT open:

- Loudest voice in the room wins
- There's no timebox or time limit on discussions
- There's no way to tell when consensus is reached
- There's no way to improve without structure to improve upon

For this reason we use games in Scrum. The most common is the **Planning Poker Game**.

Planning Poker Game. Key source for these rules

is: <http://agileinaflash.blogspot.com/2009/07/planning-poker-r.html>

- Agree on a point scale
- Team briefly discusses the User Story
- Everyone picks a card in silence
- Team members reveal the card
- If an outlier exists (more than one step from the mode), then discuss
- (Optional) After two rounds take an average, and validate with a "yes/no" team vote

This process is used to accomplish three things:

1. Validate that the size of the story is correct
2. Validate that the User Story is well understood
3. Ensure all voices are heard equally when disagreements occur

Many times there are disagreements about how to develop a *point scale*. There are valid reasons, especially when Story Points are misused by team members or management outside the team. Here are some key points to consider:

- Points are a relative metric
- Points should consider more than effort
 - Complexity - how hard is it?
 - Uncertainty - how certain are we know the business reqs and potential technical solution?
 - Effort - how much total work?
- Points should be consistent across Sprints, but not necessarily across teams

Please note that many types of "Scaling Frameworks" disagree, with basis, on whether User Story points should be an absolute metric, or at least shared across multiple teams. For Scrum and it's variations this is not important. Story points are solely to help the team know how much work can be accomplished and if the team is getting faster Sprint after Sprint.

We continue to explore these concepts of how to use scaling of points and measurements of team performance in the Agile for Control course in the Agile Project Management Curriculum. As well as briefly in next week's lessons on Scaling Frameworks.

Finally there are few additional items to consider for Planning:

- Work iteratively through picking Stories prior to Sprint Planning
- Select Stories that combine to form a cohesive "Product Increment"
 - It's best if the Product Owner has something in mind already
 - This Product Increment should be written down as a "Sprint Objective" to help focus Planning

- Work one-by-one through User Stories when performing the Planning Poker game
 - This is fastest, because everyone is focused on the same story at the same time
 - This is easiest because you only have to think about one story at a time
- Make sure to leave a little buffer on your first Sprint
- Make sure that everyone commits to getting the work done - don't let everyone leave without a clear "confidence" vote from the team
- You will end up refining the Product Backlog and identifying potential dependencies in this process - that's okay!
 - When updating the Sprint and Product Backlogs - do it now. Don't lose those moments of insight that come in planning
 - Make sure that the tools you use are simple and effective to make this go smoothly
- Finally, be sure to prioritize the Sprint Backlog so the Development Team knows which User Stories to start on first the next day.

By following these guidelines your planning will be faster, more inclusive, and more accurate than any group discussion or interview process could hope to achieve.

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