

# Are User Stories a Suitable Metric for Burn Down Charts in Agile Game Development?

COMP150 - Agile Essay

1507866

May 7, 2016

This essay will analyse the use of user stories in burn down charts in the Agile development process. The focus will be on the use of user stories as a metric in burn down charts and they're suited to use in the games industry.

## 1 Introduction

Kupianinen *et al* say that burn down charts are a measure that should be used by Agile teams [1]. The intention of this essay is to look at the use of user stories in burn down charts in the Agile and Scrum development processes. It will also look at whether they are suited to use in games development.

## 2 What is the Agile philosophy?

Agile is a software development method that focuses on the quality of software and finding better ways to develop it. [2]

Previously a commonly used method was the Waterfall method. This was a sequential process that took place over a series of stages. The clear end to a stage meant that this process was easy to measure. [3].

Instead of stages Agile is an iterative process. The development takes place over a series of sprints. During each sprint user stories are completed, user stories are short descriptions from the customer's point of view of a feature that needs to be included in the software. This makes measuring progress in an Agile software development project less clear. Scrum is a project management method used alongside Agile. Scrum focuses on customer collaboration with its daily scrum meetings. These meetings are used to discuss who is doing what user story and what the customer wants prioritized [4]. There are three main roles in Scrum; the Product Owner, the Scrum Master and the development team. [5]

Mirsa and Omorodion mention that some of these traditional metrics could be used for Agile but may not give useful data [6].

Agile is suited to use in the games industry as it states in the manifesto that it focuses on responding to change over in depth plans. Over the development process a game is likely to change a lot. Features may be cut, a certain mechanic may not be fun or an issue arises during play testing. All of them could lead to significant changes in the game. With Agile only the relevant user stories would need to be changed instead of reworking a large design document. Scrum is suited to the games industry as it works with Agile. The daily scrums allow people from different departments to communicate daily and ensure everything is going smoothly.

### 3 Burn Down Charts

Metrics are used to quantify software, this could be measuring the development resources or the development process [6]. In this essay measuring will refer to progress made in the development process.

Burn down charts are a common way to measure Agile software development. They are used to record a chosen metric, such as how many user stories were completed in the last sprint [7]. Velocity can be used in burn down charts to predict an outcome for the given metric. For example how many sprints it will take to complete the project based on how many user stories have been completed in past sprints.

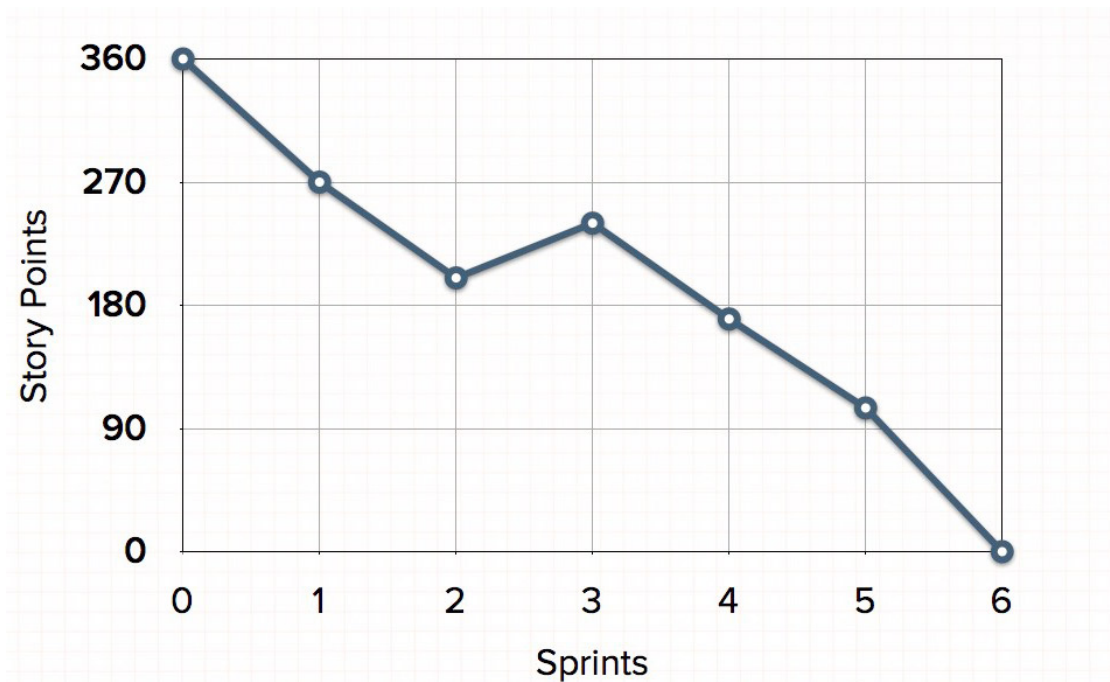


Figure 1: An example of a burn down chart [8].

Figure 1 above shows an example of a burn down chart. This chart is recording the number of story points or user stories left after each sprint. Velocity could have also been used with this graph to make predictions on

how many more sprints would be required to finish all the user stories.

The metrics used should identify and measure areas that will affect the software [6]. During software development there are many areas that can be measured. However as Hartmann and Dymond point out, just because something can be measured does not mean it should be [9].

Hartmann and Dymond say that “measurement drives behaviour ”[9]. Therefore the metrics should be designed to shape the software development process. A poorly designed metric will likely give unhelpful data [5]. Selecting a metric can measure progress but can also aid business decisions and may effect team morale.

There is also the issue of “vanity vs sanity” metrics. Some metrics may look impressive but not give useful data. For example time, recording how many hours the project was worked on may be a “*vanity*” metric as it may look impressive if the game was worked on for five hundred hours. However that gives no indication of whether all the features have been implemented. An example of a more useful metric may be user stories, this metric can be used to see what features have been implemented or what percentage of the user stories have been completed.

A simple metric to use in a burn down chart is to record how many user stories are completed in a single sprint. This may work for smaller projects. The issue with this metric is that different user stories may take different amounts of time. Also nearer the end if bugs get put on the backlog this may lead to an invalid velocity.

Downey and Sutherland have a method where points are assigned to a user story. These points can be based on it’s size, importance or the time it’ll take to complete [10]. Then user stories are chosen based on their points, then a baseline velocity for that sprint is calculated from those points. This

metric could be suitable for the games industry as it would allow user stories from different parts of the game to be prioritized. ... However an issue with this could be that the importance of a user story could be subjective.

## 4 Conclusion

In conclusion ...

## References

- [1] E. Kupiainen, M. V. Mäntylä, and J. Itkonen, “Why are industrial agile teams using metrics and how do they use them?,” in *Proceedings of the 5th International Workshop on Emerging Trends in Software Metrics*, WETSoM 2014, (New York, NY, USA), pp. 23–29, ACM, 2014.
- [2] K. Beck, M. Beedle, A. van Bennekum, A. Cockburn, W. Cunningham, M. Fowler, J. Grenning, J. Highsmith, A. Hunt, R. Jeffries, J. Kern, B. Marick, R. C. Martin, S. Mellor, K. Schwaber, J. Sutherland, and D. Thomas, “Agile manifesto [online] at (<http://agilemanifesto.org/>) accessed on 6 may 2016,” 2001.
- [3] D. Duka, “Adoption of agile methodology in software development,” in *36th International Convention on Information Communication Technology Electronics Microelectronics (MIPRO), 2013*, pp. 426–430, May 2013.
- [4] J. Sutherland, A. Viktorov, J. Blount, and N. Puntikov, “Distributed scrum: Agile project management with outsourced development teams,” in *40th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, 2007. HICSS 2007.*, p. 274, Jan 2007.

- [5] O. Ktata and G. Lévesque, “Designing and implementing a measurement program for scrum teams: What do agile developers really need and want?,” in *Proceedings of the Third C\* Conference on Computer Science and Software Engineering*, C3S2E ’10, (New York, NY, USA), pp. 101–107, ACM, 2010.
- [6] S. Misra and M. Omorodion, “Survey on agile metrics and their inter-relationship with other traditional development metrics,” *SIGSOFT Softw. Eng. Notes*, vol. 36, pp. 1–3, Nov. 2011.
- [7] C. Keith, *Agile Game Development with Scrum*. Addison-Wesley: Pearson Education, 2010.
- [8] M. Cohn, “Release burndown chart [online] at (<https://www.mountangoatsoftware.com/agile/scrum/release-burndown>) accessed on 6 may 2016.”
- [9] D. Hartmann and R. Dymond, “Appropriate agile measurement: Using metrics and diagnostics to deliver business value,” in *Proceedings of the Conference on AGILE 2006*, AGILE ’06, (Washington, DC, USA), pp. 126–134, IEEE Computer Society, 2006.
- [10] S. Downey and J. Sutherland, “Scrum metrics for hyperproductive teams: How they fly like fighter aircraft,” in *System Sciences (HICSS), 2013 46th Hawaii International Conference on*, pp. 4870–4878, Jan 2013.