

Interview transcription - 2021-04-16- 15:00 over Zoom (remote)

Speaker 0 = interviewer

Speaker 1 = Interviewee

- Speaker 0 00:00:00 Uh, okay. So, uh, thank you for spending your Friday afternoon and, uh, being a part of this, uh, our thesis. Um, so we will, or I will describe the topic and some, uh, some, uh, some necessary descriptions for this interview and our discussion. So basically what we are looking into is the concept of a user stories planning, but in terms of our thesis, it's, uh, not necessarily restricted to only use the stories per definition. It could be any work item or any kind of task, and the process of dividing that into smaller pieces into smaller tasks. So even though I might ask some questions in terms of user stories, you don't have to think about it as specifically as a user, I would like to in order to get some benefits, for example.
- Speaker 1 00:01:10 Hmm. Okay. Yeah. So also kind of including epics and features and those kinds of?
- Speaker 0 00:01:18 Uh, so to get some perspective of who you are, would you mind sharing some, uh, your professional story? Uh, so you have done or your experience and what you are doing at this moment?
- Speaker 1 00:01:35 Uh, yes. Uh, so I can start with the, I work as the product owner for, uh, uh, the intake squad in, in [COMPANY NAME] and I've been in this role for like two months or something. And before that, I, uh, had role as a business requirement analyst in the same team. Uh, we had a quite large team before and now it's split into two different teams. So that's why I'm taking over One of the teams, um, uh, yes, I've been in this kind of team for a year almost. And before that, I worked as a consultant, um, as a business analyst, uh, with different, uh, kind of projects, mostly kind of business analysts, lots of, kind of requirement work, um, have a bachelor in system science from before and experience. Uh, yeah, I don't know how far back I should go, but maybe that's enough. Yes.
- Speaker 0 00:02:42 Uh, so if we dive into your, the current team that you work with now, there is usually a, some kind of a work board or backlog or something like that to keep track of everything that's going on, would be able to describe how that looks both in terms of what kind of things are there, or what kind of objects. And also if there is a hierarchy and how that looks in that case,
- Speaker 1 00:03:12 Uh, we're actually kind of in the middle of kind of reconstruction, many of those things, but for now we have, um, kind of, um, we work in a tribe. So we have a kind of tribe board where we have put epics for all of those kinds of projects that we have dedicated us to doing during the super sprint, uh, which are like four months or so, uh, there, we have all the Epics and it's only on Epic level on that kind of common tribe board, so that other kind of squads can also go in there and look what we have prioritized and what we are working on then kind of the status of those different things. Um, and from there, we have also connected those epics to other kind of tribe boards, um, where, where we are kind of having dependencies to other teams and so on.

- Speaker 1 00:04:07 Um, and then we have, uh, kind of a separate board for our team, um, that we are sharing with the other intake team. I think you have talked with [NAME OF COLLEAGUE] already. Uh, so you might have already heard about that, but so we have kind of on, on the Epic level, we have a common board where we have all the epics for, um, uh, both of the intake teams. Um, and from there, we are splitting it to, uh, features, um, and ah, then we are also, uh, splitting the features into different user stories. Um, and the user stories could also be splitted to kind of different tasks as we call them. But I don't work a lot with the tasks. I like my work is mostly focusing on kind of, uh, creating the epics and decomposing those into features and decomposing those into stories, um, where we are collaborating with several members in the team.
- Speaker 1 00:05:12 Um, and I guess that is kind of the structure. Um, but we're also having a preparation board that we are kind of, uh, starting to, um, work with a little bit more and we haven't decided what level we should keep that on yet. Um, and that is mostly to visualize more kind of architecture work and UX and UI work and preparation work because we're doing kind of a lot of things before we actually decide to develop something. Um, so we're, we're just now kind of in discussions on how to work with that preparation word in a good manner. And so I guess that is where we are now, but it's those kinds of levels that we are focusing on. Yeah.
- Speaker 0 00:06:03 Okay. So let's, uh, focus on what you, uh, well, let's focus this discussion on the parts that you are involved in. You mentioned decomposing, uh, from epics to smaller parts or, uh, so how is that typically done or would you be able to describe that process?
- Speaker 1 00:06:29 Uh, yes, I can try. It's a little bit kind of different each time, uh, or not each time, but, um, like we're working on several different kinds of projects that require different kind of, uh, uh, structure, maybe. Um, so, um, typically, um, or most commonly, uh, it's kind of, uh, we start with kind of requirements gathering and preparation gathered preparation, preparation material, and that's, uh, kind of could be included stakeholders. Um, and it's the PO um, if there's a subject matter expert, for example, or a business requirement analyst, um, we don't have that anymore, but before, um, and then we kind of gather all that kind of customer journey and scope and those kinds of things, and carrying that out as is process to be and integrations and all of those things. Uh, and from there, uh, the PO that, or I create the Epics, um, and in the Epics or do you want to know what we put in those epics or just how we're doing,
- Speaker 0 00:07:47 It's more, uh, uh, what goes behind your decisions on how to divide them if you know what I mean? So why do you make the choices you make kind of?
- Speaker 1 00:07:59 Hmm. Um, well, I guess to kind of, uh, create workable things, I guess, like we're trying to decompose everything into, uh, like a small piece as possible so that we can kind of release or, or develop something independently of the other things. Um, so if we're looking at the kind of user story structure, um, I try to, when I create those, I try to kind of follow this, um, uh, INVEST concept if, you know, if you're familiar with that. Um, so, so that everything can be kind of separately and that we don't describe the solution and those kinds of things and all those user stories. Um, we try to

kind of having different features, uh, kind of describing, for example, a use case or a workflow a little bit, depending on kind of the project, um, that we're working with and Epic is more of describing the business value. And then we break that down into different workflows or use cases or, or yeah. Those kinds of things. Um, and from there, um, the user stories. Yes.

- Speaker 0 00:09:21 So when do you usually do this process?
- Speaker 1 00:09:27 Um, that's also up for discussion at the moment, but we're having these supersprints, so, and then we have something that is called big room planning. So it's a few weeks, I think it's two weeks that we have kind of the planning, the pre-planning phase that we are kind of gathering all the requirements and like looking over what projects and everything and the dependencies and so on. Um, and then we decide for kind of in the big room planning is three days what Epics we are doing. Um, and like from the start, we're trying to create a skeleton of kind of what features and user stories should be included. Um, and if it's something similar that we've done before, it's quite easy to kind of already set that structure from the beginning. Um, and then we, we know kind of what to do on those kinds of four months, but then when, when it's kind of start, uh, when we are starting up kind of in a new area, for example, uh, we are going through those kinds of features and stories, and maybe, or often it's need for like more technical details and information and those kinds of things.
- Speaker 1 00:10:44 Um, so then we're going through it with the whole team and discussing kind of what, what we have and if there's something missing. Um, but we're also now in discussions of maybe kind of, um, have better, uh, backlog refinement meetings, because we haven't had like super defined, uh, a refinement meetings before. Um, but that is how it has worked so far.
- Speaker 0 00:11:16 Okay. And would you say that the, the new idea of introducing a new process is that because there is a need for even more detail or more refinement as you mentioned?
- Speaker 1 00:11:30 Mm. How do you mean? Or?
- Speaker 0 00:11:33 Is it a consequence of something not being of issues arising? It's the new process of refining Is that at the consequence of problems or is it?
- Speaker 1 00:11:47 No, I would say rather than kind of, if we're several teams collaborating on something, um, more like a need of updating information, uh, if, if another team has already kind of worked with an area for a few weeks, and then we're starting on our parts, we need to align with the other work. Um, and then I guess we don't have the time when we are kind of in the, those kinds of pre-planning phases to, to drill down on all the technical details. Um, since not all the team members are involved in that either. So that's why we're doing it at a later stage when it's also kind of, so it's also kind of fresh to start with when they're all starting the development.
- Speaker 0 00:12:38 So you mentioned that you were, that you do a lot of this work. Are there more people or more roles involved?
- Speaker 1 00:12:46 No. No, I'm kidding. Uh, yes. I mean, it's, um, I guess the, kind of the, the planning phase is mostly including, uh, me and also [NAME OF COLLEAGUE] we're doing a lot of those things together. And the scrum master has also helped us a

lot. And of course the architect is involved in all of, kind of those pre-planning things. And then depending on the area also UX or UI,

- Speaker 0 00:13:20 Uh, do you have a, do you have an idea of idea why or what those different roles bring in terms of value or why those roles are involved in the first place?
- Speaker 1 00:13:34 Um, I mean, it's because, um, uh, to, I guess kind of find the balance between, um, that we are kind of following the architectural landscape or of course, and also that, um, I mean, it's from the business side, there could be several kinds of requirements and needs, but we also kind of need to ensure that it actually brings a value to the customer. And it's a higher need of kind of, um, going through that in, in some of the areas, um, when it's kind of a new, completely new concept or initiative, it's important that we have kind of the customer in focus, not only kind of the technical solutions. And so that is why they're part of the planning phase also. Okay.
- Speaker 0 00:14:26 So if we, if you were to put yourself in, uh, in the shoes of a colleague, uh, how do you think that they perceive the result of, uh, the process of splitting the stories or epics, et cetera?
- Speaker 1 00:14:44 Um, I don't think that they are thinking a lot about it actually, um, because they often kind of developers in the team often, uh, only look at the, or mostly look at, the user stories and that's the kind of, they don't shake a lot of the information in the Epic or the features, or maybe the features. Um, and then if there's some, some questions they ask those questions, but I don't think they are kind of putting a lot of thought into kind of the, how, how it's been kind of decomposed into that kind of structure. Um, as long as it makes sense there or else they will ask you, I guess, but yeah.
- Speaker 0 00:15:34 Uh, so we talked a little bit about your reasoning behind the choices that you make when you split the user story or split the work item or whatever we want to call it. Is there anything specific that you always take into account no matter which type of, uh, Epic or feature it is, for example. So if it's a UX focused one, or if it's a purely a business one, is there something that you always take into account, which is independent of the type of story I would guess, or I would say?
- Speaker 1 00:16:11 Um, that's a hard question, I guess. Um, but, um, I'm, I'm trying to kind of have all the user stories following the same structure, so that kind of no matter who is going to work with them, they need to kind of, it should be easy to understand what's expected and, um, that it's written so that you understand kind of the value for the customer. And then it's kind of up to the one working with the story to kind of solve that, um, in a matter if that makes sense.
- Speaker 0 00:16:52 Yeah. Yeah. So the, the INVEST acronym is something that's like the essence of a user story, no matter where it comes from?
- Speaker 1 00:17:03 I would say so. Yes. Um, yeah.
- Speaker 0 00:17:08 So do you have any, uh, other specific either, uh, company-based guidelines or techniques from outside to kind of assist you or inspire you in this work apart from the INVEST then I guess?
- Speaker 1 00:17:27 Um, like nothing kind of, uh, um, I mean, or I'm not sure what

your, um, what you're after, if it's like previous experience or yeah.

- Speaker 0 00:17:44 Could be both. So previous experience. Absolutely. Uh, so I'm assuming that INVEST is something that, uh, either you have been reading about or something that feels like it's a good guideline to have. It's a good idea to have it in the back of my head at all times. Are there any other ones similar to that one, which always influence your work?
- Speaker 1 00:18:07 Um, I guess kind of, I've been to kind of agile courses and those kinds of things before had a scrum kind of course. And then I went to the, the SAFe, uh, uh, course as well, if you know that one. Um, and I guess the kind of INVEST concept is kind of mentioned on, on, on, on all of those. So it's, it's quite kind of general, so I think that's easy to apply. Um, but otherwise I guess it's just need to make sense for the team and that this kind of the most important, um, so either if you're like following a specific concept or whatever. Um, but yeah, so it's mostly make it as understandable and workable as possible. Um, that is kind of my thinking when, when creating. Hmm.
- Speaker 0 00:19:06 Okay. Uh, so the next question might also be a little bit difficult to kind of know where we're coming from, but so if you would think of the perfect scenario or the perfect result of your work apart from, it's probably being very clear as you mentioned, or understandable, or following the INVEST, for example, are there any other kind of definitions that you would apply to say that, okay, this was really, this was really successful?
- Speaker 1 00:19:41 Uh, that's a really hard question. Uh, and, and we're also, as I mentioned, like discussing kind of exactly this at the moment in the team, um, because I guess we have some kind of what we have on the board is mostly development things. And sometimes it's hard to visualize the, all the preparation work and like the architectural, uh, kind of discussions and UX work and business work also. Um, so I guess we are off, we, we would like to have a little bit more kind of an, a better way to visualize things than we have now. Um, but we have talked about kind of the backlog refinement, that those kinds of things to, uh, that would kind of add value to what we're doing now. Um, I don't know if any of this kind of answered the question, but I don't know if I can say anything specific.
- Speaker 0 00:20:47 It's all good. I mean, it's, uh, it's up to us to interpret, I guess, but it's, it's all valuable for sure. Um, yeah. Sorry.
- Speaker 1 00:20:58 I dunno.
- Speaker 0 00:21:00 Uh, so you talked about, uh, now it's a little bit of, uh, going back again, but, um, you talked about the, uh, the process of starting to actually evaluate your work. So, uh, you mentioned that one of the reasons behind that was to kind of, uh, have a better overview and understanding maybe between the teams, are there other aspects, uh, which influenced that choice to actually try and have things more defined in terms of the way that you do things or applying new kind of processes?
- Speaker 1 00:21:42 Um, I'm not sure how to answer that. Yes,
- Speaker 0 00:21:48 It's a long question. Uh, okay, so you, yeah. Okay. So let's play this up.
- Speaker 1 Give an example, maybe.

- Speaker 0 00:21:55 Um, yeah. So you mentioned that sometimes when you have several teams collaborating or working on similar things, you wanted to make sure that, and that was the reason for the refinement process. So you want to make sure that you kind of synchronize maybe themes. Yes. There are other reasons why you have figured that the, it will be good to kind of evaluate the work that you have done so far?
- Speaker 1 00:22:22 Yeah. Um, yes, because I, I, I have realized that kind of, when we're planning for something, say we are four teams collaborating on one project. Um, and then we are working at different times with that project. And then like, there's always kind of things that are changing, um, that, that, like, maybe for example, in one team and then the other teams don't get the information about the change, uh, and that kind of affects the work that we are doing. And then it's a lot of kind of chats where we're kind of, um, using Teams chats, um, in those projects. And it's, it's not as smooth as it could be. And I think, um, so that's the reason for kind of rethinking kind of how we can collaborate with the other teams. Um, and also when the kind of priorities are changing in another team, and then we have all these dependencies effecting us and so on. Um, so that this may be why I would like more kind of refinement and making sure that we actually have everything needed from the start. Um, and the changes are, are like happening. We should have a better way to, um, highlight those, um, so that we don't have to kind of ask later or if we see that something's wrong. Um, yeah. Hm,
- Speaker 0 00:23:55 Sure. Uh, so if you would think about what you think the main benefits of, of, uh, decomposing big things into smaller things, uh, what do you think the main benefits from that work is in reality, or have been for you or your team?
- Speaker 1 00:24:20 I guess so that we can kind of, uh, release things independently and move fast. Um, and, and I guess kind of it's different levels and they all have kind of their own purpose. Maybe the Epics isn't workable, but it describes the needs and the business value. So that's kind of a good level for, for business developers or business people to look at. Um, but we need to break it down in order to kind of be able to work with it. Um, and I guess that this kind of the, like if we, if we didn't break it down, we would need to wait for everything and not be able to test anything before in the end. And then it's, it's that kind of old approach, then we need to start from the beginning. So it's good to kind of be able to do small things, test state, and then go back or change something and then take the next part. And so on. Um, also in collaborating with other teams, um, maybe we have like a feature that we are collaborating with, and then we can kind of do split those user stories between those two teams on one feature, um, and still deliver the feature together. And then we might have different feature, uh, with another team in the same project. Um, then we can do those kinds of independently.
- Speaker 0 00:25:50 You talked a little bit about my next question, which is more to, of course, the negative side of this process, or if there are any, uh, so would you be able to expand apart from, or if you know, any other drawbacks such as you might have to start over if you do it in big chunks. So are there any other or additional drawbacks or negative aspects about this process, do you think, or have you experience?
- Speaker 1 00:26:18 Um, no. No, but it's, I think it's, uh, it's always good to break down things like to break it down in smaller pieces to get the full picture and to actually

kind of get an understanding of what you're trying to achieve and what is kind of to do also, instead of having it on only kind of one level, then it could be kind of interpreted in, in many different ways, I think. So that's the benefit of kind of having something and then you break it down. So it's maybe manageable and understandable. And I don't, I don't see any kind of negative things, um, with that, but then kind of how it's done, like in, in, in practice, um, when we're working with different stories and collaborating with teams, that's maybe a different kind of thing. Um, and not, not kind of having the different levels. Um, that is the good thing I think.

- Speaker 0 00:27:31 Uh, so, uh, picking up a one on your points, do, do you feel like there are any, um, any reoccurring things that you see as problems that keep on happening, so to speak? Like, is there anything which, you know, um, I don't know where I was going, uh, but you know, do you feel like there are any, or do you have experienced any like reoccurring kind of issues that always that happens more frequently than others?
- Speaker 1 00:28:10 And do you mean when working with kind of the different, uh, stories or levels or when creating them?
- Speaker 0 00:28:21 Yeah, it could be maybe, maybe that you miss out on things each time when you split something and those kinds of things. So are there any like negative aspects to actually dividing bigger into smaller? Are the risk of missing out on things falling behind the chairs for example, or stuff like that?
- Speaker 1 00:28:42 Um, yes. Or I think that depends on kind of how you do the preparation work before you're, you're kind of decomposing those features and user stories, because of course you can, you can miss something if you don't have all the requirements from the start, for example, um, or if you haven't kind of included the architect or a day, you UX person, then you might miss some things. Um, but that's also why it's so important to have kind of have, um, either it's called like a refinement session or some start up session that you go through different stories with the team and also kind of the stakeholders and to align that we have everything, um, before we start working with it, because we have, we have had those projects where the requirements haven't been kind of cleared from, from the start. Um, and then it will never end because it always kind of pops up something new. Um, so that's why we're trying to put a lot of effort in the kind of pre-planning phase, um, before we're kind of breaking or decomposing them into smaller pieces.
- Speaker 0 00:30:03 Hmm. Um, I might have pre-written questions. [NAME OF INTERVIEWEE COLLEAGUE], do you have any thing you would like to ask? Uh, and okay. There's a long question coming in here. Uh, okay. I'm just going to read it. Uh, so you mentioned that you wanted the Epic to be clearly specific, but also that breaking down epics in order to get the full picture, uh, what is the difference between those things? So either them being very specific and clear and also breaking down in order to get the full picture,
- Speaker 1 00:30:47 Um, maybe I meant, um, like the Epic should be clear on describing the scope of the project, not clear in that sense of describing the technical parts, for example, um, the Epics should kind of include, uh, a clear understanding of,

uh, stakeholders dependencies as what's in the scope. And definitely it should be clear what's out of scope, um, because that's always kind of a discussion that can come up later and also that kind of business value and kind of success criteria or what it's called. Um, and that I think need to be super clear in the Epic because otherwise those questions will kind of arise later on and bring confusion. Um, yes,

- Speaker 0 00:31:44 I think that answered the question. Thank you. Uh, do you, is there anything that you think that we have missed or anything that you would like to point out or add as a last, uh, uh, source of knowledge?
- Speaker 1 00:31:59 Um, well, you've asked a lot of difficult questions, but I think it's, um, I mean, even if we have this structure now, I think it's very important to kind of, um, keep evaluating that kind of structure, um, and improve it. Um, and especially for example, we have had like, uh, different people taking different roles and so on in the team. And just because one structure is working in one setup doesn't mean that it does in an under one. Um, and maybe it's a bigger need of, um, refinement example in, in some setup, uh, and not the other one. So I think it's important to kind of go over that process, um, continuously. Um, so that is kind of my last take, I guess
- Speaker 0 00:32:58 That's a good place to end. Thank you.
- Speaker 1 00:33:01 Thank you.