**CS 5128/6028 Large Scale Software Engineering**

**Graduate Student Project**

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The graduate student project for Large Scale Software Engineering called for a continuation of the key focuses present throughout the semester. Our group, consisting of Austin Conn and John Brown, chose to focus on the popular chat platform Discord for our focus for the project. As part of the definition for the project, we compared our findings of the Discord changelog against the datasets previously identified in the course, the WebEx and Zoom datasets. Our analysis of the Discord dataset does extend back to 2017 whereas the datasets from the course are limited to the year of 2022. Our dataset was directly derived from the Discord changelog found on the Discord Developer Portal at <https://discord.com/developers/docs/change-log>.

Our project consisted of two parts: an Exploratory Analysis of our dataset, and a comparison between our dataset and the collective datasets analyzed during the duration of the course, the Zoom and WebEx datasets. During our exploratory analysis, we derived a method of collating and organizing our dataset for analysis, as well as defining several conclusions we arrived at while analyzing the dataset. During our comparison phase of the project, we compare our conclusions from our analysis and compare them to the conclusions found during the course.

In order to compile a dataset for the Discord changelog, our first step was to scrape the webpage found on the developer portal into a file which we could manually manipulate into a format that could be analyzed. Previous attempts were made at scripting the scraping and manipulation of the webpage. However, it was found that due to a lack of standardized approach Discord took in publishing their changes, the nature in which the webpage data was formatted, and the lack of structured versioning, the level of effort required to implement these irregularities into organizing the data outweighed the level of effort required to manually manipulate the data into an analyzable format.

We do note, as opposed to the datasets from the course, our dataset does extend back to 2017. After compiling the information from the Discord changelog into an analyzable format, we found there were a total of 259 feature entries (Figure 1). Most of these entries were linked together, implying these feature releases were release alongside each other. This implication led to a classification of 85 unique release days over the more than five years spanning from 2017 through 2023. A key data point lacking in the Discord changelog were changes related to bug fixes or issues resolved as a result of user feedback. Due to the lack of granularity in bug fixes being reported, no features were removed or deprecated prior to exploratory analysis. We took the liberty in this decision during further analysis in the hopes that our ability to compare the Discord data with the Zoom and WebEx data.

**Figure 1: Discord Feature Count by Year (2017-2023)**

When looking at the magnitude in which changes were implemented throughout a calendar year, we found a rather even distribution across the year (Figure 2). We did note a spike in November of the calendar year, which appeared to be counterintuitive considering Thanksgiving falls at the end of the month. Many corporate calendars involve a short week surrounding Thanksgiving (in the case of our employer, Thanksgiving Thursday and the following Black Friday are given off) which would have normally led us to believe the week surrounding Thanksgiving should be rather unproductive. Given our analysis, however, we found this to be a surprising result.

**Figure 2: Discord Feature Count by Month (2017-2023)**

To get a further understanding of our dataset, we next analyzed it by grouping number of release days by year to grasp how many noteworthy changes were made by year (Figure 3). By analyzing the dataset in this manner, we do see, as the product matures, more changes occurring as each year passes. This is likely directly attributable to several key factors, including the age of the product, the number of users on the platform, and the number of developers working on the platform.

As a product ages, it appears logical that the product would grow in width; the product would expand to cover more than the initial target for which it was developed. The breadth of customer base that a product cover could be assumed to also account for the increase in feature release a product experience each year.

Further, as a product ages, it could be expected that the number of users would also grow. We believe that this is represented in the growth seen from year to year regarding number of feature releases per year growing.

**Figure 3: Discord Release Day Count by Year (2017 -2023)**

Lastly, we observed that an addition of developers could further increase the number of features introduced throughout the year. As is aligned with the previous two observations, it is logical that as a product grows and its userbase grows, additional resources would be needed in terms of developmental ability which could account for an increased number of developers helping to contribute to the overall total of features released at any given time.

In Figure 4, we see that it is common for the end of the year to be the time to deprecate old features. This could be due to features introduced during the current year being superseded by newer developments. Another possibility could be due to the perceived “year-end slow-down” where companies may choose to focus on tech-debt. Many companies opt to relegate deprecation of features and code-cleanup to tech-debt. If Discord chose to address tech-debt in the slower part of the year, this could explain the spike in deprecation of features occurring late in the year.

**Figure 4: Discord Feature Count Depreciating Old Features by Year (2017 -2023)**

To aid our analysis of the Zoom and WebEx data, we determined that an analysis of the Discord data focused specifically on 2022, the year which the Zoom and WebEx data were focused on, would be of benefit to our comparison. In Figure 5, we find our analysis of the number of features addressed by Discord per month in the year 2022. We see a spike in November which further coincides with the conclusions of the previous forms of analysis. Many of the previous conclusions support the spike seen in November 2022.

**Figure 5: Discord Feature Count by Month (2022)**

Comparing the conclusions derived from the analysis of the Discord data (Figure 5) against the WebEx (Figure 6) and Zoom analyses (Figure 7), we find a stark difference. Most notably, we find that the feature counts for the Zoom and WebEx data appear to be more uniform throughout the year compared to the data from Discord. While we can form suspicions for this appearance, without performing identical analyses on all 3 data sets for the same time frame, we would only be speculating as to whether a causal or coincidental relationship exists.

Comparing the three sets of data, we also find that both the Discord feature count and the Zoom feature counts contain two months where there were no features identified. We were unable to come to any conclusions as to why there would be months with zero features identified, which is further complicated in the Zoom data where the months containing no features appear together (September and October of 2022).

**Figure 6: Zoom Feature Count by Month (2022)**

We also noted that Zoom and WebEx appear to have more features identified in 2022 and believe this could be due to the more business-oriented nature of the two products. Discord’s primary demographic is the gaming community which, while a large community, is not as incentivized in using a platform as a business may be.

We believe another possible explanation for the greater feature counts in the Zoom and WebEx data could stem from the company sizes. According to Wikipedia, Discord employs 600 people globally, Zoom employs 8,484 people as of January 2023. Number of employees for WebEx is a little more difficult to discern as WebEx is a subsidiary of Cisco but as reported on Wikipedia, in 2015 employed over 10,000 employees. We believe this to be a causal relationship as a larger company likely could implement more features each year due to increased development resources.

**Figure 7: WebEx Feature Count by Month (2022)**

The last of our conclusions of the data sets are that we expected to see many similarities in the data due to these platforms being similar in their function and their intended purpose. All three platforms are meant to connect individuals virtually and provide them with tools and features to allow for collaboration without needing to physically meet in person. At the outset of COVID in 2020, we did see a large increase in focus on telecommunication and being able to collaborate virtually. We believe this could have been a key factor in supercharging the development efforts of these three companies.

Overall, we found the analysis of these datasets to be a challenging yet rewarding experience, pushing us to examine many possibilities to explain the figures we were getting out of our analysis. We think with further analysis of the last two datasets, Zoom and WebEx, we could likely derive more commonalities between the three platforms based solely on the characteristics of their development cycles.

Citations

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