MEASURING SOFTWARE ENGINEERING

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**Introduction**

In today’s world we live in a software industry filled with a rapid transition from development, to testing, to production thanks to methodologies such as Agile development and DevOps. This rapid deployment pipeline comes hand-in-hand with a responsibility and need for companies/organisations to measure and assess their developers from a professional standpoint.

Within these continuous integration and deployment environments there is a pressing need to rapidly ship new versions of code and update products on the fly. But the question is how can the organisations employing these developers draw useful metrics from this workflow to ensure productivity levels remain high, work is distributed evenly and tasks are being completed across the entire team.

There have been numerous attempts to measure the productivity of software developers within the industry. When measuring productivity in any other work driven environment it can be quite simply reduced to the equation:

*Productivity = Output ÷ Input*

But what defines input and output – especially useful – metrics within the software industry is quite a hard question to grasp a conclusion on. Is it as simple as counting the lines of code from a given developer per day? But what if these lines are defective/useless or that developer had in fact been researching into a current task to ensure that it is completed efficiently and correctly. Should a developers hours spent coding be tracked and used as input metrics? These are the questions that will be discussed throughout the following report.

Productivity must also be considered from a number of different perspectives. It is not enough to just evaluate the productivity of a given developer within an organisation. This developer/individual must be analysed in parallel with that of the organisation in which they work. When attempting to measure organisational productivity one must account for the productivity of all those who influence the life of a developer such as those within other departments and also their respective managers.

**Measuring and Gathering Metrics**

There are endless methods of gathering metrics from a software development team ranging from counting the lines of code written by a given developer on a given day to measuring how much of an impact each minute spent working by that developer has had towards a given project.

When approaching a basic metric such as how many lines of code are written by a given developer each day there are quite a number of factors that must be taken into account. Just because a developer has produced over 10,000 lines of code this week does not mean that these lines are optimised, bug-free, the best approach and easy to read. This output must be measured in parallel with the testing done on the code such as through methods of unit testing and code coverage to ensure all possible scenarios have been accounted for and handled correctly. Unit testing and Test Driven Development (TDD) can add an additional 15-35% increase in initial development time which may come across as substantial, but this increase in development time also brings with it a 40-90% decrease in pre-release defects. From this same survey 78% of developers thought that TDD improves the overall productivity of the programmer and 92% believed that TDD yields higher quality code. (George & Williams).

While TDD metrics may be an excellent way of measuring your developers productivity from a usefulness standpoint, consider a scenario where a method is found with an npath complexity in the millions. This code could probably be refactored into a simpler structure but at the same time the business impact of this must be considered above the theoretical reasons for making such a refactor. In most cases it might not be cost effective to take such an approach, instead the team should agree on levels of compliance and standards to which their code is to be upheld to.

Measuring the impact of a developers code must be analysed from a number of different perspectives. Changes or additions with say 100+ consecutive lines are to be considered of a lower impact as they are more than likely to have been quite easy to implement when compared to an addition that spans across multiple different files with additions and deletions. It is likely that the latter scenario took a lot more planning in development and a more thought-driven approach taking into account various crucial dependencies between files.

**Computational Platforms Available**

A wide range of companies and organisations in the software industry today hold their code base on repositories such as GitHub. With over 2.1 million repositories hosted, GitHub provides some useful analysis and metrics into the development lifecycle of a project and also the team working on it. A GitHub commit can tell us a lot about a given developer and allows us to draw some particularly useful metrics from the source code they are contributing to a project.

GitHub commits can be used to give a brief overview of the output of a given developer within a team and to gather metrics such as lines of code added or deleted. These commit statistics however do not provide enough detail to draw much useful conclusions from this output with regards to how much of an impact these contributions have had towards a project. One insight these commit metrics can provide is how important a given developer may be within an organisation due to their contributions to the code base. A developer who has seen the majority of the code pass through from the beginning of a project be it from their own contributions or by reviewing pull requests will have a much larger value than a newly recruited developer, even at a senior level. If any bugs were to arise it is quite likely that this developer may be have knowledge of how to resolve the issue even it was not their own personal contribution.

**Algorithmic Approaches Available**

As mentioned above productivity can from a vague standpoint be measured as output divided by input. However, in order to account for other factors within the life of a software developer this equation must be changed.

In the software industry, productivity has historically been measured using the equation:

*Productivity = ESLOC / PM*

* *ESLOC = Effective or equivalent source lines of code*
* *PM = Person Month*

ESLOC must be greater or equal to the number of source lines created or changed. Using this metric can be quite easy when all of the source code contributions are brand new. However, in a professional environment there are constantly bugs arising and code needs to be fixed on the go continuously. As a result the equation must be refactored once again to account for this. When modifications occur there are several other factors that have to be accounted for. Modification requires an understanding of the code to be changed as well as the underlying system(s) or architecture(s). If there is insufficient documentation a developer must perform *‘reverse engineering’* to figure out how the code works and how it should be modified accordingly. Modifications also must respect any existing dependencies and as a result impose more difficulty on the developer. The complexity of a modification also increases if the modification must be done in a new language or has to be compiled with a new compiler or linked with a new linker etc.

To account for all of the above complexities an adaptation adjustment factor (AAF) can be applied on the modified code as follows:

*AAF = 0.4Fdes + 0.3Fimp + 0.3Ftemp*

* *Fdes = % of software requiring redesign and reverse engineering*
* *Fimp = % of software that must be physically modified (re-coded)*
* *Ftemp = % of software requiring regression testing*

Using this adaptation adjustment factor the previous ESLOC variable can be re-written and defined as:

*ESLOC = = Snew + Smod + Sreused \* AAF*

* *Snew = new lines of code*
* *Smod = modified lines of code*
* *Sreused = reusued lines of code*

While having an equation such as the one described above can be quite useful, it is not easy to count ESLOC for developers within an organisation. External tools/scripts must be used/designed in order to scrape statistics off of an organisation’s code repository and calculate the resulting ESLOC metrics. However, when ESLOC metrics are used continuously over multiple different projects within an organisation they can be significantly effective in allowing a cross-comparison between the productivity of developers throughout a given development task.

**Methodology Approaches Available**

# Bibliography

George, B., & Williams, L. (n.d.). *An Initial Investigation of Test Driven Development in Industry.*