Pivotal Tracker

An Overview of The Application
and
How We Use It at The Frontier Group

The Agile Manifesto

Have You Read It?

We are uncovering better ways of developing
software by doing it and helping others do it.
Through this work we have come to value:

Individuals and interactions over processes and tools

Working software over comprehensive documentation

Customer collaboration over contract negotiation

Responding to change over following a plan

That is, while there is value in the items on
the right, we value the items on the left more.

Tracker is a Tool

- Tools should increase the ability of a person.

- Using a tool is an acquired skill.

- Tools should be continuously improved.

- Different tools are used for a large project.

- Tracker facilitates an agile development process.

Monday, 2 August 2010

Efficiency isn't the only measure of the ability to do your job. Efficiency at the expense of health/longevity/etc. reduces code quality, group quality, dev retention and is short sighted.

Different tools - integration of tracker with other tools.

Facilitates agile but doesn't make you agile.

Will take some time to learn and settle on a workflow that includes Tracker ... or not.

The 80/20 of Tracker

- Points - how hard is a feature to implement.

- Velocity - points you're finishing per iteration.

- Current - what's being worked on.

- Backlog - queued work in order of priority.

- Icebox - upcoming work/ideas.

Story Types

- Three core story types (plus one).

- Feature - these add business value.

- Chore - requirements to delivering a feature.

- Bug - broken parts of a delivered feature.

- Release marker - sets a release date/milestone.

Bugs and Chores
Don't Score

- Points for these stories were included in the original feature stories.

- Bugs would therefore 'double count' points.

- Chores are infrastructure/ops side of a feature.

- *You can assign points if you really want to.*

Chores are the more hidden costs of implementing features. they may not offer business benefit at all, or they may not offer client visible benefit.

Search as an example. Simple search may be slow and so it's limited in functionality.

Investigating indexes or other solutions may allow a broader search ability and therefore entice more customers and make the system more useful to existing customers.

Labels

- They're what you know as tags.

- Have a variety of uses.

- We use them for high-level feature separation.

- Could use them for bug severity.

- Great for skeletal style planning.

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They are tags, but don't overuse them.

Resource requirements/blockers - need client interaction, waiting on resources, etc

Very, very easy to search - just click on them

Parallel development - labels allow you to easily see any reliant upcoming work, or to better more easily re-label work into separate non-reliant streams

Boring Bits

- Attaching files to stories is a piece of cake.

- Commenting - tracked and notified via email.

- Integrates with third parties.

- Integrates with your tools via API and hooks.

How We Use It?

- Stories are created in the ice box with a title to jog memory.
- Stories are queued in the backlog in priority of delivery.
- Story detail is developed from PM-client communication.
  - Description & comments contain only delivery related points.
- The iteration/sprint is agreed on and stories assigned.
  - This is where a Release story is used.
- Dev pops a story off the backlog and starts work.
  - Required resources and estimate confirmed here.
  - Issues happen here usually with new staff/projects.
- Dev finishes work.
- Product manager will deliver complete story to staging environment.
  - Story is reviewed here.
- Client will accept/reject in the staging environment.

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Resources and questions should happen most of the time at sprint-org time but for new devs or just sometimes you'll hit blockers later in the sprint. These need to be rectified urgently.

WIP should be low and relies on a tight finish - accept cycle. Lag between dev marking a task as finished and someone reviewing it increases WIP. High WIP is not the most efficient use of anyone's time, it's a measure of multi-tasking. Searches cover this easily.

Story owner is the person working on the story.

Handling Issues

- A PM still needs to look after Tracker.
  - The client can get lazy.
  - The client needs to be trained in acceptance states.
  - The client cannot independently queue/estimate work.
  - Someone needs to have an overview/brief of the project/app.
- Discovered scope (DS) is separated into other stories.
  - DS will be ice-boxed or queued outside the sprint
  - Its extra work and needs to be counted and prioritised.
  - Blow-out stories tend to come back to DS.
- Post sprint-org blockers will come up in retrospective.
  - Measures to combat are discussed and resolved as a team.
- Retrospectives are important.
  - Let the team vent, limit their time, assign outcomes.
- Automated deployment and testing is virtually required.

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Clients want to enter features as bugs... they're 0 points.
Clients want to reject tasks for new requirements - these are new stories.
I've never created a 0 point feature - half an hour to a developer is more of an abstract idea than a measure of time.
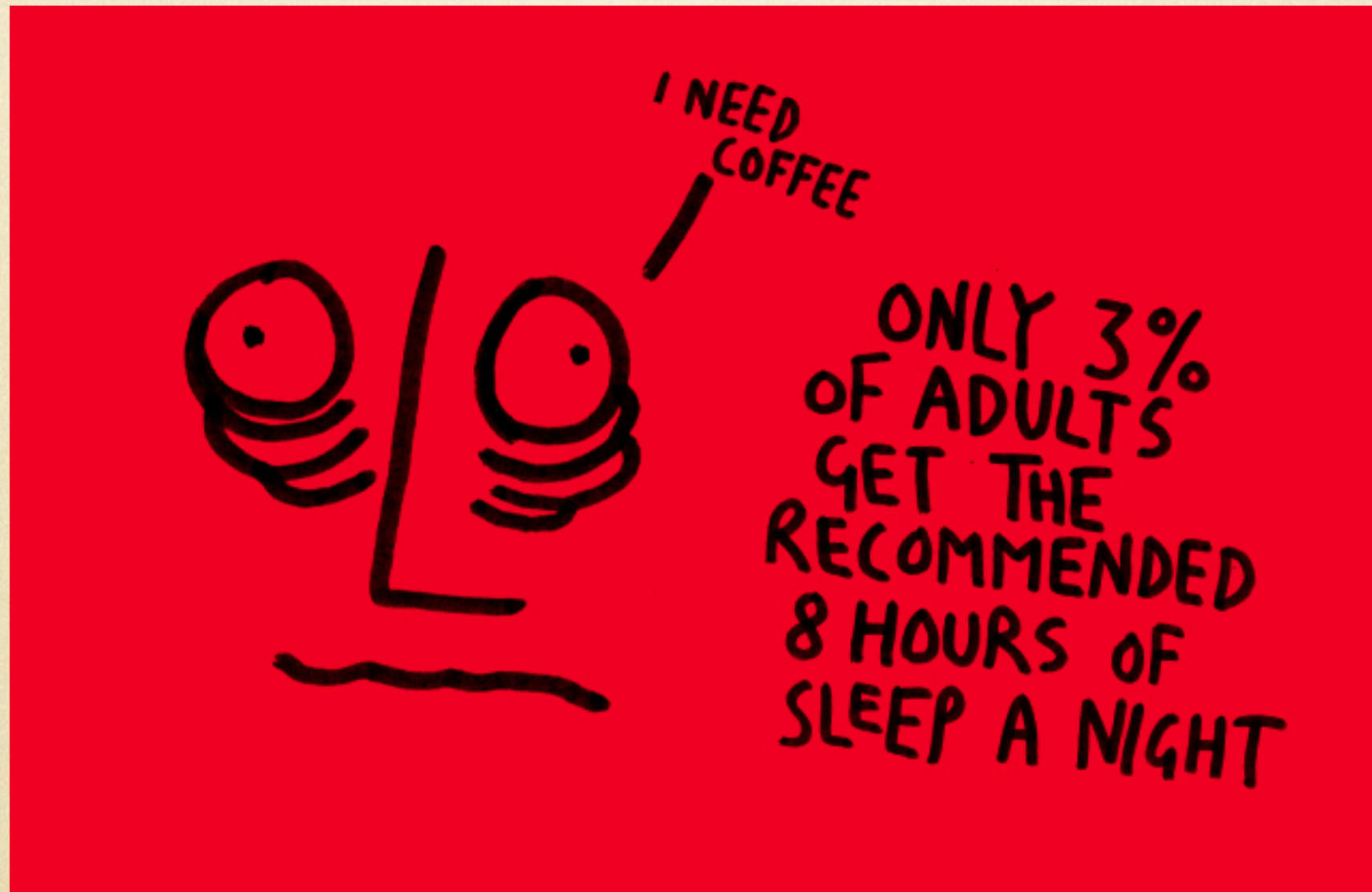
Without automated deployment, whoever is in charge of QA will spend most of their time deploying rather than testing. Devs can help a lot here by making deployable code.

Retros also share things between teams as everyone is involved.

Integrations

- We've used :
  - Slurper for simple story importing.
  - Story Mapper for planning and re-organising projects.
  - Tracker's API for time tracking/billing integration.
  - Growl notifications on project changes.

- Other interesting integrations :
  - Easy Insight for analytics.
  - Post-commit hooks can comment and change story state.

Tracker Can Help You Sleep

Thank You

Resources

- Slurper - http://github.com/hashrocket/slurper

- Story Mapper - http://www.trackerstorymaps.com

- Pivotal Tracker - http://www.pivotaltracker.com

- Pivotal Blog - http://pivotallabs.com/blog

- Easy Insight - http://www.easy-insight.com/