

Agile Sizing of User Stories

I learned a number of things during this exercise, many of which surprised me. The main concept I would highlight is that all proposed projects have to be seen within the light that everything is relative. That is, everyone has their own preconceived idea of how a proposed project might look like and therefore, how much work, effort and risk it might entail. The goal, however, is for the team to work together to communicate and bring each preconceived idea closer together to converge together. In essence, it is an exercise in groupthink. What is interesting is that though each of the numbers (1-20) does not inherently mean anything (again, they are all relative), the group works together to come up with an agreed value for each project. Therefore, depending on the talent of the group, the size chosen for a given task may vary from group to group.

One of the most important take aways from this was that asking questions and figuring out every detail of the proposed project is absolutely pivotal. That is, interacting with the leader and determining exactly what the project expectations are is key in sizing the task. I observed that when our group had a large amount of variation in our votes, we often had not determined enough details on the project expectations. Often, further discussion and voting, after a couple iterations, would lead to a commonly understood number. Additionally, as our group worked to find an agreement on different proposed tasks, I noticed our initial “intuition” on a project increased. That is, as we began to create a common understanding of what each of the numbers entailed in terms of project size, time and risk, our first guesses became more accurate.

This activity also taught me the importance of coming to a consensus within a group. So often, I might have a concept of how long something might take or how difficult a certain task is but when we are working on a project which requires the entire group effort, everyone in the group must be on the same page. In other words, a scrum meeting sets the groundwork. It allows the team to talk about the project, how difficult it may be and even start to discuss implementation strategies. It is within this setting that a group begins to actually tackle a problem and prioritize.

It is pivotal to have all of the information and for there to be a scrum master. Without one, the team will not be informed enough to make a proper decision or to size the task appropriately. So, in essence, the team needs to be functionally efficient, communicate and work together well.