

team-7 Planning poker exercise reflection paper

OPIM 5668: Project Risk Management and Agile Methodologies



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We are currently working on a project to develop an application named ‘Hospital Management Services’ which has a lot of unique features available targeting patients, other citizens, hospital management, insurance management, pharmacy owners, etc. We have listed out a few user stories which enclose all the features that we have planned to incorporate into the application that we develop. We are a team of four and we met in class to decide on the estimation of the tasks, and we continued the meeting virtually on Microsoft teams to finish the estimation of all the tasks.

Since some of our user stories overlapped in terms of feature coverage, we had some misunderstandings about how one user story is different from another. This was taken care of through some convincing reasoning by the member who created the user story. This discussion also helped in spotting duplicity in the user stories. These user stories were then replaced by new potentially distinct user stories. There were a few user stories that were written in a fashion that could be misunderstood as duplicates. These user stories were then rewritten to communicate the core functionality expected and the distinction more clearly.

Post clearing these misunderstandings the entire team went through all the user stories once again to cross-check for any additional duplicity in terms of functionality or implementation process. Once the team has ensured that there exists no duplicity within the user stories, we went ahead with the agile estimating process.

Like most software development projects, the Hospital Management Services project is a complex project having some interdependent tasks. Additionally, the team had little expertise in the Healthcare industry and hence was not knowledgeable enough to conduct ‘Affinity Estimating’ which required in-depth estimating sessions. Recognizing the complexity of the project, lack of expertise in the domain, and uncertainty regarding implementation we decided to go ahead with a more relative method – ‘The Wide Band Delphi’.

In the Wide Band Delphi estimating method’s planning poker exercise, each team member selected a card as per their understanding of the task. Once everyone had selected their cards, cards were revealed and each team member's estimates for that task were compared. If each team member gave the same score we moved ahead with the next task. If not, we had another round of discussion where we discussed the reasoning for the estimate we selected and tried to sell our respective idea of reasoning and in return received a counter explanation from other team members. Once we were done with the discussion, again every team member selected one card to represent the updated estimate. Once all the team members selected the estimate, all the cards were revealed again to check if all the team members have selected the same estimate to see whether all the team members were on the same line of understanding. If every team member selected the same story point estimate, we finalized that value as the estimate for that particular task. If not, we have repeated the process of having the discussion and revealing the cards till we reach the same point estimate. If there is any conflict of opinion or any ties occurred between the team members, we followed the voting procedure as we have agreed in the team charter and the idea or point with the majority of votes was finalized. We have carried out a similar process for all the tasks and listed out their respective point estimates.

The planning poker exercise helped to improve collaboration and communication among the team members. By discussing every task and posing questions, we were able to identify any ambiguities and eliminate misunderstandings before we provide our estimates for a user story or a bug. Also, it allowed each person to provide a point estimate of the task they have chosen independently and finally agree on the amount of effort that is needed for each task.

During this planning poker exercise with the team, we also encountered a few challenges. One being, estimation for a few tasks was dependent on familiarity with new technologies. As every team member is not familiar with the technology, the discussion was led by the team member who has more knowledge of the technology instead of having a two-way discussion. We have overcome this challenge by making a slight change to the process and adapting to some characteristics of the affinity estimating method. We did this by allotting some time to do some self-research on the technology to have a two-way productive discussion. Another challenge is that this exercise is a time-consuming process especially when we get different estimates from the team members, and we ended up spending more time having discussions. We tried to mitigate this by trying to convey our opinion and ideas to the team members and clear all the ambiguities in the first round of discussion itself.

After completing the exercise we learned that estimating in Scrum Agile can be very time-consuming and even more so if we are using ‘Wide Band Delphi’ over ‘Affinity Estimating’. On top, the ambiguity of the process can lead to inefficiency. Both of the deficiencies with this exercise can be improved by acquiring knowledge about the related workflows, connecting with experts in the domain, or having a quick market analysis to get better clarity. Another drawback of time consumption can be handled by having time-boxed discussions to avoid unnecessary perfection and thus improve efficiency.

Additionally, the Planning Poker exercise which is primarily a Wide Band Delphi estimating technique lacks accuracy when compared to Affinity Estimating. We realized that the skill of estimating with high accuracy and low precision gets better with experience. Having said that allotting time to do some self-research has helped our team to come up with reliably accurate estimates.

To conclude, the planning poker exercise while having a few deficiencies is still the best method for estimating complex ambiguous projects, which can be further improvised to give us more accurate estimates and reliable results.

At the end of the exercise, the total sum of point estimates for our team’s tasks is ‘283’.