

Estimation

Just like Waterfall, most Agile methodologies encourage estimation of work. Estimation in Agile is about getting the best knowledge in the room rather than the accuracy of a specific number. The goal is to ensure that the Product Owner and delivery team have mutual understanding. The estimation process often reveals miscommunication about a story or produces questions that need to be answered before development begins. Whatever your framework, estimation should always be done by the people doing the work — for Scrum this means the delivery team. Although the delivery team does the estimation, a Product Owner can still ask how an estimate was arrived at order to make sure the scope of the story is understood and agreed upon.

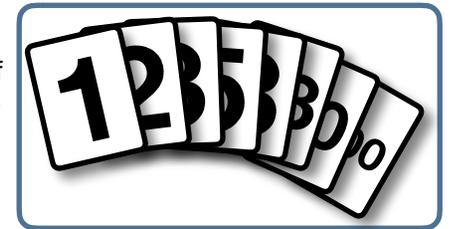
Relative Estimation

Most Agile estimation techniques are based on Relative Estimation. This means an item is sized by being compared against an established benchmark. The estimation consists of the question: “Is this bigger, smaller or the same as our benchmark?” The benchmark needs to be an item familiar to the whole team.

Estimation Techniques

Planning Poker

Planning Poker is a relative estimation technique for stories that are small enough for a team to consume. Each member of the delivery team gets a suit of point cards, typically numbered: 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 40, 100. A benchmark is used, usually 2-3 days in size and chosen as 3 points. The Product Owner reads out a new story and individual delivery team members compare the story to the benchmark. The estimate is for completing the story and includes all programming, QA, configuration scripts, documentation, etc. If the new story is the same size as the benchmark, choose the 3 point card. If bigger, choose 5; if twice as big choose 8, etc.



Everyone reveals their cards at the same time. If the points are the same, write down the estimate and move on to the next story. If the cards are all 1-2 numbers apart (e.g. all 3's and 5's) choose the large number (the most conservative) and move on. If the numbers are further apart, the team needs to discuss their estimates to ensure everyone has the same understanding of the story. If the Product Owner feels the estimate does not match their idea of the story, the team should discuss the estimate. Once the conversation has brought more clarity, the process repeats until consensus is found.

Note that developers and QA are not estimating “their part”. An estimate encompasses all Acceptance Criteria and whatever is needed to meet the Definition of Done. All members of the delivery team should participate, when a story becomes part of a sprint’s forecast, any of member of the team may be involved in its implementation.

T-Shirt Sizing

T-Shirt sizing is a relative estimation technique used for big stories or epics. T-Shirt sizing categorizes epics into Small, Medium, Large or Extra Large. A benchmark epic that is considered a Medium should be jointly understood by the team. A good rule of thumb is that a Medium is twice the size of a Small and a Large is twice the size of a Medium. An Extra Large is too big and should be broken down before estimating.



A team exercise to quickly do T-Shirt sizing is “chess moves”. A chart is created with columns for “S”, “M”, “L”, and “XL”. Epics are put on sticky notes. Each team member gets 1 or 2 moves. A move can be either placing an epic in a column, or moving an already categorized epic into a different column. If multiple people keep moving the same epic between columns then the team should discuss the requirements until consensus can be met.