

What Do User Stories Tell Us about the Business Value?

Zornitza Bakalova, Maya Daneva

z.bakalova@utwente.nl, m.daneva@utwente.nl

University of Twente, the Netherlands

Introduction: What we want to study and why this is important?

Although the agile methods are spreading fast in the industry and are getting increasing attention from the research community, the topic of the quality of agile requirements engineering (RE) artifacts – the so-called user stories (USs), seems to be under-researched. Advocates of agile methodologies (AMs) claim that AMs reduce waste by implementing only those requirements that bring value for the customers. For USs to help reduce waste, they should satisfy six quality criteria [Cohn], the most important one being that USs should be *Valuable* (to customers or users). The literature sources on AM recommend that ideally, the value should be stated explicitly on the story card. Our previously published research, however, revealed that business value evades explicit specification: we found that the business value more often than not is present only implicitly or assumed as a tacit knowledge of those involved in agile RE.

Our goal in this empirical study is to get a deeper understanding of how the agile requirements, used in practice, specify business value and how agile project teams members (both customers and developers) reason about customers' value and customers' value-creation. We will analyze the agile requirements artifacts with respect to: (i) format, (ii) content, and (iii) level of granularity of the documented business value statement. The results of the study will help identify and distill good practices for writing useful USs that do support the value creation process. Well written USs with explicit value statements could help to identify unnecessary requirements and thus reduce waste for the customers. Furthermore, they can help for value-driven decisions-making on requirements priorities at inter-iteration time.

Wanted from industry:

We welcome collaboration with any agile organization that uses USs as requirements documents for their projects. Ideally we consider two to four projects of different sizes to be enough for the purpose of our research. We would need a max of 5 person/hours distributed over 4 weeks of time from the representatives of the participating organization. The best fit would be people writing the user stories or prioritizing them. The time will be spent on interviewing the representatives from the company to understand the project context and to share our results. We consider our research to be of value to the company, because it may shed light into the quality levels of the company's agile requirements specifications and, if necessary, it also would suggest improvement actions to increase the quality of the USs with respect to value specification.

Work Plan

Our work plan includes the following: First we will analyze the USs created in different projects. Second, practitioners from the organizations will be interviewed about the practices of the organization with respect to writing the USs and using them further during the development and decision-making process. The interviews will be semi-structured, with a questionnaire prepared up-front. The data will be analyzed by means of the Grounded Theory approach.