Task duration estimation

Tom Rochette <tom.rochette@coreteks.org>

November 2, 2024 — 36c8eb68

1 Task duration vs appetite

- If you are building a product, it is your responsibility to define how much time you're willing to bet/spend on a feature, this is called the appetite
- Unlike a task duration estimate, an appetite is a fixed amount of time that is defined in order to define the boundaries of what the feature to develop should be vs an estimate which means that the task should be completed and we expect it to take X amount of time (variable)
- The appetite helps set the amount of time before a task is deemed without a proper scope

2 Do

- Record initial task duration estimate
- Record task duration after its completion

3 Estimating duration

- Make a high-level, gut feeling estimate of the duration of the whole project
- Lowest (fastest, optimistic), average (most likely), and highest (slowest, pessimistic) time duration estimates
    - A final value is computed by taking (lowest + 4*average + highest)/6
    - List the reasons why you think things may go right/wrong
- Heuristic estimation
    - At a high level, you should be able to tell how much each portion of a project should have over the complete project
- Use historical data
    - If you have underestimated in the past, you will keep underestimating if you do not adjust
- Break down any item that is larger than 10% of the project into smaller items

3.1 Factors

- Duration will depend on the skills of the person completing the task. An expert will generally take less time than a novice to accomplish the same task

4 Tracking duration

4.1 Issues

- Being interrupted while working (difficulty tracking beginning and ending)
- Working on unrelated things at the same time (diluted productivity)
- Working on multiple tasks at the same time (task overlapping)
- Determining what is and what isn't part of a task (task isolation)

- Changes in task definition
- Estimating tasks for which we have no experience

5 Task duration tool

5.1 Requirements

- Easy to start/stop tracking a task (less than 15 seconds, otherwise it feels like an interruption)

6 References

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Program_evaluation_and_review_technique
- https://rclayton.silvrback.com/software-estimation-is-a-losing-game
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Software_development_effort_estimation
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Work_breakdown_structure