The Power of Commitments

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Warm-Up Questions

Answer in your tables, be prepared to share something with the whole group

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word “commitment”?
2. What kinds of commitments do you make regularly in your life?
3. Is making commitments antithetical to an agile software development approach?
Example Commitments

“I’ll fix the door handle this weekend”
“I’ll attend the staff meeting in person”
“I’ll buy the Disney tickets this week”
“I will give a talk at the conference on July 30”
“Sure, we can do lunch next week”
“I’ll have the writeup to you by COB tomorrow”
“I’ll call you tomorrow at 11:30”
“I’ll drop off the dry cleaning after work”

What’s the relationship between commitment and trust?

• Making and keeping commitments is essential for building trust
• Failing to keep commitments is one of the fastest ways to break trust
• Commitments are a key part of any trust relationship
Making commitments can be difficult / scary for a variety of reasons

• Too many unknowns
• We have been burned in the past
• Don’t want to disappoint
• Don’t know enough about the future
• Don’t want to do the work
• Unsure how to do the work
• Stakes too high
• Don’t trust others
• Don’t trust ourselves

How does this apply to the software development environment?
A conundrum

Failure to keep commitments

Unwillingness/ inability to make commitments

This is one of the biggest pain points in software development.

We need to get good at responsibly making commitments, even in the face of uncertainty.
A true software craftsman knows how to balance uncertainty and commitment

• The ability of individuals to make and keep commitments rolls up to the ability to make meaningful commitments as a team
• A team’s ability to do this is a key component of project/company success
• We can improve our ability to make and keep commitments

1. Visualize your commitments
2. Limit “Work in Progress”
3. Say “no”
4. Distinguish between commitments & predictions
5. Use historical data & probability
6. Incorporate “stretch” stories
7. Renegotiate as necessary

TOOLS FOR IMPROVING COMMITMENT MAKING & KEEPING
1. Visualize your commitments

Make the intangible tangible

2. Limit “Work in Progress” (WIP)
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3. Say “no”

Seven simple ways to say “no”

1. “I can’t commit to this as I have other priorities at the moment.”
2. “Now’s not a good time as I’m in the middle of something. How about we reconnect at X time?”
3. “I’d love to do this, but ...”
4. “Let me think about it first and I’ll get back to you.”
5. “This doesn’t meet my needs now but I’ll be sure to keep you in mind.”
6. “I’m not the best person to help on this. Why don’t you try X?”
7. “No, I can’t.”

Celestine Chua, http://zenhabits.net/say-no/
4. Distinguish between commitments & predictions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>story bucket</th>
<th>point values</th>
<th># stories</th>
<th>total pts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>93</td>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>152</td>
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<tr>
<td>XL</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>91</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
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<td>462</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Predicted Velocity of Team

- Pessimistic: 36
- Most likely: 48
- Optimistic: 54

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4. Distinguish between commitments & predictions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ft Story</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Pt Prediction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RS Reports for second client use different template</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS Produce CR site report with dummy values</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS Produce CR site report with correct values</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>RS Produce CR area manager report with dummy values</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>RS Produce CR area manager report with correct values</td>
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<tr>
<td>RS Produce CR ops director report</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SC System imports Excel spreadsheet from email for electricity, waste, and gas</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS System imports client setup data from spreadsheet</td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CS Admin can configure report distribution mechanism</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS Admin can remove some clientinfo data with web front end</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS Produce same three reports for BI</td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS Produce same three reports for ST</td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO System notifies admin of missing import data for each utility</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM Site manager logs in to Gas Data Import system</td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SM Site manager reports meter reading</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM System flags entered meter reading</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SM System provides advice on entered reading</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM System converts meter reading to consumption values</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM Admin can modify meter reading data</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO System flags value outside range of historical data</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO System flags values less than previous week</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO System handles distribution of reports to CS</td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO Other report work</td>
<td>25-50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM Admin sets meter read parameters for a site</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM System sends meter read prompt email</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM System sends reminder when meter reading not entered on time</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS CS can add, edit, delete client and site data</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VO Admin views data exception report</td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO System flags non-numeric value</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SM System reads import file from FTP directory</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM System maps different Excel file format to standard input fields</td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EN Admin queries database to produce outliers report</td>
<td>XL</td>
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</table>

5. Use historical data & probability

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![Graph showing historical data and probability]

6. Incorporate “stretch” stories

- Underwriter asks supervisor to review proposed loan decision: 8
- Applicant uploads sensitive docs to case or account: 5
- Supervisor reviews decision: 3
- SNOC sees accurate time when case / account was accessed: 1
- Content admin updates document tags: 5
- Underwriter adds new SSP to denial notice: 1
- Update role to position mapping: 8
- Internal user can only see documents that are part of their applications: 8
- Document intake clerk categorizes documents: 5
- Underwriter can edit notice date or content: 2

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7. Re-negotiate commitments when necessary

“When you make a promise, you take on the moral duty to make all reasonable efforts to fulfill that commitment.”

BRADLEY R. AGLE

The “Yin and Yang” of accountability

“If something comes up, let me know as soon as you can.”

Patterson, et al,
Crucial Confrontations

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What will you change?

1. Visualize your commitments
2. Limit “Work in Progress”
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Write down one thing you will do differently, based on what you’ve learned today.