User Story Mapping: The Hands-on Course

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Abstract

Agile development practice breaks requirements down into small building blocks that are used to steer development and product progress. However, with this pile of small blocks it can be challenging to keep the big picture of what the product should provide and what is needed for users to conduct their task flows. User story mapping [1] addresses this challenge. It is a method and a visual representation that further helps building a bridge between scenario oriented usability methods and the fragmentation of requirements. This hands-on course introduces user story mapping with a balanced combination of up front presentation and group exercises.

Author Keywords

Agile UX; Agile UCD and development; User story mapping;

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.2 [Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI)]: User Interfaces: User-centered design.

Motivation

Agile software development allows watching the product grow and gather quick feedback. By that stakeholders can continually reconsider what is still required and adapt their requirements on the product.
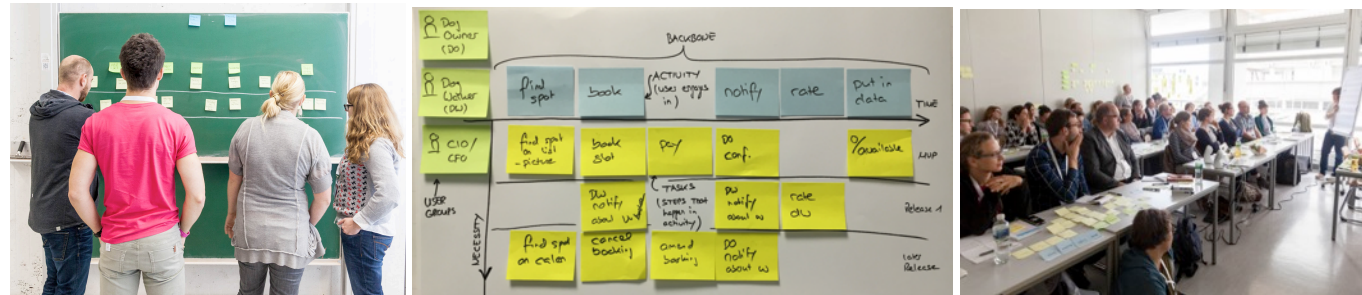
Figure 1: Impressions from previous user story mapping courses (from left to right): participants working in groups creating a user story map, example of a simple user story map to illustrate the anatomy of a map, using live sketching for lecturing.

To do so, agile development breaks requirements down into small building blocks (called user stories).

However, with this pile of small blocks it can be challenging to keep the big picture of what the product as a whole should provide and what is needed for users to conduct their task flows.

User story mapping, made popular by Jeff Patton [1], provides a method and a visual representation, which helps keeping the big picture and a focus on the user and their tasks.

The user story map is based on user's journeys and links to the stories used for development. It thereby nicely builds a bridge between scenario oriented usability methods and the fragmentation of requirements into small building blocks applied in agile development practice.

Learning objectives
During the course participants will learn:

- How to apply story mapping to put the user and their tasks up front and to build the big picture.
- How to use a story map for prioritization of stories according to user needs and business benefits.
- How to use a story map to align and integrate UX methods and activities with agile development.
- The importance of a shared understanding in a project team and how user story mapping helps building it.

Experiences from previous courses have shown that participants get a good grasp and understanding of the method and will be able to apply it in their daily work.

Content and presentation format
The course uses a balanced combination of up front presentation and group exercises.

After a very short motivation a warm-up exercise will start. This exercise aims at introducing the basic

vocabulary of user story mapping and its main challenges.

Following this, participants will be introduced to the anatomy of user story mapping, shared understanding and incremental and iterative approaches.

Next participants will build a user story map for an example case to apply what they have learned so far.

The course will then look into prioritization of stories and what models and guidelines can be used to split the big picture into viable product releases. In the following exercise participants will then apply the models to divide their user story map into releases.

A section on how to use the story map to align usability activities with development activities rounds up the course.

Background of attendees

Everybody is welcome to this course. Particularly, it is most valuable for practitioners such as user experience professionals, requirements engineers or product owner that work in agile software development projects.

Background of the course instructors

Stephanie Foehrenbach (M.Sc., Dipl. Inform. (FH)) is principal consultant and trainer employed by Zuehlke in Switzerland. Stephanie works for clients from various industries and helps them applying user centered design methods in software and product engineering projects. Additionally, she gives trainings and instructs courses at conferences (e.g. at the previous three CHI conferences).

Christian Heldstab (B. Sc., Dipl. Ing. (FH)) is business solution manager and trainer at Zuehlke. With his background in agile software development and requirements engineering, he supports various clients bringing their ideas to the road by applying user story mapping and other agile techniques. Christian is also instructor and speaker on agile and lean conferences.

References

[1]   Patton, J. *User Story Mapping. Discover the whole story, build the right product.* O´Reilly Media. September 5, 2014, Sebastopol, CA, USA.