



Kane Mar

Kane Mar is an Agile coach and Certified Scrum Trainer, specializing in Scrum and Extreme Programming. Prior to his work in Agile software development, Mar spent 15 years as a developer and project manager for waterfall and RUP projects working with Java, Smalltalk, C, SQL, and PL/SQL.

## Story Time! The Hidden Scrum Meeting

Posted by Kane Mar on February 14, 2008 at 8:58 p.m.

Is your team having difficulty forecasting when a project will be completed? Do you have a large number of un-estimated Stories in your product backlog? Are your planning meetings several days long and full of confrontation? If so, it could be that you're forgetting to "groom" your product backlog.

Ken Schwaber generally advises that the team should dedicate five percent of its time (every Sprint) to preparing the backlog. This process is generally known as backlog "grooming" or "maintenance." Here's a good definition of what is involved:

*"There are many things that one does to the backlog in preparation for future work. One adds new stories and epics, one extracts stories from existing epics, one sizes, adds benefit values, and so on."* - Dr. Dan Rawsthorne, CST

I've recently worked with several clients that acknowledge Schwaber's five percent recommendation, but don't actually follow it. That is, they understand that they need to spend five percent of their time on grooming the backlog, but they fail to do this and, as a consequence, their planning meetings become tense and drawn-out.

For several years now, I've advocated explicit backlog grooming as an integral part of the Scrum process. That is, I advise teams to establish a regularly scheduled, recurring meeting that lasts for two hours every week. It's an opportunity to discuss and groom the backlog, so the planning meeting can be as efficient and productive as possible. I call these meetings "Story Time" meetings. This is hardly a new concept. When I worked exclusively with XP teams several years ago, it was common practice to hold a regular Story Time meeting. Although they are not a formal part of Scrum, I've found that Story Time greatly improves project planning and reduces confrontational planning meetings, which are all too common for many teams.

A Story Time meeting should be held at the same time and location every single week and involve the entire team, including the Product Owner and ScrumMaster. The sole intention of these weekly meetings is to work through the backlog in preparation for future work. This may include adding new stories and epics, splitting up overly large stories, and sizing.

So if Product Owners and Developers on your team spend the majority of planning meetings arguing over semantics, consider how Story Time meetings could streamline forecasting. I'd love to hear how it impacts your day-to-day business.

**danube**

Danube Technologies, Inc.  
520 SW 6th Ave, Suite 940  
Portland, OR 97204 USA  
1.888.5.danube  
T: +1.503.248.0800  
F: +1.503.248.0801