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# User Stories Workshop

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NDC Workshop 1 hour  
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# ***User Stories: why they might be too light***

This section based on  
5 Minute Lightening Talk  
ACCU Oxford  
Thursday 14 April 2011, 18:00 session  
By Tom Gilb

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# Published Paper in AgileRecord.com



## Gilb's Mythodology Column

### User Stories: A Skeptical View

*by Tom and Kai Gilb*

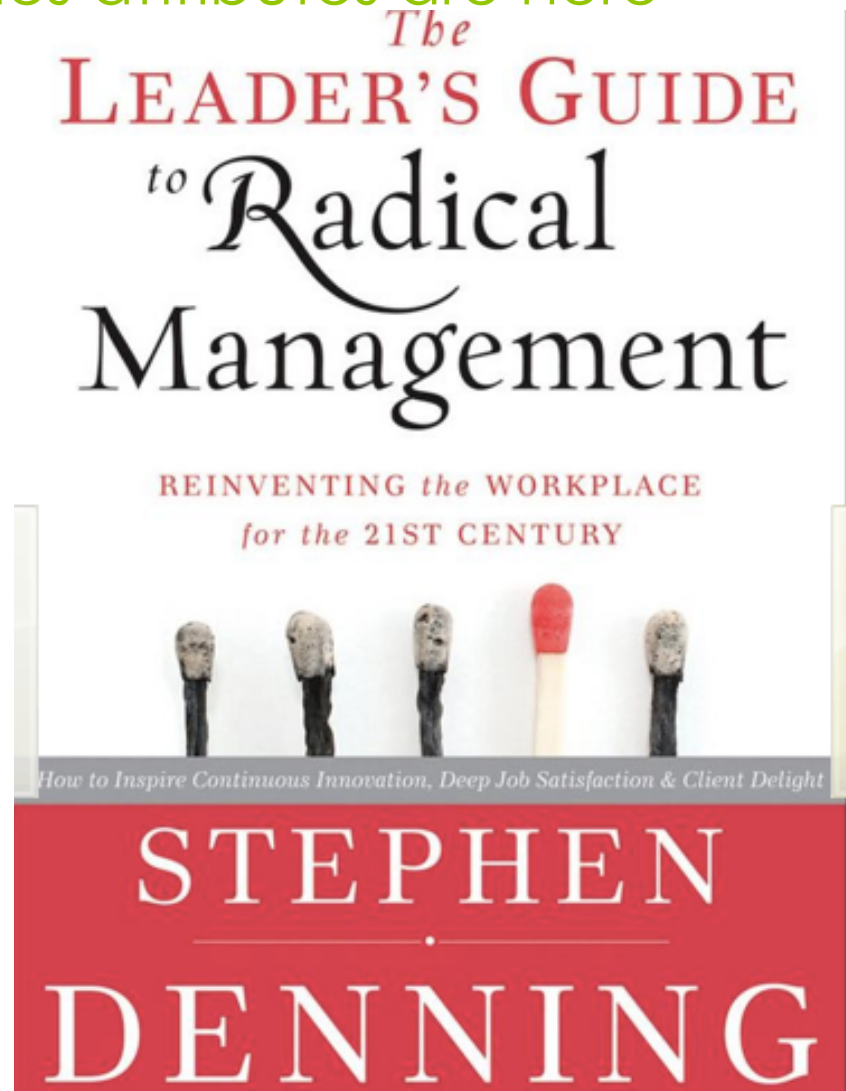
#### The Skeptical View

We agree with the ideals of user stories, in the 'Myths' [1, Denning & Cohn] discussed below, but do not agree at all to Myth arguments given, that user stories are a good, sufficient or even

of our product clearly superior to all competitive products at all times.

Scale: average seconds needed for defined [Users] to Correctly Complete defined [Tasks] defined [Help]

Original Claims for User Stories attributes are here



<http://stevedenning.typepad.com/>

## Dennings Claims are From Mike Cohn's User Stories Work



# User Stories:

- ◉ **Structure**
- ◉ **Stakeholder A**
- ◉ **Needs X**
- ◉ **Because Y**

## Sample user stories

As an account holder, I want to check my savings account balance.

As an account holder, I am required to authenticate myself before using the system.

As the primary account holder, I can grant access to additional users so that they can see transactions.



# My General Assertion

- **User Stories are good enough for small scale and non-critical projects**
- **But, they are not adequate for non-trivial projects**
- **The claims (myths in slides ahead) are not true when we scale up**



## **Myth 1:**

**User stories and the conversations provoked by them comprise *verbal communication*, which is clearer than written communication.**

- **Verbal communication is not clearer than written communication**

- ***Dialogue***

- **to clear up ‘*bad written user stories*’**
- **does not prove that there are no superior written formats**

- I, as a user, want clearer interfaces to save time

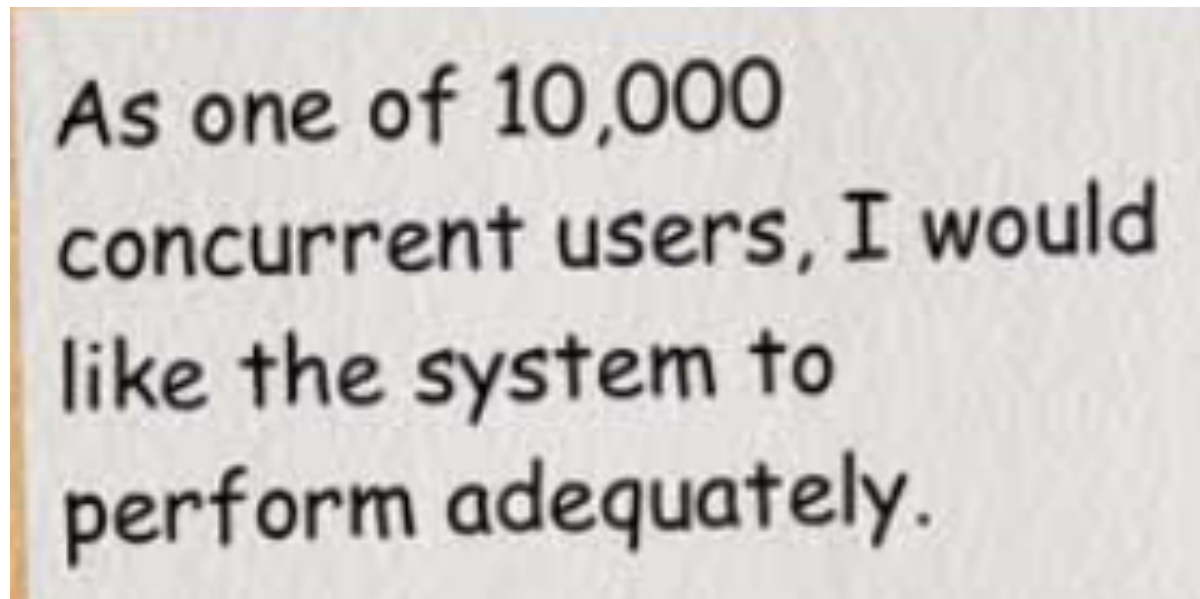
- **Usability:**

- **Scale: Time for defined Users to Successfully complete defined Tasks**
- **Goal [Users = Novices, Tasks = Inquiry] 20 Seconds.**
- **Successfully: defined as: correct, no need to correct it later.**



## Myth 2:

**“User stories represent a common language.  
They are intelligible to both users and developers.”**

A photograph of a whiteboard with a user story written on it. The text is written in a casual, handwritten style in black marker. The user story is: "As one of 10,000 concurrent users, I would like the system to perform adequately." The whiteboard is slightly out of focus, and the background is a light-colored wall.

As one of 10,000  
concurrent users, I would  
like the system to  
perform adequately.

- What does ‘perform’ mean ?
- What does ‘adequately’ mean?
- What does it mean under higher or lower loads?

### Myth 3:

**“User stories are the *right size* for planning and prioritizing.”**

- **Right Size [Requirement]:**  
defined as:
- **The size that is sufficient for all requirements purposes,**
- **without any ‘In project’ supplements,**
- **at a cost that is lower than**
- **the costs of dealing with defects in the statement later.**
- Assertion
- User Stories are *rarely* detailed enough and clear enough to do intelligent planning (for example *estimation*)
- Or intelligent(dynamic) Prioritization

#### **Myth 4:**

**User stories are *ideal for iterative development*, which is the nature of most software development.**

- User stories are a disaster for iterative development because you cannot understand their incremental and final consequences; you cannot measure evolutionary value delivery progress toward such objectives.
- The nature of software development should not be to 'write use cases', stories, and functions, as some seem to believe. The Agile ideal is to deliver incremental *value* to *stakeholders*. [6]



## Myth 5:

**“User stories help *establish priorities* that make sense to both users and developers.”**

- Ambiguous unintelligible written stories are a logically bad basis for determining the priority of that story for *anyone*.
- Here is my idea of ‘priority’.
- **A potential increment will be prioritized based on ‘stakeholder value for costs’, with ‘respect to risk’.**
- Ambiguous written stories do not admit numeric evaluation of value for defined stakeholders, or of all cost aspects, or of all risk aspects. [7]
- Also a **well-defined** requirement can be evaluated for potential **value** to **stakeholders**, it *cannot* be evaluated for cost. The **cost resides entirely in the design**, and the design is in principle not chosen yet!
- Consequently you cannot choose best value for money with user stories alone.
- Try the story:
- **“We want the most intuitive system possible”**
- What is the cost?
- You cannot have any useful idea of cost, because the requirement is so vague that you cannot even understand it fully, let alone choose a best design at all; and you cannot cost a design that is not *chosen*. It is illogical! [8, Estimation paper in SQP March 2011]
- In addition, *until you know the specific design*, you cannot understand the risk of deviation from your objectives and costs [9], so you cannot prioritize iterations with regard to risk either.
- So, the prioritization argument for user stories is logically unreasonable.
- 
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## Myth 6:

**“The process enables *transparency*.**

**Everyone understands why.”**

- The arguments above, particularly the prioritization argument, say **no**, everybody does *not* understand why.
- They may *feel* they understand, but since the user story is incomplete and ambiguous, they cannot *really* understand *anything*; for example anything about value, stakeholders, design, costs, and risks.
- There may be an illusion of understanding, but there is no rationally defined understanding.
- However, there may be *social* comfort if teams misunderstand it together, but in non-transparently *different* interpretations.
- That does not lead to value or system success, even for those who thought they understood the consequences of the user story choice. [10, Decision Rationale].
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Now,  
on with the NDC Workshop !



Try to have a ‘conversation’ about the following example of a story:

- ***“We want the most intuitive system possible”***
- ***or***
- ***We as Users***
  - ***want the most intuitive system possible,***
  - ***to save training time and reduce errors***

# Compare the User Story with this specification in Planguage

- **Intuitiveness:**
- **Type:** *Quality Requirement*
- **Stakeholders:** *Product Marketing, end users, trainers*
- **Ambition Level:** *To make the intuitive and immediate application of our product clearly superior to all competitive products at all times.*
- **Scale:** *average seconds needed for defined [Users] to Correctly Complete defined [Tasks] defined [Help]*
- **Goal** *[Deadline = 1<sup>st</sup> Release, Users = Novice, Tasks = Most Complex, Help = {No Training, No Written References} ] 10 seconds  $\pm$  5 seconds <- Product Marketing Manager.*
- **Correctly Complete:** *defined as: the result would not ever need to be corrected as an error or as sub-optimal.*

If a story is supposed to stimulate a discussion, will this stimulate better discussion?

- **Intuitiveness:**
- **Type:** Quality Requirement
- **Stakeholders:** Product Marketing, end users, trainers
- **Ambition Level:** To make the intuitive and immediate application of our product clearly superior to all competitive products at all times.
- **Scale:** average seconds needed for defined [Users] to Correctly Complete defined [Tasks] defined [Help]
- **Goal** [Deadline = 1<sup>st</sup> Release, Users = Novice, Tasks = Most Complex, Help = {No Training, No Written References} ] 10 seconds  $\pm$  5 seconds <- Product Marketing Manager.
- **Correctly Complete:** defined as: the result would not ever need to be corrected as an error or as sub-optimal.

# A User Story

- ? add from class or make up

# Template for specifying User Values

- **name tag here:**
- **Type:**
- **Owner:**
- **Sponsor**
- **Stakeholders**
- **Ambition Level .**
- **Scale**
- **Past**
- **Tolerable**
- **Goal**
- **Business Value** (of Goal):
- **Impacts:** (a stakeholder or business value)
- **Design Ideas:**
- **Issues:**
- **Risks:**
- **Dependencies:**

## Tom can fill this one in the workshop

- **name tag here:**
- **Type:**
- **Owner:**
- **Sponsor**
- **Stakeholders**
- **Ambition Level .**
- **Scale**
- **Past**
- **Tolerable**
- **Goal**
- **Business Value** (of Goal):
- **Impacts:** (a stakeholder or business value)
- **Design Ideas:**
- **Issues:**
- **Risks:**
- **Dependencies:**

# Planguage Template for specifying User Values

- **Tanning:**
- **Type:** Stakeholder Requirement
- **Owner:** Jesus
- **Sponsor :** Tanning Company
- **Stakeholders :** people who want to be tanned, Tanning Co., Cancer Institute, National Health Inst., Insurance Co., ..
- **Ambition Level:** most sexy tan for Norwegian Beaches .
- **Scale:** Number of Men and Sexy women in Bikinis who turn around as you pass on the beach, per hour as % of all people you pass.
- **Past [ Me at 70 2010, head Turner = women over 30] about 2% to 5%**
- **Tolerable Past [ Me at 70 2011, head Turner = women over 30] about 20% to 50%**
- **Goal [ Me at 70 2011, head Turner = women over 30] about 90% to 99.9%**
- **Business Value (of Goal):** \$20 mill per film like Brad Pitt
- **Impacts:** (a stakeholder or business value). Actor Contract value, like \$20 Mill
- **Design Ideas:** False Tanning Lotion, with Sexy Perfume, and very small bikini, tattoo on Buttocks
- **Issues:** can we avoid tans and tattoos with permanent bad effects?
- **Risks:** skin cancer from lotion or perfume
- **Dependencies:** getting enough sexy broads on the beach to walk past on a rainy day



# Template (full set of all options):

## Stakeholder

- <Stakeholder Tag>
- Type: Stakeholder Spec
- Version:
- Owner:
- Roles:
- Computer Expertise:
- Subject Matter Expertise:
- Use Frequency:
- Persona:
- Real Stakeholder:
- Review Stakeholder:
- Test Stakeholder:
- Stories:
- Tasks:
- Task Qualities:
- Task Details: <aka backlog items>
- Task Centric Story:
- Story Map:
- Subjective Quality:

Would this help you discuss and understand the 'User' reality better than a conventional User Story?

Would it give information needed to assess **priority** and **risk** for the user needs?

# Template with Hints

- **<Stakeholder Tag>**
  - A unique tag with Capital Letters
- **Type: Stakeholder Spec**
  - This should be enough if it is.
- **Version:**
  - Date and possibly Time, for any change
- **Owner:**
  - Owner of this particular specification
- **Roles:**
  - List roles this stakeholder can play.
- **Computer Expertise:**
  - Define expected range of levels
- **Subject Matter Expertise:**
  - Define expected range of levels
- **Use Frequency:**
  - How often per month might the use system
- **Persona:**
  - Name all Persona representing them
- **Real Stakeholder:**
  - Specify by email, name, position any real ones
- **Review Stakeholder:**
  - Specify email, name, position stakeholders who might review the product at any stage
- **Test Stakeholder:**
  - Specify email, name, position stakeholders who might test the product at any stage
- **Stories:**
  - Refer to tags of related user stories
- **Tasks:**
  - Refer to tags of defined Tasks
- **Task Qualities:**
  - Refer to Tags of any qualities related to the defined tasks
- **Task Details: <aka backlog items>**
  - Refer to or define here any decompositions of Tasks, intended for separate delivery in an iteration.
- **Task Centric Story:**
  - Define or refer to a Story Tag related to the tasks defined here
- **Story Map:**
  - Include or refer by Tag to one or more story maps
- **Subjective Quality:**
  - Define or refer to definitions of related task qualities that depend on human opinion, rather than more objective observation.

# Tom Could fill this one out in Class

- <Stakeholder Tag>
- Type: Stakeholder Spec
- Version:
- Owner:
- Roles:
- Computer Expertise:
- Subject Matter Expertise:
- Use Frequency:
- Persona:
- Real Stakeholder:
- Review Stakeholder:
- Test Stakeholder:
- Stories:
- Tasks:
- Task Qualities:
- Task Details: <aka backlog items>
- Task Centric Story:
- Story Map:
- Subjective Quality:

# End slide