

CASE STUDY:

Using Vertical Slicing and Estimation to Meet a Critical Market Window

The Situation

Adobe was planning an important initiative involving several component teams across multiple locations.

The work needed coordination across teams, but the existing structure made it difficult to deliver value quickly. Teams were organized around components and work moved through separate stages before it could be considered complete.

The planning group needed to understand how the work fit together, identify what could be delivered first, and determine when an initial release could realistically reach the business.

Challenges

Several factors made delivery difficult:

- Vertical slices could not easily be completed within one Scrum team because work was divided across geographically distributed component teams.
- Product Owners had created detailed requirements documents that teams were breaking into high-level “engineering stories.”
- Integration testing was handled by a separate team rather than being included in each Scrum team’s definition of done.
- Teams were not aligned on sprint boundaries or sprint durations, making it difficult to see what had actually reached done.
- There was no shared continuous integration system, slowing feedback when changes in one area affected another.

The Approach

During a two-day planning session, the group focused on three goals:

- ☒ Visualize the work, its flow across teams, and its dependencies.
- ☒ Identify opportunities to deliver done vertical slices as early as possible.
- ☒ Develop a projected delivery timeline for those slices.

The group spent the first day and a half writing work onto cards and arranging it in rough implementation order. This made dependencies and development sequence visible.

They then identified sets of cards that together delivered vertical slices of value. That process revealed opportunities to reduce scope from the original requirements and define a Minimum Viable Product.

The remaining backlog items were prioritized for future releases.

Turning Estimates Into a Business Decision

On the second afternoon, the teams estimated the ordered work to create a projected delivery timeline.

The group reached a high level of confidence in an MVP delivery date several months away. But that date created a business problem.

The initiative was intended to open an important revenue stream. Customers were waiting to make purchases during a specific market window, and the projected MVP date would miss that window by several months.

The Product Owner understood why the work would take that long. But delivering after the market window would make the work far less valuable in that fiscal year.

With the work visualized, sliced, and estimated, the group could have a more useful conversation.

The Breakthrough

With an hour remaining in the session, someone suggested hiring contractors to manually perform the work covered by the first two slices while the teams built the software solution properly.

The group quickly explored the idea, moved cards on the board, discussed how the approach would work technically, and validated that it was feasible.

The revised plan allowed the organization to meet the market window. Teams could then build the remaining slices to replace the manual work shortly afterward, on a timeline similar to the original MVP plan.

What Changed

The planning session did not make the original work smaller by wishful thinking. It made the work, dependencies and delivery options visible.

By turning requirements into vertical slices and estimating the work, the teams and Product Owner were able to identify an alternative path that met the business need.

The Takeaway

Estimation was useful here because it led to a decision.

The estimates showed that the original MVP would miss an important market window. Because the teams had already visualized the work, identified dependencies, and broken it into vertical slices, they could quickly explore another option.

The result was a plan that met the business need without changing the reality of how long the original software work would take.



Facing a Similar Challenge?

When work is spread across teams, it can be difficult to see what can be delivered first, where dependencies are getting in the way, or whether a planned release will meet an important deadline.

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