

Release Planning

Release Planning bring a longer term focus to the Agile team. It gives the team a shared vision, and the output can be used to show stakeholders that the team has the work under control. An output of the Release Planning session is a Release Plan, which should include a statement of what business value the release will deliver.

The first Release Planning session is done in the Initiate phase of the project. The Business Case (Project charter) would normally include a set of Features that are required from the project in order to deliver the expected business outcomes. This is the starting point for the project backlog. During the Build phase of the project, Backlog grooming, story elaboration and iteration planning will break the Features into User Stories that are small enough to be developed in a single iteration. An example of a feature could be 'Customer registration'.

Release planning is initially done at this Feature level. The Release planning session involves the whole team, the Product Owner, and if possible, the project stakeholders.

The Features should be prioritised by the Product Owner according to business value. The key is to continuously relate Features to the expected business outcomes from the project. Another technique to consider is the use of MMF (Minimal Marketable Feature). Where only a part of the functionality of a Feature is essential for a Marketable Release, then an MMF is a subset of a Feature. By including a discussion about MMFs in the Release Planning meeting, the team and stakeholders start to build up a shared understanding as to how the team can deliver early and regular business value.

Using t-shirt sizes (XS, S, M, L, XL) will help the team to get a shared understanding of the Feature and its complexity. When estimating in t-shirt sizes, it's still important to set your scale – one way is to pick a well understood Feature to be a small size. Medium size can then be double the effort/complexity of a small Feature, with XS being half the effort/complexity.

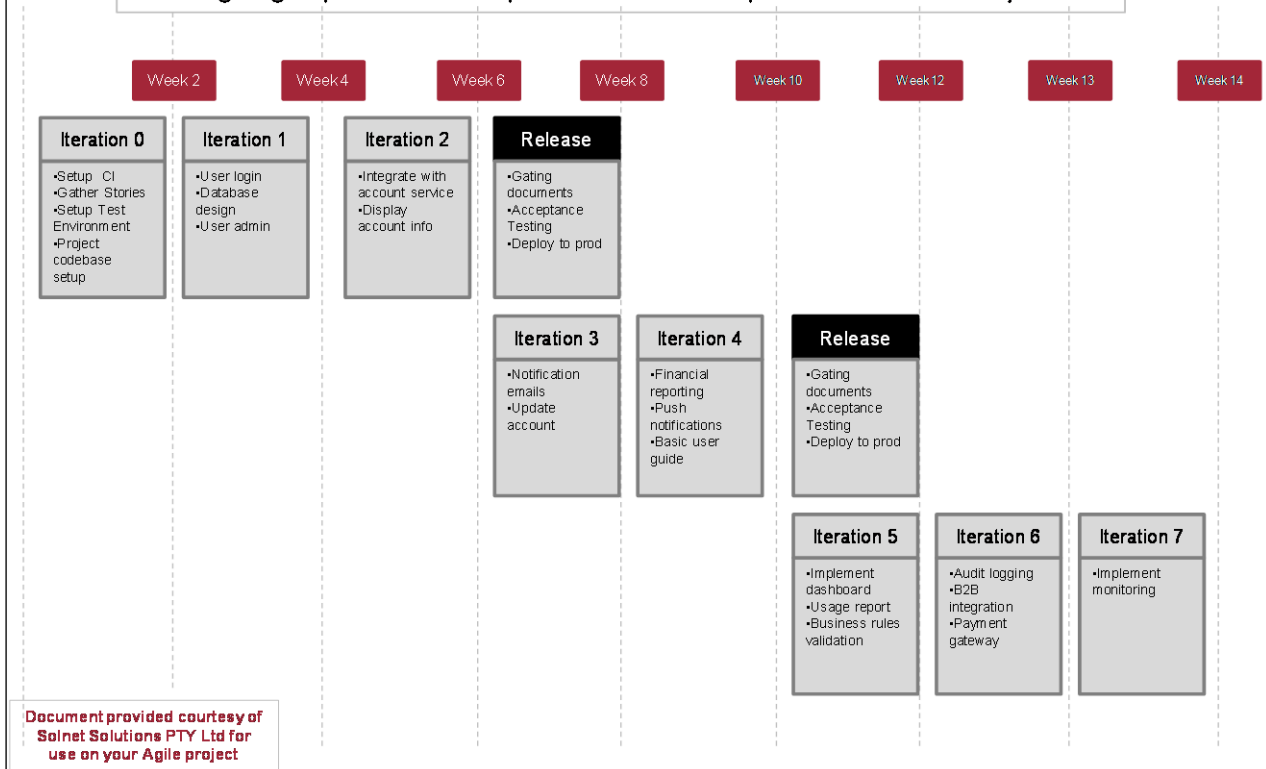
A good technique to use after the sizing of individual Features has been completed is to put all of the Features together of the same t-shirt sizes, and place the groups in ascending size groups. As a team, walk through the groups of Features, starting with the XS size group, and check that the sizing of each of the Features still makes sense.

Features can then be mapped very roughly to iterations. The output of a Release planning session is a Release plan (sometimes called a flight plan). Even with a new team, and on a new project, there should be enough experience in the room to be able to get a rough plan in place. Note that the Release plan is unlikely to satisfy all stakeholders, but it is better to have those hard discussions up front, and understand the tradeoffs that are going to have to happen (using sliders can help to clarify those trade-offs).

Release Plan for <project abc>



Project abc will give our customers the ability to purchase our finance advice on-line, giving us premier market position in terms of speed of service delivery.



It is helpful if the Release plan includes a short statement (sometimes referred to as an elevator pitch) to describe the value that the release will bring to the business. This can be used to 'sell' the Release plan, and also to bring confidence to the stakeholders that the team are going in the right direction.

Release planning occurs throughout the project lifecycle, not just at Initiate phase. The release plan should be inspected and adapted each iteration to ensure that it reflects what is known right now. Changes to the Release plan may be needed as a result of new knowledge discovered through development work, or because of changes in business priority.

Remember, a plan is simply a plan – accept that it changes and becomes more accurate as we learn more. Planning too far ahead in the future to too fine a level of detail can be wasted work; it gives the impression we know more than we do, and it quickly stops reflecting reality. That means significant effort is required to keep it up to date and remaining relevant.

