

What is a Spike

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Definition

Create spike solutions to figure out **answers to tough technical or design problems**. A spike solution is a very simple program to explore potential solutions.

extremeprogramming.org, 1999

It is used to **determine how much work will be required** to solve or work around a software issue.

wikipedia.org

A special **type of story** that is used to **drive out risk and uncertainty** in a user story or other project facet.

Scrum Alliance, 2014

A task aimed at **answering a question** or **gathering information**, rather than at producing shippable product.

The Agile Dictionary

Goal



Reduce risk and uncertainty



Collect information



Ascertain feedback



Enable fluid iterations later in the project



Understand an upcoming PBI's complexity



Find answers

Applications

Familiarize the team with **new hardware or software**

Significant **technical risk**

Significant **functional risk**

Team has no knowledge of a **new domain**

Story too big and **not splittable**

Properties

Only address problems under examination, **ignore all other concerns**

Acceptable. Spikes are accepted by the product owner when the acceptance criteria for the spike have been fulfilled

Estimable

Demonstrable. Output of a spike is demonstrable to the team

Maximum time-box of **one sprint**. Stick to the time-box.

They generally **produce information**, rather than working code

Can be a working piece of **software, workflow, documentation, etc.**

Prototypes, Proof of Concepts (PoC), and Wireframes all fall into the classification of Spikes

Warnings

Use a spike as a **last option**. First consider ways to split the story

Every user story has uncertainty and risk. A spike story, on the other hand, should be reserved for the **more critical and larger unknowns**.

Planning for both the spike and the resultant stories **in the same iteration is risky**, and should generally be avoided

Don't be afraid to take on the PBI **without the Spike**