



# Impact of Technical Debt Management Efforts on Code Quality

By Rafael Pinto

# SINNETIC

# Overview

- Why does it matter?
- Background
  - Bad Code vs Good Code
  - Code Smells
  - Do I need to test?
  - Technical Debt
  - Why should your software be sustainable?
- A Case Study on Debt Management
  - Study Design
  - Results and Analysis
  - Conclusion



# Why does it matter?

## From my personal experience

- I found software hard to work with.
- I'll do it like this for now, I'll clean up later.
- Lack of Good practices.
- Fixed one thing, broke two others.
- Where was the issue?
- This is why I started to study this topic!



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# Why does it matter?

## From the Industry

1. Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System, or MCAS
  - Boeing 737 Max anti-stall software
2. US National Grid Gas Company \$1 billion ERP
3. British Airways software failures
  - Six times in 2017
4. Google Nest Thermostat
  - Leaves users in cold
5. Glitch releases US prisoners early
  - Washington state
  - For 13 years
6. Starbucks software bug

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# Bad Code vs Good Code

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## Bad Code



- Wading through code
- Meet deadline now, clean up later
- Increasing maintenance efforts over time
- Better a running mess than nothing
- Broken Window metaphor
- Lack of Good practices

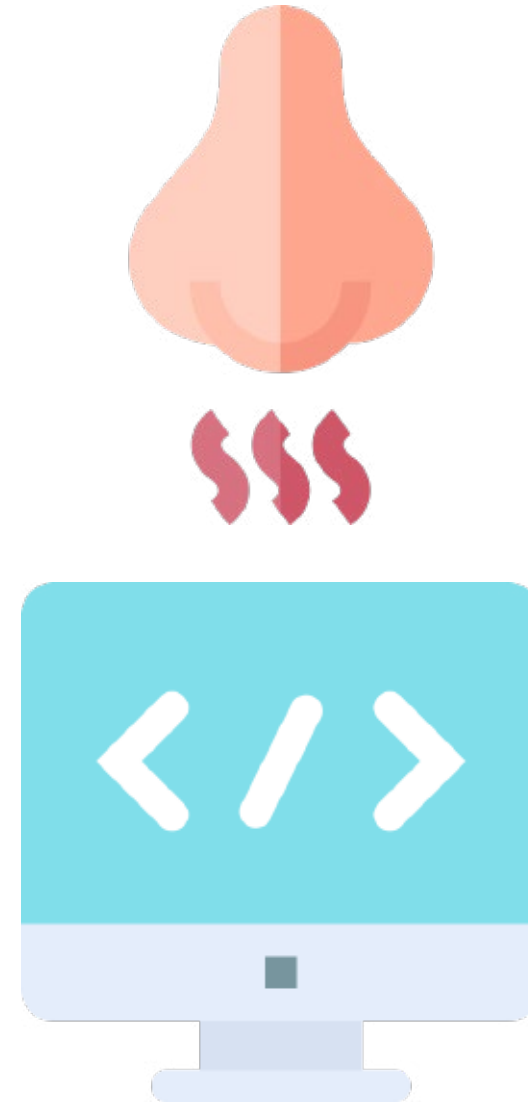
## Good Code



- Easy to find what you look for
- Be conscious about your debt
- High System Maintainability
- Clean Code
- Durable
- Good Practices

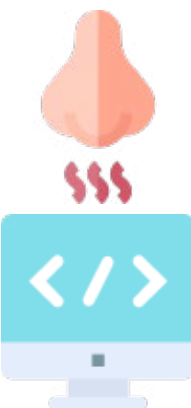
# Code Smells

- Software Smells
  - Code (discussed here)
  - Design
  - Architecture



# Code Smells

- Code Smells are indicators that something may be wrong within the code
  - No Meaningful Names
  - Duplicate Code
  - Code Comments
  - Large Class
  - Lazy Class
  - Long Method
  - Long Parameter List
  - Dependent Test Methods
  - And Others...



# Code Smells

```
class DtaRcrd102 {  
    public Date genymdhms;  
    public Date modymdhms;  
    public final String pszqint = "102";  
    /* ... */  
};
```

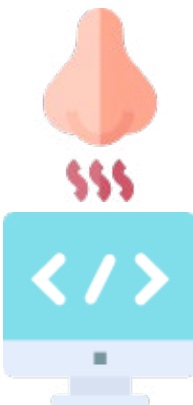
---

```
class Customer {  
    private Date generationTimestamp;  
    private Date modificationTimestamp;  
    private final String recordId = "102";  
    /* ... */  
};
```

```
public class Part {  
    private String m_dsc; // The textual description  
    // sets the description  
    void setName(String name) {  
        m_dsc = name;  
    }  
}
```

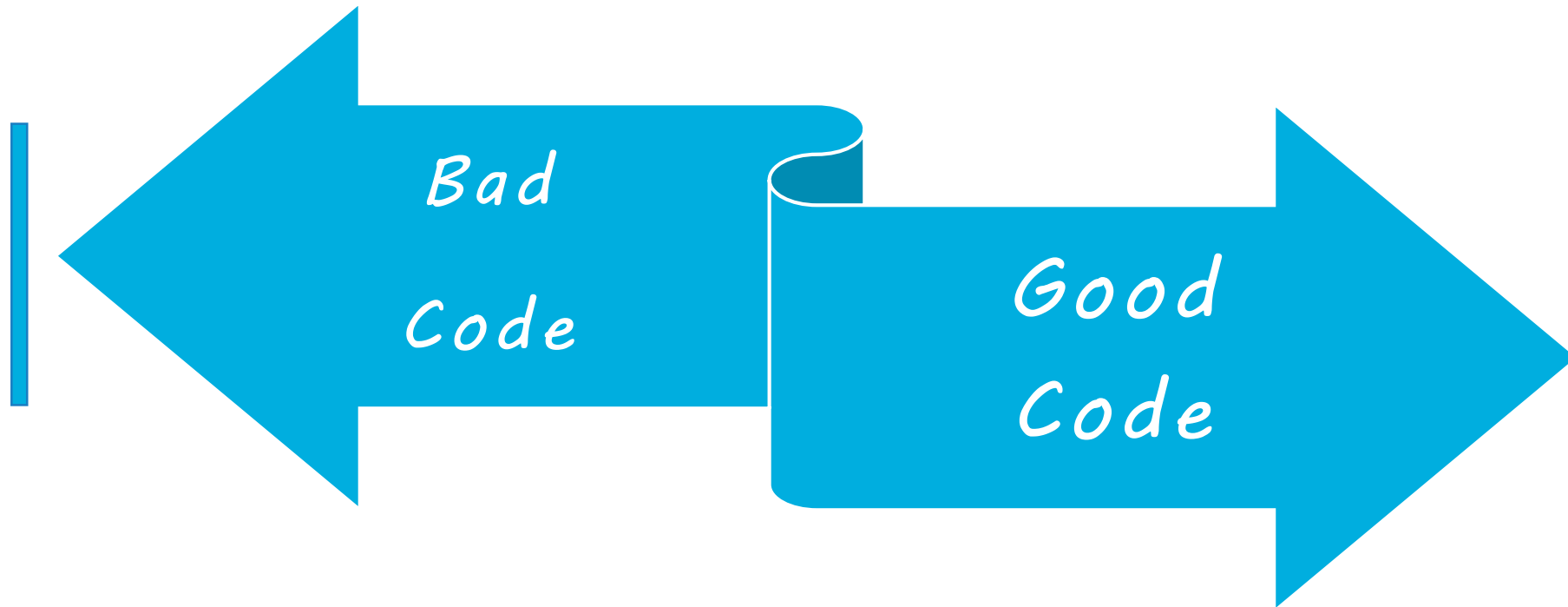
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```
public class Part {  
    private String description;  
    void setDescription(String description) {  
        this.description = description;  
    }  
}
```





# Code Smells



# Code Smells



## Names

- Intent
- Pronounceable
- Lexicon
- Scope Rule
- ← Disinformation
- ← Encodings
- ← Prefixes



## Functions

- Small
- Single Responsibility
- <4 Arguments
- ← Side Effects
- ← Error Codes
- ← Output Arguments



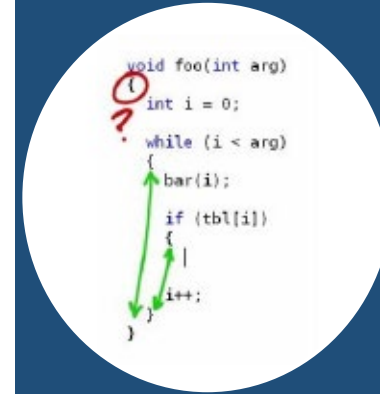
## Tests

- Unit Tests
- TDD
- 100% Coverage
- Robustness
- Stability
- ← Tests Smells



## Comments

- Good
- ← Bad



## Formatting

- 1Class = <500LOC
- 1 line per statement
- {...}
- ← // Line Breaks
- ← Nested Operations
- ← Inner Assignments



# Code Smells

- Meaningful Names



# Do I need to Test?

- If it's not tested, it doesn't work
- Types of Tests:
  - Unit Tests
  - Integration Tests
  - More...
- Software defects are extremely costly
- Tests must be mandatory
- Verification: "Are we building the product right"
- Validation: "Are we building the right product"
- V & V must be applied at each stage in the software process

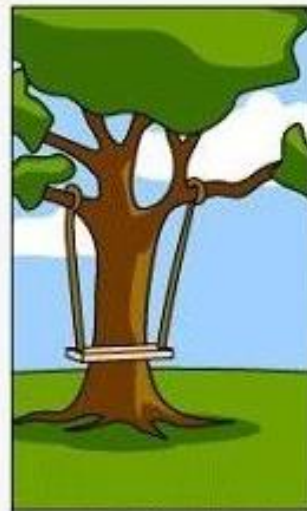




# Do I need to Test?



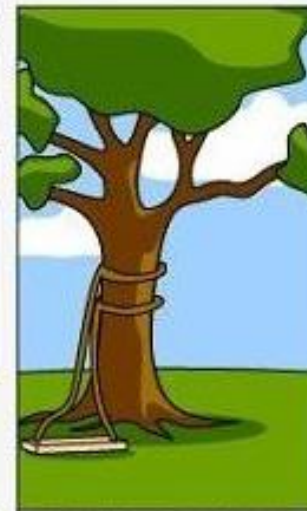
How the customer explained it



How the Project Leader understood it



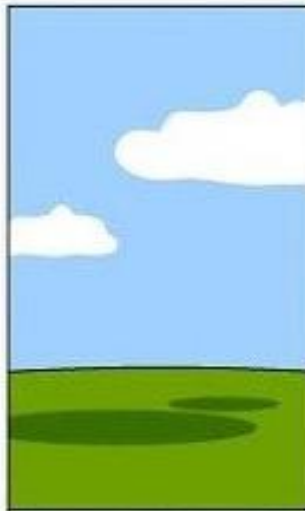
How the System Analyst designed it



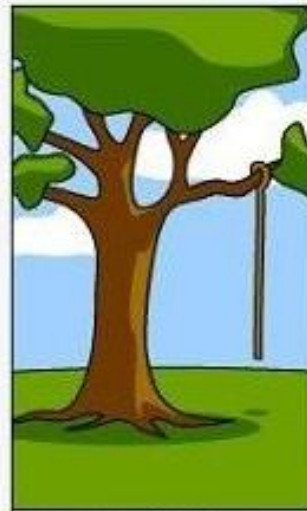
How the Programmer wrote it



How the Business Consultant described it



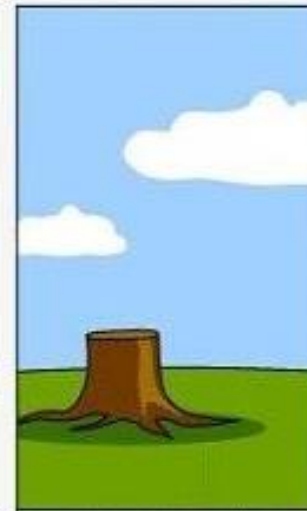
How the project was documented



What operations installed



How the customer was billed



How it was supported



What the customer really needed

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# Technical Debt



# Technical Debt

- Issues found in the code that will affect future development but not those dealing with feature completeness.

Or:

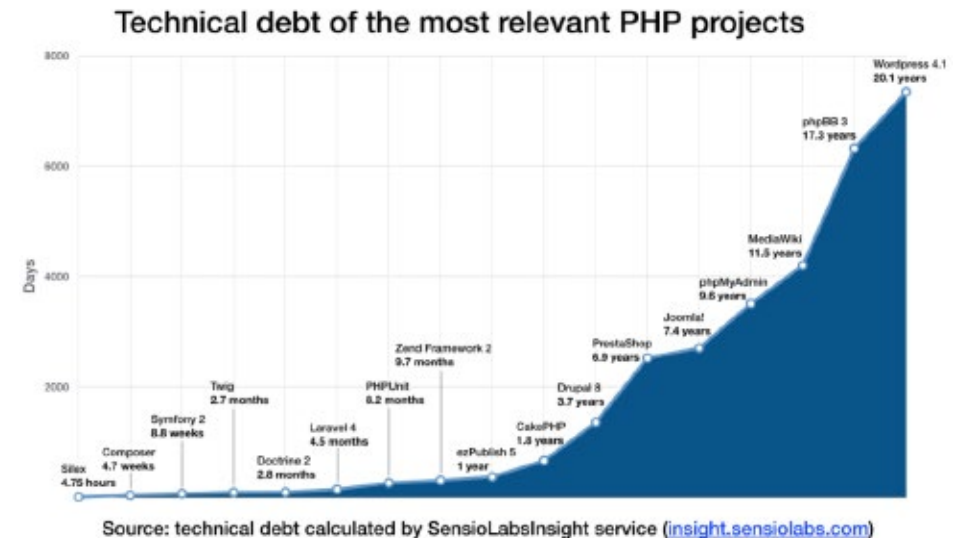
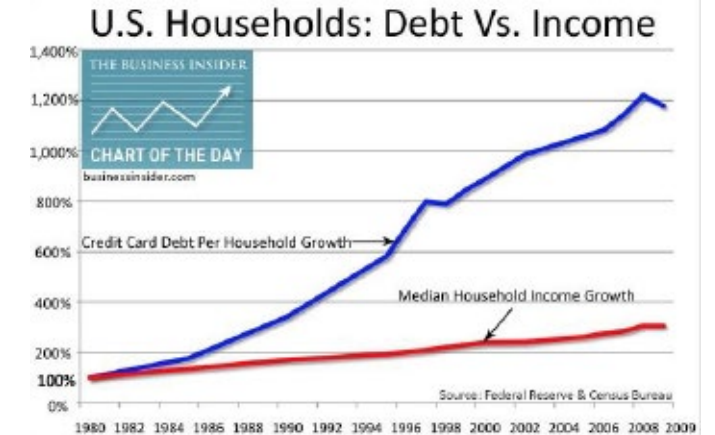
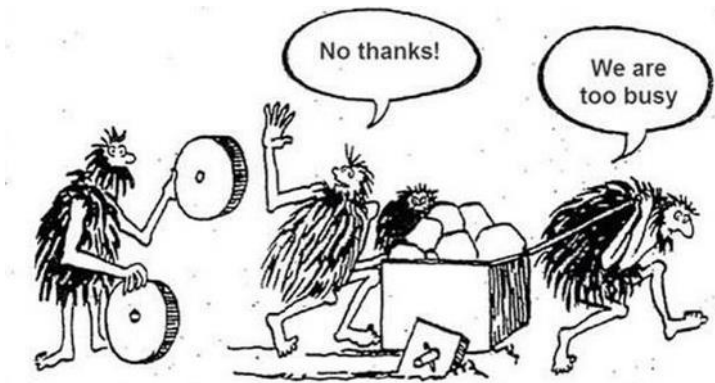
- Technical Debt is the decay of component and intercomponent behavior when the application functionality meets a minimum standard of satisfaction for the customer.



# Technical Debt

## Debt: A Short-Cut to Happiness?

- Financial Debt: Increases purchasing power in the short term but has an overall negative impact.
- Technical Debt: A quick fix, a hack, that can achieve an immediate goal, but degrades maintainability.





# Technical Debt

Why Technical Debt tends to grow uncontrollably

	Visible	Invisible
Positive Value	<b>New features Added functionality</b>	<b>Architectural, Structural features</b>
Negative Value	<b>Defects</b>	<b>Technical Debt</b>

- Technical Debt is Negative AND Invisible

# Sustainable Software

- Why do we care?
  - Common issue with most software developers.
  - Gets worst over time.
  - Costs more over time.

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## Sustainable Software

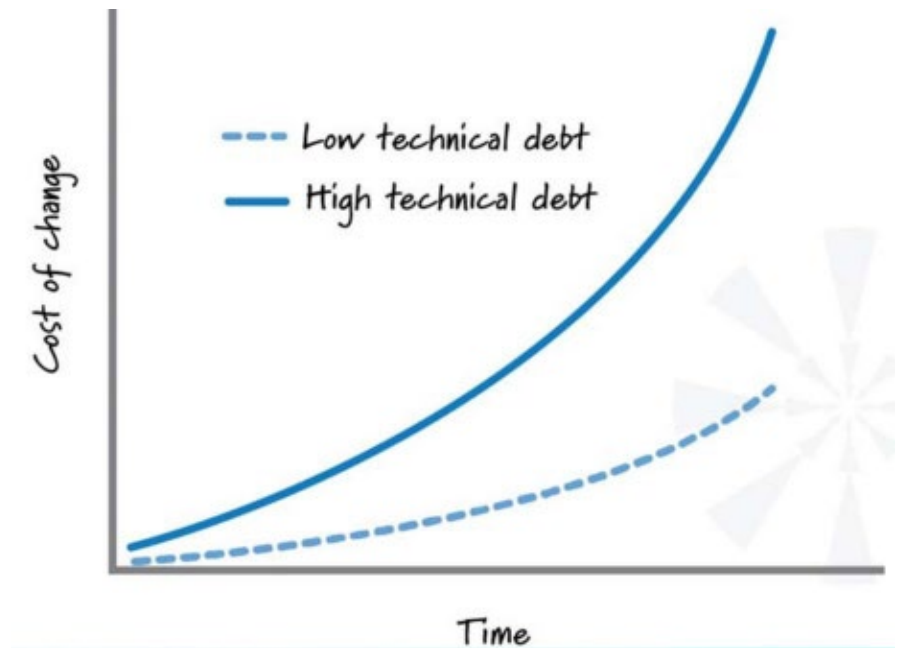


Not wanted, needed!

# Sustainable Software

## Why do we care?

- Physical: time & effort to generate the feature
- Opportunity: time to wait for benefits to be realized
- Competitive: inability to be as quick to market with new features



# Questions so far?



# A Case Study on Debt Management

A Case Study on the Impact of Technical Debt  
Management Efforts on Code Quality



# Goals and Objectives

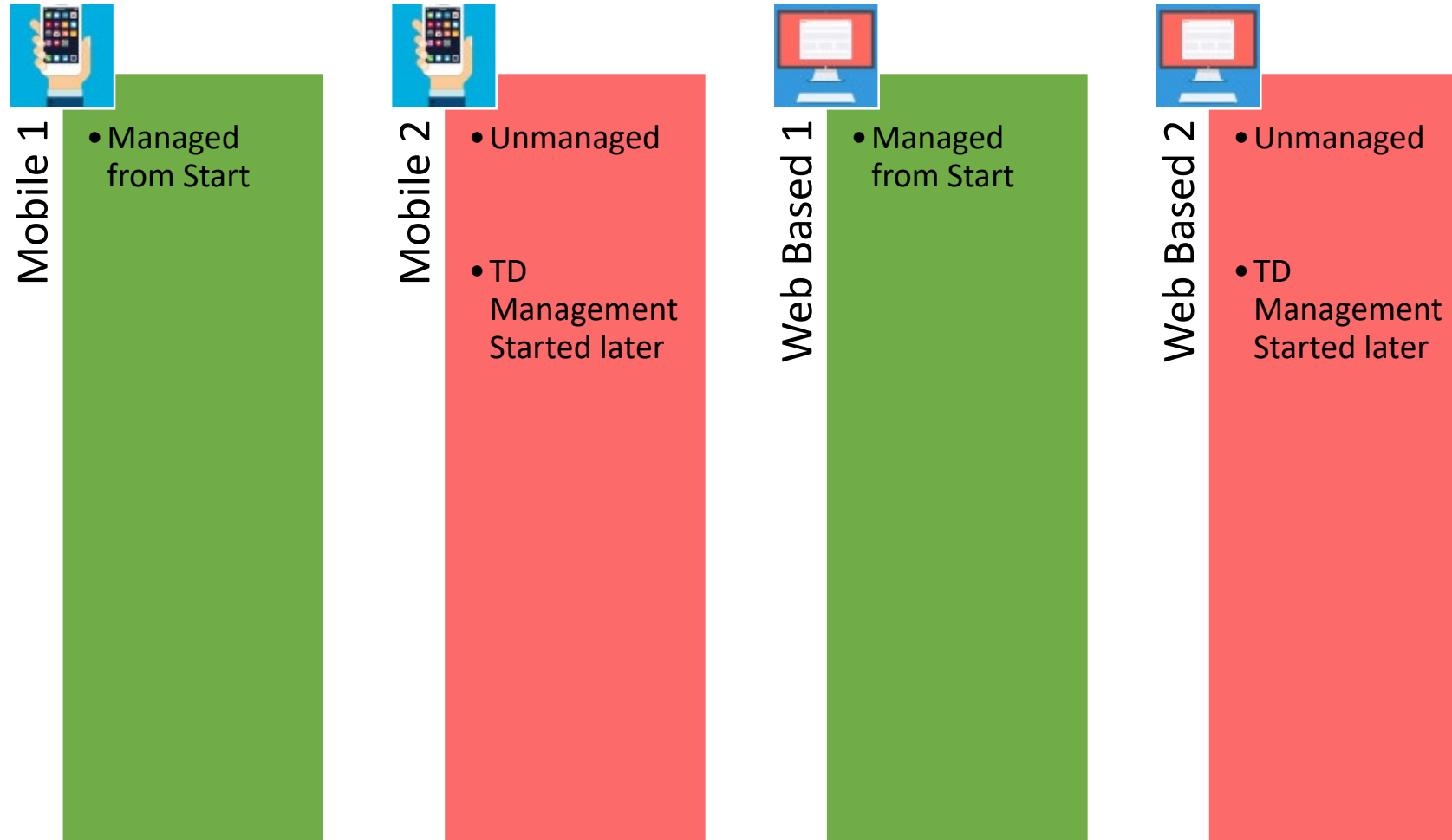
## Goals

- Assess the impact of monitoring and managing Technical Debt in software projects.
- Understand how do software engineers perceive technical debt management effectiveness.



# Study Design Overview

- Selected four code repositories:



## Data Sources

- **From code analysis:**
  - Code Smells
  - Technical Debt
  - Effort to pay Technical Debt
- **From software engineers and stakeholders:**
  - Maintainability Impressions
  - Is the code cleaner?
  - Effort to pay technical debt
    - Was it worth it?





# Study Design

## Research Questions

- RQ1: What is the impact of managing technical debt?
- RQ2: What is the effort to pay technical debt?
- RQ3: What is the perception of technical debt?



# Study Design

- Selected four code repositories:



Mobile 1

- Managed from Start

- Measure Technical Debt
- Code Smells
- Questionnaire
- Interviews



Mobile 2

- Unmanaged
- TD Management Started later

- Measure Technical Debt
- Code Smells
- Questionnaire
- Interviews



Web Based 1

- Managed from Start

- Measure Technical Debt
- Code Smells
- Questionnaire
- Interviews



Web Based 2

- Unmanaged
- TD Management Started later

- Measure Technical Debt
- Code Smells
- Questionnaire
- Interviews



## Some details about the projects

### Mobile projects

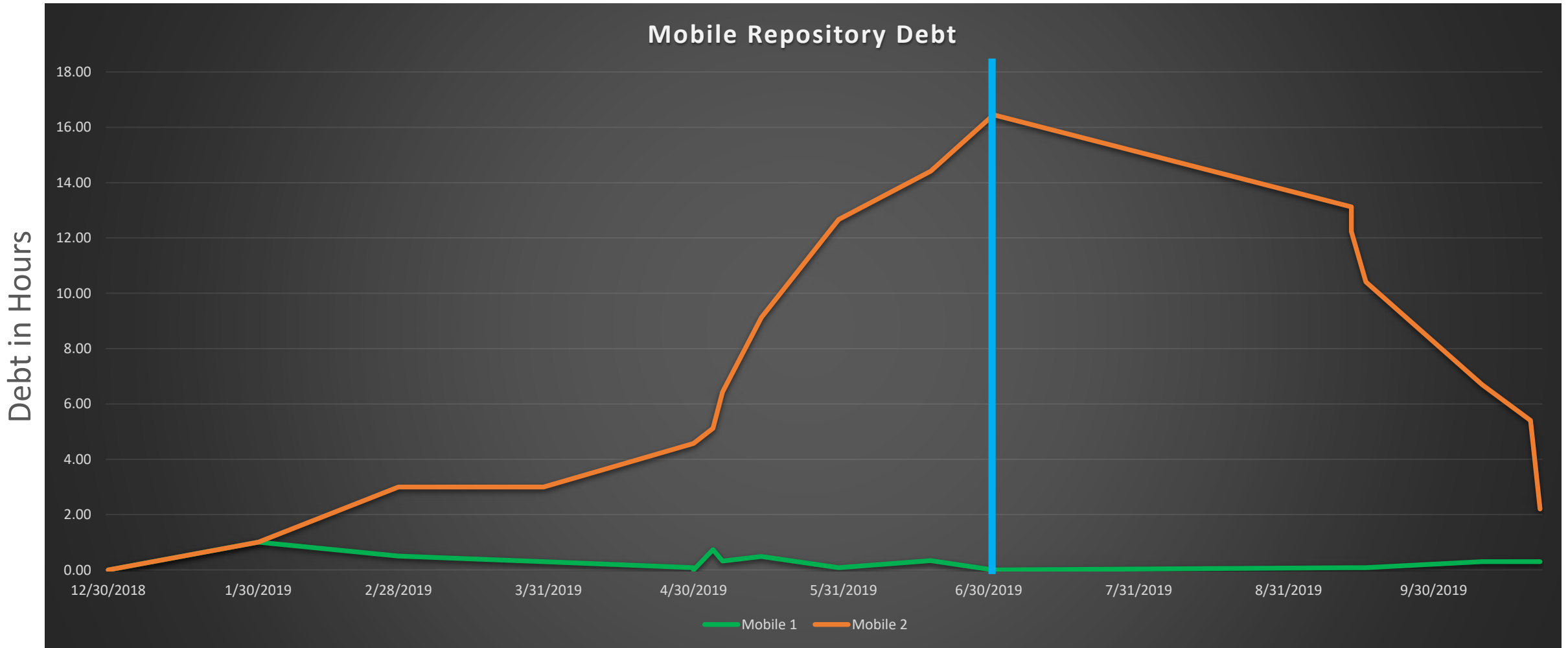
- About 10,000 lines of code
- ~ 1 year old
- ~ 150 commits
- ~ 70% of code analyzed

### Web projects

- About 200,000 lines of code
- ~ 4 years old
- ~ 2500 commits
- ~ 65% of code analyzed

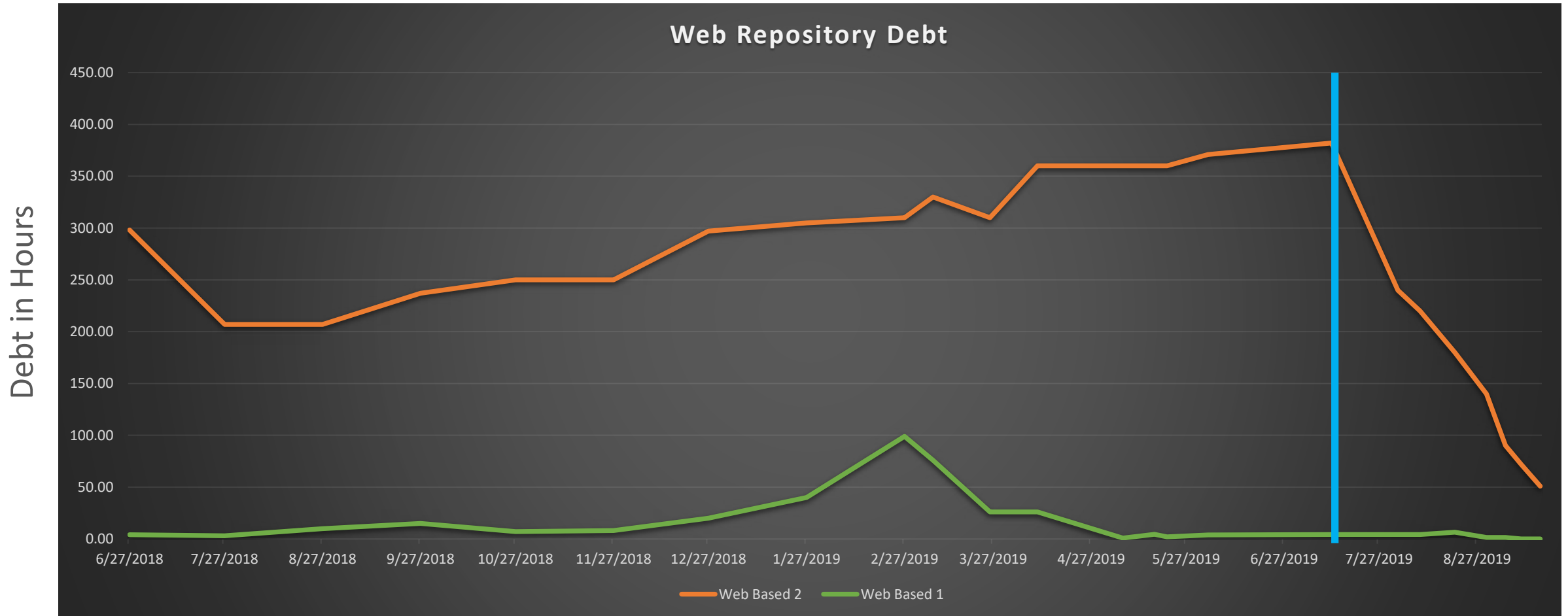
# Results and Analysis

## Mobile Projects: Preliminary Results for Technical Debt



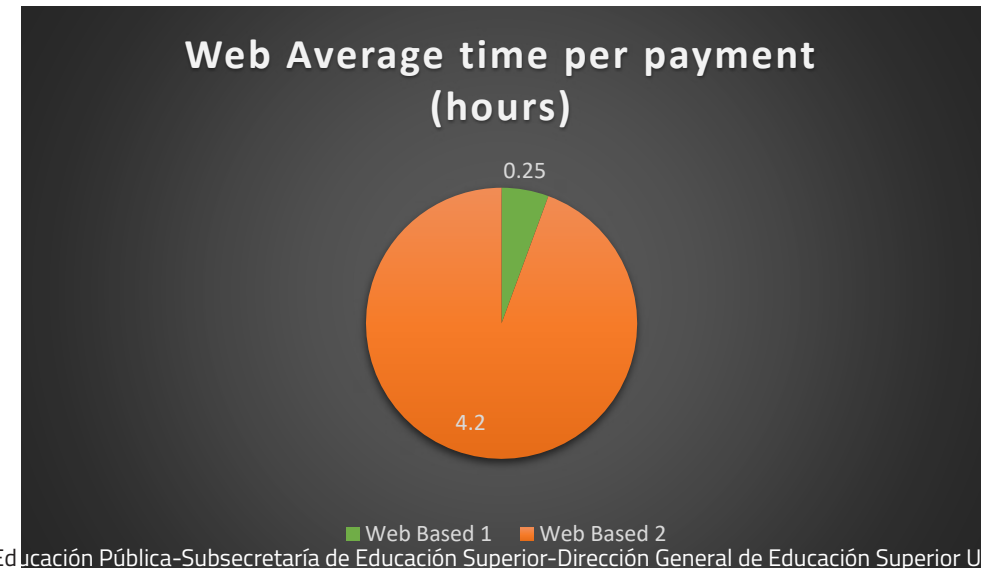
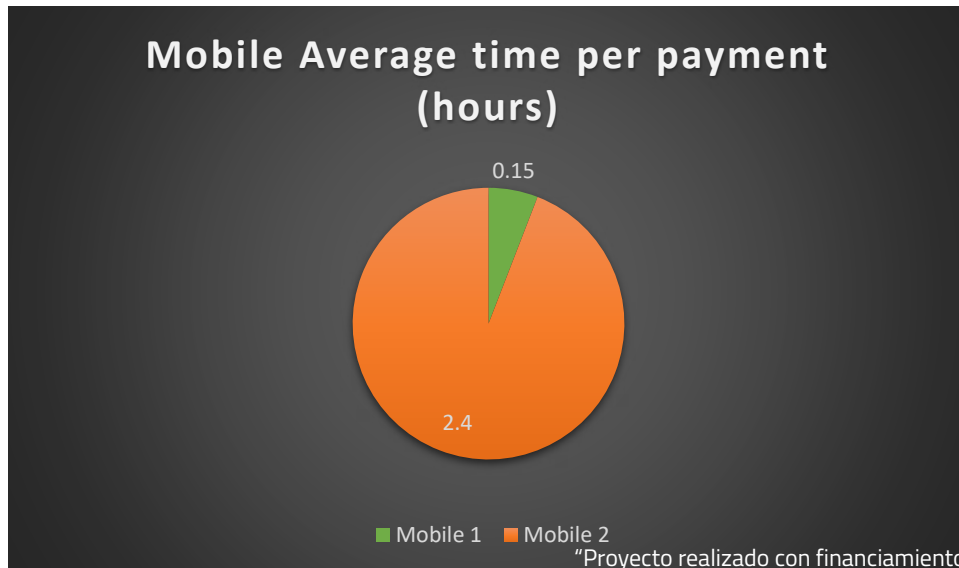
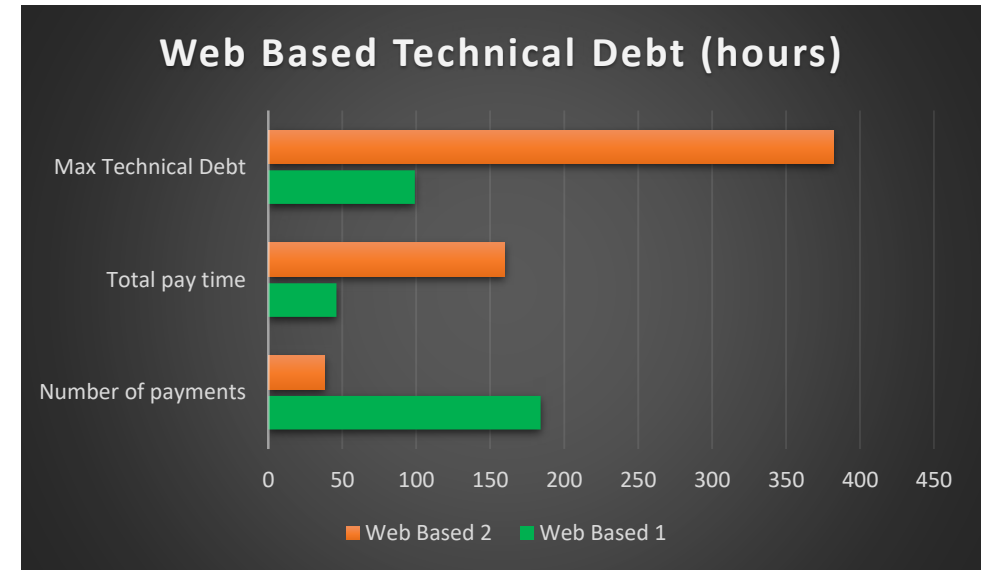
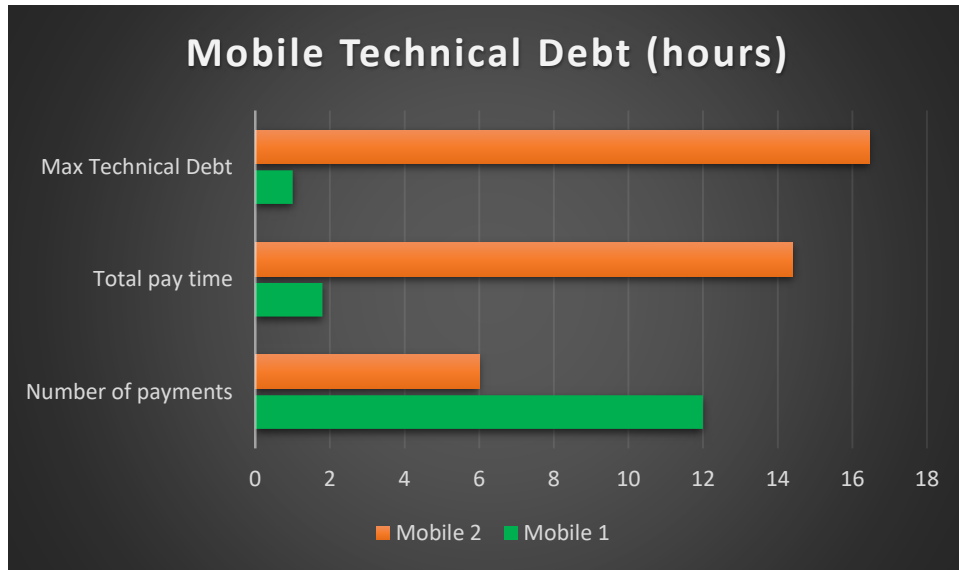
# Results and Analysis

## Web Projects: Preliminary Results for Technical Debt



# Results and Analysis

Effort to pay Debt & Max Technical Debt



# Questionnaire and interviews

- **Questionnaire and Interviews**
  - Maintainability Impressions
  - Is the code clean?
  - Effort to pay technical debt
    - Was it worth it?



# Questionnaire and interviews

## Questionnaire and Interviews question topics



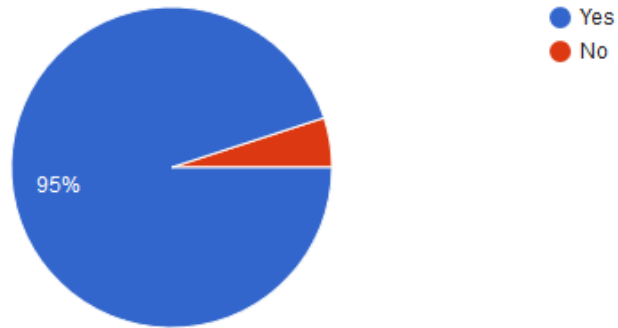


# Questionnaire and interviews

## Sample Questionnaire questions

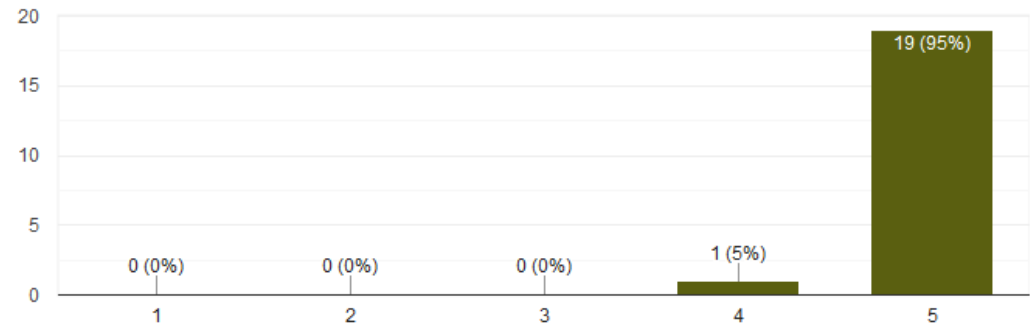
5. Did you put effort to manage technical debt?

20 responses



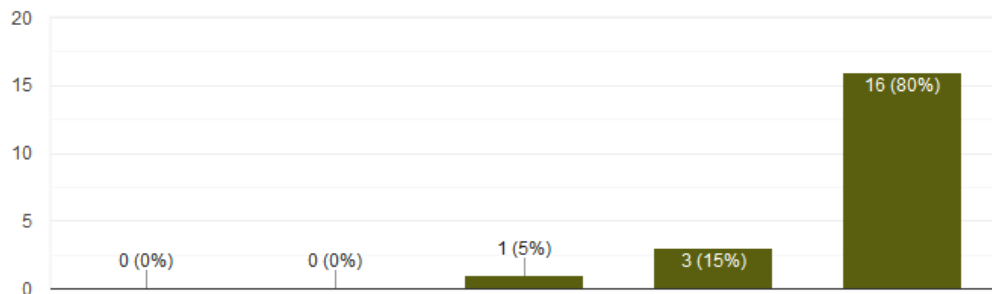
8. The effort I have put to reduce and manage technical debt was worthwhile.

20 responses



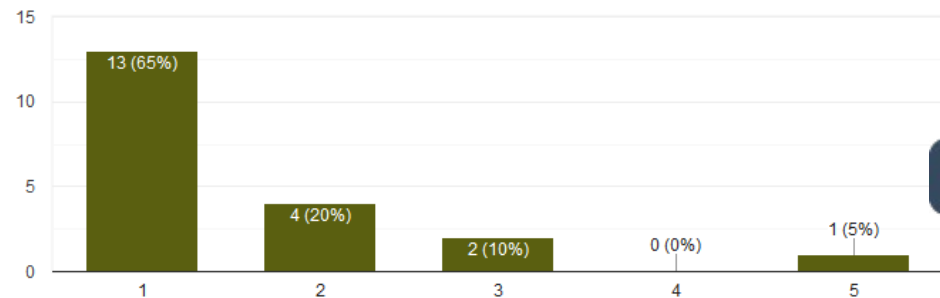
9. The code quality has improved after the adoption of technical debt management

20 responses



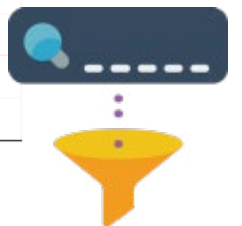
10. The code quality would have improved without the effort to manage technical debt

20 responses



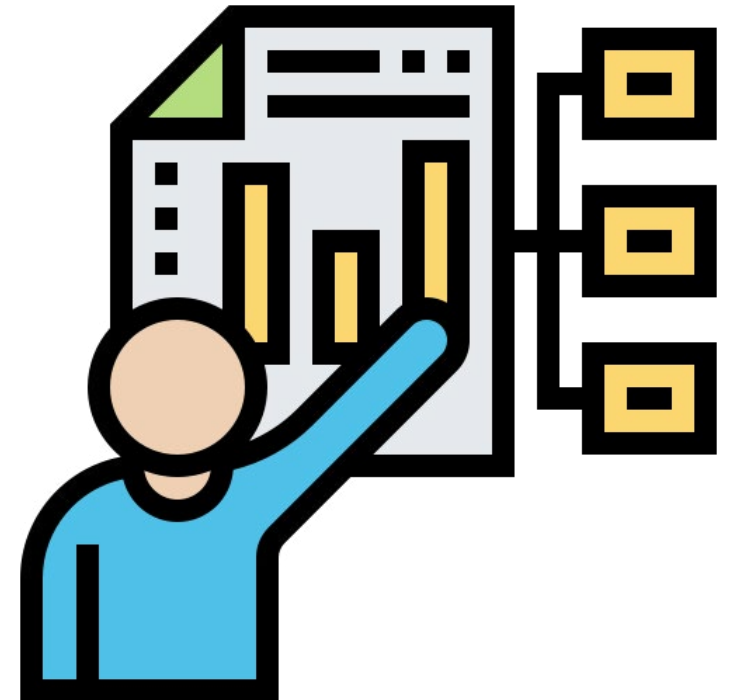
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# Preliminary Conclusion

- Technical debt grows uncontrollably
- It is worth it to manage technical debt upfront
- Engineers perceive technical debt positively



# Questions?



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nuba

444 Executive Center Blvd. Suite 208.  
El Paso, TX 79902

**915.203.2890**

[sales@nubasolutions.com](mailto:sales@nubasolutions.com)