Allstacks

ShareFile shaves cycle time by 32% and improves PR response time by 25% with Allstacks

With 40 engineering teams, ShareFile was struggling to get everyone on the same page. With no easy way to prioritize projects, estimate completion dates, or evaluate engineering performance, ShareFile turned to Allstacks.

The results? A 32% decrease in cycle time, a 25% decrease in pull request response time, and, bonus, engineering leaders who feel confident about their strategy and direction.

ShareFile

ShareFile

- **Industry:** Content Collaboration

- **Founded:** 2005

- **Employees:** 479

- **Location:** Raleigh, NC

- **Top metrics:** 32% decrease in cycle time and 25% decrease in pull request response time

The Summary

ShareFile, which was founded in 2005, is a cloud-based provider of secure file sharing services for small, medium and enterprise-size clients. The company is laser-focused on streamlining its customers' interactions with their clients while at the same time providing the highest levels of security and governance.

The Challenge

While trying to improve
customer experience in a fast-
moving, competitive market,
ShareFile's engineering leaders
faced an all-too-familiar
problem: there was no easy
way to actually see what teams
were doing, where they were
struggling, and even what they
were working on or toward.
That lack of visibility made
it difficult to estimate when
features would be finished,
let alone plan for future risks or challenges. The team was spending time in
status meetings that didn't resolve anything because no one knew what the
metrics actually were. ShareFile even tried building some custom solutions, but
found the "garbage in, garbage out" problem was real. "To be successful, we
all need to be aligned and have the right goals," explained Michael Swanson,
senior engineering manager and one of four ShareFile engineering leaders we
spoke with. "We need to know what our strategy is, what the vision is, and how
we're trying to execute and deliver value quickly to the customers, but we also
need to know what are we focused on now? Are we aligned architecturally,
who's working on what, and where it's at?"

Oct 19   -9   1 Day Early

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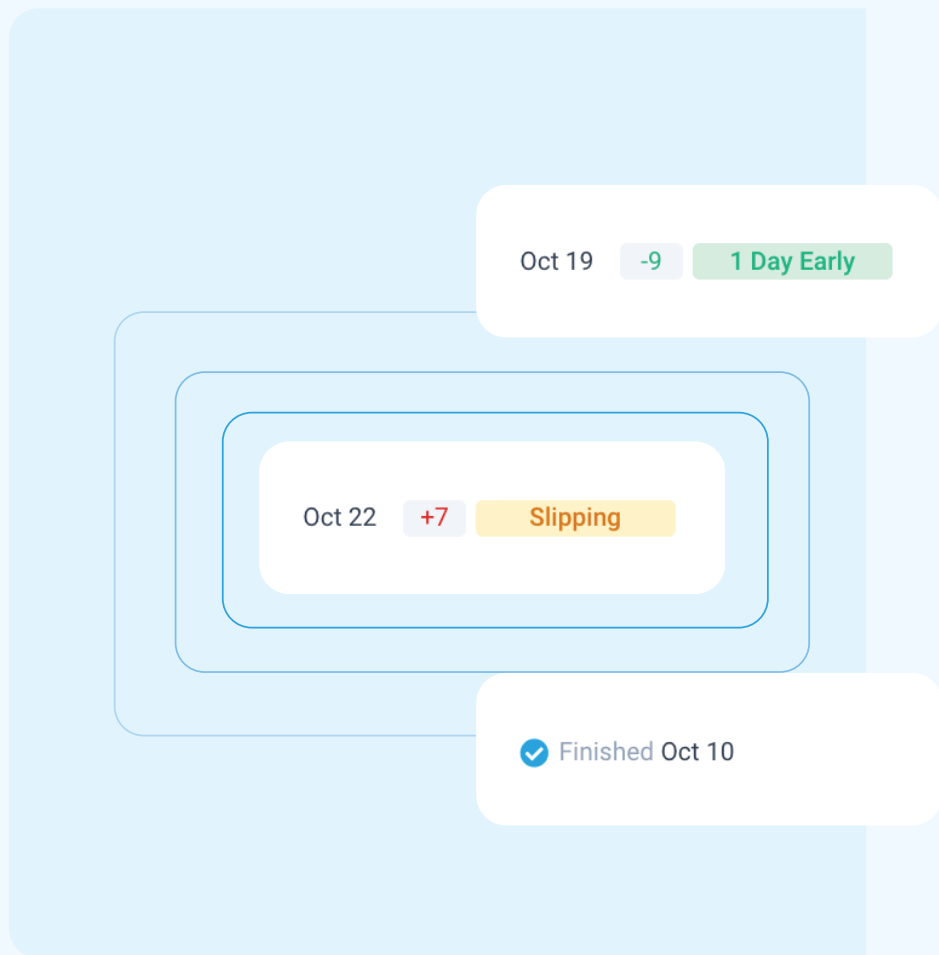
The Challenge (cont.)

With so many engineering teams, true alignment would mean having all the metrics in a single location, and that was another challenge facing ShareFile. The team tried to broadly implement a "red/amber/green" status flag alert, but as Swanson put it, "that was really not much more than putting your finger up to see which way the wind was blowing. It's not quantitative." And the lack of details and scope made it easy to push problems off to be dealt with at the end of the quarter or year, or even miss them altogether.

It was time for a change. ShareFile needed a holistic tool that integrated with existing workflows like Jira but also provided a single pane of glass where everyone could see - and customize - the metrics. In the end, the company reached out to Allstacks, not because of any catastrophic event, but instead because the engineering team was really ready to tackle the problems head on. "We just didn't have the right level of infrastructure to hold our team accountable," David LeStrat, Chief Product and Technology Officer at ShareFile, said.

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Michael Swanson, Senior Engineering Manager

The Key Metrics

When it comes to accountability across 40 engineering teams, it's not surprising there are lots of data points that are important to track but were frustratingly elusive for ShareFile engineering managers. For Leonid Marushevskyi, engineering manager and product owner, all around team productivity was critical to be able to judge, as well as the health of the backlog. The ShareFile goal – two and a half sprints ahead, or about 6 weeks – is one Marushevskyi is trying to make standard across the company.

"We wanted the team to be able to easily see the horizon and be able to execute and think broadly instead of feeling like they constantly are catching up and not knowing what's coming next," he said.
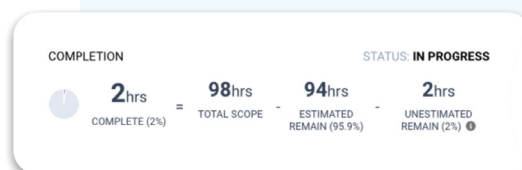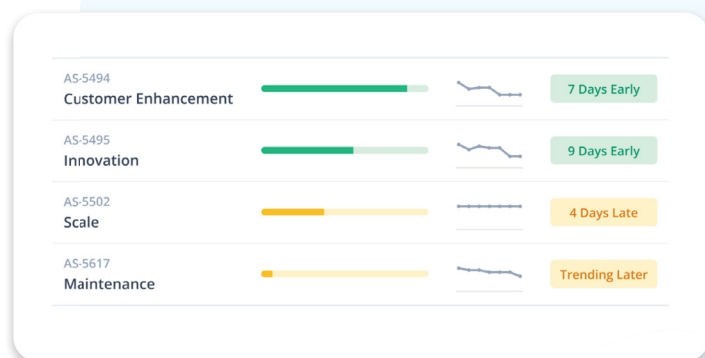
For Swanson, velocity is critical in order to ensure productivity is increasing and that teams are stable. Also on the wish list: coding metrics that could dive into everything from pull requests to cycle time, commits, and even code review. "All of this data is what can feed into our continuous improvement process," offered Marushevskyi.

And of course everyone in engineering management is concerned about the very real risk of developer burnout. (Burnout is not an isolated event: A **2022 survey from Salesforce Mulesoft** found increased workloads/demands from other team, and the pressure from digital transformation or other new technology adoptions were the top reasons for developer burnout - and 93% of organizations said it is more difficult to retain skilled tech talent than ever before.) When managing a lot of teams it can be tricky to determine which developers are over or underperforming, Piyush Jaiswal (also known as "PJ"), engineering manager for e-commerce, acknowledged. "I need an easy way to see how the team is performing on the ground level. How many coding days are my team having?"

Enter Allstacks

When the time was right, ShareFile partnered with Allstacks and made a conscious decision to start slowly. Working with just a handful of teams, ShareFile identified four key metrics (for starters) and built a dashboard around them. The metrics were carefully chosen and were meant to be useful for all engineering teams, no matter which part of the organization they sat in. The core metrics were investment type, sprint predictability, coding days and backlog health. Investment type looks at the proportion of maintenance or "keeping the lights on" work vs value-add work. Sprint predictability was another way to look at velocity, because it's possible to slice and dice velocity into different pieces in the Allstacks tool. The number of days coding might be a bit controversial, but ShareFile aims to see teams coding 3 days a week. (For comparison, teams code on average about 2.75 days a week, according to our **Engineering Performance Benchmarks**.) "If something's wrong (with this metric), it's a way to ask a question," Swanson said. "We're not assuming someone's not working. Maybe the story is just too big or there are too many dependencies." And finally backlog health is just a way to help teams know when they have the right amount of work in the pipeline, not too much or too little.
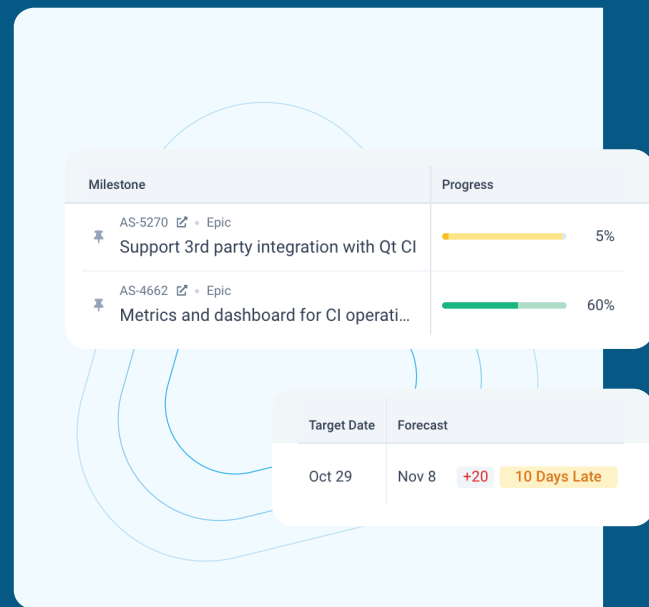
At ShareFile, Allstacks was both a catalyst for culture change and something that required a culture change in order to get the most out of it. Allstacks brought the transparency, and with that came a "democratization" of data, and that powered a tremendous amount of change. But it also required lots of conversations and the creation of a culture that was open to change. In the end, "we're much more accountable around delivering what we said we'd do," Majeski said.

Through it all the ShareFile team "fully partnered" with Allstacks at every step of the process, trained a trainer, rolled it out slowly, and created documentation and support around all the new processes. "We kind of went in full circle," Swanson said. Over time the rest of the team adopted Allstacks, and now groups beyond engineering are giving it a go, based on the success they've seen within the development teams.

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Realizing Concrete Benefits

ShareFile's adoption of Allstacks has been successful by a number of measures. First, the company's cycle time improved by an impressive 32%, which largely reflects engineering management's ability to actually *see* what's being worked on and make changes as needed. "We're no longer working on things that don't move the needle. Also, we're focused on things that matter and teams are rallying around that - it's all hands on deck. We're all trying to drive the outcomes we want so cycle time has got to go down," Swanson said.

ShareFile has also seen pull request response time decrease by 25%, a sign, Pier said, that the engineering teams and managers really understand the flow of work. "Allstacks was able to give us more data points around the PR process like what particular part of the week we were seeing a lot of PR pendings," Pier said. That made it much simpler to troubleshoot the process and streamline the steps. "In the past we wouldn't have known about this data," Majeski offered. "You don't get this type of data out of Bitbucket or GitHub so it's a completely new area for us to think about. Now we're actually collaborating... and moving our product forward."

Another key piece of this partnership was Allstacks' willingness to truly partner with ShareFile, working on some very specific metrics and reporting requests. Working with Allstacks "was a whole other dimension in terms of partnerships," Lura said. "(Allstacks) was willing to evolve the product to align with things we needed, and that's not something we could get from another vendor."
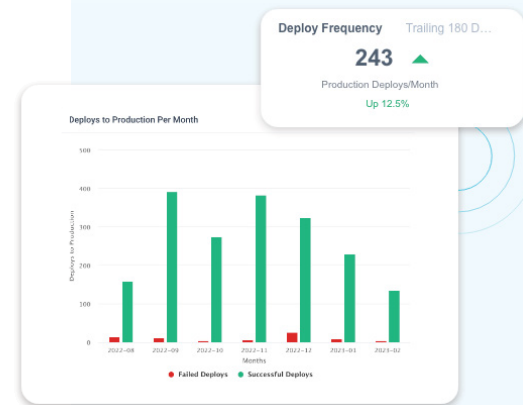
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Michael Swanson, Senior Engineering Manager

"The Tool We Start Our Day With"

Eight months after the ShareFile engineering teams adopted Allstacks, it's become a trusted go-to, whether it's prepping for a retrospective or simply starting the day. Swanson kicks off every day by looking at the portfolio view to see how teams are progressing against their planned commitments and taking a deep dive as needed if things are in the red. Now it's a simple matter to see how engineering work ties into OKRs, bringing much needed alignment between engineering and the business side.

His colleagues have leaned into Allstacks too, whether it's relying on the metrics to spot burnout or quickly eliminating dependencies and blockers to improve productivity. It was a big change, but they've learned a lot.

For companies on the fence, here are two ways they suggested to think about whether Allstacks should be the tool your organization starts its day with:

Do you understand how your engineering team works?

"We need to understand what engineering teams look like, how they are actually performing, and how they're being productive. Engineering can be one of the most expensive areas in your company. And if we don't have something which can actually provide the metrics that show if they're a good team or a medium-level team, that shows how they're really performing, it's going to be a disaster. If your product is driven by mainly engineers, I recommend you go with Allstacks." PJ Pier

Do you know where the problems are?

"You need to baseline where you think the problems are. If you come to roughly the same conclusion we did – you don't know what your teams were working on, you didn't know how quickly they were getting it done, you didn't know where the pain points were – your organization really doesn't understand the core issues, and you don't really have a handle on managing your team." Michael Swanson