Chada Tech Agile Transition

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Transitioning from a linear workflow to an Agile approach poses many challenges, but the SNHU Travel project presented an ideal opportunity to test out a new approach. Now that we’ve finished the iteration and have a chance to look back on our methodology, we can take a hard look at what worked for us, and what we may need to improve on moving forwards.

Implementing the various roles for our Agile team were crucial to the success of the project. Our Product Owner meticulously defined the product backlog and prioritized user stories based on business value, a process that was key to shaping the application. For instance, the Product Owner organized the new "Top-Five" recommendations feature into a series of user stories, ensuring that the team understood the requirements and could deliver the functionality incrementally. I, as the Scrum Master, focused on facilitating the Agile events and removing impediments. I led the daily Scrums to keep communication flowing, ensuring that everyone on the development team was aligned and aware of any blockers. The Tester was an integral part of the development process, designing and completing test cases for each new feature. This rigorous testing approach guaranteed the quality and stability of our product. Finally, the Developer built each feature, using the user stories and test plans as guides to ensure the final functionality met the desired specifications. This collaborative and clearly defined division of responsibilities was essential to our project's success.

The Scrum-Agile approach, with its iterative and incremental nature, was instrumental in bringing user stories to completion. We broke down large, complex requirements into smaller, manageable user stories. For example, instead of a single, large requirement like "Create a trip recommendation system," we created user stories like: "As a user, I want to see recommendations for trips based on a desired price range" and “As a user, I want to see recommendations for trips to destinations I have not visited before.” During our Sprint Planning meetings, the team would estimate the effort for these user stories, and we would commit to completing a specific number of them within a single sprint. The Daily Scrum meetings provided a forum for the team to report on their progress and identify any obstacles that might prevent a user story from being completed. This transparency and frequent check-in process allowed us to stay on track and deliver working software at the end of each sprint.

The SNHU Travel project experienced an interruption when the client, SNHU Travel, decided to pivot its offerings to focus on wellness and detoxifying trips and destinations. This required a significant change in the application's direction and planned work which would have caused a major disruption in a Waterfall project, and likely delayed the entire project. However, the Scrum-Agile approach allowed us to adapt quickly. We addressed this change during our next meeting, where Product Owner worked with SNHU Travel to re-prioritize the product backlog to reflect the new requirements. Several user stories related to the previous strategy were de-prioritized or removed, and new user stories focused on "wellness destinations" were added. The team then began working on these new high-priority items, minimizing the impact of the change and ensuring that the project continued to deliver value aligned with the client's new vision.

Effective communication was a cornerstone of the project's success. The Scrum framework provides multiple opportunities for communication, and I ensured these channels were used effectively. For example, during our Daily Scrums, I would keep the meeting focused by deferring in-depth discussions about impediments and taking ownership of the problem-solving process. This approach encouraged team members to speak up about challenges without fear of derailing the meeting. I also used our team communication channels (like email and instant messaging) for quick, clear announcements, which ensured everyone received the same information promptly and understood the required actions. The use of project boards or a project management platform (like Jira or Azure Boards) could have acted as an information radiator, letting team members get updates about the current status of the project on their own in real time.

We did not use a project management tool during this project, which limited our ability to visualize progress. Having a centralized place to track and manage user stories became an area for improvement. For future projects, I recommend implementing a tool that can integrate with our communication channels. This would allow for a Kanban board to be used during our Daily Scrums, giving the team a clear, real-time view of what's in the "To Do," "In Progress," and "Done" columns. For example, if a developer moves a user story to the "Done" column, an automated update could be sent to our team's Slack channel, improving transparency and keeping everyone informed of progress. The Sprint Planning and Sprint Review events would also be directly tied to this board, providing a single source of truth for our team's work.

The Scrum-Agile approach presented several pros during the SNHU Travel project, including adaptability, faster delivery, improved communication, and increased collaboration. The iterative nature of Scrum allowed us to quickly respond to SNHU Travel's change in marketing strategy without a significant negative impact on the project timeline, and we were able to deliver working, demonstrable software at the end of each sprint. However, the approach also had some cons, such as an initial learning curve for team members accustomed to the rigid structure of the waterfall model, and a risk of scope creep that had to be carefully managed. The effectiveness of the process was also heavily reliant on a strong Scrum Master to facilitate meetings and remove impediments efficiently. For this project the Scrum-Agile approach was a good choice, and an excellent opportunity to practice, since the project's requirements were not fully defined at the outset, and the client's needs were subject to change. A waterfall model, which relies on a comprehensive, upfront plan, would have been a poor fit for this environment. The Scrum-Agile methodology's emphasis on flexibility, continuous delivery, and transparent communication allowed us to build a product that not only met the client's evolving needs but also delivered value incrementally. This pilot project has shown that a transition to a Scrum-Agile approach at ChadaTech has the potential to improve our adaptability, enhance collaboration, and ultimately deliver higher-quality software to our clients.