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SNHU Travel Development

A Sprint Retrospective for Chada Tech

Chada Tech formed our team, which we self-named as “Team X”, X for experiment. The experiment focused on working with the Agile philosophy. We divided into three roles: the product owner, scrum master, and developers. As a team of equals we worked together to deliver a high-quality travel website for SNHU Travel, focused on niche travel packages. As you will see from this retrospective we attempted to work within the Agile framework as much as possible.

We will start with the pre planning phase. The product owner, Christy, scrum master, Ron, and the client, Amanda held a meeting to discuss the product. Amanda explained she wanted a travel website for her booking agency that featured niche vacation packages within the United States. After the initial meeting Christy started on the backlog developing user stories. The backlog is a collection of user stories that end-users and stakeholders wish to see in the final product. Managing the backlog is the product owner’s responsibility. She often held meetings with end-users to discuss what they desired on the website. For example, in one meeting users discussed a travel profile, a top 10 list, and a refined search feature. With this input Christy developed a multitude of user stories like: “As an end-user, I want to setup a travel profile so that I can get ideas for travel destinations”. Another is: “As an end user, I want to click a link to view the top five destinations list, so that I can see the most popular locations for travel to educate myself on the best places to go.”

Once Christy established the backlog Ron, the scrum master, formed the development team. The team consisted of Bill, a developer, and Jill, a tester, and me, a novice programmer. Ron worked directly with us, allowing Christy time to maintain the backlog and interpret the product’s vision. As scrum master, Ron guided the development team through various ceremonies like the daily standup. Each day the developers gathered to explain what they did the day before, what they planned on doing that day, and what help they needed to accomplish the task. In this meeting Ron guided the discussion and ensured it did not last longer than fifteen minutes. He also mediated between the product owner and developers. For example, when Christy and the client decided to change the travel packages to detox and wellness. Ron worked with Christy to clarify potential issues, like moving the project deadline or refocusing user stories. This proved that Ron’s main concern was the health and stability of his team.

Bill and Jill, worked in tandem to create the product. As the tester, Jill created test cases based on user stories. Going back to the user story about a travel profile, she crafted a test case on how a user creates a profile. She established pre-conditions and a set of inputs, then laid out expected results. Bill then developed code and web design that satisfied these test cases. This is an example of test-driven development, where results are established first and the design is planned around that criterion. Looking at the test case of the travel profile, Jill established two preconditions, the account is email verified and the user is signed into the website. From there, she setup eight inputs, starting with a link from the account page and seven subsequent steps to follow. Each step has a corresponding result. For example, when the user clicks the reset button the profile reverts to its last condition.

Development and testing occurred in sprints, each lasting two weeks. The scrum master and development team worked together to flesh out the user stories on the backlog, using a small white board. Stories were written out on note cards and each morning team members divided up the tasks, moving them from in progress, to committed, and finally released. This process went through a feedback loop, where we invited end users to test a beta site. Beta testers used the website looking for bugs and suggesting features or refinements, that Jill used to tune her test cases. During development, a beta tester emailed us suggesting that users can establish certain criteria before receiving results. In response, Jill revised the test case factoring this in and Bill programmed a button which brought down the refined search on the main page.

The team handled major changes as a group. At one point in a sprint Christy called a meeting. Bill, Jill, and Ron gathered, and Christy explained that they wanted the website to focus on detox and wellness packages. Bill asked if he needed to overhaul the website and Ron needed to understand how this affected the deadline. Christy assured them they would not revamp the website, and that she and Ron will reprioritize the backlog. What is unique in this situation is how Christy handled the interaction. Instead of a memo she held a face-to-face meeting. She respected the team and needed their input on how to make the change.

This form of communication is key to the Agile-Scrum setup. In small settings like ours face-to-face meetings are possible when people are collocated. In some cases, email is preferred, such as with our beta testers. Other forms of communication we used was the Kanban board in the common area. The board is updated by me, Ron, Bill, and Jill daily. This way Christy can monitor completion and understand impediments.

Overall, Team X sees the agile approach as a success. Some of the benefits we took away from this assignment included flexible time management. While SNHU gave us a five-week deadline, we organized the work and sprint ourselves. This allowed us to alter future increments if a story took longer than expected. Also, we found communication effective. Many times, we preferred face-to-face meetings, but in some cases we used other means. One tool we enjoyed was Jira. While we did not use it extensively, we did play with it some. It helped streamline user stories and facilitate the feedback loop. For example, Christy can add a user story to the board and Ron can make some changes. Also, developers and beta testers organized their contributions tailored to a specific story. For example, the legal department created guidelines that new users agree to. Jeff, the lawyer assigned to our team, drafted the guidelines, and attached a PDF, which we copied and pasted on to the new user page. Then our beta tester was able to compare the original PDF to what he saw on the website, essentially double checking our work.

We did have a few problems. Sometimes the daily standup took longer than expected. Especially the Monday after Will slapped Chris on the Oscars. Our short time with Jira confused some testers, who did not understand how the virtual board worked. We tried holding a workshop, but only a couple showed. Overall, we enjoyed the experience and believe the scrum-agile framework is much better than the waterfall method.

The most important aspect of this experiment is how the team treated one another. Everyone saw each other as equals. At first there was some friction between Bill and Jill, mostly over what PaaS to use, Azure or Amazon. The final decision was left to Christy, despite Bill’s protest, but in the end, he believed in the product and with Ron’s help we all worked through our differences. This is how we saw the Agile framework play out, a collaboration of professionals.