ChadaTech and Agile

During our eight week trial period of the agile methodology, we learned how to effectively develop deliverables as a team in a far more efficient manner than the waterfall method. Shifting towards scrum as a way of handling our workflow presented some initial challenge, but we found our stride and took off in terms of handling whatever came our way. We wouldn’t have been able to handle this shift if it weren’t for everyone on the team doing their part.

Our developers and testers demonstrated effective communication when it came to ironing out bugs and adding additional content to the project. We felt as a team that this was important, and we should truly emphasize the power of effective communication. Their check-ins during the morning scrum meetings gave us very good insight into the progress of the project. The scrum master was punctual and mentally present for every morning scrum meeting we had. Without their efforts, our sprints would have been uncoordinated and team resources would have been gravely misused.

Lastly, our product owners and shareholders were always giving us critical feedback related to the project. Their input was always taken into account as they’re going to be the ones using the product once it’s complete. Collecting user stories from the product owner and the shareholders was easy, as we held meetings regarding what they’d like to see added or changed about the project. This feedback was always taken by our developers and testers, assigned priority within the product backlog, and implemented once the meetings were finished.

A primary example of how our team members effectively executed their role was when our testers and developers took user stories from our initial shareholder meetings and made them reality. We gave them the proper level of priority within our product backlog and when met with requests for change or addition we shifted priorities to compensate. This became common practice as the weeks went by and making sure the product was in line with shareholder needs became our focus.

At one point during the project, our developers were met with a meeting in which the product owner had requested changes to be made to one of the features of the site. Thusly, our developers replied with being able to do it within the timeframe and communicated the changes made with our testers. Then, appropriate test cases were created and executed to ensure that the changes were sound and would be bug-free on arrival. The team and I made sure to communicate with the product owner regarding this new addition for further clarification.

We utilized team meetings and emails to effectively communicate between team members outside of the morning meeting. We treated our meetings as sprint check-ins and worked with each other to resolve any impediments one team member may have. We shared our knowledge and skills between members to conquer our sprint deadlines and ensure timeliness. This also grew our overall confidence as a team in both each other and the project as a whole and solidified our total individual knowledge.

In the waterfall methodology, everything is meant to come flowing down in a glorious crash which results in a completed deliverable. I feel as though that gathering information and planning for it in advance, as we had as a company, is completely inefficient after experiencing agile. Daily, and sometimes weekly, check-ins are extremely important for product quality. They allow for your team to strategically strengthen the sprint effort on a day to day basis versus having one singular and immovable schedule. It also eases shareholder anxiety by giving them a roadmap and the ability to make changes to their own product.

Utilizing a handful of simple tools, we were able to accomplish our goals in an organized and timely manner. The most important tool, in my opinion, would have been our poster board with our backlog items. By using this tool, we were able to assign personal accountability to tasks at each and every morning sprint meeting. We were able to efficiently plan and update the team on tasks on the board, keeping the pace of the project brisk yet clear. Given more time, I would have liked to experiment with other management tools such as Jira as I believe they would have been a great asset to our team.

Reflecting on this experience, scrum and agile worked very well for this project. Agile allowed us to develop in bursts while maintaining effective teamwide clarity through the use of our task board and large displays. Some cons I would like to address lie in the potential for clients to be slow regarding response time. Some situations require shareholder involvement and ensuring prompt response would be good. There is also the potential of your shareholder group completely bombarding you with change requests. As a result, you bog down the development pipeline and gum up your scrum master and product owner’s schedule.

This particular project was developed using the agile framework and it felt great through and through. I would say however that not all projects should be done in an agile framework. Some larger projects can be done in a waterfall style if every possible piece of information is present in the planning stages. With agile, you plan sprints whereas waterfall plans the entire project from the get. It comes down to rigidity versus fluidity and how large the project is versus how much information you have. From the developer perspective, I’d have to argue that most projects should be done in an agile setting given just how productive we were during this trial project.

Moving forward I invite all present at ChadaTech to give agile a try. This methodology proved it’s mettle these past two months and I truly believe that it can change the way we operate as a company. With proper training and information handling, we can morph our corporate staff into the support our developers need and become the face of freelance. I thank you for your time and effort put in these last few weeks, now get out there and show our clients what we’re made of.