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Sprint Retrospective

At the end of a sprint, and in this case our final sprint, it is important to look back on our successes and our struggles to learn the various ways we will continue to grow and become a more efficient team. This is a key concept in agile, continuous growth and improvement. This retrospective is especially significant because it is my hope it will be clear from this review that Agile is an effective project management methodology and is ideal way for Chada Tech to continue developing quality products to our clients. Our team was tasked with assisting SNHU Travel in the rollout of their new travel booking site. An already top performing travel site, SNHU Travel, hoped to expand their client base and virtual presence by offering new and enticing travel packages. They asked for help in developing this system.

Each member of our team was integral to the success of this project. Our project manager lead the way by effortlessly imparting the desires of the client on to our dev team. They helped create an easy and manageable product backlog which made completing the project in a rapid amount of time feel effortless. Thanks to the constant effort to communicate with our client, the project manager was able to help us easily pivot and change when requested by the client. As the scrum master, I did my best to help facilitate effective communication between team members and others. I also worked diligently to remove impediments to our dev team’s progress. I believe that the daily scrums that we held were especially effective in completing the project at hand. I was able to see this when our developer and tester were able to quickly change test cases to address changes in direction just in our brief meeting. Without our daily meetings, those interactions might not have been able to happen. Our developer was the backbone of our team. Without their diligent work in completing the program itself, this project would not have been possible. Two key principles of agile are delivering working software and promoting sustainable development. By crafting our code incrementally and as simply yet efficient as possible, our developer helped ensure that the code could easily be re-written and adapted as new issues and challenges presented themselves during the development process. Lastly, our tester cannot be forgotten for their contributions. Agile insists on delivering working software, it is a primary measure of success. By creating clear and concise test cases, our tester ensured that any deliverables we presented would be able to accurately and without issue represent the work that we had already put into the system.

A benefit of the agile approach is that there is less focus on documentation. This allows for more flexibility and less confusion. We see how that is beneficial when we consider how user stories are completed. We strive to have them be put in simple language that can easily be understood by the developer and the user. Ideally this simple language allows the developer to showcase their skills and contribute to the success of the project. The value statement is an especially useful tool in the user story as well because it allows those working on it to put themselves in the shoes of the end user. This exercise in imagination ensures that the original purpose of the system is not lost while the team is designing the system. This is also a good opportunity to highlight how agile’s adaptive nature is especially useful when a project needs to change direction.

One of the key user stories we had for this project was the Top 5 Destinations page. In its beginning phases it was meant to be a link that could be accessed to show the top 5 travel destinations for a specific user. In accord with agile’s focus on simplicity and presentable work, our developer was able to present a working prototype of this user story. As communication with the client continued, it was determined that a slideshow presentation would be a more effective approach. Because a simple and flexible code was created, it was easy to transition the current code into what would become the final design choice of the slideshow. Another curveball was then thrown when the client returned requesting a pivot to a focus on wellness and detox vacations. In a more traditional methodology, these changes may not have been possible. The planning and design phase of the SDLC would have long since passed. It could have increased production time and cost a great deal more to make this possible. Thanks to the hard work of our team, this pivot was more than easy to accomplish. Constant communication between team members ensured a smooth transition to this new vision. Additionally, no change had to be made to the project timeline. It was still completed in the original time agreed upon.

Communication was critical to our success in this project and a cornerstone of Agile. When everyone is on the same page, it is easier to collaborate and address issues. Here are a view excerpts from our communications during this project:

* “As I create the test cases, I have a few style questions regarding User Story 4, Vacation Type Selection. The user story mentions the user should be able to select dates for their vacation packages:
  + If the latter option is selected, should the user enter their dates by the commonly American, month/day/year, or the most European, day/month/year?”
* “I was hoping that you could clarify a few details for me as I complete the user story that fulfils their request?...... If you can get back to me within the next day or two with any extra details you can share I would greatly appreciate it. If it would suit you, perhaps we can even meet either in person or via Zoom to discuss the details further?”

In the first, it may seem like a small detail, the question asked, but with travel related work it was vitally important. This clarification helped ensure simplicity of the user story did not get in the way of proper design of the system. The other highlighted how we weaved flexible communication into our schedule. We can’t always be together in one location, nor does text alone provide clear instructions. We made sure that all members of the team made great effort to constantly collaborate and communicate effectively.

To help us complete this project, we took advantage of Microsoft Azure. It was an effective tool that helped all on the team be able to easily reach and reference the various materials we needed. For instance, having a virtual kanban board was especially useful instead of having to rely on a physical space. It is convenient to be able to call back decisions made during the daily scrum on your own computer. The various scrum principles we used in our charter helped center the team around the same ideals throughout the project. We adopted adaptability as a focus and embraced change. We took seriously the principle to build in quality. As we mentioned, this focus helped ensure we finished our project on schedule even with multiple large scale changes requested from the client. We could not have accomplished this if we were not one cohesive team.

There are of course negatives to the scrum approach. A loosely structure team may not always come together quickly, change can sometimes be unwelcome, and hard work might have to be scrapped in favor of changes. Through this project we were able to see many positives in return though: a highly effective team come together. It was always very clear what needed to be worked on during the project through our backlog, user stories and test cases. I believe agile was the best approach for project. I believe we were able to deliver a higher quality product for SNHU Travel that we may not have been able to return using another methodology. We were able to do so in the time requested and I do not believe our team ever felt crunched for team even with the various changes brought throughout the process. I personally highly recommend that we begin to look for new projects where we can apply the agile methodology in Chada Tech.

Sources:

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