Sprint Review and Retrospective: SNHU Travel

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Our client SNHU Travel recently requested our assistance with creating a system that will allow them to expand their client base using innovative tools that they’ve identified. Completing this request took effort on the part of every member of the team. This project also serves as the pilot for ChadaTech’s transition into using Agile methodology with Scrum framework. This helped with developing the system, as we had a clear iterative process for how we could roll out the project.

Each member of the team played an integral part in the project’s success. As Scrum Master, I took responsibility for running the Daily Scrum and implementing Scrum throughout the development process. To do this, I devoted time to coordinating with the Product Owner on the product backlog. This process provides the project with clear success metrics that provide the project with structure. I also worked to guide our Daily Scrum, engaging the group with open-ended prompts like: “What are your key goals and which one are you closest to accomplishing?”, “What tasks are standing in your way of accomplishing this goal?”, and “What do you plan to do today to bring you closer to achieving this goal?” These questions encourage the group to reflect on where they are in their work and what is still standing in their way. Finally, I clearly defined our project’s vision, mission statement, success criteria, risks, and communication/intrateam behavior guidelines in the Agile Team Charter.

The Product Owner essentially serves as the face for the team to the client. Their first priority was meeting with the client, Amanda, to determine the initial goals of SNHU Travel. This process involved gathering the key details of the client’s goal for the system and the timeframe in which they’re looking to complete them. Using these details, they’ll then begin to create the Product Backlog to provide the team with a reference of what still needs to be done. Additionally, during this sprint, the Product Owner also held a focus group with a few of our client’s top customers to determine what needs the customer base has that the client may not have been aware of. From this process, we learned of several additional needs for the system, such as a top 5 destinations list, the ability to filter by price and vacation type, and customized vacation recommendations. These recommendations are then elaborated and organized using user stories template in Microsoft Excel. The Scrum-Agile approach was crucial to implementing this feedback, as its iterative process allows the team to quickly pivot their work toward incorporating new ideas. If we were to use a less adaptive approach, we would be limited to the original system requirements with no room for change.

The Tester played a pivotal role in developing the user stories into a format more suitable for the developers. Using a format similar to the User Stories Excel document, the tester refined the user stories by breaking each story down into the specific actions taken by user along with the expected response from the system. This information is especially useful to the development team, because it provides clear and precise success metrics for each test case. When the test cases have been completed, the Tester then reviews any communication from the Product Owner to determine if these test cases need to be refined any further. Our tester in this instance revised all three test cases based on the information provided to clarify the success metrics further.

Our development team was the backbone of this project. They were able to seamlessly incorporate Agile principles into their development process for SNHU Travel. The team moved quickly to incorporate updates requested of the system based on information from users and the client. These changes involved adding features that were not originally part of the Product Backlog. When the Tester sent in the refined list of system requirements based on user stories, they were able to seamlessly incorporate these functions, though they were not initially part of the plan for the system. The Waterfall methodology would not have been able to succeed with these same changing conditions, as it doesn’t allow for adjustments to the system’s requirements after the development process has begun. In addition to the updates based on user feedback, there was a last-minute change in the client’s needs based on a shift in the market. The system now had to incorporate a slide show view, and the vacations needed to be focused on wellness and detox vacations. Due to the Agile framework we used for this system, we were still able to meet the client’s needs on the same time schedule by deprioritizing other stories in the backlog.

When facilitating communication within the team, I’ve done my best to keep things clear and concise. This can be seen in the following excerpt, taken from communication between a Tester speaking to the rest of his team: “As part of the Product Testing team, the Agile methodology provides me with more freedom when reviewing user stories. While previously, I put focus on implementing feedback that directly corresponded with the set product backlog. With the incorporation of Agile methods, I now feel empowered to ask questions that dig into the root of what the client is looking for, even if it’s not part of the original plan for the system. This will undoubtedly result in a more dynamic system overall.

In the end, I feel that the Scrum-Agile approach was the best for the SNHU Travel development project. While this approach undoubtedly increases the workload of the Product Manager and requires a Scrum Master to implement, the ability to adapt to changing market conditions vastly outweighs the cons. Both the client and developers have much more flexibility with this approach, allowing for updates to system requirements based on user feedback. This feedback will need to be clear and refined, however. Otherwise, it would still be impossible to implement. In this instance, the team was able to take advantage of our user feedback, refine it using our Testers, and develop a truly optimal system for SNHU Travel.