Sprint Review and Retrospective

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1. SNHU Travel Scrum-Agile Team Roles

The various roles of the Scrum-agile team worked together to produce the project results like pieces of a puzzle coming together. Each piece by itself makes up a small amount of the bigger picture, but without the other pieces, the puzzle cannot be complete. As I experienced each role of the Scrum-agile team, I learned what each role contributed as well as what each team member might need to do their part better.

The scrum master must understand everyone’s roles and where they are in the process at all times. While this role can sometimes “blend in with the background” in a way, they are actually an integral role facilitating between product owner and the team, or even serving as conflict negotiator. As scrum master, I managed the overall “to-do” list as well as progress for the SNHU travel project. I also developed the agile team charter, started the team on their daily scrum meetings, and identified possible conflict within the team regarding a habitually late team member. Although the scrum master might start a team off on their daily scrum, ultimately the goal is to empower the team to lead these meetings.

The product owner engages with stakeholders and users (or potential users) as well as manages the product backlog. As I experienced the product owner role, I gathered input, requirements, and requests for use in user stories and helped the scrum team understand their tasks and goals regarding the project. Meetings with the client company representatives as well as holding focus groups helped to gather this information for the team as well as gain insight into any changes along the way, such as switching the focus of the “Top Destinations” to a “Wellness and Detox” niche. With such changes, user stories then need to be updated and tested.

As tester, I experienced the development of test cases which related to the user stories and communicated with the team on what worked and what didn’t along the way. Any changes that occur would also need to be tested, such as when the client changes the main focus of the site you’ve been working on with your team. As the user stories are updated, so must the test cases be updated as well. Some changes affect only part of the user experience, which is what I encountered with my test case scenarios. When the Top Destinations slide show changed to a Detox and Wellness focus, this did not impact the parts of the SNHU Travel site related to user profiles and ratings, therefore those areas were not changed but still tested and refined as needed.

Finally, the last role I experienced in the scrum team was that of the developer. This role is exactly what it sounds like: the person or people on the team who develop the code and fix any issues along the way that are identified by the tester. This role is a heavy load to bear, as changes that arise later in the development can cause a lot of stress and questions. As the developer, when changes occurred late in the project, the biggest question was, “Does all the work progress need to be scrapped or can it be adapted to fit the changes?” In this role I also experienced the need for clear communication amongst the team and with the client, and I found that the developer needs to be able to work closely with the tester to find what works and what does not in each test case.

1. Scrum-Agile Approach to the SDLC and User Stories

The Scrum-Agile approach to the software development life cycle helped the user stories come to completion through each team member’s flexibility and continued communication. Defining the project and identifying the prospective users was the first step in the product owner developing user stories, but good communication within the team through daily scrum meetings, emails, collaborations, and the facilitations of the scrum master to help move information along was critical in helping the user stories come to life as a finished product in the SNHU Travel site. Any questions or suggestions along the way could be communicated openly amongst the team and the product owner, in conjunction with the scrum master, could update the user stories and product backlog as needed to produce the final product that matched the user stories. For example, in the focus group a potential user stated that he wanted to customize his profile to include cruises. Therefore, a user story was created to allow for customizing the user’s profile to certain types of vacations. A test case was then created from that user story which allowed the developer and tester to bring this scenario to life in the actual travel site.

1. Scrum-Agile Approach and Project Interruptions/Changes

Flexibility, openness, and transparency within the team are key concepts of the agile approach and this was very evident when changes were requested by the client near the end of the project (while the timeline remained the same). With agile being so flexible and running smaller portions of the project in sprints, it allows for change without necessarily needing any adjustments in the timeline. Nevertheless, each team member had questions pertaining to their role when the project was interrupted and changed direction. For example the developer needed to know if everything they had worked on had to be scrapped or could be reused in any way, the product owner needed to update the user stories and the tester needed to update the test cases.

1. Communication

Communicating amongst team members can take many forms: face-to-face, written, electronic, etc. Effective communication is essential for success and team members must remain open and willing to seek clarification as needed. Addressing questions to individual team members via email is one example of getting answers and because it is direct, there is no confusion about who should respond. However, all information received should be shared with the rest of the team (again, agile is known for flexibility and transparency). Some of the communication used during this project to clarify project details follows. The questions are addressed directly to specific individuals or a team, and each question is separated and uses a numeric ordering to help ensure nothing is missed. In addition, team members are reminded of meetings or offered meetings for a chance to engage in real time.

Christy and Ryan,

As product owner and tester on this current slide show project, please respond with regards to specific answers as they pertain to you and your role in this project:

1. Are there any changes to the formatting or cosmetic look of the site? Should the background color be changed? Should the font size, style, and/or color be changed?
2. Do any pictures need to be changed? If so, when and where can I expect to receive them for inclusion?
3. Will there be any changes to the current timeline and/or final product deadline?

Please respond within 1 business day, and if I haven’t heard from you by the next daily Scrum meeting, I will inform and/or remind you about these questions.

Thank you,

Tosha Kocka, developer

Re: SNHU Travel site “Top Destinations”

Good morning Christy,

Our team is working through the user stories and design elements that came out of the focus group and we have some important questions about the layout/look of the site. If you can provide the following details, we would greatly appreciate it:

1. Will the Top Destinations appear ranked in a list from top to bottom?
   1. If so, will the list start with #1 at the top and continue with #10 at the bottom?
   2. If not, will we present them as a slideshow instead?
      1. Will the slideshow start with the top-ranked Top Destination or start with the last-rank Top Destination?
2. Will we allow the user to customize the Top Destinations list with filters?
   1. If so, what kinds of filters do you see as needed? Our team has suggested sorting the Top Destinations by price, user entering a price range (minimum price and maximum price specified by user), and a “For You” filter that shows Top Destinations related to the user’s profile interests.

Please get back to us as soon as possible and perhaps we can schedule another meeting to ensure this project is on track the way your company envisions it.

Thank you,

Tosha Kocka

1. Organizational Tools and Scrum-Agile Principles

The team used several tools for effective communication and to track progress, such as a whiteboard and color-coded markers, post-it notes with dates or to-do lists that can be moved around or checked off, and a virtual task/progress tracker similar to Microsoft TFS. Each team member had access to the tools and the scrum master was ultimately responsible for overseeing and ensuring each tool was up-to-date and that each team member interacted with the tools per their roles. The physical tools (often referred to as information radiators) were utilized in daily scrum meetings and maintained in a central location where team members could revisit and update them as needed. Virtual tools were available via computer and always available to team members as well.

I found daily standups (team meetings of approximately 15 minutes) to be an essential tool for the team to stay connected and updated. The scrum master can help facilitate and get these meetings started, but the goal has always been for the team to take ownership of their meetings. Each team member takes turns answering the same three questions such as:

What did I accomplish yesterday?

What do I plan to accomplish today?

What obstacles are in my way?

These questions could change or be tailored based upon the project, team, or where the team is in the project. The team utilized the agile business principles throughout the process and all tools and communications upheld these principles (such as focusing on customer need and constant improvement of user experience, adaptive strategies/tactics, empowering team members, and minimizing “wasted” effort – using/salvaging what we could when the project focus changed).

1. Effectiveness of the Scrum-Agile Approach

The agile approach has both pros and cons that presented themselves throughout the SNHU Travel project. I really like that each team member is valued and encouraged to input ideas and ask questions. This creates a cohesive team where workflow becomes easier the longer the team is together. The downside is that a newcomer may feel intimidated and have a difficult time assimilating. Another advantage to the agile methodology is the flexibility without delaying release or extending/revising the timeline. When one of the main project focuses changed from “Top Destinations” to “Detox and Wellness” the team did not have to completely start over, however a drawback to this was that team members experienced some stress in revising their parts of the project and the developer in particular had to scramble to revise code and figure out from where to pull assets for use in the new slideshow. Overall, the agile approach was the best approach for the SNHU Travel project because it allowed for changes to occur without delaying or starting the project over and it allowed for each team member to exercise autonomy in their role which can bring out the best possible ideas both creatively and technically.