**Sprint Review and Retrospective**

Kyle L Bauer

SNHU

CS-250: Software Development Lifecycle

February 13, 2023

As the SNHU Travel project comes to a close, I think now is the time to reflect on how everything came together and to analyze the various components of an Agile-based project management approach.

All of the Scrum roles contributed a satisfactory amount of value towards the project. For example, the Product Owner had a meeting with the expected end users of the website in other to gauge what features and functionalities would be most important to them. Afterwards, she was able to prioritize those items into the product backlog. The Tester had experienced some confusion regarding a few user story requirements, but they were able to easily get clarification by sending out an email to the Product Owner requesting more information. Last but certainly not least, the development team was able to come together to actually implement the desired features. They were even able to successfully adapt to changing requirements when the Product Owner informed the team that they would be shifting focus to detox/wellness vacations.

The Scrum approach was very effective in creating user stories to reflect the functionality that was going to be built. While writing user stories, there was an emphasis placed on putting oneself in the shoes of a particular stakeholder in the project. For our purposes, this was done from the point of view of the end user. By assuming this role, we were able to write stories based on what the user would want to accomplish by focusing on what value they were hoping to obtain. For example, several of our user stories involved displaying destinations to users that they were more likely to be interested in based on their previous travel history. Other stories included the ability to sort destinations by price, or to eliminate those that were outside a used-supplied budget range. With these stories, we were able to clearly describe the steps and outcomes that were necessary to achieve proper implementations of said features.

A core facet of an Agile ideology is being responsive and adaptive to change. In the case of the SHNU Travel Project, there was a moment when the Product Owner communicated to the team that the focus would be changing to detox/wellness vacations. This meeting was held face to face, which upheld the Agile principles of valuing people over processes as well as open communication. During the conversation, the development team was able to ask clarifying questions on how the change in direction would affect their already completed work. Ultimately the Product Owner decided to deprioritize other product backlog items in order to accommodate this shift while maintaining their Sprint deadline.

While working in the role of Tester, I had to write an email to the Product Owner requesting clarification on some of these new requirements. For example, I wasn’t quite sure what was intended by the term detox/wellness vacation. Initially I had thought this meant we were going to be targeting the drug and alcohol rehabilitation market, but after clarification I was able to realize our terminology was supposed to refer to technological detox and general mental health wellness. Had I not had open communication channels, I might not have been able to get clarification on this point quickly, and I may have been subject to unnecessary delays or even wasted my time producing incorrect tests.

We also made use of various tools to help facilitate communication, collaboration, and to encourage success. Affinity grouping was a technique used to evaluate the level of difficulty associated with user stories compared to the other user stories in the Sprint. JIRA was used to digitally track progress during each Sprint. Using JIRA, the development team, the Product Owner, and the customer were able to stay up-to-date with how the project was progressing. Events such as the Daily Scrum were also carried out in order to get everyone in the room together for fifteen minutes to review the status of the project. During this meeting, everyone on the team was given the opportunity to verbalize their successes, their challenges, and their impediments. Action would then be taken by the Scrum Master in order to eliminate any challenges or impediments to the best of their ability. Using tools and Scrum events are very important, as they encourage active communication within a product.

As with any approach we could have taken, there were positives as well as negatives with following Agile. One major benefit was that we were able to start working on the SNHU Travel project immediately without having to wait for detailed project requirements. Because we were implementing functionality “just-in-time”, we were able to more easily adapt to any changing requirements than what we would have been if we were already committed to a permanent picture of what the project was supposed to look like. However, Agile presented some drawbacks as well. Agile is all about embracing change, but there is some level of anxiety that can be present while expecting change to occur. There is truly no way to know ahead of time whether the changes that come will be small and easily manageable or if they will be large, complex, and require a significant shift in resources. Furthermore, the project had a deadline of five weeks, and if the customer requested too much change it may have been difficult if not completely impossible to meet that deadline.

I do believe that Agile was the best approach for this project. We had enough requirements at the start that allowed us to start working on functionality that was unlikely to change. In particular, we knew that the project was going to be a website offering vacation destinations to customers. This meant that resources could be devoted to developing functionality such as allowing users to access pages, view lists of arbitrary destinations, and sort those destinations. When the Product Owner told us that we were to shift focus to detox/wellness vacations, all of those pieces of functionality were still perfectly usable. Additionally, the customer was able to get value from us following Agile because it meant they could start working on their website immediately while ironing out some of the finer details of their business and marketing strategy. In a way, they might have also been following Agile themselves by devoting their own resources to complete just enough work to stay competitive while also being open to changing market conditions.

References

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