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7-1 – Final Project

During the project made for SNHU Travel, I have assumed various roles in the team. I started in the position of scrum master, in which I would facilitate the communication of the team by setting up meetings, establishing the communication tools, and the scrum events. The Scrum events are extremely important for the success of implementing Agile, and they comprise Sprint Planning, Daily Scrum, Backlog Refinement, Sprint Review, and Sprint Retrospective.

The planning sets up the goals for each sprint. Sprint ‌categorizes a feature, or broken-down tasks for the team to tackle in an organized manner with a timed duration. The planning will say how long each sprint is supposed to last, what each team will be responsible for, what priorities will come from the backlog. Daily scrum works as a progress tracker to know how far each team is from completing their assignments; to avoid idleness and also to make sure that the expertise is being correctly used. Even though the teams are cross-functional in the Agile environment, the most efficient way to use a team is to have teams with a variety of experts from different backgrounds, so they can support each other with their knowledge, instead of having one person who knows a little of many things. Backlog refinement cuts corners in the production, because it ensures that the features have been curated in the product backlog prior to being put to work in production. When the team works into something that was poorly communicated with the client, and is denied during demonstration because it was not what they wanted, the whole team loses. And the loss is on resources and trust as well. Because of that, making sure that the client is communicating their idea correctly and also saying “no” when its needed, avoids many problems along the way for the whole scrum team. The Sprint review inspects the outcome and determines if the feature will need future interactions. Sometimes the client will be present for a demonstration to collaborate with ideas or changes to the main product, especially to say if they are not satisfied with what was delivered. For last, all the scrum team must be present for the Scrum Retrospective, which analyzes how the whole team behaved as an organism ‌during the sprint and what needs to be polished moving forward to the next sprint in order to operate better. The team was composed of developer/designer, tester, a scrum master, and a tester. During our sprint planning, we decided the sprints would last one week each with no breaks in-between; that our daily scrums would happen from 11am to 11:15am; the Sprint Review would be every Friday from 4pm to 5pm; and finally, the Sprint Retrospective would happen on Fridays, from 4pm to 5pm. Our backlog refinement would happen anytime when needed during the duration of the project, since the priorities of the customer could change.

The next position I assumed was the Product Owner, where I established the bridge between the team and the SNHU Travel, and made sure that the requirements for each of the features that were being developed were being met before we entered the production phase. This role works really close to the scrum master to keep the scrum team nice and tidy. The Scrum master works as the schedule organizes, while the product owner works as the schedule builder. The user stories I created alongside SNHU travel, helped our Scrum team build a functional and organized product backlog in which we could organize our sprint schedule without overwhelming our team with too much information at once. Instead, we broke features into smaller tasks and tackled them separately daily, checking their progress daily in our daily scrum meetings.

The second to last role was the Tester. This activity is usually done by the development team when it is not outsourced. I developed test cases for each of the User Stories created in the product backlog in order to check if they met the requirements necessary for approval. That would determine if it was ‌done or not by the end of the sprint and during Sprint review, when we checked with the customer if everything had been executed to their liking. Failing is not a big deal, as long as communication is prioritized. Sometimes, the problem lay in something the customer forgot to add last minute, and that is not under the Scrum team’s control. That is a risk that any business is prone to have. But if all the steps of Agile are being followed correctly, testing minimizes the amount of issues that will surge during sprint review, since it is done from the start and happens constantly throughout the development process. We needed to change test cases for SNHU Travel’s website, when we remodeled the brand to only sell Spa Vacations & Wellness Travel packages.

Finally, the role of developer is the one operating behind the curtains, responsible for functionalities and behaviors, which transform ideas into attainable products. Since we had to change the test cases last minute the week before, it was easier to remember what needed to be done when I assumed the role of developer in the upcoming week. I took charge of the changes in the homepage, swapped the previous content to Spa Vacations & Wellness Travel packages instead, and all the user story requirements for the new feature to be ‌marked as done. We had to make changes of description, upload new images, and correct the default size of the window to create a template; facilitating the inclusion of more travel packages as they are needed by the customer in the future.

 For our project, the adoption of the Scrum-agile approach was especially important, since we were working closely with Amanda, representing SNHU Travel. The fact she accompanied the transition with us in every Sprint Review was an amazing opportunity to better our understanding of how to communicate the important topics during meetings. In our case, for the first Sprint Planning, we proved with numbers that the estimated gain of rebranding SNHU Travel from the ground up would not result in capital loss in any way, since the platform was very antiquated and improper for the current needs of their customers, like the lack of a mobile application.

We organized our schedule and our product backlog with Agile by adopting User Stories. They were shaped in a way where the whole scrum team could understand, because of its non-technical language. This helped collaboration and creativity of various backgrounds among the team; and as an immediate result, it improved overall productivity. A user story is the smallest piece of work that delivers value to the customer, and it is composed of title, description, and acceptance criteria. Also, it is used to estimate, prioritize and plan sprints, and provide more flexibility, so the team can manage the work in progress and stay on track with the workflow.

Agile helped us immensely during the transition. One example was the aforementioned situation where we had to rebrand the website last minute before the sprint ended. Luckily, our team was working on time and was not swamped with activities, and we could manage those changes. Tests were also redone to account for the changes before we demoed the features during Sprint Review. I believe this would not be possible if we were still dealing with a waterfall methodology, where unforeseen circumstances during production for the most part mean complete chaos, since they are not expected to happen. In Agile, failure is a part of the process, and changes are a type of failure that is welcomed, if caught early enough.

When I worked as a developer, I emailed the product owner regarding the changes on the website. Because the website was too old and it did not seem like they had done any recent backup on their servers, I asked John if we should do a backup ourselves and provide them with a copy via cloud. Here is a sample of our conversation. “I wanted to know if we should keep a database backup of the current packages somewhere, or if they will not need it in the future at all. We are sending it to the cloud, just in case, for your thorough analysis when you are in the office on Monday.”

Regarding how we combined organizational tools with Scrum events: because of our hybrid model, most of our meetings are online. So we needed a real-time video call service for all our meetings, which most of our team voted to be serviced by Microsoft Teams. If we had asynchronous communication, it would be too hard to do our Sprint Planning, since we would need one point of contact responsible for all the back-and-forth between the group, until the entirety of ideas could be acknowledged by the team and that would take more than a week, which is supposed to be the duration of a sprint. For our project management tool, we have chosen JIRA because of its multitasking abilities, including bug-tracking and testing capacities; it would also be very useful if we ever needed to switch to a Kanban style board. It also works great for a cross-functional development team that integrates testing, which was the case for our team at ChadaTech. For physical tools, we used chalkboards for meetings, notepads and notebooks with calendars in them, post-its, and group discussions.

The agile principles that guided our project the most were, “Adaptation to real-time information and replan”. That is shown when we bring real life well-known customers of SNHU Travel to ask them what they would like to see in the service. That shows them that the company really is trying their best to bring forth not only something good, but something that prioritizes the well-being of their audience if they are looking for relevance in that market. Another one is, “Continuous improvement is achieved through embedded reflection time, behaviors, and cultures that support learning”. Since the travel industry is well known and built, we can access enough data on the market and also on SNHU Travel themselves, as long as we have access to their previous numbers. As long as we have it, we can then build reports to create growth estimates high and low to the future of the project since the Agile Methodology has been in place.

The biggest benefits of using Scrum-agile on our project was having the ability of breaking down stories into smaller tasks during the sprint, keeping our focus on what the customer and the final user of the product want, and ensuring it will be well-built and stable with constant testing, and holding Sprint Review meetings that combine the expertise of the Scrum team and SNHU Travel. It also enables creativity. Encourages the team to think critically about how to solve the end goal. The project becomes more manageable. It is the best way to work with small and estimated elements rather than with big complex tasks. Inspires the team, creates momentum and the small wins motivate the team to work even harder. For disadvantages in the model, I would say the lack of prior documentation, since the previous website was based on the Waterfall Methodology, the need for the whole team to adapt to the new routine and brace changes in Sprint Planning that may occur, like we had when the theme of the travel packages changed.