Sprint Review and Retrospective

CS-250

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Unlike previous projects, SNHU Travel called for a new management style that allowed our team to respond to the evolving demands of our client. For this new management approach, we utilized the Agile methodology to build an adaptable framework around which our team could build and adapt the SNHU Travel product.

The foundation of this new Agile team is based around four key roles. The Product Owner, Scrum Master, Developer, and Tester. Each role in an Agile team plays an essential part in ensuring the progress and success of a project.

Navigating the roadmap of the SNHU Travel project, our Product Owner serves as a bridge between what our client expects and what our team delivers. With the backlog in mind, they organize and prioritize features and tasks based on user stories, ensuring they stay aligned with the client's needs. For example, the Product Owner conducted a focus group around desired functionality for a travel booking application. This information was then translated into descriptive user stories, providing the developers and testers with a solid foundation to build from.

Supplementing the effort of the Product Owner, the Tester takes the user stories and works collaboratively with the development team to build robust test cases that ensure desired functionality is provided by each feature. In the case of SNHU Travel, the Tester took user stories and provided descriptive names, steps for each test case, and pass/fail measures for each story. This ensures that our client receives a working product that functions as desired in production and meets expectations.

Working closely with the Product Owner and Tester is none other than the developer. Using the test cases provided by the Tester, the developer codes the functionality for each feature described in the user story, using the test as a guide to avoid bugs and undefined behavior. In the case of SNHU Travel, the developer used the test cases to build out the first iteration of our SNHU Travel application, allowing the user to browse our top destinations.

Finally, there is the Scrum Master. Contrary to how the name may appear, the Scrum Master serves as a facilitator to the team and ensures that a collaborative approach is taken to completing the project. The Scrum Master holds numerous Scrum Events such as daily stand-ups in an effort to eliminate any blockers the team might be facing. For SNHU Travel, the Scrum Master took time to establish an Agile Team charter which served as a cohesive document to describe our team mission and establish key behavior and communication practices that would be applied within our team.

This Scrum-Agile approach aided in the completion of each user story chiefly by keeping the team organized yet flexible. For example, a backlog of user stories for SNHU Travel was created to help guide the attention of the developers and testers for which features would need to be delivered first. While the focus meetings revealed many desires for functionality, we focus on the highest priority stories first. This allowed us to build test cases and deliver our first iteration of working software in record time.

Adapting to change is a serious advantage of the Scrum-Agile approach. This became clear when our Product Owner informed us of the new “wellness” based approach to the travel application. With new feedback, our tester and developer were able to build out new test cases in a short time. With these new test cases in hand, we quickly delivered a working wellness-based travel application that was aligned with the clients wishes.

Due to the collaborative nature of the Agile method, open communication is key. An example of practicing open communication was an email I initiated upon a change in direction for the project. This is a portion of the email pertaining to feature specifications, testing parameters, and priority features (Flood, personal communication, October 4, 2023):

“I’ve successfully updated the text and pictures per your requirements. As we navigate this new direction, there are a few pieces of information that I’m seeking clarity on:

* Feature specification: Christy, could you provide me with a list or breakdown of new features or enhancements that users may desire given this new wellness-based focus?
* Testing parameters: Brian, considering the new shift towards wellness, are there any new parameters or conditions to be considered? Having this will help me keep development aligned with our test cases.
* Priority features: Christy, given our existing timeline, which features are top priority in regard to this new focus? I will focus on the highest priority first.

I’m feeling very good about this new direction, and with the right guidance, I am positive I can make this transition seamlessly...”

Reaching out and making any blockers or ambiguities surrounding a project clear is essential to facilitating the timely success of a project. Do not be afraid to take the initiative in reaching out for help instead of waiting for the next Scrum Event to make an issue known.

To further facilitate the principle of collaboration, you will find a number of tools utilized in an Agile team. One of the most common in the industry is JIRA, an issue tracking product that also provides Scrum-Agile project management features like kanban boards, sprint boards and other visualizations to help backlog management and sprint planning, which is a key scrum event.

Another tool large organizations may also utilize is communication software like a discussion board, which we utilized in the development of SNHU Travel to develop understanding of Scrum-Agile project management to ensure a successful of the project. Together these tools coalesce into an effective team that can adhere to another core principle which is iterative development. These tools help teams adapt to change while keeping everyone informed and productive.

In total, the Agile methodology is a powerful framework in which you can shape a product team around. In my experience on the SNHU Travel project, this approach benefited us most in terms of adaptability. Agile enabled us to deliver a working application which was then used to get more feedback through a focus group. With this feedback, we pivoted towards a wellness-based application and delivered a product customers want to use. Another Agile tool that we benefited from was the information radiator that was our discussion board. This allowed us to share ideas and perspectives that allowed us to further develop and refine our understanding of Scrum-Agile principles.

While the Scrum-Agile based approach to the project was overall beneficial, there are some notable issues to be aware of. It requires significant client or stakeholder involvement. If stakeholders are consistently absent from the process and are hard to communicate with it can be detrimental to the process. Another issue that can arise is scope creep. The flexibility afforded by an Agile approach can also allow for unnecessary features and functionality if the backlogs and user stories are not appropriately managed.

Ultimately, I do believe the Scrum-Agile approach was the best framework for our team to use approaching the SNHU Travel Project. Due to the competitive nature of the travel industry, we should be able to move with the travel trends our clients and customers want to experience. That means the approach we choose should allow for continuous feedback between us and our stakeholders, and for this purpose Agile is the clear winner.