Final Retrospective: My Experience with Agile

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Throughout this course, I have put myself into the shoes of all the various roles found within an agile development team. The first role I found myself practicing was the Scrum Master, whose primary purpose is to facilitate communication and effective development practices. The most obvious form of this facilitation is the daily Scrums. These are daily meetings spanning roughly twenty minutes were the previous day, and plans for the current day are discussed. To encourage good communication between team members, we ask questions like, "What did you do yesterday?", "What will you do today?" and "What is impeding your progress?" are answered by each member of the development team. As the Scrum Master, directly participating in these meetings is unnecessary; instead, it is more important to ensure that the team stays focused and communicates effectively by monitoring each meeting. This example is not the only responsibility of the Scrum Master. It is also expected that the Scrum Master assists with the development process, whether working on a project with a developer to help them learn or even helping with board items more directly. The Scrum Master also serves as the middle man between the development team and the Project Owner; this is one of the most important responsibilities of the Scrum Master.

The next role I occupied during this course was that of the Product Owner. Regarding the development team, the product owner is the head of the operation. With direct communication with the shareholders, the Product Owner is the development team's connection to the project's parameters. The Product Owner is expected to have good communication skills, the ability to say no, and a firm grasp of the project scope, to name a few traits. While I was the Project Owner, I created user stories; this is achieved by meeting with potential users or even shareholders and asking about their desired features. The information collected during this first phase must then be molded into a series of tasks ordered by size and priority for the development team. The Product Owner's communication skills are vital to the project's overall success; if anything is unclear, the development team's sprint deadlines will surely be missed.

I also served as the Tester for the development team. As the Tester, it was my responsibility to take the user stories I made as the Product owner and create test cases with that information. The test cases communicate the parameters that must be met for every project function to be considered complete. The test cases are also ordered based on priority; they are also expected to be even more specific than the original user stories. The appearance, as well as the interaction of the project, is described in this step. If a price slider is supposed to be at the top of a web page, that parameter should be communicated in the related test case.

I was also a Developer during this course. My primary objectives included making changes to the project based on the test cases I received and learning to effectively communicate with the other development team members when anything was unclear. Besides having the skills necessary to complete the job communicating effectively and working as an effective team are the primary goals of the developers.

We can see how powerful the Agile methodology is when we look towards the many lines of communication occurring throughout the development process. When learning about the user stories, the Product Owner can be observed encouraging the potential users to bounce ideas off of each other to help expand what they would like to see in the finished project. This information is then turned into user stories that will be refined into test cases by the Tester. This refinement is achieved by communicating any unclear points in an open-ended manner to encourage detailed feedback. If the development team is unsure about anything in a test case, they can always ask the Tester, who can be more descriptive. This process is one of the most powerful tools behind the Agile methodology.

The scrum-agile approach helped to minimize the time lost when the project's direction suddenly changed to fit the changing market. The flexibility of the Agile methodology allowed us to revisit any part of the project that needed to be adjusted. Some of the changes I made include locations on the top five destinations list and, going even further back in the development process, the background color on the list. These changes would not be possible in a Waterfall methodology, and this is not because the Waterfall method is terrible, but rather not as flexible.

Communicating effectively is a staple of the Agile method. It is important that the message clearly describes what is unclear and is sent in a timely fashion. Asking about the page layout at the end of the last sprint would only hurt the project in a big way. Some examples of me communicating with my team follows:

Thomas,

You mentioned a new SOP (Standard Operating Procedure.) I need to know if this will be in a burn-down style regarding the time it takes to complete sprints (if implemented.)?

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Kimberly,

Regarding the daily Scrum meetings, how long will these meetings be; is there a time frame we should try to stick with? Additionally, will Barbara be required to attend the daily Scrums in some form, or perhaps once a week to stay on the same page?

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These examples are straightforward and brief; I feel it is best to get right to the point as this will encourage a prompt response to any inquiries that I pose to my team members. In my message to Kimberly, I inquired about the length of the daily scrum meetings she planned to implement. The message is short but very specific to reduce the chance of miscommunication. The question also encourages a simple answer that I would almost certainly have to try and misinterpret.

Within the Agile method, there are several tools designed to help the development team succeed. I have already talked about some of these tools, like the Sprint process, daily Scrums, user stories, and test cases. These tools are excellent for opening effective, transparent communication between all of the development team members. I also consider every tool mentioned to be part of the formula for a successful Agile-based project. The daily Scrums ensured that the developers stayed on the same page and helped communicate any issues or bugs occurring. The Sprint Process helped maintain the scope of the project while presenting clear and achievable goals to strive for. And the user stories and test cases ensured that the developers understood what each function needed to do to be considered complete. All of these tools need strong, effective communication between team members to be successful.

Regarding the effectiveness of the Agile method for the SNHU travel website, I can honestly say I feel that it was a huge success. The flexibility that the new Agile approach provided helped us adapt to a significant change midway through the project. The increased communication between team members also helped to encourage efficient and accurate development, saving countless resources in the process. The only downside was the unpredictable nature of the development cycle. New decisions can drop on a dime. Some of these changes can be stressful and cloud the development team's perception of the finished project, causing a loss of scope. That said, I feel that the Agile method for a project of this scope is a fine choice. The flexibility helped the development team adjust the project as needed at the drop of a dime, and the emphasis on communication helped establish a more efficient and accurate team.