SNHU Travel Sprint Review & Retrospective

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Each role on our Scrum-agile Team contributed so much to the success of the SNHU Travel project. The Scrum Master played a key role in centralizing everything necessary for the Agile implementation throughout our software development. They successfully implemented multiple scrum events across the process. At the end of each sprint, they initiated sprint planning for our subsequent sprints to keep driving our development progress. Each day, they facilitated the daily scrum and the daily stand-up to ensure everyone knew where everyone was currently at, what everyone has done, and any blockers anyone was facing. On top of that, the Scrum Master allowed the team to help each other with their blockers, and made sure everyone was on the same page. This was key to our success. A way they tied up each sprint nicely was running the sprint reviews and sprint retrospectives. Furthermore, with the retrospective, we were able to reflect back on each of our sprints and develop action items for our future sprints.

The development team was just as important. Specifically, the tester constructed test cases from the user stories developed by the team and user feedback. The tester wrote specific test cases for the user story detailing the feature for recommended destinations based on user profile and previous user travel. One example of a step from a test case was to “Verify that under each column, there’s a slideshow widget of the respective destinations.” The expected result from that input ended up being “On the page, and under the columns, there are two slideshow widgets of the respective destinations. Both are navigatable with "Previous" and "Next" buttons.” So the tester really helped us make sure our software was meeting the requirements and expected results. The developer communicated well with the tester, asking the tester for a walk-through of their thought process for updating the test cases. They also communicated well with the product owner, asking for more specifics regarding the new focus on detox/wellness travel. There would be no software at all without the developer’s building blocks, so of course the developer contributed greatly to the success of SNHU Travel.

The product owner was pretty much the glue for the SNHU Travel project. They took the lead on owning the product and knew the vision and structure of our SNHU Travel application through and through. Because of this solid knowledge, they were able to communicate effectively between all stakeholders. They also knew the customer very well. Thus they were able to make the key decision to redirect all focus of the SNHU Travel application to detox/wellness travel. And after that decision, they followed through and communicated the change with everyone on the team, and made sure everyone was on the same page once again. Teamwork is extremely important in Agile development, and everyone contributed so much to the success of our project. The project without any of these members would not have been the same, and would not nearly have been as successful as it turned out.

The Scrum-agile approach allowed each of our user stories to come to completion. One key aspect of the Scrum-agile approach is the unrelenting devotion to the user. With this devotion, we really ensured that we could create strong, specific user stories for our application. Coming with such user devotion was our ability to communicate with the user. Through continuous conversation, we could refine the user stories.

The structure of an agile user story is straightforward, as it details what the user wants and why. One of the user stories was “As an End User, I want to click a link to view the top five destinations list so that I can see the most popular locations for travel to educate myself on the best places to go.” Thanks to the structure, we knew exactly what to ask the users so that we could know what they wanted, and how to construct a user story around these desires. Another key part of agile is to develop acceptance criteria for each user story, which basically means the team defines what is acceptable for a user story. Along with the acceptance criteria comes with the crafting of the “Definition of Done,” which allows the team to think through what it means for something developed from a user story to be done.

The Scrum-agile approach supported project completion even when our project changed direction. At the inception of the SNHU Travel project, we were developing an application for all kinds of travel. Some weeks into this, the product owner told us that we needed to focus only on detox/wellness travel. Members of the team felt a bit reluctant at first. The developer asked if we needed to scrap everything we’ve done and basically start right back at square one. But, since we embraced the Scrum-agile approach, we were able to adapt what we currently had into the new vision of detox/wellness travel. So even though our project changed direction, we already planned for change from the start, and it was no problem to re-adapt things into the more specific detox/wellness travel.

Throughout the project, we all really communicated with each other effectively. Here is a sample of one email I sent to a user as a tester:

*I read through your user stories. I’ve been drafting some test cases from them, and I wanted some clarity on your vision for these stories. Can we meet in person and discuss this together? Please bring a diagram or drawing of what you have in mind for this user story before we meet. I want to see – is it a widget on a webpage, with columns and slideshows? Or just a page of images with destinations that the user scrolls down on? Let’s talk it out. Here’s my initial thoughts on each story.*

As the tester, I made sure to be clear with my questions, and be proactive in meeting with the user. By encouraging us to meet and discuss further, I created a good relationship between me and the user, and thus a better relationship between the team and the user.

The scrum-agile organizational tools and principles were extremely effective in helping our team be successful with our SNHU Travel project. Our agile team charter allowed us to outline our success criteria, project risks, rules of behavior, and our communication guidelines. It was a great guide for kicking off our project, and allowed us to know how we were going to approach the whole project. The team charter was the basis of our team rapport. The daily scrum and the daily stand-up running together definitely supported our daily organization efforts. They kept us on track – everyone knew who’s done what, and everyone knew of any blockers. Thanks to these scrum events, we were able to help each other through our awareness of each other’s progress. The daily scrum also helped us with our backlog refinement. With the backlog we knew what was going to come next, and we were ready to tackle the items we’d start in our next sprint from our backlog. Finally, the continuity of the sprint review and the sprint retrospective allowed us to analyze our current and past work, in order to improve our work for future sprints. All of these Scrum-agile principles working in tandem really allowed us to succeed with SNHU Travel.

The pros of the Scrum-agile approach for the SNHU Travel project are high flexibility, consistent team communication, and strong structure. Thanks to the Scrum-agile design, the framework is highly responsive to change. So when things come up or things need to change, teams adopting the Agile methodology can mold to these changes with greater ease than the waterfall methodology. Again, the new focus on detox/wellness travel didn’t stop the project in its tracks. It just simply changed its directions, but it wasn’t overall detrimental to the team or the project. Team communication was also maintained well throughout the project, with the frequent emails, meetings, and daily standups. On the note of daily standups, the Scrum-agile approach also has a strong structure, which is a fantastic basis for the team to fall back on. Sprints impose a healthy pressure on the team to complete each objective. The pros of the Scrum-agile approach helped the SNHU Travel project come to stable fruition.

The cons of the Scrum-agile approach for the SNHU Travel project are the lack of predictability, and increasing time demands (ccaps.umn.edu). The team didn’t know that the product owner would suddenly change the direction to only detox/wellness travel. While they could adapt fairly easily, this is not something that was predictable. Also, with the team being highly dependent on each other, time can become a demanding and increasing factor. Multiple times throughout the project, teammates had to email each other to receive further clarification before proceeding with their tasks. This waiting hindered our timeliness on completing certain tasks.

The Scrum-agile approach was extremely effective for the SNHU Travel project, and yes, I’d say it was the best approach we could’ve taken. The alternative would’ve been the waterfall approach, and that approach is simply too rigid for our project.

Sources

*Agile methodology: Advantages and disadvantages*. College of Continuing and Professional Studies. (2022, February 11). Retrieved April 15, 2023, from https://ccaps.umn.edu/story/agile-methodology-advantages-and-disadvantages