Michael Ross

CS-250

Sprint Retrospective for SNHU Travel

This past sprint has been great. We were able to release the health and wellness capabilities to production and business has jumped 10% because of it. All members of the team were functioning well, and communication and productivity held even after a mid-sprint change in priorities.

The product owner, Christy, was excellent at communicating the needs of the business. Importantly, she was also great at communicating those needs back to us in the form of the backlog. Even when a very important change came up mid-sprint, she did not shy away from communicating that to the team clearly and effectively. This to me speaks to the level of trust we have built up in our short time practicing agile methods. The health and wellness backlog item she put forth as a mid-sprint change was able to be executed because she clearly communicated the requirements for this change.

The development team was the engine behind our success. The team was able to practice the tenets of agile very well during this sprint. From the beginning, when we executed planning poker to estimate the level of effort for the backlog items, the team was engaged, polite, and efficient. Then, during the daily standup calls, while last sprint they would routinely try to go over the 20 minutes allocated, this sprint they were ready with their action items, and we were finished in 15 minutes every day. Executing pair programming to try and even out the skillset went well as we are starting to see levels of proficiency rise in some of the junior members of the team. Even when requirements and sprint goals were changed mid-sprint to work on the health and wellness backlog item, the team was able to adapt and deliver an amazing product.

The testing team performed especially well during this sprint. They integrated into the process even more tightly than last sprint. There was the feeling of some level of adversarial behavior between the groups, but now they were just part of the team. We piloted using test driven development this sprint and I think it went extremely well. The level of quality of the finished product was 20% better than last sprint with fewer bugs reported. We even integrated some of the testing team into the pairs in pair programming. They were able to catch issues in the code before the code was even committed in some cases.

The scrum master is also improving with each subsequent sprint. In this sprint, because of the level of trust built up over time, they felt much more comfortable communicating openly and honestly with the product owner and asking the right questions to help the rest of the team process the incoming requests. In the daily standup call, they were able to keep the meetings to 15 min by encouraging the team to think about their standup content before coming into the meeting. They did this by pushing the meeting 15 min later to give the team time to process before attending. They also piloted using planning poker for the estimating phase, and it went so well, they’re planning on using it again next sprint to see if the results can be replicated. Story points was a good concept but didn’t seem to work for this team as there are a lot of newer members.

There were relatively few user stories during this sprint, in fact there were only four stories identified for the sprint. However, these stories were very time sensitive and current event related and so needed to be completed quickly to capitalize on the opportunity. As stated above, from the start using planning poker helped us greatly with our first task of estimating effort required for implementing the stories. The implementation of the daily standup meetings was also crucial as there were several times when technical roadblocks were encountered that were overcome quickly because of these daily meetings. In one case, a junior developer was having issues with the database and a more senior member was able to pair program with them the next day to quickly get them over the issue. The daily standups also helped to keep efficient communication between the product owner, the development teams, the testing team and the scrum master.

The product ended up including the health and wellness feature because we were using agile. This would not have been able to be included in the end-product if we were using waterfall. It was not even a concern when the initial requirements were being developed and so would have had to wait until the entire product was out before being able to be included which could have been up to a year. By that time, the ability to include health and wellness travel options may not have been important or needed. Because we were using an agile process, we were able to be flexible to ongoing requirements and story changes. The team reprioritized health and wellness and worked on only that for this sprint.

Some sample communications are shown in the appendices. Descriptions of the communication is below.

* E-mail to the product owner to clarify the Health and Wellness story re-prioritization
  + This e-mail contained all the questions needed to properly develop this story.
* E-mail from Development to the Testing team giving them a heads up on some of the things that they may need to test due to the changes being made

In all, I would say that using an agile approach to this sprint was critical to its success in getting a finished and timely product out the door to our users. Embodying the principles of agile allowed us to be flexible, fast, and accurate in developing this sprint’s product. I would recommend continuing with the agile approach for future sprints and projects in the future.