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Sprint Review and Retrospective

Our small Agile team found great success on this Sprint while working towards the SNHU Travel project. The various Scrum roles we embodied helped significantly over the course of development. Notably, the Product Owner was able to provide rapid and specific insight into design decisions, such as the layout of the top destinations page, when a Developer or Tester had a question about implementation. Additionally, the Scrum Master helped facilitate the daily and Sprint-long operations of the team, taking actions such as moderating Daily Scrums and adapting Agile methodologies to best fit our classically linear development teams. Our Testers and Developers worked hand-in-hand to generate and deliver a product that lived up to the expectations of stakeholders. The Developers accurately ingested user stories into polished features, such as the relevant content on the Top Destinations page, and the Testers generated test cases that quickly and accurately identified pain points in the product. Testers were particularly valuable when a complex features such as the sorting for destinations was modified, and the old algorithm was accurate enough to be unnoticed by human eye, but failed test cases due to small oversights.

When developing User Stories, an Agile approach was essential to handle the rapidly evolving requirements from the stakeholders. Testing helped catch bugs early, while the reliance on collaboration and communication between team members prevented miscommunication. Particularly, when developing the Personalization Settings user story that would allow site users to select preferred travel types, rapid communication from the Developers to the Testers and Product Owner helped clear up an oversight in the user-selectable that could have generated more necessary changes when shown to stakeholders. Had the site shipped as it was described in the User Story, a few important settings would be omitted from the Personalization page. Working Agile prevented this issue by revealing the discrepancy early and allowing team members to get it fixed early in the development cycle.

Without an Agile approach, the shift to health and wellness trips would have been a major disruption to the SNHU Travel project and could have caused substantial delays. However, because of the team’s adherence to Scrum principles and ideologies, this shift was quickly analyzed by the Product Owner and the entire team reacted shortly after. The Product Owner pruned the Backlog and adjusted User Stories to align the end product with the stakeholders’ vision while preserving a feasible scope, and the Tester modified their test cases to quickly begin assessing the current state of the product against the new requirements. This structure allowed the team to pivot to a new focus quickly and deliver a product that stood up to the rigorous expectations of the SNHU Travel stakeholders.

A particular example of the potent communication within our Scrum Team occurred when the pivot to health and wellness trips occurred. The team reacted quickly after the meeting with the Product Owner, including our Developer. They composed an email to the Product Owner Jane Doe, and the Tester Tim Timothy, seeking clarifying information about the precise nature of certain updates and how they impact the product, as well as about updated test cases. The following questions are direct excerpts from the communications, highlighting the precision and direct nature of communication developed by the team in adoption of Scrum principles.

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* First, is the detox and wellness focus primarily about content and branding?
* Additionally, after the titles and page categories are updated, do we need to make any changes to existing features?
* Tim, do these changes substantially impact our test cases? How different testing-wise is a generic travel website to one that focuses on detox and wellness trips?

“ – SAMPLE EMAIL from Liam Daley, Developer.

This clear and precise communication fostered collaboration between the team members, creating the informational connections required for the individuals to work in close parallel. Strong collaboration is essential to the success of any Agile team, so these clear communication methods were extremely helpful in the transition from Waterfall to Agile.

The team primarily relied on a project board as an information radiator, as well as our Daily Scrum, to keep everyone on the same page and working together efficiently. As our Product Owner refined the backlog and updated the project board, the rest of the team relied on that source to inform their decision making towards self-organization. Additionally, the project board was detailed with priority values (decided using T-shirt sizes and Affinity Grouping) to keep the team’s priority on high-value features. Simultaneously, our Daily Scrums kept the team connected and aware of the specifics of each other’s development processes, which assisted greatly in our focus on maintaining collaboration and Iterative Development.

Overall, a Scrum-agile approach was the key tool that allowed the SNHU Travel team to overcome shifting vision and requirements while delivering a product that met Chada Tech’s quality standards and the needs of the stakeholders. The only substantial “con” faced by the team is that Scrum is not designed to facilitate teams of specialized Developers. Our developers, who were used to working in siloed, heavily specialized project spaces, found they had to “fight” against the Scrum organizational system to get a chance to apply their knowledge. However, Scrum’s flexibility is a “pro” under this scenario too – the team was able to alter some of their organizational practices in a joint effort to best utilize the skills that each team member had developed, while working together to radiate those skills out to other team members as well. Undoubtedly, Scrum-agile is a methodology perfectly suited to the type of development required in a project like SNHU Travel, which may expect disruptions to it’s plans over the natural SDLC. It is highly recommended for adoption by the rest of Chada Tech from the perspective of this experimental transitory team, who found it’s tools and practices to be especially valuable.