Module 7 – Final Project

Michael Duclos

The Product Owner played a very important role in the success of the SNHU Travel project. He was very knowledgeable on the client business. He kept the team informed on what the stakeholders were looking for. He also held interviews with several of the client’s customers to get a feel for what the customers wanted to see and feel in the way of a web application. He was very involved in the process and was quick to respond to questions and to clarify any points the team was uncertain on. Initially the user stories were a little ‘sparse’ with information, but as the project progressed the user stories became more detailed, which decreased the number of questions/uncertainties for the development team and allowed the pace to increase.

The development team consisted of two developers and a tester as far as specialized skills go. It was a relatively new team and they had not worked on an agile project together before. One of the developers was experienced but not in an agile setting. The same for the tester. The other developer was relatively new but had worked on an agile project before. The team seemed to mesh pretty early on in the project. The more experienced developer also had some testing experience and the tester had some knowledge in coding, all of which helped with the cross-functionality of the team. They both were able to pass on some of their knowledge to the new developer. This ultimately resulted in a true cross-functional team by the end of the project.

There were some issues in the first sprint due to the lack of specific information in the user stories. Some of it was intentional, some was just inexperience on the part of the product owner. The development team, in the first sprint, created a product they thought the product owner had wanted, only to find out part way through that it was not entirely what was expected. We had to have an additional meeting to hash out the differences and determine why the product had missed the mark. This delay caused the team to miss one of the user stories (which was added to the backlog) due to time. However, the meeting proved to be well worth the time. The user stories improved to include anything the product owner thought essential, and if not included, was up to the development team to be creative with. There were a lot more clarifying questions in the second sprint between the development team and the product owner, but by the fourth sprint, things had settled down and the team was able to increase the pace.

There was one minor/major disruption when the stakeholders input an additional requirement that had not been accounted for in the initial planning. We had to change some priorities and reshuffle the backlog to account for the additional requirements. The change also required the development team to redo a portion of the work that had already been done. This caused the requisite amount of grumbling by the development team and empathy from the product owner, but the team had meshed fairly well by then and were able to make the changes and even add an additional feature that the stakeholders had not considered but were very happy to have incorporated.

The agile approach allowed for the changes to be incorporated without a major problem. If we had been using a waterfall approach, we might have had to delay the project, or scrap it and start all over. But because agile is built to handle just such changes, it was a minor speedbump and the team was able to incorporate the changes into the flow.

Communication was a bit of a problem with the product owner not being co-located with the development team. He was able to meet physically with the team on two occasions, but otherwise communication was through e-mails and extensive use of Teams. This allowed for video conferences, which helped to cement relations with the product owner. There was one other issue when the our experienced developer was quarantined for two weeks; which, of course, happened at the same time as the aforementioned ‘speedbump’. This probably caused the issue to be bigger than it might have been otherwise. But, again, the effective use of Teams and its videoconferencing and screensharing helped keep the problem to a manageable one. Also, the team had developed by then so the additional burden on distance communication was not as great as it could have been early on in the project.

Some of the principles of Agile that proved helpful:

* The team was small – this made communication between members of the team easier, even when they were not co-located.
* The team was effectively cross-functional – because of the experience and knowledge of two of the team. The team became truly cross-functional by the end of the project.
* The team was motivated and empowered – the product owner learned to trust the judgment of the development team on certain issues and made sure they understood what issues were needs. This empowered the team and made them more enthusiastic on the project, knowing that what they were producing was a lot of their own initiative. This also allowed the team to incorporate an additional feature that the stakeholders were very pleased to have.
* The product owner seemed to intuitively understand the agile process. He made sure the stakeholders did not overly interfere with the scrum-agile process as far as the development team were concerned. He also worked well with the scrum master to make sure stakeholders were kept informed of the progress of the team and to understand the agile process. This kept the bureaucracy and politics to a minimum.
* The product owner kept the focus of the project as much as possible on the customer. By holding periodic interviews with the client’s customers, he was able to bring their ideas and wants back to the team and the stakeholders and incorporate most of their wants into the project. Some additional ideas from the customers may be incorporated into future projects.
* Sprint reviews played a vital role in making sure we were on track and on point, especially early on.

I believe the Scrum-agile approach to this project was the best approach to take. The initial requirements were a bit vague and only developed over time. This would have made a waterfall approach next to impossible to complete in the time frame requested by SNHU Travel. The fluidity of the agile approach allowed for the initial programming to be completed and then updated/fine tuned as the project progressed. It also made the major change from the stakeholders to be taken in stride and incorporated into the project without having to start all over again. Although it did make the beginning of the project a bit rough on the development team, partially because, other than the scrum master. Only one of the team had any experience with he agile approach and he was the least experienced team member. However, this probably helped in the team formation as he felt he had a lot of knowledge to contribute to the team and this helped the team to normalize faster than if he felt he had nothing to offer.

Overall, the effort was a success. The team has come together well. The client was very pleased with the product and are already in discussions about adding to the application and even adding an internal application the team and product owner suggested might provide a better incite into their customers’ desires.