SNHU Travel Sprint Review

Tanner G. Collins

ChadaTech

Author Note

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Abstract

A comprehensive look at the applications of Scrum-agile tools, practices, and methodologies as applied to the SNHU Travel project across the duration of the course in the format of a Sprint Review. Detailed in this document are the assessment of the sprint including where the software currently stands, as well as a look into each role of the Scrum team, how scrum helped each user-story, demonstrative examples of communication, evaluation of tools and principles, and an assessment of the effectiveness of a Scrum-agile approach to this particular project.

Keywords: Scrum, agile, sprint, scrum master, product owner, developer, tester

SNHU Travel Sprint Review

At ChadaTech we have begun undertaking a transition from a waterfall development model to using agile methodology within a Scrum framework. Our specific development team has been one of the first teams to adopt this model, and our sprint will be used to show the fruit that this transition brings to the table. The goal was for this new agile approach to enhance our products and build a more cohesive corporate culture. This document will act as a more formal end-of-sprint review and retrospective where we take a closer look at the results of our efforts as a team and as a company, for the benefit of ourselves as well as our clients and stakeholders.

# Assessment & Presentation

In our first sprint for the SNHU Travel project we were tasked with implementing new features to our client’s website to cater to a projected increase in travel customers before the next season. We assessed the needs of those customers and discovered that many of them were looking for ways to have further control of their browsing experience by means of narrowing the displayed bundles and destinations to accommodate to their specific interests. We further discovered that customers wanted their displayed bundles and destinations to be formatted in a ‘top-#’ list based on destination popularity within those bounds. Finally, our contact point at SNHU Travel informed us that a shift in their market is leading them to make the informed decision to cater specifically to the detox and wellness demographic.

## Change in Formatting

After our work, the website’s functionality presents a list of five destinations for a specific interest genre. For example; The customer is interested in beaches, and will be shown the top five beach destinations by order of popularity, sorted from #1 to #5. This list is presented in a slide-show presentation format where each item on the list contains; the name of the location, a short description of the destination, and an image of the destination.

## Catering to Individuals

Currently the website is designed such that each interest genre will be tailor made, presumably based on data polling or surveys on the client’s end to appeal to changing interests among their customer base. As such, the resulting work that we can present takes an example interest genre, and only presents destinations from that category. Following the suggestion from SNHU Travel, we have selected detox and wellness.

# The Roles of a Scrum Team

As we shifted our company and teams from a waterfall development model to an agile methodology using a Scrum framework, some internal organizational changes had to be made. By necessity we brought on a Scrum Master, and one of each roles were filled for Product Owner, Developer, and Tester. The following sections will elaborate on their respective duties and the effectiveness therein.

## Product Owner

The product owner in layman’s terms is responsible for the team’s project in it’s entirety. They are the primary point of contact for external affairs, conducting meetings with clients, stakeholders, and customers. We seen how beneficial this is for our team in garnering direction and assessing the needs of our clients in our Product Owner’s first meeting with SNHU Travel, which gave us a clear indication of what was needed (not wanted) for our product at the end of the sprint. Furthermore, it is the Product Owner’s responsibility maintain a cohesive and trimmed feature backlog that will ensure that the rest of the team is on the right track with implementation.

## Scrum Master

The Scrum Master is responsible for making sure that the team is operating in an agile manner within an agile environment. The Scrum Master facilitates efficiency and effectiveness by ensuring that the entire team is following the scrum framework. As I stepped into this role, my duties were to foster transparent and open communication within the team, ensure meetings are attended and on track (like our daily standups, and this end of sprint review), save and trim time when necessary, and block out disruptive elements from my team to ensure that they can focus on their work.

## Developer

Developer in a scrum setting isn’t exactly synonymous with software developer. The developer’s job within a scrum environment is to deliver the intended work on time at the end of the sprint. They’re also responsible for fostering transparency and channels of important information for example at the daily scrum. More specifically, it’s important that the developers are clear and thorough on where each leg of the sprint stands, and what roadblocks are needed to proceed. As such, it falls to the developers to be flexible in addressing the needs of the shipped product, working together to do as such.

## Tester

Our testers are absolutely necessary to ensure that our product ships with the functionality needed by the client. As such the tester is essential to deliver. A tester brings eyes to the requirements of each set of functionality, defines success and failure states for each user-story, which helps in swatting any bugs that may present themselves. The tester role is a planning role that sees the team and their project through a valuable lens that the other members do not.

# Completion of User-Stories

User-stories take a predominant role in the process of shipping features within a product. Each user-story takes a need of the consumer and translates it to a block of information tangible to the team, defining it’s priority in the backlog, as well as the needs that are required to consider the user-story addressed and implemented properly. The following sections will briefly take a look at the user-stories completed in this sprint and how Scrum helped facilitate their completion.

## Product Owner

The product owner in layman’s terms is responsible for the team’s project in it’s entirety. They are the primary point of contact for external affairs, conducting meetings with clients, stakeholders, and customers. We seen how beneficial this is for our team in garnering direction and assessing the needs of our clients in our Product Owner’s first meeting with SNHU Travel, which gave us a clear indication of what was needed (not wanted) for our product at the end of the sprint. Furthermore, it is the Product Owner’s responsibility maintain a cohesive and trimmed feature backlog that will ensure that the rest of the team is on the right track with implementation.

## Top Five Destination List

As per scrum practices, our Product Owner met with SNHU Travel to assess their initial interests and ideals. As the Scrum Master also attended, what followed were clear communication channels between our team and our client. The client stated that they wanted the formatting of their new website to feature a top five list of destinations. This information was translated into user-stories which were associated with the backlog and assigned success and failure states by our testers. This allows for conducive development by our team, which allowed us to implement the feature by the deadline of the end-of-sprint.

## Catered Destinations

Our team also had a meeting with a sample of customers for SNHU Travel. In this meeting, it was assessed and determined that many customers have a desire for their individual interests to be catered to. What followed was a user-story that allows for the user to click a link and be presented with a more catered destination list. The testers then maintained that for this story to be completed, no destination can be shown that doesn’t fall within the bounds of the interest chosen by the user. As such, the feature was implemented and successful.

## Detox and Wellness

Finally, SNHU travel met with our team once more to discuss the impending influx of travelers looking for destinations catered specifically to detox and wellness. The user-story that was garnered from this meeting involved the user clicking a link where they arrive on a top five list of detox and wellness destinations formatted as previously mentioned. Again, the tester ensured that for the user-story to be deemed successful, the success and failure states mandated that the outputting list of destinations must show only destinations from detox and wellness, and thus the feature was implemented successfully.

# Effectiveness in Communication

Throughout our first sprint as a scrum team, it has been paramount that communication be made a priority. As the Scrum Master, it is my job to allow for open and transparent communication channels between team members and external peoples. There were two specific instances that we can look to as examples of clear and effective communication by necessity within our team.

## User Stories Fields Email

There was an exchange with Brian in which the composition of user-stories was brought into question, as the Product Owner was asking questions about why or how the development team was proceeding the way that they were. Christy then took responsibility in communication by composing an email to Brian to address the topical points, namely; the method of list display, the format of the list (multi-page, single page per item on list), and making note of potential edge cases. This not only fosters efficient communication between Christy and Brian, but also the rest of the team, as Christy made sure to tag the rest of the team in the email so that they were on the same page.

## Updating Test Cases

Further into the sprint, the needs of our client changed to require us to shift focus to detox and wellness destinations. As with such an abrupt transition, it was brought to our attention that test cases would need to be updated. Facilitating proper communication, one of our developers—McGee—followed up a meeting with an email to the rest of the team detailing the topic, doubling down on the necessity to adjust test cases for a mid-sprint pivot, as well as bringing to light that we may need to more narrowly define that constitutes a detox and wellness destination. This shows initiative and willingness to be open and transparent with ones’ thoughts in the sprint.

# Evaluations of Tools and Principles

Adopting agile methodology within a scrum framework means adapting to make use to different tools and principles core to scrum. Each meeting, each sprint, and each necessity has needs to be met that make use of these tools and principles. In the following sections I’ll outline some of the tools and principles that were a boon to our efficiency acting as a scrum team.

## Product Backlog

One of the issues with a waterfall method is that occurrences that present themselves through the development cycle never get addressed because of the current implementations being tackled. The product backlog is a tool that allows us to prioritize user-stories and features for implementation by organizing them in a list by need (not want). The Product Owner (assisted by the Scrum Master) maintains and organizes the product backlog so that the user-stories can be addressed in order, but if something comes up that requires attention, the priority is shifted and the story is moved up on the backlog at the Product Owner’s delegation. This ensures that everything is given the attention that is needed.

## Framing Time

A core tenant in scrum is that the sprint has a defined time period, at the end of which a feature or story is implemented completely. It’s important that this window of time doesn’t change, but that the team assesses how much work can be done in the allotted time. As such, the team can make use of a projection tool such as user story comparison to forecast how much work can realistically be completed within each sprint. There are plethora tools that can be used in this manner, and it’s up to the team to select what is best suited.

## Daily Scrum

The daily scrum is a meeting at the start of each day of the sprint where the goal is to ensure each member is on the same page in regard to information, potential problems and roadblocks, and what is necessary to move forward. This meeting is overseen by the Scrum Master to ensure everyone is brief and concise, allowing for open and transparent communication. One specific tool that we made use of was a ‘talking ball’ which gave the floor to specified speakers until they were done. Finally, we rotated out transcription duties to make sure that if we ever needed to revisit the topics of a scrum, the information was recorded and ready.

# Final Assessment of Scrum-agile with SNHU Travel

We knew up-front that the transition from waterfall methodology to a more agile environment within a scrum framework would necessitate a lot of change, both as a team and individually. We were prepared for the shift in focus, work, and role. All of this being said, the effort was worth the outcome. One key takeaway from the success of this sprint is that if we were still using waterfall methodology, the point in which SNHU Travel pivoted their focus to detox and wellness, we would not have been able to address that pivot by the end of the projected time period, as our focus would have been on the tasks at hand. Scrum allowed us to pivot with our client, and change according to their needs. Additionally, I’ve never seen a more active and communicative environment among our development teams.