***Sprint Review and Retrospective***

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For the Agile approach to development to work, nothing is more important that the cohesion and optimization of the scrum group and its members. The first role of importance that will be discussed is the Product Owner. A good Product Owner is the conductor of the orchestra that is the scrum team and can be the difference between a successful and failed product. To be successful, a Product Owner must first understand the product inside and out. They must have a complete understanding of what is needed by the company/customer and must have a firm grasp on what the market for the product is. It is through this understanding that they can manage the product backlog in a way that optimizes the value of the development teams work and performance. This is done through careful analysis done with the scrum master in a way that is transparent and comprehensible by the development team. Within the scope of our project, the Product Owner significantly served this role during Module 5 when the focus of the project shifted. Through market research and an understanding of what the end-user desired, the Product Owner shifted priorities and reorganized the backlog to focus on market demand. Another important job the Product Owner holds is the duty to be a decisive voice on what priorities/stories are important enough to be developed while reducing potential bloat and inefficiency by saying no when necessary.

A role of similar importance is the Scum Master who, according to the Scrum Alliance, must be humble, respectful, empathetic, and connected. These qualities are essential to being an effective Scrum Master as they should embody the role of a servant leader. The primary function of this role is to facilitate the development team in any way possible, but particularly in three ways. First, a Scrum Master should be an approachable educator. Nobody has the answers all the time, and as the senior member of the team the Scrum Master should be a voice of wisdom and experience that every team member can turn to when a roadblock is reached. Second, a Scrum Master must be a sort of bureaucratic protector, willing to shield their team members from the tedious aspects of the commercial development process that everyone despises. In this role, they must be capable of clearly and accurately voicing the progress, struggles, and successes of their team as a sort of team representative. Acting in this manner aims to produce an increase in productivity as the team has less time wasted and a higher morale as “busy work” is avoided. Lastly, a Scrum Master must be capable of drawing out the potential of the team by facilitating discussion within the team through any means they deem adequate. There are countless ways that this can be accomplished within the Agile framework, such as gamification of discussion or the optimization of meetings, but a Scrum Master must use their deep understanding of each team member to find a way that encourage every member to voice their opinions. Within the day-to-day function of the team, no role has more importance than the Scrum Master.

If the Scrum Master is the heart of the Agile framework, then the Scrum Team is the body. This is meant to mean that every part of the team must function together to sustain the development process. While there are many Scrum Teams in which no roles are specifically designated, the most common roles (that will be discussed here) are programmers and testers. A successful Scrum Team programmer is someone who may have specialties but is a jack-of-all-trades. The beauty and efficiency of Agile relies on the fact that each team member should feel and be viewed as equals, capable of filling any role and being able to come to the aid of any team member in need of help. Ideally each programmer should be a vocal communicator able to express their opinions and struggles, but not everyone is as comfortable being vocal.

The tester is the final important role and should be every part as involved in the development process as the programmers. Despite the traditional stereotyping of the overly critical/uninvolved tester, a tester within a Scrum Team should effectively be just another member of the team. The primary divergence from the programmer role comes from serving as a sort of voice of the consumer. A tester and Product Owner must have a similar market understanding as the tester will need to use and abuse the product in every way that a potential customer might come to do. This means that the tester also needs to be an advocate for end-user wants and needs. This becomes particularly important in the event that a significant shift in direction occurs, as the tester needs to be a voice of either approval or constructive feedback to drastic changes that impact user experience. In the end, I believe that Simon Reindl described the role of the tester best, stating that “the role of the professional tester in an agile team is that of the quality coach, as well as completing their work within the development team.” (Reindl, p. 2)

In retrospect, I believe that the use of the Agile framework positively contributed to the development of the SNHU Travel Project. A key example of this that can be directly pointed at is the sudden shift that occurred, resulting in travel options being narrowed down to “detox and wellness travel”. In such a dynamic market where trends are prone to change rapidly such as this instance, being able to make a quick pivot is essential. When comparing the Agile and Waterfall frameworks, it is simple to deduce that working within Agile allows for resources to be rapidly refocused for a specific time frame to adjust to Product Owner demands. While in this instance the changes necessary made it such that the work could have been accomplished within either framework, this small scale example really drove home how key Agile’s flexibility really is when work is being done with customer/client satisfaction in mind. Though this group project is more of a solo project, the distance learning aspect of this class made me realize how possible it is for communication to break down when operating in a “work from home” environment. An example of this is the group discussion that was done in the previous module. While three of our four members participated in the discussion, we experienced what would have been a complete communication breakdown when a member of our group failed to participate. This activity may not have been a part of the project necessarily, but it served as a critical reminder of how important maintaining communication is to the team.

Keeping the focus on communication, there were several instances in which the organization of the Scrum Team aided in the clarity of directions that were given. Looking at the user stories and product backlog, you can see clearly that tasks are assigned definitive priority levels so that every member understood the order of what needs to be completed. The same clarity can be seen from the testers, who establish clear and concise requirements for features to be deemed deployable. These examples are the mechanisms within scrum teams that enable clear communication, but I believe that, again, the Module 5 focus shift demonstrates the ease of communication best. When the Product Owner comes to the team and says that market research indicates that the scope of travel options should be narrowed, even though the team may or may not have seen the data, the team follows through with the understanding that the Product Owner has the best understanding of customer and market needs. This may have been me reading into the scenario too much, but the willingness to shift at the Product Owners discretion is proof enough to me that the team’s communication channels are tightly streamlined.

Finally, the organizational tools available to the team enabled a finely tuned workflow. Implementing tools like JIRA allows for both transparency and clarity within the development process. JIRA enables team members to have an open view of the product backlog, bugs that need to be fixed, the size and priority of stories, and sprint planning. For the scrum meetings, I am personally a fan of organizing scrum meetings in a way that gamifies member contribution such as planning poker. Using methods like planning poker, members are encouraged to get involved in unorthodox ways that enable everyone’s voice to be heard. Additionally, these methods boost group chemistry and morale in ways that the corporate model of meetings fails. While these are only a select few of the tools available to use in the Agile framework that I enjoyed or found interesting, there are many more that will work and have interesting effects within the team.

**References**

Reindl, S. (2015, October 20). The role of a professional tester in an agile world. Scrum.org. <https://www.scrum.org/resources/blog/role-professional-tester-agile-world>.

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