Developing mobility software in times of Corona: how are the project teams at InTraffic approaching this?

Colleagues Maurice and Sebastian explain!

The country slowly seems to be starting up again after we came close to a complete standstill due to the Corona-crisis, but public transport remains a crucial sector. The applications developed by InTraffic for various clients are often of mission-critical importance. They have to keep functioning correctly, especially during this time. Developers Sebastiaan la Fleur and Maurice Knoop explain how they and their teams make this happen.

Remote meetings

Like so many companies, InTraffic is currently also working entirely from home. Normally some employees work on-site at the client's office and the others from InTraffic's head office in Nieuwegein, but now everyone has their workplace at home. Because you can't just walk over to a colleague, remote meetings have become increasingly important, says Maurice. As software developer he is responsible for developing and maintaining systems for up-to-date travel information.

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mastering mobility

"Our team works in an agile manner, which means that we are self-managing. It's important to keep in touch with colleagues and to be properly informed of what they're working on."

Stand-ups have become even more important

We keep each other informed when we have our daily online stand-ups – short meetings during which team members join in to discuss important daily issues. This has become even more important. Sebastiaan, also a software developer at InTraffic, adds: "Our stand-up takes place earlier than usual. Because we're not having any brief, informal talks, our stand-ups take longer than at other times. It's important to discuss the day with the entire team to see whether there are areas in which we can help each other."

Moreover, the work of some teams has become even more important during this period. This applies to teams that manage the applications which are used to process timetables, because timetables need to be adjusted more frequently now than is usually the case, Maurice comments. Normally he works at the InTraffic office in Nieuwegein and sometimes on-site at the client's office. "Most people think I have less work to do because of the decreased amount of traffic. But it's the exact opposite. Because of all the changes in the timetable I actually have more work to do! What's more, the impact of my work has also increased."

Team spirit

In addition to the daily stand-ups during which the entire team is present, there can be a need for meetings between team members at other times. We use the entire gamut of tools, from e-mail and voice call to Microsoft Teams. Maurice: "We have a Teams-meeting running in the background all day. Normally everyone is quiet, until you encounter an issue. When that happens, you discuss it with the group. Each time someone asks a question there is a quick response. This means that the interaction is a bit different, but it hasn't become less efficient." Other teams may prefer chat or the phone. What matters is that team members don't feel any hesitation to ask questions to their colleagues.

Discussions between separate teams

When you work on larger application, several teams usually work on separate parts of the same application. While those teams would normally have regular meetings, it just doesn't work to have online meetings with dozens of people at the same time. This is why discussions between separate teams now take place via the product owners. On the one hand, this is more hierarchical and developers cannot always talk to each other directly, but on the other, it does save us a considerable amount of time.

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Consciously finding time for the human factor

Finally, it's important for people to have a chat with one another and bring each other up to date. An occasional chat about things other than work is important to our team, Sebastiaan adds. "The best team work comes from people who are in tune with each other, and getting to know each other better contributes to this. We strongly believe it's important – especially when there are no face-to-face meetings – to consciously create time for informal chats. And this is why our team organises things like 'tea parties': virtual get togethers during which everyone can talk about anything they want, except work." The virtual Friday afternoon drinks are also attended by more people than the real world ones, says Maurice. After all, possible obstacles such as travelling times are gone!

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