

Johannes Schartau, LS user group leader in Hamburg Germany, is growing his local user group and helping a colleague (Sylvia) get another started in Berlin. Check out the terrific advice he offers below. It reflects perfectly my experience in Seattle and our user group. Hats off to Johannes.

On Thu, Mar 24, 2016 at 6:21 AM, Johannes Schartau

<johannesschartau@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi Sylvia,

Great to hear you're starting a meet up group in Berlin! I follow Olaf Lewitz on Twitter and saw that you introduced Liberating Structures at the Culture Hacking Meetup. Looks like that went well.

I'm happy to share what I have learned so far. If you have any specific questions, please let me know. I'll just write these down in no particular order:

- *German as the language for the meetup works better than English.* This might be different in Berlin (although Hamburg is a large city with a lot of expats). We started out in English and only one person who didn't speak German showed up. Our first English meetup was great though and I'm sure it wouldn't be a show stopper for most people.
- *Involve others as early as possible.* I got three colleagues hooked on LS and they were enthusiastic to help with the user group and spread their enthusiasm in ways I never thought of.
- *Even when others are involved, you will probably have to lead for a while.* A lot of people really enjoyed the user group and quite a few helped organize it. However, people were happy to do just a little part and I was the only one who got "the big picture". April's meetup will be the first I'm going to miss and now I'm sure the others will handle it just fine. This wouldn't have been possible for the first six months though. We just had to go through the whole process several times before everyone involved got used to it. (It's very much like Agile, really.)
- *Be patient.* We started out with something like 15 participants and that quickly dwindled down to our all time low of four (exactly the number of the core group). We sat there all alone and debated whether this was the end. But we decided to focus on growing the number of participants instead. Numbers climbed went back up after that and now we gain roughly one additional participant per meet up.
- *Nothing is going to attract people like demonstrations or word of mouth.* We decided to do at least one experiment a month to attract new participants. We hung cool posters on the entrance doors of our company (about 500 people).

That led to exactly zero people interested in our user group. We posted in online forums. Same result. Things that were really successful included holding a 30 minute session at the local Scrumtisch (20 out of 27 participants in our session. All of them took a flyer home. Five of them showed up for the user group.) and straight up telling people about the user group ("I've found these awesome tools and I'm sure they're right up your alley!").

- *Agile and Liberating Structures are a natural fit.* Most of our participants have at least something to do with Agile. It's like they've been looking for LS for a long time.

- *Just have fun doing the meetups.* We always tried to focus on making the experience pleasant, having fun ourselves and learning as much as we can. People appreciate that. We get really great feedback for the format and the "spirit". People just really like coming. And then they tell others about that pleasant experience.

- *Some things won't work and that's fine.* We always start with the disclaimer that each user group is an experiment. Not everything is going to work but people are fine with it as long as they get the chance to point it out. We do our 3Whats diligently and participants are often surprised by the honesty and clarity this brings. What's still very tricky though is finding the right topic. We often have a big debate going on about focusing more on the structures or more on the topic. We sometimes have great topics that let people forget the structures completely and sometimes the structures don't seem to work that well because no-one really cares about the topic. We haven't found a solution for this. Last time we talked about "Great team - coincidence or design?" and that attracted people who just saw the topic on meetup.com and decided to join. Only during the 3Whats did they remember that the meet up is mainly to learn about these new structures.

I hope that helps! As I said, let me know if you need any specific information. All in all I can say that starting the user group was one of the coolest things I have done. It's so much fun, there's an incredible amount to learn and I've met dozens of fascinating people. As far as I know lots of them now use LS regularly at their place of work and that was one of my main goals.

I'm curious to see where this all leads. I'll be hosting a workshop at the Global Scrum Gathering in Orlando with Greg Myers next month. We'll introduce LS to the Scrum community. Keith helped us come up with a great string. Henri Lipmanowicz will be in Naples at that time and I'll pay him a visit. Amanda Pennington from Seattle is going to be in Hamburg on April 5th and we're going to meet up with her. At the last Limited WiP Society meeting I talked to a friend about LS and someone listened in. Turns out he's the organizer and he wants me to facilitate their next meeting using LS (they usually have between 50 and 80

participants). A woman who works as a business coach has asked me to help her introduce LS to one of Germany's largest retailers. All this is kind of crazy and slightly magical. I hope it goes the same way for you and you get to feel all that connectedness and joy in Germany as well. Keep me updated! :)