

Short stories leading to high performing Scrum teams



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Storytelling can prove to be a powerful tool in Scrum. Peter Beck, Partner at DasScrumTeam AG dedicated his presentation to sharing insights about this powerful

technique and by showing how it can add a lot of value.

Peter developed his art of storytelling following the various workshops that he had been giving since 2003. While these workshops were generally well received, there seemed to be something missing from them. By creating a retrospective and gathering feedback, the pieces of the puzzle slowly came together when it was revealed that people were wary of accepting and trusting the contents of the workshop. After some experimenting with the structure of the workshop, a story was included in the contents. This method turned out to fare well with workshop attendees and from that point on, stories became an increasingly larger part of the trainings.

In storytelling it is important that the story contains a message and that this message is clear. Furthermore, it's important to only use true stories, as fabricated stories are perceived as being too perfect and therefore unrealistic. Another important factor is the use of body language in order to deliver the story more naturally. People have been used to hearing stories from their early childhood on, so they tend to be very experienced in what makes a good story. As such, it is important that when telling a story, one makes sure that it is as convincing as possible. Some tips that can be used to improve this are summarized in the following list:

- The story should have one message
- The story should be true
- The speaker should be prepared
- The delivery has to be executed properly

After this introduction, the speaker shared two stories with the audience to illustrate the matter. The first story was about a Scrum team meeting that Mr. Beck attended in Vienna in 2008. At this meeting there was a person, the product owner, who consistently showed a lack of interest. This was illustrated by the fact that this individual was constantly doing things other than concentrating on the meeting. When confronted with his lack of interest, the individual informed Mr. Beck that, if desired, he would bring in two product managers in order to substitute him. The two product managers did end up replacing the product owner. However, at some point in the Scrum process, there was an issue regarding the backlog for the next meeting that couldn't be solved. After some consideration, the product owner was asked to join back in.

The product owner ended up solving the situation very quickly. It turned out that before, the product owner wasn't showing a lack of interest, but in fact he was giving the team the free space it needed to work. The product owner was just present in order to provide assistance and to make decisions when needed. The morale of this story is that good leaders can make the right decisions at the right time.

The second story is about a highly complex project that involved a huge Scrum team of about 25 people. After the first sprint had been completed, the architecture needed to be changed and the team made the decision about the direction they should take. However, after about 2 hours, two developers came back on this decision by stating that they would rather continue on the approach they had proposed. The team working on the project was unhappy with this proposal and felt like the two individuals were holding back progress, which led to them being removed from the project. Once these two people were no longer part of the team, the rest of the team became very fast and efficient. The point made here, is that it is important to find the right people when making teams. It is possible to start working on a project with the people that are available at the time, but, in order to make the team as good as it can be, organizations have to be prepared for changes to occur in team structure.



The conclusion of the stories shared is that good leaders give their teams freedom, but are present when needed. Additionally, when forming teams it is important to get the best people possible while being prepared to make changes in team structure if needed.

Lastly, as a piece of advice to all those interested in learning more about the storytelling technique, the book "The Leader's Guide to Storytelling" by Stephen Denning was recommended.

about the speaker

Peter Beck is a passionate Scrum coach, trainer (Certified Scrum Trainer, CST) and facilitator with a sound background in software engineering, working independently and within a network of partners. Over the years he has trained and coached a wide range of development teams, business departments, project managers and senior executives in using Scrum, Agile planning and engineering practices. He is the founder of the Austrian Scrum Group, editor of the Scrum Checklists, published at InfoQ.com, and regularly gives talks at Agile conferences and community events.
