Quantified Self Meetup Group Assessment

Prepared for:
Quantified Self Labs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Quantified Self Meetup groups are rapidly spreading to countries all over the world, and leadership at QS Labs does not know precisely much of what meetup group organizers are experiencing. Because of this, an ethnographic assessment was conducted to get a better understanding of the barriers and challenges organizers encounter, and to uncover some of the points of innovation occurring in different groups. The major finding is that there are three main challenges organizers face: finding reliable venues, getting people to attend meetings, and getting presenters for meetings. The main barrier preventing organizers from overcoming these challenges is lack of time. Six areas of interest highlight the other main findings.

The meetup profile

Meetup organizers come from a variety of backgrounds, as students, engineers, and technology and health professionals. They also have different engagements with self-tracing, and their practices fall along a spectrum from low technology involvement to high technology involvement. In addition, while some organizers were tracking when they started their meetup, others were not.

Cities where QS meetups are starting tend to have a few characteristics in common. Cities often have active tech communities, which can include the presence of tech start-ups, hacker spaces, and other tech related meetups. Some cities are also major health centers, with a large health industry presence, or centers for health research.

Goals & benefits

Organizers share some common goals, which either relate to personal goals or group goals. Regarding personal goals, organizers want to grow local self-tracking communities, become more social, and explore professional opportunities in the QS community. Regarding group goals, organizers want to build an environment where new ideas can be created, expand the group membership outside of tech circles, and have the group members set the agenda for the group.

Meetup organizers enjoy several personal benefits from having a leadership role. Organizers get to meet new and interesting people, be influential in making new connections between members, learn about self-tracking tools and methods, and feel like part of the global QS community.

Planning

There are several considerations organizers make when planning their meetups. Meeting frequency is one, and organizers mostly agree six to eight weeks is the optimal time between meetings. The features of Meetup.com make it a great tool for planning, although a few organizers have trouble with some of the features of the site, and some complain about the fee. Organizers differ on how actively they advertise for the group and meetings. More advertising may be necessary in places where Meetup.com is not well known. For the most part, organizers have difficulty lining up presenters for meetings, and this can be a challenge for organizing.

Venue

Finding reliable venues so that meetings can happen is a significant challenge for some organizers. Finding venues can take extra effort from organizers of smaller groups especially. Some organizers are not familiar with their city well enough to know the places their group could be meeting. While there are benefits from moving the meetings to different venues each time, some smaller groups consistently use a single space.

Format

The format for meetings is generally the same across groups. Presentations mainly focus on personal self-tracking projects, while some groups allow toolmakers to present works in progress to get group feedback. Smaller groups often have more Q & A, and are more conversational. Most groups have a social hour either before or after the presentations.

Support & recommendations

Organizers feel that leadership at QS Labs makes a genuine effort to support them. Being provided with contacts has helped several organizers get their group started. The FAQ for meetup organizing has been helpful. Providing a videographer and posting the videos on the QS blog helps groups feel connected to the source. Having meetings announced on the QS blog and Facebook page also helps groups feel connected.

Based on feedback from organizers, there are several recommendations for QS Labs.

- Create open channels of feedback for organizers to share their problems and ideas with QS Labs, and create channels for feedback so individual members can share ideas with their group and QS Labs.
- Create stronger connections across leadership, so that organizers can feel more connected with each other, and provide peer support.
- Encourage groups to have several co-organizers, so there is less work for any one person to do, and to increase the diversity of ideas, projects, and people coming to the meetings.
- Encourage organizers to make event planning more open, so individual group members can help organize. Members may not want to take a leadership role, but may have an idea for a onetime event.
- Find ways to supplement presentations, especially for the smaller groups, where organizers may feel like it is not worth scheduling meetings because there is not enough presentation content.

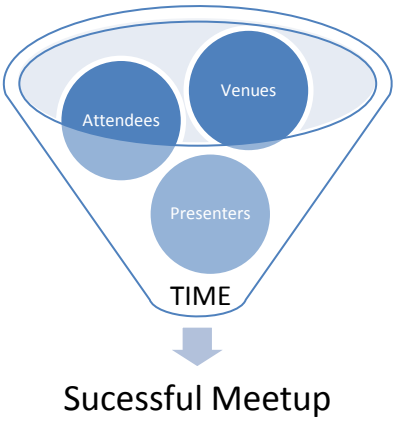
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to present the findings from six months of ethnographic research on Quantified Self meetup groups. The idea for this project came out of a discussion with Gary Wolf, co-founder of Quantified Self, in September of 2011. The QS global community is growing rapidly, and new meetups are starting all over the world. At the start of this research, there were 33 official Quantified Self meetup groups, now (as of March 16, 2012) there are 54. With the intention of finding out more about some of these meetups in order to enable QS Labs to provide better support to new emerging groups, we came up with an idea for a project focusing on meetup organizers. Gary though it would be valuable to know more about who some of the organizers are, what motivated them to start a meetup, some of the challenges and barriers they have been running into, and some of the points of innovation occurring in the meetups.

What is a successful meetup?

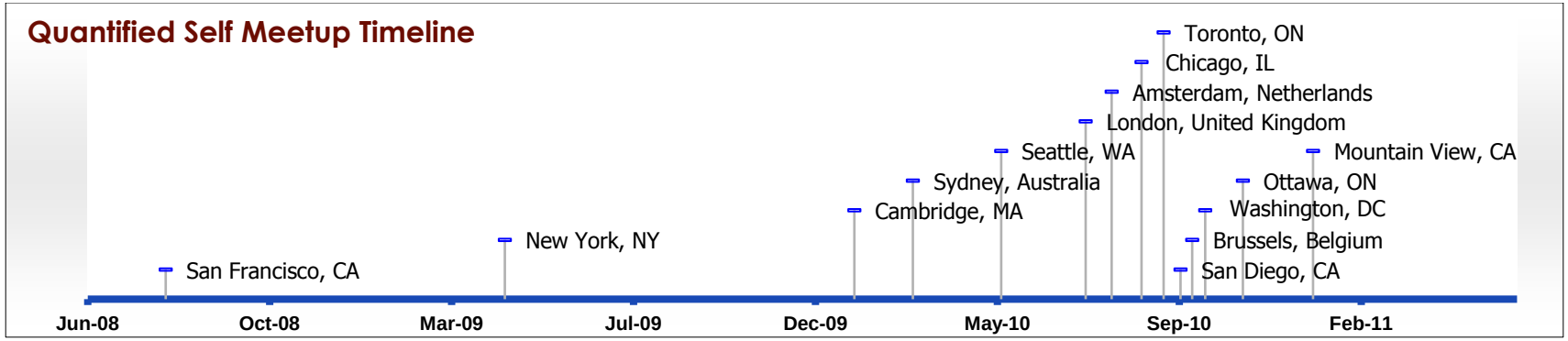
When organizers discuss whether their meetup is successful or not, the main factors they consider are whether the group is meeting as frequently as they would like it to be, and if there are new people coming to each meeting. In addition to these two factors, some organizers also mention that a meetup is successful when organizing does not feel like "work." The message organizers get from QS Labs is that organizing should not feel like "work," and most of the organizers try to follow this advice.

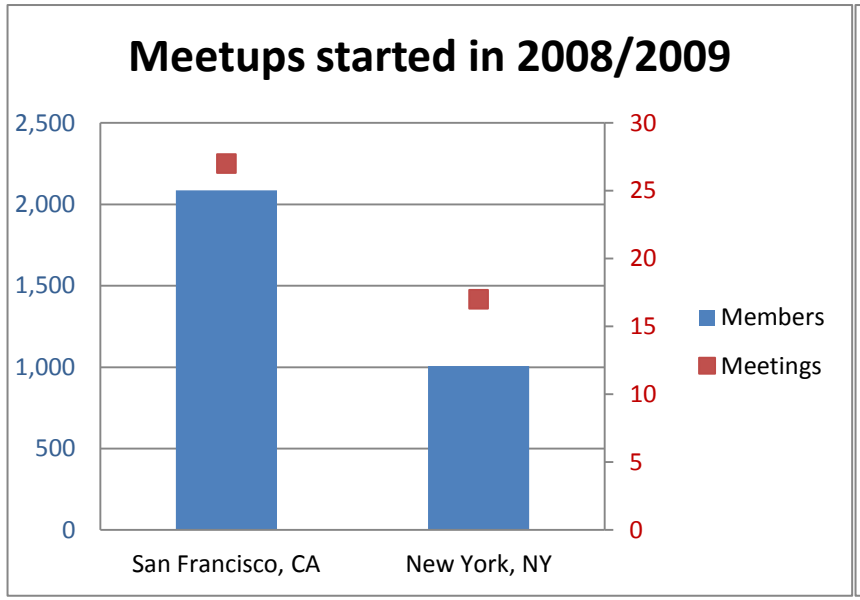
Concerning the hurdles for organizing a successful meetup, organizers consistently mention three main challenges: getting reliable venues, getting people to attend the meetings, and getting presenters for their meetings. These three challenges are connected in different ways for different organizers, in different cities, with different situations. The main barrier for many organizers that keeps them from overcoming these challenges is time. Organizers have to balance their personal and professional lives, in addition to organizing the meetup. These three challenges and the main barrier of time, are the pretext for all that follows, with each section of this report providing some context to what organizers are experiencing.

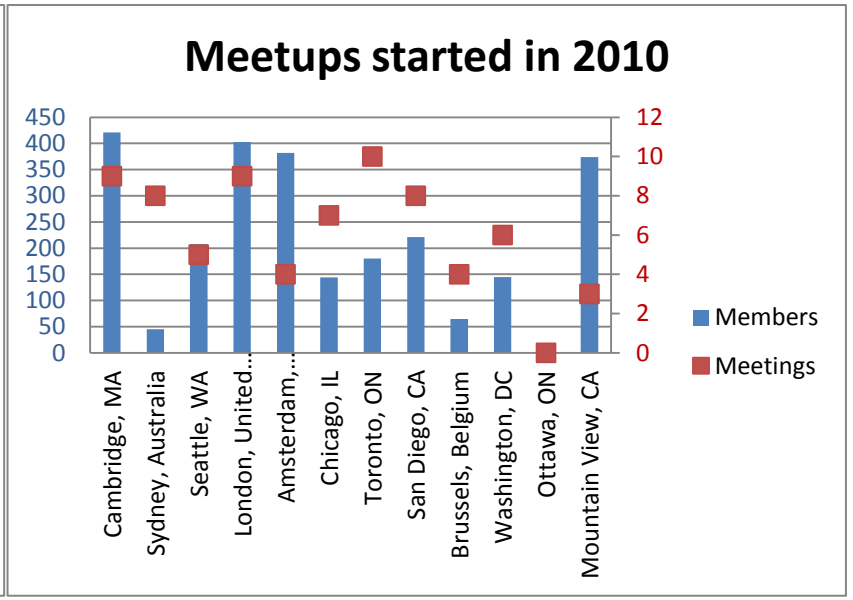


Which meetups are successful?

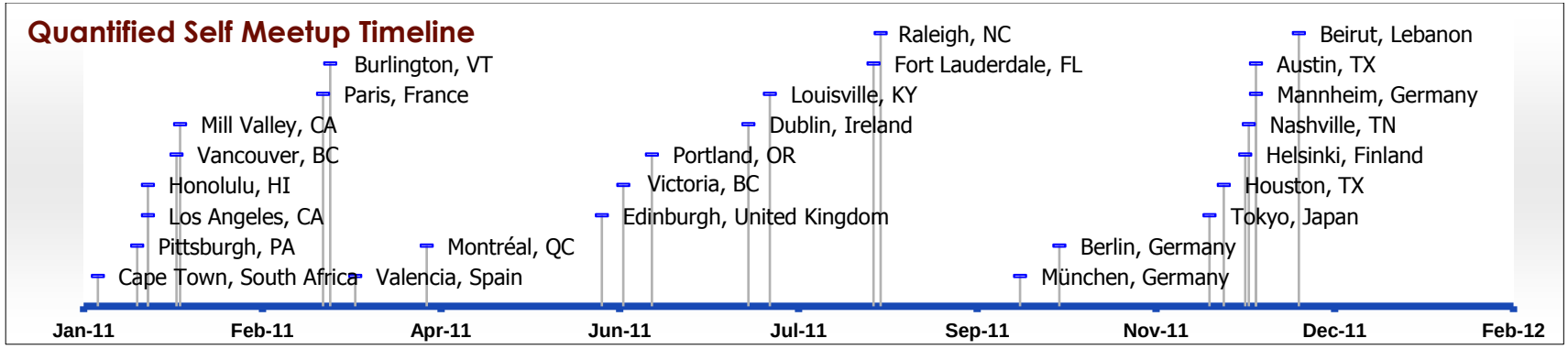
By using the criteria of meeting frequency and meetup growth, it is clear that some groups are more successful than others are. Some groups are growing faster, and other groups are meeting more frequently. One could assume that the longer established meetups would be larger and meeting more frequently. However, looking at some data on the meetups shows that this is not always the case.

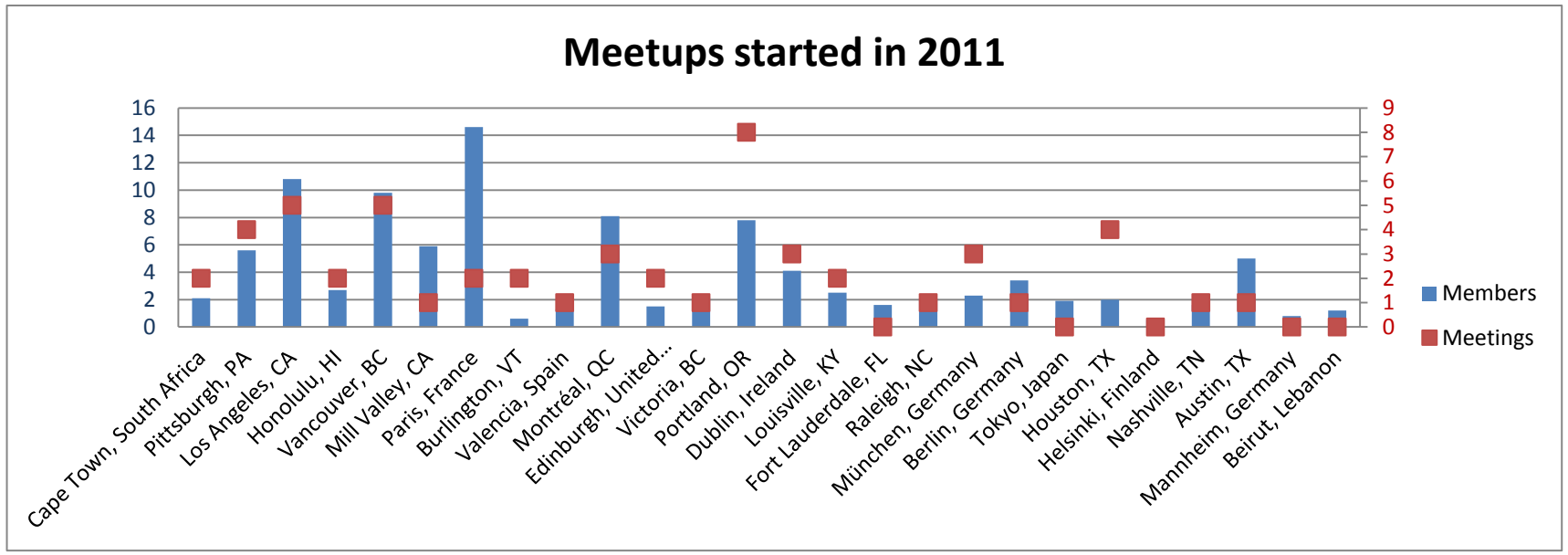




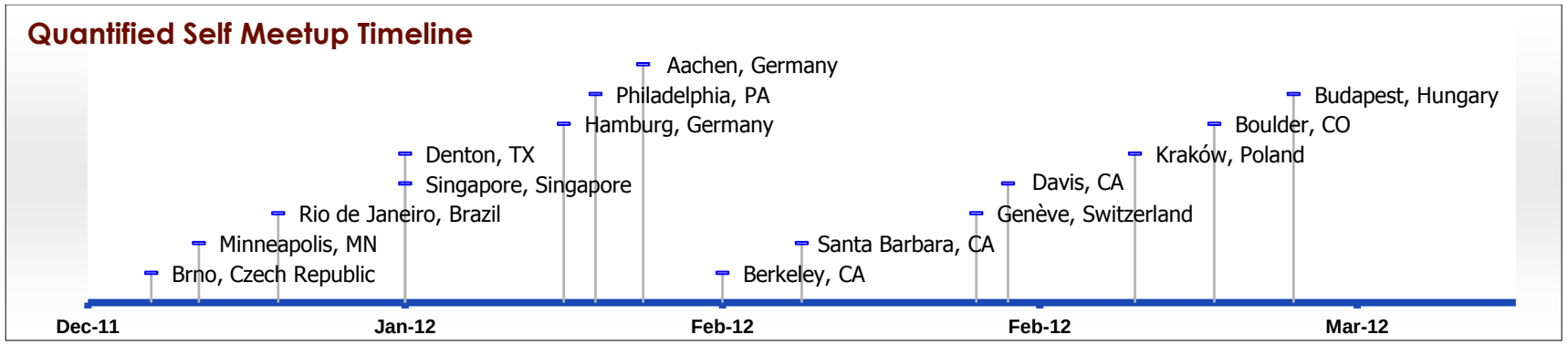


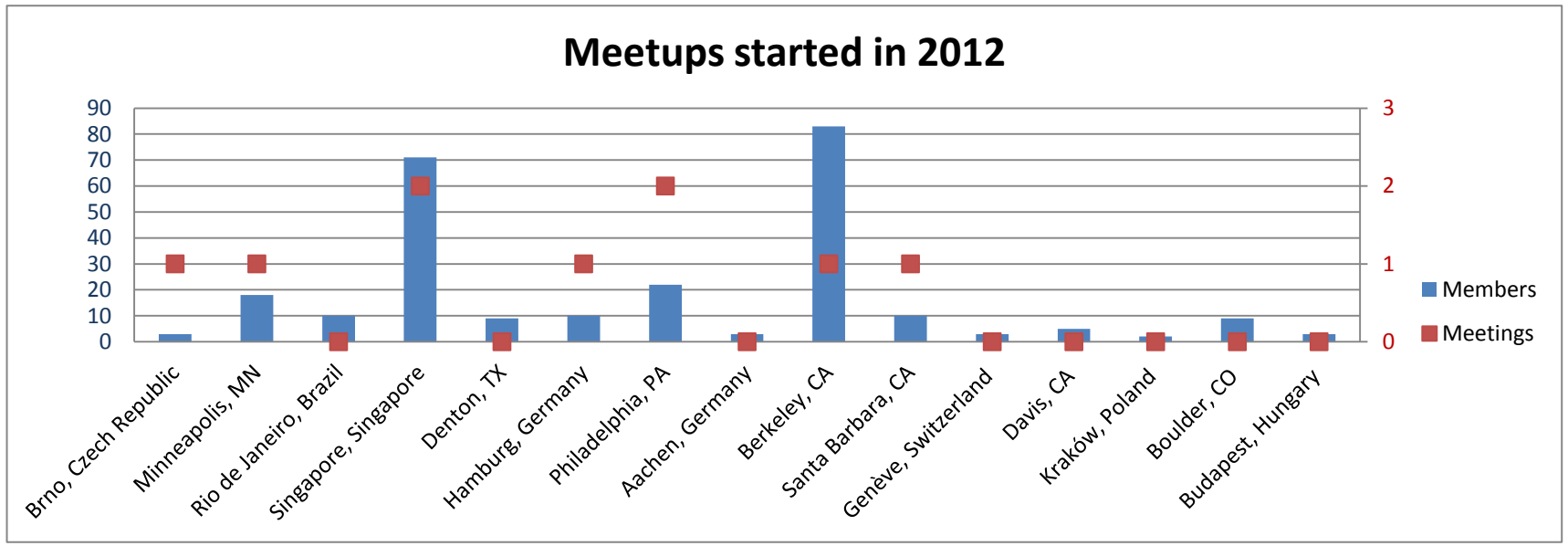
Timeline of meetups founded from 2008 – 2010, with data on total group members, and number of group meetings (as of March, 16, 2012)





Timeline of meetups founded in 2011, with data on total group members, and number of group meetings (as of March, 16, 2012)





Timeline of meetups founded in 2012, with data on total group members, and number of group meetings (as of March, 16, 2012)

Quantified Self Meetup Group Data

City	San Francisco, CA	New York, NY	Cambridge, MA	Sydney, AU	Seattle, WA	London, UK	Amsterdam, NL
Members	2085	1007	421	45	208	403	382
Meetings	27	17	9	8	5	9	4
City	Chicago, IL	Toronto, ON	San Diego, CA	Brussels, BE	Washington, DC	Ottawa, ON	Mountain View, CA
Members	144	180	221	65	145	12	374
Meetings	7	10	8	4	6	0	3
City	Cape Town, ZA	Pittsburgh, PA	Los Angeles, CA	Honolulu, HI	Vancouver, BC	Mill Valley, CA	Paris, FR
Members	2.1	5.6	10.8	2.7	9.8	5.9	14.6
Meetings	2	4	5	2	5	1	2
City	Burlington, VT	Valencia, ES	Montréal, QC	Edinburgh, UK	Victoria, BC	Portland, OR	Dublin, IE
Members	0.6	1.3	8.1	1.5	2.2	7.8	4.1
Meetings	2	1	3	2	1	8	3
City	Louisville, KY	Fort Lauderdale, FL	Raleigh, NC	München, DE	Berlin, DE	Tokyo, JP	Houston, TX
Members	2.5	1.6	2.1	2.3	3.4	1.9	2
Meetings	2	0	1	3	1	0	4
City	Helsinki, FI	Nashville, TN	Austin, TX	Mannheim, DE	Beirut, LB	Brno, CZ	Minneapolis, MN
Members	0.5	1.6	5	0.8	1.2	3	18
Meetings	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
City	Rio de Janeiro, BR	Singapore, SG	Denton, TX	Hamburg, DE	Philadelphia, PA	Aachen, DE	Berkeley, CA
Members	10	71	9	10	22	3	83
Meetings	0	2	0	1	2	0	1
City	Santa Barbara, CA	Genève, CH	Davis, CA	Kraków, PL	Boulder, CO	Budapest, HU	
Members	10	3	5	2	9	3	
Meetings	1	0	0	0	0	0	

As the charts show, there is no obvious pattern of growth for QS Meetups. There are groups with a very small membership base that have had many meetings. The opposite is also true. While the age of the meetup does have some correlation with size, this is not always the case. Some meetups started in 2010 are the same size as ones started earlier this year. Clearly there is more to these pictures than just the data, and finding out why some groups are growing while others are not will take more than just looking at the numbers.

The Research

This report is informed by 12 interviews conducted from November 2011 through January 2012. Ten of the interviewees identify as founding members of their meetup group, and the other two primarily identify as co-organizers. The sample included organizers from meetup groups of different sizes, ranging from very small groups of around 20 members, to the second largest group with now over 1000 members. The criteria for choosing a group were that it needed to have had at least two meetings, and be a primarily English-speaking group. Organizers for meetups that fit these criteria were contacted via email, with the help of Alexandra Carmichael, director of Quantified Self, providing e-introductions. All organizers that were interested in participating in the research were invited for an interview. During this time, I also attended three meetings of the Bay Area QS Meetup group, and informally spoke to some of the attendees and organizers at these meetings.

Use of Terms

The term "meetup" in discussion can refer to an individual QS Meetup group, the events a meetup group holds, and the website QS Meetup groups use to organize. For the sake of clarity in this report, I use different terms to differentiate these. The term "meetup" always refers to a QS Meetup group, unique to each city, or collectively sometimes as meetups, or simply groups. The term "meeting" always refers to the events each QS Meetup group holds. The website QS Meetup groups use to organize is always referred to as "Meetup.com."

In most cases, Quantified Self is abbreviated as QS.

Format of the Report

Data from the interviews was arranged into six main topics, each with several sub-topics. The exact number of respondents for any position on a topic is often not mentioned, because for any topic there was always a range of responses, and further discussions with other meetup organizers will likely reveal other responses. I tried to blend responses that were similar together and present a spectrum of positions on any topic, while at the same time trying to preserve the individual voice of each organizer and have their experience inform the presentation of the data. Throughout each section, there are comment boxes. These comments are derived from direct statements made by organizers.

The report begins with some basic background information on the landscape of QS Meetups. The first section, The Meetup Profile, focuses on the characteristics of meetups, the organizers and co-organizers, and the cities where QS Meetups are starting. From there, the report moves to explore the outlook of organizers. The second section, Goals & Benefits focuses on the different kinds of personal and group goals organizers have for their group, and some of the personal benefits organizers enjoy

from organizing their meetup. The next step is to look into what organizers go through to get their meetup going. The third section, Planning, explores some of the different aspects of managing a meetup and planning a meeting. Because getting reliable venues is an issue that came up in nearly all the interviews, the fourth section, Venues, focuses entirely on the venue problem. Operationally, the different meetups are similar in many aspects, but also have some differences. The fifth section, Format, focuses on how different organizers run their meetings. Organizers mentioned several ways they feel QS Labs has already assisted them with their meetup. The final section, Support & Recommendations, focuses on the different aspects of support, and offers some ideas based on responses from organizers.

Section 1: THE MEETUP PROFILE

There is no single profile of a QS Meetup. However, most meetups share some common characteristics. Some of the characteristics that are extremely important for the success of one meetup, but not present at all in another.

This section explores…

- The profile of group organizers
- The topic of co-organizers
- The profile of cities where meetups are located

The People: Organizers

Organizer Background

People come into organizing a QS Meetup from a variety of backgrounds. Some are graduate students at large universities, others work in the health sector, and several of the organizers work developing self-tracking related tools or other technology in some design or engineering capacity.

Regarding self-tracking as a practice, it was about an equal split between those that came into organizing from a heavy technology supported tracking practice, those that are more "pen & paper" self-trackers, and those that were not tracking at all when they started the meetup. The different backgrounds that organizers have also give them different perspectives on self-tracking. Some look at self-tracking from a more individual perspective, as an approach to build new habits and create behavior change. Other organizers see the trend of self-tracking related technology as the latest development of contemporary technology, some aspects of which will become common in everyone's lives. Some others see that self-tracking is a response to inadequacies in our current health care system, and hope that QS as a movement can help bring some of these critiques into discussions about the future of medicine.

If you are thinking of starting a meetup, start it for personal reasons rather than business reasons.

Motivation

The motivation to start a local meetup is different for every organizer. Some organizers were inspired to start their own local self-tracker community after going to a meeting of the Bay Area Meetup, or after attending the first Quantified Self Conference. Organizers spoke of being inspired by the openness and honesty of the group and the stories people share about personal life struggles. Some people start a meetup in order to be inspired and inspire others to take on the task of self-tracking.

Other organizers had not attended a QS Meetup before they started their own, but were motivated by the idea of building a local self-tracking community. These organizers usually are frequent readers of the articles and often watch the videos on the QS blog, read books suggested in the articles, and generally try to educate themselves the best they can about self-tracking and the QS community.

Leadership Styles

Nearly all organizers said they try to have as little influence on the group as possible. Organizers feel that their role is to assist in creating the conditions for self-tracking communities to grow, simply by making meetings happen. In several occasions organizers specifically said they want the community to set the agenda for itself.

Most organizers have some experience taking a leadership role, but say that organizing a QS Meetup is very different from any of their previous tasks. Professionally, organizers have led design teams or the other project teams. Others have experience organizing clubs and activities from their time in college or even high school. However, organizers say the other types of organizing are so dissimilar that the experience does not reflect or influence how they run their meetup, or why they started the meetup in the first place.

> *Feeling connected to the group is important when stepping up to a leadership position. You should have a significant level of identification with the group, and feel that you want to contribute something back.*

A few organizers said that starting a social group like a meetup is completely out of their character, even for some that have previous organizing experience. A few organizers in this position said that they do not feel like they are doing a good job organizing their meetup, and that probably someone else could do better. On the other side, some organizers said that they are naturally very social people, and that starting a meetup is not out of their character. Starting a meetup just made sense to them.

The People: Co-organizers

It seems like there is a lot of work to do to get a meetup up and running. Although, some organizers said that they might be making things more complicated than is necessary. In addition, some organizers do not feel like they have enough time to commit to organizing. This is why having one or more co-organizers is probably the best support a group can have to help make meetings happen.

All of the organizers who did not have a co-organizer said they would like to have one. However, just because a meetup has one or more co-organizers does not mean a group is more successful in terms of meeting as frequently as the organizers would like, and in not making organizing seem like extra work. In fact, one of the most successful groups in both regards (Toronto) is headed up by only one person, and other groups that have co-organizers, are not meeting as frequently as the organizers would like. This points to the fact that there is no best way to run a meetup that will apply in all situations.

> *If you do not have a co-organizer, try to get one. If you already have a co-organizer, try to get a few more. It is better to have people you can rely on to split up the work of organizing.*

Granted that each group is different in terms of its leadership, overall I can suggest that in general groups benefit from having co-organizers.

Some benefits of having co-organizers are:

- Less load on any one person, splitting the duties can make organizing more enjoyable.
- Co-organizers can help diversify a group, especially when they have a different disposition towards self-tracking.
- Having co-organizers reduces the feeling of "ownership" in the group.
- Co-organizers may be connected into different networks, and can bring in different people.
- A co-organizer volunteers to be a regular supporter of a local self-tracking community, and if nothing else, is another person to be there at the meetings.

The Cities: Tech Community

For the most part, people are staring QS Meetups in cities that have a solid tech community.

Organizers mentioned several attributes that contribute to a tech community:

- If a city has tech related start-ups, or large technology companies established there.
- If there are other technology related meetups, or meetups on programming languages.
- If a city has an active hacker community and hacker spaces
- If a city has one or more universities with large or well known, technology related departments.

The Cities: Major Health Centers

Some meetups also are in cities that are a major center for the health industry. In some cities, there is a major presence of large health insurance companies. One organizer specifically mentioned that some health insurance companies are starting to show interest in self-tracking as a way to potentially gauge the health of individuals, and whether they are a risk from an insurance perspective. Other cities are major centers for health research, both in the private sector and in research universities. On occasion, organizers said they feel like a QS Meetup belongs in their city because of the strong health industry presence, and that their own interests in self-tracking mostly relate to health.

If there is any tech or health related event in your area like a Bar Camp or Health Camp, see if you can present, or get some members from your meetup to present. If nothing else, try to attend and meet new people that might be interested in a QS Meetup.

Section 2: GOALS & BENEFITS

Surprisingly, most organizers said that they did not start their meetup with any specific goal in mind. A comment that nearly everyone made is that they simply want to grow the community.

This section explores…

- The personal goals organizers have
- The goals organizers have for their groups
- The personal benefits that organizers feel the meetup provides

Personal Goals

Building community

Organizers that come to QS as long time self-trackers always mention how excited they were to learn that there is a whole community of people out there interested in connecting with each other along this common interest. These people often have no reservations when they realize they can start a meetup in their area and help build a local self-tracking community.

Before you start your meetup, experiment with some devices, find a few people that are into self-tracking and have some informal discussions. Almost start your meetup before you start it.

Being more social

Some organizers said that they started the meetup in order to have a new social outlet for interacting with people. This intention definitely fits with the spirit of meetups, which are about providing a format of people to socialize around common interests. Some self-trackers were looking for something to help get them out of their daily work routine, and starting a QS Meetup seemed like a good way to do that. For some, interest in this social aspect grew after meeting some of the leadership at QS Labs, and other people in the community, either at the first QS Conference or at a meetup in another city. Everyone that has met people from other meetups say that they genuinely like the people involved in the QS community. For them, starting a meetup is a reason for them to connect and interact with people in the larger QS community, while at the same time finding similar people in their own area.

Professional interest

A few organizers started their meetup coming from a professional interest in the QS community. Some had been self-tracking prior to starting their group, while others had not. Most of these organizers are toolmakers; they have the goal of building new tools and improving current technology. They see that one way to accomplish this is by hooking into the QS community, to see what people are using and start using the technology themselves. They would like to see more people using self-tracking related technology so that markets grow for the tools they want to create. These toolmakers also want to create technology that is useful to people, that fills a demand. The meetup provides a way to see what people are interested in and how they can have a hand in creating technology that will truly benefit people's lives.

One organizer who approached QS from professional interests had a completely different angle. His professional interests are in personalized medicine. He sees QS as being part of the technology piece of the current state of personalized medicine. Being not very technologically minded, he came into QS with the goal of learning more about the technology around self-tracking and how that might configure into future trends of personalized medicine. He also sees QS as a good platform for discussing and bringing more awareness to personalized medicine.

Group Goals

Focus for the group

Organizers generally share a vision about the environment they hope the group will create. They see the group providing an environment for the cross pollination of projects and ideas. The group can provide a productive space where people that were touching into the lines running into QS, collide into each other in ways they were not before. Organizers would like to see people in the group generating new, unique ideas together, simply from hanging out with one another. The intention is to help get some of these conversations started, and to make some of the invisible networks surrounding QS more visible.

As a group, organizers see the potential for their meetup to help reveal the diversity and caliber of projects, both personal and professional, going on in each particular city. The hope is for the group to reach new people and expose them to these projects, and that this will inspire them in new ways, help them learn and grow and start new projects of their own. The ultimate goal is to have new people step up one day and want to present their own projects, and inspire a new groups of people to have the cycle continue.

> *Don't make your group seem like it's only about technology; building habits, and behavior change is what's really important, and can be over-shadowed by the gadgets and technology. Some people might be turned off if the group seems too "techie."*

Membership goals

As far as membership goes, most of the organizers mentioned that they want their group to expand into a more diverse range of people. For some of the smaller meetups this is particularly so. The membership for several groups started with people in the organizer's immediate community and extended networks. For example, for one meetup located at a university, the initial members mainly included other people from the university. For others well hooked into their local tech or hacker community, early members came from these networks. They would like to bring in people that are new to tracking and long time self-trackers. However, expanding out into the general population is a challenge for some organizers.

Most organizers do not have any goals around the size of their group. Several organizers said they want their group to grow "organically," and do not have a specific vision about the size of their group. Some organizers of smaller groups see their group staying rather small, maybe growing to 200-300 members, with one fourth to one third attending each meeting.

Feeling of the group

Several organizers mentioned that they want their group to become more interactive. Rather than in just be a space for consuming something (i.e. attending the meetings just to watch a show & tell), they would like their group to become more productive and actively foster collaboration.

Some organizers mentioned specifically that they want their group to be a social thing first, and then about QS second. After meeting a few times, they feel like they have formed a group of people that they like to socialize with; that the common interest they share is specifically around self-tracking does not matter so much. For some organizers, there is this feeling like there should be some other activities they could do as a group, but many organizers have not been able to figure out exactly what to do. Some mentioned potentially making their group multi-segmented, and having different activities than just show & tells, making the group more experience based, running group experiments, or having field trips.

This coincides with another goal several organizers mentioned; they want to shift the focal point of the group away from themselves and onto the community. Organizers would like to see people in the group volunteer to organize other activities outside the show & tells, but they feel like they need to create the space where there is "permission" for people to do this.

> *Experience is key, give people a new experience with the meetings. Offer something new in their life.*

Benefits

Meeting people

The most frequently mentioned personal benefit that organizers get from the meetup is the opportunity to meet new and interesting people. Organizers genuinely identify and connect with the people that attend the meetings. Often the type of people organizers see drawn to self-tracking are very curious, self-improvers, and life-long learners. Several organizers mentioned building new friendships with people they met at meetings.

Creating connections

A few organizers also mentioned that they enjoy connecting different people together within their local meetup community. Sometimes organizers hook people together around a common interest, or connect people that are working on very similar, or even very different projects, who might benefit from one another's input. Simply providing the space where productive interactions can result is one of the personal benefits for meetup organizers.

> *Reach out to people in your community that are doing interesting things that relate to QS.*

The QS community

One of the greatest benefits for organizers that are also avid self-trackers, is being part of a self-tracking community. Feeling that they are not alone in their interests and practice is a great motivator to continue projects. Some self-trackers are not comfortable sharing their practice with family and friends, worried that others might think their practices are signs of being

"obsessive-compulsive" or "self-absorbed." Discovering QS can be quite liberating, by knowing that people all over the world are into the same practices.

Some of the personal benefits of having a local QS community organizers mention are:

- The feedback they receive on personal projects from members of the group.
- Hearing other people present inspires them to build new habits and continue with projects.
- That they enjoy feeling like they are connected into a larger movement of people.
- That they enjoy sharing knowledge and experience around practices they are passionate about, with the hope that other people will benefit from this knowledge and experience.

An opportunity to learn

QS meetings are a great venue for learning about new things around self-tracking related technology. All organizers mentioned learning about new things is a personal benefit they enjoy.

Organizers mentioned specifically:

- Learning about new tools, technology, and devices
- Learning more in general about the fields of technology, health, and medicine
- Learning new ways to use self-tracking tools, including little tricks they say they would have otherwise never thought of.
- Hearing about personal projects can get you thinking differently about their own personal projects.
- Learning about other people's motivations for self-tracking, and how these differ from one's own provides perspective.
- Hearing deeply personal stories, which sometimes come up in presentations, can be especially moving and insightful.

Section 3: PLANNING

Starting a new QS Meetup requires some planning up front, but once the group is up and running organizers say it gets easier. Most organizers did not think about and methodically plan aspects of their group from the beginning.

This section explores…

- How frequently should groups have meetings
- Whether or not to advertise for meetups and meetings
- Whether or not to offer food and drinks at a meeting
- Whether or not to line up presenters before each meeting

Meeting Frequency

Organizers have to plan meetings in order for the groups to be active and grow. One of the biggest hang-ups around planning is deicing how frequently to have meetings. Meeting frequency ranged from one group that meets consistently every month, to a few which had not held a meeting in more than six months.

> *Quite a bit of thought goes into all this, but it's not as hard as you think once it gets going.*

Two groups have been meeting consistently every six weeks. Organizers from both of these meetups (NY and Toronto) agreed that this was the ideal space between meetings. Having a meeting every month seems to be too often. One month does not give people enough time to run a self-tracking experiment or project and have something new to present. This is especially important for the smaller groups where a core of regular members are often the ones providing much of the presentation content. The organizer that holds monthly meetings mentioned that the energy has waned at the latest meeting, and that he should start planning them less frequently.

On the other side, having too much time between meetings is not conducive to building a strong self-tracking community. An organizer from one of the newer meetups mentioned about one person that joined the group on Meetup.com soon after their first meeting. This new member was quite excited to find the QS group and sent several messages to the organizers saying that he was eager to attend a meeting. Several months later the group still had not scheduled a second meeting. The new member grew extremely frustrated by this, eventually left the group, and sent the organizers a message stating his disappointment with them.

> *You need to have meetings so that the group grows. Even if only a handful of people show up, it is worth having the meeting. Only five people might show up, but maybe 100 other people wanted to come but could not make it.*

Based on the feedback from organizers, holding a meeting every two months seems to be the upper limit. Any longer than that and people may begin to forget the talks from the previous meeting. In the spirit of wanting to build a

self-tracking community, it can be beneficial to maintain some continuity. One way to build the feeling of continuity is by having meetings at regular intervals.

Some organizers also try to keep continuity by having meetings on the same day of the week. However, most organizers do not see this as very important, and schedule their meetings based on whichever day is convenient for the venue.

Another consideration some organizers take when scheduling meetings is whether other large tech related meetups in their city are having meetings on the same day. This was only an issue for two groups. Some members of these QS Meetups also regularly attend these other rather large tech related meetups. Because of the overlapping circles, these organizers do not want to schedule the QS meetings on the same day. However, it was not considered a problem to schedule around these other meetups.

Pay attention to what is going on in your city. Set up custom Google searches for QS related key words in your area.

Meetup.com

Without the Internet QS would likely have not grown to what it is becoming today. Moreover, without Meetup.com, it would be difficult to organize as efficiently. Generally speaking, organizers think Meetup.com is a good way to organize and get new members. The site takes care of a lot of the work, with RSVPs, having the wait list feature, automatic reminders, and providing an easy way to send email messages to the entire group. Other features, like suggesting the group to people with related interests, also helps to grow the group. A few organizers mentioned that there were already people waiting for a QS Meetup in their city when they started the group on Meetup.com. This feature is especially helpful to get a new group off the ground.

Organizers did have a few complaints about the Meetup.com site:

- Some organizers mentioned the monthly fee as a downside.
- Some organizers have problems coming up with content for their group page.
- Some organizers do not know how to use some of the functions of the site.

By far the biggest unknown regarding Meetup.com is how well it works for attracting new members. Awareness and use of the site for organizing groups of all kinds varies by area. In areas where Meetup.com is not that popular, we cannot expect it to be a good source of new membership as it is in places like the Bay Area and New York. It is the smaller groups that are in places where Meetup.com is not well known that have problems growing their membership. A couple of these smaller groups have experimented with organizing in other ways, like also creating a Google Group, but not with much success. The organizers in this position may have to put a little more effort into outreach and advertising.

People may be interested in self-tracking, but not looking on Meetup.com for a QS Meetup. Try to find popular ways people spread the word about tech related events in your area.

Advertizing

Organizers have mixed attitudes toward advertising for meetings and their meetup.

- Some groups are advertising.
- Other groups would like to but do not.
- Some organizers feel like they do not need to advertise.
- Others commented that it does not seem like their responsibility to advertise.

The most active advertising was from one organizer that put up flyers around her college campus advertising for a meeting. Similarly, one other organizer posted information about his meetup at the different hacker spaces in his city. Most organizers use social media (especially Twitter) to spread the word about meetings through their extended networks. Several organizers mentioned about their meetup or a meeting to local tech related or hacker list serves. The organizers that said they would like to advertise more but have not, mentioned things like tech list serves or online event boards, but did not know any in their area. The organizers that felt advertising is unnecessary have been successful in gaining membership simply through the Meetup.com group page.

If you are going to advertize for the meeting, try not to use too much QS jargon, use a more general vocabulary, and try to describe self-tracking in a way that promotes positive interest

Presenters

Every organizer tries, or at least has tried, to line up presenters before meetings. However, most organizers do not have much success with this. The only groups that seem to be able to do this are the larger groups. Some of the mid-size groups try to get a couple of presenters to commit beforehand, but still have to hope some attendees come to the meeting intending to present. For most of the groups that do not line up talks beforehand, at times they have difficulty getting enough presentations.

For the groups that do line up presenters, giving enough notification is essential so people have time to prepare and feel confident about presenting. Giving a four to five week notice for a meeting seems to be sufficient lead-time to make sure people have time to finish their self-tracking project and develop a presentation.

The organizer for one group (Boston) has consistently been setting a theme for meetings, and he finds this approach extremely effective. He decided on setting themes because he felt like the group could run into a problem where different people end up presenting essentially the same talk; someone using the same app to do the same thing with the same results. He thought setting a theme might be a better way to sample the variety of projects people are dong in one area. An added benefit to this approach is when different people are using the same technology, you do not have to explain what it is for each presentation. For example, one meeting focused on sleep projects, and for almost all of the projects people used a Zeo device. The first presenter talked about what the Zeo is and how it works. This became a common knowledge base and all of the following presenters could just jump right into

their project. The organizer mentioned this meeting went very well, and even though almost every presenter was using a Zeo, all of the projects were very different.

Food and Refreshments

Another area where organizers are split is on the topic of providing snacks and refreshments at meetings. Some organizers think it is a really good idea and provide at least basic refreshments at each meeting. Other organizers have tried it, but were not certain if it made a difference. A couple of organizers did not think having refreshments matters, and do not ever plan on providing any. The groups that do bring refreshments say it is nice to have them, especially for the groups that have an informal social hour before the presentations.

One group (Pittsburgh) has an interesting approach to the food issue which works extremely well because the groups is small. After their meetings, nearly all of the attendees go out of dinner together. However, at one meeting the presentations near the end were rushed because some of the attendees were getting hungry.

Involve food in some way, either providing refreshments, or going out afterwards. It provides a good social lubricant and an incentive for people to attend your meetings. Experiment with having a donation bucket to cover refreshment costs.

Section 4: VENUE

If someone wants to start a QS Meetup group they will inevitably run into the question of how to find venues.

This section explores…

- The problem of not having reliable venues
- Opinions on what makes a good space for a meeting
- Some of the different kinds of spaces organizers have used for meetings
- Insights on the dilemma of having a consistent meeting space or moving around for each meeting

Finding & Choosing Venues

For some organizers, finding venues for meetings is incredibly difficult. In fact, finding venues either was or continues to be a problem for almost all organizers interviewed for this report. Finding venues will likely be the task organizers spend the most time on, especially early on. The model that works in the Bay Area and New York meetups, soliciting attendees for spaces, works great because of the large member base to draw upon. However, for smaller groups and especially brand new groups still planning their first meeting, it is up to the organizer to find a venue. Finding a venue so that the meetings can happen is probably the most important factor for how successful any particular meetup will be, because it is the first one or two meetings that inspire organizers to continue organizing the meetup.

If there is a university in or near your city, look for the niches in departments on campus that might be interested in QS, and willing to host a meeting. Technology or health related departments, especially in research universities, might be really interested in hearing more about self-tracking.

How do smaller groups find venues?

Quite often organizers already had a space they could use for meetings when they started their meetup. For some organizers, it was their office. They either manage their own start-up or work at a place that has a meeting room or other space that works for meetings. Other organizers are connected into the hacker spaces in their local community, and can readily use those as venues for meetings. Every organizer that lives in a city with a hacker community mentioned hacker spaces as valuable resources for venues. Other organizers are affiliated with universities and take advantage of classroom space for their meetings. Any organizer that did not already have any one of these options already available to them when starting the meetup, stated that finding venues is a major problem.

Another issue regarding venues is that several organizers feel they do not know their own area and city as well as they would like, to know what venues might be out there. Although the main barrier, lack of time, prevents them from finding out what their city has to offer. The time commitment along with the amount of initiative and self-motivation necessary to go out and look for venues can seem like a lot of work. However not all organizers spoke of finding venues this way. For some, finding out what is going on in their local community and what venues are out there is part of their personal interest, the

interest that got them turned onto QS in the first place. This is one area where the decision to start a meetup for professional interest more than personal interest can put a group at a disadvantage. In the spirit of trying to make organizing not feel like "work," people that come to the meetup from a business interest may be more likely to see certain tasks as extra work, whereas someone coming at this from personal interests may enjoy these tasks.

Once the task of finding some venues is over, the next step is to get your foot in the door. When trying to make a contact with someone at a venue, it can be helpful to refrain from using too much QS jargon in describing the meetup, unless the host is already familiar with QS. If the host seems interested in offering a meeting space, it may also be important to clearly outline what the meeting will look like; start and end time, how many people, if there will be food, if there will be audio or video recording, et cetera, in case there are some restrictions at the venue. Demonstrating that you take any concerns the host may have seriously will help give the host a good impression of your group.

Try to get some venues that are well known in your area, which can be a draw for people to attend a meeting.

After finding the venues, and getting your foot in the door, the most important part of getting new venues is following up. Two different organizers, both of whom are having trouble finding venues, said that lack of follow up probably prevented them from getting venues that they otherwise would be using.

How to pick a space?

There are several factors that can make for a nice venue:

- A good venue is a place that gets people to think and interact differently.
- Spaces that are inspirational, or have an artsy or DIY feel, like design spaces.
- If the space is comfortable or has a nice view.
- When the venue itself provides attendees with a new experience; this becomes another incentive for people to attend a meeting.

Operationally, it is helpful if the venue…

- Is easy to get to, near public transportation, or has available parking.
- Is near restaurants, bars or coffee shops, so after the meeting there are places people can go to continue their conversations.
- Has projectors for presentations, or even marker boards.

Types of venues to look for:
Design spaces, hacker spaces, college or university campuses, community centers, restaurants, bars or coffee houses, non-profits, start-ups, co-working offices.

The size of the space is something that some organizers may also want to take into consideration. Size mainly becomes an issue when meetings begin to get larger. Some organizers have no problem finding one or more small venues to hold meeting of 15-30 people, but anticipate needing to find new venues if their group continues to grow.

Moving the meetup vs. single location

Leadership at QS Labs suggests to organizers that it is better to move the meetings to different locations than to have one consistent location. This approach seems to work well for the larger groups, but some of the smaller groups tend to meet in a consistent space. While these groups might benefit from having different venues, it is the trend to have a consistent space when first starting out.

> *Try to find the spots in your local area that you do not know, but would like to know better; discover the strengths in your community.*

Using a consistent space has the advantage of stability; people know what to expect each time they attend a meeting. One of the most successful meetups in terms of meeting consistently and having new members at each meeting (Toronto), has been using a consistent space for several of their last meetings, a free for use community center.

However, keeping a consistent venue is not without disadvantages. Potentially a feeling of "ownership" can grow if the meetings always happen in the same place. This is especially so when the venue is the office of an organizer, or some other space they are affiliated with. In addition, not moving to different venues deprives the group of the benefits many organizers see resulting from moving meetings. Organizers mentioned that moving the meetings is a great way to explore and discover the community, almost like using the city as a laboratory. Moving the meetings can also help catch different people and get some new members at the meetings.

Section 5: FORMAT

There does not seem to be a "best" size when it comes to a meeting, but in some ways, size dictates the style of the group.

This section explores…

- The style of different sized groups
- The social hour either before or after the presentations
- The content of the talks at meetings
- Facilitation for meetings and Q & A sessions after each presentation

Size & Style

The format for meetings generally depends on the size of the group. In small to medium size meetings, it is possible to have more of a conversational feel. Everyone attending is able at least to introduce themselves to the group, if not have a chance to talk about their self-tracking projects. For larger meetings, the number of presenters limits the amount of time for presentations and Q & A.

It is a good idea to set an agenda for the evening, to help avoid breaks in the flow of a meeting. Come prepared with ways to keep the conversation going

Most of the organizers like the informality of the smaller meetings. They like that you can go around the room and have everyone introduce themselves. At the very first meeting of many groups, all the attendees took turns talking about what they were working on at the time, either their personal self-tracking project or tool they were developing. Organizers mentioned liking this format, and feel that everyone who is coming to the meetings probably have something interesting to share.

Once the size of a group grows and meetings happen more frequently, the format usually shifts to being less interactive and the presentations become more formal. For the most part, people prepare a talk of a certain length, often between five and ten minutes. Some organizers from the more established groups see the need to curate talks, and try to bring in if not more polished, at least more directed talks. Limiting talks to five minutes seems to be the standard for groups that have moved onto more presentation-based meetings. This gives enough time to present a project, and if any attendees would like to get more details, they can always talk to the presenter directly. Some organizers encourage presenters to stick around after the meeting in case people would like to talk to them.

Go to some QS meetings in other cities if you can. Seeing how other groups do it can be the best help for organizing your own meetup.

Presentation Content

Presentations tend to fall on one of two sides, either strongly focused on a personal self-tracking project, or more focused on a tool for self-tracking. Leadership at QS Labs tries to encourage that the presentation space at meetings is for personal self-tracking projects. Toolmakers are free to present personal projects they have done with tools they developed, but making a "sales pitch" for the tools is

generally discouraged. Organizers from other meetups more or less feel the same way about the content of meetings. The three questions (What did you do? How did you do it? What did you learn?), generally guide personal project presentations at most of the meetings.

Depending on the size of the group, and if the venue has the capabilities, presenters use slides with their presentation. Many groups do not set the expectation for presenters to prepare slides for their talks. Some presenters simply show the display on their notebook or tablet computer to show data visualizations, or applications or programs they are using for their projects.

For presentations without slides, if you have a projector and a computer with internet, bring up some of the homepages of the websites or apps people are talking about in their presentations to provide some basic visual context. You can also do this during introductions.

For tool talks, some organizers said they do not mind having people present on tools they have developed, as long as they present it in the context of a personal narrative, showing how they were inspired to develop the tool and how they have been using it. The format that the Bay Area group has, of providing demo tables for people to display tools during the pre-presentation social hour, might not work for other groups. Some organizers feel that there probably are not enough projects going on in their area to have demo tables. This is why they do not mind having people talk about their tools in presentations.

A few groups have been allowing a different kind of toolmaker talk where people present on their works in progress. Again, organizers try to encourage presentations to be about how the tools arrived from their own personal experience, but the purpose of these talks is more to get feedback from the community. The tools in these presentations are in early of stages of development, so there is no worry that they will seem like product pitches. The toolmakers here are hoping to find ways to improve their tool. The organizers that are having these kinds of talks do not mind having the group help support the development of new tools, and would like to see toolmakers succeed in bringing new innovative self-tracking tools to market.

Social Hour

At the meetings, be social, and get people talking. Shake hands with people, show them that you are genuinely glad to have them come to the meeting.

Once meetings reach a certain size, having a social hour either before or after the presentations becomes a good idea. The open time to meet new people and have discussions greatly helps the community feeling of a meeting. Having the social before the presentations has an added benefit, by making a flexible time frame for people to arrive. Smaller groups may even delay the start of the presentations if some good discussion develops in its own, or if not many people have showed up yet for the meeting.

Some organizers have a social hour at the venue after the presentations. After the presentations, all attendees have some common ground to connect on, simply by having the shared experience of being at the meeting together. Organizers that have tried incorporating a social hour both

before and after the presentations at different meetings, said they notice conversations are more interesting when they have the social hour after the meetings. The best format seems to be when meetings have a little bit of both; 30 minutes to one hour before the presentations, and an hour of time open at the venue for people to stay and socialize.

Facilitation and Q & A

To some extent, all organizers help facilitate the meetings and Q &A sessions that follow presentations. Several organizers said they have tried being more and less active in moderating at different meetings, and felt there were occasions when they should have stepped in and changed the direction or stopped a discussion or presentation, but did not. One situation organizers mentioned where they intervene is when discussions get too technical, to where it may exclude a good portion of the group. Organizers will step in and suggest that the discussion would be better reserved until the end of the meeting, when the interested parties can talk about the finer details among themselves.

For smaller groups especially, Q & A sessions naturally develop into discussions, and sometimes these discussions can expand into a wider range of topics. Because of the smaller size, these groups have more freedom to explore different topics. Inspired by these discussions, some organizers mentioned that they might experiment with brainstorming sessions along these lines, as a productive use of the group.

If you know you are not the kind of person that can make things up on the spot and throw ideas out on your feet, preparation is key

Section 6: SUPPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS

For the most part, meetup organizers really enjoy taking on the leadership role, and feel that QS Labs has been extremely supportive in helping them start their local self-tracking community.

This section explores…

- Some of the ways organizers already feel supported by QS Labs
- Some recommendations for further support and ideas for meetups

Support

Everyone feels that QS Labs has been as supportive as possible and most organizers could not think of any other form of support QS Labs could offer.

Among the things organizers mentioned regarding support…

- How friendly everyone is, and the genuine feeling that QS Labs wants to provide support to new groups.
- That borrowing and sharing content for the group pages on Meetup.com was helpful.
- Being offered time to talk on the phone with leadership at QS Labs meant a lot for one organizer.
- QS Labs providing contacts in their city early on was extremely helpful for some organizers.
- The FAQ for starting a QS Meetup was very helpful for some organizers.
- Having group meetings announced on the QS blog and Facebook page is a great support.

Several organizers mentioned that QS Labs offers to pay for a videographer for groups that want to record their meetings. Some groups that have not yet used this offer mentioned that they would like to in the future. The groups that are using the videographer said that the best part is seeing the videos up on the blog. They mentioned that the presentations have been well received, and the positive feedback on the videos is very encouraging.

One organizer mentioned the best support he received was not direct support, but just the spirit of non-ownership which QS Labs promotes, that individual organizers are not restricted to run their meetup a certain way. In this comment, the organizer referred to the meetup group Habit Design, which has much more restricted guidelines for anyone that wants to start a Habit Design meetup. This organizer really appreciates the open feeling, that he cannot “mess up” what he does with his QS Meetup; it really takes some of the pressure off organizing.

Recommendations

The goal of this report was to show the range and complexity of the situations of different meetup groups. While there are some common hurdles, overall there are not always common solutions. Based on organizer feedback, it is clear that QS Labs is already doing a good job at providing support, and with this report as a roadmap for some the terrain of the meetups, hopefully QS Labs will be able to identify new ways in which they can assist meetup groups.

In addition to continuing the support efforts that QS Labs is already doing, there are some recommendations and ideas for groups coming from organizer feedback.

Create open channels for communication and feedback

As far as leadership goes, organizers mentioned that they would like to have ways to communicate ideas across the organization. As the group of organizers grow worldwide, this will potentially become great creative source for ideas, but only if there are ways to channel that feedback.

As far as individual groups go, we do not need to assume that organizers are the only ones with good ideas. As the global QS community grows, this pool of members will become a great creative resource. Again, creating channels of communication is necessary in order to crowd source ideas. On one level, this could be done within groups, by simply having a comment and suggestion box at meetings where any attendee can offer ideas. Globally it may take some more planning to figure out the best way to have open channels for feedback.

Create stronger connections across leadership

No matter how big their group is, or what city they are in, organizers feel that they have something in common and would like to connect with each other on that level. Organizers would like to interact with other organizers, either virtually or in person. A simple way to assist organizers that want to take the initiative to connect with other organizers is to compile a list of contact information that organizers are willing to share with each other. If organizers create connections across groups and provide support for one another, it may lessen the load of support QS Labs has to provide.

Encourage groups to have several co-organizers

The organizers that have several co-organizers for their group seem to enjoy their leadership role the most, while organizing is often more stressful for organizers that do not have co-organizers. Having a team of several co-organizers reduces the load on any particular person. The rapid growth of QS shows that interest in self-tracking will likely not fade out anytime soon. Having a leadership team, will help ensure that groups will endure, as over time some organizers may eventually want to step out of their leadership position.

Encourage organizers to make planning more open

In addition to having a team of co-organizers, the event planning process should be open such that anyone from the community can offer an idea or help plan a meeting or other event. Some members may not be able to commit to becoming a co-organizer, but have a great idea for a onetime event or some other activity.

Find ways to supplement for presentations

Some organizers feel substantial pressure to make sure that there are enough presentations to make organizing a meeting feel worth the effort. It may help some organizers to find ways they can compensate if they want to meet more frequently but do not have enough people to provide presentation content. One idea is that groups could try having a meeting where they watch some video presentations on the QS website as a group and discuss them, or have people do distance presentations over Skype.