

Group Leadership at Events

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The **Early Bird Special**, **Awake to the End** and **Hidden Timepiece** patterns deal with several aspects of preparation for and running a short-time activities that involve several participants, from the point of view of the leader of the activity. The **Bridge** pattern deals with an important aspect of communication across different cultures.

The target audience of these patterns are group leaders such as managers, organizers, teachers, directors, guides, moderators, presenters etc.

A crucial part of leading a group of people towards achieving a goal is the attention given to planning for the settings in which these people will interact. It has been noted [1] that the settings in which an activity will take place transmit certain assumptions and intentions that have impact upon the behavior people will tend to adopt and display in response.

The **Early Bird Special** pattern suggests a way to reward early arrivals to an event (such as a meeting, a discussion group, a conference,) while keeping a discussion from starting prematurely between those already present.

The **Awake to the End** pattern suggests a way help preserve attendance through or to the later stages of an event (such as a meeting, a discussion group, a conference,)

The **Hidden Timepiece** pattern suggests a way for a leader of a group activity to keep track of time without distracting the participants from the activity while allowing the participants to concentrate their attention on the activity

An important aspect of working with people, is that one needs to take into account the different perspectives that each person uses when communicating across platforms, cultures or domains.

The **Bridge** pattern suggests a way to facilitate better communication and understanding between two environments or cultures.

Appreciation:

I thank my shepherd Linda Rising for her invaluable questions, insights and guiding. Working together was enriching as much as it was fun.

Early Bird Special

When preparing an event (lecture, business meeting, conference, the Oscars) to which several participants will be invited.

You expect that some of the participants may arrive earlier than the appointed time, some may arrive just on time and there will be some who will even be a bit late; and you feel it will benefit your plans to have everyone start working together on something.

You want an event to follow a specific agenda, or you wish to go over all the planned items, for which the arrival of all attendees is necessary.

It may be the case that you want the input and interaction of all attendees or you wish to prevent a spontaneous discussion from starting between the attendees before the arrival of all participants or prior to a presentation of some facts or evidence; yet you are aware of people's tendency to interact as soon as they have any partner.

You also want to take in, reward, those arriving ahead of schedule or on time, and definitely not let them feel penalized for being there on time. You don't want to create the feeling of stalling while waiting for all invitees to arrive.

Of course, there are people who naturally tend to arrive early to scheduled events, and there are people who tend to arrive late. Those arriving early want to make the best of the time, and you wish to balance these two groups, so you can run your program as planned. And you may wish to compensate the early or punctual arrivals.

Therefore:

Plan for and prepare in advance a rewarding, interesting, special or intriguing activity for the very beginning of the schedule; or make plans for a pre-meeting activity that will be appealing to the attendees already present, or at least keep people reasonably busy with a meaningful task. These activities or tasks should not be part of the main purpose of the event. Try to make it something people cannot give up easily so it doesn't become redundant or superfluous

Even with all good intentions and all measures taken, there will always be people late for activities. It is best to plan for this, instead of having your schedule muddled up.

A punctual start of activity helps assure meeting all the goals set for it and better use of the time allotted for it.

If this is a repeating event, you may wish to create an incentive for people not to be late in the future.

Either engage the early arrivals in a discussion of a topic outside the realm of the scheduled meeting, or prepare an extra-curriculum activity that will not be repeated during the planned schedule.

Make sure to plan ahead for this, and know how much time you allot this stage, before you turn to the main activity, the purpose of the meeting even if not all invitees have arrived.

Give the present attendees something pleasant to do, while using **Hidden Timepiece** pattern to monitor your plans so you can keep your schedule without making the attendees annoyed because of the passage of time.

Examples:

1. At each monthly meeting of one group that created computer games, the manager made sure to always show a sneak preview of a cool product under development. It would be first on the agenda to ensure the timely arrival of attendees. [2]
2. The coffee & cake often offered to participants of a big conference or a small meeting, alongside the registration process is such an activity. Both are rewarding (though on different levels) and provide the feeling of a valuable use of time, “conceal” the stalling and make sure the discussions and other activities will start according to the plans of the organizers.
3. Asking early arrivals to fill in a survey of their opinions, late arrivals will either not be given this chance or will have to actively look for a way to participate at the expense of their free time.
4. Discussing of the agenda of a conference call while awaiting all parties to connect. The reward to the prompt participants is the ability to influence that agenda whereas the late arrivals will have to follow the decided agenda (well, most times).
5. A Consumer Division manager celebrated any birthdays or special events at the start of the meeting, so people felt it would be rude to the honoree to come in late, and didn't. [2]

By providing attendees with a rewarding activity, you both reward them and keep them from feeling slighted by the inevitable wait for the late arrivals.

You also give yourself the ability to control to some extent the beginning of the main activity for which all were convened. Having set the stage, you may start off and lead the activity along pre-planned lines. Which of course doesn't guarantee a success to your plans, but does give them a better start-off, and supports your wish to Set the Pegs [3] for your event or activities.

If this is a recurring activity, this pattern may help you create an incentive for other attendees to be punctual for future activities.

This doesn't solve all the problems of balancing the beginning stage of your event; and it may happen that you misjudge the effectiveness of your Early Bird Special.

In any case, you should be ready to start off even if not all required attendees have arrived rather than offend those present and throwing the schedule completely out of order; And be ready to avert a discussion (not to say an argument) if it had started before the important facts or views were presented according to your plan.

Depending on circumstances, or if this pattern fails to create the desired effect (that of getting participants to arrive early or on time in the case of a recurring event), consider using the complimentary pattern: **Swiss Train** (see thumbnail on the last page).

Awake to the End

You are in the planning stages of your activity or event. You may have used some of the suggestions from Early Bird's Special in planning how you start, but you're not home free yet. You have a long schedule planned and you wish to keep them for the duration.

The success of your plan depends on the participation of all those invited.

Though you have a lengthy activity planned, you want to keep your participants from leaving too early. Since you certainly don't want to be left at the end with only a small part of the participants.

You invited the people because you felt they can contribute to your activity – discussion, a venture, a brainstorm, a workgroup, or a conference.

Even when the topic is interesting, energies tend to flag when the program is long, and people's patience is limited if not presented with a challenge or incentive. People also have busy schedules requiring their presence or attention elsewhere.

You feel there is value in all that the schedule presents, or it is important to you for other reasons that participants remain present in your program for as long as possible.

Therefore:

Save the best for last - Put on the end of the schedule, known in advance to the participants, an incentive for the participants to stay: schedule a well known speaker that will attract attention or curiosity, or a rewarding activity such as prize drawing.

The idea is to give participants an incentive to stay alert throughout the activities. By creating more points for attention, and to remain present for the duration by offering them some reward at the later stages of the event.

Examples:

1. At each monthly meeting of one group that created computer games Bill Gates was saved for the end of the hours-long company meeting to entice people to stay.[2]
2. At the Jewish 'Seder' (the Passover meal) there are many activities designed to keep the interest of the young children so they will stay awake and hear the story of the Holiday. One of these is the tradition of the 'Afikoman' – a half of a Matzos hidden away, which the children search for and without which the Seder cannot continue beyond a certain point.
3. In many computer conferences a drawing of a cool gadget or coveted appliance is announced to be held at the end of the conference, to entice participants to stay at the conference to the end and not leave early.
4. Some movies have added a "surprise" addition to the movie at the end of the long credits scroll, to entice the audience to remain and not leave immediately when the credit list started rolling. – either an epilog,

bloopers, or funny ‘cuttings’ as in the movies “Bug Life”, [4] “Lethal Weapon 3” [5] and Space Jam [6]

People will make arrangements in advance, or change their plans during the event itself, in order to be able to be present for the ‘celebrity’ talk or participate in a drawing or watch the extra parts.

You earn a better attendance and participation of more people at the later stages of the activity for which you invited them.

Note that this pattern is not seeking ways to prolong an activity, but tries to handle activities that cannot be shorter. If you feel your planned activity is too long, first try to cut it as much as you can without damaging the contents, once you decide your activity has to be long, consider using this pattern.

Naturally, these measures will not guarantee the continuous attendance or attention of your participants, and they cannot replace valuable, meaningful contents at your event. No one will stay just for the ‘gimmicks’ if there isn’t real substance to interest them.

Another consideration in case you choose to use a draw of a prize, is that the prize should not be too expensive or it will underscore the feeling participants stay around only for the chance to win it.

Also, be aware that there will always be a tendency of diminishing numbers of participants towards the end of an activity, especially a long one. So you should still plan to cover the most important issues before long. (but not too early, as you learned from the previous pattern **Early Bird’s Special**).

Depending on circumstances, or if you feel this pattern will not create the desired effect (that of getting participants to stay for the entire event), consider using its complimentary pattern: **Most Important First** (see thumbnail on the last page).

Hidden Timepiece

While moderating an activity with other of people (one or more), you need to keep track of time for the current activity.

At times, when leading a program, you find that while you need to keep track of time or pace the activities, you don't want the time keeping to disturb or distract the attention or concentration of the other participants or constrain their activity or participation.

The leader of the activity, or the presenter, wants to create a feeling of wholeness of experience that would be detached from “worldly” considerations. The presenter wants participants’ full attention on the activity at hand, without outside considerations disturbing it. At the same time it is very important to the presenter to control the use of the time.

In the western world’s culture there are limits of time allotted for each activity, but there are times it may not be socially acceptable to check your wristwatch, as it may imply you are distracted, bored, or have “better things to do with you time” than attend the present activity. You may not want to put the team under pressure but you do need to monitor time, and/or pace the activity.

Social conventions perceive checking the time a few times may indicate time stress and may imply of other obligations, boredom, or distraction. And a person checking the time makes the other people present also aware of the time passage.

Therefore:

Keep a timepiece hidden from sight, so that it is visible to you but not to the other participants. This way you can keep track of time surreptitiously, without alerting the participants to the passage of time or to your interest in it.

The idea is not to completely block the possibility of participants tracking time (that would be over doing it) but to reduce the visibility of the timepiece in order to give the participants an environment that will encourage their participation in the activity.

Examples:

1. Psychologists need to keep a meeting with a patient to its 50 or 45 minutes schedule, but should not distract the attention of the patient or make their patient feel rushed nor let it be interpreted as criticism or boredom.
2. The introduction session of EuroPLoP is severely limited in time (like all other activities at PLoP conferences). The leader of the activity, George Platts needs to pace the activities and not exceed the limits of time while creating the feeling of an activity set apart and without making the group members constrain their participation.
3. On some versions of MS Power Point there is a small clock in the corner that's visible to the presenter. Linda Rising recalls: “I used someone's laptop once and it helped enormously. Each time I looked at the next slide, I could see the time”.

4. The waiters in a crowded restaurant we visited in New Orleans had a clock attached to the clipboard used to log seating reservations. This clipboard was kept on a stand, out of direct line of sight of the customers, and allowed them to clock who has been waiting and for how long, while customers had no clocks in sight at the waiting area.
5. Linda Rising recalls: "I've also been presenting in rooms where a very large clock was exactly on the wall at the back of the room where I could see it when I looked up -- but was not visible to the audience. It kept me on track!"

By keeping a hidden timepiece at your line of sight but out of easy sight by the participants in the activity you guide, you are able to moderate your activities, keep track of the passage of time while not making the participants too aware of the time flow. Thus you allow them to put their full attention to the immediate task.

Of course this is not a fail-safe method, as the timepiece itself may be accessible to the participants since they share the same space as the activity leader and be moving around;

Participants are also anyway aware of time, and of course since they are sensitive to the presenter they can become aware of her/him tracking the time.

On the other hand, there are times you do need or want participants to take part in the responsibility for keeping time. In such cases consider using the complimentary pattern: **Obvious Timepiece** (see thumbnail on the last page).

Bridge

You are dealing with two very different environments or cultures that have difficulty communicating directly with each other.

When communicating a need across platforms or cultures, there may be many misunderstandings and difficulties. Some of the assumptions of one realm may not be valid in the other realm. The way one world is built leads to solutions that are not logical in the other world. Because of these differences, the two environments, or cultures, cannot communicate effectively.

People may not be aware of constraints, limitations, taboos and customs that prevent or make it impossible to perform the action they require in the other realm.

Often, people feel the person presenting a request, a new idea, or suggesting a change, may be blind to their constraints, concerns and interests, or may not have fully understood their own needs and worries; and so instead of discussing the suggestions before them, they are busy arguing their point, trying to convey their interests.

People often mistake differences of communication style for disagreement or even criticism.

Therefore:

Put a person who thoroughly knows both cultures, is profoundly familiar with the protocols of both worlds, is speaking or programming fluently in both languages, or platforms, as your chief intermediary that will act as a bridge between the two worlds.

The bridge can explain back some of the issues, warn of misunderstandings, know how to create a mapping between the two world models. And because bridge allows the other people to let go of defending their point of view and open a chance to consider changes, they can compromise on some requirements, or more easily accept differences from their expectations.

By acting from and on their cultural terms, by using their correct terminology, such a person can convince the people of a profound understanding of their needs and interests. Such person can explain back the reasoning, the requirements in term you can also work with.

For example, people speaking more than one language are familiar with this problem: one cannot directly translate an idiom from one language to another. The cultural connotations linked with some or all of the words may differ; the whole meaning of the idiom may differ. They may know of an idiom that relate the same spirit, but may have different nuances or not have the full nuances of the idiom in the other language.

In computer realm terms, one cannot perform the same allocation of permissions or other needs in Windows platform as in UNIX platform. Some compromise has to be made. Having a System Administrator well versed in both UNIX and Windows helps find the parallel commands (cls vs. clear

screen) and more easily convince that she understood the need but it really cannot be done that way on the other platform. The expertise of the System Administrator in the platform the customer is familiar with, can allow the customer to really believe it is not because of misunderstanding that his request cannot be met without adjustment(s).

Examples:

1. Computer companies that have projects involving more than one platform seek programmers who know very different domains and computing languages; or have worked extensively on different platforms. This is to facilitate bridging differences or be able to translate requirements into possible actions that will produce the required results.
2. The metaphor of the astronomer episode in the story “The Little Prince” is evocative of this pattern: Presenting his discovery wearing the ethnic clothing his discovery was ignored, next year, because a law was passed forcing him to dress conventionally he received the attention and respect of his colleagues. [7]
3. Diplomats visiting new cultures employ a translator, and knowing that language is only part of creating understanding communication they prefer someone who has spent a significant amount of time in both cultures, and will know and understand the customs and values of both cultures. Such person will be able to explain meanings, warn of misunderstandings of perceptions as well as in language.
4. A friendly warning I saw Jim Coplien and Neil Harrison give Eugene Eric Kim (all three of them Americans discussing ChiliPLoP hot-topic) of choosing a different term than “patterns of collaboration” so as not to alienate the Dutch, the French, and the Belgians as the word has quite negative connotations.

Using a **Bridge** may help you avoid many obstacles; or clear up misunderstandings that may arise, avoid distrust, or correctly apply requirements on different platform.

Of course, using a Bridge doesn't magically solve all problems, not everything in one realm has a parallel or a replacement in the other realm.

Also remember that a bridge is human, and has limitations, point of view or opinions. And that there is a danger of choosing the wrong bridge.

Using the help of a Bridge doesn't absolve you from the responsibility of evaluating the situation and needs constantly. and using a Bridge doesn't replace the need for diplomacy, good judgment and tact.

Pattern Thumbnails:

Swiss Train Pattern thumbnail:

Start your activity on time, even if some of the participants have not arrived yet. This way you keep the schedule and help ensure all that was planned will happen, and hopefully, over time your participants will learn to be exact.

Most Important First Pattern thumbnail:

Plan your schedule to handle the most important issues at the earlier (though not first on the schedule, in case some participants will be late) this way if some of the participants leave early, they still contribute to the more critical issues. Over time people learn they need to be on time if they wish to take part of the major decisions.

Obvious Timepiece Pattern thumbnail:

Keep a timepiece available and visible to all participants. This way there is no dispute as to when activities start or end, and the participants share the responsibility for keeping the time.

References:

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- 1 Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In, R. Fisher, W. Ury, B. Patton, (1992)
 - 2 All I Really Need to Know in Business I Learned at Microsoft, Julie Bick, Simon & Schuster, (1997)
 - 3 More Patterns for Group Leadership, Ofra Homsky, Proceedings of EuroPLoP2003
 - 4 A Bug's Life, Disney/Pixar Studios (1998)
 - 5 Lethal Weapon 3, Warner Studios (1992)
 - 6 Space Jam, Warner Studios (1996)
 - 7 The Little Prince, Antoine de Saint-Exup'ry (1943)