

## More Patterns for Group Leadership

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Group Leadership patterns focus on the unique role the leader of a group has in steering her/his group through successes and hardships. They emphasize the place of the leader in affecting the behavior of the group, focusing on the function a leader should take to help the group to better manage some of the changes that come from within the group itself, created by the social interaction among group members.

We all accept for granted the alchemy that creates a group out of a collection of individuals. A group, being comprised of individual people, takes on an additional identity, a collective identity – that of the group: a software team, a task force, a tour group, a class.

There are many factors that influence the general mood in the group – external factors and internal factors, some of them are unexpected but some can be predicted and prepared for.

The target users of these patterns are group leaders: teachers, guides, managers, instructors, and coaches. The patterns assume that a person acting as a group leader also has a certain level of professionalism including people skills, group dynamics and theories, motivation and coaching. Leaders are the ones who have an overview of the group: its assignments, tasks, abilities, composition, performance and goals. Consequently, the group leaders can influence, facilitate and streamline the group conduct and disposition.

Group Leadership patterns should combine with other patterns and pattern languages referring to group work, in the sense that together with the preparations of and for the program, group leaders should bring into consideration these “mood change” factors and integrate these suggested patterns into their program.

These patterns join those I presented in last year’s EuroPLoP and are part of what I hope to build into a full Pattern Language.

In the initial phases of the teams work together the main issues are setting what is to be achieved and how it is to be achieved [1].

The ‘**Unity of Purpose**’ pattern [2] helps team members create a shared vision of **what** is expected of their team.

People also want to find out **how** these goals are to be achieved, which norms and behaviors are expected of them.

There are two levels that define these - one is the stated level, facilitated by ‘**set the pegs**’ pattern. Depending on the team and leadership styles, either setting or arriving at an agreement of how it should be done in the early stages the team works together.

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But stating and declaring is not enough, which is why it is important to get to the level of doing. How you as a leader behave is setting an example for the team members.

Throughout the entire life cycle of the team, there are times when events do not occur as planned. The team's progress towards achieving its goals is stuttering or halted. The obstacles seem impassable. Team moral turns low.

The problem might be a bug that halts down everyone, disrupting work and making everyone work hard at isolating it. It might be a field day where the team was to cook out together, and someone forgot to bring the salt and pepper or drinks...

Once the source of the problem is found, it is very human for the team to focus the anger and aggravation on a person who is associated with the problem or delay.

While this behavior is very human, it also acts against the continued cohesion of the group – in some cases, the mistakes made might be made by anyone, at anytime. People learn how making mistakes is handled, and may adopt defensive behaviors (such as the military and bureaucratic CYA – Cover Your Ass) that are counter-productive to achieving the team goals. This is where the **Compass** and **Scapegoat** patterns come in handy. Shifting the focus from blaming to preventing, curing rather than symptomatic treatment.

There are times that group members will not express themselves as openly as described in **Compass** or **Scapegoat**. Not all people express disagreement or difference of opinions with the leader, the group behavior or members conduct, and it is important to manage these feelings. The group leader has to **Keep an ear to the Ground** in order to notice corridor gatherings, body language that reflects disagreement or avoidance. All these can give a sensitive and experienced leader clues that there are issues that are bothering group members but are not dealt with.

Some of the pressures or considerations that occupy group members' attention arrive from outside of the group. **Field Day** pattern offers ways to compensate and reduce pressures pressing from outside considerations group members deal with.

And the last pattern, **Grand Finale**, relates to the end of the group work. People need to pay special attention to an end of a period in their life, and in a group they need ways to handle the end of the group, the project they gave time and effort to.

## Set the Pegs

### Context

Your group is new, only starting its work together. You wish it to adopt certain guiding principles, norms and character that will guide all actions throughout the program.

Alternatively, the group is embarking on a new type of activity, faces its first conflict or absorbs new team members. This new activity requires the group to reorganize or reorient itself. This might be the starting of a testing phase following the coding phase, reorganizing for field trial of a product, or an interest group that ran for election in the student union, won, and now needs to reorient itself towards performing tasks and services for the entire student body.

The typical atmosphere in such beginnings is a mixture of goodwill, hopes, aspirations and ritual sniffing [1]. Most team members expect the team leader [3] to provide structure, make expectations clear, orient the team towards the goals and the means to accomplish them, defuse doubt, help in forming sub-teams, facilitate getting acquainted even for the introverts in the team and help in establishing the team's contract.

### Problem

During your first encounters with the group you are aware that what you do at beginning tends to have effect for a long time.

Team members are looking for clues into what are the norms the group is to follow.

Presenting the team members with a book of rules, procedures and regulations usually has little to no effect in most organizations, even in autocratic or military style cultures.

Yet, you wish to set basic values and the framework that will guide the group's conduct, and help new team members find out in an orderly way what are the expected norms of behavior and performance.

### Forces

- ~ Group spirit and values influences its conduct and performance.
- ~ People tend to assimilate into a new framework and assume its rules and conduct.
- ~ Group leaders and members tend to assume the desirable atmosphere will create on its own.
- ~ Group leader needs to show the way and means to achieve a harmonious social relationship.
- ~ It can be unpleasant to present rules and restrictions at the time everyone is getting to know each other and try to present their most acceptable sides.
- ~ Though unpleasant to set rules and easier to let things flow, group leader needs to lead the shaping of the group and project.
- ~ Ethic rules and team goals will provide reference for decisions and reorientation in times of doubt and under pressure.
- ~ Lacking rules and norms, people will tend to fight or flight, according to their individual behavior patterns when disoriented.
- ~ Individual character and personal cultural background may be in conflict with the presented leadership style and expected norms.

## **Solution**

Use the agreeable spirit of a beginning to set the pegs for your group conduct and values. What you do at beginning tends to have effect for a long time. Against the surrounding euphoria of a new start, at the beginning of your group's life the group expects the leader to shape the culture and ethos for the group to work with throughout its existence. Use all first time events to present the expected norms of behavior. Personal example is a very strong motivator. Remember the reverse: things that aren't done or aren't set now stand fewer chances for defining later – team members will form norms on their own, and changing those norms later will require a lot more energy and cause a lot more aggravation. Present minimal rules that will support this vision and be strict about them - at this stage people won't grudge and you the strictness and you can instill the preferred behavior and culture that will prevail into the group life.

## **Precautions**

You will still need to perform maintenance and re-evaluation of the norms throughout the group life. Plan in advance so that the rules you establish align with the ultimate goal and the character of your program. Do not set a rule you will not be able to support, maintain and enforce. Beware of overdoing – do not attempt to set a huge set of requirements, regulations and norms in a single opening session.

## **Known Uses**

- \* A tip I was taught in one guiding course: If you want your group to keep to the schedule, be very strict about time on the first day of the program. Start all and every activity set in the itinerary on the dot. If you allow time spill on the first day - your group will always be late for the duration of the program. This advice proved itself throughout my guiding years and any group I witnessed time and again.
- \* In most teams, people learn the decision making process on the first time a decision is made. The style used for resolving conflicting opinions has significant impact on how people will voice their opinions or avoid from voicing them.
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## Compass

### Context

Compass and scapegoat talk about conflict management.

The leader is the one charged with the responsibility of keeping the group focused. At times, group members may get lost in the details and the everyday problems or get sidetracked by event(s). The leader by having the wider view is able to see the full picture instead of the details and has the responsibility to re-focus the group.

**Compass** concentrates on the responsibility of the leader and the need for the leader to be the sentinel always checking if events disrupt group work and countering such deviations to restore the Unity of Purpose (PLoPD2).

### Problem

At different points along the program group members may drop into quarrels, despair, problems or difficulties. The group allows impact of event(s) to divert it from course.

### Forces

- ~ The leader is also affected by events.
- ~ It is difficult to predict when or what will prompt.
- ~ It is tiring to be constantly on the look out
- ~ Group leader may also get swept with routine and daily problems.
- ~ Hardships tend to make people short tempered.
- ~ People tend to look for a reason, or someone to blame for what bothers them.
- ~ Group behavior can escalate sporadic anger into aggressive behavior towards one person.
- ~ The leader's people skills, perceptiveness and experience affect detection of the problem.

### Solution

Watch out for a drop into unproductive quarrels, a drop into a circle of despair, desolation and justifications. Literally step in and tell the group to stop, describe the ineffectiveness of their actions. Refocus the group members on immediate tasks and activities to improve or correct the problem. Remind them of the character of the group as you were building it.

### Precautions

Be aware that at any time the group can let even a single event plunge it into this vicious circle.

### Known Uses

\* Joseph Bergin tells he was group leader at the end of a successful program taking young people on sailing boat as a program for self-image promotion. It was the last day of the sail, and the guy in charge of navigating missed the entrance to the harbor and we all had to work hard, tired as we were, to get back and into docking. The group members were upset with that on-duty person and the situation very quickly deteriorated to black mood threatening to obscure all the achievements of the program”

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## **Resulting context**

By reasserting the goals, the working definitions and the group character group leader helps strengthen group member's resolve and directs their separate efforts towards the collective goals.

It also enhances the group cohesion.

## (Not the) Scapegoat TBD

### Context

In a group there's assignment division. A failure of one member for any reason may delay, disrupt or disorder the whole group's progress. The group tends to blame the individual.

### Problem

One of the group members made a mistake that has influence on the entire project. The other group members get upset at the individual.

### Forces

- ~ Useless energies wasted instead of harnessing toward finding solution.
- ~ Lower group and individual moral causes lower productivity and lower ability
- ~ Anyone may make a mistake, but making one should not deteriorate team spirit.
- ~ Aggressive group reaction to mistakes may cause timid members not to take risks thus might miss on good ideas in the future
- ~ Blaming may allow discharging of responsibility to other aspects of the work that still needs to be done.

### Solution

Intervene when you notice the group attacking a person(s). Make the problem into a group project to solve.

Set the group to work on solving the problem together instead of offending each other, maybe have a meeting focusing on finding a solution as a group to the problem, making sure to avoid accusations and other wasteful

Estimate the need to also remind all group members of context, goals, encourage energy and finally redirect them towards finding a solution with the group helping in.

### Precautions

It is advisable to also allow venting of frustration – as described in the pattern **Safety Valves**.

### Known Uses

- \* In Joseph Bergin's example the whole group was needed to help correct the error and get the ship back and into the harbor.
- \* Once a bug is discovered in a new product, the project manager will set a group of programmers to try to locate the error and a group of programmers to find a solution. A smart project manager will also keep the group from troubling the one who made the error turning this into a learning experience and channeling the energies toward solving the problem.

### Resulting context

Be refocusing the group on solving the problem instead of blaming and arguing you utilize their abilities and energies better, you prevent damage to the social cohesion

Mobilizing everyone in the group into solving a glitch will involve all of them in the achievement.

It may be wise to set time for checking the incident itself in order to avoid similar mistakes in the future and to allow clearing of bad feelings between group members. You may consider using Safety Valves pattern for this purpose.

## Keep an Ear to the Ground

### Context

Some of the messages people give are not said in plain words. For a group leader, non-verbal messages or information can give critical indication of what goes on in the group.

Harvesting this information and addressing issues may help either by eliminating obstacles, correcting program mistakes, attending to needs

This pattern is relevant at all stages of the program and at every activity of the group.

### Problem

Group members may have needs that should be met, or have important information that the group leader should be aware of. However, group members may be reluctant to openly express problems, present issues or preferences that bother them.

### Forces

~ Group member's shyness may prevent them from bringing up problems such as not understanding and issue, disagreement with the speaker or simply tiredness.

~ There are times that groups or group members are reluctant to express concerns, conflicts or problems for various reasons (not to insult, not to appear to criticize, not to become target) but these may contain very important information, either indication to group dynamics, program problems, and practical issues.

~ People may think criticism is disrespectful, or show lack of manners.

~ The leader's people skills, perceptiveness and experience affect detection of the problem and reaction to it.

### Solution

**Pay attention to group members' behavior:** Do they turn away while you speak? Are they sinking in their seats as the lesson progresses? Are there conversations going when a task or idea being presented? Do group members avoid eye contact? **Respond accordingly:** change activity, make a break even if it is not scheduled yet, stop whatever it is you're doing and inquire of the group as to what may be disturbing them.

### Precautions

Circumstances have strong influence on both behavior and interpretation of body language. Do not get too sensitive and intimidated by your group's responses.

### Known Uses

\* When presenting an idea or procedure, many group leaders can gauge the level of enthusiasm of their group members by the sound level and facial expressions.

\* Amir Raveh says when he teaches he takes a visual evaluation of "people heads height" at the beginning of class. Then when he sees this average dropping, (meaning, people sag in their places) he makes a break even if one is not scheduled just yet. The time wasted is compensated with better attention when program continues.

\* A guide in a museum will notice the group members moving towards displays other than the one being discussed or generally drifting away from the group or small conversations going inside the group, all those will hint the guide to cut the present explanation short and either move on to the next exhibit or find out from the group where their interests are or what bothers them.

## **Resulting context**

Having attended to non-verbal messages, you may have learned of problems you were not aware of, and you can apply your mind to solving them or involve the group in finding a solution.

Also you gain better attention and cooperation from group members. Hopefully, this will also enhance their willingness to share their needs and problems more easily.

## Field Day

### Context

Group members are people who have many dimensions. While in the context of your group they are committed to the group and its goals, they also have other commitments outside of the group. In a group working closely together, group members sometimes fall into conflict of interests between their commitment to the group and other personal obligations whether other groups of interest they are members of or towards family or friends.

### Problem

Conflict of interests between commitments to the group and its goals to other, outside obligations affect group members up to damaging performance and achievements. This conflict can create powerful cognitive dissonance with the group members that their contribution to the group can be affected.

### Forces

- ~ Work can take personal toll.
- ~ Commitment to the group and its goals can sometimes conflict with other commitments of avocations.
- ~ A person has several personae each fitting a different role in life.
- ~ Acknowledging damage is partial compensation.
- ~ People may worry about exposure of their personal lives
- ~ pressures from outside affiliations can influence persona moral and even performance.
- ~ Acquaintance with the group, its goals and members helps rallying the family members to the "cause".

### Solution

From time to time create opportunities to involve, reward or meet the people surrounding the team members. Also, make sure during these occasions, or at summation opportunities and especially at project end to acknowledge the sacrifices, personal prices, and contributions of the families of the group members.

These events should be structured so as to ease the gap between the different personae of the group members to reduce embarrassment and enhance the affectivity of compensation.

### Precautions

### Known Uses

- \* Many companies reward their employees by inviting them and their partners to a social evening, or a formal dinner.
- \* Organizations carry out a 'fun day', where all group members have a day off, bringing their families in for collective fun activities.

### Resulting context

By acknowledging the contributions of the personal support network of each group member to the goal of the team and the price the pay some compensation is awarded the important people and the team members themselves.

## Grand Finale

### Context

Having put so much effort into creating and maintaining group cohesion it may be wise not to let it all disintegrate. Connections made during a project can be preserved and may be useful in the future. The end of a program has as much importance to the participants of the overall perception of success as the work to achieve the goals.

### Problem

After spending efforts to create a cohesive, successful group, when the project ends group members need a closure to the experience, and wish to preserve the good relations created, the memory of a good experience.

### Forces

- ~ A lot of work was put into the creation and maintenance of a well working, cohesive group.
- ~ An end of a good experience causes sadness and a sense of loss and people need a way to deal with these feelings.
- ~ People need closure to experiences they put effort into.
- ~ Severing the social connections is helped by ceremonies (in anthropology they would be called rites).

### Solution

Make a 'grand finale' to your program. Use the good feelings to give a "final good taste" at the closure of the experience. Help members preserve connections through a contact list perhaps, or declaring a way for contact in the future.

Give a final summation of the achievements of the group, maybe a vision connecting the past work to the future. Make sure there is room for thanks to all who contributed, acknowledgment of the individual and collective effort.

### Precautions

### Known Uses

\* Every Group celebrates the end of its mission in an official or unofficial manner. Either a party, or a series of occasions such as lectures, cocktails, luncheons and such alike that give the group members time to close this period in their life (closure). Both an official recognition of the efforts and

\* 'Failed Project Wake' [4] is a private instance of this pattern reminding group leaders that especially in failed or interrupted projects human nature still needs a closure to the experience into which the group members contributed time, labor, intellectual efforts. In unexpectedly severing of social structure and relations people are left grieving without closure.

\*In every group ending its time together on the final days group members exchange phone numbers, addresses and Emails, demonstrating the human need to preserve connections made.

### Resulting context

By recognizing people's need for closure, for celebrating the achievement at team and personal levels you are making it easier for the team members to better cope with the loss they encounter when the team ends its existence.

## Thanks

I want to thank Neil Harrison, my shepherd for his questions and guidance. I learned more then pattern writing.

## References:

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