Contrast within a Pattern: Capturing a Gap between Problematic and Good Consequences

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This paper explores the role of contrast in patterns, delineating between problematic and good states. Patterns, comprising a context, a problem, and a solution, encourage readers to envision both potential futures and their implications, motivating them to aim for a good state and avoid problematic ones. The contrast that provides this positive drive is essential for the pattern's effectiveness in changing readers' behaviors. After citing Christopher Alexander to underscore the importance of contrast, this paper demonstrates the concept of contrast and its application in creating a pattern language. It introduces three examples from a pattern language developed by the author, Takashi Iba, and his colleagues, highlighting contrasts such as 'closed' versus 'open', 'from a certain direction' versus 'from all directions', and 'separated' versus 'continued'.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pattern languages consist of patterns representing ways for good design or practices in a specific domain. The fundamental elements of a pattern description include the Context, Problem, and Solution. The patterns inspire readers to avoid problematic state and strive for good consequence by conducting the Solution of the pattern. This contrast, which delineates between problematic and good consequence, is crucial for the pattern's effectiveness in influencing readers' behaviors.

2. CONTRAST AS A PROPERTY TO ENHANCE LIFE

Alexander emphasizes the role of contrast in bringing vitality to objects in his book, *The Nature of Order*. Although his main focus is on spatial design, he illustrates that this property applies to all forms of design in both art and nature, as demonstrated by numerous examples in his book. In the chapter on the CONTRAST property, he states:

> "Another feature I have found repeatedly in works of art which have great life is a surprisingly intense CONTRAST --- far more contrast than one imagines would be helpful or even possible to sustain." (Alexander 2002, p.200)

> "And in order for the thing to be truly whole, the contrast has to be pronounced. Black-white and dark-light contrast are the most common kinds. Empty-full, solid-void, busy-silent, red-green, and blue-yellow are all possible forms of contrast, too. However, the most important contrasts do not merely show variety of form (high-low, soft-hard, rough-smooth, and so on) but represent true opposites, which essentially annihilate each other when they are superimposed. In some sense, it is the contrast ----- awareness of silence created by a hand-clap----- which is going on here. The difference between opposites gives birth to something. This is the origin of yin-yang, active-passive, light-dark." (Alexander 2002, p.200)

According to Alexander, contrast, not merely opposition, contributes to creating wholeness. He remarks:

"The contrast, instead of separating things, brings them together." (Alexander 2002, p.202)

In this sense, the contrast within a pattern is important as it imbues the pattern with a sense of living wholeness.

3. UTILIZING THE FEELING OF CONTRAST IN CRAFTING A PATTERN LANGUAGE

3.1 A Contrast Between Two States within a Pattern

A pattern in a pattern language typically includes two contrasting states: a problematic state and a good state resulting from a solution. The contrast between these states is the essence of the pattern. When reading the patterns, this contrast acts as a push from a problematic to a good state, more than a mere static comparison. It motivates readers to strive for a good consequence and avoid the problematic state, serving as an impetus for action.

In this way, contrast provides positive encouragement to affect changes in readers' behaviors. Contrast thus becomes a key motivator for readers, and without it, regardless of the solution's excellence and appeal, this push alone is insufficient. Therefore, it is crucial to embed and strongly convey a clear contrast when reading the patterns. To achieve this, we must have a thorough understanding and be conscious of the concept of contrast when creating pattern language.

3.2 Pattern Name, Pattern Illustration, and Solution are Influenced by the Contrast in the Pattern

While writing patterns or crafting pattern illustrations, we capture the essence of each pattern and infuses these feelings into the pattern's text and illustrations, based on the contrasts he perceives between its problematic and good states. By using simple words and illustrations to convey the contrasts he perceives, he effectively shares these insights with other members involved in crafting the pattern language.

However, it is crucial to note that it is the "feeling" of contrast that is important, and that the words and illustrations used are merely supplementary tools to visualize and share these feelings. Given the abstract nature of these feelings, words and diagrams are inevitably incomplete and cannot fully encapsulate the contrast's essence. Therefore, descriptions of contrast may vary, and there is no definitive or correct way to portray them.

Nevertheless, the manner in which contrast is conveyed through words or illustrations significantly impacts the creation of pattern languages. By doing so, pattern writers can share their perceived feelings with other team members, reducing the risk of misunderstandings or misinterpretations when collaboratively developing the pattern language.

As Iba (2021) suggests, when naming patterns, it is advantageous to select words that reflect the contrasting feelings within the pattern. A firm grasp of these contrasting feelings aids in clearly representing the good state in a pattern. Similarly, a sense of contrast can be good in crafting pattern illustrations and solution sentences, as it allows writers to incorporate nuances indicative of a good state, such as openness, simplicity, and freedom. This approach is also effective for problem sentences, enabling writers to include nuances like closedness, complexity, and restriction.

4. EXAMPLES OF CONTRAST IN A PATTERN

To demonstrate how contrast is perceived in patterns, we present three examples from *Words for a Dialogue* (Iba and Nagai 2018). The following subsections will first introduce each pattern's description, consisting of Context, Problem, Forces, Solution, Actions, and Consequences. This will be followed by a sketch illustrating the contrast as experienced by the author, Takashi Iba, during the development of the pattern language. Finally, the Pattern Name, Introduction, and Pattern Illustration, both influenced by the contrast, will be displayed.

4.1 First example of a pattern from *Words for a Dialogue*

4.1.1 *Pattern Description.* The description of the pattern, consisting of Context, Problem, Forces, Solution, Actions, and Consequences, is as follows:

You want to ask questions to hear the other person's story.

<p style="text-align:center">▼In this context</p>

If you ask closed questions where their response is limited to what you can think of, it will be difficult for them to express their true feelings. People use questions when trying to understand another person. However, if you ask questions that limit them to 'yes' or 'no' responses or ask questions that offer a limited choice from multiple answers, you can never expand the dialogue beyond your imagination. You should try to reach the raw thoughts and feelings that they have never released.

<p style="text-align:center">▼Therefore</p>

Ask open questions that make it easier for them to freely express themselves. When initiating a dialogue, you should begin with an open question such as 'How do you want us to spend this time?'. When they are talking about their experience, you should keep asking questions such as 'When did that happen?', 'What did you feel when that happened?' and 'What happened next?'. In this manner, they can maintain focus on their experience and deeply discuss it.

<p style="text-align:center">▼Consequently</p>

It becomes easier to deepen the understanding of their Experienced World by generating an environment where the person can speak freely and discuss things that they find important. This makes the other person feel that they can take initiative to deepen the dialogue by talking about what they want without being limited to what they are asked.

4.1.2 *The Contrast in the Pattern.* The contrast in this pattern can be described as 'closed' versus 'open', with a corresponding illustration depicted in Figure 1.
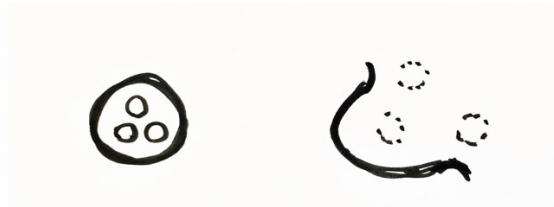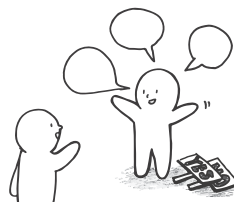

Fig. 1: Contrast in the Pattern: 'closed' versus 'open', with the Problematic aspect on the left and the Solution aspect on the right.

4.1.3 *Pattern Name, Introduction, and Pattern Illustration of the pattern.* The Pattern Name, Introduction, and Pattern Illustration of the pattern is as follows:

<h1 style="text-align:center">Open Question</h1>

<p style="text-align:center">Questions that open the other person's mind
and make them think.</p>

The pattern name '**Open Question**' was actually derived from the sensations associated with 'closed' versus 'open'.

4.2 Second example of a pattern from *Words for a Dialogue*

4.2.1 *Pattern Description.* The description of the pattern, consisting of Context, Problem, Forces, Solution, Actions, and Consequences, is as follows:

The dialogue has begun.

▼In this context

If only certain people are talking, other participants will lose their opportunity to speak and share their unique perspectives. The flow of a conversation is strongly influenced by what is said by those who frequently speak or have a strong position. In such a case, other people will lose their chance to speak and participants will be unable to hear everyone's opinions.

▼Therefore

Provide opportunities for participants who are not sharing to express their own thoughts. In the beginning of the dialogue, you should create an opportunity for all participants to share their thoughts and expectations. For example, you can ask questions such as 'Why did you decide to participate in this dialogue?' and 'What do you expect to take away from this dialogue today?'. If there are people who are not saying much, you should ask them questions and help them share. In the end, you should again ask everyone to share their thoughts on the dialogue.

▼Consequently

All participants will be able to express what they are thinking and feeling. By hearing everyone's voices, people who frequently speak will focus more on sharing a dialogue rather than focusing only on their own thoughts.

4.2.2 *The Contrast in the Pattern.* The contrast in this pattern is 'from a certain direction' versus 'from all directions', as illustrated in Figure 2. This is exemplified by arrows pointing in the same direction, in contrast to arrows facing inward, creating a focal point towards the center or each other.


Fig. 2: Contrast in the pattern: 'from a certain direction' versus 'from all directions', with the Problematic aspect on the left and the Solution aspect on the right.

4.2.3 *Pattern Name, Introduction, and Pattern Illustration of the pattern.* The Pattern Name, Introduction, and Pattern Illustration of the pattern is as follows:

Invitation for Utterance

Make it known that all voices are significant.
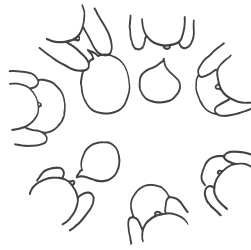
Based on the imagery evoked by this contrast, the pattern illustration depicts speech bubbles emerging from each member in the image. Given the previously established need for group discussion in the preceding pattern, one can also perceive a circular imagery with bubbles converging towards the center. Conversely, a one-way discussion represents the problematic state, where only some members participate in the conversation.

4.3   Third example of a pattern from *Words for a Dialogue*

4.3.1 *Pattern Description.*   The description of the pattern, consisting of Context, Problem, Forces, Solution, Actions, and Consequences, is as follows:

You have started a dialogue to dissolve the problem.

▼In this context

If you try to wrap things up within a certain period of time, participants will not be able to discuss the problem and thoroughly express their thoughts. Everyone has their own personal life and a limit to their concentration and energy; thus, it is difficult for all participants to gather for a long period of time. Understanding each other through a dialogue, however, takes time. Holding a continuing dialogue is one of the main points that makes Open Dialogue effective, so it is essential to have enough time to do so.

▼Therefore

Hold meetings frequently to continue the deepening dialogue. In the Open Dialogue therapy sessions held in Finland, each meeting is approximately 60 to 90 minutes long and is first held every day for 10 to 12 days consecutively. How often the dialogue sessions are held can be decided later. At the end of each meeting, participants should reflect on what was shared, decide when they will gather next and what they will discuss at that time.

▼Consequently

There will be enough time to dissolve the problem through a dialogue. Participants will be able to carefully listen to others because they know that the dialogue will continue. Through such a thorough dialogue, a 'Co-Created Understanding' that helps dissolve the problem will be established.

4.3.2 *The Contrast in the Pattern.*   The contrast in this pattern can be described as 'separated' versus 'continued', as illustrated in Figure 3.

Fig. 3: Contrast in the **Everyday Meetings** Pattern: 'separated' versus 'continued', with the Problematic aspect on the left and the Solution aspect on the right.

4.2.3 *Pattern Name, Introduction, and Pattern Illustration of the pattern.*   The Pattern Name, Introduction, and Pattern Illustration of the pattern is as follows:

Everyday Meetings

Continue the dialogue as long as needed.
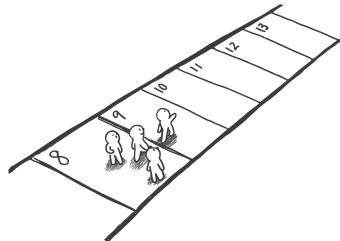
The pattern name and illustration symbolize the essence of the pattern, where the feeling associated with the good state is clearly embedded in the pattern's name and illustration. The word 'everyday' in the pattern's name, '**Everyday Meetings**, and the metaphor of events continuing like a calendar in the illustration convey the ongoing nature of the meetings, representing the good state outlined in this pattern.

5.   CONCLUSION

This paper presented the role of contrast in patterns, delineating between a problematic state and a good state, providing examples. In this paper, we discussed how to grasp the contrast within a pattern for crafting pattern names and drawing pattern illustrations based on the pattern's content. However, after writing this paper, I realized that when writing patterns, we were already consciously incorporating contrast into the text. A good pattern is marked by strong contrast, and it is important to craft patterns with this in mind during Pattern Writing. This aspect was not covered in this paper, so I would like to consider it as future work.

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