

Envision the Future of Collaboration: Imagination Run Wild Summary Paper

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Our Imagination Run Wild session aimed to envision the future of collaboration. The participants worked together in groups with others towards this objective, combining skills, knowledge, and resources. The session began with a brief lecture, followed by dividing the 18 participants into smaller groups. Each group received a handout of our Patterns of Patterns II paper and four "Oracle For Transfeminist Technologies" cards to spark collaborative creativity. The activity fostered engaging group interactions and provided valuable insights through collaborative learning. A survey was provided to participants following the experience. Those results contribute to our lessons learned from the session and advice we want to share for the future of collaboration, including the development of a new protopattern: "Have Multiple Leaders Onsite".

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1. INTRODUCTION

We co-facilitated an Imagination Run Wild (IRW) session titled "Envision the Future of Collaboration" on Tuesday, October 15th at 7:30 PM Pacific time at Skamania Lodge in Washington state at the 31st Pattern Languages of Programming, Practices, and People (PLoP) Conference. Our description from the conference website was:

"Transform your teamwork! Is your current project collaborating with others stuck at an unproductive point? Share the example and we will help you get unstuck! Are you a collaboration savant with helpful stories to share for others to learn from? ... Join us as we will play a fun card game plus blend Causal Layered Analysis and design patterns to create innovative visions for the future of peer production, learning, and collaboration."

We had sixty minutes. There were 18 participants and three facilitators on site. Our overall method of engaging the participants was based on the PLACARD pattern [1]. PLACARD is a way to combine three distinct approaches to collaboration within a single, cohesive process for collaborating successfully to complete complex projects with

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peers. The name PLACARD remixes the acronyms Causal Layered Analysis (CLA), Project Action Review (PAR), and Design Pattern Languages (DPL). CLA provides a framework for creatively imagining possible futures and scaffolds strategic thinking about how the project fits into society as a whole. DPL uses patterns to inform actions towards bringing an envisioned possibility into reality. PARs allow for systematically reflecting on progress along the way. This tactic allows participants to determine whether any changes need to be made or if things are working smoothly.

1.1 How the Session Related to Our Other Work

Our IRW session is related to focus groups that we ran earlier in 2024 at AsianPLoP [2] and EuroPLoP [3]. All of these utilized the PLACARD technique, first introduced in our PLoP 2021 paper, “Patterns of Patterns” [1]. It was further refined in the PLoP 2023 paper, “Patterns of Patterns II” [4]. These papers incorporate some of the “Patterns of Peeragogy” detailed in our PLoP 2015 paper [5]. All the papers draw inspiration from our work on the Peeragogy Handbook [6], in particular, the PAR is a tactic that comes from our peeragogical research.

1.2 Goals

Heading into the session, our goals were to achieve three outcomes outlined in our submission proposal: to provide attendees with ideas to enhance their peer learning and peer production skills, to introduce them to PLACARD, and collectively envision the future of collaboration, capturing these ideas in artifacts and documents. During the session, we successfully introduced PLACARD to the attendees and initiated a collaborative exploration of the future of collaboration. This was achieved through an interactive game in which participants used object cards to create their own stories. Additionally, the activity provided attendees with an opportunity to refine their peer learning and peer production skills. We ran out of time before we got a chance to do a PAR with attendees during the session, although we circulated a follow-up survey which gave space for reflection. This paper is an artifact capturing the ideas we co-imagined about collaboration to formally share with the world.

2. HOW THE SESSION WAS CONDUCTED AND WHO PARTICIPATED

We began the session with a short lecture that explained PLACARD and its three component methods through a slide deck. One of the slides introduced CLA visually, via the iceberg metaphor [7] (reprinted in Figure 1). Imagine if you were in a boat and encountered an iceberg. The first CLA layer, *litany* is above the water and what you would see most clearly, it is the day-to-day information about reality. An example is economic statistics. Just below the water level is the *causes* or *system* layer, which encompasses the proximate reasons for the observed facts. Underneath that is the *worldview* layer, the way of looking at the world and corresponding choices that give rise to the system layer. Finally, the biggest and most hidden layer is *myth*. These are societal level beliefs about life, often influenced by religion and art.

We asked the participants “What is collaboration?”, as we worked together to arrive at a group understanding. We went through the layers collectively and provided a secondary visual aid of the layers as concentric circles on a paper flip chart taped to the wall, as shown in Figure 3. As a tool we used “The Oracle For Transfeminist Technologies” card deck to give participants manipulative creative structures around values, situations, and objects. It is “designed to help us collectively envision and share ideas for transfeminist technologies from the future” [8]. We hoped it would provoke them to imagine creatively about design patterns for inclusive futures.

Participants were divided into five groups seated at three round tables. Each group was made up of three to five people and received a few pages from our “Patterns of Patterns II” [4] paper and four cards from the Oracle deck [8]. We randomly selected value cards, object cards (e.g., a guitar, wine, hat, bicycle, trash bin, bread) [Fig 2], situation cards and the territory/body card.

To establish a collaborative atmosphere, we encouraged everyone to remain open-minded about future possibilities and, most importantly, to have fun! After playing the game participants wrote their ideas about the future onto

CLA as Iceberg

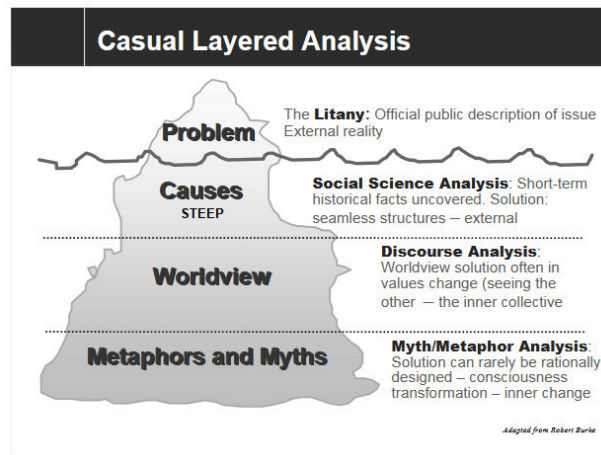


Fig. 1. CLA as Iceberg from Dr. Sohail Inayatullah, used with permission



Fig. 2. PloP '24 Workshop - Transfeminist Oracle Cards.

post-it notes. Next we asked them to consider which CLA layer their notes fit into best. Two were placed on the outermost Litany layer, three on the System, two on the Worldview, and one on the Myth in the middle [Fig 2].

3. LESSONS LEARNED

We gained valuable insights thanks to the generosity of the participants who shared their time with us. There were multiple interesting stories that emerged from the groups. One example was the team who received the “hat” object card. They placed the note on the Worldview layer in Figure 3. In Figure 4 you can see they wrote “We all cooperate by wearing hats. These hats instantly transfer people’s memories to their heads if people post personal information online, while simultaneously erasing that information from the Internet.”

We felt going from the image of the hat card to a technological device that could aid with collaboration was very clever. They were considerate of privacy as well by adding that following a shared hat experience, participants could remove their information from the internet. Another group interpreted the cards differently and placed

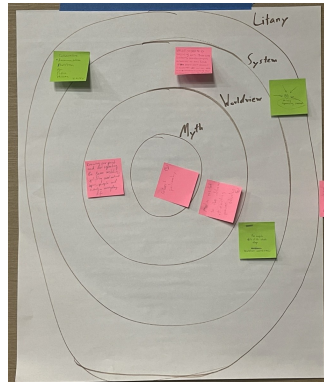


Fig. 3. Flip chart with Concentric CLA Meaning Map Circles and Post-It Notes

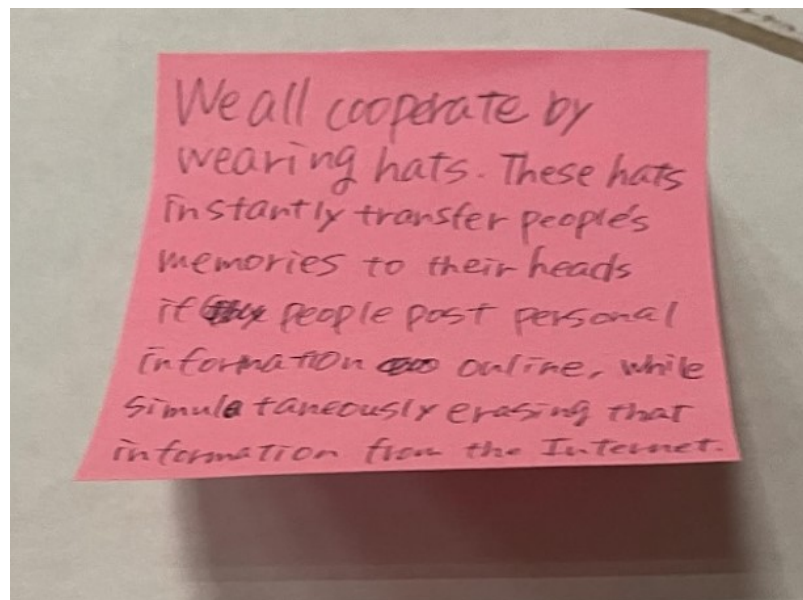


Fig. 4. Post-it note from the "hat" group.

"Democratized Media Platform" at the Litany layer, then "Media is resistant to the influence of existing power structures", at the Worldview layer and "Subvert patriarchy" at the Myth layer. We were pleased to see so many diverse, creative visions of the future.

All groups were able to map the cards to some of the layers. CLA is a way to help others find a way out of current predicaments and we felt the participants embraced this aspect of the framework based on the way they transferred what they learned with the cards to their notes on post-its and discussions.

3.1 Survey Results

One of the ways we learned from the experience was with a survey. This was similar to the one we sent to participants following our earlier EuroPLoP focus group [3] which included questions inspired by the PAR [6],

though we had more responses to the IRW survey (11 rather than 3). This time survey participants mentioned how the session was confusing at the beginning, but they were having fun by the end. One of the things we found was that participants had a lot of experience attending other PLoP conferences [Fig 6] (two respondents wanted to stay anonymous, and their responses are excluded from Figure 6). The EuroPLoP survey responses had the same result, everyone had previous PLoP experience. During both sessions, that previous deep experience with patterns was helpful for conducting the workshop, as we did not need to explain what they are, giving participants a shared baseline for working with that aspect of PLACARD. We asked on the IRW survey “What and how did you end up learning?” Hiroaki Tanaka replied “I had the opportunity to actually apply the concept of Patterns of Patterns 2 that I previously read about in WWS [Ed’s note: Writer’s Workshop]. The meaning of the pattern became clear to me.” Dennis Dubert wrote “I learned, that using the cards as ideation material really helped with letting your creativity run wild and that there are different levels behind a Problem.”

We also asked “Should the facilitators make any changes to the focus group going forward?” There were some helpful suggestions including “I thought the task was too abstract so you could change that” from Erika Inoue; and, relatedly, Jim Applegate suggested “I might try to give an example of the kinds of results or thinking you’re looking for.” We did not do a survey following the AsianPLoP session [2], but in responses to the related PAR question “What else should we change going forward?” attendees mentioned how they wanted to “See organizers and volunteers more energetic after event” because “Organizers sometimes burn out after an event”. We tried to embrace this feedback by doing the session multiple times in 2024, including this IRW session. We plan to continue this energy and learning exploration with future events.

3.2 Collaboration Pattern Mining

Reflecting on this session, along with the related sessions at EuroPLoP and AsianPLoP, we developed a new protopattern [9] for people organizing IRW sessions and focus groups at PLoP events. The name is “Have Multiple Leaders On Site”. During our sessions at AsianPLoP and EuroPLoP we only had one organizer in the room and this presented challenges, even though we had co-facilitators who joined remotely. Having three of us in the room in Washington led to a much richer participatory experience. Here is a framework for the protopattern:

3.2.1 *Have Multiple Leaders Onsite*

—Context:

—You are leading an interactive session at an in-person conference

—Problem:

—It is difficult to handle groups alone to ensure they all are comprehending the content and able to participate

—Solution:

—Have multiple people in the room to help co-facilitate

3.3 Conclusion

In retrospect, the content of the session drifted away from what we had advertised. We expected to specify the future of collaboration. The cards were supposed to be tools to help open up participants’ imaginations. Most groups were comfortable, but one was overwhelmed by the cards. For that group we had to simplify the game in the interest of time. We did not explain the rules of the game to the groups before it began [8]. In the future we plan to spend time specifically going over them. Additionally, someone asked for a definition of transfeminism, we have that ready now to share before the game starts.

PLACARD as a whole was difficult for participants to access after only a few slides. There was also not enough time for them to read and absorb the handout we provided. We used the iceberg slide [Fig 1] [7] and the visual



Fig. 5. International Participants Working with the Transfeminist Oracle cards

Question 7: How many PLoP, EuroPloP, AsianPloP, and related Hillside Group conferences have you attended?

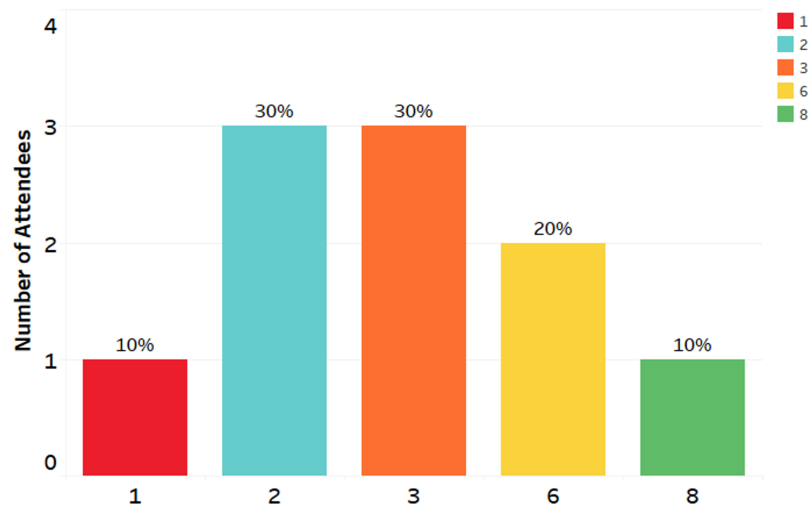


Fig. 6. Chart from survey question that asked how many PLoP events respondents had attended. Most people attended 3 or less events, but one experience person attended 8.

metaphor helped people understand the complex concept, but there were still lots of questions. Perhaps in subsequent workshops we could also use the moderately simpler Futures Triangle [10], “A tool to map the future through the three dimensions that are shaping it: the pull of the future, the push of the present, and the weight of history”, and/or a Futures Wheel [11].

The PAR is a helpful way to conclude a meeting by collectively describing what was accomplished. It was supposed to give participants clarity about what we all learned. Not having this closing ritual left some participants confused about what was accomplished. Specifically we did not sufficiently connect the session back to imagining the future of collaboration. At the next workshop, and in subsequent in-house testing, we will make the connection explicitly and hope to focus more on the patterns from the PLACARD papers, which may help participants relate

to the content better. Despite these challenges, based on the survey responses we saw participants did enjoy themselves and we all heard some interesting stories during the hour.

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