

LESS FEAR, MORE PATTERNS

Gustaf Brandberg

Linda Rising, independent consultant, and Mary Lynn Manns, professor in the Department of Management and Accountancy at the University of North Carolina, have co-authored the book *Fearless Change: Patterns for Introducing New Ideas*. Gustaf Brandberg read the book and wanted to know more.

Gustaf: Linda and Mary Lynn, you have both been working on introducing new ways of thinking into the workplace and now you have written a book together. Tell me a little bit about the history of your book. How did it evolve?

Linda: I started writing patterns for introducing patterns way back in 1996 with a colleague, David DeLano. We were both working at the same company and were having considerable success introducing patterns – so we thought we should write some patterns about introducing patterns!

Mary Lynn: Then in 1998, I was hired by a large telecommunications company to build a knowledge repository of successful software development practices – patterns! I had some challenges in introducing the idea of patterns into this organization, but this is when I met Linda at a conference in Arizona. We decided to combine our efforts and work on a book about introducing patterns into organizations. As we were writing this book, many people kept telling us that the book was really about introducing any new idea, not just patterns, into an organization. So we kept writing it with this in mind.

Gustaf: The first part of the book describes a general approach to change projects. If I would want to introduce a new idea into Citerus, where should I start? What are the phases we would need to go through in order to achieve and sustain change?

Linda: We have some “early” patterns that most change agents have used to get going. The first is Evangelist. The name has a religious flavor and there’s a good reason for

that. You must believe in your “cause” or you won’t have success. I just tried to introduce an innovation in a group I’m working with and I knew from the start that it wouldn’t work. I didn’t believe in it myself. I think that belief is very powerful and can make a difference. In many companies change agents are assigned the job to “make it happen.” We have seen that this doesn’t work well, unless, of course, that person happens to really be excited about the new idea.

Mary Lynn: The chapters titled Where Do I Start?, What Do I Need Next?, and Meetings and More contain the patterns that you, as the Evangelist, would use as you start your efforts. Your primary goal at the beginning is to give visibility to the new idea and to get some key individuals on your side (such as Innovators and a Guru on Your Side) – Ask for Help and don’t forget to Just Say Thanks. You must remember that you can’t do it all at once. We recommend that you take it Step by Step, celebrate your Small Successes, and take Time for Reflection along the way so that you can recognize what is going well and what you need to change.



Gustaf: OK, I guess I shouldn’t be surprised that you use pattern names to answer my question. As you mentioned above, you both have a background in the pattern community and the last part of your book is a pattern repository for change projects. What is a pattern and why did you choose to use the pattern format for your book?

Linda: This is a good question that’s been debated ever since people in the software community have started talking about patterns. Here’s a simple definition: a way of sharing good ideas that includes pretty good documentation of the problem the pattern solves, the setting in which the problem occurs, the nature of the solution to the problem, and the consequences. I think having patterns for a problem domain is a powerful way to help folks really face the issues. A pattern language, a collection of related patterns, gives the user a language to talk about the domain and a way to

remember the solutions. In our pattern language, we find that people who know it use the names to talk about their experiences. This is really exciting for us!

Gustaf: You say: “people who know it use the names to talk about their experience”. What’s in a name? Why is it so important what you call a pattern?

Linda: If the pattern is part of a pattern language, then the pattern names give users a way of having a conversation about the domain. I have seen software developers, for instance, describe an entire architecture in the following way: let’s have a Broker with a Registrar communicate with the Proxies at the interface using Abstract Factories to create messages and Visitors to deliver the messages to the devices. You can sketch this as you talk and if the others understand these patterns, a lot of information is communicated with just a few words. The names carry all those elements we talked about earlier: context, problem, solution, and consequences. Others should know what the issue is and whether the approach is appropriate or not.

Gustaf: In your experience, what are the biggest obstacles in a change project? Are some of your patterns counter-intuitive and therefore more often forgotten than others? Are some patterns more important than others?

Linda: I think the most important message behind the patterns is that we are not logical decision-makers. We act based on emotion, primarily fear. Most of us are afraid of change, even if it seems exciting. As a result, you need to appeal to emotion and relieve the fear. Don’t throw up a PowerPoint slide with a zillion bullets and say, therefore, we need to do this. You have to listen and people will tell you what they are afraid of – if the environment is open to that. If not, change will probably not happen. People will resist it. These are great patterns, road-tested, based on the ideas of lots of folks around the globe, but, they are not silver bullets. Every pattern has a context – think of it as a set of requirements. If the context doesn’t fit, then the solution won’t work.

Mary Lynn: Every pattern also has consequences, both positive and negative. We have documented this in each pattern. To address your other question about whether some patterns are more important than others – it is important to start as an Evangelist, but whatever patterns you use from there depends on your organization, the type of new idea, and what kinds of things you are comfortable doing and not doing. The experience reports in the book show that people have used our patterns in a variety of ways. So, as Linda said above, the decision to use one pattern versus another is all about the context.

Gustaf: Your book also talks about “the rule of three”. Explain!

Linda: A pattern is based on experience — it's not just a “good idea” that someone thought of in the shower. Ideally, there should be a section in the pattern that describes “Known Uses” — instances of actual use. Ideally there should be three separate instances.

Mary Lynn: Yes, ideally there should be three separate known uses. But few pattern authors take the time to find that many before they publish their patterns. We have two known uses for each of our patterns.

Gustaf: Some of the patterns, such as Involve Everyone, Ask for Help and Just Do It have self-explaining names. Other names are not so obvious until you have read the pattern. I am thinking, for example, of Champion Skeptic, Hometown Story and Royal Audience. Can you tell me a little bit more about these patterns?

Linda: Sometimes the name came from the originator. All the patterns have been through one or more reviews with “shepherds” and writers’ workshops at patterns conferences. Some of the names are more meaningful to some readers than to others. Mary Lynn and I have had a lot of discussion about many of these names. We don’t always agree, but we do our best. The patterns you mention were named by the originators. Champion Skeptic is one of a collection in the pattern language for dealing with resisters. It says that if someone is particularly resistant to the new idea, you might honor their stance and let them play the role of “official skeptic.” Save space at the end of every meeting, for example, to let the Champion Skeptic have five minutes to say what could go wrong with the plan. Hometown Story tells us that nothing is more convincing than a success story, so have some informal gatherings where successful users hold a discussion about what worked well for them and what they learned about the new idea. Royal Audience is attached to the Big Jolt pattern. We are all influenced by famous visitors — the Big Jolt. When he or she comes to your organization, let people have a chance to sit down for coffee, lunch, or dinner in a small group to really get to talk to the Big Jolt. It’s a reward and an influence strategy.

Gustaf: I guess the important thing is that you remember the name of the pattern the moment you need it. Actually, I think Hometown Story is a “stickier” name than for example Mentor. Speaking of mentors, we often function as mentors in our clients’ organizations and have discovered the power of mentoring when introducing new tools and techniques in the software development process. When, in your opinion, is it appropriate to bring in a mentor?

Linda: We brought in a Mentor to help teams work with design patterns, because some were reluctant to start on their own. Some users are more adventuresome than others. Some need a little boost. Sometimes the Mentor can just be available and sometimes

the Mentor can really be part of the team. I think a good Mentor can make or break an innovation — but, again, consider the context. Sometimes it's not needed. If people ask or express a need, then a Mentor is important.

Mary Lynn: A Mentor can be brought in at any time, early on in a change effort, as a substitute for formal classroom-type training, or to support and follow-up other kinds of training.

Gustaf: Suppose I have realized that I need a mentor. What do I need to think about before I find one?

Linda: Of course, you need someone who knows about the innovation you are trying to introduce, but you also need someone who knows the “patterns”! The wrong Mentor can hurt your cause. The right Mentor must also be an Evangelist and believe that the people in your organization are smart and willing to learn. The Mentor must have had hands-on experience and be able to work alongside the teams to help them. A good Mentor is patient and willing to answer lots of questions! If I were hiring a Mentor from the outside, I would use another pattern (from another pattern language I am working on: How to Grow a Beautiful Company). This pattern, Audition, suggests that the potential Mentor be brought in for a few days to see how he or she works with the team. I would have the team decide whether or not to hire the Mentor after this experience.

Gustaf: Your book is a good place to start for anyone interested in patterns and change processes. Then what? If I would ask you to pick one or two favorite texts on patterns and change processes from your book's reference list, which ones would you pick? Are there other pattern languages on change processes?

Linda: If I were choosing other references from our list, I guess I would recommend Malcolm Gladwell's book, *The Tipping Point*. We describe Gladwell's three important roles: Connector, Maven, and Salesman, and, in fact, Connector is one of our patterns. Gladwell has a new book out, *Blink*, about the consequences of quick decisions. The best book about patterns is, of course, Christopher Alexander's *A Pattern Language* or *The Timeless Way of Building*. These are books about architecture, building architecture, but it's where all the work in software patterns started.

Linda: I have been hearing from other pattern writers who are starting to build on our pattern language, so I think you will see more patterns soon on change processes. I don't know of any that have been published yet.

Gustaf: Finally, I will use one of your patterns and Just Say Thanks (which is something we often forget). Thank you very much for sharing your experience with us!

Linda: We are excited that our book has generated so much interest. We have been working on it for several years, so we are close to the work and enjoy it, and we are gratified that others have been using it and see that it is helpful in introducing new ideas.

Mary Lynn: And keep the feedback coming! We love to hear from our readers! ■ ■ ■



Gustaf Brandberg is the CEO of Citerus. Why not initiate a dialog with him on the topic of patterns, especially in the field of software project management? You can reach him at gustaf dot brandberg at citerus dot se.

LÄTTRÖRLIG UTVECKLING I PRAKTIKEN

Stockholm

2 maj 2005, kl 13.00 - 16.00

Missa inte årets viktigaste händelse inom lätttrörlig utveckling!

- En av grundarna till Agile Alliance, amerikanskan Linda Rising, berättar om hur agile-rörelsen uppstod och om aktuella trender.
- Ongame, ett av Sveriges mest snabbväxande och lönsamma företag, berättar om hur de på kort tid började arbeta lätttrörligt och hur det har förbättrat samarbetet mellan utveckling och marknad.
- Konkreta erfarenhetsbaserade tips på hur du själv kommer igång och jobbar lätttrörligt.

Läs mer: <http://www.citerus.se/events/agile05.jsp>

LINDA RISING, FEARLESS CHANGE: LÄR DIG SKAPA BESTÅENDE FÖRBÄTTRINGAR

Stockholm

3 maj 2005, 8.30 - 17.00

Linda Rising, internationellt anlitad konsult och författare till bästsäljaren Fearless Change: Patterns for Introducing New Ideas, delar med sig av sin erfarenhet av hur man skapar bestående förbättringar i stora och små organisationer.

Läs mer: <http://www.citerus.se/events/rising05.jsp>