

Surviving Design Projects

Patterns for Managing Conflict in Creative Workplaces

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Pattern: Ask for help

Recognize when you're in over your head and be prepared to ask for help. Come with recommendations for what would help you the most.

Use when:

- You realize you're not being effective because you're constantly encountering obstacles.
- You anticipate running into problems and know that you won't be able to handle the tidal wave when it comes.
- [Permalink](#)
- Posted at 9:11 PM
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Pattern: Convert failure to action

Use failed approaches to zero-in on the right path.

Some situations look like dead-ends: there's no apparent place to go from here. Colleagues may contribute to this perspective, seeing the latest round of design as complete failure, for example. They'll throw up their hands and think there's no way to get back on track. Use these opportunities to ask questions about what isn't working about the suggested approach. Dissect the failure to understand why it didn't work and what the right solution would have to do. Dig beneath the surface and see if

Use when:

- Confronted with an apparently hopeless situation.
- [Permalink](#)
- Posted at 8:44 AM
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Pattern: Logistics specifics

Do not ask open-ended questions about date, time, location or other logistics. When convening a meeting or conference call, be specific about your preferred times. At the very least, you'll get agreement. At worst, you'll be asked to change the time.

If you don't define the details, no one else will. You minimize unhealthy conflict when you don't give people something to argue about that has no bearing on the success of a project.

Use when:

- Setting up a meeting or other activity requiring the coordination of calendars and venues.
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- Posted at 6:32 AM
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Pattern: Channel your colleagues' best qualities

When facing a difficult situation, ask yourself “What would X do?” where X is a colleague who brings a unique perspective. By pretending to be one of our colleagues, you can try to take advantage of their strengths in exploring solutions for a difficult challenge.

Use when:

- Your exploration of a situation or challenge hits a roadblock.
- [Permalink](#)
- Posted at 11:10 AM
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Pattern: Help me help you (The Jerry Maguire)

Don't force people to defend their actions: they'll be unwilling to change their behaviors if put into a defensive posture. Instead, use words to indicate you've noticed a challenge and you'd like to provide resources to help.

Use when:

- Colleagues aren't contributing as expected and you need to raise performance issues with them.
- Your responsibilities and activities are starting to overlap with other members of the team, who may feel possessive about their tasks.
- [Permalink](#)
- Posted at 10:57 AM
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Pattern: Anticipate agendas, perspectives, and objectives

Before attending a meeting, think about the participants and what they want to get out of the conversation.

Try to anticipate issues that will be top-of-mind for participants. Also consider situations where participants will want to have something to get off their chest. In such situations, anticipate their need and provide room in the meeting schedule for them to vent. But, enforce the plan to address all the objectives of the meeting.

Use when:

- A meeting you're organizing will cover a controversial topic.

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- Posted at 10:46 AM
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Pattern: Good cop, bad cop

Use a colleague as “bad cop” to deflect the responsibility of making a big decision.

Example:

Look, if it were up to me, I'd agree to do this for you, but I've got to talk to my project lead to make sure she's OK with my spending the time on it.

Use when:

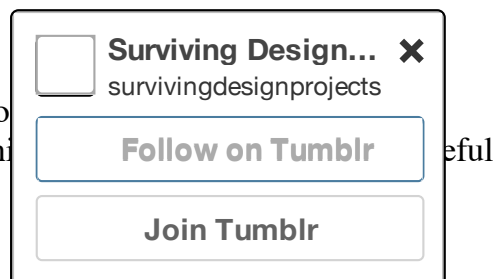
- Confronted with a question beyond the scope of your responsibility, or with a dramatic impact on the project.
- [Permalink](#)
- Posted at 4:11 PM
- Tagged: [Pattern](#)

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About Patterns

Patterns have:

- **Description:** A short summary of what to
- **Use When:** A list of circumstances in which
- [Permalink](#)
- Posted at 8:51 AM
- Tagged: [pattern overview](#)



[Jul 21](#)

Pattern: Pick your battles

Before confronting someone where you know there will be disagreement, make sure the potential fall-out is worth the effort.

Use when:

- You receive a communication that escalates the conversation in a confrontational way, baiting you into unhealthy conflict.
- [Permalink](#)
- Posted at 11:17 AM
- Tagged: [pattern](#)

Pattern: Capture lessons learned

Create a repository of lessons learned from project to project to avoid making the same mistakes.

Use when:

- You feel like your project team relies on the same process again and again.
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- Posted at 10:15 AM
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