

Creative Collisions: Meet and Create

And Other “RE Interactive” Suggestions

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Abstract—The International IEEE Requirements Engineering conference (RE) is the premier international forum for requirements engineering. However, participant interaction mechanisms have not received significant recent attention and conference attendees have suggested that interaction support could be improved. The “RE Interactive” program is a first implementation step to increase the level and quality of interaction at RE. We present here a brief background to the initiative, describe in greater detail those initiatives being introduced this year and summarize possible initiatives for future years. We describe in greater detail the focal “RE Interactive” session: Creative Collisions. This session aims to explore the power of combinatorial creativity to create unexpected ideas for the RE community by promoting creative engagements between individuals, focusing on forging new relationships within the community.

Index Terms—RE, Interaction, RE4RE.

I. INTRODUCTION

Attending a conference is resource intensive and time-consuming; there should be a strong return on this investment to justify this physical meeting. For example, let us assume that 300 participants attend RE. With a mean flight cost of 900 euros, one week at a hotel at 150 euros per night and 800 euros for registration, the incremental participation cost to the community is approaching one million euros. We believe that we can improve the value proposition for attendance by more strongly promoting interactions between conference attendees. Unleashing the creative and intellectual energy of 300 specialists gathered together to learn about and to advance the state-of-the-art within their favorite topic should only increase the value of the experience.

Paper presentation sessions are the main interaction tool at conferences but they are not noted for being particularly exciting [1]. Even with a high quality presentation the interaction is limited and it is difficult to effectively unleash the creativity of the audience upon the presented material. Techniques such as question and answer sessions following the presentations tend to be superficial and can easily be dominated by a small subset of the attendees. Session breaks and lunches offer much-needed informal interaction but this informal networking is challenged by the unavoidable “cliques” that form with time; cliques that are driven by known interests and personal relationships that unfortunately may keep separated people that would greatly benefit from interaction.

Informal and serendipitous interaction is wonderful but perhaps we could be more efficient. Alternative sessions such

as the “RE Top Model” and “Ready, Set, Transfer” in recent years have been well received but have not yet found a place within a more organized program whose goal is to foster interaction between conference participants.

At RE’11 in Trento, Alistair Mavin and Martin Mahaux, along with a group of RE participants, launched the RE4RE initiative aimed at discovering the requirements for the requirements engineering conference. After gathering opinions via participant interviews, they invited the community to contribute their requirements via an online requirements platform [2], based on a tool from Marten *et al.* [3] gathering an interesting set of goals for RE. To build on this online effort, they ran a creativity workshop at RE’12, where participants prioritised goals and generated solution ideas. The two clear winning goals were “*Avoid watching boring presentation*” and “*Enhance the way we discover the right people*”. Other popular goals were “*Meet, exchange and collaborate with industry people*” and “*Learn new and applicable things*”. As a consequence of this work, the RE’13 Program Chair launched a new initiative, “RE Interactive” and asked the authors of this paper to manage it, holding the “RE Interaction co-Chair” position for RE’13. Hundreds of ideas for enhancing interaction at RE were reviewed and the short list of candidates was presented to the program chairs for further discussion regarding feasibility and fit with the larger community. Further discussion within the organizing committee led to the decision to implement some of these suggestions at RE’13.

II. RE INTERACTIVE

Several initiatives are being discussed for introduction at RE’13. At the time of writing this paper, it is still not clear which ones will indeed be implemented this year, beyond the Creative Collisions, Thematic Lunches and Presentation Good Practices. These initiatives are described in greater detail below.

A. Creative Collisions: Meet and Create

The goal of this session is to explore the power of combinatorial creativity to create unexpected ideas for the RE community by engaging with new people, people that you have not recently engaged. We will randomly pair participants for four 15 minute working sessions, switching pairs for each session. In these sessions, participants will be asked to mix their knowledge and expertise to produce some creative result: hence the term “collisions”. Possible creative results could include the creation of one or more of the following:

- Research program mission statement
- Research problem statement
- Research challenge description
- Practitioner challenge description
- Abstract for a new paper
- New product definition
- New service definition
- Training syllabus (of all kinds!)
- Wherever your creative collision takes you...

The session will begin by explaining the collision concept and how the output must be rooted in the combination of the expertise of the participant pair, even if the combination seems strange or impossible. The goal is to create many unexpected ideas that can be used as inspiration, not to create a finished product of any kind. Participants will begin by preparing a 2 minute pitch describing their expertise so that they can quickly introduce themselves to each other at the beginning of the collision.

We ask that each collision be typed up by a volunteer from the team and sent to us by the morning coffee break of the following day. We will gather the collision outputs together and publish them on the conference website as an inspiration to the RE community. We hope to be able to trace some collaborations and new works that evolved from this initiative and report to the community on these results.

B. Thematic Lunches

The goal of this initiative is to facilitate informal interactions between individuals during the lunch breaks, promoting creative interactions on topics of interest. An announcement board will be available for interested individuals to promote topics and others can then add their names to the list of interested parties. The group will then meet and proceed to a facility of their choice for food and engaging discussions. If possible, someone could volunteer to capture attendance and notes and the results of these informal birds-of-a-feather sessions could be made available to the RE community.

C. Presentation Good Practices

As noted in the Introduction, presentation quality matters to the conference participants. We have developed a presentation practices guide for the community and made it available on the conference website. The guide is not definitive (and we expect it to evolve as others make their contributions over time) but it does provide guidance for the basic presentation principles including font size, number of slides, typical content and much more. The guide also presents some alternative techniques that can be used to make a presentation more interactive and interesting for those presenters that want to try something new. We would be particularly pleased to see presentations that do not rely entirely on a series of bullet points in Powerpoint.

D. Augmented Session Chair Role

The goal is to enhance the quality of presentation sessions by giving the Session Chair a more significant role, becoming more active before, during and after their session. They would work with the speakers to ensure that they are well prepared

and provide help if requested. The Chair could more actively facilitate discussions and could invite attendees to meet after the session to continue the discussion. This enhanced role would be supported by a Session Chairs guide and pre-conference participation in the planning process. Finally, Chairs would actively encourage systematic feedback and collect the speaker feedback at the end of their session for sharing with the speaker and the Organizing Committee.

E. From Papers to Panels

The goal is to explore new forms of presenting contributions that foster constructive interaction without becoming a workshop format. One paper session could be converted to a panel session where the presenters state their contributions and the works are discussed among the presenters in a panel format.

F. Social and Community

The goal is to explore how the social setting can be modified to enhance the participant experience. Some form of social software could facilitate interaction within the community before, during and after the conference. The social program efforts could be expanded and made more prominent to ensure that great RE discussions occur within the local attractions and that there are options available to the community at all times. Greater effort could be devoted to ensuring that the new members of the community are introduced to those with greater experience, perhaps even some form of semi-structured social mentoring efforts could be introduced. Collaborative installations such as community workspaces featuring large canvasses for community contributions (both artistic and intellectual) could be supported. Gala seating by random draw for the adventurous, dedicated social meeting spaces at the conference facility, local sightseeing tours – the only limit is our imagination and our willingness to invest our time and effort.

III. CONCLUSION

We present herein the first steps toward enhancing the conference experience by responding to community feedback and introducing a small set of interactivity enhancements to the conference program. We hope this initial effort will begin a tradition of “Interaction Chairs” who will strive to continuously improve the conference experience and to ensure that the effort of physically meeting once a year is worth it in every way.

IV. REFERENCES

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