



WiseMonkeys

WiseMonkeys facilitates your event scheduling, by integrating a consensus-driven process into IM.

The concept

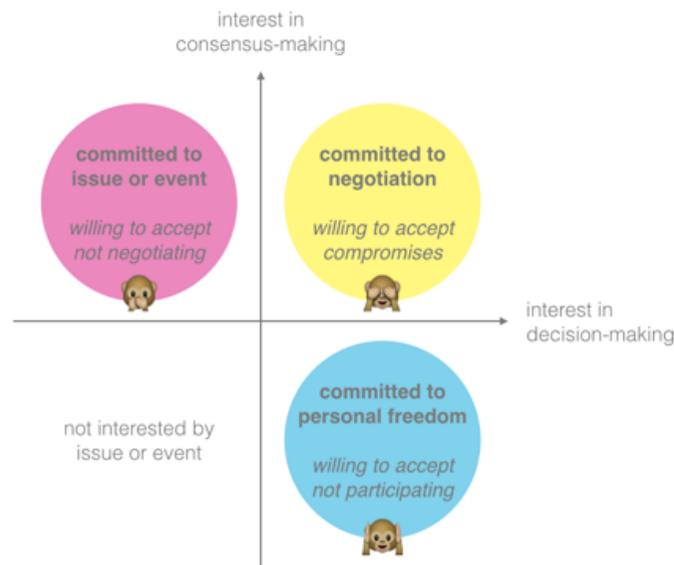
The project intends to improve event-scheduling between friends, by focusing in this decision-making on collaboration. The outcome is a service built on an instant messaging (IM) platform, to integrate smoothly with current communication habits. An IM user creates an invitation for her group, leaving some parameters (date, time and/or location) open for discussion. Members choose a profile: negotiator, committed, independent, or not interested. Negotiators propose options and express their liking, while chatting on the IM service. Members can join or opt out of this discussion any time, by changing profile. The negotiation is closed manually, or automatically after a grace period. The results, based on the most liked options, are notified to all members.

Motivation

A qualitative research study showed a variety of concerns in real event-scheduling practices. Current tools are regarded as too formal and cold for the private sphere, e.g. to organise a friends gathering. On the other hand, all-purpose communication tools, such as phone or email, are seen as inefficient for this purpose. This status-quo lead us to consider supporting event-scheduling within the informal tool *par excellence*: Instant Messaging. Another shortcoming revealed by the study could also benefit from this choice: decision-making is often experienced as slowed down by late replies (if any).

Process

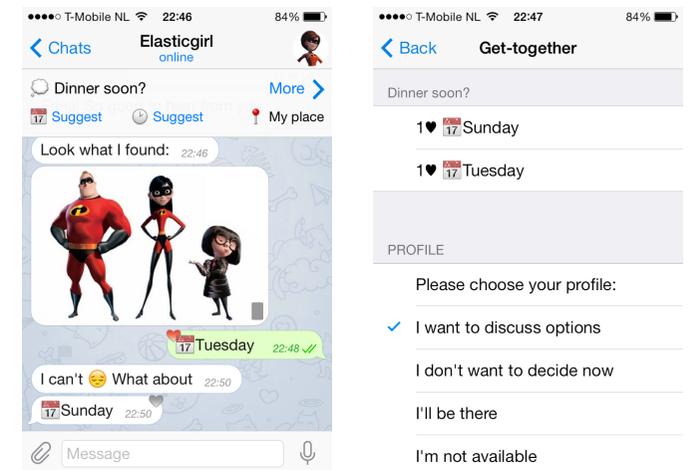
This project addresses these issues by centering the decision process back on what it implies: a group activity. Principles of consensus-building methodologies are applied in our workflow: the tool should facilitate an agreement, not moderate a discussion, nor take a decision. The tool should enable members to invent options for their mutual gain, giving them ownership. Proposing or supporting an option should further be separated from committing to it, to avoid postponement strategies. In addition, this project acknowledges the variety of behaviours in front of decision-making, by allowing users to define positively their own commitment (see figure below).



Implementation

Based on these findings and design decisions, a paper prototype was built and its usability tested. The tests showed people are very sensitive to imperative interaction: the application should leave a way to postpone decisions, even if it goes against the process efficiency. More leeway was thus given for the initial user input (deciding her profile). As a counterweight, the interface was fine-tuned for the scheduling task to have enough visual presence, acting as a passive reminder.

A working prototype was created as an additional layer to the open source client of a real IM platform. Application-specific messages ("like" notifications) were embedded in the payload of standard IM messages, to be server-independent. The application was tested successfully on two iPhones.



Next steps

The application will be deployed to two independent groups of friends, who already use the IM client daily. Service adoption will be thus unencumbered by any "baby duck syndrome". Instrumentation will be included to track app usage. Semi-structured interviews will be carried after two weeks.