Go Build Your Thing

And in the process inspire others to do the same

By Rebecca Wirfs-Brock and Lise Hvatum

These lines are from a story by Devin Arrigo about the human desire to create. Pattern and pattern languages are created by pattern authors. True, patterns are aimed at sharing proven practices with others, they are not innovations. But the way we as authors decide to communicate the practice, and what practices we decide to communicate, that is our choice. The usefulness and quality of the work is up to us.

Early pattern writers were mindful about quality. One characteristic that was deeply discussed was generativity. Generativity simply means, "the quality or ability to produce something new." Applying a pattern *always* creates something new. So, are patterns inherently generative? We don't think so. Patterns that only offer simplistic instructions—do this, then this, then this—are of limited value, especially for patterns that deal with human interactions.

In *Pattern Hatching: Design Patterns Applied,* John Vlissides offers this definition for *pattern generativity*: "…generativity refers to a pattern's ability to create emergent behavior. That's a fancy way of saying *the pattern helps the reader solve problems that the pattern doesn't address explicitly*." Generative patterns solve immediate problems. But more importantly, they change the problem landscape, potentially resolving larger problems over time. They are ambitious.

We believe that generative patterns are more closely connected to the inner workings of the organizations where they are used. As such, they require more from the users in studying, understanding, and adapting the patterns to their own situation. Experience, personal heuristics, and culture play a large role in the application of generative patterns to get the best out of them. And for those of us who have been around for a while (or longer) we believe we have a profound responsibility to ensure the patterns that we provide have enduring impacts. We should strive to create pattern languages that have a generative nature.

For all pattern writers – Go Build Your Thing and do so with mindfulness and respect for the people you are writing for. Think about your contribution deeply and profoundly before you create, and in the process inspire others to design impactful things.