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Pattern Making, Pattern Breaking

*Using Past Experience and
New Behaviour in Training,
Education and Change
Management*

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Prelude:

Pattern Breaking, Pattern Making

As human beings, we are pattern makers. Our brains seek order in the information they receive from our senses. We seek to establish patterns that become recognisable to us in order to make sense of the world we live in. We recognise and value patterns in nature, in language, in society.

This ability to form and manipulate patterns allows us to integrate new knowledge into existing frameworks, to relate new concepts to those we already have and to make connections between many discrete and distinct observations.

The ability to build patterns is fundamental to our ability to learn. As we acquire new information and knowledge we integrate and assimilate that knowledge into the related knowledge we already have, making small and subtle shifts to the existing patterns to accommodate the new ideas. In childhood, the existing patterns are flexible and fluid, shifting easily to accommodate new elements. In adulthood, this process may be less comfortable and may take more time. New ideas or knowledge may, ultimately, be rejected if the learner cannot find a way of blending the new knowledge into the existing patterns.

We also use patterns in the development of skills. Skill development requires practice and repetition: building and repeating a pattern of movement, action or thinking. Learning a physical skill – to the point at which the movement becomes grooved – means repeating an effective pattern until the muscle memory takes over and the action becomes automatic. Building competence, whether physical, intellectual or social requires pattern recognition: the patterns of behaviour that achieve the desired results.

As educators, instructors, trainers or facilitators we work to help our students to make and break patterns. In supporting their learning, we aspire to help them to build those patterns that will be useful to them. These may be technical patterns of language, number, sequence or process. They may be thinking patterns that support problem-solving, creativity, logical analysis or empathy. They may be patterns of behaviour that demonstrate trust, influence or integrity in relationships.

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But at times we also seek to break patterns: to help our students to unlearn. Before they can move on in the learning process we may need to help them to reject long-held patterns of behaviour or assumptions that have proved incorrect or of limited use.

Many writers and practitioners make reference to the *art* of facilitation. Great facilitators allow their students to become artists and designers: pattern makers who understand the connections between multiple individual elements and can connect them in ways that create both form and function.

Facilitators help learners to check and test these patterns, choosing which to retain, which to reject and which to build upon. This choice is the key element in moving towards attitudinal and behavioural change: something that only comes about when the learner wants to initiate real change.

The purpose of this book is to explore with you the ways in which the design, delivery and reviewing of training and learning activities can become a fundamental part of the adult learning process. This uses learning principles that allow observation and reflection upon new and existing patterns, an opportunity to re-work or re-form existing mental models and the time and space to understand, rehearse and apply the new learning.

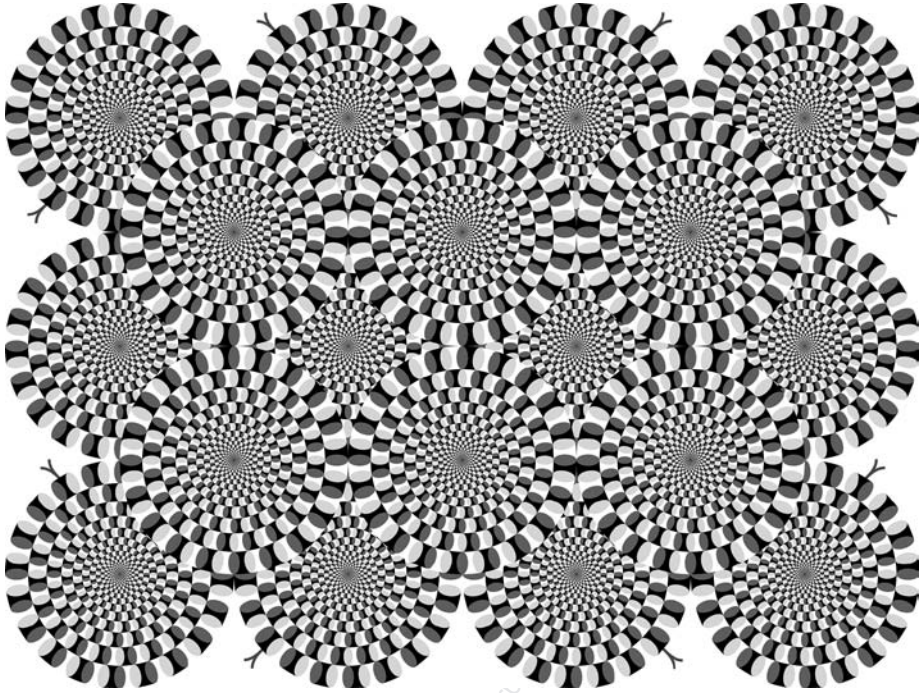
The book is written from the standpoint of a facilitator of personal and professional learning. Whilst it makes some reference to research and theoretical models, it is fundamentally a review of the learning that has come from my own experience over 30 years. It models the belief system upon which the content is based. This is an attempt to apply and transfer to others the learning that has come from my own experience, the experience of my international colleagues (some of the most creative and professional facilitators in the world!) and from the learners with whom I have worked over the years.

My hope is that, in reading this, learning and development professionals will be inspired to challenge their own patterns, experiment with new approaches and work with the learners in their lives to find ways of making the learning process enjoyable, memorable and rewarding.

Ann Alder

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Rotating snakes

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Pattern making: The image above is not animated. However, most people looking at this pattern see movement. The brain interprets the pattern and we see something that is not actually happening. We are fooled into a belief that has no logic to it. From time to time, we all apply this false interpretation to the patterns that form our own mental models. 'This is how I see it, so this is how it is.'

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