ON A PERSONAL NOTE

During a recent yoga class, it hit me. More often than I'd like to admit, I focus on what's next to be done or accomplished as opposed to being in the moment that's happening now. The in-between or transition is often disregarded as merely a series of steps towards the end goal.

Science validates the importance of transitional energy. Potential energy is just that, until it gets set in motion. Immense power comes from the shift from potential to kinetic; from liquid to gas. The transition is where the energy is – not the end states in of themselves. In nature, the cycle of the seasons also demonstrates extraordinary and delightful transition. (Just think of magnolias and cherry blossoms starting to form, indicating the official progression from winter to summer). Likewise, in many cultures, coming of age rituals mark the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

However, we tend to bypass the importance of the 'journey' and set up the destination as the ultimate state within which to exist. Once we approach the goal, our attention is quickly diverted to what's next.

Clearly, there is importance in comparing one state to the next. How do KPI's measure up against the goals set? How does one year's profit compare with the next?

But what would closer attention to the in-between teach us about ourselves and the organizations we lead?

Numbers compare static states of an organization. Rarely do they reveal resiliency in response to unforeseen circumstances. Paying attention to our patterns in transitional states allows us to react intuitively and adapt quickly as opposed to fixating on an abstract goal. It brings into focus the culture of the group - which can be useful in driving positive, energetic change.

Culture is the *feeling* of an organization. The 'quirks' - informal rules of engagement*- that make us unique as a group; what the organization stands for; its values, even

(and especially) when the CEO isn't there. A culture exists when everyone sees it as their responsibility to fulfill the mandate of the group as a collective. It is the heartbeat of the organization. And while KPI's are a good source of information, they don't fully tell us how adaptable our organizations will be in the face of stress and change. Hence, successful companies spend immense resources on enhancing their culture. Creating culture is not necessarily about designing a cool, trendy workplace. Culture materializes in the in-between.

So, as we approach the two thirds mark of the first quarter of 2020, let's pay closer attention to transitional moments. Let's be curious about it, and our reactions to it. Bring an open mindset to being in the in-between. At most, it may reveal the countless possibilities that exist. At the least, when we finally arrive, we might be filled with the joy of the magnolia bud – full of life and vitality - having taken our full turn in transforming into a spectacular bloom. It may reveal the magic of our organizations. That *thing* that makes you truly exceptional.

See my January newsletter on the 7 principles of stakeholder engagement

Multi-stakeholder Engagement – A simple guide to the process

A successful engagement workshop has been proven to save time and money. It serves to clarify the basis for design and obtain buy-in from stakeholders. Most processes would cover some of the following stages in one form or another:

Group / Problem Identification

Stakeholders have a stake in the overall success of the project. The selection of participants is therefore key, and introductions should go well beyond one's name and department. It should aim to understand each participant's 'stake in the game'. It is also critical to understand the problem from each vantage point. This is the true strength of a multi-stakeholder engagement process. The project benefits from being carefully considered from as many angles as there are stakeholders.

Common Language / Participant Roles

Before moving on to even a sketch design, a clear understanding of what success looks like is important. If I said to you, 'this project will be beautiful!' I guarantee that there will be as many images of what is that means as there are people in the room. Hand in hand with this is also the understanding of what each of the participant's role is in the process. If this isn't clear, many stakeholders see the process as a waste of their time. Clearly illustrating the problem and understanding everyone's role makes the process clear and effective.

Deviation

Many of us come to a stakeholder engagement workshop with the hope of leading the charge to solve OUR problem. We are wired to see our own issues as the most important and/ or pressing. By applying tools and exercises to deviate from one's inherent thinking, the problem and its solution becomes richer. We can see a bigger picture develop, allowing for a more nuanced and complex solution.

Co-Creation

Having seen multiple pieces of the puzzle emerge, the group dynamic often shifts to one of solving each other's issue. As a facilitator this is as exciting as designing itself. Creating together is one of the most natural things we do as humans. Its amazing what seemingly 'uncreative' participants come up with when collective creativity can flourish.

Step Back / Analyze

In any creative field, the opportunity to reflect on and critique your work is vital. It reveals blind spots and untested assumptions that can stop a project in its tracks. By spending the time and applying mental clarity to look at the creation from an objective perspective the project objective is refined. Alternative solutions can emerge. It brings clarity to the priorities and project goals. This step cannot be overstated for its power to bring the group into alignment.

Commitment

If the first 5 stages are successful, this last step is usually a given. It calls upon all participants to support the group's decisions and commit to whatever role they play in the project's next steps. It keeps the project goals aligned and the design team focused. This stage marks the launch of a successful design project.

Stakeholder engagement is a diagnostic tool for outlining the solution to the problem. I would caution against any doctor who starts performing surgery without first diagnosing the ailment.