



Transcript:

Creativity, Uncertainty & Change with Janice Francisco

Cross-pollination podcast Episode 38 (28 minutes) part 1

[Intro quotation] **Janice Francisco:** [00:00:00] I think one of the things that has stared many people in the face through this experience is we're living under constraints that we haven't had to deal with before. And at the same time, we're living under a level of uncertainty that is really throwing people off. I think the reality is that life has always been uncertain, it's just that we could kind of hallucinate ourselves into thinking that we had more control over things. And now we're realizing that maybe we don't have the same level of control [as we thought] and there's just circumstances.

NBee (podcast host): [00:00:45] Welcome to [Cross-pollination](#), a show about doing things differently. We're a member of the Alberta Podcast Network.

[Introduction with background music] **NBee (podcast host):** [00:00:53] This week, we're talking creativity, change innovation and the pandemic with Janice Francisco in a two-part episode. Janice Francisco is the founder of Bridgepoint Effect, a company that helps teams collaborate better, work smarter and workplaces be more creative and innovative.

If you've listened to the show for a little while, you might have heard our chat with Janice nearly two years ago. In that episode, we talked about Creativity, Curiosity, and Change [title, episode 16] and how companies can innovate better. Since then, everything has changed.

In this episode. Janice tells us what she's seen happen over the past year and what companies and the people leading and working in them can do to adapt, stay afloat and what they might think about heading into the future. It's what we can do when uncertainty is the most likely certainty. As a hint, it has a lot to do, unsurprisingly, with getting calmer, getting positively creative and getting curious.

Janice kicks things off with three big changes that have come, like unexpected and unasked guests, to organizations everywhere.

Janice Francisco: [00:01:56] There's been so much change. You know, we could... I don't know where, where to even start. I think a few things have changed in what we're noticing and what we're hearing from our clients is - let's put it this way: there's a few things that have changed. We had to make a quick change, right? We were forced into, there's no negotiating: this is what we're doing. We're going home. We're staying at home. We're doing that, right. So, everywhere went into that. But when we went into that, the assumption was we were going into it for a short time. It was a temporary thing. You know, what's really funny, NBee, we are a year later, a year later in Canada, since we did this and



many places in the world too. And I'm sitting in Toronto where we are still in lockdown. We are still in, stay at home [mode] and we are quite restricted in our movements. And quite frankly, it doesn't look like we're getting out of that in any hurry.

[00:03:11] So I know it's different in all places, but, so I think what happened was that organizations made decisions and did their best, thinking this was temporary. But it's not been temporary and it might go on [continue] the way that we've changed. The workplace is going to continue in some form going forward. So what I'm hearing from clients is, you know, we did these things, thinking this and it worked for a while, but now that we realize we're in the middle of this, and we don't know when we're getting out of it, that isn't working for us. It was: okay if it was temporary but it is not okay for us if it's longer. And so what I'm hearing from leaders is they're rethinking and re-evaluating the decisions they made around how their teams are working, the collaborations that they want to have,

[00:04:11] and they're looking for alternative solutions, but they're not quite sure what they're looking for. So I think that's one thing that's changed is [the pandemic changes] it's not temporary. It's permanent. What does that mean?

The second thing that's changed, I think is the leader's job. I see leaders hugely overburdened and overwhelmed because in the past, we run the business, we manage the people, we got stuff done,

[00:04:43] and now we're managing people's emotions. We're managing people's at-home challenges. We're managing, how the heck am I going to get this work done? We're managing being in a virtual environment when we used to be able to run into a room [in person] and just figure stuff out. We're managing through, I don't have the sight line

[00:05:06] on what is happening with my team in the same way that I did before. You know, in the past I could look out my office window and go, yeah, it looks like they're collaborating. Yeah, it looks like they're looking for alternatives. Now I don't know. Right. I don't know. I don't see that. And so how do I reconcile that for myself as a leader?

[00:05:27] So I think those are two major things that have happened.

And I think the third thing that's happened is that we have a workplace that didn't do a good job of collaboration to begin with.

[00:05:41] Nobody likes the fact that they couldn't collaborate well across functions. It was difficult to collaborate even though we understood, you know, if we were working in a more innovative environment we needed to do that. But I think now, you know, yes, we're at, yes, we're in a virtual world and we've learned a lot about functioning and surviving in that sort of an environment.

[00:06:06] But the challenge I'm seeing is that that many organizations haven't quite understood - and I think the light bulbs are starting to go off - they haven't quite understood that having tech tools that enable collaboration is not the same as being able to collaborate. And so where we're stepping in to play a role for clients, that's quite different for us before [what] we [did] in the past.



[00:06:34] We teach people the nuances of creative collaboration. Now we're also having to help them understand how to do that well and in a way that's safe and productive. And I don't mean COVID-safe. I mean, safe emotionally to contribute in that way in an environment that is very different.

NBee (podcast host): [00:07:02] Three things that have changed adds up to pretty much everything. It's no wonder a lot of us are wrestling with stressful times and a lot of demands [versus] back in the "good old days" when it might have felt like things were more stable. What did regular collaboration look like [then]? And what did Bridgepoint Effect do? How did they work with companies back then?

Janice Francisco: [00:07:19] I'm Janice Francisco. I am the founder and I started the company back in 2001. And what inspired the start of the company was the fact that I had been working as a change manager and a coach on a lot of large business transformation type projects, the stuff where they go in and retool the tech, or they're doing quite a lot of changes to the organization itself.

[00:07:48] And I noticed something pretty curious. I noticed that when teams, a lot of the teams I was working with, ended up in a situation that was a little outside of the normal. Or it was a situation where they really did need to come together and work together, solving problems as a team. They had some difficulty around that and it got me curious. And so I was looking for ways to help teams work better together and help them over those weird uncertain times and help them feel that they were moving in the right direction. And that's when we started the company and the focus was, you know, how do we help?

[00:08:34] How do we help teams find innovative solutions to the day-to-day and the challenging things that they're facing. And so, our company is really focused around providing guidance, tools and training to help teams win, right. To help them get through those tough situations and have the confidence to be able to come together as a team and really move through the challenges and the activities that they need to do.

NBee (podcast host): [00:09:08] Different types of collaboration is certainly a lot about what this past year has looked like, as well as immense disruption. What does good collaboration - productive collaboration - look like?

Janice Francisco: [00:09:15] I really wasn't aware even myself that that's what was lacking. What I realized was people were kind of caught in a what I call a problem-solution paradox.

[00:09:29] They'd have a problem. They'd rush to a solution. They go and do the work and then they'd go, that didn't quite work the way we needed, or they'd implement a solution to a challenge they were facing and found that it wasn't exactly hitting the mark. And so it was just that they didn't have a deliberate process to think very deeply or very broadly or to really focus in on: what are our options and our opportunities here?

[00:10:00] What are the many ways we could do this as opposed to the one way we can do this, right. We all want to be efficient and we want to, you know, we want to get stuff done. And so there's this, let's just get something done. Let's show that we're being productive.



And often that's not driving the thinking and the breakthroughs that the organization really needs.

[00:10:25] So it was really, you know, how do you teach people or how do you help people get to that place where they are and the value, as well as the discipline around doing that and see the results from making that kind of an investment. And that's really what we do. And it turns out that the magic formula was getting people out of that critical thinking [mode], that knee jerk reaction, and showing them how to harness creative thinking and use that.

NBee (podcast host): [00:10:54] So creativity, I think, is something a lot of us have had to do over the past year and not always as a choice, as we've talked about and not necessarily from the fun flow state, "let's get creative" mindset either. Out of necessity. So, what can we expect over the next little while, in the immediate future?

How might work and collaboration, creativity, and all those things we might be doing while we're at work doing our jobs, be likely to look over the next few months? Will it be different if many of us are still working from home? Are we all heading back to the office?

Janice Francisco: [00:11:23] Well it's really interesting because I think many organizations, again, as I said, they were hoping that they'd be in a position to start bringing people back to work. But what I'm finding and hearing from the organizations I work with is they've been pretty well told to expect to be home. Definitely through to the fall of this year and likely again for the balance of the year. I'm hearing from many of the leaders that I'm working with that they [00:12:00] have set up committees or groups to examine what will work from home versus work from office be.

[00:12:08] You know, a lot of them own their buildings and obviously they want to take advantage of that space. A lot of them are seeing some challenges around people working, you know, not being in close proximity, and that's having a psychological impact on wellbeing for people. You know, social, all of that stuff.

[00:12:28] I mean, I don't have to talk about that but I think there's challenges there. And the other thing that's starting to rear its head, you know, it's not simple to say, "let's work from home", because apparently there are implications. I know there's been a lot of movement. People have moved provinces in Canada, they've moved cities. There's been exodus out of the big cities. Some people are going well, why do I even have to stay in this country? Why don't I go work [from] somewhere else? But apparently if you are an employee shifting where you live, it has tax implications and payroll implications for your employer.

[00:13:10] It's not as simple as saying, I'm just somewhere else. So I think that's the next wave of complexity around this. And it might drive people [in organizations] to say no, we're not figuring out this problem. Now, on top of all of the other ones that we have to deal with, you're coming back to work. So I think they're just going to, I think, they're going to figure that out and a lot of my clients are saying they're looking for some sort of a hybrid where



they're just going to make people come back [to the office] but understand that they might not want to come back full time.

So who knows, right. I think it's going to be different everywhere. I think it will be dependent on the size of the business, the kind of business, there's so many things that come into play with this, right. There's not one answer to it.

[Advertisement] **NBee (podcast host):** [00:14:04] This episode is brought to you by Shift Podcast by Alberta Innovates. Shift showcases the work being done in the province's innovation ecosystem, everything from health to clean energy. Join hosts Katie Dean and John Hagan as they interview the researchers, entrepreneurs, and businesses that are shifting our perspective about innovation in the province.

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[Return to episode] **NBee (podcast host):** That ad tells you one of the big themes on this show is innovation. And it's a theme in Bridgepoint Effect's work as well. What does that [innovation] look like in the near future? Especially while things are still highly uncertain and we don't know entirely what to expect, what can organizations innovate toward? How do they do it and what should they be aiming at?

Janice Francisco: [00:14:56] It's really interesting. I don't think we can look at innovation in the same way now as we did before, I think.

So again, I think your experience of innovation is completely dependent on the situation your organization found itself in as a result of this [pandemic]. If you were in a business industry that was declared not-essential, man, you've got a completely different situation. Like how the hell do you innovate when they've completely shut your industry down?

[00:15:38] Do you focus on where the puck's going in, I don't know 18 months, you know? Another two years? Who knows, right. So, what's the innovation they need to do? Will they need to completely change what they do? Will they be able to go back? So there's challenges there. If you were an industry that was allowed to stay open but under restricted conditions or in business, many of them had to pivot, adapt, shift.

[00:16:11] We saw changes to business models. We saw changes to product lines, you know, take a look at the restaurant industry where, here in Canada, most of them have had to operate in takeout mode. Well, okay. If you're a gourmet restaurant that's focused on delivering beautiful experiences and ambience, how do you recreate that in a takeout package?

[00:16:38] You're not going to deliver the same thing. And you might not be delivering the same amount of stuff, you know, which means the menu items have to change. The pricing has to change. So they've had to flex and adapt and be innovative in a lot of different ways. So, and then there's been places that have had to completely revolutionize and do something different.



[00:17:01] So I think what we're seeing is more examples of the range of innovation that's necessary. And I think what we're seeing is that there's more of an awareness that what we're innovating is really dependent on the context we're in. And in my experience prior to this: that was not apparent to many people.

[00:17:34] So I think what's happened is, when you step back and look at what innovation is, innovation is changing something. Let's face it, if you're innovating, you are adapting, shifting, creating new, introducing new, you are changing something. Now what has been absolutely apparent in our society for the last year is everything is changing.

[00:18:04] So now we're focused on change. We're not really talking about innovation as much and we're talking about how people have been really creative and adapted and we're talking about how they've been innovative. But really, I think what people have done is they've done what they've needed to do to survive and respond to extenuating circumstances.

[00:18:27] Is that innovation? Yeah, I think it is. Is it what we thought innovation was before? I don't know, because a lot of people had the impression that innovation was new, novel, never seen before and there's a crapload of innovation happening when I'm changing my business model, I'm adapting my menu. I'm figuring out how to do curbside delivery. If I work in retail and I want to survive, I'm completely digitizing my business when we had never done that before in a short time. That is innovation. That is some level of innovation and shift. So, I think we've done a lot of things because we've had to.

[00:19:21] So we've made choices and made decisions to just get things done. And much as the example is, as I said with the organizations, they've had to innovate the way they work, but they're realizing that how they're working isn't necessarily working. So there's this paradox of, how are we innovating?

[00:19:48] What are the results we're getting? Are we getting what we want? Or is it that we're reacting? Right. So maybe that's the differentiation I want to make. Yes, we are being creative. Yes, we are being innovative, but are we truly going through an innovative process where [in] an innovation process, we're thinking things through well and upholding a clear purpose and reasons for doing it.

[00:20:15] If our reason and motivation was simply to survive and thrive, we might not be getting the results that we want long term. Right, we did what we needed to do, but it may not serve us long-term.

NBee (podcast host): [00:20:29] So that's involuntary innovation under high pressure and abrupt need for change. But as we've seen very obviously over the past year, change continues and things are still changing now. Are things going to go back more towards what we knew as "normal" as large-scale vaccination goes forward in a lot of regions? Or are we ready to accept things going back? Or having had a chance to think about our priorities a lot in the past year, what do we want to go back to? How will it look different from where we were before [the pandemic]?



[00:20:57] We're still very much in circumstances of uncertainty and ambiguity. Typically, that's something Janice and Bridgepoint Effect have been thinking about a lot over the past year. How can we make decisions? How do we plan in organizations when the immediate future is still uncertain? What do we do? What decisions can we make when we can't know where we're going? At least not for sure.

Janice Francisco: [00:21:19] So I think part of the challenge is that I think one of the things that has stared many people in the face through this experience is there's two things. Maybe one is we're living under constraints that we haven't had to deal with before. And at the same time, we're living under a level of uncertainty that is really throwing people off. And I think the reality is that life has always been uncertain. It's just that we could kind of hallucinate ourselves into thinking that we had more control over things. And now we're realizing that maybe we don't have the same level of control and there's just circumstances.

[00:22:21] So you know, there's no need for creativity if there aren't constraints, none at all. We innovate and be creative when we are operating under constraints. But - and the challenge with operating under these kinds of conditions - is that when we're in that react mode we're operating kind of from what I call Maslow's lowest level.

[00:22:46] Right. Everybody knows Maslow. And if we're at that, if we're focused on our survival and our safety, and let's face it, we have all had a whole lot of stuff drummed into us about safety that I think is being misinterpreted, and so what happens is when you're operating, it overloads your system and it shuts down your ability to think.

[00:23:20] And if there's one thing I'm hearing many people saying, it's like, no one's thinking, we're just doing. Right. We're just doing, cause we just gotta get stuff done at work because there's all these things going on at home that we're managing. There's all of that other stuff. And so it's really difficult to be in that place.

[00:23:46] I think a major condition for being able to bring out your creativity, for being able to tap that creative thinking where you can get a different and a better result rather than the one right thing, that that's all I can manage right now, is being able to be mindful. You know, you gotta be mindful of what you're doing.

[00:24:14] Why am I doing this? What's the bigger purpose? And we have to be aware of how we're feeling in that moment. And if we can't bring that to the table, we're not thinking, we're not tapping creative thinking and we won't ever get to a different response other than that safety, fear-based reactionary thinking.

NBee (podcast host): [00:24:42] That naturally enough leads to other questions in an atmosphere of uncertainty, change and sometimes lots of stress and anxiety. How do we be creative? How do we settle our minds [and bodies] to get into that creative mode and make decisions regardless of the ambiguity of the circumstance?

Janice Francisco: [00:24:57] There were many people that I would recognize as being very creative people. People who knew how to think very deeply but you know what? This has been hard on all of us and we really have got to harness that emotion and understand, you



know, what we're doing. And if we're not able to connect to that broader purpose, it becomes very difficult to navigate uncertainty because you get completely unhinged, right?

[00:25:24] This is why you get distracted. This is why you can't concentrate. It's, if you cannot hold that vision of, what is that grander purpose - and your grand purpose at home might be very different than your grand purpose at work - but that's what we need to rally around to be able to move through this because that's the only way we can make decisions and understand, okay, you know what, this not a priority right now. This [other thing] is a priority. And that's what people have been struggling with. It's they can't nail themselves to something or tether themselves to something to help them move through that uncertainty. And that's just so important.

NBee (podcast host): [00:26:11] So that's been over the past year through some tough and challenging times with forced pivots and obligatory innovations. And we're still walking through the woods of uncertainty. But there are tools and ways to help get us through that, how ever messily or grandly we do it. In the next part of this episode, we look with Janice at some of the keys to moving through and figuring it out. Not surprisingly, as she mentioned, it involves emotional agility, getting better and smarter at managing how we feel about the shifts happening around us or the ones that are needed. And of course, [it involves] creativity's little sister, curiosity. Listen to part two to see how it happens.

In the meantime, if you're interested in knowing more about Janice and Bridgepoint Effect's work you can find them at www.bridgepointeffect.com or on Twitter @creative_janice. If you're interested in connecting with us, you can reach the show on Twitter @Pollinata1 or on our website www.crosspollination.co or on Apple Podcast, Google Podcast, Spotify and podcatchers everywhere.

[00:27:07] Thanks for listening, as always and bringing your curiosity to this show. See you shortly.

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