



Transcript:

Creativity, Uncertainty & Change with Janice Francisco

Cross-pollination podcast, Episode 38 (30 minutes) part 2

[Opening quotation] **Janice Francisco:** So why are we here? Why are we in business? What is our purpose? When we're navigating through uncertainty it's very important to remember that we cannot do long-term planning. The challenge with this whole uncertainty, ambiguity piece is we're conditioned to do long-term planning. We need to focus on short term planning and more immediate wins. When we're operating from a place of purpose it's much easier to navigate through that.

[00:00:40] **NBee (podcast host):** Welcome to [Cross-pollination](#). We're a member of the Alberta Podcast Network.

[Introduction, background music] **NBee (podcast host):** We're back with part two of this episode, entitled *Creativity, Uncertainty and Change*, continuing our chat with Janice Francisco, founder at [Bridgepoint Effect](#). If you heard the first part of this episode or episode 16, where Janice talked to us originally, you'll know that she's the founder at Bridgepoint Effect, a company in the business of creativity and innovation that helps organizations collaborate better and solve problems more effectively.

[00:01:12] In part one, Janice told us about what she's observed over the past year, the challenges, pivots, and adaptations that companies have had to make to stay viable through the biggest year of disruption we've all seen, as well as the challenges that leaders and employees are now faced with, like collaborating suddenly across remote environments and under a kind of pressure that hasn't existed before and the new skills that are required to communicate and collaborate with teams under conditions of prolonged uncertainty and ambiguity as to what the future looks like. As well as constraints on our daily lives. In the second part, we'll hear more about the new skills, the pandemic demands of people and of organizations, like trust and emotional agility, how they help and how we can cultivate them.

[00:02:00] **Janice Francisco:** So why are we here? Why are we in business? What is our purpose? So what's the noble cause that we're attempting to address in the marketplace so that we have some value we can offer? I think we've got to keep that front and center for people. And I think the other thing we need to do is, as you said, is remind them of what's not changed.

[00:02:27] So, you know, we are still here. We are still viable. We are here. Whatever it [our purpose] is. And I think that's really important. Then I think the next thing you need to understand is, if we're working through uncertain times, we need to maybe be focused more



on what are the jobs are that we need to be doing. Right. So look at it in that context of, what are the jobs that need to be done and what's the priority for those?

[00:02:53] I think we've got to get very pragmatic and I think the other thing that we need to be concerned about is, when we're navigating through uncertainty it's very important to remember that we can not do long-term planning. So the only way to move through - because what uncertainty brings is also ambiguity and that frightens people - we teach people how to be okay with that.

[00:03:25] The challenge with this whole uncertainty, ambiguity piece is we're conditioned to do long-term planning. Okay, I now look at my day or I now look at what we're doing, you know, it's like, okay, what's the year? Okay, what's the month? What's the week? What's today? What am I doing right now? And so we need to - so it's like, yeah, okay, this has to be done this month but this is a crappy week where we've had all kinds of tech issues and blah, blah, blah. And okay, today I just feel like crap because I didn't sleep last night and this didn't happen because of whatever. So I'm not able to do as much. So what can I do right now?

[00:04:17] It's like we need to get much better at understanding that we need to focus on short term planning and more immediate wins. Because if we're not looking for that and I don't mean quick hits and just, you know, doing something for the sake of it - like that's silliness, don't do something for the sake of doing it - but when we're operating from a place of purpose, it's much easier to navigate through that.

So then we're planning for short term. We're stepping back and looking at what the wins are. And what we've got to do is, we've got to constantly go through what I call a learning cycle. We've got to become very good reflective thinkers.

[00:05:09] And so what I mean by that is that as we go through an experience individually, and as a team, we need to understand what happened, what it means. And what are we going to do about it? So that we're, right, so, and that's the only way that you can manage yourself and each other through that uncertainty, because if you're not taking the time to reflect on how you're doing and how it feels, you're just being automatic, you're staying stuck in that fear mode. You're staying stuck in that unresourceful reactive aspect, and you're not able to lift your head above the craziness of the situation to appreciate where and what you're doing.

What I think is, this is a practice we use in our business weekly and certainly at the end of every project and it's like, okay, we just spend half an hour to an hour at the end of the week. Okay, what did we learn? Like what happened this week? What did we learn? What are we proud of? Where were we having difficulty, what's going on? And we just keep it very free flow. But what I'm finding for us is we've had to deal with so much it's horrendously overwhelming. It feels in our business, it feels like every time we turn around, we're learning something new. We've got new tech, we've got new stuff. We've got, it's like everything is new! Okay. But like, what's going on, how are we doing? How are we supporting each other? So to me, that's what's allowing us to stay real and stay connected and that's keeping us tethered and it's allowing us an outlet to go like, I'm not doing well this week or I am doing



well this week or I'm really excited and proud this week or crap, I don't want another week like this, this has been hard. And you know, or like, hey, look at this, we did all of these things that are new and this is what we learned and won't it be easier to do that.

Next thing like it's so, is it's just we need, we cannot operate as if it's the way it was [pre-pandemic]. It's not, and it won't be. It's going to evolve. I don't... You know, I've given up any hope of the fact that we'll get to something called normal or we certainly won't get back to where it was. And I am the most optimistic person in the world but I'm also very pragmatic and I think we're fooling ourselves if we think that. We are not going back. We have to be operating differently and we cannot operate in this environment like we used to work. It's not going to work. It's just not going to work. You know, you can't think about this, you can't have a global experience of this magnitude and not have it get into our psyche.

[00:08:31] Like you know, every once in a while I go, I always remember listening to my grandfather talking about living through the war. You know? Cool. Right. And you could see that had a psychological impact, right. When you look at your grandparents, you hear what they went through. Or you listened to family members if you're a family that immigrated or had to leave a country and all of that. All of these things that went on and the reality is we're living through that event. How can that not change and shape us? How could it possibly not?

[00:09:14] **NBee (podcast host):** So whether many of us like it or not, even when we're not necessarily essential workers and if we are on the frontline engaged in public-facing work, we've all been faced with a lot of tests and ongoing challenges. And it's pushed many of us into a different mindset that we're not usually in. Often while we're also trying to live our lives and do the same jobs and it takes a lot more consciousness and agility to move through that, even while knowing that it is a difficult time and that's to be expected and more has changed than just the pandemic.

[00:09:43] We'll hear about some of that in an upcoming episode on social changes that have come to the forefront recently as well and what that has to do with workplaces. As well as people's thoughts about what's truly important now that we've had a strong incentive and a good long time to think about that. All of the changes of the past year elsewhere imply new needs inside organizations too, for things like trust, as Janice talks about here, and why it's needed, not just to talk about the challenges that people are working through but also to work creatively and to develop solutions, not only out of necessity but from a positive mind space.

[00:10:21] **Janice Francisco:** You know, it's really funny you bring that up because trust is one of the conditions for creativity. So in order to get creativity in the workplace, there is a level of trust that's required in the moment and in the environment. And so to your question, yeah, I think trust is really important. It takes a different level of it.

[00:10:52] I think there's the trust in, can you divulge to the people that you're working with, how you feel? You know, when you think about it again, I want to just step back for a second, because this is a creativity podcast. Okay, so what we're doing is, we are creating change that's forced or chosen, right, in our lives? That is a creative process. That is an



emotional process because it is a creative process. There's going to be an emotional aspect to it. So in order to get to a place where you can bring creativity into the environment there's certain conditions in the environment, and trust and openness is one of them.

[00:11:43] So what employees are typically looking for in that environment, if we're saying, hey, let's be willing to talk about what's working well and what's not right. Let's sit down and have a reflective thinking piece for somebody to be willing to open up in what is likely a virtual environment.

[00:12:10] There's even more need for safety because virtual environments isolate. And so we have many situations where we're working where people can't - and there's not a judgment on this - they are unable to turn on video because there's distractions or whatever in the background. But if I'm a leader and I need to have an honest, open trust-based conversation with my team, I better be able to see eyeballs if I want to be fostering trust.

[00:12:45] And so that creates some challenges. So what we need in a situation for trust to be evident and safety, psychological safety to happen, people are looking for a number [of things]. I call it the three questions that need to be answered. They want to know: am I clear on what is the behavior that you're expecting of me?

[00:13:12] So if you want me to be creative or you want me to be sharing, like what is the behavior that's expected? The second is, do I feel supported in behaving this way? So when I open up and I share or I give you this information, are you able to accept it? And are you open to it? And a third thing that we're looking at is, do I feel that I matter?

[00:13:38] Does it matter what I'm saying and divulging, are you recognizing and rewarding me for what I'm doing? Because you know what, I'm living in a world right now where the stories I'm hearing from people about the stuff they're navigating at home, at work. You know, we all have to, there's this [thing] drummed into us:

[00:14:01] we've got to stay safe, keep safe, keep safe, keep safe. And yet you want me to open up and leave myself vulnerable in a time that's highly uncertain? All right. So, back to the question we had about the leaders before. That's enough, right? Leaders now are responsible for holding a space, a collaborative, creative, shared emotion, driven, trusting space in a virtual or combination of virtual and in the office.

[00:14:37] That's a burden for a leader. But a good leader can get that going with their team.

NBee (podcast host): Those kinds of emotional and personal skills are new for some workplaces and some leaders, although many will, hopefully have had that before, but the emphasis and the level of it is new now. I asked Janice about trust and cultivating it. Is this a skill that will be in high demand in the future? Lots of authors and researchers like Amy Edmondson, for example, has a Ted Talk and more on psychological safety and its importance in the workplace. And it was one of the key findings of Google study of high performing teams in its own company. That concept [psychological safety] addresses not only characteristics, like not being punished for making mistakes at work, but it has



implications for creativity, for innovation and problem solving, which is what we're talking about here.

Janice Francisco: I don't think there was as much emphasis on it [trust] before because it wasn't necessarily needed to this level.

[00:15:33] People could manage themselves. You could see what was going on now. Now we've got to do check-ins and, you know, worry more about the psychological wellbeing of people, just because of what people are going through. So you know, we're seeing it show up in different ways. In our client base, we have we've many clients who had invested quite heavily in that emotional intelligence and a lot of those aspects and had had the opportunity to build up that trust or build up that ability to be vulnerable with their people.

[00:16:13] But then we have this situation where we're seeing turnover in teams. So we've got new team members coming in who are being onboarded in an environment where they have never touched the people they work with. And they're so struggling with, how do we build trust on a team? How do we move the team to that level of experience and ability to do that?

[00:16:42] And you know we've been working quite a bit with people helping them do that. Kind of team - I don't want to call it building - it's just not really building, it's helping a team function, you know, to do that collaborative aspect and understand how to open up and build that trust.

[00:17:09] So, yeah, I think it's a new skillset for many leaders or it's something that they need to recognize the need for and have to go out and get it. You know, in a parallel in our business, I've become highly aware of the fact that in a digital marketing world, right - because now we're all digital marketing as opposed to out in front of people -

[00:17:34] there are certain skills we have in our organization and certain skills we do not have and I don't have the ability or the time to develop those skills. So I've got to go buy them, right. So I think that reality may become more evident for leaders. There's only so much they can do there.

[00:17:56] They're already overburdened. And I think it's also underestimated. I'm not sure it's fully appreciated. We're starting to see some things come out in the press about the burden that leaders are feeling and that professionals are feeling too, right. We've heard lots about how the frontline workers have been impacted but now we're starting to hear [about] the knowledge worker impacts and I think there's many.

[00:18:27] **NBee (podcast host):** One of the other impacts of this time and the big changes that have come about over the past year are also to innovation. As we talked about in part one, there's been lots of innovation over the past year as many organizations have shifted and pivoted what they do and adapted and often the heart of their business models, but it hasn't been the same kind of innovation that they were often focused on before.

[00:18:49] **Janice Francisco:** And we started to notice in April last year, something unusual. And we started to see higher levels of hits going to certain blogs titles [on our company



website]. So we started tracking it. We had one blog that had an over 4000% increase in hits and our top five blogs were all about how to develop innovation skills. How to bring innovation to a company.

[00:19:20] So it was all about individual or organizational ability to be innovative. And I think what happened, I think why that's been happening, is that people realized how unprepared they were. So if they weren't engaging in innovation to begin with, they realized, oh my God, we're needing to be innovative.

[00:19:45] What the hell is this stuff? What do I need to know to do this better? Because this is stressful and at an organizational level, I think a lot of organizations that kind of said they wanted to be innovative but hadn't really internalized that, realize that there was a stress and a strain and a threat on the organization that they needed to resolve.

[00:20:08] On an aside from that, what we heard from a lot of people in the innovation community, the companies that rally around, let's be more innovative, a lot of the people who were running the [existing] innovation programs found that there was less interest in [side] the organizations to be doing that kind of innovation. So the proactive kind of innovation. Many were complaining that the organization was becoming very risk averse, more so than they had [been] in the past.

[00:20:42] And they were having difficulty continuing to move through on what they had already been engaged in. But I think it was simply because they couldn't move decisions through with the leadership teams because they were all organized working on other things. So I think in innovation has, it's just changed, the face of it has changed so much.

[00:21:06] It's just there's more of it happening in a much more diverse way. And yet some of the corporate innovation programs have really kind of had some difficulty keeping their momentum because so much of the psychological and other resources of the company have been focused on just doing damage control over what the heck, this [the pandemic changes] all means. [00:21:30] Right. So that's been kind of interesting.

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[Return to episode] [00:22:11] **NBee (podcast host):** In this episode, we've talked a lot about the importance of creativity to innovation and as a precursor to it, thinking creatively about options to make better decisions. As we've talked about the present circumstances aren't always conducive to being in a positive creative mindset right now, but when we need to, are there things we can do to cultivate that?



[00:22:38] **Janice Francisco:** There are some ways, you know. Well, how do you cultivate? I think you cultivate this creative mindset in the same way now as you did before. I think the challenge is recognizing how. You're living in that place of fear and what do you need to do to get yourself out of it? So that's one thing, I think. The other way of cultivating it is... How about this? I think let's be clear on what it means to be creative. This isn't about, in this situation, in this context, it's not about being artistic. Or, you know, that this is about how do we create options? How do we optimize conditions? How do we find opportunities? How do we keep our emotional state in a much more resourceful standpoint?

[00:23:55] And how do we enable our ability to adapt and get that agility and resilience without feeling like we're being tossed around on the ocean? Right, so I think that's the creativity that we're looking for. So I think, there's maybe... Why don't I make this simple? I think if you want to cultivate it in this kind of an environment, I think you need three skills minimum to be focused on. One is, where's your curiosity?

[00:24:42] Take care. Look at what's happening in our world right now. We're constantly being fed a line about how things are and there's a lot of assumption in it. You can not be creative, resourceful, adapt, and agile if you're not thinking for yourself. And how you think for yourself is by being curious and asking questions.

[00:25:10] Because think about it, by being curious and asking questions you're putting yourself back in control. You're going, there's information, I'm missing those things. I don't understand. I'm not quite sure that that's sitting okay with me. Could I ask some questions about that? Instead, what I'm seeing is a lot of people that are just accepting what they're being given and they're not questioning.

[00:25:35] So curiosity, so important, curiosity. Second thing, we need to be open. We need to be open to the fact that the assumptions that we're operating under are likely not correct or are not always going to be correct or might not be correct for us in this particular circumstance. So being aware of the assumptions we're holding and also being open to accepting or hearing other ideas is really important because if we're in react mode, wow, we've got very narrow focus.

[00:26:24] But if we can be curious and move ourselves into a more open mode, if we've got a few people looking in different directions, we might find something else out. Right, and so it's how do we open up to that and create some awareness in that aspect? And I think the third thing we need to do to foster creativity right now is to recognize that it's really important to be original.

[00:26:51] There's a lot of people doing the same thing. Doing the same thing every day with the same people every day, because that is maybe what they've been forced to do. You know, whatever the situation but there's an awful lot of sameness and we need difference in order for creating. Creativity is about doing something novel and different.

[00:27:16] So how are we bringing some level of novelty or originality into our life when it's become smaller? When it's become more challenging, when we're tired and there's only so much bandwidth we have? So how are we allowing that in our life? How are we creating it?



And are we willing to hear diversity of opinion, diversity of thinking in, in that process, as we start to figure out, how are we going to respond and move through this? Myself, even I found it's like, okay, I'm going to go for a walk every day. Am I going to go for a walk in the same place every day? Or am I going to at least try to find a different way to walk every day and look for something different?

[00:28:08] And how am I bringing my curiosity out on my walk so that I'm aware of what's going on around me and maybe how things have shifted or what they're different. Or am I doing the same thing all the time. And as you know, it's that mindset, right? It's how are you looking at things? And are you able to shift those perspectives to take in something else, because that's what will happen to move you out of that reactive mode?

[00:28:40] It'll give you a little bit of a bridge to get up to that more creative aspect.

NBee (podcast host): So, what are some of the big takeaways for us to go forward with now that we're living in a world of radical change and continuing uncertainty? It's not all bad news. And there's lots that Janice has talked about that we can do, even while there's lots we can't control. And again, it has a lot to do with curiosity and being mentally and emotionally agile and adaptive

Janice Francisco: It's, I think, the skill of being a continuous learner, who's okay with newness. It's going to be the new skill that everybody needs.

NBee (podcast host): That's it for this show, if you'd like to know more about Janice and Bridgepoint Effects' work, you can find them at www.bridgepointeffect.com or on Twitter @creative_janice.

[00:29:28] If you'd like to comment on this episode, you can find us on Twitter @Pollinata1 or on the web at www.crosspollination.co Join us next time for an episode with a guest, Jessica Ketwaroo-Green who you can expect to hear a lot more about in the future, on some of the social changes that have been bubbling to the surface over the past year and what it means to lead, operate and work in diverse workplaces. Jessica Ketwaroo-Green tells us about the ELAT framework she's developed to help organizations do just that. Thanks as always for listening and see you next time.

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