

The Need for Silence, Spontaneity and Thinking Time in 21st Century Organizations

Sometimes to get where you are going you have to go back and pick up what you have dropped along the way. Before organizations can breakthrough and take a LEAP forward they first have to re-introduce and embrace some of the behaviors that have either been forgotten or just lost. These are behaviors that are required in 21st Century organizations to pioneer innovative ideas, leverage the potential of all people and respond to today's complex problems using 360-degree vision. Three essential behaviors are Silence, Spontaneity and Thinking Time.

As organizations move into the 21st Century, behaviors that have been methodically phased out in the never-ending pursuit of speed must now be re-established. Ironically, it is in this pursuit of speed that organizations have adopted habits and behaviors that have actually slowed them down and impeded their progress. The ability to: transfer knowledge, within and between locally and globally diverse teams; assemble quickly and respond to complex problems; and respond to constant and unpredictable change are how success will be measured in this new century. Yet this level of success cannot be achieved if

organizations continue to be so pre-occupied with planning that innovation is thwarted and if time-sensitive ideas cannot be moved on or reacted to without exhaustive analysis or scheduling meeting upon meeting. Responding to an ever-changing world and acting in the moment without needing a comprehensive plan are impossibilities considering the outdated and ineffective practices in today's workplace resulting from restrictive behaviors and old habits and mindsets.

The capacities to create space for Silence and Spontaneity and to encourage Thinking Time are required if an organization wants to be ready to respond to the rapid changes in the marketplace, its workforce and global opportunities and challenges. And while some individuals may be prepared to champion the need for these behaviors, many people have accepted the current ways of operating as "what must be" in today's organizations.

Silence

Individuals need to take the opportunity to have quiet moments inside the rapid pace— often chaotic and constantly demanding— workplace of today's organizations.

Silence is not just the absence of acoustic noise; it is also the absence of the visual noise of a busy office, the mental noise of multi-tasking and the interruptive noise caused by the all-encompassing connectivity of cell phones, email and instant messages. What I am talking about is good old-fashioned hear-a-pin-drop silence, the type of silence that has the ability to rejuvenate our energy and unclutter our mind. There are few things more powerful than a group of people sitting in silence for one or two minutes before launching into a meeting.

Spontaneity

The old expression "Life is what happens while you are making plans" has never been more true for enterprises than it is today. Just as some parents will tend to over-plan and over-schedule every moment for their children, forsaking spontaneity for a predictable and controlled itinerary, so too have many of us within our organizational lives. If an unplanned event or opportunity arises within an organization, it is perceived as intrusive to the "plan." It is something that needs to be dealt with and then coordinated with others; as soon as you stop to coordinate with others you lose the opportunity to be spontaneous.

Think of an 18-wheeler barreling toward a concrete guardrail at top speed. Because of its burdensome size the 18-wheeler cannot react in time and, therefore, cannot avoid the crash. Now think of the same scenario, but instead of an 18-wheeler, this time imagine it is a person on a skateboard. The skateboarder is nimble and fluid and can react in time, thereby avoiding the wall.

Organizations, regardless of their size, need to be more nimble and fluid, embracing a culture in which teams are built for constant and unpredictable change. Spontaneity will become the norm when collaboration and knowledge sharing become the new currency for influence and results. Spontaneous events cannot be planned for and scheduled into a calendar. Spontaneity represents individual and organizational energy and an intuitive relationship with others in the organization and with the world, the marketplace and the global community.

Thinking Time

We have come to value the individual who can think fast on their feet with a ready answer. Rarely do we value or reward individuals or teams who indicate that they need additional time to respond to a query. In fact we often wonder if they have the capacity and knowledge that is needed. However, given the complexity of today's issues it is even more critical that we slow down to speed up and that organizations encourage and reward people for taking time to be thoughtful in their responses.

Thinking time offers people a chance to take time to process information and consider options before acting, instead of merely reacting with their top-of-mind thoughts. Many people in organizations today are going from meeting to meeting, task to task and conversation to conversation without time to integrate what they have experienced, to think about what they have heard, to contemplate a response or to step back from the experience in order to gain a broader perspective. This may be a byproduct of the questions and tasks with which people are being challenged or it may be a result of organizational cultures that value the fast answer instead of the best answer. What results can be likened to a game show condition where people rush to respond before the buzzer goes off and the chance to respond is gone forever; organizations are not game shows and the buzzer is often self-imposed.

This type of speed actually slows organizations down. Fast—not best—answers take more time in the long term and are seldom needed as early as organizations act like they are. The feeling of urgency and immediacy comes from the top down, from peers, from wanting to get something done and from being in a constant state of rush. When people have an opportunity to think before answering, what they offer is more in tune with their experience, knowledge and understanding rather than a reaction based on a fear of answering too slowly or being without a quick response or just wanting to get something behind you—over and done so

Initial Steps

(not perfect, but a place to start)

Three Things You Might Do:

1. Silence—start your day and/or start a meeting with 1 or 2 minutes of silence.
 2. Spontaneity—schedule “open time” on your schedule and make it sacred.
 3. Thinking Time—let others know when you need it and don't feel that it makes you “the problem.”
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you can get on to the next thing to rush.

It requires courage and a willingness to take risks to challenge the current norms, but to continue on the current path is not viable in both the short term and the long term. Providing a culture for people to have opportunities for silence, acting spontaneously and thinking time is necessary to innovate and create the solutions that today's reality requires of 21st Century organizations.