"Curiosity, Creativity & Change"

with Janice Francisco, CEO & Principal, BridgePoint Effect

Cross-polliNation podcast – Episode 16 - Dec-18

NBEE (HOST):	00:00	Welcome to Cross-polliNation. This week in our last show of the year, Cross-polliNation chats, curiosity, creativity and innovation inside organizations. It's a hot topic. Change and disruption are coming to nearly every industry. Companies need to figure out how it'll affect them and what they can do. Janice Francisco, the CEO and founder of BridgePoint Effect, is in the thick of it. Her company helps organizations internationally chart bold, new routes to innovate and respond to change. She tells us what organizations need to consider and why employees are their best creative resource when it comes to new ideas. We talk about how teams and organizations can collaborate better to solve challenges, some tough practical truths about innovation and how it's all connected by change. Janice starts with her unusual background and how she used it to improve some of organizations' least loved events - office meetings.
JANICE:	00:52	I did a Master's of Science in Creativity and Change Leadership, and what drew me to it was a challenge I found with my clients. So I was working on a lot of large organizational change programs where there was business transformation or some sort of technology transformation that the organization was wanting to achieve. And in my role as a change manager, because I also happened to have facilitation skills, if the teams I was working with found themselves up against a difficult challenge, they would often ask me to facilitate a meeting and get all the people together and figure stuff out,
NBEE (HOST):	01:39	Wait a second. Aren't traditional meetings about the opposite of creativity and change? Let's back up to where Janice had the idea that studying creativity and change leadership could change how those meetings worked and help her clients.

JANICE:	01:53	There was this typical ending where everybody felt better, that they'd had time in a room to talk things through but the thinking that derived out of the challenge wasn't really extraordinary. They were solving really complex, difficult challenges by coming up with status quo answers and it got me really intrigued. It's like, if this is so difficult to do, if this is such a big problem and you're coming up with obvious answers that you would have come up with anyway, why are we investing the time to figure this out together? And what if you could think differently about that? At the time though, I didn't have the skills to help people think differently and that's what sent me out on this quest to go and find a place where I could learn about how to help people think better and that's what got me into my Master's of Creativity and Change Leadership program.
NBEE (HOST):	03:02	So creativity in organizations isn't necessarily about artists or mad scientists: it is about realizing and cultivating creativity as a capacity we all have and that we're likely already using at work to solve problems and create value. Change leadership comes into play in dealing with changes that confront companies and innovating as response, in facilitating how organizations and the people in them react and adapt to change. Here's how BridgePoint Effect does its work.
JANICE:	03:30	We have three different focuses in the work that we do that's related to how organizations change and respond to change and use innovation to do that productively. So the first thing we do is we help leaders and their teams understand what it means to be innovative within their own context. And that's important because the way that one company is innovative is going to be very different for the need of innovation in a different company or different kind of organization. The second thing we do is we teach tools and skills that help to bring creative thinking into an organization so that people can embrace, respond to and implement change in a much more productive way. And the third thing we do is back to why I said we started this company in the first place. It was still facilitating thinking and more importantly to facilitate

creativity so that when organizations are engaged in strategic planning or they're dealing with critical organizational meetings where they need to creatively think through the challenges that they're dealing with, and engage their stakeholders and other people that they work with in a productive way. We bring the process and the tools to help them do that,

NBEE (HOST)	04:52	BridgePoint Effect has a range of tools and approaches that they use. I asked Janice, what's typically on her clients' minds when they seek out her company? Are they banging down the door, desperate for a dose of creativity?
JANICE:	05:06	The clients [that] are coming to us, they're coming because they see change on the horizon or in the midst of doing a change where they're realizing a need to respond a little differently or they want some support for their innovation program to make it more likely that people will start to behave in the way that they need to demonstrate to actually achieve innovation.
NBEE (HOST):	05:37	So innovation comes in different types - revolutionary disruptive breakthroughs as well as smaller scale incremental innovation that's still hugely important in creating value. Janice talks about how we often focus on the big disruptive innovations but sometimes overlook the value of incremental innovation, especially for small and medium size enterprises – SMEs that have under 500 employees. We talked about that particularly in the Canadian context, where according to Stats Canada, SMEs make up over 98% of businesses and contribute over 54% of GDP, and how focusing on incremental innovation in that sector can reap big benefits both here and for comparable businesses in other countries.
JANICE:	06:25	The sad thing is that Canada consistently is underperforming. And we are actually on a decline in our standings against other countries in the world in the way that we're innovating. That doesn't necessarily mean it's all bad. It just means that we aren't perhaps looking at innovation in the same way. Now on the other side of that, there's a strong desire

or recognition that innovation is important. There is not as much carry-through around how to make that tangible in a day-to-day aspect in our businesses. One of the things that I see happening is there's a lot of confusion around what we want by innovation and there's two kinds of innovation. What we call the revolutionary groundbreaking, absolutely new things that you know, for the most part, we perceive with what comes out of Silicon Valley, and there's also innovation that in how we're managing inside of businesses. Are we innovating the way that we do our work? Are we finding better ways to do it? Are we implementing technologies well or new technologies, are we willing to embrace new technologies so that we get the efficiencies and the value from them that they're promising. And that's what we call evolutionary or incremental innovation. Incremental innovation is definitely important to these small medium enterprises because it makes a big difference to their bottom line. There's a large value in that kind of innovation in your organization and not everybody understands that that's necessarily important too.

NBEE (HOST):   08:01   Zooming back in to individual organizations, BridgePoint Effect works with organizations in the private and public sectors. Janice noted that those two sectors are not as different as you might think when it comes to innovation and from my own experience I know that's true. In both, organizations are changing to respond to challenges and innovating to create new value or doing it in a new way, whether what they produce results in profit or in services to citizens. In trying to change and innovate, what do private and public sector organizations need? How do they start to think about going on an innovation journey and how do employees fit in?

JANICE: 08:35   We have people who find they have to respond to change differently so they're looking for new ways of working, new ways of thinking. Well, you know, one of the best ways that you can respond to change is through bringing your creativity and innovation skills to that mix. If you're an organization, and there are many who have put into their organizational strategy that they want to be more innovative - innovation is

one of their key strategies for sustaining the organization, growing the organization. Well, you know that is requiring a skillset that not everybody has. And you know, so we can leave innovation as something that is needed or used within a small part of an organization with a select few people, or we can look at it more broadly as: do we want to make a shift in the way that our organization is oriented and look at doing some level of upskilling with our employees. So looking at thinking skills, creativity, creative thinking skills and all of the skills associated with innovation, right. Like, how do we help people take risks? How do we get comfortable as an organization with taking risks when we know it's a necessary part of innovation? How do we build the relationships? How do we learn to collaborate? How do we communicate better? How do we bring a new set of eyes to the problems we're facing or the challenges we're facing and think differently and get outside our typical answers or the status quo approach? How do we imagine new possibilities where they're having some level of creativity and innovation skills in that workforce to make that happen?

NBEE (HOST):   10:25   Getting comfortable with the risks required to innovate and try new things that might not fly, does take adjustment both for organizations and at the level of employees. Organizational culture as well as strategy needs to support the kinds of activities innovation requires, like risk taking, tolerating possible failures and learning from them. Many people know the famous quote, "culture eats strategy for breakfast" and in this context it suggests if a company's culture doesn't support what it wants to do to innovate, it likely won't succeed, no matter how good it's strategy is. It also opens the door to cultural change when that's what's needed. One of the kinds of change getting innovative might demand. Janice talks about what it looks like when she first steps into a company.

JANICE: 11:09   I have a fabulous quote. It's accredited to Roosevelt, I believe, and I have it sitting in front of my desk all the time and it says, do what you can, where you are with what you have. So where we start is where they are and you know, an innovation journey from one

company to the next is very different because innovation happens within a context and there are very specific things an organization needs to do to be productive when it comes to innovation. Having a strategy around that and doing some thinking about why they want to be engaging in innovation, what it's going to do for them, those sorts of things. The "who, what, where, when, why" of a strategic plan is really important because that helps to align people in the organization. It helps to align the leadership team, you know, We've got to have a plan for what we want to do

JANICE: 12:12   even if the plan is: we're going to dip our toe in the water and just see if we can figure out a few things. It's still somewhat of a plan. So we start by looking at: where are they, what have they done, what's good about what they've done, what are their pain points, what are they really having some challenges with? And the other thing we look at is, well, what's your tolerance? Because anytime an organization is going through on an innovation journey, they're having to navigate change. It's the leadership team as well as the employees who have to go through that at the same time that they need to manage the business and keep that running, at least in the current state, right? So we need to figure out, you know, given all of the typical things that are on your plate: what's the level of energy and time and effort that you want to put into doing something new and doing things differently or examining where, you know, how you're going to achieve these innovation outcomes given everything else that you're doing? And I think that's often where organizations run into difficulty is they have this great desire - and maybe this explains why we have people who, organizations where we know they've put innovation as a key strategy, yet they haven't been able to implement and deliver on that in a consistent way. It's, I think, because of the level of energy and attention it takes to actually do it. And it goes to that human behavior aspect: change is hard.

NBEE (HOST):   13:56   Now we're into the tough practical stuff and before we climb out, I asked Janice what happens during change, when the need for change might suggest to

some employees that it invalidates all their past work and casts their experience to date aside. In a previous episode, Episode 14, "Why innovation is a survival skill" guest Shari Hughson talked about the Gallup poll survey that said 70% of employees are not engaged at work and how innovation can possibly re-engage them in solving problems, coming up with new ideas and re-committing to their organizations in the process

JANICE: 14:38   Imagine being in an organization and you've shown up to work every day, despite the challenges and stuff that's going on around you and you've sat there with your coworkers and you've given it your best and you've done your best and maybe without being fully aware of it, you were creative and you jumped through hoops and you could see some results for having done it. And then imagine somebody coming along and going, "hey folks, we need to be more innovative". You've been working hard. "Well, what do you think I've been doing? I took these three things and I pulled it together when nobody said it could happen", and I think it is very much could be interpreted as insulting, as well as a question to whether or not what you've been doing has value. And one of the things that I work with my clients, and this is part of what you say: if you're going down in innovation injury, let's also understand that, you know,

JANICE: 15:30   yes, tell me where you want to go, but at the same time, let's appreciate where you've been and what you've been doing when maybe you didn't have a very disciplined process for going through that. It's not a comment on what we've done so far. It's a comment on, man, it's going to be changing at a faster pace. You know, they say that the change we're experiencing today is unlike anything that we've experienced before and it's unlike anything we're going to experience going forward, which means we're going to have to deal with more change. Which means we need people in our workplace who have much greater capacity to deal with change and think productively as they move through that.

NBEE (HOST):	16:15	Getting to the core reasons for why an organization wants to innovate helps people be clear on why they're being asked to participate in change. To help them work through change and innovation challenges, BridgePoint Effect draws on a Foursight tool that gives an indication of each person's creative thinking style and their preferred way to work. It's intended to help people understand how their preferences can influence how they work and how they collaborate during different phases of an innovation process. From building information around a challenge to coming up with ideas, developing solution, and deploying it. Janice describes the four thinking styles, how some people combine them and how the thinking assessment works,
JANICE:	16:53	So this is a piece of research that evolved out of a discipline or a thinking process called Creative Problem Solving, and what happened was the developer, Dr Gerard Puccio, was working with various groups of people and what he started to observe more and more was that at some points of what he was teaching, people would come to him and go, "oh my gosh, I just loved those tools in that thing that you were just teaching us. This was fabulous. I'm so excited to be doing this" and then somebody else, having gone through the exact same training would come back and say, "oh my God, I hope we don't have to do anymore. That I found that was terribly draining. I didn't enjoy that". And he started to get curious. And so part of his doctoral studies, he started looking at why do some people respond in one way to a process for thinking creative problem solving versus another. And what he found was that there were four very distinct ways that people were describing the kinds of things they do when they approach a challenge and they need to solve a problem.
JANICE:	18:13	So he turned that into a model called Foursight that describes the thinking preferences that people engage in as they figure out how to tackle those challenges. So the first preference is to clarify the problem [Clarifiers] or the situation itself, so look at it from a number of different angles and look at the detail and sort out what's going on and you know,

who's involved in those sorts of things. And the second step is to generate ideas [Ideators]: look at options of how are we going to solve this problem. And the third step is to look at it from the standpoint of developing those ideas into workable solutions [Developers]: how do we get those ideas to actually live within the context within which we're work. And the final step is implementing it [Implementors] and getting it done. And what we know is that each one of us has a preference to engage in one or more of those steps and that has a big impact on the way we think through challenges, the way we work with each other, the kind of results we get. And when you look at this through the lens of many organizations who are looking at innovation as a really important aspect of the sustainability of the organization

JANICE: 19:38   this has a direct tie to innovation because it's the creativity of individuals and the way they think that actually supports what we're doing with innovation.

NBEE (HOST):   19:50   The assessment addresses preferences. It doesn't suggest that people's actions aren't affected by other factors or that we're not adaptable and we can't flex to develop and exercise new skills. Janice explains how it works.

JANICE: 20:03   Well, here's the analogy I like to use. If I were to ask you to pick up a pen, my bet is you're going to pick up that pen in one particular hand, and that's the hand that you prefer to write with. Well, if I were to ask you to pick up the pen in your opposite hand, you could do it, but it would take you more energy and so thinking works the same way. So if you prefer to think in one of those four styles and you're being asked, because you're working on an innovation team or just because of the thinking process, you have to go through, you have to think all of those other aspects. What you'll find is, as you switch modes of thinking and move through this process your energy may peak or it may come down. And so if we have an understanding of that, particularly if we're working in an environment that's asking us to move quickly where things need to happen in a particular way

JANICE:	21:09	we have better information on how to manage ourselves and manage each other as we go through those peaks and valleys. So the way we think as we solve challenges and problems is almost like an energy wave. My energy wave is going to be different than yours and if we understand that, okay, here's the step we're on and here's the kind of thinking [that's needed], we can have a lot more empathy with each other for how we're moving through that and we can use tools and process to help us through that and help keep our energy up and keep us focused on what is it that you really need to do to
NBEE (HOST):	21:46	That speaks to teams, employees and creativity. I also asked Janice how companies can adapt to the need for innovation and the risks that come with trying new solutions, how they can approach entering a new, sometimes uncertain, complex and ambiguous world. I asked what the low hanging fruit is that organizations can access quickly and relatively easily to get their innovation engines moving.
JANICE:	22:10	You know, there's rules and every organization and as we start to ask people to be more creative and engaging in innovation, the perception is they're going to have to start breaking rules. Well, it's not so much that we're going to be breaking rules. It's that we're going to be breaking habits. We're going to get the organization out of the habit that it's been in. And so one of, I think one of the places for the low hanging fruit, is to ask people and we go, let's just work from a few assumptions. Let's say that you can't add headcount and I'm not going to give you more money and I still want you to come up with a way to solve a problem or deal with a challenge. Something that bugs you on a day to day basis within the realm of what you and your team are doing that you know that if you could just put a little bit of effort into doing some different thinking and you had the approval to go ahead and do it
JANICE:	23:12	you could make it a whole lot better. And so we ask people to just look at the day to day pain points of that isn't working and we keep doing it that way and there's gotta be a better way to do it. And we give

them the time with the support of their leadership team to go explore what would happen if we did this differently What do we need to do to this differently? There is no risk or repercussion here because all we're doing is thinking what would happen if we do it. And we asked them to explore it and look at it and take it apart in a whole bunch of different ways and now we ask them to come back a few months later and explain what happened in the process of questioning the status quo. And what's fascinating is the learning that starts to solidify in the organization because the employees start to understand that their manager who's been working with them on this little experiment of, what if we did it differently and what could our recommendations be,

JANICE: 24:20   they all start to realize that there are other possibilities and there is possibility within constraint because we said: no new headcount, no new budget, so what can you do to make this better? How could you do this? And then they come back and they go, wow, we took this thing that's always the bugging us and here's what we've got. At the same time we go, maybe you'll explore it and you'll realize you can't do it differently and you just have to accept that. But that's okay too. Does that mean that the experiment failed? Does it mean that it was successful? It means that you learned something about the environment that we're in and we've also learned something about taking the risk of looking at something differently. So I think the low hanging fruit is the day to day stuff that bugs you and finding a way to safely engage in a risk that's supported so that people start to understand that all innovation requires some level of risk taking. And if we can give people that learning that forms a beautiful basis for looking at doing bigger innovation projects, tackling more challenging things, maybe doing a special innovation project. Or just looking at that incremental innovation over and over and over again.

NBEE (HOST):   25:40   Something I was curious about, in addition to the processes that need to happen in organizations to catalyze innovation is rebel thinkers of the kind we heard about in Episode 14: people who naturally often think differently and are the first to identify problems

and the need for change and how to solve them. We often hear that people like this are critical to organizations and they sometimes lead the way when change needs to happen, but how do those natural rebels fit in terms of working within companies? What's your role if you're someone who thinks differently and often sees opportunities for things to be different?

JANICE: 26:17   We need people in our organizations who are going, hey look at this, we could be doing better, we could be doing things differently, who say, hey, this is over on the horizon - we need to be paying attention to this and get prepared for it. We need people like that in organizations. And those people also need to understand they have to be respectful of the limits and the boundaries of the organization itself: the limits and the boundaries or the attention of the management team or the leaders in your organization have to put to attention on that. You know, it all has to work. We always talk about an innovation ecosystem, well there's an innovation ecosystem, even within an organization, and we have to figure out how to get all of the pieces working together, focused on creating that change in a productive way. So it's one thing to say, "hey, I have an idea". It's another thing to say, "I have an idea that's going to solve this particular challenge that we're experiencing in the organization and here's the ways that I think we could develop it and here's the value it can create ultimately".

NBEE (HOST):   27:26   This is a pretty pragmatic approach to balancing innovation and the realities of organizations and it's very similar to the balance the organizations themselves need to strike in spending time and resources on innovating at the same time as looking after their current operations. Too much innovation and existing operations slide; too little and the organization risks becoming stagnant and declining. As a final question and bringing things back to where we started with creativity, we talked about, if creativity is necessary for innovation, how can all of us cultivate it more strongly in ourselves, knowing that creativity activates more strongly and easily with practice.

Janice recommends a large dose of openness and a little practice at doing things differently.

JANICE: 28:11   How often do you go to the same restaurant versus choosing a different restaurant? So, it's how do we give ourselves experiences of something new in a safe way, to the level that we're willing to experience something new. That's one way. So looking for newness, bringing something fresh, exposing ourselves to new ideas or new places. So if we are in very heavily knowledge based work, actually taking up something that allows us to use our creativity in a different way can be helpful: so cooking, taking an art class, going out for a walk. Walking in the forest is something that they talk about as a mean way of improving your creativity. So it's looking at different ways that you can start to build a skill. Being curious. You know, what if you spent the entire day asking, why does that happen? I'm sure everybody can connect to a point where they were exposed to a three year old and all they did all day long was go, "but why? But why? But why?" If we're willing to be curious, we can start to open up to what might be the possibilities for something else. Play is so important to developing that creativity skill. There's so much around that from imagination. So playing in whatever way we find to be really important to us. And there was a great book, I believe it was by Stuart Brown and it was titled "Play", and he talked about the different ways that people like to play. Some people like to play by research, other people like to play competitive sports and developing that skill really helps with creativity too.

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