

emergent by design

How to Design Culture: 16 Patterns to Build Adaptive Learning Organizations

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POSTED BY VENESSA MIEMIS IN UNCATEGORIZED

≈ 11 COMMENTS

Tags

culture



How do we form learning cultures in times of accelerating change?

What tools and practices can self-organizing structures implement to become more agile and adaptive?

I just received a copy of a new book by Dan Mezick called The Culture Game, which is all about answering the above inquiry. It touts itself as “the reference manual and toolbox for management “culture hackers,” those innovators and change-makers who are focused on creating a culture of learning inside their team...and the wider organization.”

I’ve known Dan now for the better part of this year, and he’s been feeding me these tips, which are totally changing the ways I approach my own personal growth and development, as well as how I’m interacting with others.

For me, the culture hacking movement really gets to the essence of how to build /become a learning organization and transform the future of work.

Below are the 16 learning practices outlined in the book, and a brief description of each.

<In just a few weeks, I’ll be going to the Culture Conference in both Philly and Boston to get some firsthand experience with these tools and frameworks. If you plan to come, click here to register and

enter discount code CULTUREHACKING to get \$10 bucks off!>

1. Be Purposeful

““It is easy to maintain your focus when you have a clear purpose.””

Ain't that the truth. I've found myself thrashing plenty a time when I allowed myself to slip off course, get pulled in multiple directions, or generally lose the thread of my core values and principles. Decision-making and goal-setting alone or in groups becomes much easier with an explicitly stated purpose.

2. Facilitate Your Meetings

““Facilitated meetings tend to have a clear goal, a clear set of rules, and a clear way to track progress. They provide space for the convener to observe and reflect.””

Meetings can be painful. I'm in them daily, whether by phone, skype, google hangout or meatspace. Without some advanced planning, they drag on 10 times longer than necessary and don't actually accomplish much. Facilitated meetings can be engaging learning experiences, and fun.

further exploring: [Gamestorming: A playbook for Innovators, Rulebreakers and Changemakers](#)

3. Examine Your Norms

““Normal is what you willingly tolerate. Examine your norms, because what you tolerate is a minimal level of what you insist on. Insist on norms that encourage tribal greatness.””

A huge contributor to the learning and development I've been experiencing has been through constant examination and inspection. Treating various tasks and interactions as experiments has been a way to give myself permission to 'fail.' When that's followed by an honest retrospective and an openness to learning from the experience, habits seem to change quickly.

further exploring: [Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap – and Others Don't](#)

4. Be Punctual

““Punctuality associates with focus, commitment and respect; these in turn associate with individual and group greatness.””

In the past, I've had a tenuous relationship with time, perhaps even gone so far as to pretend it didn't exist, or that I was somehow exempt from its rules. I wanted things to just be fluid and organic, just flowing with where the energy moved me at the moment. This is fine for certain kinds of activities, but when in a group environment, we can't all learn if we're not all present. Now that I'm noticing the precious value of my own time, I'm respecting it. I'm becoming much more aware of how others value their time, and how they demonstrate the degree to which they value mine.

5. Structure Your Interactions

““Use protocols to clarify essential interactions. Employ structured speech as a tool to clarify the meaning of what you say.””

Communication can be tricky. Without some structured ways of addressing what is transmitted and received, misunderstandings can quickly lead to loss of trust and conflict. There are many simple ways to structure interactions so that we have frameworks for things like investigating another person's feelings, for deciding, for providing feedback, or for questioning another person's

intentions.

further exploring: [Software For Your Head: Core Protocols for Creating and Maintaining Shared Vision](#)

6. Announce Your Intent

““Be easy to follow by announcing what you intend to do. Announcing your intent is making a request for help. State what you are doing with purpose.””

I’ve spent a lot of time this year both personally offline and posting to this blog about intentions and how to get clarity around them. The more I experiment with collaborating with others and in the whole concept of self-organizing systems, the more I see the necessity for clarity around intent. We’re usually taught to hide any signs of “weakness” – like having needs – and so there is a lot of important information that is not being disclosed. I’ve found it becomes extremely difficult to align with others when it’s vague as to what they’re working on exactly, what problems they’re dealing with, and what their general trajectory and intentions are.

further exploring: [Who Really Matters: The Core Group Theory of Power, Privilege, and Success](#)

7. Game Your Meetings

““Meetings suck when attendance is not optional, when the goal and rules are fuzzy, and when there is no way to track progress.””

A good game has 4 properties: a clear goal, a clear set of rules that are uniformly applied, a clear way to get feedback and measure progress, and opt-in participation. Creating working agreements for meetings makes them fun and productive.

further exploring: [Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams Great](#)

8. Conduct Frequent Experiments

““Frequent experimentation means frequent learning.””

I tend to approach life with a sense of childlike wonder anyway, and now I’m playfully engaging in experiments of all kinds, weekly. Whether it’s how I’m managing my time and workflow, how I’m setting and maintaining boundaries, or how I’m showing gratitude to others, I’m paying attention and really adapting to what works for me.

9. Manage Visually

““Radiate information and use visual artifacts to define physical space that in turn will influence thoughts and perception.””

One wall of my office is graced with whiteboard paint, another is covered in corkboards that have my personal kanban daily workflow, weekly and monthly goals, book chapter themes I’m fleshing out, storyboards for video projects, and various photos that inspire me. Keeping up with these boards gives me a tremendous sense of location in the larger narrative of my life, and a sense of control and progress.

10. Inspect Frequently

““Change is the new normal. Extensive change means high complexity. Use iteration and frequent inspection to make a game of change.””

Conducting retrospectives on a weekly basis has been tremendously helpful in adopting a more iterative attitude towards life and work. Constant learning and adaptation are becoming the standard operating system for myself and my colleagues. This seems to be making the idea of changing old beliefs, habits and patterns as fun and experimental, versus scary and impossible.

11. Get Coached

""Coaching helps the learning process and is a best practice. A coach will see what you do not and cannot.""

Coaches help cultivate personal mastery. A group of people taking responsibility for leveling up their personal mastery, and hence the tribe's mastery, is a forcefield. I love coaching!

12. Manage Your Boundaries

""Be mindful of boundaries for authority, role, and tasks. Loosen boundaries for inquiry and dialogue, tighten boundaries when deciding and executing. Manage boundaries to create the kind of space your tribe needs to accomplish every kind of work.""

Boundary management has been another big focus of mine this year. Where boundaries are fuzzy, stress and chaos seem to be nearby.

13. Socialize Books

""Books contain ideas and concepts that you can leverage in pursuit of tribal greatness. Select the right books to reiterate the beliefs, values, and principles you want.""

I enjoy GoodReads for keeping up with what my friends are reading. Now where's the free p2p ebook sharing platform?

14. Pay Explicit Attention

""Pay attention to what is working and what is not. Zoom in on details and focus on interactions and results.""

Though this one sounds similar to some of the above practices, this one is a general principle of mindfulness. I've noticed that becoming aware of reality is sometimes painful. But nothing is going to change, let alone become great, without facing harsh facts and then deciding what to do about it.

15. Open the Space

""Open Space meetings are fantastic for managing the integration of transitions, evolution and learning in groups. These meetings generate opportunities for expression, inquiry, dialogue, and learning.""

Big fan of open space. It creates a safe and flexible environment for ideas to cross-pollinate and for people to have fun together.

further exploring: [Open Space Technology](#)

16. Be Playful

""Play games to get work done. Use games for simulation, work, and learning.""

If the lines between work and life are getting blurred, then why not make it fun? Transitioning to 'work as play' makes me feel more engaged, connected, and safe.

further exploring: [Innovation Games: Creating Breakthrough Products Through Collaborative Play](#)

Interest piqued? Come to [CultureCon](#)! Every attendee at the Boston event (Sept 14) can look forward to receiving a complimentary copy of The Culture Game. Hope to see you there!

To get the Culture Game book, click [here](#).

To register for CultureCon, click [here](#). (enter code CULTUREHACKING for \$10 off)

For more on the event and speakers, go [here](#).

thoughts on “How to Design Culture: 16 Patterns to Build Adaptive Learning Organizations”

1. *said:***Glisten**

August 16, 2012 at 8:12 pm

Thank you so much for this post Venessa, these are highly relevant insights into effective group dynamics which speak directly to what I am working through with a group right now! So much real direction toward action to embrace and embody, I am inspired!

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2. *said:***DaniBelleDakini**

August 16, 2012 at 8:24 pm

Reblogged this on [theofficemystic](#) and commented:

Normally I would not be a fan of the ‘Reblog’, especially when I’ve just launched my own Blog. That said, I would be remiss in not sharing with my loved ones the experiences of these incredibly engaged and actively awesome leaders who are blueprinting, map-making, and open source communicating their own evolution for those of us who are experiencing these shared visions of a new culture.

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3. *said:cocreatr*

August 16, 2012 at 8:36 pm

Piqued, indeed. Culture eats strategy for lunch. To see why, google that.

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4. *said:edbrenegar*

August 17, 2012 at 7:09 am

I agree Bernd. Culture is precognitive; strategy all cognitive.

I like this Venessa. Especially 13, Socialize books. Goodreads is one of only a couple FB apps that I'm willing to use. Are we connected there?

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