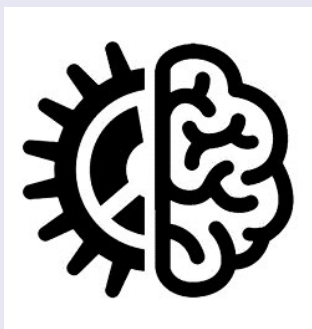


Workshops: Slowing Down to Sprint Forward



As I write this article we are two weeks into the new year and the air is thick with resolutions to be healthier, fitter and more mindful. By the time this article comes to print, however, the vast majority of us will have slipped back into old habits and the vegan diet cookbook will be collecting dust on the bookshelf.

It is no different at work; we probably know that more collaborative and creative working can lead to great things but when budgets are tight, or the deadline clock is ticking, convening a group workshop may seem like the kind of idea to get you fired; not only does it risk opening a can of worms that may challenge existing thinking, but it could also cost valuable time and money in the process.

On the contrary; pausing to invest in the often-misunderstood workshop may actually be the risk we should all be taking if we want to progress this year – especially when it comes to aligning on important decisions, dreaming up breakthrough ideas or truly appreciating research findings.

Here are just a few key reasons why:

The lightbulb moment

Businesses are overwhelmed with information – so much so that we often cannot pinpoint the real insight – and culture robs us of the crucial time we need to really digest what we are learning or consider the implications of how we are responding. Ringfencing some quality time and space to step away from ‘the noise’ and take a closer look at what you know (and don’t know) enables you to spot things you could not previously and plan more meaningful next steps.

Embrace difference

Skipping stakeholder engagement in decision making and project management is often a false economy, even more so now remote working has removed some of our everyday office interaction. The value of bringing together multiple perspectives in a targeted session should not be underestimated – both in terms of ironing out potential issues or agreeing a common goal and in actively seeking or benefiting from the richness of diverse thinking. We mustn’t fear different opinions, constructive criticism or a temporary spanner in the works; when managed properly they form a healthy part of the creative process that will help ensure thinking is stretched.

Push the boundaries

From a young age we are encouraged to think logically and follow failsafe methods and this habit is perpetuated in the workplace where having a tried and tested process is applauded. However, with the same approaches come the same solutions, which doesn’t help us to stand out from the competition. Workshops offer a safe place to innovate, try things out and have a play without judgement or consequence. Using creative techniques that inspire the brain to find new neural pathways gives teams the opportunity to have fun with new concepts and see where they go.

Smart working

A common misconception of workshops is their perceived preference for style over substance; most brands cannot justify what many consider to be just a fun day out of the office when there is ‘real work’ to be achieved. However, a well-designed session delivered by an experienced facilitator can be considerably more productive in generating a high volume of ideas or content iterations than a handful of teleconferences or email conversations. Even a standard meeting with flipcharts and post its – often seen as the halfway house to true workshoping – can disappoint in terms of the quantity (and quality) of work produced. The key lies in maintaining engagement and energy levels.

Feel it in your belly

We have all been the victim of a 90-minute slow death by PowerPoint experience that has left us none the wiser about what the findings of a piece of research really mean or what to do next. Taking just an extra couple of hours to build a deeper and more intuitive understanding of what it is like to live with depression or step inside the barriers to market entry with a new cancer drug will ensure we move forward to strategic planning with a visceral rather than superficial ownership of insight.

Individually, we do not have all the answers to the challenges facing us in 2018 and beyond. But if we are willing to slow down and invest more in the quality of our group thinking, the brands that we represent will be in considerably better health by the time January 2019 comes around.

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