

Everyone should have a little packet of stuff that got handed out. And what I'd like to share today is something that I've been kind of exploring and working on for quite a while, but it's recently kinda come to a new catalyzing point. And I noticed some of my other colleagues in this so-called "rock block" mentioned the thing you need to know about me. And I guess if there's one thing you need to know about me, it's that I'm a wonderer. I wonder a lot.

I design. I drive. I do other human, regular things, but I actually do wonder, and I look up at the clouds, and I kind of think about things. I wonder about big things, like where's technology going, and is that interaction gonna work for the customers that we're designing it for. And I wonder about little things, like where I put my keys.

But part of it is I wonder about creativity, and I wonder about the activity of having ideas, both as individuals and as part of a community of practice. And in the field that we're in, that's increasingly the skill that we need to be able to make sure is we're always on our game.

And I like to think about ideas, and having ideas is like breathing, right? You start with questions. You breathe the questions in, and then somehow you breathe those ideas out. And it's kind of an iterative process, and it goes back and forth, and ideas and questions come in all different shapes and sizes.

But it's that process of breathing and being really good at it that I think is part of an exchange with the world. And working in creative teams, how we can facilitate our own creative exchanges, I think is part of what it means to be in an organization that can learn, that can advance, that can solve hard problems when they come up, and that can constantly be thinking about new ways to approach the problems that – as Cameron said earlier in the talk, the new problems that come up every day.

So I also like to think about ideas a little bit like sex, right? So you wanna have a lot of 'em, and you want 'em to be really awesome every time, and you wanna have 'em with great people.

So with that kind of as our foundation, I thought we could structure the time today a little bit as breathing in and breathing out. So for the first half of the day – or our session together, I'll be breathing out and telling you some things. And in the second half, you'll be breathing out, and we'll be sharing things together, like capturing some of our own knowledge and what we do in our own organizations to foster a creative culture.

So speaking of wondering, this was a catalyzing event. I was about to get on a plane, and I was in the bookstore. And I love *Harvard Business Review*, and with a title like *Harvard Business Review on Breakthrough Thinking*, how can you go wrong? So I bought this book, and I was reading it on the plane, and this one article really stood out. This was an article called "How to Kill Creativity." That's just a buzzkill right there.

But it was fascinating, and this is written in 1998. The Harvard Business Review imprint is kind of a collection, a curatorial collection of past articles that have been published in the mag. And Dr. Teresa Amabile is a researcher who's been working on organizational creativity for over 35 years. So she has this ginormous body of really interesting work about organizational and personal creativity.

And as I was reading it, not only is her work very well founded, a lot of anecdotal but also empirical evidence from organizations, but it also had this really beautiful structure to it, and I just couldn't get it out of my mind. And I had to put it down there because I thought, "You know, if this was in some kind of visual framework kind of form, I wonder if I could use this to be more knowledgeable and thoughtful about the kind of everyday practices we do at Adaptive Path, and get better at them, make sure we don't lose anything with some of our activities, that we enforce the creative culture, and fill in some of the gaps that I know we have."

So into this thing. So this thing is an accounting of the article, with some extensions and enhancements based on my experience at Adaptive Path, that kinda tries to structure what's at play within an environment of creativity, and specifically a creative culture. And the way that it's framed is in three kinda major ways.

So the idea is that this blueprint can work as kind of a guide for creative culture, 'cause it frames it in three big chunks. One, how do you get it? How do you initially create a creative culture? The second one is, how do you nourish it, foster it? And the third one is, how do you support it? And those sound like they might all be the same thing, but there's some really different interesting principles at play with those.

So after I made this framework, I went through a bunch of our activities – this is just a little bit of a side project – behaviors and practices, things we do at Adaptive Path, to see why were these things working. I don't know if you experienced this, but occasionally there's a behavior or a meeting or an activity you do as a company, and you think, "Oh, that feels like us. It feels right." And then someone comes in, and they wanna change it, or your organization grows and it's not working any longer, and you think, "Well, we can't get rid of that. That's like our heart and soul." You can't really put your finger on why.

And I found that, by using this kind of blueprint as a framework, I could better understand why, and that meant we were okay to mix things up and change things when they needed to be changed. There wasn't that fear of losing something really important.

So I'm just gonna walk through a little bit of the structure of the blueprint. It's divided into three different zones. First one's – they're all labeled, but they're very teeny print, as Peter said. So the first zone is what creates a creative culture, what feeds it, and then the last one, what supports it. And then if you do any reading around creative literature or kind of the nature of how ideation and new things happen in organizational structures, you'll probably recognize things like this.

So there's the second piece of the structure of these areas, and there's nine of them. And they have these big, broad words, right? Like "expertise," "creative thinking skills," or "motivation." There's huge bodies of work just on these topics alone. "Challenge," "freedom," "resources," and they all sound so great, but when you start to actually put your mind around what that means, it gets very – it's too abstract. You kinda can't connect to it. I don't know what freedom looks like at Adaptive Path. I think I have it, but I don't really know.

Especially in the organizational structure section. So work group features. Well, we all got 'em, whether or not they're good, right? But what does that really mean? And a lot of the literature kinda stays at this level, and it gives you great anecdotes and examples. But it doesn't give you something to play with, some tool or some kinda system, as BJ Fogg might reference.

So the cool part about the article and the extensions to it are, there's actually these 32 elements that sit underneath those areas that start to give more specificity and life. These are things like passion, which admittedly is still pretty open and broad. But there's examples. There's little bits of that that actually help you say, "Oh, I know how I can work on that in the organization," or "I can see that." Things like time for exploration.

If I asked you, "Harry, do you have time for exploration in your design creative practice at your work?" – no. He would say no. But he'd have an answer, right? What if I said, "Do you have resources?" Well, yeah, but that doesn't mean anything. So things like goals that don't shift, as we all know. Card. Thank you, by the way, for the – and time for exploration. Those are things that research has shown really are important to foster a sense of creative practice, freshness, and enlivening us.

And then onto the organization section, things like mandating information-sharing is one that occurred. And it's just one example that companies who have essentially forced or mandated information-sharing have started to see really different responses in how their communities of practice start to interrelate and cross-pollinate ideas.

And so using this blueprint, there's two major ways that I've been playing with it, and this all part of a greater experiment to see how far this can go. You can use it as an assessment tool. So you can go through, look at some of the elements that are at play, and say, "How do we do that? Do we do that thing? Do we have time for exploration? Yes, no?" You can use it to kinda figure out a gap analysis for yourself.

Or you can also use it as an ideation tool. What kinds of activities or practices could we do every day that can be simple, cheap, and become part of our everyday, habitualized activity that could reinforce or promote this activity?

And then the kicker is making sure you were working at the right level of scale, right? So activities still is pretty an open term, but things like meetings, resources or rooms, physical space. Conferences like this would be considered an activity, a place where you can go, get outside of your own design challenges and socialize around ideas. Routines,

behaviors, policies are also activities. And by putting these two pieces to work, you can actually start to play with and craft your own creative culture.

So I'm gonna walk through just about three different examples, because you know it's coming, right? I'm gonna ask you to write one of these down from your own culture, so start thinking. And hopefully, if you had a chance to even take a glance at it, you'll already have a little bit of a preview.

But I wanna walk you through three that are part of the 57 that I've collected both from Adaptive Path, interviews with people, as well as just magazines and articles that I've been reading.

And the first – so the blueprint of one of these, like, note cards that are capturing this activity is to just write it down in as simple, basic terms as possible. This actually isn't rocket science. There are things that we forget about because there's so much part of our daily routine.

So here's one called Five-Minute Madness. We do this at Adaptive Path. It's a session of five minutes where you pose a question that you think may or may not be true. And then we do this at our company meetings once a month, and there's six slots. You sign up. And for five minutes, the group discusses that question. But the kicker is, you have to kinda say something you don't think is true, or might not be true, or you're not sure. So it's automatically kind of an odd thing to be doing. After the group discusses it, five minutes, stop sign goes up, you're done, but it's been a little bit of that getting it out there, starting to foster other conversations.

What's interesting about this is, when you start to take it and deconstruct it and put it against the creative blueprint, some really important fundamental pieces start to emerge, right? So departing from the status quo. You have to say something you think isn't true, so it's a place where groupthink can't be the No. 1 – it can't be the informing part of the question. You're forced to get outta your comfort zone.

It encourages diverse perspectives in our work groups, because you're used to listening to a different perspective and point of view. In fact, you expect it.

It reinforces open communication. It says that our company meetings, this is a place where you can say something, not be sure, but rely on the group social aspect to help you make those ideas better.

For the recipients or the listeners, it helps you meet things with an open mind. So you hear something that – "Holy crap, that's wrong." But you're there, and you're able to actually balance in practice, not having that gut "no" reaction, that negative bias.

And honestly, without Five-Minute Madness, I don't think I'd be standing up here doing something, an activity in a venue I've never done before, with more people than I've ever done it before, because really, Five-Minute Madness is about taking risks. It's kinda hard

to stand up in front of your colleagues and say, "Here's something I don't think is true." It's even worse to kinda be wrong or think you're wrong in front of your colleagues. But, you know, if you practice, you could get really good at it, as I have learned.

So that's one of them. The second is something that many companies do, and I hope that this will make the activity part of it feel pretty accessible, is brown bags. Someone from either the organization or outside the organization comes in. You have lunch. You listen to what they gotta say. Google puts theirs on video. A lot of the other big companies down south, in Silicon Valley, have open ones the public can come to.

And, again, when you put this against some of the practices, you hear – you start to realize it's firing on different levels. So we've heard from a variety of futurists, people doing interesting research, and what it does is it gets out of our own problem space and helps us understand themes and trends in other problem spaces, and that's part of that creative thinking skill set that we need to have.

We also ask folks if they wanna share their portfolio. It's like any time you join an organization. It's like that person's brand new when they walk in and they've never done anything before, unless they insist on telling you about it, right? But this is a chance to kinda have a little bit of a ride-along to who they were before. That means you can get to know their skills and abilities in a way that might not come up naturally within the course of your work together.

Also ad hoc working sessions. Just working with people that you don't always have an opportunity to work with can smooth quite a bit of those paths when you are in a critical project and you have to have a good working relationship based on honesty and an open mind.

And then the last one, and this is directly kind of an assault against many colleagues who feel that meetings are essentially the death knell of any kind of productive behavior, right? Like show up in a meeting – worse yet, standing meetings. God forbid, you meet once a week to talk to people that you work with, right?

But as part of our sales consulting meeting, we do a few things within the body of that meeting that I think are unusual. So the name of this activity is weekly consulting sales meeting, and when we apply that against this creative blueprint, you see that we actually have conversations around the fit between practitioners and the nature of the creative work that's up for a possibility to work on, from the point of Adaptive Path. We actually intentionally talk about that. We don't talk necessarily about the approach and the fit, but we talk about how we get to a better approach and fit. We talk philosophically about it.

We also try and match people with assignments. People are able to stand up and say, "That's interesting to me. I've done something like that. That's a creative problem I wanna help solve." It's very hard to get that kind of leverage and even that kind of insight or feedback in many companies. And if you make a place for it, it'll happen, and then kinda natural collections of working teams start to emerge.

It also helps us know each other's passions. So even if you don't work on a project that strikes at that heart of the passion, I know what it is. I can find out what Paula's interested in, or Pam, or Peter, or any of their colleagues, because they're actually vocal about it. They're used to stating what they expect in the world, and that makes it more likely to happen.

And that paves the way for shared excitement. When you are working on a project, you know that when times get rough, people wake up and they say, "I signed up for this because I'm interested and I care."

So looking at the weekly consulting meeting and saying "Wow, I think that's actually a driver of some pretty core fundamental creative behaviors in our organization" was a real wakeup call for me. And I hadn't expected that kinda follow-up and feedback from admittedly a very simple list of stuff kinda put together in a visual model.

So then the next question is, if you're gonna plus it or do something more with it, how can we generate more of these things and capture more activities like this and then socialize them? Because someone's organization might think, "Oh, it's old-hat to have brown bags," but in another organization, that might just be that small, simple behavior that can start to move things around.

And thus was born this lightning session of rapid collaboration. And so all you need to do such a thing is a visual prompt, something to write on and write with, and a whole bunch of awesome, smart people, all with individual ideas that just aren't connected yet.

So the instructions – now for the breathing – I'm gonna start breathing in; you guys are gonna start breathing out your creativity and your insights – is a ten-minute activity. And if you think that's short, it's okay. That's like four YouTube videos. Right?

*[Audience laughter]*

Think how – or even TED videos, right? So you can get a lot done in ten minutes if you're focused.

So we're gonna bring the lights up. I want you to look through the teeny-tiny little print, but it is clear. It's just quite small. And look around for something that seems to make sense. None of this is complex or should feel fairly obvious, but look for something that you guys do. Do you feel like your money is appropriate amount? Are there principles or practices in your company that help that be true? Human resources policies, even? That might be something you wanna work on. How does your organization communicate that the work matters?

So just take a look through this, pick an element, and then think about an activity. How does that actually take form in the world? So if you have mutual support, how does that actually start to happen?

When I was test-driving this on a friend who works in a completely different field, he was irritated and said, "You know, we don't have a creative culture. We don't have a creative company. I don't wanna do this anymore." And he said – and I'm like, "Well, when you work with people, how do you know that you guys are supporting each other when times get rough?" He goes, "Well, we know each other really well. We go to lunch every day." As a team. Their whole team. Every day. I was like, "Well, that's an activity." He's like, "Really?" I'm like, "Yeah. You go to lunch every day? You guys are actually there for each other."

And then the last simple step is just to write it down. Really basic. It might be a brown bag. It might be having lunch. It might be that thing that helps get more exploration space or sticking to deadlines. Holy crap, if anyone here has some good thoughts on that, I think there's gonna be a really, really wild audience for those.

And we're gonna do this in ten minutes, and the result of this work, after we've captured things like this, is gonna be a whole bunch of things like this. Hopefully 200, 300, 350, if everybody does one. That's a lot of really big ideas to start to – or little ideas, even, to start to look through.

We're gonna take ten minutes for that, and then I'll tell you what the next step in my commitment back to you is gonna be.

So how am I gonna make the most of what you just did and your efforts and contributions? Well, I don't know yet, 'cause I don't know what's gonna come out of this. But I suspect, coming from a UX practice, that there will be cards, and they will be stacked or sorted in some way, okay? They might even be clustered. There might even be more than one cluster, and they will hopefully be associated with areas across this structure, which means that we can use it now as kind of a collection of areas – if you look through and do some gap analysis – of areas that you do wanna invest some of your time and efforts in, and have some simple and clear and proven ideas for what you can do in your own organizations.

And that always brings up, at the last point, is like, "What's the point of this, anyway?" And anytime I think about a creative culture, we talk about it, it becomes this kind of its own idea on itself, and you can't disconnect that from the bigger picture.

So a little bit back to the clouds. Imagine every day waking up and being part – not only participating in, but actually actively helping form, foster, nourish, and support an environment that's open, where people really can get the best ideas out there and collectively can co-create those, when we can do that with customers. We can do that with other people out in the world.

And what that lets us do as designers – how that generosity, how that openness, how really that spirit of living and learning in public, to always get to that best idea – not your idea, but that best idea, can actually help make great experiences for others.

So we are on our way to lunch. I wanna give a shout-out to all the creative contributors who have brought this work this far. Dr. Teresa Amabile for her catalyzing article; of course, the *Harvard Business Review*; some other folks at Adaptive Path who I rely on; and, of course, you.

And what I'm gonna do is scan all these articles – or all the contributions that you've made and put them together in some semblance of function and have something available by the end of UX Week, okay?

So on your way out, we've got volunteers at the door, and you can just drop your ideas off there or at information afterwards, anytime during the week. Okay, thank you for your time.

*[End of Audio]*