Flipping orthodoxies to design more inclusive meetings

MAKING SPACE

CENTERING EQUITY
IN PLANNING

Description

Organizations tend to develop a set of habits that shape conventional wisdom over time; we call these habits orthodoxies. Often these orthodoxies are not rules, they're just a typical way of getting things done. They're often framed as "well, that's just the way things are always done around here", and left unchallenged, create blind spots, and stand in the way of change. When we flip these orthodoxies, it provides a powerful starting point for organizations to understand how to shift the status quo, and change the experience, structures, and outcomes for all involved in a process.

A few examples

Planning: before the meeting
"Meetings happen in the evenings" is an orthodoxy that often limits the participation of those whose schedules don't fall in a typical 9-to-5 structure, like those who work night shifts. To flip this, and say that "meetings can happen at any time of day" helps to expand access and have dialogues at times of day when a diverse range of people are energized and available.

Facilitating: during the meeting
"People will speak if they're in the room" is an orthodoxy that lends itself to spaces where the primary way to give meaningful feedback is to speak directly to the City staff members in front of (often) a large group. If we flip that, and assume that people will not speak by virtue of simply being in a room, we are then forced to intentionally design a way to ensure that every single attendee leaves feedback. It could inspire more options than having to speak in front of the group, and in that way, be more inclusive to those who are fearful of public speaking, or feel unsafe or uncomfortable to share in a larger group.

Related How-tos

• How to lead an equitable meeting

This tool has been inspired by:
• Nagji, Bansi, and Helen Walters. "Flipping Orthodoxies: Overcoming Insidious Obstacles to Innovation." Rotman Magazine, Fall 2011.

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Following Up: after the meeting

"People who are interested will stay connected" is an orthodoxy that assumes that to be interested and invested in the outcomes of a consultation, individual residents have to actively reach out to the planner, read staff reports, and the like. It assumes that people have the access, civic literacy, and sense of agency to both understand how City processes work and also to feel comfortable taking space with a staff member (or their local representative). If we flip this, and assume all who are interested need to be proactively kept in the loop, it puts the responsibility on the City to loop-back in a timely way with participants of a consultation to share outcomes and next steps.

How to use this worksheet

Step 1
Using the table on page 3, brainstorm orthodoxies for each stage of the engagement process: Planning, Facilitating, Following Up. If you are struggling to think of orthodoxies, use the sample categories listed in each box to stimulate your thinking (e.g. what are orthodoxies about meeting locations?)

Step 2
Mark the orthodoxies that you think could be impactful if they were flipped. (Note: not all orthodoxies are bad, or need to be flipped! e.g. "we engage the public" is an important one to keep!).

Step 3
Choose one orthodoxy to flip per stage. In the boxes, brainstorm how to bring the flipped orthodoxy to life (i.e. if the orthodoxy is "meetings happen in the evenings", and the flip is "meetings can happen at any time of day", ideas could include: doing 'Lunch and Learn' style events, afternoon events that are kid-friendly, etc.) Keep the demographics of your participants in mind as you explore ideas.

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**Planning
(before the meeting)**

e.g. Timing, Location (Physical or Virtual), Food, Accessibility, Support Services (transportation, childcare, eldercare), Language, Establishing goals, Sharing context, Agenda design, Experience design, Representation

**Facilitating
(during the meeting)**

e.g. Introductions, Managing difficult conversations, Sharing next steps, developing personal connections, agenda management

**Follow-Up
(after the meeting)**

e.g. Closing the loop, Sharing knowledge, Documentation

Ideas

Ideas

Ideas