LILA’s 2023 “TOP TEN” of Placemaking

**LILA’S definition of placemaking:** Organizational placemaking is an intentional, creative, and collaborative process that sees *people* and *place* as interrelated and co-construction agents with the power to influence and shape each other over time, in order to create and sustain value, meaning, and purpose for organizations and the individuals within them.

We offer these ideas as a starting point from which to launch your placemaking journey.

1). **Create the space for place attachment and identity.** Place is a repository for interpersonal, cultural, and community relationships. From our identity formation to our sense of belonging, place plays an active and dynamic role in creating meaning in our lives. Place attachment is the emotional bonding of people to particular places. It’s both a psychological process and a measurable bond with psychological, social, emotional, and functional elements. Place identity is crafted and re-crafted over time, gathering meaning through individual and group memories, lived experiences, discursive practices, and social and emotional interactions experienced within a place.

2). **Understand the dynamic assemblages of your places.** Place is not only a fixed, static location, but an interconnected network that is created and re-created through the interaction of three parts: **materiality** *(the physical constitution of a place)*, **meaning** *(the affective connection we feel to a place)*, and **practices** *(what people do and how they interact in a place)*. Places *gather* things, including experiences, histories, languages, thoughts, stories, and so on.

3). **Broaden your thinking from “roots” to routes and rhizomes.** We traditionally think of place attachment as “putting roots in the ground,” but if we shift our thinking from *roots* to *routes*, we can focus on creating a stable sense of place that endures transience and motion, rather than seeing mobility and change as a threat. Similarly, we can expand our view of place attachment from the metaphor of roots (which are fixed and lock us into one place) to one of *rhizomes*, which are more like a *mobile and networked system of roots*. These expanded metaphors help us conceptualize place as more moveable and adaptable, enabling more versatile and dynamic ways to approach placemaking in the new world of work.

4). **Stay alert to the role of anchors and magnets in placemaking.** Anchors are factors that prevent people from leaving a place, while magnets are factors that draw people to a place. Identifying the anchors and magnets in an organization can help leaders be more intentional about maximizing what’s working and adjusting what’s not in order to attract and retain employees.

5). **Manage the tensions of fixity and flow.** There is a productive tension between *fixities* and *flows* – that is, between the static and mobile, the fixed and changing, and the stable and unstable. *Fixities*, which are spatially static, stable, and centered, are interwoven with *flows*, which are spatially shifting,
changing, and centerless. The goal is not to resolve these tensions, but to find ways to negotiate these opposing forces; it’s with some combination of fixities and flows that places become most meaningful.

6). Construct places through discourse. We make and remake places by talking about them: discourse shapes how people make choices, find meaning, accept or resist a place. Narration is a key strategy in placemaking because the process of re-narration can bring unequal power dynamics to light and actually help create a sense of coherence and integration amidst change, enabling people to reshape their understandings of place *stability* and place *change*.

7). Nurture places for grief and loss. When we experience disruption or displacement of some kind, it can impact our sense of place attachment, negatively impacting well-being and mental health. Organizations can create spaces for people to acknowledge the loss and grief they are feeling and establish rituals to honor both old and new places in an integrative way for employees. A related idea is preserving the *genius loci* of a place (loosely translated as the “core spirit of a place”) which is not simply about replicating the old in the new; it’s about reinterpreting the old place and preserving its core identity and values through new ways of re-creation and representation.

8) Use relationships as a source of resilience and coordination. Relational coordination is a way of seeing change that puts relationships at the center and conceptualizes a system of continuous improvement. Relationships shape the communication through which coordination occurs. The crux of relational coordination is interdependence; structures need to be developed for shared accountability and rewards, conflict resolution, information transfer, and supported job design. Vital to relational coordination is psychological safety so that those involved feel free to ask questions, raise concerns, offer suggestions, and share differences of opinion. Places that are designed in such a way foster learning and innovation.

9) Co-create the *view from somewhere*. Places are created and recreated through lived experiences, and are produced via socially, politically, and economically interconnected networks among people, institutions, and systems. These interdependent networks create a powerful potential for social learning systems that allow us to transcend our initial understandings to arrive at new ones. Networks that successfully engage in social learning are characterized by the co-creation of knowledge, convergence of goals, collective action, and emergence that operates at the systems level.

10) Promote holding environments in uncertain times. As organizational leaders making decisions for the future, it’s important to take a step back to consider how the new landscape of work and life might be impacting your employees differently, affecting their ways of interacting in the world, and shifting their perspectives and priorities. Employees need to carve out and understand their place within an organization themselves. Holding environments can be cultivated through four types of connections - to *place* (a dedicated workplace), *routines* (rituals that streamline workflow), *purpose* (a bridge between personal interests and motivations and a need in the world), and *people* (trusted folks employees can turn to for encouragement & reassurance).
As we close out the year exploring the theme of Placemaking, perhaps a quote by Rebecca Solnit can guide our actions. “In the spaciousness of uncertainty there is room to act”. The quote suggests that our changing sense of place can actually offer us hope and a chance to move from a feeling of precarity to one of opportunity; we can use the “spaciousness of uncertainty” to effectively navigate shifts of change and continuity around us. As Solnit notes, “When you give yourself to places, they give you yourself back; the more one comes to know them, the more one seeds them with the invisible crop of memories and associations that will be waiting for when you come back, while new places offer up new thoughts, new possibilities.”