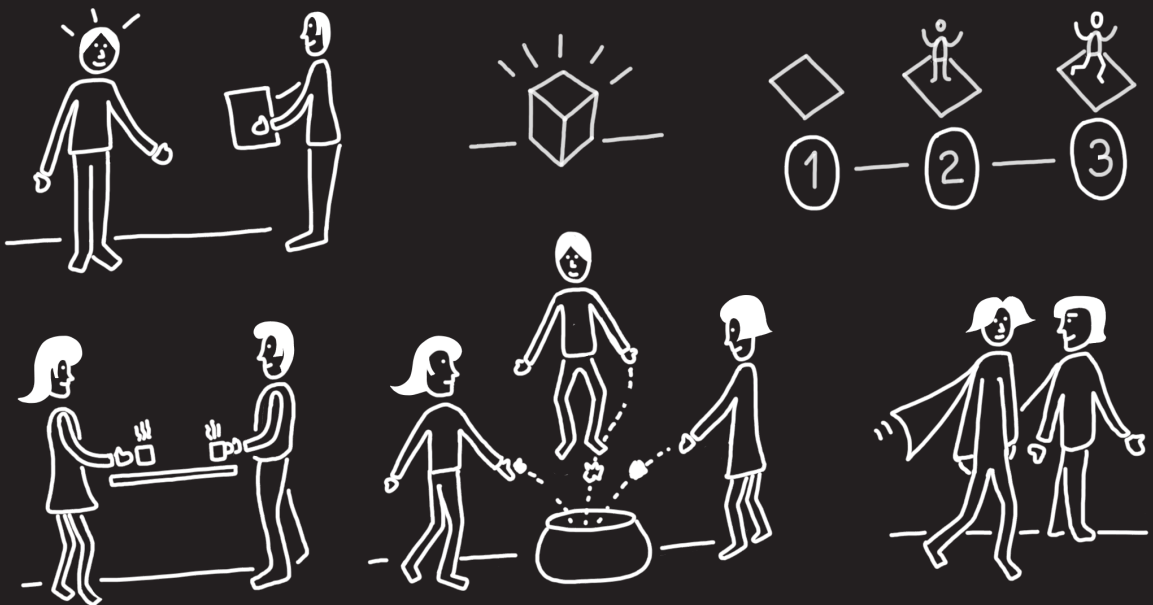


RITUALS FOR WORK

50 WAYS TO CREATE ENGAGEMENT, SHARED PURPOSE
AND A CULTURE THAT CAN ADAPT TO CHANGE



KURSAT OZENC, Ph.D.

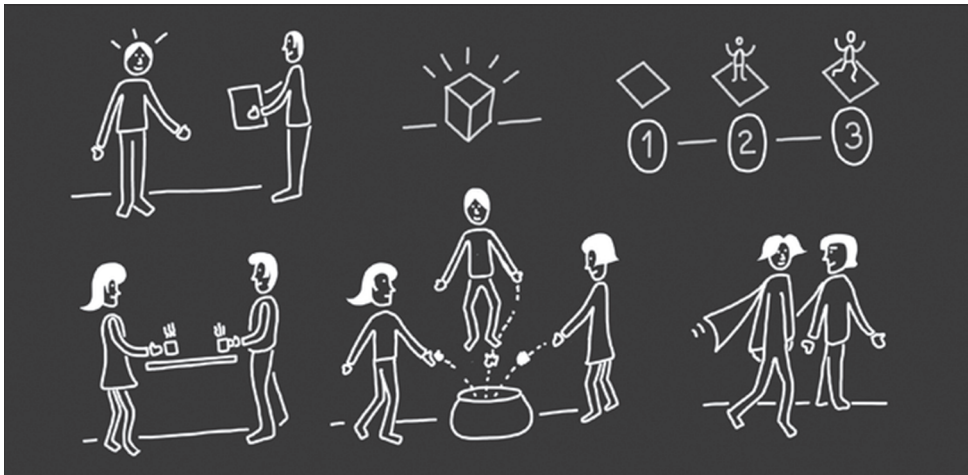
MARGARET HAGAN, Ph.D.

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AND A CULTURE THAT CAN ADAPT TO CHANGE



Kursat Ozenc, Ph.D.
Margaret Hagan, Ph.D.

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We dedicate this book to our families, and in particular
Aliye, Mehmet, and Selcen.

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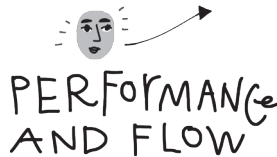
Individual

Chapter 3



- + Fire up the right brain
- + Bring dead projects to life
- + Start building things quickly

Chapter 4



- + Make your focus tangible
- + Eliminate distractions for deep work
- + Manage your emotions in a high stakes situation
- + Create a sense of control and boost confidence

Chapter 5



- + Encourage team members to avoid clashes
- + Decrease anxiety before feedback sessions
- + Repair deteriorating relationships

Chapter 6



- + Create an identity to foster a sense of belonging
- + Increase empathy among team members
- + Share personal histories to increase bonding

Chapter 7



- + Welcome a new hire into the organization
- + Celebrate the start of "real" work
- + Deal with career changes



Team

- + Encourage lateral thinking
- + Giving license to risk and fail
- + Inspire the team with idea building
- + Meet people where they are struggling

- + Rescue the team from distractions
- + Move stalled projects forward
- + Recognize the purpose at the heart of the team's work

- + Nurture radical transparency
- + Take a pause from a heated discussion
- + Resolve a conflict by releasing emotions
- + Prevent conflicts by making trade-offs clear

- + Hold more engaging meetings
- + Celebrate holidays across geographies
- + Create bonds among virtual teams, and across different offices
- + Sync up and explore with teammates

- + Achieve closure after a departure
- + Welcome new hires with the company values
- + Create an identity for a temporary team
- + Make orientations engaging



Org

- + Develop solutions for recurring issues
- + Create a culture of ideation and controlled risk-taking
- + Encourage everyone to share their skills

- + Remove distractions that are hampering performance
- + Keep and maintain meaning in everyday work
- + Pair employees to have them hold each other accountable

- + Nurture a culture of candor to have honest, difficult conversations
- + Build psychological safety within the team
- + Address team health with a neutral party

- + Create shared memories to solidify the organization's identity
- + Celebrate civic outreach and impact stories
- + Break down silos between teams

- + Have stability through mergers, acquisitions, and leadership changes
- + Get closure for departments or programs that are closing
- + Manage your org's changing direction

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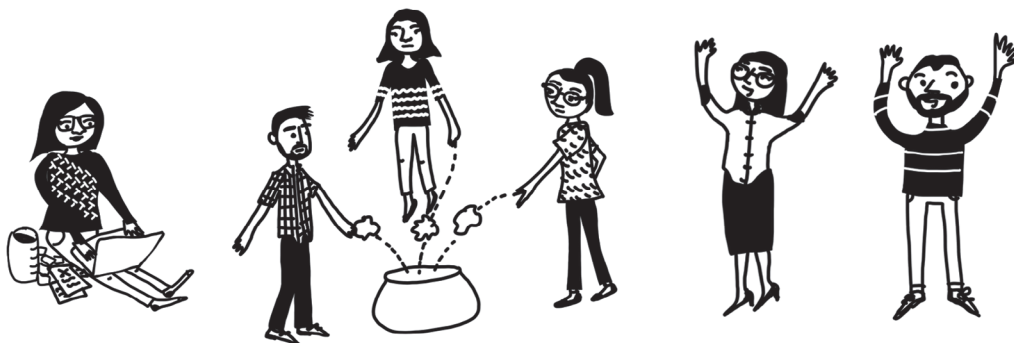
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Experience Director
IDEO Chicago



Introduction



OUR
BOOK
writing
RITUAL



A Welcome Note

This book offers rituals that can be used to bring new energy and community into your everyday work. Our focus is on bottom-up changes to how we work. Rather than relying on top-down, formal efforts to make work better, rituals can help you create smaller-scale, participatory ways to help people more satisfied, productive, and connected.

Beyond bottom-up rituals, we also present rituals that help your team communicate better. There are also rituals to help organizations make changes and deal with difficulties.

Over the past years, we have taught courses on Ritual Design at Stanford's d.school, with corporate and public service partners, to identify ways to respond to problems around disengagement at work. We began to collect other organizations' and people's rituals to show our students, and to inspire them as they created new rituals for work.

In this book, we showcase a mixture of these rituals—those from well-established companies that have whole teams devoted to culture and community-building, as well as more experimental ones that have emerged from design workshops and sprints. At the end of the book we present the basics of how we run our own ritual design practice. There you'll also find a process to design your own custom rituals.

Throughout the book, we have profiled people who are making new rituals and who are creating better organizational cultures. We feature them, to show examples of how people are experimenting with new ways of working, being creative, and building great relationships.

This book is a practical one, which you can browse and skip through, to find what might be relevant to the challenges you are facing. On page viii-xi, there are 2 overviews of themes and rituals to guide you.

Why Bring Rituals into Work?

We spend so much of our lives at work—whether in a big company, a small startup, or on our own projects. But how much do we invest in making our work lives better, when it comes to our relationships, our creativity, our focus, our life transitions, and the ups-and-downs of our organizations?

Rituals can be one powerful strategy to improve our work lives—and help us act more like we aspire to be. They are practices that can bond people together, help us move through conflicts, amp us up to better performances, and assist us in adapting to change.

Companies and people face big challenges at work today. There are low levels of employee engagement, high levels of stress and fear, inhuman environments, and failed reorganizations.¹ These problems at work require a multi-faceted set of strategies to make more human-centered, values-driven, and creative workplaces. Rituals are one of these

strategies, that leaders and individuals can employ to address their big problems.

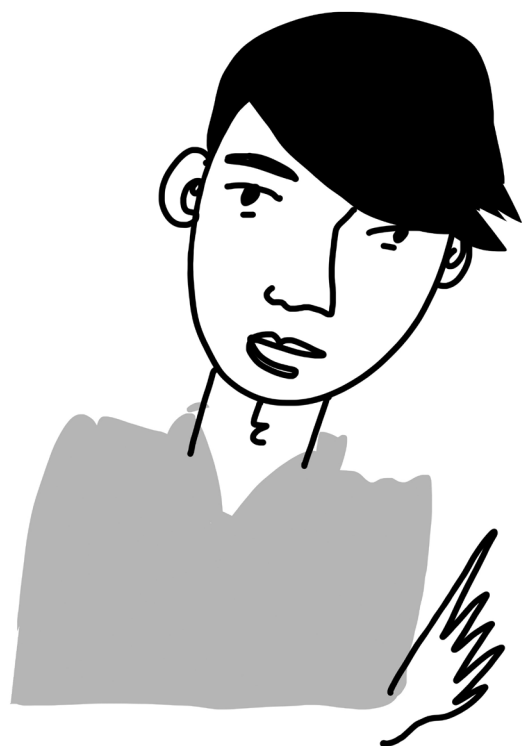
Sports fans likely are already familiar with rituals for work. Rafael Nadal has an extensive sequence of rituals for his tennis game performance. He takes a cold shower forty-five minutes before every game. This is his work ritual, to regulate his emotions and get into a focused performance and a state of flow.²

Zipcar created a ritual to lead their company through a big organizational shift. When they decided to redirect towards a mobile-first company, they brought the company together for a ritual smashing of desktop computers.³ (See more in Chapter 7.) It was a collective ceremony to mark the end of the old way of working and move to the new.

This book presents the research into why rituals improve work, as well as many more examples to inspire you.

Our goal in this book is to show ways to experiment with more intentional, connected, and meaningful work culture. Using the rituals in this book can be one way to experiment with making your work better.

We know that rituals are not the only solution to tackling the big challenges of work, but they are a distinct and effective strategy to help you put your values, ethics, and goals into practice.



What
IS
a
RITUAL,
exactly?

RITUALS

(a definition)

ACTIONS that a
PERSON or GROUP
does repeatedly,
following a similar
Pattern or Script,
in which they've
imbued SYMBOLISM
and MEANING.

The Meaning of Ritual

We use the term “ritual” to capture practices that have a special power to make a meaningful moment. They have unique factors that elevate them above normal experiences.

A ritual is an action done following a similar pattern and script, in a particular situation. Most rituals follow a script, with a set path that people will follow and repeat.

They are done with an intent and awareness. Unlike a routine, rituals are not mindless. They are done with people recognizing that something special is happening, that they are tuned into.

They involve some physical movement. There is usually a patterned rhythm of people moving, that activates a sense of something special going on. There are symbols at work. They could be props, words, or actions that represent something bigger—usually a higher value. These symbols invoke a sense of the

extraordinary, that transforms the average into the special.

A good ritual tells a story, which often helps a person make sense of something that is going on, figure out what it means in a bigger picture, and deal with it.

They have a *je ne sais quoi* factor that elevates an average moment into a memorable, charged one. From the outside, a ritual could look irrational or nonfunctional, because it does not always make logical sense.

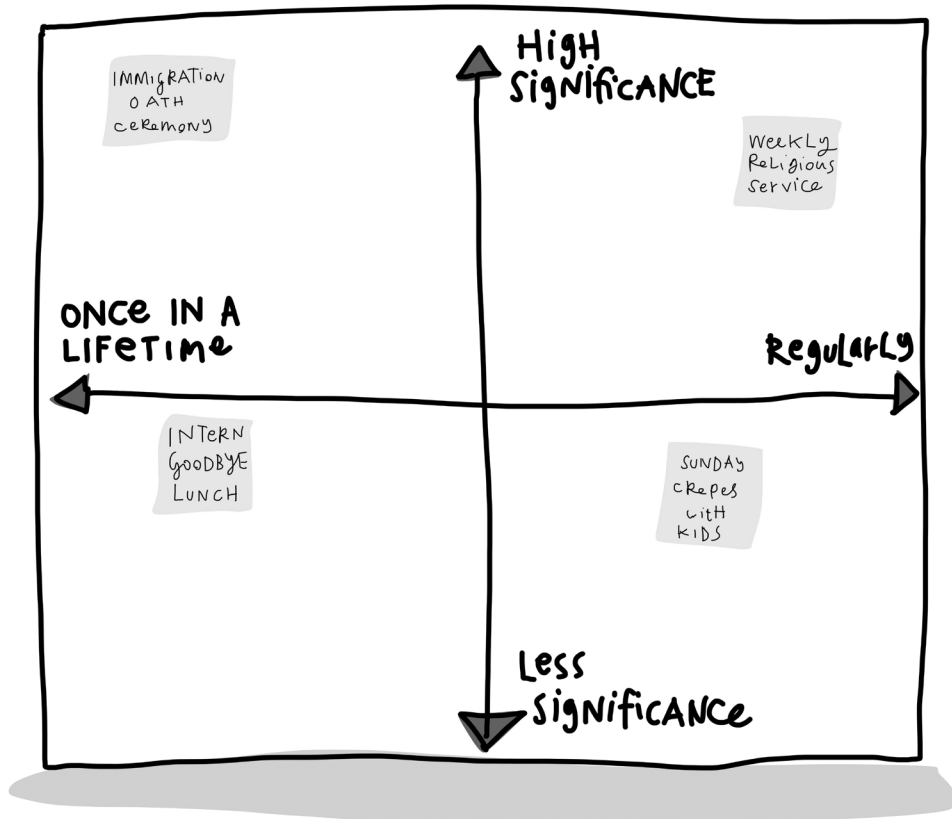
Rituals at Different Levels

Rituals don't have to be grand or spiritual. They are on a continuum of intensity and frequency.

Some rituals are short and happen often, like daily stand-up meetings in a development team. These may be low intensity, but still carry the benefits of building shared purpose and a sense of community.

Other rituals are dramatic and infrequent, like a graduation ceremony. It has more elaborate scripts, formal actions to take, and a once-in-a-lifetime quality. This can also mean it carries a bigger sense of meaning and connection.

Rituals may seem like a “soft” strategy to make meaningful change, because they do not operate with a direct, transactional logic. But they have value in making abstract organizational identities, goals, and principles concrete. And they produce intangible benefits of shared purpose, a sense of meaning, and community bonds.



Who Can Use Rituals for Work?

Rituals are about creating meaning: how do we make our lives, our teams, and our products more meaningful? Rituals can help you intentionally create better culture at your work—at the level of a whole organization, a team, or your own practice.

This book is for people who are interested in experimenting with building better work cultures.

It could be a person who wants to make their everyday work routines more productive, more in line with their ethics and goals, or more memorable.

Or it could be a team member or manager who knows their work-life could be more in line with their values, and wants to bring more collaboration, humor, and creativity into their organization.

Or it could be a leader at the helm of an organization who wants to

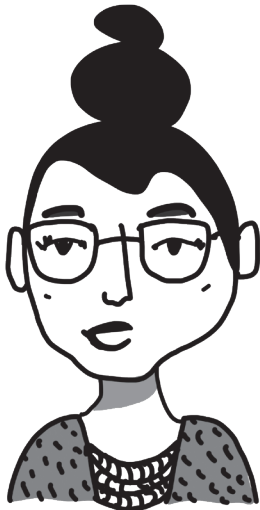
nurture a large-scale culture, that manifests the values and norms of the organization's mission statement, guiding principles, and ethical obligations.

Or it could be a designer or an engineer who is working on an entirely new innovation. They may want to find ways to be more creative, or to roll out the new thing they are making. They may want to experiment with making a culture shift that would help their new innovation succeed.

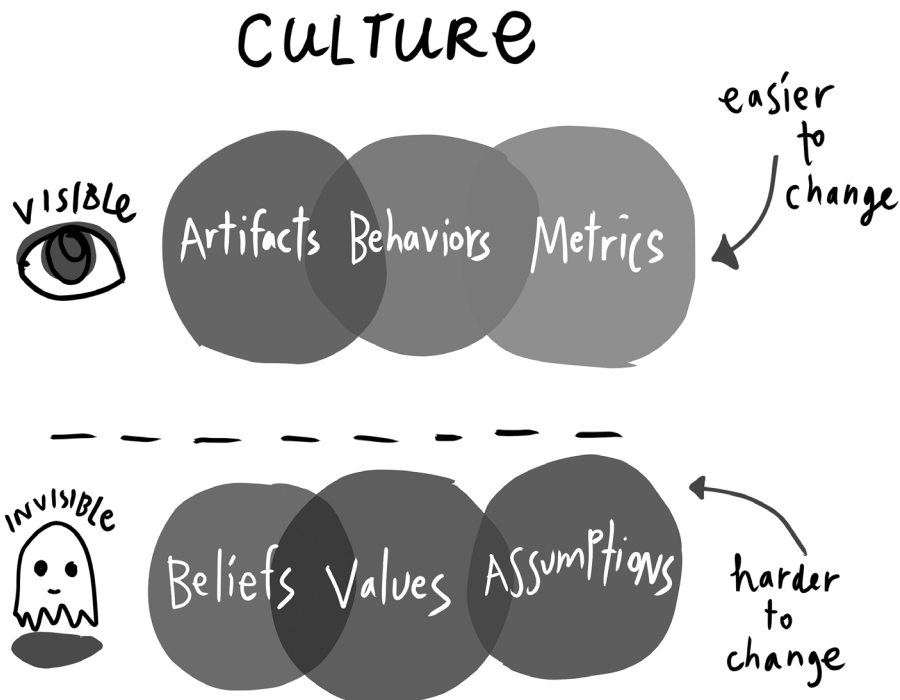


I want to improve the **CULTURE** at my organization, to make us stronger & more values-driven.

I am managing a team, and want to build a sense of community, even through many changes and setbacks.



I want to change my own ways of working, to be more creative, focused, & efficient.



Culture Map, adapted from James Heskett's Culture Cycle⁴

In particular, people who are interested in their work community and culture can use rituals. This might be managers or leaders—or even new hires who care about how their organization is run.

Often, the culture of an organization is set by talking in the abstract. This could be through writing down a manifesto, core principles, or a constitution. Rituals are ways to bring these big, abstract ideas into daily practice. By default, they involve physical actions and concrete behaviors. A good ritual will take the underlying values and intangible beliefs of a company—all these valuable, invisible things—and make

them visible, interactive, and lively real-world practices throughout the organization.

Can you be an architect of your work life? Even if you are not the manager of your company or your team, you can use lightweight strategies—like rituals—to make work be more like you wish it could be.

This means bringing a sense of practical creativity to work life. What are small experiments and new practices you can try out, to see how you can address the problems you face. It also means being more thoughtful about what powers you have and what type of work you want to do.

