

CULTURE YOUR CULTURE

Innovating Experiences @Work

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BY

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Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley, BD16 1WA, UK

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78743-899-6 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-78743-898-9 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-78754-501-4 (Epub)



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Thank God.”

This phrase comes up in conversation quite often. The thing about common colloquialisms is that they sometimes lose meaning, and as a result, impact. And yet when it came to sitting down and writing my acknowledgments, “Thank God” was the first thing that came to mind. It speaks volumes for how I feel. This book played a part in my greater personal, spiritual, and professional journey over the last few years. By 2013, climbing up the corporate ladder left me unhealthy in body and spirit. I was burned out and wondered where my pursuit of an inspired, thriving life went astray. Over the course of time, I made a commitment to take better care of myself. The aim: to focus on work where I could truly find passion, make a difference, and personally grow. A folder on my computer is named “My New Life” and indeed it is.

At the tail end of this book project, my life (and my heart) expanded even more with the arrival of my son, who was aptly named Christian Hong-Ji. I am amazed at the abundance of good things that matter most. They exist in spite of the crazy world we share and the unique set of struggles each one of us are challenged to overcome. I hope to never lose sight of that fact.

So when I say “Thank God,” I am referring to first and foremost my profound gratefulness for the many blessings in my life that afforded me the opportunity to write this book and survive working independently. Were it not for my faith, my family, my friends, and colleagues along the way, I would not be where I am today. I truly could not have done this on my own. There are many to thank, especially Jesus Christ my savior, my parents Paul and Amy, best-husband-in-the-world Jason, my siblings, Timothy and Christine, and my extended friends and family for your steadfast encouragement and support. Thank you to Dr. Tom Keller, my chiropractor in the Midwest and informal life guide. You so patiently saw me through my healing journey with wonderful stories, gentle questions, and chicken soup for

both the soul and the body. Ron and Patricia, thank you for giving us our fresh start in CA. Much love to all.

I also have so much gratitude for Emerald, who saw the potential in my proposal – Pete Baker for bringing me in, Eve Hawksworth for getting things going, and Helen Alexander for the dedication and partnership throughout the editorial process. I'd also like to recognize Abi Masha and Sujatha Subramaniane for your partnership and hard work during the final edits of this manuscript. Thank you Dr. dt ogilvie for introducing me to my publisher in the first place. Eric Rayman, how glad I am to have met you through Timothy Rogers. Your sage advice on contracts was so invaluable. My appreciation is worth repeating for my husband Jason Madson, this book's very first editor and greatest cheerleader, and my sister, Christine Usmen, a busy working mom, for reading, editing, and providing your opinions and reactions. Special thanks also to Dr Rochelle Parks-Yancy for your thorough academic review and Annetta Hanna for your willingness to work with me in shaping the manuscript as my developmental editor. Not only were you wonderful to work with, but your coaching made this final version so much better than the first. I built greater confidence and skill under your tutelage.

For your time and willingness to provide stimulating conversation during the writing of this book, I'd like to recognize Len Banks, Becky Bearse, Carol Cherkis, Lawrence Chi, Rick DeVleeschouwer, David Esposito, Hua Han, Beth Kavelaris, Laura McHugh, Rick Moyer, Joe Mulhearn, Patrick O'Brien, Francine Parham, David Perls, Karen Smith, Brian Sorge, Mark Wefler, and Lindsay Wolff Logsdon. Your perspective inspired and kept me from feeling too lonely while writing.

I have many intellectual heroes, some of which were mentioned in this book: Tim Brown, W. Warner Burke, David Cooperrider, Jeanne Liedtka, Roger Martin, and Peter Senge. Many more have encouraged and stimulated this curious mind and fed its learning. This book is my contribution and in appreciation for your pioneering work.

All of you, named here or not, who have been a part of my life and contributed to my experiences, I offer my sincere thanks once again and dedicate this book to you.

Karen Jaw-Madson
Redwood City, CA

INTRODUCTION

Topics covered in this chapter:

- Why and how this book was written and for whom
- The origin of DOWE

What would you say about the best and the worst jobs you ever had?

What was it about the conditions (people, behaviors, and the environment) that made it so? How did these work situations affect you, your relationships, your productivity, your life?

When you think about it, the impact of good and bad experiences at work are significant. The best situations don't just feel good – they produce great work. For an employer, multiple factors need to be in place for this to happen consistently for many people, as often as possible. The goal is to align individuals and organizations to interact in the most mutually beneficial ways. Few experience this rare ideal and even then it appears to happen accidentally before it fades away. People spend the rest of their careers looking for it again. Others might say all this sounds lofty, maybe even unrealistic. Since when do agendas line up between employees, their leaders, and the business? This hasn't stopped people from looking for it.

It is possible to increase the chances that this mythical alignment happens. The foundation for connecting the right people in the right job in the right organization in the right environment begins with a great culture manifested in equally great experiences at work. Culture is complex and unique to every organization. It can't be "hacked" nor can it be "bootstrapped" forever. Because of its powerful influence in day-to-day operations, people's lives and ultimately business results, culture should be managed with the same (if not

greater) degree of importance as any other business asset. Many organizations don't take advantage of this opportunity to differentiate themselves.

Organizational culture, experiences at work, and talent can be managed much like an investment portfolio. You might diversify across sectors, decide between a growth or value tilt, and make changes over time. You understand how the different parts come together to meet your present and future goals. You can maximize your returns if you manage it well. You can also choose to ignore your investments, but then you have to accept that performance might never reach its full potential.

This book promises to show you how Design of Work Experience (DOWE) can enable your organization to systematically build culture and experiences at work that support the achievement of business strategies – if you are willing to do your part. It's not intended to be a magic wand. The answer might be that there is no *one* solution but rather the right *combination* of solutions. With so many choices available, what do you want to do? DOWE can help you figure it out.

DOWE ORIGINS

As you will discover with DOWE, the journey is as important as the results. In that spirit, I'd like to share with you how this book came to be. Years ago, I was fortunate enough to assemble and lead a one-of-a-kind team at a large multinational corporation. Our mission was to develop a global talent management strategy with a new approach. Inspired by the recent implementation of a design program, we were asked to experiment with a consumer product development process and apply it to talent. For the following nine months, our team was given the freedom to learn and work together as a “leaderless team” without hierarchies. We conducted extensive user research to master our understanding of employees' perceptions and needs. We selected external subject matter experts to provide stimulus. In the end, we created all the content for a multiyear strategy. Truth be told, the ideas we presented weren't all that exceptional. What gave it impact can be attributed to the strategy's *relevance* to the organization for which it was created. That's because it was custom-made for this particular context.

When I saw the degree of engagement from both leadership and employees *throughout* the initiative, I realized something: This was a journey the

organization had to take *with us* in order to be ready for *real* change. No subject matter expert or decision from above could've generated the same enthusiasm. Maybe the opportunity for people to have a say in something that impacted their own lives elicited universal ideals of freedom and liberty. Perhaps it also triggered a phenomenon that's been called the "IKEA effect". the greater the effort invested, the more value placed on the successful completion of one's own creation – something that could be touched and felt *while* it's being developed (Norton, Mochon, & Ariely, 2012). Regardless, taking design as an approach gave life to our process and enlightened all of us with *what could be*. Change begins the moment new possibilities beyond the status quo are considered. I first heard, "our worlds are formed by the questions we ask" while working with David Cooperrider, Professor at Case Western Reserve University's Weatherhead School of Management. If you pause to think about this, it's a little mind-blowing – because it's true.

Throughout my career, I've had responsibility for cultivating the culture, talent, and engagement within many work environments, sometimes in the midst of extraordinary changes. This is what I learned – and I'll put it in performance management terms: how we manage people in the workplace – particularly culture – needs improvement, desperately. Inspired by human-centered design, Design of Work Experience (DOWE) is intended to address this unmet need by giving companies a way to innovate their workplace experiences and maximize the potential in their people.

HOW THIS BOOK WAS BORN

I've led a number of projects since that first initiative – each was an opportunity to combine academic research with the refinement of DOWE as a concept and practice. It wasn't long before I realized I had to share it for the greater good. I wrote this book in the spirit of design: iteratively, in collaboration, and inspired by ideas from other places. I was never formally trained on how to write a book nor was I familiar with the publishing process. I learned by doing, through trial and error, mistakes included. Ideas came from seemingly unrelated and surprising places. I worked in different parts of the manuscript partially and simultaneously, jumping between the big picture and the tiny details, keeping things incomplete for as long as possible.

There were endless iterations as the book went through revision after revision. Sometimes I went analog – off my computer and into quiet contemplation with good old-fashioned pen and paper. Changing routines helped me think differently.

When I got lonely and sluggish, I found new energy talking with others about their perspectives and experiences. Ideas marinated while I did other things, especially when I was stricken with writer’s block. On the toughest days, I reassured myself with Anne Lamott’s *Bird by Bird* and her advice on “Shitty First Drafts” (Lamott, 1994, pp. 21–27). The writing I did in my first draft, as bad as it was, gave me the chance to try again, improve, and create something better. Writing this book was remarkably more difficult than I ever imagined, partly because it’s so important to me and partly because it’s really hard work. It demanded persistence, even on days when I had no appetite for it. Still, I had to keep moving forward, going slowly at what felt like a snail’s pace when I really just wanted things to go faster. At a certain point, I had to throw away the outline and allow a better version of the book to reveal itself. Bit by bit, what diverged widely slowly came together. Now this finished book is much different (read: better) from what I first envisioned. None of this – from beginning to end – was anything like how I was trained to work. My linear left-to-right modus operandi was ill suited to the creative writing process, so I had to fight through my discomfort in order to experiment and learn new things. My chiropractor’s words became an adopted mantra: “Relax and enjoy the folding.”

I have two reasons for sharing so many details about the writing of this book. The first is to show how much design has changed my life. It’s made such an impact that it transformed the way I think, the way I work, the way I live. It could do that for you too, if you are open to it. The second is to use the writing of this book as a preview for what it will be like to create culture using DOWE: you’ll need to be curious, learn through exploration, diverge and converge, practice flexibility, collaborate with others, empathize with multiple perspectives, apply creativity, take opportunities, be iteratively persistent, and – most importantly – *trust the process*. So if you choose DOWE, you will choose all the hard work that comes with it. It will seem chaotic and counterintuitive on the one hand, but also exciting and promising on the other hand. You’ll feel both energized and overwhelmed. Time will feel like it’s entered a vortex where things appear fast and slow at the

same time. The experience will stretch you in ways you have never been stretched, but you will learn a lot and come to see its value.

USING THIS BOOK

This is not your typical business book. I ask that you dismantle your mental models and consider this text on its own merits. Three intertwined, yet distinct spaces are evident: it's part business case, part how-to, and part commentary. In the business case, I present the need for and the merits of DOWE for your consideration. In the how-to, I offer practical and actionable steps for using DOWE in practice, along with advice learned from real-life application. The third space offers perspective and ideas for your rumination. Think of it as parts of the same conversation happening at different times. I'm sure that you'll discover much on your own, and I encourage you to share it as a contribution to our collective knowledge.

Different from other texts, I've kept the inspiring examples and conversations I reference as anonymous as possible: who said what isn't really the point so much as *what was said*. At least in this circumstance, the source is not what gives credibility – it is the content. That being said, names are occasionally provided to give credit to work done by others and to point you to a direct resource.

You'll also find fewer stories here than some other books you've read, and no chapters dedicated to specific case studies. I'm a big believer in the power of storytelling and evidence-based research. With this book, however, stories had to be carefully selected because DOWE is all about taking your own path to finding your own solutions. To discourage the temptation to simply copy what others have done, the only anecdotes used here are either applicable to all contexts and audiences or analogies to explain ideas. It is my hope that through the practice of DOWE, you will create and contribute your own narratives for sharing.

While I would be tickled to have you, the reader, so riveted that you absorb every word in these pages with enthusiasm, this book does not need to be read cover to cover. However, it is important that you get the key parts down – the overview of the concept (Chapter 2) and the how-to (Chapters 4–9). Feel free to otherwise jump around and in between as needed.

If you've gotten this far, this book is for you. It is intended to be a resource for people and organizations using DOWE to apply innovation to culture and to guide its co-creation journey.

Regardless of your role or position, if you care about culture, need change, and are willing to work for it differently, you are invited to join me.