

inner work space

**Reflective Tools & Practices
to Support the Self at Work**

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INNER WORK SPACE

Reflective Tools & Practices to Support the Self at Work

A thesis submitted to the School of Design, Carnegie Mellon University,
for the degree of Master of Design in Design for Interactions

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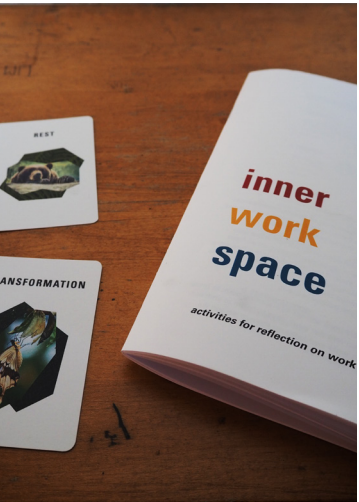
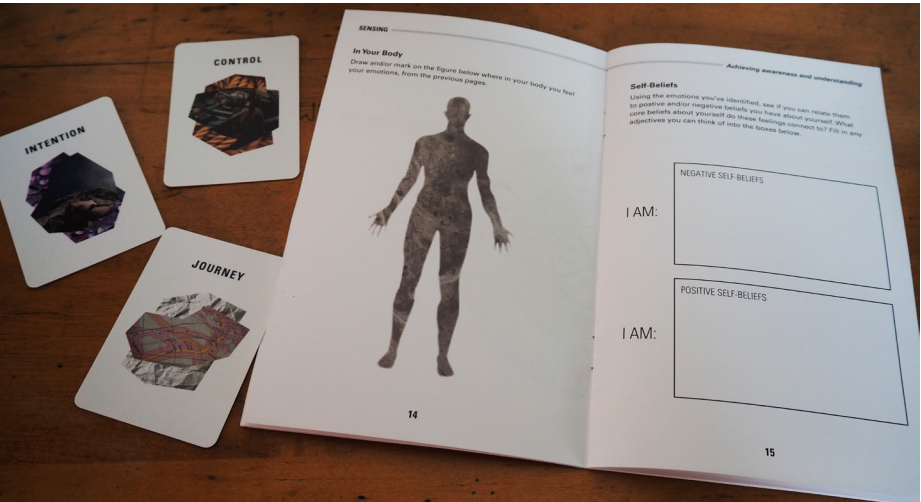
Molly Wright Steenson, Advisor

ABSTRACT

In workplaces, especially those that are traditional and hierarchical, the ideas of teamwork, collaboration, communication, trust, and safety have become corporate buzzwords. But what do we need as individuals to make these things come true in our work lives? How can we collectively create work environments that foster these ideals? My intention with this thesis project was to explore ways to support the self at work, starting at the base unit of a workplace community, the individual, and to propose methods and resources for individuals to practice self-reflection in the workplace.

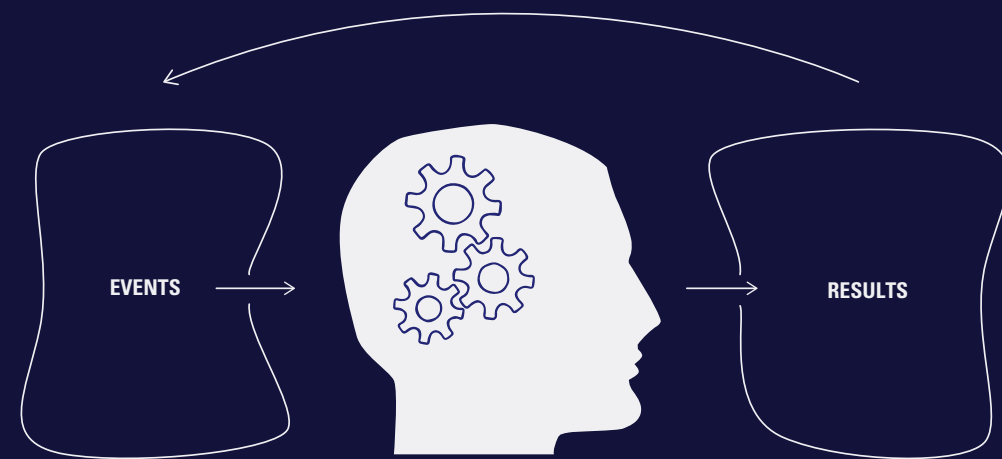
Through the course of this project, I investigated theories and frameworks related to the self, reflection, and the workplace and applied them to prototypes that served both as generative research methods and designs to evaluate. The methods devised and prototypes designed drew on ideas from psychology, sociology, business, spirituality, and other fields related to personal and professional growth.

The outcome of this thesis is a system of tools called Inner Work Space that supports reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action. Ultimately, I aim for Inner Work Space to meet individuals where they are with accessible tools that assist them in the moment of need and beyond and to use myself as probes to continue to explore this space and expand on the contributions of this thesis project.



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How might I support individuals at work in establishing and maintaining a practice of self-reflection in, on, for , and as action?

INTRODUCTION

Many of us experience difficulties navigating the effect that our work and workday events have on our emotions, our internal lives, as well as on our ability to do our jobs, maintain working relationships. Even when the workday ends, these events can have an effect on our personal lives and relationships. Further, our own experiences then have an effect on others and perpetuate this cycle, as we find ourselves bringing our issues to work. (See diagram to the left.)

Unlike other solutions that focus on organizational change or development of teams and processes, Inner Work Space focuses primarily on individuals and not just their work performance or satisfaction but their inner lives. It aims to make change where these individuals have the most control, with themselves. How can we reframe difficult moments at work not as events that happen to us, where we are powerless to external forces, but instead as circumstances that are impacted by our own past experiences and the thought and behavior patterns we've established throughout our lives? Inner Work Space is an invitation to unpack the past, take responsibility for our own feelings about our jobs, and step into a healthier future relationship with work.

Research Question

How might I support individuals at work in establishing and maintaining a practice of self-reflection in, on, for, and as action?

Reflection is, at its core, before anything else, the difference between reacting and responding. When we react, an event happens and a reaction immediately follows. Responding on the other hand builds in a pause after an event. Pausing like this offers space for consideration on how our actions line up to the kind of person or coworker we want to be and gives us the ability to see the situation from more than one perspective.

When we build the reflective pause into our way of being, that can look like a practice of self-reflection. And there are three different ways this might happen:

1. **Reflection-in-action:** pausing in the moment (Schön, 1984)
2. **Reflection-on-action:** thinking through events after the fact, once they are in the past (Dewey, 1936)
3. **Reflection-for-action:** looking forward to how you might improve or change for the future (Killian & Todnem, 1991)
4. **Reflection-as-action:** as activity and practice (Farrell, 2018)

1

C H A P T E R O N E

contextualizing self-reflection at work



[Figure 1.1]
This concept map shows the areas adjacent to self-reflection at work that this thesis drew upon. How each relates to the self, reflection, and work is explored in this section.

1.1 UNDERSTANDING THE SELF

This section discusses perspectives on the self: what it is and what it isn't, what it means to be aware of the self and to know it, what it means to have a true or authentic self, and how individuals can grow more fully into their selves.

But first, there are many different angles and interpretations on the self. Consider how many ideas begin with the “self-” prefix. Before we get into the relevant literature, to understand the relationship between all of these different dimensions of the self, I’ve synthesized this model to demonstrate the progressive relationship between these ideas that build upon one another:

Self-consciousness	<i>“I have a self.”</i>
Self-observation	<i>“I see my self.”</i>
Self-awareness	<i>“I recognize my self.”</i>
Self-knowledge	<i>“I understand my self.”</i>
Self-acceptance	<i>“I release my self.”</i>
Self-compassion	<i>“I embrace my self.”</i>
Self-confidence	<i>“I believe in my self.”</i>
Self-growth	<i>“I transform my self.”</i>

Experiencing the Self

How do we experience having a self? First, we may want to describe the self. In *Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges*, social psychologist Amy Cuddy (2018) shares three characteristics of the self:

1. It is multifaceted, not singular.
2. It is expressed and reflected through our thoughts, feelings, values, and behaviors.
3. It is neither static nor rigid. It is dynamic, flexible, and open to growth.

To the first point, the self is not singular. In fact, it is made up of many parts, all of which are “not just feelings but distinct ways of being, with their own beliefs, agendas, and roles in the overall ecology of our lives” (van der Kolk,

2015). We manage our parts through what’s known as “internal leadership skills—how well we listen to our different parts, make sure they feel taken care of, and keep them from sabotaging one another” (van der Kolk, 2015). This aligns with the idea that very often our worst enemy can be ourselves. More specifically, we can face challenges when one or more parts don’t get along or an internal leader insufficiently negotiates among the parts.

Further, our self-experience is made up of a balance between emotion and reason. While emotion and reason are not necessarily oppositional, it does take a good balance between these two parts of our brains to feel like ourselves. In average circumstances, these parts are usually able to work together relatively well. But in critical situations, especially when survival is at stake, these systems work independently and instinctive action takes over. Many of us are able to find balance once we are no longer in danger, and we experience the self once again. The speed at which we return to ourselves depends on how quickly our reactions cool down. (van der Kolk, 2015)

As our life circumstances inevitably shift and change throughout our lives, if our sense of self is too rigid, the inflexibility of the self can get in the way of our well-being. Being able to adapt to change is critical to our long-term happiness, peace, and even survival. If we consider that the self is usually associated with the body, it becomes even more evident that a rigid sense of self is not ideal, as our bodies grow and change regularly throughout our lives. Buddhist psychology brings us the idea of “no-self” which supports these points. “No-self” does not mean we’re no one or don’t experience a self. It means that our self isn’t fixed and is a part of everything around it. (Germer & Salzberg, 2009)

The self is experienced from both the outside in and the inside out. To experience the self, we need to have consciousness of it. There are circumstances in which we forget the self, and there other other times when our awareness of the self becomes magnified. As individuals, we have a strong concern for the self. So much so, that when engrossed in a task, if we hear a reference to ourselves, our attention will be drawn to the self (we become self-conscious), and we are pulled away from the task at hand. It doesn’t matter if the reference is critical or praising or anything in between. (Csikszent-mihalyi, 2004)

The Implications of Self-Awareness

How do we define the distinction between the consciousness of the self and self-awareness? While self-consciousness is the moment in which we remember the existence of the self, self-awareness is “the ability to see ourselves clearly—to understand who we are, how others see us and how we fit into the world around us” (Eurich, 2018). Clearly is the operative word here. Beyond simply taking note of our “selves,” self-awareness brings us clarity on

the implications of our selves in context. Self-awareness is a foundational skill for understanding, monitoring, and improving our emotional lives. Identifying “our destructive emotions as they are first stirring” gives us “maximal choice about how we will respond to them” (Goleman, 2004). We will discuss more on emotions, reactions, and responses in the coming sections.

We can identify two primary types of self-awareness: internal self-awareness and external self-awareness. Internal self-awareness involves seeing yourself clearly. This includes understanding what you value, what your interests are, what makes you tick, where you want to be, and what you want to do. Someone with high internal self-awareness knows what they want and makes choices that are consistent and aligned. Consistency and alignment are key features of authenticity, which we will discuss more about later in this section. External self-awareness involves understanding how others see you and being able to see yourself from the outside in. Someone with high external self-awareness, being able to see themselves from the perspective of others, is better at building stronger and more trusting relationships. Those lower in internal self-awareness may find themselves doing things that don’t match up to their beliefs and desire; those low in external self-awareness may get shocked by feedback from others, if they ever hear it. (Eurich, 2018)

Self Knowledge (Or, Knowing Thyself)

Once we are able to recognize ourselves, at what point do we know ourselves? In *Good Business*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2004) explains that there are multiple (but equally valid) ways to go about self-knowledge. He describes two generalized paths one can take: the philosopher’s path and that of the business leader. Philosophical thinkers are more likely to view self-knowledge as a lifelong project in which the goal is the end. Business leaders on the other hand tend to view a journey to self-knowledge as a means rather than an end. Their goal is to “act effectively in the world,” and self-knowledge is how they begin to do that. Csikszentmihalyi explains that instead of endlessly searching like the thinkers, these business leaders look for a “core belief that can sustain them through life.” When they come across a belief (usually borrowed from their upbringing, religious background, or culture) that instinctively seems right, they tend to go with it and carry on.

Is one approach better than the other? It likely depends on the individual. Some might find the philosopher’s journey more meaningful; others might see it as a tiresome slog. Some might find the business leader’s journey more immediately impactful and freeing in the way it adds value quickly; others might see it as vacuous or surface-level. Different paths will be better for different individuals, possibly at different seasons of their lives. No matter which path is chosen, it’s still hard work, which requires reflection. We will discuss more on that in the following section on reflection.

The Authentic Self Is a State of Being

When describing what it means for the self to be true, we may be tempted to imagine authenticity as a quality. Either someone is authentic or not, full stop. While authenticity is many things, it is not a feature that exists or does not exist. While this means the work of “being authentic” is never done, it also means that we all exist on a continuum of authenticity. Even if we have a bad day or two, those days do not make us inauthentic people. Authenticity is, as many other states of being, “a conscious choice of how we want to live” (Brown, 2010). We make these choices everyday, and eventually we may establish a practice of authenticity.

The authentic self, as a state of being, is flexible, not static. In conjunction with purpose, a practice of authenticity “allows us to connect the events of our past to who we are now, and who we are becoming” (Craig, 2018). Authenticity plays an important role in our continual process of becoming as individuals. Through practice, we find ourselves “letting go of who we are supposed to be and embracing who we are” (Brown, 2010).

Synchronous, Differentiated, & Integrated

When we practice authenticity, we find ourselves coming into alignment. In these instances when we are in a state of authenticity, all facets of the self are in harmony. There is consonance between what is going on inside us (our thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and values) and outside (our actions, behaviors, words, and expressions). If what we do is not consistent with what we believe, we feel inauthentic. If we do not reflect our genuine feelings in our expressions we do not feel like our true selves. (Cuddy, 2018)

How can we develop a self that feels synchronous and coherent? And what does it look like? By establishing and maintaining a consistent set of goals, individuals can create order in their experience “which manifests itself in predictable actions, emotion, and choices,” and “in time becomes recognizable as a more or less unique ‘self’” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998).

Differentiation and integration work together to form a self that feels true and appropriately complex. The realization of the uniqueness of self, as previously described, is referred to as the process of differentiation. Integration, on the other hand, allows us to see that our selves are reliant on and embedded in networks of other humans: our relationships, our communities, our cultural associations, and our environments. We have the best chance at having a life that contains happiness, meaning, and authenticity when we work towards both differentiation and integration. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004)

Acceptance & Compassion

Acceptance of and compassion for the self work hand in hand. “The better we are at accepting ourselves and others, the more compassionate we

become” (Brown, 2010). We can define self-acceptance as “recognizing what is happening inside us, and regarding what we see with an open, kind and loving heart” (Brach, 2004).

Self-compassion is the next step. Compassion itself involves “the recognition and clear seeing of suffering” as well as “kindness for people who are suffering, so that the desire to help—to ameliorate suffering—emerges” (Neff, 2015). With self-compassion, we turn that kindness toward ourselves. Self-acceptance and self-reflection are courageous acts when you consider the context of a culture of people-pleasing that oftentimes promotes putting ourselves last.

Self-Confidence & Presence

This specific type of confidence in the self that stems from awareness and acceptance is far from representations of cockiness or arrogance that we might otherwise think of. In her book, *Dare to Lead*, Brene Brown (2018) calls this grounded confidence: “the messy process of learning and unlearning, practicing and failing, and surviving a few misses.” This can also be referred to as presence.

Presence is “the state of being attuned to and able to comfortably express our true thoughts, feelings, values, and potential” (Cuddy, 2018). It grows out of feelings of personal power, sincerity, and authenticity. In her book *True Refuge*, Tara Brach (2016) describes presence as “intrinsic to our nature” and as “immediate and embodied.” She lays out three components of presence:

1. **Wakefulness:** consciousness to what is going on around us and within us, including our body sensations and thoughts
2. **Openness:** recognizing and allowing without evaluating
3. **Tenderness:** sensitivity, warmth, and responsiveness

Brach explains that while these three can be referred to as qualities of presence, they are inseparable, like a sunlit sky: the light of consciousness, the wide openness of the sky, and the warmth of the sun. No one element can exist without the other two.

Self-Growth & Mindset

One way to describe self-growth is “an erratic forward movement: two steps forward, one step back” (Cameron, 2016). Here’s another description, given by Jane Fonda, as quoted in *Good Business* (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004):

People are capable, including myself, of perpetual change and growth. It’s the one thing in the entire universe that goes counter to the second law of thermodynamics—entropy—everything descends into decay. Everything

spirals downward, rots and decays, except the human spirit, which has the capacity to grow and to evolve upward.

Growth is not a linear process, but there are models and frameworks we can use to understand how self-growth and change happen. First, what is the difference between a growth and fixed mindset? People with a fixed mindset are likely to believe that intelligence is static. Their desire to appear smart leads to a tendency to avoid challenge, get defensive or give up, and ignore feedback. They can also end up feeling threatened by others and believing that any effort they put in is in vain. Those with a growth mindset, on the other hand, are likely to believe that intelligence can be developed. Their desire to learn leads to a tendency to embrace challenge, persist, learn from criticism, get inspired by the success of others, and work hard on a path to mastery. Those with a growth mindset are afforded the opportunity to ‘become’ which may be preferable to the existence of someone with a fixed mindset, who doesn’t believe in that luxury. (Dweck, 2007)

Mindset is the foundational element of achievement and fulfillment. No growth is possible without believing it to be possible. The behaviors that support your vision build upon that and work toward the goal or desired outcome. (See Figure 1.2)

Frameworks for Change

In the next section, we will discuss reflection as a tool and practice. But before that, there are two frameworks for growth and change that relate to reflective practice that I want to call attention to here. The first is “The Spiral of the Work” from the Work That Reconnects. The spiral is a journey with four stages:

1. Coming from Gratitude
2. Honoring our Pain for the World
3. Seeing with New Eyes
4. Going Forth.

Gratitude is an opportunity to quiet the mind and center ourselves. When we honor our pain, we experience it and accept it, and on top of that, seeing with new eyes allows us to observe, sense, and make connections. Finally, going forth is taking (new) action. This process is reflective, as it allows for stillness, connection, and sensing before any actions are taken. The process may also be fractal and repeated at different scales. (Macy & Brown, 2014)

Similar to the spiral, Otto Scharmer’s (Scharmer & Senge, 2016) Theory U is another well-known framework for change. It contains these main steps/elements:

1. Downloading past patterns
2. Seeing with fresh eyes
3. Sensing from the field
4. Presencing/connecting to the source
5. Crystallizing vision and intention
6. Prototyping the new by linking the head, heart, and the hand
7. Performing by operating from the whole

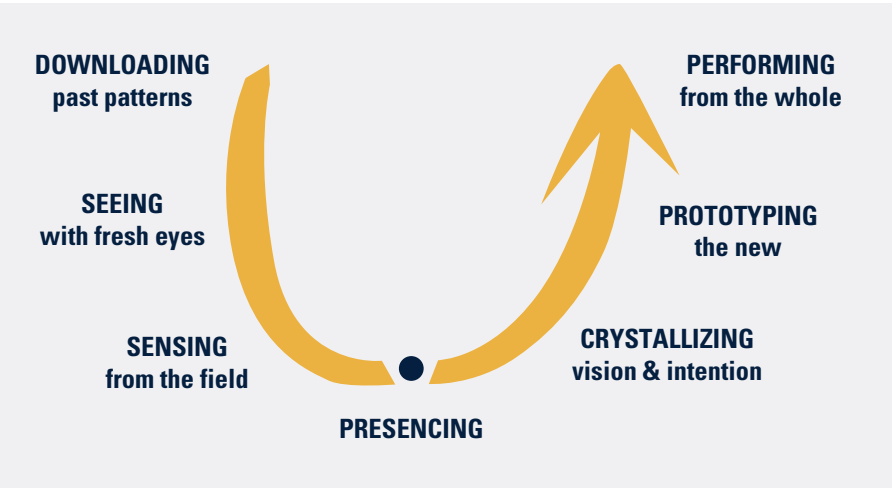
Although Theory U is primarily intended for use with groups and teams within organizations, it still has relevance as a reflective process. This and other reflective processes for change expose the value of reflection in innovating or making change in the world. Whether reflection is happening in group settings or by individuals alone, the steps overlap across these frameworks.



[Figure 1.2]
The Creative Pyramid (Jarvis, 2019)



[Figure 1.3]
The Spiral of the Work (Macy & Brown, 2014)



[Figure 1.4]
Theory U (Scharmer & Senge, 2016)

1.2 REFLECTION AS A TOOL & PRACTICE

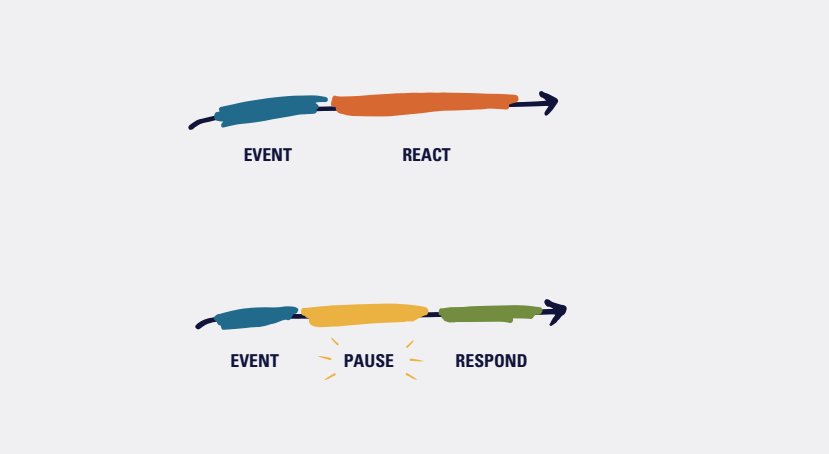
At its core, reflection is a tool and a practice that helps us scale from self-consciousness ("I have a self") to self-growth ("I transform my self"). The first step to reflection is the pause, which delays and/or stops reaction completely, allowing for response. Effectively building these kinds of pauses into our daily lives becomes a reflective practice.

Learning to Pause

In *Radical Acceptance*, Tara Brach defines the pause as “a suspension of activity, a time of temporary disengagement when we are no longer moving toward any goal” (Brach, 2004). While there are times when reaction is necessary for survival (or we wouldn’t have reactions at all), there are many

times and ways in which we can build these pauses into our daily lives. Understanding that not every situation is a crisis and that we are allowed the space to pause is the first step.

Brach explains that a pause is time-limited by nature. Eventually we go back to our activities, but the pause brings us more presence and confidence and increases our ability to make choices. She explains the value of the pause: “We free ourselves at ground level from the reactivity that perpetuates our suffering” (Brach, 2004).



[Figure 1.5]
The role of the pause



[Figure 1.6]
Pausing in practice

Practicing pausing and paying close attention to our minds and bodies opens up our options. The alternative, which many of us live with, is being driven by the unconscious emotions and needs which manifest in our reactions. Pausing is a choice. We can hold back from saying something in reaction, and we can name the inner thoughts and sensations that are affecting us.

Through pausing, we are able to listen and communicate coming from a place of presence and compassion. (Brach, 2004)

Rumination Is Not Reflection

The key to reflection is focusing on the present. Rumination, on the other hand, focuses on the past and the future. This tends to happen when we jump to conclusions about cause and effect, rather than focusing on the elements of the situation we are in. (Fosslien & Duffy, 2019)

Psychologist Martin Seligman has called attention to “three P’s” that we tend to focus on after a negative event: Personalization (“It’s all my fault”), Pervasiveness (“This will ruin everything”), and Permanence (“I’m going to feel like this forever”). Reflection bypasses these negative thought patterns. (Seligman, 2006)

Noting Emotions in the Body

While many conceptualize emotions as part of our minds, they are always expressed in the body, more consistently and regularly in the body. In fact, it can be a helpful reflective tool to identify where in the body we are feeling our emotions and how they affect our bodies. This kind of body awareness can help de-escalate even the most intense emotions. Even simply labeling your emotions within your body, giving them names as simple as anger, fear, sadness, etc. is an excellent grounding tool for the ruminating mind. (Germer & Salzberg, 2009)

Waking from Trance into Presence

Related to the ruminating mind is the idea of trance. This symbol created by Joseph Campbell (Figure 1.7) expresses the relationship between consciousness and unconsciousness. The line represents the distinction between what we are conscious of and what is outside of our conscious awareness. When we are living below the line, we’re in trance, unaware of the larger reality of our existence and experience. Becoming self-aware and living in presence, we emerge above the line. (Brach, 2019)

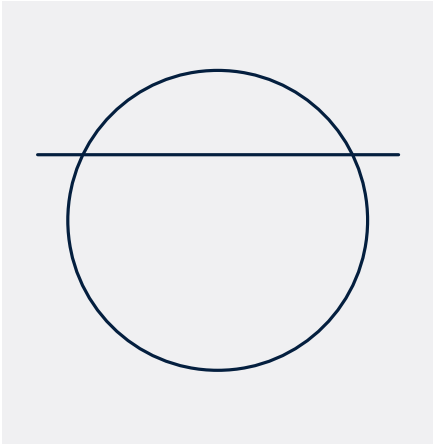
These are some of the characteristics as laid out by Brach (2019):

Trance

*unconscious—below the line
asleep, in a dream
caught or possessed by emotions
dissociated
heart defended or numb
reactive to experiences
grasping or resisting*

Presence

*conscious—above the line
wakeful, lucid, aware
emotions witnessed mindfully
in contact with feelings
heart caring and tender
responsive to experiences
balanced, open, and discerning*



[Figure 1.7]
Joseph Campbell's Circle of Awareness
(Brach, 2019)

To move from trance to presence, Brach promotes a reflective tool known as RAIN (Recognize, Allow, Investigate, Nurture).

Shedding Negative Self-Beliefs

All of us have experienced negative self-beliefs. These are related to the enemies within who tell us who we are, who perceive the self with judgment, cynicism, and fear. Reflection helps us understand that these negative self-beliefs are just that: “beliefs not facts” (Cameron, 2016).

As quoted in *Radical Compassion* (Brach, 2019), Nietzsche wrote, “The snake that cannot shed its skin perishes.” This means that in order to continue on living a life that is fulfilling and meaningful, we need to let go over negative beliefs that tell us something is wrong with us and that have never served us well. As our emotions, these self-beliefs can be found embedded in the body. The first steps are realizing that these beliefs are “real but not true” and critically viewing our inner voices and thoughts. (Brach, 2019)

Modes of Reflection

What is reflection? Reflection is the activity that helps us learn. As John Dewey (1936) explained, as “[w]e do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience.” This reflection-on-action takes place after an event happens. In his book *The Reflective Practitioner*, Schön (1984) builds upon Dewey with the concept of reflection-in-action which takes advantage of the pause in the middle of action. Reflection is taken to the next step, when we consider reflection-for-action (Killion & Todnem, 1991) which is reflection on future actions, intending to improve or change a practice, behavior, pattern, etc. Further, reflection-as-action (Farrell, 2018) acknowledges that reflection itself is a practice that one can incorporate into their life.

Skills of Reflection

Three skills are known as the tripod of reflection: *openness*, *observation*, and *objectivity*. Openness suggests that we are receptive to what we come across and are no longer clinging to what we believe things “should” be. It allows us to see things clearly, for what they actually are, instead of through the lens of our beliefs. Observation is how we perceive ourselves and the context in which we are living. Objectivity is what lets us have a thought or feeling and recognize its impermanence. We don’t have to identify with our thoughts and feelings. Reflection at its core requires that we stay open, observant, and objective as we perceive what’s going on inside and outside of us. (Siegel, 2010)

1.3 IN THE WORKPLACE

How do all of these ideas of the self and reflection fit into a work context? In a diagram related to the concept of generative team design, Dara Blumenthal (2016) demonstrates how the outcomes of innovation and change that many organizations and teams are trying to achieve stem from adult developmental capacity, which I define as related to a growth mindset: wanting to grow, knowing we can, and having the resources to begin. Self-awareness and self-reflection build upon this idea.

Attitudes on Work

If we had the chance, many of us would spend less time on work. This is true for two reasons. The first is related to the conditions of work, which lead many of us to believe that we can’t have a good time at work. The second is the cultural and historical understanding of work that many of us inherit. Together, those two reasons make it difficult for many of us to admit that work can be fun. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998)

We may have an attitude of resentment toward our jobs because it seems pointless to us, not doing anyone any good, or worse, doing harm. We may overcome this by finding ways to add meaning or value to our work. Another reason may be that the work is boring or routine and lacks inherent opportunities for growth. Overcoming this relates back to understanding that growth is our journey, it’s on us to uncover opportunities that may not initially be apparent. Additionally, another problem is stress, especially related to interpersonal relationships at work. This is an internal experience that we may be able to work through with self-reflective practices. These attitudes of resentment are obstacles within our control. While family, history, and society have played a part in shaping these attitudes, if our work is meaningless, stressful, and dull, it is within our hands to overcome it. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998)

Power at Work

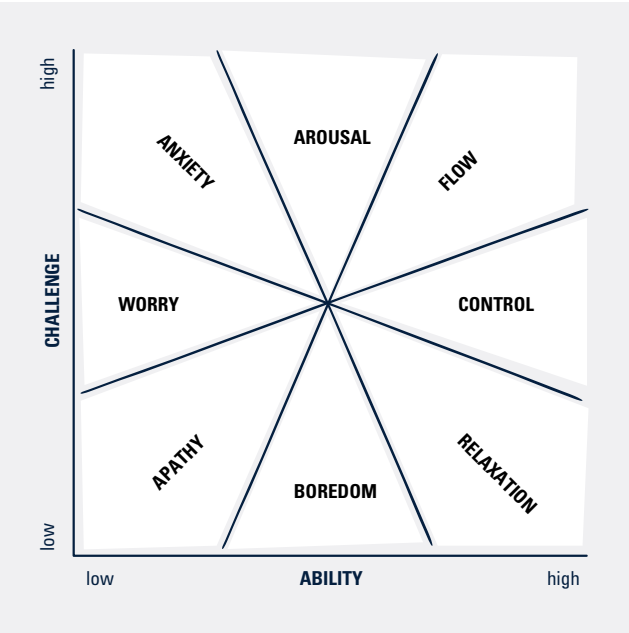
Considering control, a related concept is the idea of power. In her book *Dare to Lead*, Brene Brown (2018) calls attention to three different types of power that we can access in the workplace: power with, power to, and power within. “Power with” is how we work together, with our teammates and collaborators, to build a collective strength. Our power

[Figure 1.8]
From Blumenthal (2016)



multiples as we bring together our diverse skills, talents, knowledge, and interests. “Power to” relates to agency, when each member of a team believes they have autonomy and some ability to make a difference in their experience or through their work. “Power within” is where self-reflection at work comes through most strongly. It is understanding ourselves and doing that inner work that is critical to how we see ourselves and our experiences.

[Figure 1.9]
 Flow Diagram (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998)



Flow at Work

Our experiences accomplishing tasks relates to the relationship between our personal skill level and the level of challenge. When both skill and challenge are high, making the task just about manageable, we are able to experience flow. While this can occur often playing games or sports, it is often easier to achieve in our professional lives than in our personal lives since it requires having a clear goal. Flow also requires relevant and immediate feedback on the task. When these characteristics are met, we can achieve a fully-focused flow in which self-consciousness disappears. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998)

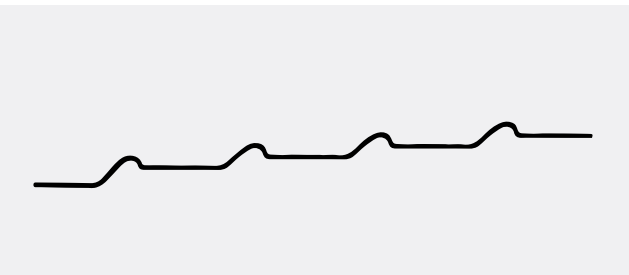
As seen in this flow diagram (Figure 1.9), arousal and control are two states adjacent to flow. Arousal occurs when the challenge is somewhat greater than the person’s skill level. In this state, a person feels focused, active, and involved but perhaps not so strong or cheerful. Control happens when the challenge is moderate but our skills are a good amount higher than what’s required. We may feel happy, strong, and satisfied

when in control, but not as involved or focused. In this way, the model of flow and these adjacent states represent a model for learning and growth. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998)

Mastery at Work

Self-reflection at work is a key to mastery. The mastery curve (Figure 1.10) recognizes that when learning any skill, we have spurts of progress, followed by a slight decline and then plateauing at a level somewhat higher than where we were before. To move toward mastery, we practice diligently, practicing for the sake of practicing, and understanding that we may be on plateaus for long periods, likely not always perceiving progress. In that sense, mastery is not a destination, but a way of moving toward increased skill, learning to appreciate and enjoy our plateaus as much as we do our burst of increase in skill. (Leonard, 1992)

[Figure 1.10]
 Mastery Graph (Leonard, 1992)



1.4 SUMMARY

This reading was critical to understand the context of research and thinking already performed as relate to the self, reflection, and the concept of work. This informed greatly the approaches my research and design took and allowed me to narrowly scope my work in opportunity grounded in theory and understanding of the problem space. Before moving onto the research I conducted with participants, here are the main takeaways from the literature summarized:

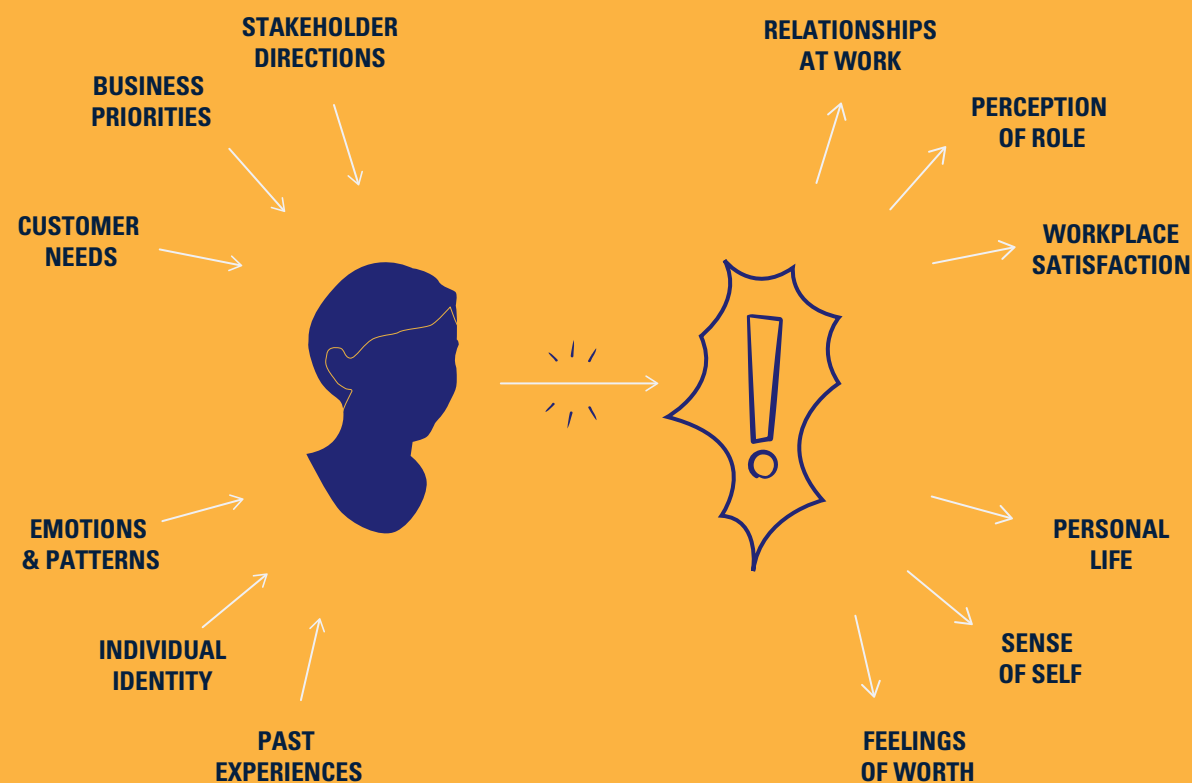
- Our selves are not fixed. Knowing ourselves is not a destination; it is the work of a lifetime.
- Authenticity is a value we live, not a goal we achieve. There is no one "right" way to live authentically.
- To find meaning in our work and our existence, differentiation and integration help us see our unique gifts and how we use them to contribute to the networks of others in which we're embedded.
- Our ability to make change (in our own lives and in the world) is foundationally dependant on our mindsets.
- Reflection is a pause that brings us to the present moment, unlike rumination which gets us stuck in the past and future.
- Our emotions live in our bodies and are one of our greatest resources for understanding ourselves and the world around us. Difficult emotions are often tied to negative self-beliefs that can have a lot of power over us.
- We inherit attitudes on work from our culture, society, and family. This inheritance makes it nearly impossible for most people to see work as something they want to spend their time on.
- Learning and improving at work are dependent on achieving states related to flow and increasing comfort with the plateaus on the mastery curve.

2

C H A P T E R T W O

exploring self-reflection at work

[Figure 2.1]
This diagram is a summary of the effects on individuals that lead to difficult moments and emotional reactions at work, as well as some of the resulting effects of those moments.



2.1 EXPLORATORY RESEARCH METHODS

Following my review of relevant literature, I used a survey to begin to validate some assumptions from my reading and to understand better what stands in the way of self-reflection at work for my 22 survey participants. This survey was aimed at individual contributors (not managers) in creative roles who work in traditional hierarchical organizations. I chose this group specifically because I believed the challenges they would have especially with respect to feelings of power, value, and meaning would be noticeable. I also hoped to identify positive deviants whose different experiences and behavior I could leverage. Beyond the survey, I conducted a few interviews with people outside of this initial target audience who I thought might provide an interesting perspective.

To synthesize my findings, I labeled observations from my interviews and surveys as roses (positives), buds (opportunities), and thorns (challenges/negatives). Affinity mapping the observations from interviews allowed me to use the themes that arose from the interviews as a categorical sort on top of survey insights. I uncovered five main themes in my research which provided direction for my project.

2.2 INSIGHTS

The following sub-sections relate to the main themes and takeaways from the survey and initial interviews conducted. These insights confirmed assumptions from the literature and gave direction for following design work.

The Value of Reflection at Work

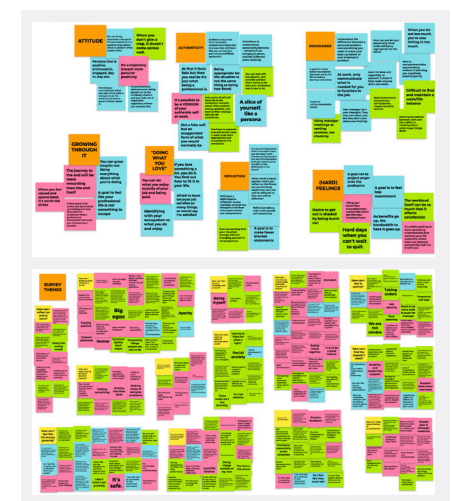
Through these methods, I was able to confirm three main assumptions about the benefits of reflection, especially related to work. Here's what was evident:

Reflection is not generally built into the average workday. Given that many find themselves spending much of their time in meetings or jumping from task to task, employees often struggle to reflect at work. Especially considering the optics of a physical workplace, it is hard to justify pausing for anything that doesn't appear immediately productive. While reflection in groups, such as in design workshops, is gaining traction, having regular personal reflection time during the workday is not the norm. The paradox is that without reflection, we tend to put energy toward things that don't ultimately serve us or don't come to fruition. How can I create a design that doesn't feel it has too great a barrier to entry?

Reflection aids self-awareness and decision-making. It allows individuals to turn the corner from looking externally for validation to following their own intuition. Choices made following reflection tend to be more

[Figure 2.2] Initial survey (visual)

[Figure 2.3] Synthesis of observations, affinity diagramming and coding (visual)



thoughtful responses to the external world and less reactive. They tend to stick better and feel more aligned with the self. After gathering all the data, the pause of reflection gives the heart an opportunity to weigh in on the question at hand.

Reflection promotes feelings of control. While environments like the workplace can often make individuals feel out of control, reflection helps individuals feel power over their circumstances as it makes clearer on what they need to do to get where they are trying to go. It helps elucidate the actionable steps that need to be taken in order to feel better, not just in the moment but in the near future. Rather than considering how a job will be different, those who reflect at work consider how they will be different. This is one of the distinguishing characteristics of reflection from rumination. Is there some way that I might be able to make that value of reflection clear in my work?

Behaviors and Attitudes to Support through Design

We tend to see more clearly when talking about others. Why do we struggle when it comes to ourselves? Through questions that probed on what good and bad coworkers look like, I am able to understand the thought patterns and actions to support and to thwart via my design:

Ideal coworkers are...	Difficult coworkers are...
Positive	Cynical
Optimistic	Indifferent/dispassionate
Respectful	Egotistical
Humorous	Hierarchical
Open-minded	Lack of investment
Willing	Back-channeling
Flexible	Apathetic
Adaptable	Taking too much ownership
Enthusiastic	No accountability
Engaged	Prideful
Aligned to corporate mission	Stubborn
Express shared values	Inflexible
Sincere	Superiority
Collaborative	Interrupting
Able to acknowledge mistakes	Invalidating

Unsurprisingly, the majority of the items on these lists relate to attitudes, alignment (or lack thereof) to values, flexibility versus rigidity, as well as other supportive or destructive behaviors. While what made it onto these lists is not surprising, what may be a little more surprising is what’s not on them. For example, while it does appear important that a coworker is engaged and has

values that are aligned with the company mission, a sense of passion does not appear to be a necessarily good or bad quality to have as a coworker.

Vulnerability and Authenticity Are Not All-or-Nothing

An all-or-nothing approach doesn’t get us anywhere when it comes to authenticity. We can be human while still being discerning about what we choose to bring into a workplace. Are there ways that a design could help individuals see where they need to draw healthy lines in their lives while still feeling like they are being true to themselves? Could a design help us understand the distinction between having healthy boundaries and putting on a false persona?

In beginning this project, I had wondered an appropriate design goal would be to help people bring their “whole selves” to work. The results of these methods were clear: some people who feel inauthentic at work (or who perceive their coworkers as inauthentic) see authenticity as a binary characteristic. Either one is or isn’t authentic. Similar to this are the attitudes around vulnerability. Either you feel able to share every thought and feeling you have or you feel unable to share anything. This is a common misconception, not only as seen through these methods, but the literature as well.

Other participants expressed an understanding of necessary compartmentalization at work that is possible to accomplish while still feeling true to one’s self. This compartmentalization could also be referred to as having boundaries at and about work. These boundaries don’t just exist to protect ourselves from letting in a bunch of garbage, but they also help prevent us from dumping our issues onto other people. When you let out too much, you are also letting in too much. When it comes to vulnerability, there are safe(r) ways to practice this, at levels that are appropriate based on the closeness of the working relationship. We can make ourselves vulnerable in so many ways that we don’t often account for, including sharing our ideas even though they may not be accepted.

Taking Ownership of Difficult Emotions

Emotions will not always be stable. Great days will be followed by hard days when you just want to quit and vice versa. Some participants expressed an understanding and acceptance of this, a great first step. It is possible to see your emotions and your reality at work as two separate things that influence each other but do not have a direct cause-effect relationship. Your emotions come from you, not from work. Can a design help individuals take responsibility for their internal experience?

Emotions will not always be easy. Those that are able to take ownership of their difficult feelings, instead of pinning it all on their coworkers and their surroundings overall had a more positive attitude toward work. Here are some examples of difficult emotions participants expressed having:

- Resentment
- Anger
- Loneliness
- Fight/flight/freeze (defensiveness)
- Absence of control and/or agency
- Not feeling valued
- Anxiety
- Frustration

Perception of Growth

How do we define growth? A salary or job title increase? Or something else? While some participants perceived opportunities for growth as something that either does or does not exist within a workplace, particularly related to climbing the hierarchical ladder or formal trainings, those who were overall more satisfied with their jobs and their workplaces seemed to share a few core beliefs about growth:

1. When considering professional growth (as well as other life goals), looking back, the journey will be more rewarding than the resulting end or achievement.
2. There will always be external factors that seem to thwart our progress, but it's possible to uncover opportunities for growth.
3. You don't have to like everything you are doing to get something out of it and feel like you're growing, whether that be by making purposeful moves, learning something new, or working toward personal goals.
4. While they don't tell the entire story, the external validation frameworks that come along with working for an organization can be helpful to measure success.

These core beliefs illuminate what a growth mindset is, an understanding that the ability to improve is within us and that the path we take in life is the reward itself. Achieving our goals is an added bonus. My design might serve as a lens that allows individuals to perceive their own growth as it's happening.

3

C H A P T E R T H R E E

generative research & principles

3.1 GENERATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

Having a better sense of my target audience and their needs, as well as a sense of direction for the project, I devised three generative research methods. They also served as early rough prototypes of reflective tools I might incorporate into the final design. These were conducted in eight interview sessions that ran from one hour to an hour and forty-five minutes. All methods were conducted remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Card Sorting

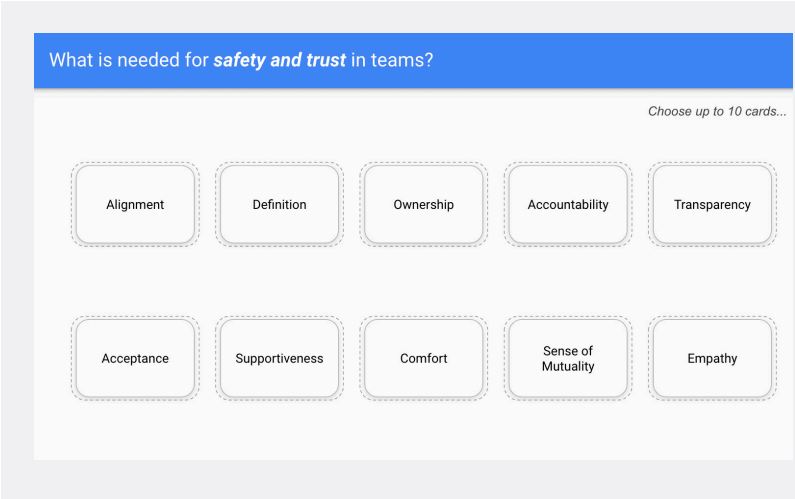
I used this method to understand what participants believe need to exist in teams so that I could uncover what specific goals my design needed to support for the individuals within these teams. This also served as an early prototype for a set of reflective cards that are found in the final design. The qualities labeled on the cards and the categories themselves were derived from my literature review and the previous survey.

Participants identified up to 10 of these qualities of teams to assign to each of three categories:

- 1. What is needed for safety and trust in teams?
- 2. What is needed for effectiveness and productivity in teams?
- 3. What is needed for teams to innovate and create change?

I heatmapped some of the qualities that appeared most frequently and collated insights and opportunities related to these ideas.

Safety and Trust: The qualities that related most to this category were primarily fuzzy ideas that relate to how someone feels as well as some of the behaviors that are important to create safe and trusting work environments. Some of those facilitating behaviors are transparency, supportiveness, and empathy. Transparency, the top characteristic for this category, helps provide much-needed clarity on decisions that come from above, even though it's not always comforting. Supportiveness was defined here as not just being accepting of others' ideas but also actively helping them cross the finish line. Here, empathy was understood as communicating an understanding of other



[Figure 3.1]
An example of a remote card sort

people’s perspectives. Some of the fuzzier characteristics were belonging (feeling part of the group, feeling you understand your role on the team), mutuality (a sense that we’re all in this together), and authenticity (that others are genuine and speaking from their own, true perspectives). Authenticity seemed to be measured by the apparent motivations of coworkers and a judgment on their purity or lack thereof. Although seen as an external factor, participants expressed that good leadership was an important factor to safety and trust. If they believed that their leaders were trusting them, they felt it was easier to trust their leaders. The main sign of being trusted by leadership was that leaders were facilitating their work instead of undermining it.

Effectiveness and Productivity: The characteristics that came to the top of this categorization were much more focused on the day-to-day and on what’s most needed to move as quickly as possible while having done appropriate planning to avoid unnecessary work along the way. Accountability was seen as the top characteristic, necessary for longevity of effectiveness and productivity. Organization (planning and preparation as well as a working team structure and establishment of roles) and alignment (the clear picture of the goal which everyone is bought into) were seen as critical in the upfront. While working together, decisiveness (which helps things get done), flexibility (the opposite of believing your way is the best or only way), and collaboration (including perspectives and knowledge of all team members) helped to keep the process moving while still appropriately inclusive to all team members. Some participants also called attention to having a mission or vision to anchor their motivations and prioritize.

Innovation and Change: This category was more focused on team dynamics than the other two. The top characteristic of teams that innovate was a willingness to take risks. The understanding here is that risks are required for change and having the courage to take them is vital. Creativity, collaboration, and playfulness were seen as vital within the teams themselves. Decisiveness was also towards the top of the priority list here (as choices have to be made in order to move forward), but so was intuition. Participants had an explicit understanding that decisions had to be made and sometimes that required following an intuition or inner wisdom that develops over time. Finally, a strong mission and vision informed by data and experience is required to understand the purpose of the work.

Journey Collage

I used this method to learn more about how individuals understand their past, present, and where they are trying to go in the future. It also functioned as an early reflective tool. Participants told a visual story of their work and life from the past five years to the present and then projecting into the future. I asked the participants to focus on one of the cards from the previous activity,

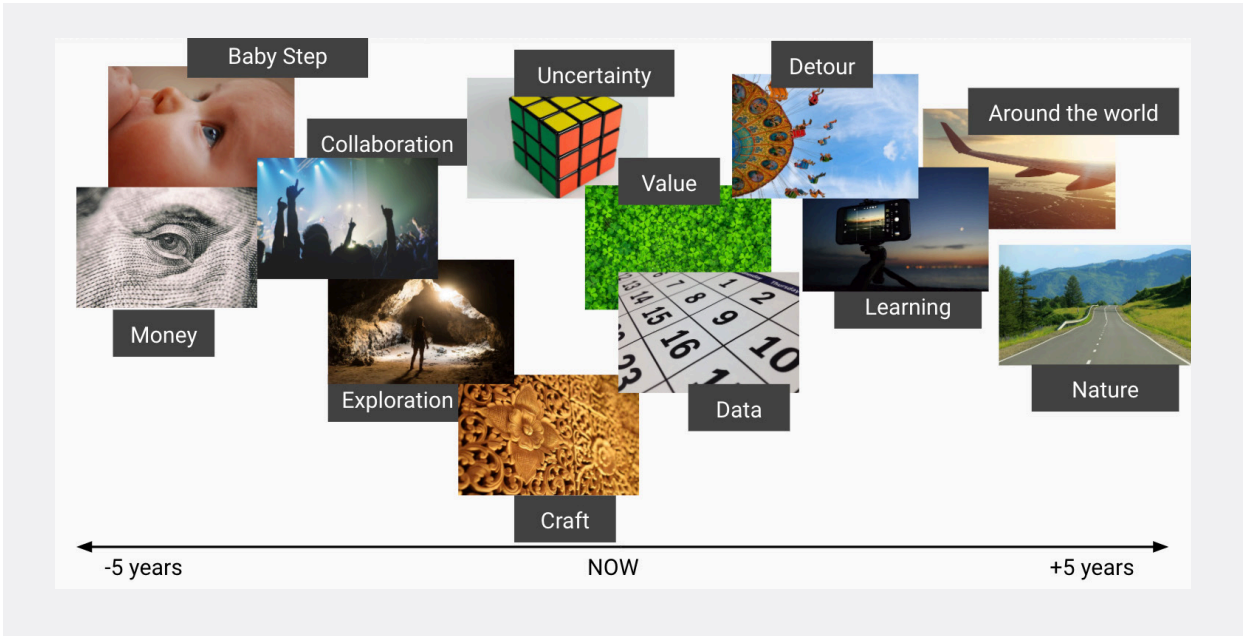
something that had struck them as relevant, important, or interesting, as an idea to guide the story if necessary. The participants selected from a collection of photographs to use to describe their journey either literally or figuratively.

Overall, when focusing on the past, themes that came through were finding one’s way with a focus on the self. Participants were able to look back and see how far they’d come, all the effort it had taken to make transitions and blossom into where they are now. There was also an emphasis on learning and exploring, not just in an effort to achieve something. Although the past was on the whole idealized by these participants, they were able to remember the frustrations and impatience along the way.

Feelings about the present were more mixed, primarily focusing on inner experiences in the the workplace. Some of what was expressed was uncertainty, lack of motivation, stress, and the feeling of being stuck. There were participants, however, that focused more on the goals they are focused on right now, some of those being collaborating more, gaining experience, lighting passions, and adding value. This demonstrates a design opportunity to frame difficult feelings by relating them to the goals we are working towards.

Participants generally viewed the future positively, as having potential, and in much more abstract terms. This shows an opportunity for a design to help people understand better what these ideas mean to them as well as make these abstract goals more concrete and actionable. Some of the participants’ visions for the future included growing into leadership, gaining comfort, security, and independence, connecting to community and nature, inspiring others and being inspired, as well as being exposed to and having new ideas.

[Figure 3.2]
Example of a journey collage



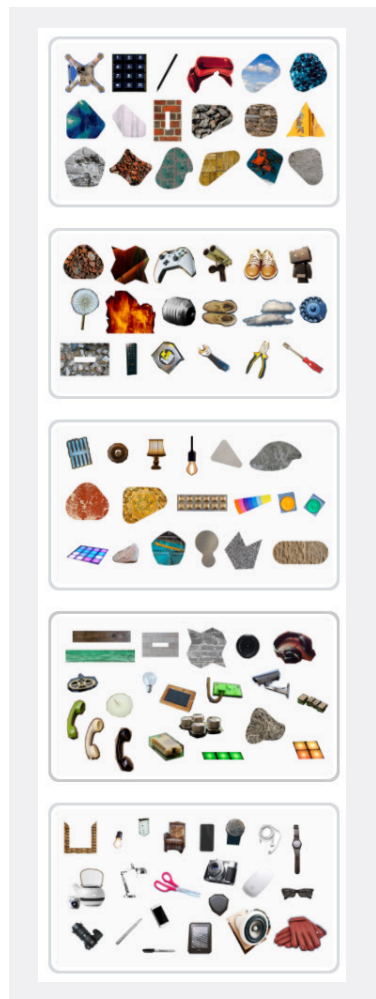
Enchanted Object Collage

The final method of these generative interviews was an enchanted object collage. I helped participants focus on a single goal for where they want to be five years in the future, based on the previous journey collages. I asked them to create an enchanted device using odds and ends cut out from images, as seen in the figures. This enchanted device would help them to get where they are trying to go and give them the abilities and skills they will need to face their imagined future.

One main theme that came through this activity was externalizing the internal: being able to see and express thoughts, visualize abstract ideas, and noticing patterns. There was also an important element of being able to forecast the future, seeing the consequences of different decisions and helping aid in the navigation of complexity. These enchanted device collages expressed the importance of balancing understanding what is in our control and preparing for the unexpected. There appears to be an opportunity for a reflective set of tools

[Figure 3.3] (left)
Some of the elements available to use to create enchanted devices

[Figure 3.4] (right)
Three examples of enchanted devices created by participants

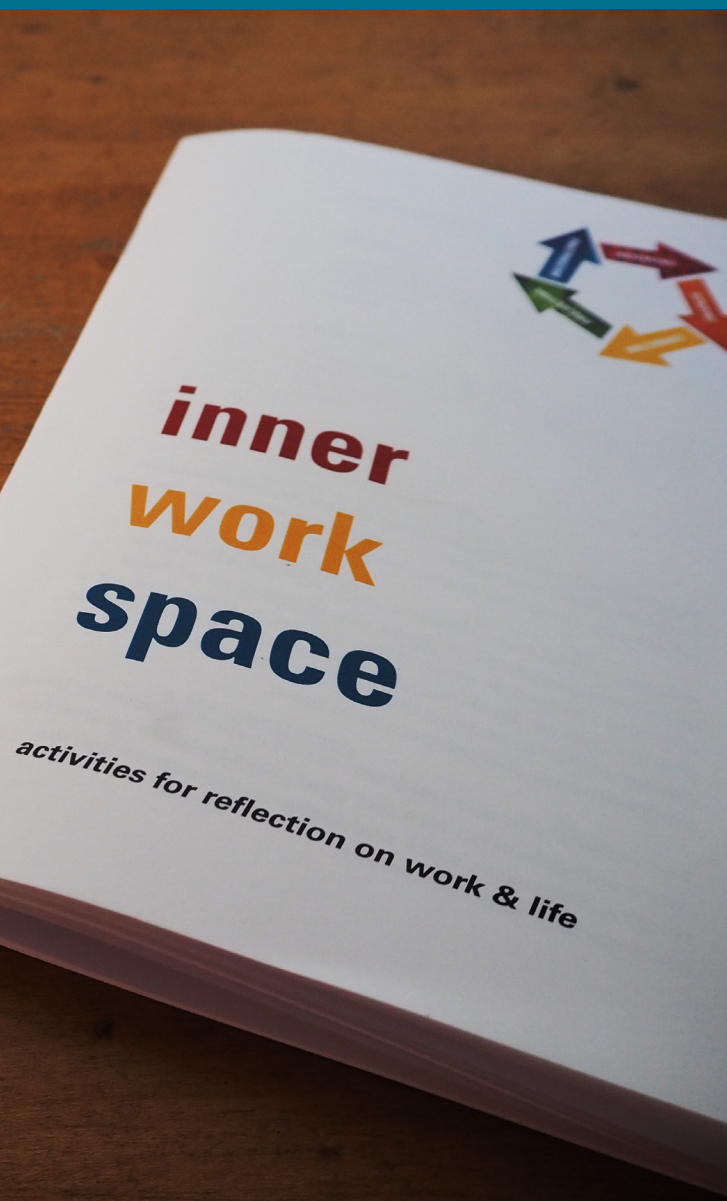


to help both bring people into the present moment and help them establish their own set of principles to guide them into the future.

3.2 DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Going forward into prototyping and testing my designs, these generative methods (as well as the previous research) led to these four design principles:

1. A design should balance **structure** with **flexibility**. While participants will require a sense of structure to understand what they are getting themselves into, they also need the room to try things out and start with what seems most doable in their unique contexts. Not all ways of reflecting are going to be right for all individuals.
2. A design should balance **accountability** with **self-direction**. While individuals crave systems for feedback and accountability, the design should enable them to take initiative and not pre-suppose a way to use it.
3. A design should support reflection both in a **moment of need** and as a **practice** over an indefinite period of time. Ways to reflect should be varied to support diverse goals.
4. A design should balance the **time and effort** required to start with the **expectation** for results. Low-effort tasks should provide for small but noticeable wins, and growth over time with significant effort should be perceptible.



4

C H A P T E R F O U R

design & evaluation



[Figure 4.1]
Above is a representative photograph of Inner Work Space. On the left are examples of cards in the oracle deck. On the right is a booklet that contains reflective activities.

4.1 DESIGN

Inner Work Space is a set of tools and activities to support self-reflection in and out of the workplace. It includes a booklet of activities and prompts which take an individual through a framework of five reflective steps that represent different perspectives on ways to use reflection and that build upon one another. It also includes an oracle deck that provides a few different ways to engage in reflection, regularly, on a daily or weekly basis as a practice, or as a moment of need arises.

Audience

Although I conducted my initial research with individual contributors in creative roles at traditional, hierarchical organizations, Inner Work Space is suited for any person who works. It will be especially helpful for those whose roles require extensive collaboration with others. The intent is not to take those who are unmotivated and create motivation in them. This system of tools exists for those who crave it, for those who are looking to suffer less in their corporate lives and want to reclaim their individual power.

Framework

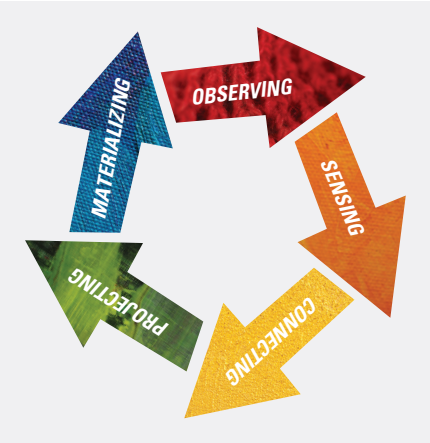
It was essential that Inner Work Space contain a framework for change to perceive progress, understand connections between reflective activities, and to give meaning to reflection. The steps of Inner Work Space are as follows:

- **Observing** (gathering information without judgment)
- **Sensing** (achieving awareness and understanding of the self)
- **Connecting** (putting those pieces together and turning the corner into the future)
- **Projecting** (imagining what that future might look like)
- **Materializing** (beginning to give shape to that future)

These steps are very clearly inspired by Theory U and The Spiral of the Work. This framework fits along side those and other reflective frameworks which contain an element of gathering information, giving it meaning, figuring out where to go next, and then actually moving forward. Inner Work Space is no different; it's the ways to reflect and the intended applications that are different.

4.2 COMPONENTS

Inner Work Space contains two main parts: an oracle and a book of activities. The oracle is a deck of 60 cards with reflective prompts, and the booklet contains a series of visual and reflective writing activities. In the following paragraphs, I will go into more detail.



[Figure 4.2]
The framework for Inner Work Space: (1) Observing, (2) Sensing, (3) Connecting, (4) Projecting, and (5) Materializing

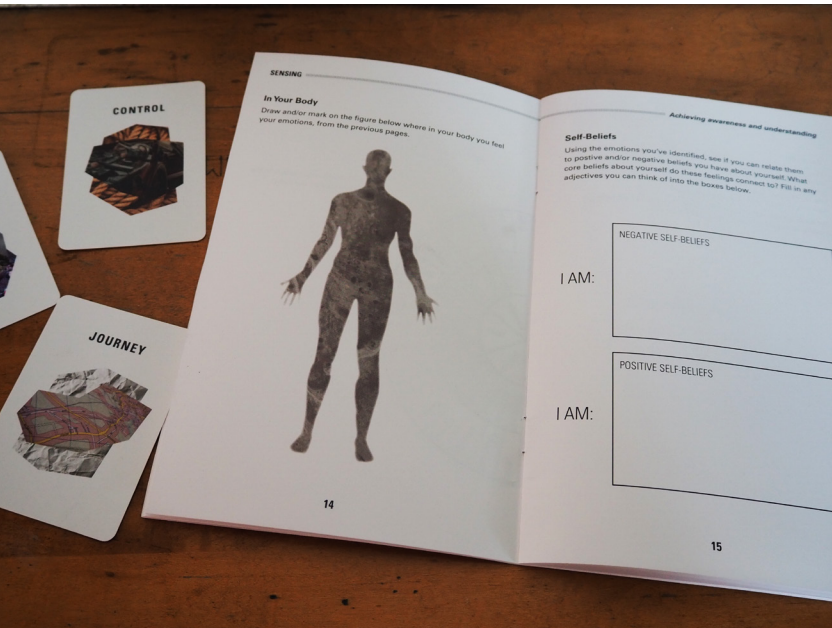
Oracle

Inner Work Space contains 60 cards, each with a theme for reflection. They each come along with descriptions and reflective questions. These cards can be used multiple ways, as you would use other oracle decks. Those who use it can pull a single card to reflect on over the week, a day, or a moment. There are also two spreads available: a three-card spread to consider past, present, and future, and a five-card spread ("the bridge") to consider transitions. While oracle decks generally speak to you based on the chance of the card being pulled, this deck can be used to draw random cards or select specific cards that feel applicable to situation can be selected by surveying them and going with cards that stick out instinctively. These cards also each come with a description and reflective questions to help the individual create their own context and understanding for the themes.

Activity Book

The activity book has five sections (one for each step as laid out in the framework), each with two to three visual reflective activities followed by a journaling/free-writing prompt. Below are descriptions of each of the activities.

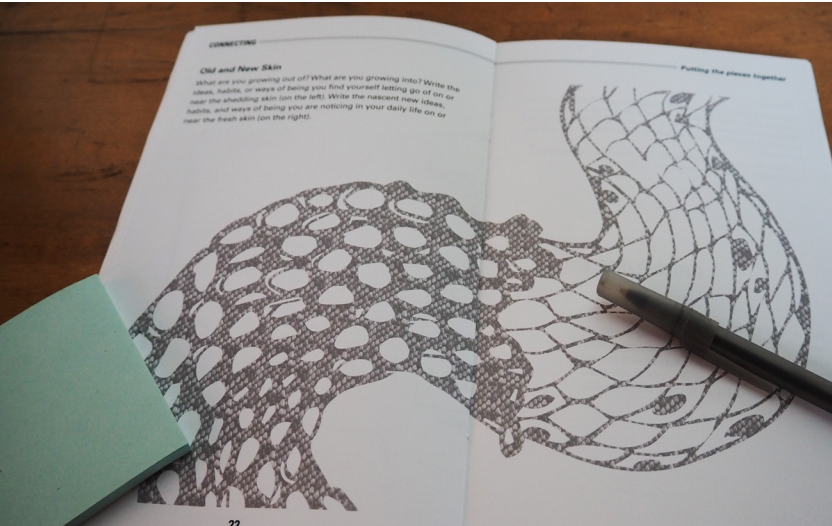
- **Self "Empathy" Map (Observing):** This is similar to the design exercise one would use to gain empathy for a user or client. Directing these observations toward the self, people can use the exercise to step outside of themselves and see themselves more clearly by calling attention to what they think, feel, do, and say.
- **A Different Kind of Resume (Observing):** Individuals may identify strongly with their roles and more obvious life and career achievements This activity allows individuals to consider what else is important to them and what else brings them pride and satisfaction.
- **Wheel of Life (Observing):** Inspired by the Life Pie from *The Artist's Way* (Cameron, 2016), this activity allows people to take note of how fulfilled they are feeling in different areas of prioritization in our lives. There is one wheel each for the last week, month, day and year.
- **Naming Emotions (Sensing):** As discussed in the literature section, labeling emotions is a powerful way to slow reactivity and to help us make better use of the information that can be derived from our feelings and sensations. While the emotion wheel is not new and has been repurposed time and again in many contexts, this one is custom for this book. The emotions chosen were inspired by lists within Germer & Salzberg (2009) as well as Rosenberg (2015). They are separated into categories:



[Figure 4.3]
Book and cards together



[Figure 4.4]
An image of five cards from the oracle deck.



[Figure 4.5]
An image of the old skin and new skin activity in the book

light and dark. After naming emotions, individuals using the book write out what in their life contributes to those feelings.

- **In Your Body (Sensing):** We feel emotions in the body. This activity asks individuals to label where they feel their emotions on the provided figure.
- **Self-Beliefs (Sensing):** Calling attention to our positive and negative self-beliefs, related to the emotions we feel in our bodies, helps individuals see them as real, but not necessarily true.
- **Inner Voices of Resistance (Connecting):** What's holding you back? Call attention to the enemies within, the voices in your head that are holding you back.
- **Inner Work Life System Map (Connecting):** Modified from Amabile & Kramer (2011), this activity connects the events at work to a model for the inner experience of thoughts, feelings, and motivations and how those play out in our lives.
- **Old and New Skin (Connecting):** How are you changing? What are you letting go of? What are you growing into? Label What are you letting go of? What are you growing into? Label
- **Ten Thousand Foot View (Projecting):** Imagining the future, what will the big picture of your life look like? What will the bird see? Individuals can write or draw.
- **One Inch View (Projecting):** Imagining the future, what will the details of your life look like? What will the ant see? Individuals can write or draw.
- **Planting Seeds for Harvest (Projecting):** In the thick of life, it can be difficult to see what you are doing today to benefit from in the future. Individuals make this explicit by labeling the seeds they are planting now (what they are working on and practicing today) and the plants they will someday grow into (what those actions will enable in the future).
- **Relationships Map (Materializing):** In many ways, work resembles a family system. In this activity, individuals can create a map of their professional and social network. This activity is inspired by the genograms used in family systems therapy, as seen in van der Kolk (2015). Beyond simply mapping out the interconnections, individuals are able to code the quality of different relationships and gain insight into how certain relationships between others impact the relationships they have.
- **Storyboarding Futures (Materializing):** The final activity is a set of storyboardings to being preparing for things we might do differently or new things we might add into our lives.

OBSERVING

Gathering information and noticing the unnoticed

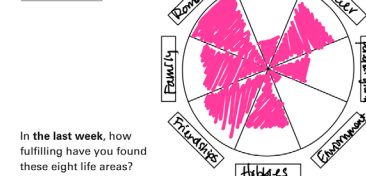
Wheel of Life

How balanced is your life? Let's find out. Start by choosing the areas of your life that you value the most. If you can only spend your time on eight areas of life, what would you prioritize? Here are some ideas:

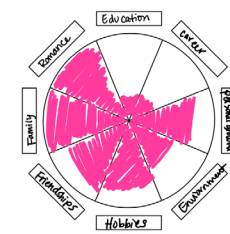


Label each wheel segment with one of your eight areas. Then, following the prompt on each wheel, mark and then fill in how fulfilled you feel in each of these areas.

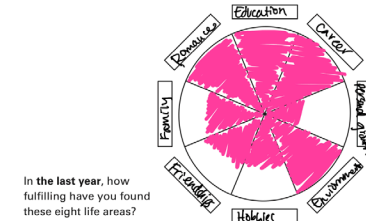
It should look something like this:



In the last week, how fulfilling have you found these eight life areas?



In the last month, how fulfilling have you found these eight life areas?



In the last year, how fulfilling have you found these eight life areas?

[Figure 4.6]

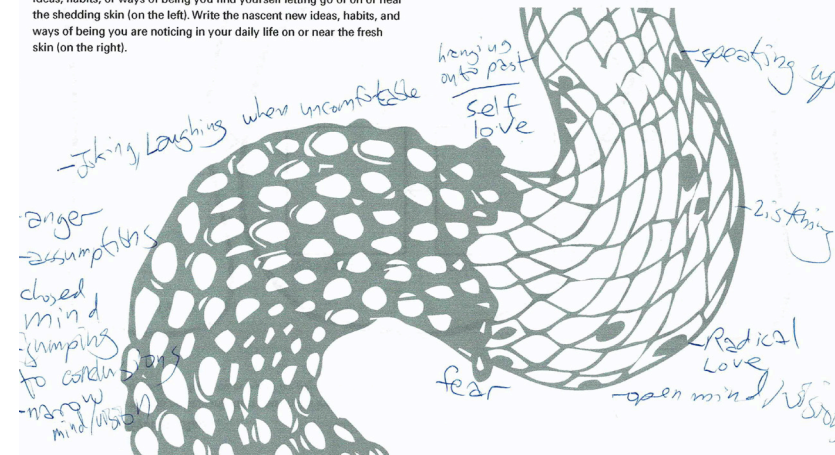
An example of the Wheel of Life from testing with a participant.

CONNECTING

Putting the pieces together

Old and New Skin

What are you growing out of? What are you growing into? Write the ideas, habits, or ways of being you find yourself letting go of or near the shedding skin (on the left). Write the nascent new ideas, habits, and ways of being you are noticing in your daily life on or near the fresh skin (on the right).

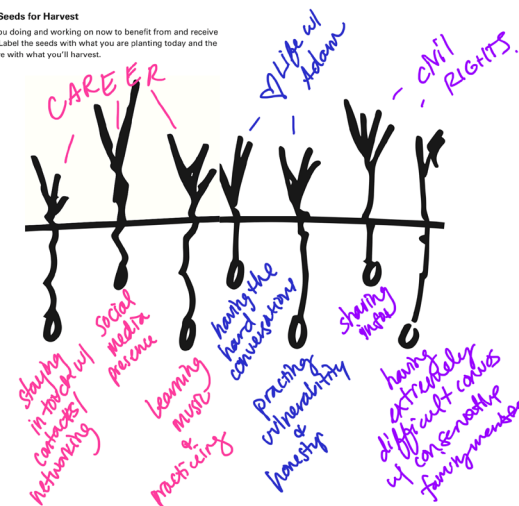


[Figure 4.7]

An example of Old Skin and New Skin from testing with a participant

Planting Seeds for Harvest

What are you doing and working on now to benefit from and receive fully later? Label the seeds with what you are planting today and the plants above with what you'll harvest.



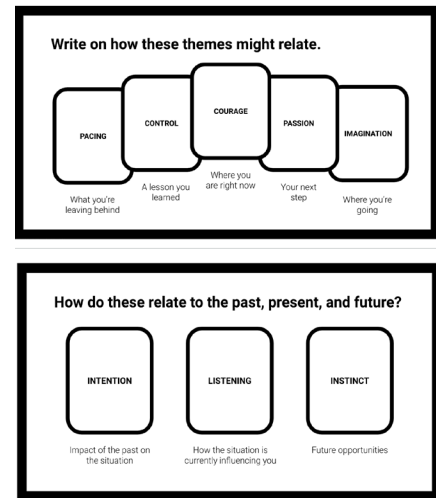
[Figure 4.8]

An example of Planting Seeds for Harvest from testing with a participant

[Figure 4.9] (top)
Example of the five-card spread prompt called "the bridge" about transitions

[Figure 4.10] (middle)
Example of the three-card past, present, and future spread

[Figure 4.11] (bottom)
Examples of the cards in the oracle



4.3 PROTOTYPING & EVALUATION

I designed three prototypes that each represented elements of the framework and components that I envisioned part of the final design. The first was a set of themes to reflect on along with two visualization meditations and corresponding “templates” for the words to slot into. Each template served as a free-writing prompt. (See Figures 4.9 and 4.10) The second was a booklet that contained activities that were ordered and broken down based on a preliminary framework for change. Finally, the third was a subset of 10 cards to select from and reflect on for the week, each with a corresponding journaling prompt for the end of the week.

Testing & Results

I ran two rounds of testing. The first was a remote facilitated session, and the second was unfacilitated, and I simply provided instructions to go along with the prototype. After both tests, I followed up with a feedback survey form to gather thoughts and reactions from participants.

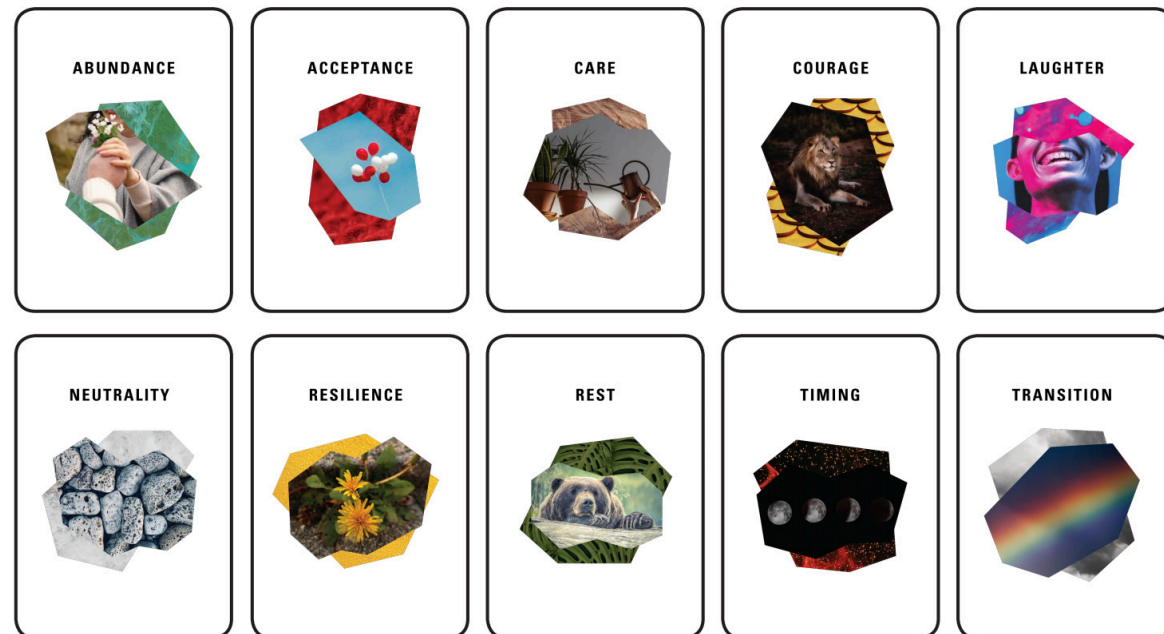
The results were generally positive. On each round of testing, I asked, on a scale of 1 (not at all likely) to 6 (extremely likely), how likely the participant would be to try other activities like this in the future. Over 40% of participants rated this extremely likely, a 6 out of 6, over 50% gave a rating of 5 out of 6, and no one rated this question below a 4. This demonstrates that the tools designed were overall seemed helpful and valuable.

In general, participants characterized these activities as a good balance

between practical and abstract. The activities were seen as therapeutic, allowing participants to “turn down the noise” and actually hear themselves. Some participants were put off by either activities that required drawing (because it’s intimidating) or those that required writing (because it seems self-serving). Overall, I think it’s clear that these activities take time and energy (which we don’t always have enough of). One participant, explaining why certain activities didn’t appeal to them, asked, “Is it bad if I’m lazy?” While I do think there are only a few circumstance in which we can’t fit a pause into our days, I don’t believe that we can all be expected to have the energy for more involved reflective tools on any given day. That’s why the flexibility of a reflective system of tools like this is so critical. The concrete feedback I was able to incorporate was making the framework “steps” as well as the connections between activities clearer and more explicit.

As interesting as the feedback on the activities, I was interested and glad to hear the following:

- Participants acknowledging that it is emotional reactions that are not helpful at work not the emotions themselves
- That reflection can help ascertain whether your goals have been impressed onto you by external forces or truly are coming from within
- That although reflection at work feels out of place and scary, it needs to be normalized





CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Working on any thesis project, let alone one that so heavily focuses on the inner life of individuals has been very much colored by the time at which I’ve been working on this. In all of my research activities, some of the immediate effects of not just living through a pandemic, but also the social moment we are living through have been quite apparent. And it’s not only affected the people who were my participants, but it’s affected me as the designer. While I’m starting to notice and make sense of these things, it will take me much longer to truly understand the impact on the collective "us" living through this as well as on me, as an individual.

Self-reflection at work is relevant, and I believe now is its time. In an era in which we are all considering our priorities, our values, and whether our actions are aligning up to our inner hopes, dreams, and desires, the tools and practice of self-reflection are there for us.

What's Next

I am looking forward to sharing these tools and ideas more broadly and publicly. I want to make this work accessible to others, but I'll be starting immediately with my team(s) in my current workplace. I believe this framework, system, and the corresponding tools will have value beyond through individual use. Might they expand into tools for mentorship and team relationship building?

I will continue to learn from use of this system, even and especially through my own use. I plan to adapt and grow the system within the framework I’ve established. At the end of the day, I designed these tools to ameliorate my own suffering at work and in life as much as that of those around me and all over who may not know the power of the pause. My hope is that this thesis demonstrates a path forward for people who work all over that doesn't hinge on anyone or anything but the self.

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