

THE POWER OF RITUALS

A Study of Transition Rituals in the Life Cycle of
Complex Construction Projects

This dissertation provides an in-depth understanding of the practice and meaning of transition rituals in the context of complex construction projects. Construction projects are characterized by their high cost and duration, immense scope, inherent complexity and uncertainty, high environmental and societal impact, and the difficult collaboration between public and private partners.

The ever-changing, non-linear, and often unpredictable process that typifies the life cycle of such projects is a main concern in organization and project management studies. Within this complex context, this research takes the ritualization of transitions in the project life cycle as the main research focus.

Specifically, it addresses rituals that mark important transitions and milestones in the project life cycle, such as signing contracts, (sub) project kick-offs, project phase launches, celebrating milestones, and (sub)project completions or deliveries.

Using an ethnographic, qualitative-interpretive approach, it was found that transition rituals are performed to attribute special significance to the construction process. Within their demarcated space and time, rituals tell stories and sketch visions about construction projects and their environment through aesthetic and poetic performance.

Rather than being purely symbolic and ceremonial, rituals are performed strategically for various purposes, such as enacting transitions in the project life cycle, embedding a project in its environment, rebalancing the disturbance caused by the construction process, and gaining public support, especially in urban settings.

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