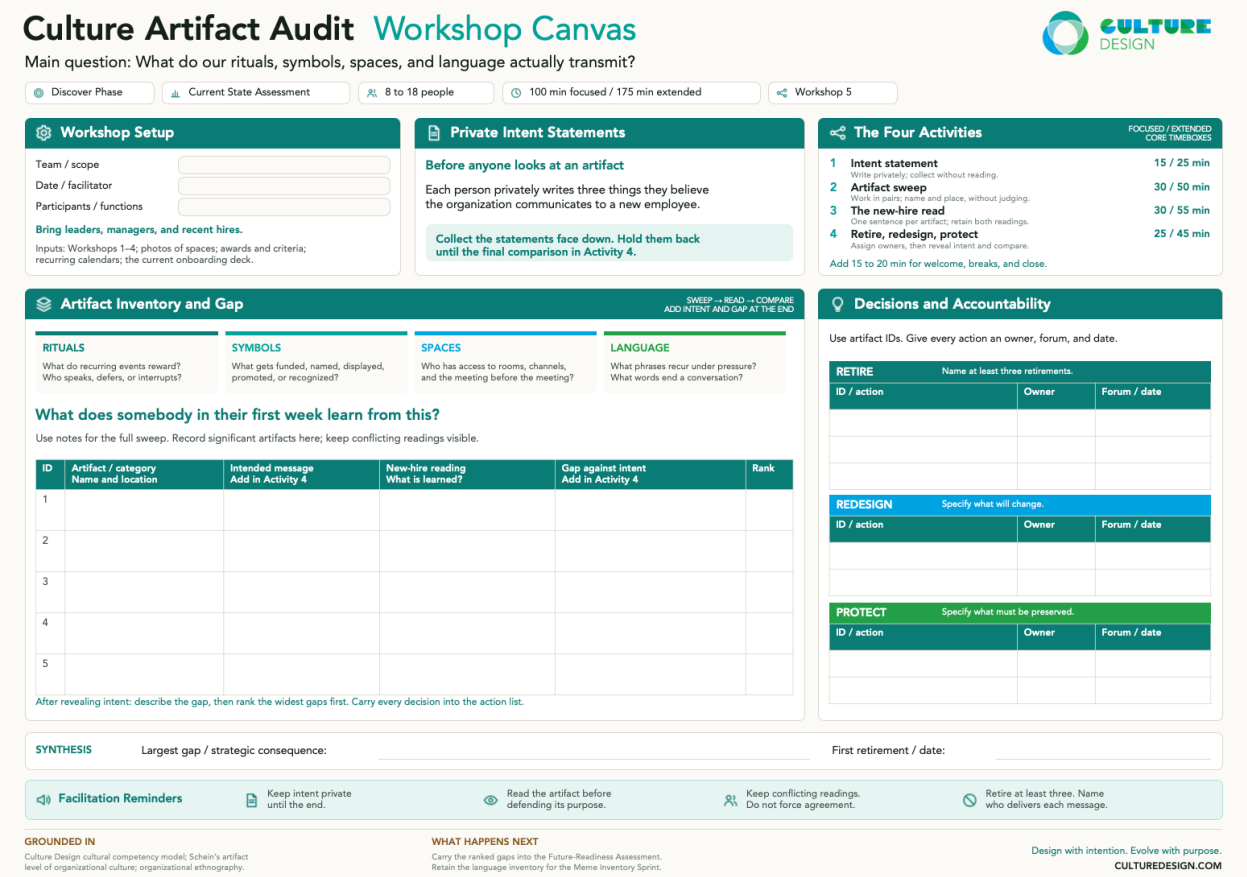
Culture Artifact Audit

Workshop Wednesday 10.14.26 | Authored by Jason Burnham



Use this blank canvas to capture significant artifacts and decisions. Keep the full inventory on additional notes or in a separate table. A completed example appears near the end of this article.

People learn what matters here by watching what happens around them. We can explain our values clearly, but employees also see who gets recognized, who is invited into a decision, and what happens when someone raises a concern. Those experiences give them a practical understanding of how to work within the organization. When that understanding conflicts with what we say we value, we need to examine the practices creating the difference.

The *Culture Artifact Audit* helps your team read what its rituals, symbols, spaces, and language communicate. It builds on the *Cultural Competency Assessment* by looking at specific things people encounter in their daily work. Participants compare the message they believe the organization sends with what a new employee might learn from each artifact, then decide what to retire, redesign, and protect.

Main Question: What do our rituals, symbols, spaces, and language actually transmit?

Phase: Discover - What is our current experience?

Best For: A cross-functional group of 8 to 18 people. Include executives, managers, and recent hires, because they may read the same artifact differently.

Format: A focused session with 100 minutes of core activities or an extended session with 175 minutes. Add 15 to 20 minutes for welcome, breaks, and close.

Inputs: Findings from the earlier Discover workshops; photographs of workspaces; award names and criteria; a month of recurring meeting invitations; and the current onboarding deck.

Outputs: An artifact inventory, written descriptions of the gaps between intent and interpretation, and a prioritized retire, redesign, and protect list with owners, review forums, and dates.

Description

An artifact is something people can encounter in the organization, such as a standing meeting, an award, a private channel, or a phrase managers repeat. The audit examines what people learn from those things and how that learning relates to the culture you intend to create.

A recognition program might celebrate someone who rescued a delayed hand-off. Leaders may see initiative, while a new employee concludes that asking for help earns less recognition than fixing a problem alone. Both readings belong in the inventory. The difference gives you something specific to discuss and check with the people who experience the practice.

Purpose & Objectives

The purpose is to make the relationship between everyday practices and stated intent visible. Keep the work connected to your strategy and the cultural capabilities it requires. An artifact matters because of what it encourages people to do, avoid, or accept.

1. Record what participants believe the organization communicates before they examine the artifacts.
2. Inventory live artifacts across rituals, symbols, spaces, and language.
3. Describe what a new employee might learn from each significant artifact.
4. Decide what to retire, redesign, and protect, with responsibility for each decision.

Artifact Categories

Use these categories to guide the sweep. They help participants look beyond the values poster and notice the recurring practices they may have stopped questioning.

RITUALS: *Which events recur, and what do they reward? Who speaks first, who gets interrupted, and who is expected to defer? Which meetings continue even though their original purpose has passed?*

SYMBOLS: *What gets funded, named, and displayed? Which behaviors earn recognition or promotion? What would the most recent award tell a new employee about how to get ahead?*

SPACES: *Who has access to particular rooms, conversations, and decisions? In a distributed organization, which channels are open and which require an invitation? Who is included before a decision reaches the formal meeting?*

LANGUAGE: *Which phrases recur when people are under pressure? How do managers talk about customers, mistakes, and work nobody wants? Which words encourage a concern to be explored, and which bring the conversation to an end?*

Agenda & Activities

Activity 1: Intent Statement [15 minutes focused / 25 extended]

Ask each participant to write privately the three things they believe the organization communicates to a new employee. Collect the statements without reading them aloud. Explain that they will return at the end, after the group has read the artifacts.

Activity 2: Artifact Sweep [30 minutes focused / 50 extended]

Work in pairs across the four categories. Name each artifact and record where it appears. Bring actual photographs, agendas, recognition criteria, and onboarding materials into the discussion. Hold evaluation until the next activity so the inventory includes ordinary practices as well as the ones people feel proud of.

Activity 3: The New-Hire Read [30 minutes focused / 55 extended]

For each significant artifact, write one sentence answering: What does somebody in their first week learn from this? Ask recent hires to contribute their own readings. If participants disagree, record both interpretations and the experience behind each.

Activity 4: Retire, Redesign, Protect [25 minutes focused / 45 extended]

Make an initial decision about each significant artifact and assign an owner. Then reveal the intent statements and compare them with the readings. Describe the gaps, rank the most consequential ones, and revisit the decisions where the comparison changes the group's understanding. Confirm a review forum and date for every action.

Where It Sits in the Process

This workshop follows the *Cultural Competency Assessment* within Discover. The journey mapping and experience impact work establish what stakeholders encounter. The competency assessment examines whether the culture can support the strategy. The artifact audit adds specific practices that may help explain those findings and that the team can investigate or change.

Carry the ranked gaps into the *Future-Readiness Assessment*, where they can inform discussion of the capabilities needed to address them. Keep the language inventory for the *Meme Inventory Sprint*. Avoid treating an artifact reading as a complete explanation of the beliefs underneath it.

Facilitator Instructions

Bring the artifacts into the room. People recalling their culture from memory may describe the practices they identify with while overlooking routine meetings, restricted channels, and forms. An actual invitation or onboarding slide gives the group something concrete to examine.

Keep intent separate from interpretation until the final activity. Once someone explains why a practice exists, participants may start defending that purpose rather than describing what they experience. Acknowledge the explanation and hold it for the comparison. The question remains what the artifact teaches someone encountering it for the first time.

Treat the new-hire reading as an interpretation to check. A participant imagining a new employee's response cannot speak for every new hire. Record what people have actually experienced, distinguish that from inference, and keep conflicting readings visible. Agreement reached too quickly can hide the differences the workshop needs to understand.

Ask the group to identify at least three concrete practices it can retire and explain why. Name who will communicate each retirement. Keep useful functions intact when removing a harmful feature and sequence any replacement so the change does not leave people without a way to do the work.

Synthesis

Write up the inventory with the artifact, intended message, new-hire reading, and gap. Preserve disagreements rather than replacing them with a single sentence that nobody fully recognizes. Rank the gaps against the strategy, with a reason for each priority. This workshop uses qualitative judgments, not a numerical scoring scale.

Connect every decision to an owner, a review forum, and a date. After the change, return to the people who encounter the artifact and ask what they now experience. Removing a slide or opening a channel confirms that an action happened. You still need to establish whether it changed how people work.

What the Output Looks Like

This example continues Kestrel Valley Health, the fictional regional health network from last week's article. All artifact descriptions, participant readings, names, dates, and decisions below are invented for illustration. They are not findings from a client engagement or an update on completed actions in the earlier example.

The earlier scenario involved integrating three acquired clinic groups into one operating model. Organizational Actualization scored 5.7, Psychological Safety scored 6.4, and Common Purpose was a strength at 8.1. This separate illustrative session examines practices that could help explain the first two findings while identifying what supports the third.

Twelve people take part: three executives, three clinic leads, three operations colleagues, and three recent hires. Five significant artifacts are carried onto the canvas from the wider inventory.

Activity 1 Outcome: Intent Held for the Comparison

Three themes emerge when the private statements are revealed at the close: we work as one network, it is safe to raise a concern, and patient access comes first. These are the messages participants believe the organization communicates. The artifact readings give them a way to examine that belief.

Activities 2 & 3 Outcomes: What the Artifacts Communicate

Artifact 1: Reporter Names On Near-Miss Slides

The Monday quality huddle is intended to support early reporting and learning without blame. The new-hire reading is, "Reporting puts my name on display; I should stay quiet." The group ranks this gap first because public identification may discourage the reporting the process depends on. It gives the team a specific practice to examine alongside the earlier Psychological Safety finding. It does not establish that the slide alone caused the low score.

Artifact 2: The Solo-Saver Award

Leaders read the monthly award as recognition of initiative. Recent hires read it as a signal that asking for help is failure. The canvas keeps both interpretations. The gap is that individual rescue work receives visible credit while reliable hand-offs do not. The group ranks it third and decides to end the award, with the CHRO explaining the reason to staff.

Artifact 3: The Invitation-Only Referral Channel

The channel is intended to coordinate referrals across clinics, but the new-hire reading is that only head office can unblock a referral. Restricted access conflicts with the ambition to work as one network. Ranked second, this finding connects to Organizational Actualization and the earlier hand-off problems. Adding clinic leads can address access, but the team must also agree who responds to referrals. The channel change alone will not resolve the separate scheduling-system problems.

Artifact 4: "What Made This Hard?" in the Onboarding Debrief

Participants read this prompt as permission to discuss a process problem without defending themselves. It supports the intended message about speaking up. The gap is inconsistency with the quality huddle, so the group protects the prompt while changing the huddle's approach.

Artifact 5: A Patient Story at the Start of the Clinic Huddle. The reading matches the intent: decisions should be judged by their effect on patients. The group protects the practice because it provides a concrete way to sustain Common Purpose while integration changes the work around it.

Activity 4 Outcome: Decisions & Accountability

The group prioritizes artifacts 1, 3, and 2, in that order, and protects artifacts 4 and 5. The ranks reflect its judgment of the gaps. They are not new competency scores.

Decision	Artifact & Action	Owner	Review Forum	Date in 2026
Retire	1: Remove reporter names from shared near-miss slides	Leah Brooks, CNO	Quality council	October 21
Retire	2: End the solo-saver award and explain the change	Nora Ellis, CHRO	Executive huddle	October 28
Retire	3: End head-office-only access to referral decisions	Maya Chen, COO	Integration	October 23
Redesign	1: Use a de-identified learning review in the quality huddle	Leah Brooks, CNO	Quality council	November 4
Redesign	3: Add clinic leads and agree a referral response owner	Maya Chen, COO	Integration	October 30
Protect	4: Keep the non-blaming onboarding debrief prompt	Nora Ellis, CHRO	People review	October 28
Protect	5: Keep patient stories linked to access decisions	Maya Chen, COO	Clinic forum	October 30

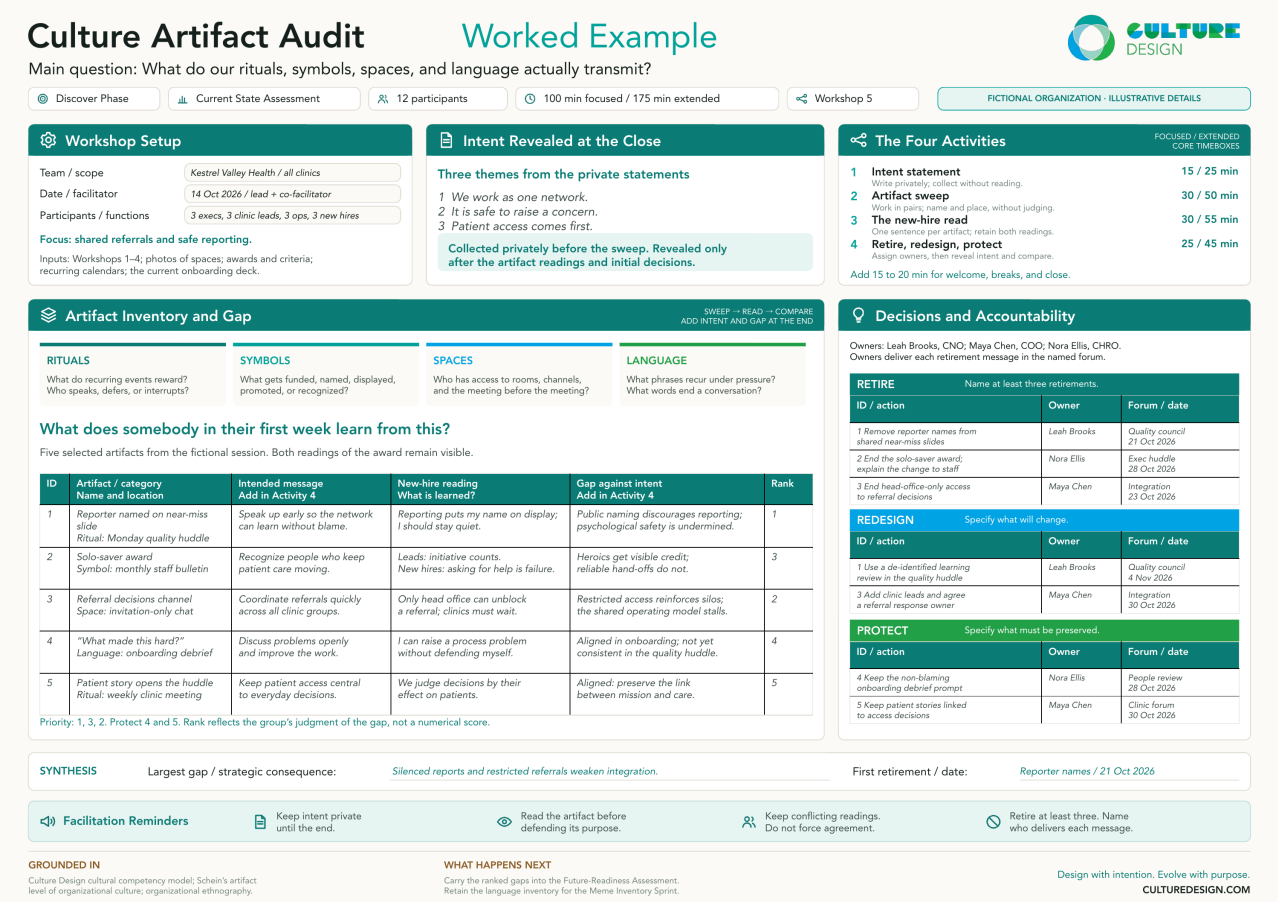
The Synthesis

Kestrel's intent is to operate as one network where people can raise concerns and keep patient access central. The strongest gaps concern practices that participants read as discouraging reports and restricting referral decisions. Those readings give the team specific starting points for addressing the earlier Psychological Safety and Organizational Actualization findings.

The decisions also show why retirement and redesign can apply to the same artifact. The team removes reporter names from shared slides while retaining the quality huddle's learning function. It ends exclusive access to referral decisions while clarifying responsibility for responding. Neither decision requires abandoning the underlying work.

The patient story and onboarding prompt remain because their readings support the intended culture. Protecting them requires ownership too. An integration program can remove useful practices simply because nobody has identified what they contribute.

These are commitments for the fictional session, not demonstrated improvements. At the review dates, the owners need to establish whether people feel able to report concerns, whether clinics can get referral decisions, and whether the protected practices still serve their purpose. The completed canvas makes those responsibilities visible.



Completed canvas for the fictional Kestrel Valley Health session. All entries are illustrative. Use the blank canvas near the top of this article with your own team, retaining additional notes for the full inventory.

Grounded in: The Culture Design cultural competency model, informed by Edgar Schein's work on the artifact level of organizational culture and by organizational ethnography. Rituals, symbols, spaces, and language are the organizing categories used in this workshop. For background on Schein's model, see MIT Sloan's overview of his work on organizational culture.

Before your next values refresh, bring your managers and recent hires together to examine what your existing practices communicate. Start with a recurring meeting, a recognition decision, and a place where access is restricted. Compare the readings with your intent. Name the owner and date for the first change.