

Change the Rules!

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Dear readers of Simulation and Gaming,

One of your EIC's – Toshiko Kikkawa – is Japanese and this may (possibly) come as a surprise, also a licensed Japanese tea ceremony teacher. As a sign of hospitality, she would like to indulge you a bit in explaining how a formal Japanese tea ceremony is carried out. There are in fact many variations in how a proper ceremony should be held, depending on the season, room setting, utensils, and so on. It is a kind of game between a host and the guests who jointly decide on the theme of a particular tea ceremony. For example, when a tea ceremony party is held in December, the host uses tea bowls and utensils related to the season, and in addition, changes the interior of the room to fit the season subtly. The host challenges her audience by proposing a riddle about the theme of the tea party, and the guests try to find out the solution to the riddle during tea conversation. Both to propose and solve the riddle, the host and guests respectively should have a wide range of knowledge such as history, season, literature, etc.

Even though there are many variations, the basic procedure and –steps of a tea ceremony remain constant. In other words, it is an orchestrated ritual. We realize that in every culture there are many rituals in many different areas. Some of them can perhaps be interpreted as 'games' since participants should know the rules and follow them for the ritual to pass. Some say about these rituals, the rules are 'the tradition' and therefore cannot be changed to adapt to time or circumstances. But the rituals that remain and persist throughout the times and generations are those that do allow for some change. Culture and its rites are never static but need to be flexible to survive and be passed on. If not, rites and rituals are to die with the culture itself.

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So how about a thought experiment on bending traditional rules? In the case of the Japanese tea ceremony, formalized in the 16th century (at least your EIC's affiliation with the 'Urasenke' tradition), the rules have been changed somewhat indeed to better adapt to the changes of the society. For example, it invented a procedure using chairs to adopt the Western culture in the 19th century.

So even if we have a long tradition of ritual or cultural rules in society or orthodox beliefs in each academic field, we can and we must now and then change or bend the rules a little for them to remain relevant. If we do not, we inevitably face conflicts between our time, different cultures, and regions.

Indeed, we have changed rules and rites in our history – many times. Remember how we changed society to increase the opportunities for women and to be able to better understand and accept different ethnicities, and so on. And the more flexible we are changing rules as many gamers are, the more likely we will be to understand our ever-changing world for the better.

We, S&G researchers, should always have a 'what-if' mind in designing and playing games. And be able to explore and embrace various scenarios of our rules, just as in the tea ceremony. A particular game may not be your 'cup of tea' – but as in life, there are many flavors to choose from!

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