Chores as Complex Coordination

Regenerative labor and new institutions



Daniel Kronovet
Zaratan Coliving

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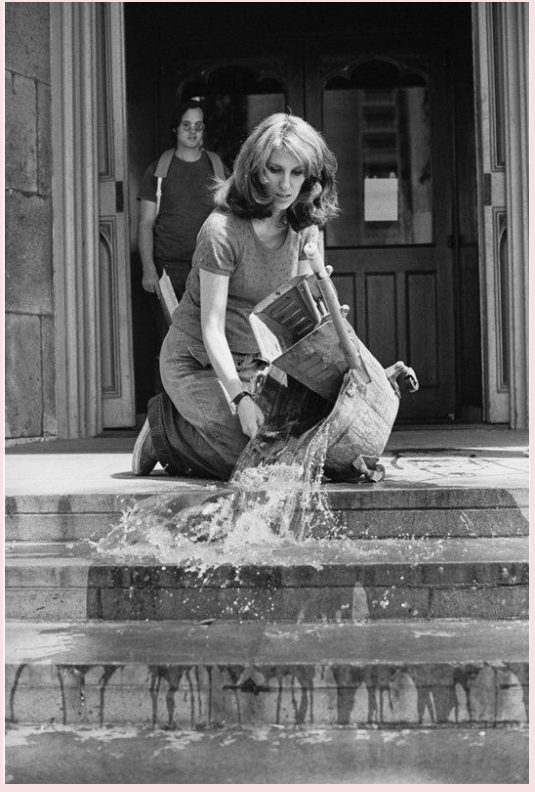
Manifesto for Maintenance Art

*"**Two basic systems:** Development and Maintenance. The sour ball of every revolution: after the revolution, who is going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?*

***Development:** pure individual creation; the new; change; progress, advance, excitement, flight or fleeing.*

***Maintenance:** keep the dust off the pure individual creation; preserve the new; sustain the change; protect progress; defend and prolong the advanced; renew the excitement; repeat the flight."*

- Mierle Laderman Ukeles, "Manifesto for Maintenance Art"



https://www.guernicamag.com/lifework-open-engagement-2014-may-16-18/

Regenerative labor

Definition: the repetitive, low-status work that maintains equilibrium in a group. Core to long-term function but often undersupplied, as benefits are shared while costs are not.

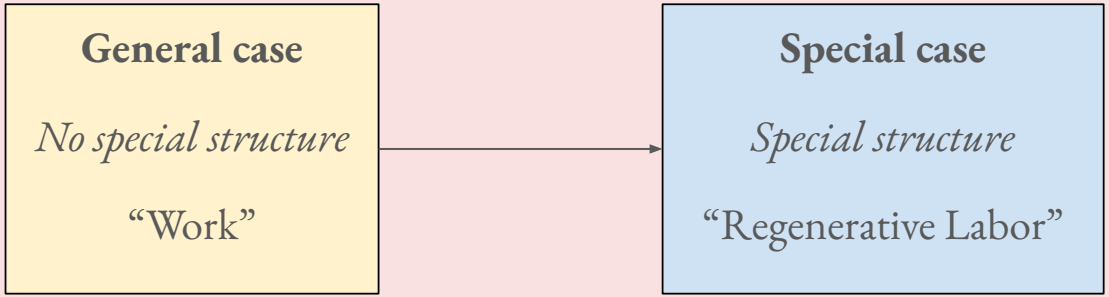
Overlaps with:

- "Care work," but acts on *shared spaces*, not people
- "Reproductive labor," but *serves the group*, not external economy
- "Maintenance," but is *generative*, not steady-state

Regenerative labor *maintains* physical capital and *creates* social capital.

Regenerative labor as a special case

In mathematics, a "special case" of a problem has *additional structure* that the general case *does not have*, which allows for solutions to the special case that *are not possible* in the general case.



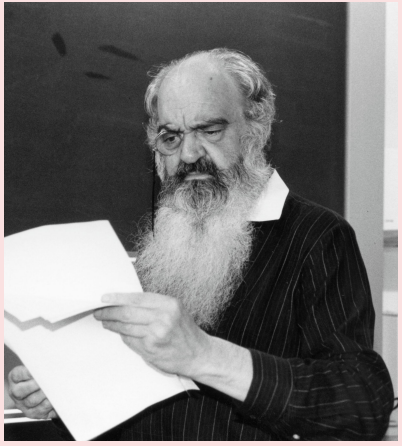
For regenerative labor, that special structure is *repetition* – the same tasks done over and over again, as opposed to an endless sequence of *unpredictable and novel* tasks.

Designing new institutions

Stafford Beer

Business theorist who advocated for “cybernetic” computer-aided approaches to management.

“Without a model of the system to be regulated, you cannot have a regulator.”



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/99/Stafford_Beer_1990.png

Elinor Ostrom

Economist who studied natural resource management, articulated “eight principles” for institutional design.

"A resource arrangement that works in practice can work in theory”



https://polisci.indiana.edu/research/elinor-ostrom.html

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Design Principles for Common-Pool Resource Management

1. Clearly defined group boundaries
2. Mechanisms adapted to local conditions
3. Members participate in decision-making
4. Effective monitoring
5. Graduated sanctions
6. Cheap and accessible conflict resolution
7. Self-determination of the community
8. Multiple layers of nested enterprises

Is this... a protocol?

Design Principles for Distributed Digital Institutions

1. No managers or privileged roles
2. Simple and intuitive inputs
3. Humans for sensing, machines for bookkeeping
4. Continuously available, asynchronous processes

Is this... a protocol?



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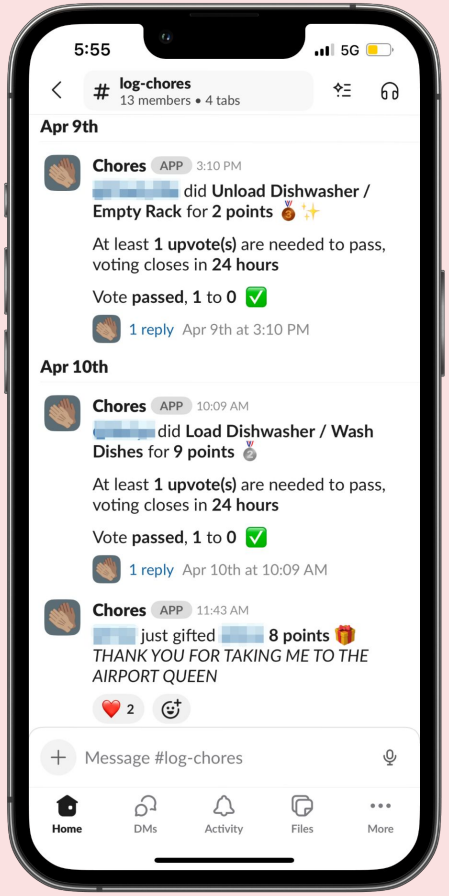
Chore Wheel

Three complementary mechanisms:

- **Chores**, for organizing regenerative labor
- **Hearts**, for organizing norms and accountability
- **Things**, for organizing shared fund spending

All implemented as Slack apps in a shared workspace.

Big idea:
One protocol → three resource-management systems.

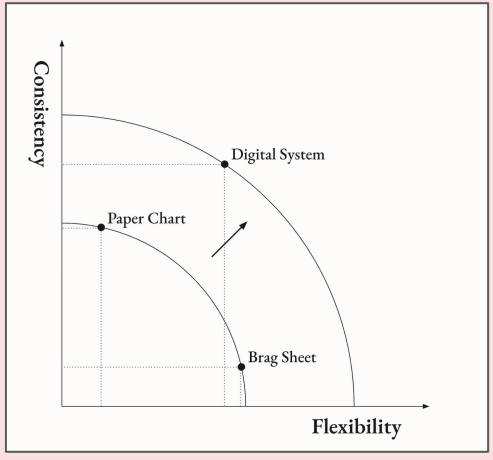


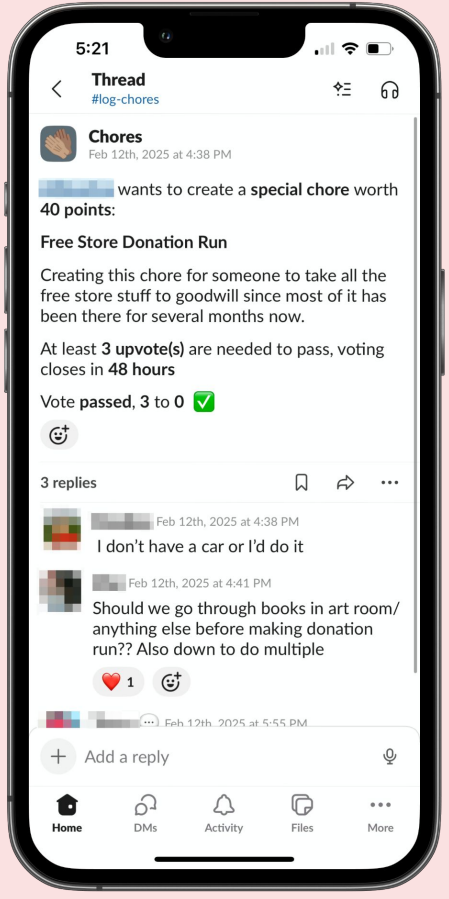
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Chore as complex coordination

Proposition: people *want* to contribute – it just has to be both *easy* and *visible*.

The key is being able to separate task *definition* from task *performance*, at low cost.



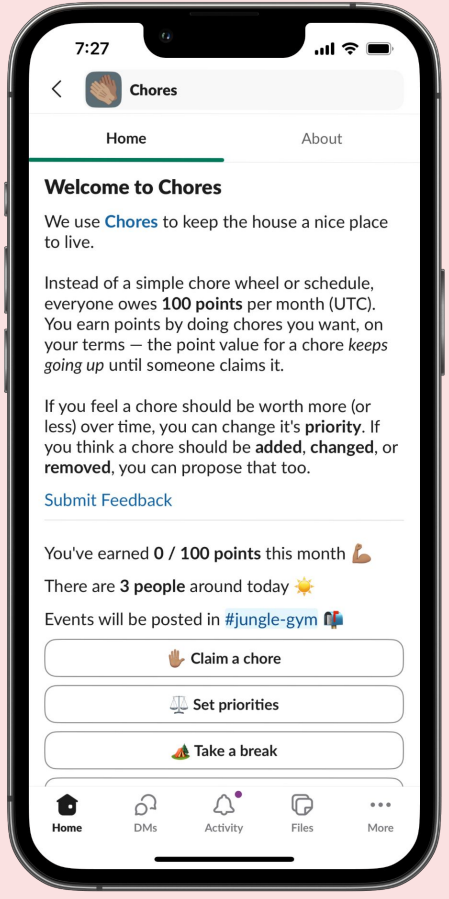


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The Chores app

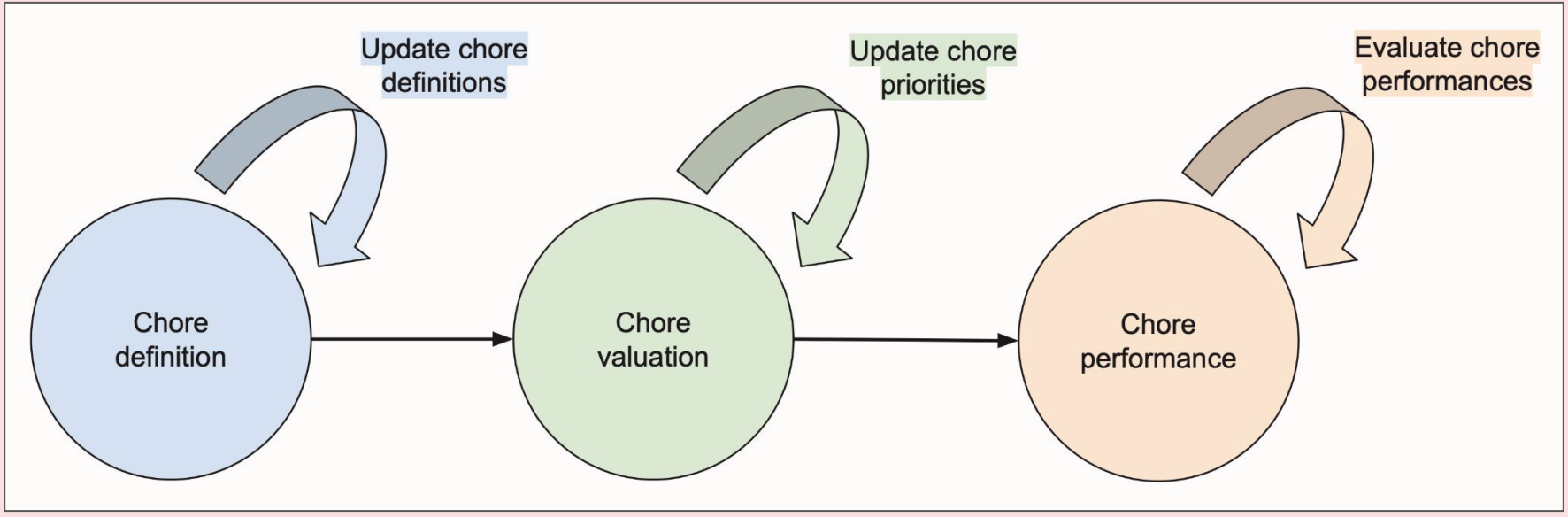
A community currency and contribution system.

- Everyone owes 100 points per month
- Chores gain points the longer they go undone
- Anybody can do any chore at any time
- Anybody can prioritize any chore at any time
- Claims are publicly posted and upvoted
- Decisions emerge bottom-up, no manager



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Three feedback loops



The Limits of Structure

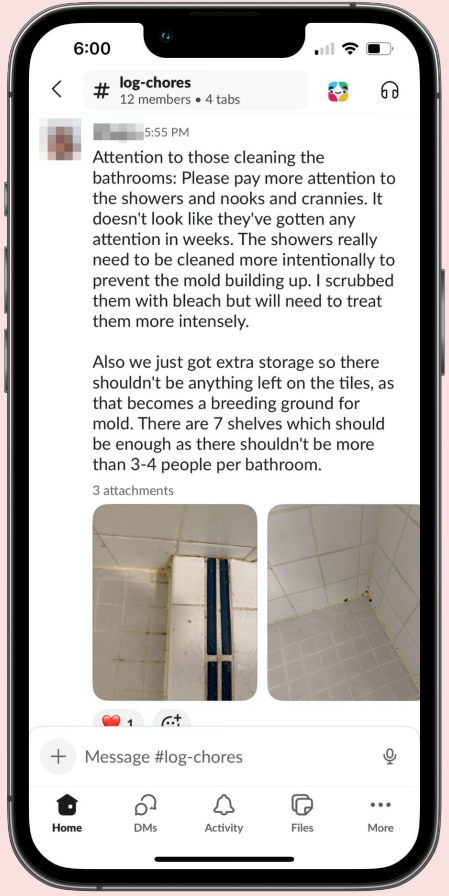
"Formal order... is always and to some considerable degree parasitic on informal processes, which the formal scheme does not recognize, without which it could not exist, and which it alone cannot create or maintain."

- James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*

"Community creates conflict, which creates community"

- Seth Frey

How can we *give the residual some leverage?*



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Regenerative labor revisited

Definition: the repetitive, low-status work that maintains equilibrium in a group. Core to long-term function but often undersupplied, as benefits are shared while costs are not.

When visibly shared among members of a group, regenerative labor is *positive sum*: it *maintains* physical capital and *creates* social capital.

This creates the preconditions for bold, coordinated action beyond the shared space.

Thank you

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