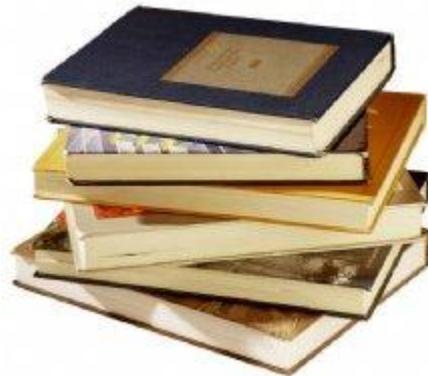


OPEN BOOK PUBLISHING

By Dr Geoff Wells



Online publishing is creating exciting new vehicles through which consultants can deliver new kinds of value.

The rise and rise of online publishing is reported daily. Perhaps no other sector has been so immediately and thoroughly transformed by the Internet. The introduction of the tablet has significantly strengthened this trend.

A recent survey ¹ of tablet usage provides clear evidence of this growth. US tablet usage is already projected at around 54 million, with very high satisfaction ratings. Tablet users tend to be from higher income households. They view tablets as their preferred reading device: 54% prefer reading a book on a tablet, as against 33% on an ereader; and 42% regularly read books on tablets.

In addition to providing an expanding readership, the migration to online reading crucially opens new kinds of readership vehicles and modes. An important new model is the open book. Here there is a fundamental shift in dynamic of writer and reader. Open books move away from the solitary writer working on her own to create material that is then published for essentially passive readers. The online environment makes it possible to bring writer and reader together much earlier: readers are invited to work directly in with the author and with each other in a direct collaboration to create the book.

Other online trends are contributing to the viability of this model. It is worth looking at the 'comments' threads on news stories internationally over the past two years. There has been a clear move from commenting on the original story to vigorous and uninhibited commenting on the comments. Online interaction and collaboration is becoming routine.

Here is a case study in open book development. I decided to use the open book model for the writing of a book entitled *The Fractured Workplace And Its Remedies*². This work was intended to be a reasonably trenchant critique of modern management theories and practices with respect to people. In a recent online comment, I described it in this

way:

“What I'm trying to do here are two things: (1) attack the foundations and practices of the conventional approach to people taken by modern management, which seem to me to be intellectually negligible and ethically scandalous; and (2) start with the idea of health, rather than of work outcomes, and build up an understanding of the healthy workplace from there. I'm arguing that the things we know about how people work best outside the workplace must be the guiding principles--that things don't suddenly change to an alternate reality when you cross the work threshold to one driven by 'it's just business' mentality.”

Given this content it seemed that an open book approach could be particularly appropriate. The main thesis of the book is that toxic workplace experience is in part a structural outcome of misconceived management techniques; and that solutions to it are to be found not in management textbooks but in everyday experience. This opens the book up to the experience of every worker in every workplace, with respect both to problems and solutions. Moreover because we spend a large part of our lives in workplaces these are matters on which most people have clear, even passionate, opinions. This project therefore seemed to offer good prospects of an engaged online forum.

There were some important preliminaries to consider. The question of intellectual property immediately presented itself: who would own the product? By definition the authorship of the book is being opened up to more than one, perhaps many, contributors. I arrived at the procedures for collaboration, licensing and publishing, which, in accord with the principle of full transparency, were placed on the site³. These include the following:

- The commitment to collaboration is real, and all inputs are welcomed.
- The book will identify me as primary author. All material contributions (including concept development, drafted sections, edits, further reading) will be individually recognised.
- The book will be published under a Creative Commons license: it will be able to be downloaded and shared (with appropriate crediting), but it can't be modified or sold.⁴
- The book will be made available as a \$1 download through bookstore sites (like Amazon) or from the host site.
- All contributions and comment come through the 'Comments' field. Comments are moderated by me as author for appropriateness, with a general commitment to transparency and openness.

Guidelines for the appropriateness of comments and contributions were also posted⁵. These deal primarily with the length and type of comments (not limited, text only); attribution of right to use comments in the project; compatibility with the Creative Commons license; decent language and the unacceptability and removal of spamming

(here the formulation of The New York Times⁶ was adapted, with acknowledgement).

These guidelines embodied important principles. Knowledge, it seems to me, is something to be shared, not hoarded. The value of knowledge is in making the conditions of human life better: if it can't do that, it doesn't rank as knowledge. Any significant advance in society has always come about through advances in knowledge. It follows that there is an ethical imperative to share knowledge: everyone, it is said, should tell what they know. And the process itself should uphold the basic ground of communication: openness, transparency and respect.

Even from the perspective of business itself the days when knowledge can be created, fenced and harvested are long gone: the Internet has forced its demise. Business value now resides in innovation: as Peter Drucker pointed out many years ago, "What exists is getting old."⁷ This principle in turn places attention on how well and how quickly one can collaborate, because that is the surest way to develop new ideas and new economic value. For a consultant the value of this exercise thus rests in both the ethical imperative that exists to share good ideas and in the new ideas and approaches that collaboration can bring.

In practice, the results of the *Fractured Workplace* project have been more than encouraging. Online contributions have been thoughtful, and have contributed new ideas, drawn from experience, both personal and professional. Challenges have been thrown up from younger managers. Theorists from associated human science disciplines have joined the fray. Comments came in outside the site from those--often the young--who were hesitant to post their views. One of the most pleasing was the report of a young worker who was so excited by the first chapter of *Fractured Workplace* on workplace bullying (to which young employees are most vulnerable) that she printed it out and covered the walls of her workplace with it. That kind of passion is, one would have to say, engagement at the highest level.

The open book is here to stay, and it is a forerunner of many open vehicles. As consultants we can use it to advance both our profession and our own work in it. And we have the opportunity to do these things in the company of a community of practice, of shared ideas and ideals--surely a unique privilege.

By Dr Geoff Wells, CMC, MIMC

¹[http://onlinepubs.ehclients.com/images/pdf/MMF-OPA_-_Portrait_of_Todays_Tablet_User_-_Jun11_\(Final-Public\).pdf](http://onlinepubs.ehclients.com/images/pdf/MMF-OPA_-_Portrait_of_Todays_Tablet_User_-_Jun11_(Final-Public).pdf)

² <http://www.geoffwells.com/open-book-blog-the-fractured-workplace-and-its-remedies/>

³<http://www.geoffwells.com/2012/07/fractured-workplace->

draft-procedures-for-comments-input-licensing-publishing/

⁴<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

⁵ <http://www.geoffwells.com/2012/07/the-fractured-workplace-and-its-remedies-posting-guidelines/>

⁶<http://www.nytimes.com/content/help/rights/terms/terms-of-service.html#discussions>

⁷ Drucker, P (1964, 1986) *Managing for results*, HarperBusiness, New York, p.8.