

The Challenges and Successes of Wikibookian Experts and Want-To-Bees

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Basic Study

Survey of more than 80 Wikibookians about the creation and coordination of a Wikibook. Issues addressed include ownership, problems encountered, tools to facilitate online collaboration.



Wikibookian

A Wikibookian is someone who coordinates a Wikibook project.



Wikibook Creation and Collaboration

Objective and Design

- Explore the potential to use Wikibooks as a new instructional strategy to promote learning collaboration and social interaction across classrooms
- Find the success factors in the development of Wikibooks at the Wikibooks web site in order to improve the implementation of Wikibook projects



Objective and Design

Two-part study:

I. Wikibook project among 3 classrooms in 3 locations

II. Wikibooks web site -

http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Main_Page



Methodology

- **Two Surveys for each group**
 - 13 participants of cross-institutional Wikibook project
 - 80 participants of Wikibookians
- **Follow-up questions were sent via email to:**
 - Three people of the Wikibook project
 - Eight people of the Wikibookian group



Findings from Surveys

- **Topic Selection Issue:**
 - Students were hesitant to share their rough ideas in Wikibooks environment
 - Selecting topic is a 'class task' in Wikibook projects.
 - Wikibookians do not need to select the topic.



Findings from Surveys

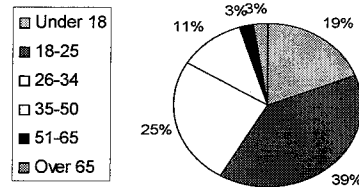
- **Part-time vs Full time**
 - Most participants in the Wikibook projects were part-time graduate students, their interactions within the Wikibook-project site were not extensive as expected.



Findings from Surveys (cont.)

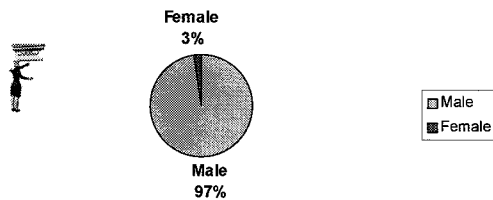
- **Demographical data: 58% of Wikibookians were younger than 25 years old.**

Age of Wikibookians



Demographical data: more than 97% were male

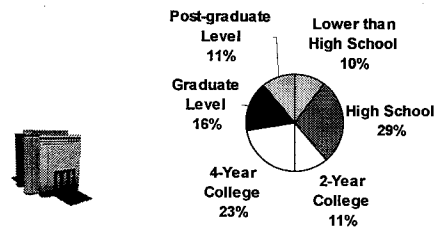
Gender of Wikibookians



Findings from Surveys (cont.)

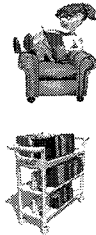
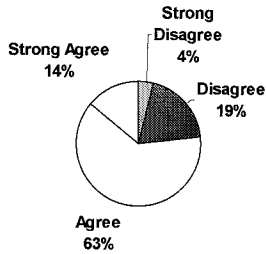
- **Demographical data: many without a college education**

Highest Year of Schooling



Findings from Surveys (cont.)

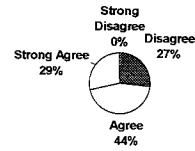
- 77% of Wikibookians agree that their recent Wikibook project was successful.



Findings from Surveys (cont.)

- 76% of Wikibookians agree that Wikibooks promote communication between writers and readers.

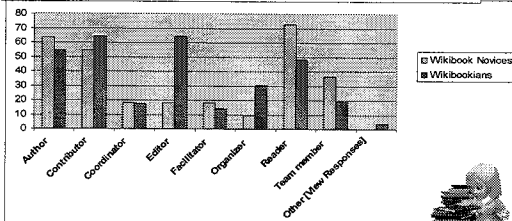
Wikibooks promote communication between writers and readers?



Findings from Surveys (cont.)

- Sense of community*

What were your primary roles in developing a Wikibook?

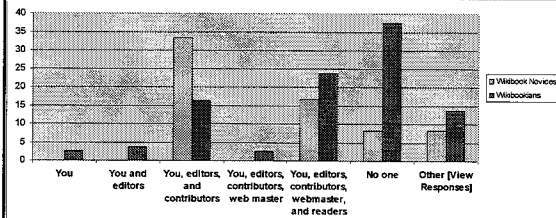


*Data is displayed by ratio

Findings from Surveys (cont.)

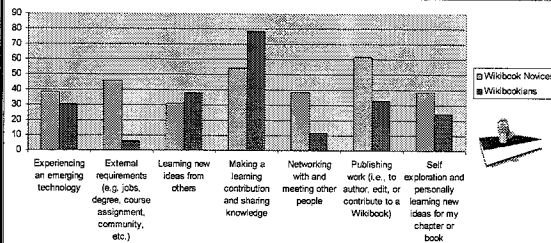
- Control and ownership

Who are the owners of a Wikibook?



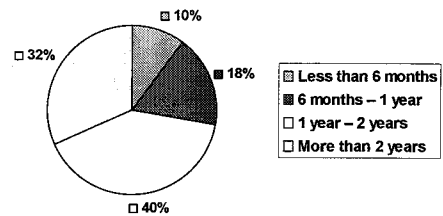
Findings from Surveys (cont.)

- Inspiration to work on Wikibooks



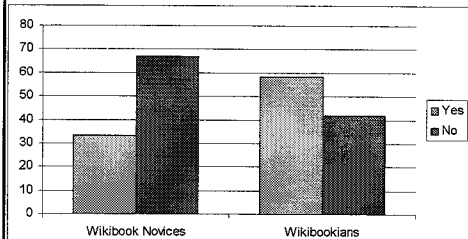
Findings from Surveys (cont.)

How long been involved in designing or contributing to a Wiki of any kind?

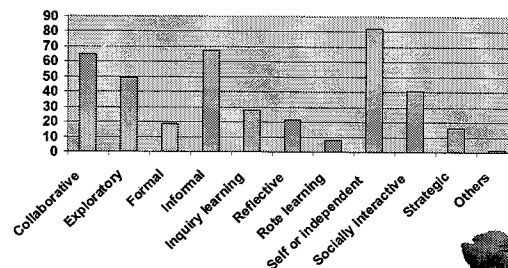


Findings from Surveys (cont.)

- Question: Can a Wikibook ever be completed?



What type of learning does a Wikibook foster?



Qualitative Themes from Email Interviews



Theme #1: Introduction to Wikibook



1. How did you know about Wikibooks? Who, if anyone, initially showed you them or recommended Wikibooks and what did they say? (Wikibookian)

– I helped found Wikibooks when I started writing an Organic Chemistry textbook on Wikipedia. Jimmy Wales agreed to start another site where we could write textbooks.



1. How did you know about Wikibooks? Who, if anyone, initially showed you them or recommended Wikibooks and what did they say? (Wikibookian)

– I found Wikibooks about Wikipedia, after I realised that my project on which I was working got to long for Wikipedia. I was also recommended that for such projects Wikibooks would be better.



1. How did you know about Wikibooks? Who, if anyone, initially showed you them or recommended Wikibooks and what did they say? (Wikibookian)

- I was exposed to wikipedia and was looking for a place to host my book. However, I found wikibooks wasn't interested in original pieces. So I eventually moved it to wikireason.



1. How did you know about Wikibooks? Who, if anyone, initially showed you them or recommended Wikibooks and what did they say? (Wikibookian)

- I discovered WIKIBOOKS through WIKIPEDIA- some Wikipedia articles refer to articles on WikiBooks, saying "WikiBooks has more on the subject" and include a link.



1. How did you know about Wikibooks? Who, if anyone, initially showed you them or recommended Wikibooks and what did they say? (Wikibookian)

- I found out about Wikibooks, because I was active on the Dutch Wikipedia, and one of the active users quit Wikipedia to work on Wikibooks. I wanted to know what project he was working on etc. Further, I am active on the Dutch Wikimedia-chapter, so it was logical for me to explore as well the other Dutch language wikimedia-projects.

Theme #2: Initial Expectations about Wikibook



2. What was (were) your expectation(s) before using Wiki? (Wikibookian)

- I expected it to be for whatever kind of book. So also fun-books etc. It appeared to be only for school-books, what is nice :) Then I expected it to be not very effective, as it's hard to let people work together at all, especially on this large amounts, and even more when it's spread over multiple pages with a specialistic subject. You should need at least two specialists, as both have to understand the subject very good. That appeared to be hard indeed.

2. What was (were) your expectation(s) before using Wiki? (Wikibookian)

- My expectation was to help create a free, collaboratively written textbook. At this point I have done almost all of the work on the book. Admittedly, word about the book hasn't gotten out, but hopefully once it does others will begin to contribute. Until that happens, my expectations will not, technically, have been met.

2. What was (were) your expectation(s) before using Wiki? (Wikibookian)

- I anticipated having more time than I do to working on this project. Development has been slower than I expected, by about a factor of two. I originally expected to be able to finish the book I'm working on in about two years....I also hoped that collaborators would take an interest in the book as it developed. Although there have been isolated contributions, no one else has taken an interest in making a real investment in the book. I still hope this will eventually happen.

Theme #3: Previous Experiences with Other Online Learning Environments

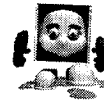


3. Please describe 1-2 online collaborative environments, other than the Wikibook, wherein you have worked in or learned from in the past (e.g., program, activities, important features, etc.).

- I worked on a couple of other projects of the Wikimedia Foundation. For example I spend much time on Wikipedia and Wikimedia Commons.



Theme #4: Important Features and Activities Necessary for Collaborative Environments from a Wikibookian's Perspective



4. What are important features, mechanism, and/or activities that an online collaborative environment should have?

- The ability to track the contributions and changes of each contributor. It should also make contributing easy. Wikibooks does an admirable job of that...

4. What are important features, mechanism, and/or activities that an online collaborative environment should have?

- A way for people to communicate with each other, a way to track the contributions of each person, a way to make the information accessible to newcomers, a simple interface that an average person can learn very quickly or even use intuitively.

4. What are important features, mechanism, and/or activities that an online collaborative environment should have?

- *Message boards (Wikipedia's "Talk" section) is one of the most important sections that needs to be included. Besides that, the "open editor" should be included, as well as the ability for Administrators to monitor the content of articles and who has been updating them.*

9. Which activities or tools would you suggest to include in Wikibooks environment in order to promote learning collaboration?

- *Make a special area where one set group of people can take over a book for a time, for example, to enable one class or one group of professors develop materials in a protected environment where, at least for a time, they have the final authority of whatever happens in that area.*



Theme #5: Differences Between the Wikibook Environment and Other Collaborative Environments Online



5. Are there situations in a Wikibook environment that are unique or different from other collaborative environments you have encountered? If so, what are they?

- *"There is not one person in charge..."*
- *"An open-source attitude"*



5. Are there situations in a Wikibook environment that are unique or different from other collaborative environments you have encountered? If so, what are they?

- *"Working with people I've never met...Typically, the people I collaborate with at Wikibooks differ from my perspective more than people I would collaborate with in a more traditional context."*



5. Are there situations in a Wikibook environment that are unique or different from other collaborative environments you have encountered? If so, what are they?

- *The difference is that I'm usually working with people I've never met, and with the sort of people I wouldn't ordinarily work with in writing. It's much more challenging to see where someone is coming from if you haven't had a chance to meet her or talk with her....Typically, the people I collaborate with at Wikibooks differ from my perspective more than people I would collaborate with in a more traditional context. Sometimes, the new perspective is very interesting. At other times, the other person can be way off base.*



**Theme #6: The Notion of Wikibook
Not as a Product but a Process**



6. Explain whether a Wikibook is ever complete? Why or why not?

– "I think a Wikibook becomes complete when the participants loose interest in the topic."



6. Explain whether a Wikibook is ever complete? Why or why not?

– No wiki is ever complete, because it is ever evolving. That's one of the best things about wiki's. I personally think that paper is dead and in many ways the ideas contained within them too. I want my ideas and thought evolved and allowing others to improve them makes the work alive.

6. Explain whether a Wikibook is ever complete? Why or why not?

– Theoretically a wikibook could be complete, depending on the subject. If, for instance, the book is about the Iran/Contra scandal and all of the information relevant to it has been made public and summarized in a wikibook, I could see it as been "complete." But that is not likely the case for "most" wikibooks.

**Theme #7: Toward Collaborative
Knowledge Construction: Issues of
Ownership and Disputes over Editing**



7. What would happen if someone edited or changed a section of your Wikibook but you did not agree with the change? Has this ever happened to you? If so, what did you do?

– So revert it :) It's a Wiki, so everybody can edit it. When s.o.'s edit doesn't apply to my standards, I can revert it. And that person can revert me too. When we both find it important, we can start talking through the talkpage, and in the end, maybe get a mediator, or ask the community what they think about it.

7. What would happen if someone edited or changed a section of your Wikibook but you did not agree with the change? Has this ever happened to you? If so, what did you do?

– Sure it has happened and usually I challenge the changes and or clarify my points and will revert the changes after I have posted a discussion section and got others opinions.

7. What would happen if someone edited or changed a section of your Wikibook but you did not agree with the change? Has this ever happened to you? If so, what did you do?

– This happens frequently. I usually either talk to them via the "Talk" pages or send them a private message regarding the change(s) if they are not an anonymous user. I leave or qualify their changes if they are correct, but if not I may revert them back to their original form.

7. What would happen if someone edited or changed a section of your Wikibook but you did not agree with the change? Has this ever happened to you? If so, what did you do?

– This has happened to me. In my experience, changing the material back is pointless, and will just cause dispute. It's best to write your reactions on the Talk page and work it out there. I've had very good luck with this approach.

7. What would happen if someone edited or changed a section of your Wikibook but you did not agree with the change? Has this ever happened to you? If so, what did you do?

– It didn't happen yet so that I don't know how I would react. I think I would revert the changes and ask the contributor to discuss them with me.

Theme #8: Suggestions for Promoting Learning Collaboration in Wikibook Environments



9. Which activities or tools would you suggest to include in Wikibooks environment in order to promote learning collaboration?

– Use it. That activity will promote it the most. When one single school starts using it, even besides the current books, and has positive experiences, it will become more a success.



9. Which activities or tools would you suggest to include in Wikibooks environment in order to promote learning collaboration?

– I would suggest a better organized starting of books. I think authors have to make concepts before they write a book and think about it, because it's not only an article like in Wikipedia.



Theme #9: Skills Needed to Complete Wikibook Such as Planning, Negotiation, Communication, and Coordination



10. Are there any concerns, suggestions, and/or recommendations to someone creating a Wikibook or for someone wanting to become a Wikibook author or editor?

– Start with planning, and work on existing books rather than create a new one.



Theme #10: Advantages and Disadvantages of Wikibooks



8. What are the advantages and disadvantages of Wikibooks mechanisms?

– Advantages: Openness, accountability, record of changes and attributions, easiness of use, free license, formatting buttons, levels of permissions, automated features like the Infobox, formatting shortcuts, templates, and navigation, ...



8. What are the advantages and disadvantages of Wikibooks mechanisms?

– Disadvantages: People have not seen it work enough for them to believe in it, and there are not mechanisms in place that convince educators of the value of Wikibooks as a teaching or learning tool. No way to upload many images at once or to modify meta data of multiple images or pages at once. No structured way to lead groups by the hand through the collaborative book-writing process.



Theme #11: Wikibook Recommendations



10. Are there any concerns, suggestions, and/or recommendations to someone creating a Wikibook or for someone wanting to become a Wikibook author or editor?

– Get help. Don't try to do it on your own, it's a too big amount of work and you will definitely lose the overview.



10. Are there any concerns, suggestions, and/or recommendations to someone creating a Wikibook or for someone wanting to become a Wikibook author or editor?

*– Be aware of copyright
– Be patient. "A little bit is better than nothing, it can always be improved later."*



10. Are there any concerns, suggestions, and/or recommendations to someone creating a Wikibook or for someone wanting to become a Wikibook author or editor?

– I'd suggest getting several co-authors from the get go and deciding on a template for the book chapters so it is uniform from the beginning. It's bound to change over time, but you may as well start with a plan. Also, I'd mention that, for the most part, they shouldn't expect many people to contribute to the book. Writing a book is challenging; most people will never attempt it.

Theme #12: The Future of Wikibooks and Other Comments



11. What do you see in the future in terms of Wikibooks?

*– I don't know. It might go two ways:
*Become a success, people will use it.
*Die a silent death, people won't use it.
There is no "some people will use it".
Because when you want your book to become used, it has to be used by a large amount of people, not by a few.*



11. What do you see in the future in terms of Wikibooks?

- Community-written textbooks in every American classroom as well as around the world, students and teachers involved in the production of textbooks on occasion as a part of the development process, better textbooks than we have ever had before, teaching materials shared for free in many languages all over the globe, the end or dramatic change of much of the the textbook industry (cartel) as it currently exists.

11. What do you see in the future in terms of Wikibooks?

- I don't think the concept will catch on except among small niches until there are some very well-developed textbooks available on the site. If academics turn to using it regularly for free introductory textbooks, wikibooks could explode with interest. But we aren't there yet. Maybe in the next 5 years or so.

12. Do you have any other comments about Wikibooks or the Wikibook process?

- I think WikiBooks is an excellent environment, but not enough people seem to know about it. Additionally, the method of creation would be a bit better if the tutorials were better written (more clear) and if their interface was a bit better. Still, all-in-all it is an excellent environment.

12. Do you have any other comments about Wikibooks or the Wikibook process?

-Go rockin' on!



Conclusions

- Key to success for Wikibooks
 - Features of Wikibooks; e.g. tracking contributions
 - Precise goals and concepts
 - Coordination and Communications
 - Achieve challenge of social issues; e.g., talk first



Conclusions

"I love wikis they're truly the closet example of the purest form of democracy."

