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### Wikipedia, Me, and OHP

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## Wikipedia, Me, and OHP

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"Danny, what are you doing on the new computer?"

"Dad, I'm looking up an article about *Romeo and Juliet* for my theater class."

"Are you using the *Encyclopedia Britannica* online?"

"No. I'm using *Wikipedia*."

"What's that?"

"It's an online encyclopedia that readers contribute to. All my friends and classmates use it. I started using it towards the end of high school."

"Is it any good?"

"Dad, it's great. I found all kinds of stuff. You can look up Shakespeare. The Poisson distribution. The role of Grandpa George's Eighth Air Force in Europe during the Second World War. *Wikipedia* even has an article about Hank Bauer, your favorite New York Yankee. It's got something on everything. Or almost everything."

The question I asked my son in 2005, "Is it any good?", was answered for me in an article written by Jim Giles and published in *Nature* that same year. The accuracy of *Wikipedia* stacks up well against the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. *Wikipedia* has the added advantage of being free and easily available from all

kinds of platforms (AOL, Mozilla Firefox, Explorer, etc.).

I learned from my son and his friends that high school and college students consult *Wikipedia*, and frequently refer to it in papers they write for their teachers. Sometimes they use it but don't cite it.

It was January 2007. I had been named editor of *The Newsletter* a year and a half earlier. I thought it would be a good idea to create a *Wikipedia* entry for occupational health psychology (OHP). Such an entry could introduce college students, like those at CCNY, the institution at which I teach, to our discipline.

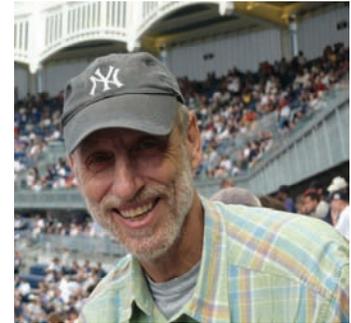
I began by considering the entry points. I weighed industrial/organizational (I/O) psychology and health psychology, and concluded that a good point of entry for a *Wikipedia* beginner like me would be health psychology because that *Wikipedia* entry was, at the time, shorter than the I/O entry. (I say "at the time" because all *Wikipedia* entries are fluid and change as individuals contribute and make adjustments.)

I edited the *Wikipedia* entry for health psychology ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health\\_psychology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health_psychology))—it needed editing—and then augmented the entry by adding a paragraph devoted to OHP. I observed that the health psychology entry included a section near the end that

listed doctoral programs in that discipline. The section inspired me to add another section that enumerated doctoral programs in OHP. Some time later, I added a paragraph on OHP to the *Wikipedia* entry on I/O psychology ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial\\_and\\_organizational\\_psychology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_and_organizational_psychology)).

However, I was unsatisfied with what I had done. I decided to begin an OHP entry from scratch. I started slowly in May and June of 2008. First, I created an occupational health psychology stub. A stub represents a bare beginning. It includes a couple of informational sentences and sometimes imports an existing *wiki* template. I imported a sidebar template that would run to the right of the text, down the side of the page. This sidebar lists the main divisions of psychology, and allows a reader to pass through from the page I created, via links internal to *Wikipedia*, to articles about the various divisions within psychology (e.g., personality psychology, clinical psychology). I left the stub untouched for about two months; instead I devoted time to augmenting and editing the *Wikipedia* entry concerned with the college at which I teach (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CCNY>).

Then in September 2008, I went to work on the OHP entry. Every day I added one or two sentences to the stub or edited what I had previously written. I decided not to do more because I was pressed ... (Continued on page 9)



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"My enthusiasm for  
*Wikipedia* has ... taken  
me around the world."

## Wikipedia, Me, and OHP (cont'd)

(Continued from page 8) ... for time. Gradually, the stub grew, and the entry I created was no longer a stub. It became a full-blown entry with *Wikipedia* footnotes. I began to learn the *Wikipedia* syntax in much the same way one learns computer programming. When I made mistakes I either figured out the solution myself, or looked up the right answer in one of the online help facilities.

Then I got into an argument.

I quarreled with one of the *Wikipedia* veterans who frequently navigate the encyclopedia with the help of the *Wikipedia* "watchlist," looking for entries that reflect bad grammar, mis-statements, rule violations, and vandalism. I had decided to edit the template for the psychology sidebar by adding occupational health psychology to the list of divisions within psychology. My inserting OHP into the template for the sidebar would allow a college student visiting a different psychology entry to notice our discipline, and with a mouse click pass through to the OHP entry.

The veteran editor reversed my edit, removing OHP from the sidebar. Then I reversed his move. Then he re-reversed my edit. We were engaged in a game of editorial Ping-Pong that lasted several weeks. I was furious (this sometimes happens in *Wikipedia* editing). I am embarrassed to admit that I said some harsh things to the veteran editor on a *Wikipedia* page where editorial disagreements get hashed out.

In the end I lost the argument about the sidebar but discovered an alternative solution. *Wikipedia* editors tend to be conservative, and reluctant to make changes in longstanding templates, particularly brief ones like the template for the sidebar where there is little room to expand. There is also the larger, more flexibly constructed psychology template that can be placed on the bottom of most psychology entries. I was able to insert occupational health psychology into that psychology template without opposition. Oddly enough, the editor and I later became allies on an unrelated sidebar dispute.

I continued to develop the OHP entry ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupational\\_health\\_psychology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupational_health_psychology)). Before going on, I should underline the fact that the two most important kinds of links found in *Wikipedia* articles are

internal links, which take the reader via a mouse click to other *Wikipedia* pages, and external links, which take the reader outside of *Wikipedia* to just about anywhere on the Web. As I developed the OHP entry, I placed in the text external links to (a) the journals occupational health psychologists read (e.g., *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* and *Work & Stress*) and (b) two important OHP organizations, the Society for Occupational Health Psychology and the European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology.

Then I got into a scrape with a second *Wikipedia* editor. By this time, I had learned that *Wikipedia* editors—there are thousands of them—watch *Wiki* pages very carefully; they constitute a kind of DEW line. The editors pounce on rule breakers and writers who add wrong information. One of the rules that this second editor insisted on enforcing is the *Wikipedia* protocol that specifies that wherever possible a writer should place internal links in the text. My placing external links in the text was wrong. She told me that if there are no *Wikipedia* entries for a concept, journal, or organization, I should create stubs for them; I should not pour external links into the text. External links should be placed at the end of a *Wikipedia* entry.

I learned a lot from my earlier editorial conflict. It is better to work things out than to fight. I re-edited the OHP entry a little at a time. For example, I removed from the OHP entry an external link to the journal *Work & Stress*. Then I created a new *Wikipedia* entry for *Work & Stress*. In a third step, I inserted in the place where the external link stood an internal link to the new *Work & Stress* entry. I created 15 separate entries (for 13 journals and the SOHP and the EA-OHP), all of which started life in *Wikipedia* by my having placed external links in the text of the OHP entry. Because the work involved in creating a new *Wikipedia* entry is tedious, I decided to do no more than create one new entry on any one day. The second editor was helpful, directing me to a model that made it easier for me to create new entries for the journals. I also placed external links at the end of each new entry to help put the reader in touch with the world outside *Wikipedia*.

The internal links I agreed to create

are part of the vastly larger fabric of *Wikipedia*. Those links make it easy for a reader to move around the encyclopedia, to move back and forth to look up topics. I realized that it is not enough to place links in the OHP entry to take readers to related topics. I made sure to visit a variety of other relevant *Wikipedia* pages (e.g., the existing entry for workplace stress that I had no hand in starting) and insert internal links that can deliver the reader to the OHP entry. My aim was to create a tapestry of links to and from the OHP entry.

All this effort did not dampen my enthusiasm for *Wikipedia*. If anything my enthusiasm grew. I edited and expanded the entry on school violence ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/School\\_violence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/School_violence)). I continue to use the watchlist to monitor changes in the *Wikipedia* entries I either started or contributed to. The watchlist alerts me when a rare individual vandalizes an entry—relatively few visitors to *Wikipedia* entries are vandals but they do exist. The watchlist makes undoing the vandalism easy, a mere click of a mouse. I also try to improve upon some contributors' problematic writing, including my own past contributions.

I also used my membership in LinkedIn to encourage members of the SOHP LinkedIn group to join my effort to elaborate the OHP *Wikipedia* entry, though without much success.

My enthusiasm for *Wikipedia* has also taken me around the world. I joined the French chapter of *Wikipedia*, and started an entry called "Psychologie de la santé au travail" ([http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychologie\\_de\\_la\\_sant%C3%A9\\_au\\_travail](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychologie_de_la_sant%C3%A9_au_travail)), the French expression for OHP, making sure to cross-link the English and French OHP pages. Another nice feature of *Wikipedia* is that one can easily link an entry in one language to parallel entries in other languages.

All this effort began because I decided that I wanted to expose college students like my son, his friends, and the students at City College to occupational health psychology, a new and exciting discipline within the broader field of psychology. Perhaps some of the readers of this article will consider contributing to *Wikipedia*.



**WIKIPEDIA**  
*The Free Encyclopedia*

**"As I developed the OHP entry, I placed in the text external links to (a) the journals occupational health psychologists read (e.g., the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* and *Work & Stress*) and (b) two important OHP organizations, the Society for Occupational Health Psychology and the European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology."**

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