

## Personal Repositories Online Wiki Environment

- a JISC-funded joint venture between the Open University and the University of Leicester Beyond Distance Research Alliance

### Overview:

Personal resource management strategies (PRMS) are as diverse as the populations using them. From contributions to OU PROWE focus groups and responses to a project questionnaire survey, we see that often they are accidental or inadvertently imposed on the individual from outside. They are seldom logical, sensible or effectively sustainable but they may also be deeply embedded and keenly defended! For many the idea of changing their practice is courting disaster because it introduces as yet unproven alternative guardians of what is dear to them. This does not mean there is a lack of interest, more a need for transparency and robustness in any new system or proposed strategy.

### Personal:

Highly personal and individual, many practices have arisen in response to experience rather than deliberate strategy. For example, employers have imposed certain practices e.g. some tutors have to send tutorial handouts back to Regional Office as requested but one of them comments: "I have no idea what happens to them there". Another tutor places all materials on a "teaching drive" at one of her workplaces because "that's how we do it".

Other influential experiences relate to past misadventures – these can have an influence well out of proportion to the effects of the original misadventure e.g. a tutor who having lost data many years ago persists in printing out anything with reuse potential and storing it in a cardboard folder. Less extreme but similar, there were several tutors who reported that the only place that they felt was safe for storing materials was on their personal PC or laptop hard drives – but these were not necessarily backed up to a level that would actually ensure no loss of the material in the case of any system crash – *perception* of security was paramount and individual.

### Resource:

What constitutes a resource is as personal as the strategies for managing them. One PROWE tutor claimed he had no resources to organise. Others organise using blogs, for example, by turning off the comment feature and using a new post as the repository for all links or materials relating to the latest section/unit/module of the course. For another tutor resource was clearly equated with URL. Several felt the most important and useful things to share were those which would short circuit the time and tedium of tutoring e.g. marking templates and standardised assignment feedback comments which could be recycled for use with subsequent groups. The value accorded to different resources is equally wide ranging as seen by the extent to which different tutors are willing to see their work developed. Some are concerned about how resources might be viewed by others in terms of quality (and thus how well they are perceived as performing) whereas others are concerned that they would not want to contribute anything that was not proven as good (but were assuming that they as individuals – not the potential end users – would be the best

---

placed to confirm the resource as good for someone else's context)

### **Management:**

Data from PROWE suggest that people do not spend a lot of time actually managing their digital resources in any consistent or targeted way. Once a system is in place there is little likelihood of change – despite whatever new tools might now be available. Some focus group participants felt it was a case of "if it ain't broke don't fix it"; changing systems was inviting disaster. There was concern over loss of control over original work, it's OK for others to use it but originating authors want to keep track of the original.

### **Strategies:**

For finding or using others' resources – the flip side of organising their own (as covered above) – these should be sorted according to level; have a search tool which can deal with keywords, and have abstracts but not anonymous reviews. Several tutors suggested an "Amazon.com" star rating system and cross-referencing system "those customers who bought this title also bought...". Overall, presently existing resources were considered to be difficult to access and searching results too variable, and dependent on region and on how many other Associate Lecturers were teaching on the same course. One tutor summarised three possible outcomes operating at present: finding them is complex, either "like mining nuggets in a land of admin"; or "there is nothing there"; or, you are lucky and "someone collects the good bits and harvests them into a folder elsewhere" – but it's still a gamble as to whether you can find them there.

### **Implications for the PROWE project:**

The emphasis for understanding PRMS needs to be placed on the "personal" – you simply cannot legislate for how things are done, at least, not completely, the personal/individual element is too strong. Even if you require certain things to be stored/logged different people will exercise the requirement in different ways, not necessarily the most technically sensible. And, attempts to control what happens may lead to shadow or parallel storage systems too. You can take a horse to water, as the saying goes, but you can't make it drink.

---

### **Contacts:**

Project Officer: [a.hewling@open.ac.uk](mailto:a.hewling@open.ac.uk)

Project Consultant:

[rdd13@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:rdd13@leicester.ac.uk)

Project Manager:

[j.t.lamberton@open.ac.uk](mailto:j.t.lamberton@open.ac.uk)



**University of  
Leicester**