# The Open Organization: Igniting Passion and Performance

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**The Open Organization: Igniting Passion and Performance** Jim Whitehurst
TODAY'S LEADERS KNOW THAT SPEED and agility are the keys to any company's success, and yet many are frustrated that their organizations can't move fast enough to stay competitive. The typical chain of command is too slow; internal resources are too limited; people are already executing beyond normal expectations. As the pace accelerates, how do you inspire people's energy and creativity? How do you collaborate with customers, vendors, and partners to keep your organization on the cutting edge? What kind of organization matches the speed and complexity that businesses must master—and how do you build that organization?

Jim Whitehurst, CEO of Red Hat, one of the world's most revolutionary companies, shows how open principles of management—based on transparency, participation, and community—reinvent the organization for the fast-paced connected era. Whitehurst gives readers an insider's look into how an open and innovative organizational model works. He shows how to leverage it to build community, respond quickly to opportunities, harness resources and talent both inside and outside the organization, and inspire, motivate, and empower people at all levels to act with accountability.

*The Open Organization* is a must-read for leaders struggling to adapt their management practices to the values of the digital and social age. Brimming with Whitehurst's personal stories and candid advice for leading an open organization, as well as with instructive examples from employees and managers at Red Hat and companies such as Google, The Body Shop, and Whole Foods, this book provides the blueprint for reinventing your organization.

## The Open Organization: Igniting Passion and Performance Details

Date    : Published June 2nd 2015 by Harvard Business Review Press (first published May 12th 2015)
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# From Reader Review The Open Organization: Igniting Passion and Performance for online ebook

### Dave Pusey says

Fascinating concepts. A little repetitive but helpful!

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### Tom Simmons says

Great book on the future of organizations. Red Hat has created an open culture that is leading to great innovation and passion in its employees.

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### Nabil says

Great book about the COO of Delta, moving to become the CEO of Red Hat. It's a short read, that tells the story of a different type of org.

It's like a practical guide on how to deal with open organisations.

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### Schmacko says

This is another book on moving from autocratic leadership to open, inspiring, and communal leadership. It uses the idea of open sourcing. The reason this book separates itself from others is that there is a lot here that can be used to motivate free agency and meritocracy.

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### David says

Jim Whitehurst, as Chief Operating Officer of Delta Airlines, created and fostered a team of employees based upon personal and collective input, collaboration and sacrifice. After taking over the operations helm at Delta, he was faced with keeping the airline afloat and employees/unions secure while fighting off a huge corporate takeover by a competing airline. He did this through a policy of open communication, complete transparency and by treating every single employee like "they mattered" regardless of their title or position. Pay cuts across the board, including his personal salary, an increase in working days and a general tightening of the belt, not only allowed Delta to stave off the competition, but restored profitability to the airline and even restored pay levels, work hours and operating conditions to previous levels. All without layoffs or restructuring. These actions not only saved the airline and garnered the respect of all his employees, but got the attention of RedHat, the world's leading provider of open source enterprise IT products and services, who, at the time, was looking for a Chief Executive Officer.

Whitehurst knew something was different about RedHat, even during the interview process. He arrived in

North Carolina, the home of their corporate headquarters, on a Sunday morning to closed offices and no one to meet him. The cab that he would want to return to leaves, and the recruiter pulls up in a car. They proceeded to drive around looking for a place to have coffee. The recruiter didn't want to talk about his accomplishments, but more about who he was. Afterwards, he met the previous CEO, present at the time, for lunch. After both meetings, he had successfully secured the position and the check at both locations. Interestingly, neither of the individuals he had met with had any cash on hand at the time. This would be the beginning of an entirely new experience for him.

Although Whitehurst had built an "Open Organization" during his time at Delta, he did so against the grain and within the confines of a standard corporate structure. At RedHat he would be tasked with continuing their "Open" structure while recreating himself to fit within the ideals of his new home. This began with the Meritocratic structure of RedHat. The book describes this type of organization as, "A system of government or other administration (such as business administration) wherein appointments and responsibilities are objectively assigned to individuals based upon their 'merits', namely intelligence, credentials, and education." In other words, everyone has a chance to be heard, but it's those that "earn" their place, that get listened to. Throughout the book, he makes the distinction between thermostats and thermometers. Those who set the temperature and those who tell you what the temperature is. If you look at your department and examine the true influence makers within, how many of them carry a title associated with their ability to operate as a thermostat? Furthermore, how many people with the title are truly operating as a thermometer? In a meritocracy, this division of ability and title would never exist.

RedHat as a company is driven by passion. Employees within the organization all see themselves as part of the pulse of company and no one questions their worth or value. They just operate within it. The carrot that drives them is not financial gain, albeit with Whitehurst at the helm, RedHat has more than doubled its profits. What drives them is their ability to be the difference that sets themselves apart from other companies, especially tech companies. RedHat employees don't just come to work, they operate in their purpose. Whitehurst writes that purpose is the primary reason that RedHatters work harder and the company has less turnover than the industry average.

Perhaps one of the greatest secrets to RedHat's success as an Open Organization is the collaborative culture that exists there. This culture is based on the four values of Freedom, Courage, Commitment and Accountability. Think of these values as being balanced on a scale. You need people to operate in their freedom, but not so much that it takes away from their accountability. You want people who are committed, but not imprisoned and having the ability to be driven by their courage. These values set the stage for true passion to exist. But true passion can be explosive. It does allow for tensions to rise. Whitehurst describes this as a ship that is being rocked by the wind. Too much lean to one side or the other can cause the ship to capsize, but proper "offsets" will right the ship in any wind. Interestingly enough, passion drives both sides of that equation, the wind and the offset. Whitehurst writes, "Many see a highly collaborative culture as a supportive, positive environment where people encourage each other with positive reinforcement. Actually, RedHat is anything but that. It is very supportive and collaborative, but in a very different way. We debate, we argue, and we complain. In many ways, it can seem harsh. But iron sharpens iron, and we've come to embrace the notion of letting the sparks fly."

Ignition is the result of a controlled explosion of fuel, air and fire. Whitehurst takes the time to highlight a number of RedHat employees who operate at the "ignition" level of passion and performance throughout the book. He speaks of his own transformation from being a "suit" to being reintroduced to his tech roots. He draws upon his time at Delta as well as publically acknowledging other corporations that, like him and RedHat, have adopted openness as a mantra and used it to drive passion and performance in the company. Finally, he offers suggestions for incorporating these philosophies into organizations that don't operate with

such meritocracy. The Open Organization is a testimony to the greatness of his RedHat team of which he describes himself as inclusive within. In a sense, Whitehurst has penned a thank you letter to his employees in which he publicly acknowledges, "look what we have done together."

## David says

**Wonderful Read**

So many nuggets. For all of the information that I want to reject, I know that those are the exact principles that I need to practice implementing. Looking forward to sharing this one.

## Cezary Zminkowski says

Very good book, showing the vision where you might want to be with your organization if you do things right as servant leader with self organized fully engaged teams and individuals. A lot of similarity with book "Creativity Inc" where Creativity is about Pixar vs Disney culture differences between two organizations one fully Agile an the other fully corporate, same Open Organization book compares RedHat culture with AirLine corporate culture.

worth reading but same like Creativity Inc and few other books. Gives you better understanding of "keep in mind end state" when you are trying to make a change and impact.

## Carlos Martínez Gadea says

This book has cleared my path towards the foundation of my current project to a level I never expected before. The way it deals with team work, management, vision of a company, monetization and personal fulfillment (for the people involved in a project) it's simply brilliant.

I appreciate as well the transparency that infuses the author on the way he talks about all the previous topics. He is very honest and that is an aptitude that not many people have and which is very well needed (IMHO).

## Grace says

I didn't expect to enjoy this book.

## Denis Vasilev says

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## John says

A fantastic read. I wish my leadership in all of my precious employers had understood the concepts here, and enabled my team to accomplish everything that we could have. We would have accomplished far more this way than in our limited and constricting environments, and retained the good people longer.

## Hector says

Red Hat has a unique and possibly revolutionary business model, enabled by new forms of technology and organization. If you are looking for a deep dive into how they pull this off you're unfortunately going to have to write it yourself, or find some good blogs. If on he other hand you want a fluffy feel good piece of drivel about the magical properties of open source software, eat your heart out.

## Jan says

Had been hoping for more detail, although some interesting stories, any references to problems or resolutions too high level to give any practical understanding

## Sankarshan says

If you've been with an organization for a significant duration, the perspective and understanding is often sharply different than what outsiders have. I've been at #RedHat for the greater part of 11 years and as is usually expected, faced the "How is it to work at Red Hat?" question a number of times.

The question is simple and perhaps the audience demands a pithy response. The truth is that such an answer is pretty much impossible to craft. How do you begin to explain a company that has as its mission statement the line "To be the catalyst in communities of customers, contributors, and partners creating better technology the open source way." (cf. https://redhat.sc.hodesdigital.com/li...) ?

Anyway, the point is, that to an extent, the "What is Red Hat and how is it" side of the question was often answered through innovations in technology, spectacular work in upstream communities and good solid hard work. In some form, the absence of a canon, so to speak, enabled a lot of commentators to write about the company and shape the narrative. While reading through Jim Whitehurst's book (cf. http://www.amazon.com/Open-Organizati...) I realized that this would perhaps be the first step in developing the narrative from the perspective of an insider. And including the points of view of individuals I've seen, known or, met within the company. And that's why it is a great read.

Any narrative about Red Hat tends to work around the theme of "enterprise open source company" with typical emphasis on the "open source" parts of how things might work. While this is largely true, the very notion that an agile organization structure can be created drawing upon the fundamental principles is something this book provides a number of citations about. It is not easy work and the surprises which Jim

tripped into are well narrated. The part I did like is eschewing the "Red Hat is special" construct of an argument. Instead, it draws upon numerous experiments (successful and failures), conversations, incidents to demonstrate that there are a set of basic guidelines which emerge. A template which can be consciously or, deliberately adopted.

The principle that leadership can and will emerge often from the unlikeliest instances and individuals can come together to make a difference is a powerful one. That arc is a strong complement to the values of the company as well as the singular aspect of an open source community - collaboration. The book does well to curate and collate such instances which the (non-RHT) readers can relate well to. But, for the associates (and alumni) there are daily reminders of such events and the fact that this is "just how we get things done".

The book weaves in the values (Freedom, Courage, Commitment, Accountability) as a practice and provides the scaffolding to the various decisions which have been made by Jim and his leadership team. However, the part I like most is that it provides a basis to create a well thought answer to the "How is it like to work there?" question. And with the material being generally available, the top tier talent seeking to join the company will have a well defined perspective to their choice. That's a fantastic thing!?

## Mike Randall says

I'm biased since I work for the company, so a review likely isn't appropriate.