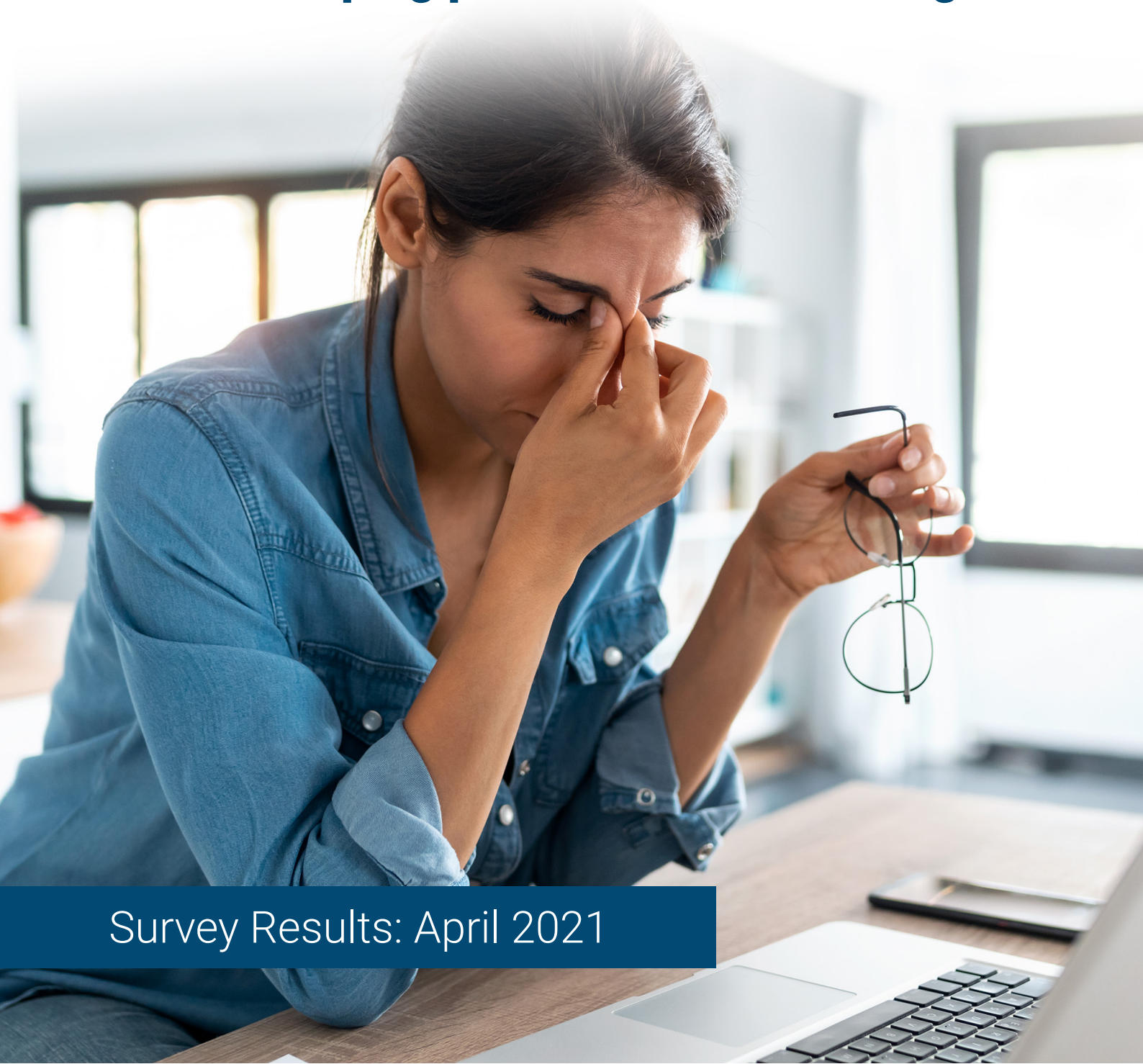


Deanta

Trends in Academic Publishing 2021

What's keeping publishers awake at night?



Survey Results: April 2021

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Introduction

In September 2019 Deanta published our Future of Publishing survey. In our conclusion to that survey, we noted that although academic publishing was going through a period of change, that change may not be as significant as some might expect. Despite digitisation, powerful retail giants, and AI-led innovation, many publishers seemed to be going about their usual business in the same manner they had for decades. Then came 2020.

Covid-19 shook the world and forced us all to re-evaluate. Supply chains were affected top to bottom, companies shut down, offices closed, and a new work-from-home culture emerged. As Warren Buffett famously said, "It's only when the tide goes out that you see who's been swimming naked", and 2020 certainly highlighted which companies had undertaken digital transformation; which had the greatest flexibility and which had the best culture towards change management.

Given this context, it seemed right to revisit our academic publishing audience and understand how the lessons of 2020 are driving change in 2021.

Deanta believe that meaningful change is a product of three elements:

- People
- Processes
- Outcomes

These business functions came under great scrutiny in 2020. As plans were hastily re-evaluated, new outcomes were considered, ranging from survival and growth to diversification or consolidation. Publishers had then to consider how best to use their dispersed talent and adapt their ways of working to achieve these new outcomes.

The shining lights of publishing are turning the dial on each of these functions to achieve new outcomes. Processes, our ways of working, are being radicalised by the adoption of new AI-led technologies, simplified workflows, and data-driven decision making.

These new processes are, in turn, affecting publishers' attitudes towards their people and challenging traditional thinking about the size and structure of their organisations, as well as what skills they require to future-proof their business.

For those organisations who are mastering this balancing act, the old goals of simply being faster, less expensive, more efficient than the competition have largely been achieved. New outcomes are on the horizon, led by new technologies and organisational structures which allow smaller, more agile teams to flourish. HFS call this approach the OneOffice concept* and Deanta set out to find any evidence of this within the publishing industry.

It was for this reason that we broke our 2021 survey questions into three inter-connected categories: people, processes, and outcomes, each of which we will explore now.

* <https://www.hfsresearch.com/research/skills-driving-the-one-office-organization-the-future-of-work-is-here/>

Executive Summary

People:

The range of skills and talent required to publish is changing

Publishers are beginning to embrace a hyperconnected future, whereby highly skilled, small, agile teams use technology to drive better results.

These teams may have dependencies on the supply chain but the best relationships evolve into partnerships and employ technology to bring back-office and front-office functions together. Simplified, digitised, workflows allow staff to free themselves from the tyranny of day-to-day tasks and give them the space and the data to make better informed, more strategic decisions.

- Technology roles are becoming more normalised in publishing.
- Data science is already having a major impact in publishing.
- Publishers are optimistic about delivering growth even with stagnated teams.

Processes:

Data science and technology are breaking new ground

Covid-19 triggered widespread and immediate reviews as to how publishers managed their workflows. Few organisations had the luxury of waiting out, what proved to be, a hugely busy year to conduct their ways of working reviews, although there's ample evidence that reviews, particularly around the use of technology, will continue into 2021 and beyond.

The most striking change is in the form of data science and data-based decision making, which made an unexpected appearance in publishers' top-ranked business priorities. If publishers remain as agile and collaborative as our survey suggests, then real change may be afoot.

- Data-based decision making is a top priority.
- Traditional ways of working and siloed hierarchies are slowing the rate of change.
- Outdated technology is still commonplace.

Outcomes:

Industry confidence is high

Where Covid-19 crippled some industries, academic publishing went into overdrive and came into sharp focus as high-quality, fast-produced content was in more demand than ever.

Attitudes toward Open Access continue to evolve as the industry explores multiple ways to meet market needs whilst plugging any loss of revenue associated with this initiative.

By contrast, what does remain settled is the role publishers see themselves fulfilling, with 'commissioning new content' topping our poll.

- Majority of publishers predict a buoyant market in 2021 with only 20% expecting a downturn.
- Open Access is a far from settled topic.
- 'Production Management' remains outsourced as publishers retain the more creative soft skills in house.

About the Research

We surveyed a wide range of academic publishing professionals, speaking to people in diverse roles, specialising in diverse areas of publishing. Here's how the sample broke down:

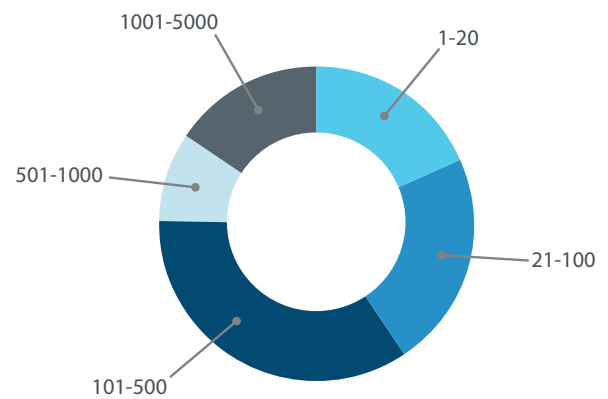
Questions and answers

Please note that some questions were multiple choice with more than one answer being permitted. For this reason, some of the responses listed within this survey add up to more than 100%.

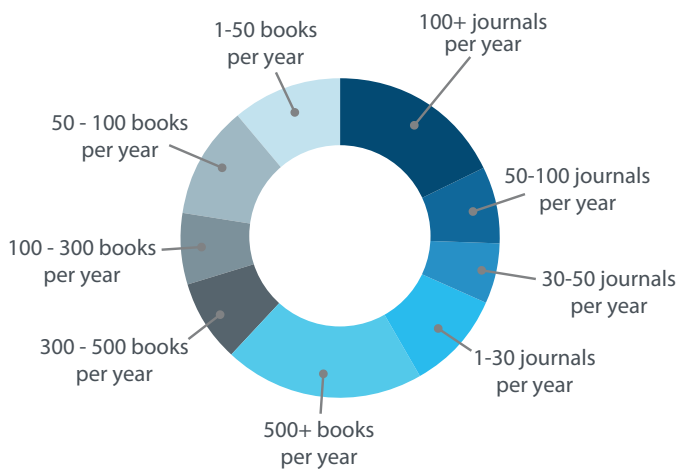
Response by team



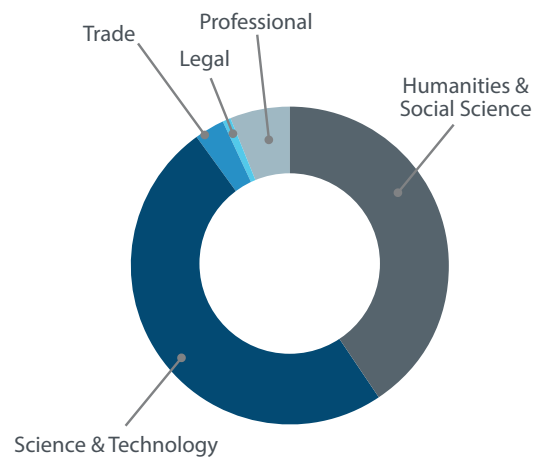
Number of staff in the organisation



Organisational output



Disciplines covered by the organisation



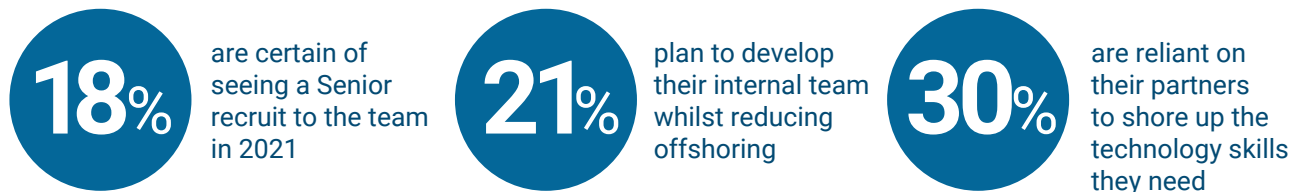
Part 1. People

We asked a series of questions around the people and skills that publishers employ, and discovered the following:

1.1 People: The skills that publishers need are changing

The mix of talent required to drive a successful publishing business is evolving. Where once a strong editorial and production team was enough, technological advancements which support rapid and accurate publishing at a reduced cost have forced publishers to reconsider their own skills base more carefully.

New commercial models, new forms of consumption, and opportunities for the digitisation of the entire supply chain have all created competitive advantages, but academic publishing remains a traditional business, achieving good margins historically, so the push to modernise and embrace technology has often been from vendor-driven innovation rather than from publishers themselves. This may explain why many publishers remain optimistic, even though their internal teams are not growing.



Less than 4 in 10 have confidence in their internal team's technology skills.

There is, however, evidence that a subtle shift may be coming. Of the 18% that foresaw a senior recruitment in 2021, the overwhelming majority of those senior recruitments look to be in technology roles, with data science and production following, but well behind. The data science department is on the rise for publishers – even if not all appointments are at a senior level.



*most likely in the fields of data analytics, content management, and sales & marketing.

1.2 People: Collaborating with the supply chain

Publishers are increasingly comfortable delegating certain skill sets to their supplier base, with some alluding to a more complex interplay with their supply chain as the digitisation of the publishing ecosystem creates more commercial opportunities.

The trend for publishers to outsource editorial and production services began back in the 2000's. At that time the aim was simply to reduce staff costs by ad hoc use of overseas or onshore labour. In the decades since, outsourcing has become ubiquitous and an established vendor market now offers a far wider range of services to the sector in the race for competitive advantage.

What's clear is that this vendor market is offering mainly the hard skills required by publishers.

62%

described their organisation as "Collaborative"

80%

expect outsourcing levels to be maintained or to grow

Most outsourced functions

1. XML creation
2. Copy editing
3. Off-shore project management
4. Proof reading
5. Metadata creation
6. Technology development
7. Creative services

It will be interesting to see how the offshore labour market adapts as data science and machine learning heralds the automation of some editorial and production tasks. Publishers will have the option of deploying technology to perform simple copy-editing tasks, wrestling back control of this process by working in the cloud, not overseas.

“ Over the past eighteen months, more of our processes have been outsourced to external vendors.

“ We use an external service to turn our metadata into an ONIX feed for international markets.

1.3 People: Experience of Covid 19 – a personal view

With outsourcing well established, it may come as no surprise that the overwhelming majority of publishers reported that the transition to working under Covid-19 conditions was largely trouble free. Many publishers had already introduced a level of flexible working prior to 2020, so the enforced escalation of this during lockdown was not a huge adjustment.



had no problems transitioning to work-from-home due to Covid-19

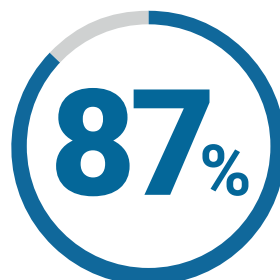
“ The initial move presented a few problems, but the company as a whole has embraced WFH, and it will form a large part of the long-term approach to working.

“ Complex and not without difficulties, but manageable thanks to competent management and highly motivated staff.

“ I would say that it actually helped us become more efficient and that it was a good opportunity to start some overdue changes in how things were run.

What the survey does not reveal is the impact of Covid-19 on the offshore vendors themselves. India was hit hard by Covid and the lockdowns there were exacerbated by infrastructure and logistical challenges getting the workforce equipped and ready to work from home. This led to a greater concentration of work in Q3 and Q4, once the most serious supply chain issues had been addressed.

Publishers’ exposure to this crisis in the supply chain may explain why more than half of the publishers we spoke to are considering a review of how they work.



stated “technology will play a key part” in a ways of working review

1.4 People: Managing change or a slave to it?

It has been said that publishing is a simple business, made complicated by the people within it. These complications were once limited to the interplay between author, reviewer and editor, but innovations in technology and new commercial models have created a publishing ecosystem which continues to evolve rapidly.

Developments such as Open Access, transformative agreements, digital libraries and aggregators, data science, enhanced metadata, and XML workflows have all added to the decisions that publishers must make each day.

The commercial future of each and every publisher will be determined according to how they react to these changes and the evidence from our survey suggests that publishers remain a mixed bag when it comes to change management.

62%

cited **hierarchical organisations, long-established ways of working, and senior staff** as factors contributing to stifling change.

43%

stated they had **small teams that were able to adapt to change relatively smoothly.**

40%

agreed that their organisations **find creative solutions when faced with unexpected challenges.**

“ Publishing is in many ways stuck in the old ways (e.g., producing print-like journals without printing) and parts of our team have worked 20+ years in this way, which makes change hard.

1.5 People: Summary - evidence of a OneOffice approach?

Publishers are beginning to embrace a hyperconnected, OneOffice future, whereby highly skilled small, agile teams use technology to drive better results.

These teams may have dependencies on the supply chain but the best relationships evolve into partnerships and employ technology to bring back-office and front-office functions together. Simplified, digitised workflows allow staff to free themselves from the tyranny of day-to-day tasks and give them the space and the data to make better informed, more strategic decisions.

Our survey supported the view that publishing is moving towards this new horizon:

1



Technology roles are becoming more normalised in publishing.

Data science is already having a major impact in publishing.



2

3



Publishers are optimistic about delivering growth even with stagnated teams.

Part 2: Processes

In this section we invited publishers to share their respective organisations' approach to getting the job done. Here's what we found:

2.1 Processes: Time to review our ways of working?

"The best laid plans of mice and men, often go awry" and whatever plans the publishing industry may have had as it approached 2020, you can be sure that Covid-19 threw most into disarray. Our 2019 Future of Publishing Survey suggested that many publishers were beginning the review process before planning their digital futures, though for some this was a 3-year horizon.

Our most recent survey showed that many of those "ways of working reviews" have already happened or are coming, far sooner than expected.



53%
certain of a full ways of
working review in 2021



Only
25%
were unsure whether
a review was afoot



90%
said technology will play
a key part in that review
process

A large proportion of the
balance stated that reviews
had already happened
in 2020.

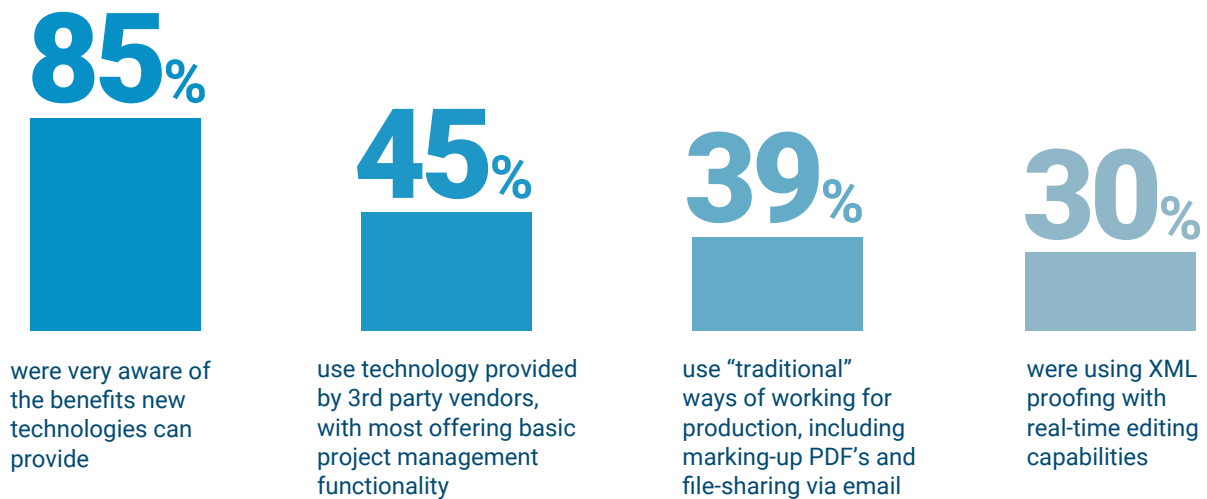
Remote working looks set to stay for the foreseeable future, with some publishers opting not to take up new leases on existing offices. So, management, staff, and suppliers alike are having to adopt new means to communicate, edit, track, and publish works – all without the established physical and digital networks that an office provides.

“ Our parent organisation has already finalised a 'new normal' policy for when we are able to return to the office.

2.2 Processes: changing attitudes toward technology

This wholesale shift to remote working and digitised means of communication has brought into sharp relief organisations' attitudes towards technology. Any remnants of resistance from individuals who may have been uncomfortable working from home have long since passed. As HFS recently stated, "We have no choice but to embrace this emerging business world where a perfect alignment of business outcomes and their enabling technologies demands all our focus and creativity."

Our survey supported the view that new technologies will play a key role as we face a new normal in 2021.



As a publisher, we have all the skill within the team that we need. It is more about understanding how digital processes outside our company work, for example, in the supply chain for physical books or between academic libraries and aggregators when it comes to digital content. For this, we currently rely heavily on our personal relationships with individuals at external partner companies. They generously share their knowledge and together we find ways of bringing our products to the trade and consumers and/or offering consumers a smoother experience.

2.3 Processes: The rise and role of Data Science

Dig a little deeper and there is plenty of room for optimism as far as technology's role in publishing is concerned.

Data science and publishing are a match made in heaven. Developments in NLP (Natural Language Processing) have allowed machines to analyse and categorise this data, allowing for automation of editorial tasks, whilst AI tools have long supported sales & marketing by creating data for list curation and customer recommendations.



stated "data science would have a growing or significant role in their business in 2021"



said data science will have its immediate impact in "data analytics"



argued that "data-based decision making" should be the top priority for their business



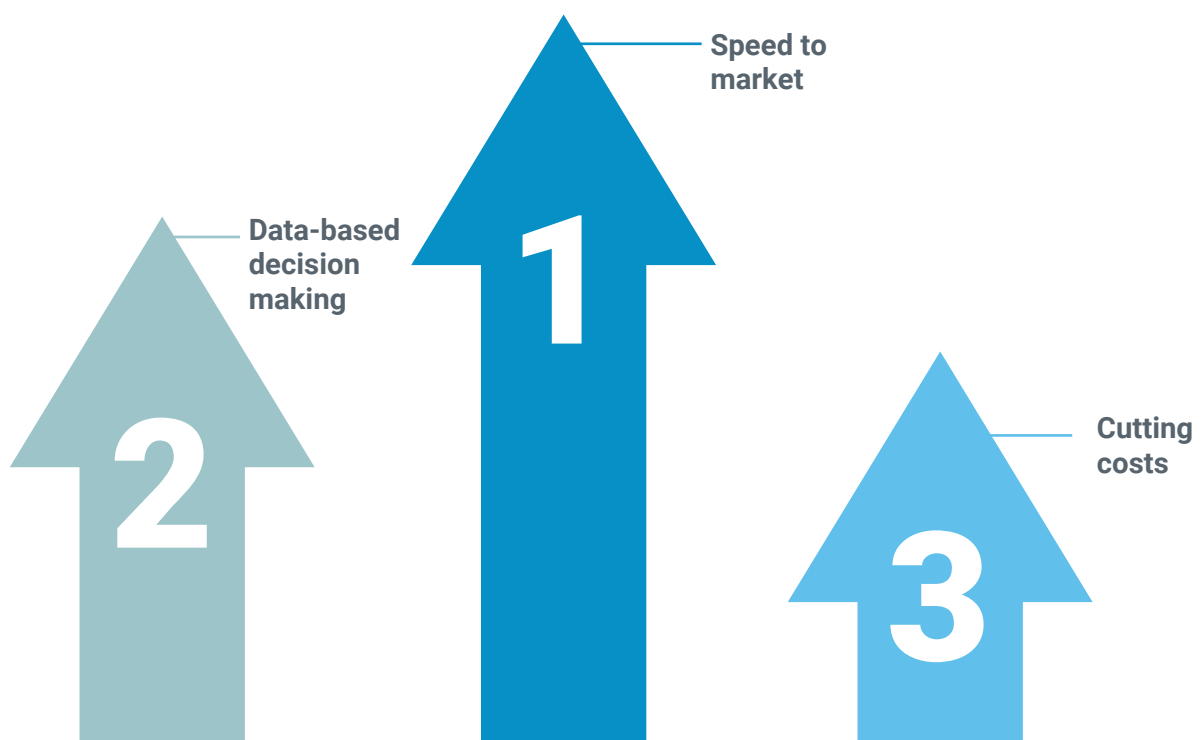
“

We are including AI tools as part of a big project this year.

2.4 Processes: New horizons, new priorities

In our 2019 Future of Publishing Survey, the usual suspects of “speed to market”, “controlling costs” and “improving product quality” ruled the roost. In many ways these familiar goals are hygiene factors – KPIs that all publishers and, in fact, all businesses should address each year. When has there never been pressure to cut costs, speed up the process, or eradicate errors?

We were interested to see if the 2020 experience had challenged these three pillars which have taken the top spots for so long. The answer is a firm yes and no.



Speed to market remained in top spot, but it was a very even contest, with **expand data-driven decision-making** coming a close second, but noticeably ahead of **cutting costs**.

- That “finding the right off shore partner” took bottom spot was no genuine surprise given the evidence that outsourcing is already well established.
- Developing an agile culture” won out against “quality” considerations.
- 90% agreed that “modernising workflows should be the top business priority”

2.5 Processes: A positive working culture?

To deliver meaningful change, organisations need to be unified and have a shared vision, promoted by the leadership but with buy-in from staff at every level. They need to be ready and able to adapt quickly whilst communicating their quick wins and mini-milestones as they set off on their journey. Managed badly, organisations can face change fatigue – seeing staff lose confidence in the process - or even sabotage as competing interests take hold.

Our survey suggested that publishers have many of the facets which make up a positive working culture, and which would support change programmes.

When asked to describe their organisations' working culture, the top three choices were:



34% described their organisation as **traditional**.

When asking publishers to describe their organisations attitude towards change management, the No.1 response was: **we operate in small teams, agile teams with multiple skill sets, able to adapt relatively smoothly.**

2.5 Processes: Summary – data the new priority?

Unsurprisingly, Covid-19 triggered widespread and immediate reviews as to how publishers managed their workflows. Few organisations had the luxury of waiting out, what proved to be, a hugely busy year to conduct their ways of working reviews, although there's ample evidence that reviews, particularly around the use of technology, will continue into 2021 and beyond.

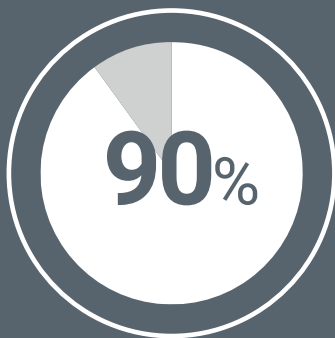
The most striking change is in the form of data science and data-based decision making, which made an unexpected appearance in publishers' top-ranked business priorities. If publishers remain as agile and collaborative as our survey suggests, then real change may be afoot.



Data-based decision making is a top priority



Outdated technology is still commonplace



90% agreed that 'modernising workflows' should be a key priority



Traditional ways of working and siloed hierarchies are slowing the rate of change

Part 3: Outcomes

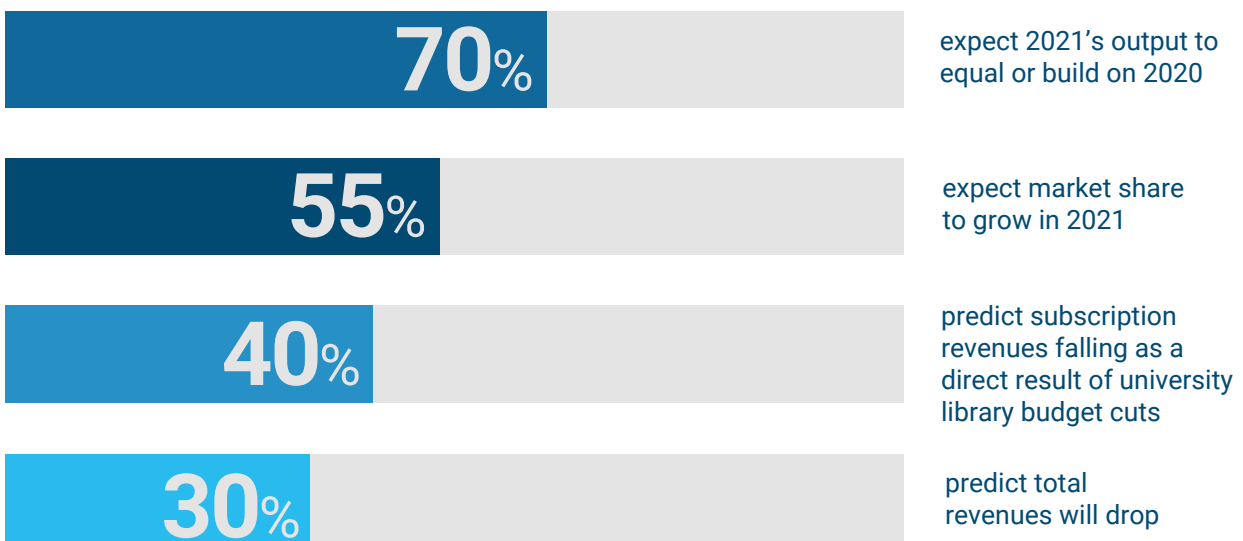
Having looked at people and processes, as we head into our collective new normal, we wanted to understand how business outcomes had changed. This is what we found:

3.1 Outcomes: Commercial predictions & confidence in 2021

In many ways 2020 was a transformative year for the publishing industry. Not only did the Covid-19 crisis reinforce the need for high-quality, quick-to-market academic publications, but publications across all scientific journals saw a sharp rise in submissions.



Overall, 2020's disruptions and the challenges with supply chain workflows have failed to rock the confidence of the academic publishing industry.



Revenues tell only one side of the story of course, as profit margins for the industry have historically remained high - higher even than Apple and Google, at over 25% for the top 5 players**

* Nature (<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-03564-y>)

** <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-06-30/covid-19-shows-scientific-journals-like-elsevier-need-to-open-up>

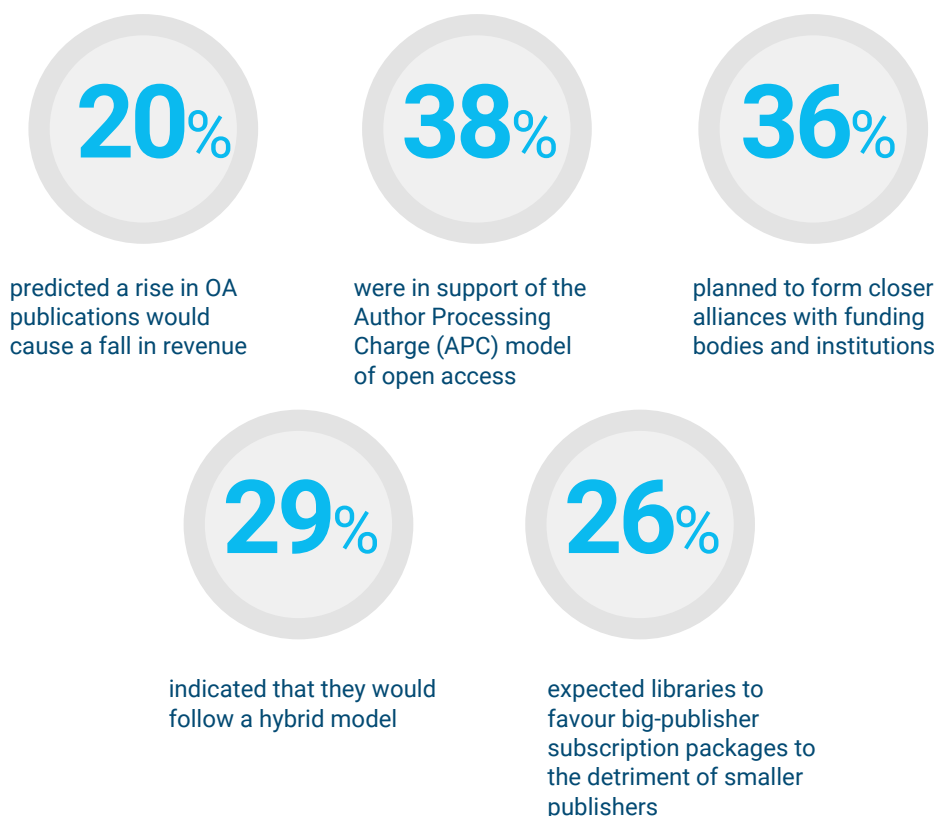
3.2 Outcomes: Reactions to Plan S

Plan S took effect in January of this year, just as our survey was launched. The main principle is:

“With effect from 2021, all scholarly publications on the results from research funded by public or private grants provided by national, regional and international research councils and funding bodies, must be published in Open Access Journals, on Open Access Platforms, or made immediately available through Open Access Repositories without embargo.”

Though Open Access looks set to stay, the debate as to which commercial model publishers should adopt remains heated. In 2019, the “Society Publishers Accelerating Open Access and Plan S” (SPA-OPS) listed 27 possible OA publishing models.

In this context, it is perhaps not surprising to learn that publishers gave a mixed response when asked to describe their organisations’ response to OA.



Deanta will be keeping a close eye on the OA landscape as this picture evolves.

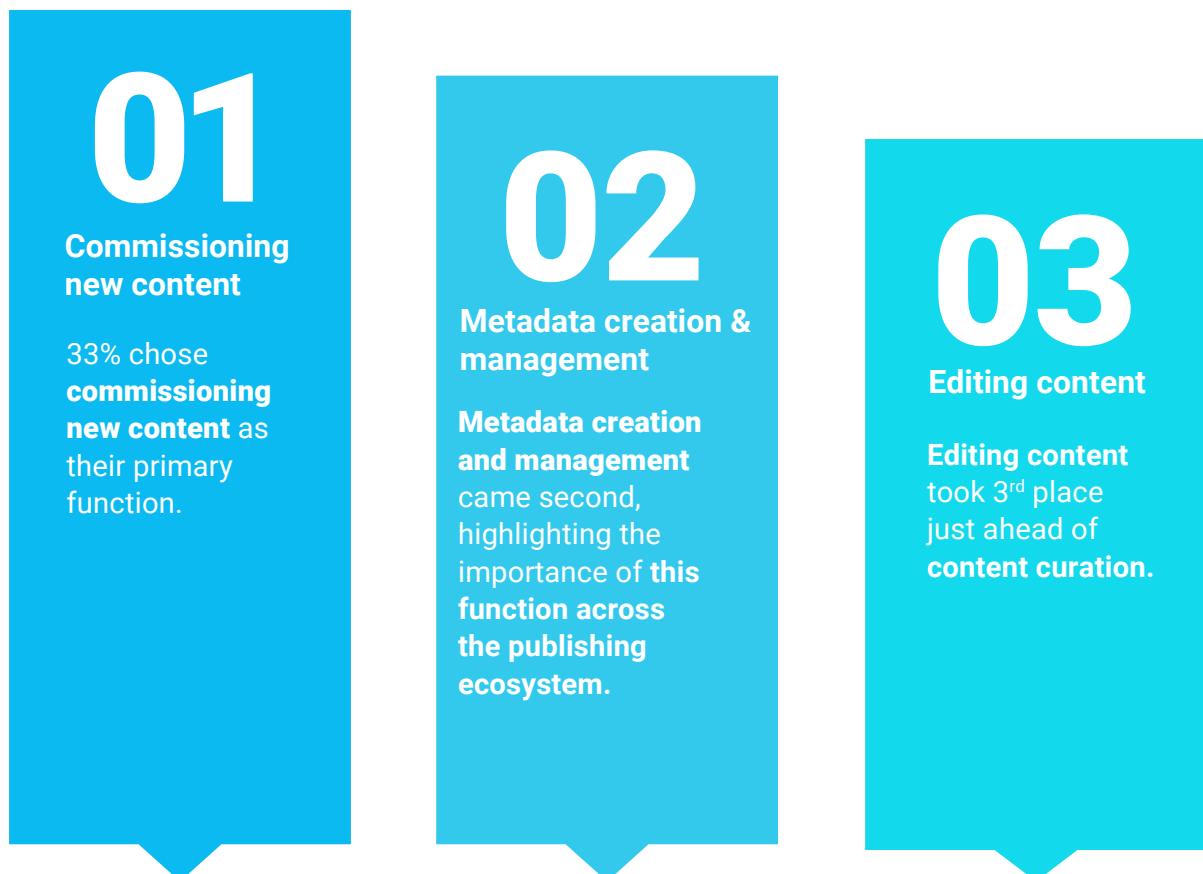
“ We are having great success with converting subscriptions to transformative agreements which cover all our journals.

“ The current approach to OA promises extra commercial opportunities; however, the proposed changes for REF (wherein all material must be OA) are challenging for both publishers and authors, especially ECRs and those without institutional support.

3.3 Outcomes: Future of Role of Publishing

Innovation in the publishing industry has often originated in the supply chain. The digitisation of publishing has created opportunities for new enterprises to either syphon off some traditional publishing functions, or in some cases build new markets entirely. An example of the former might include the almost complete delegation of production to the Indian market, with offshore typesetting, copyediting, proof reading, and project management now commonplace. An example of the latter might include the outsourcing of XML conversion for those publishers who don't manage XML-first workflows; the rise of peer review platforms such as ScholarOne; or companies such as Ingrams.

As these innovative markets bite off chunks of the publishing process, we asked publishers to rank what their future core functions should be.



Production management seems permanently consigned to the offshore market, taking the lowest aggregate score with only 2% selecting this as a primary function for publishers.

3.4 Outcomes: Summary – content is king

Where Covid-19 crippled some industries, academic publishing went into overdrive and came into sharp focus as high-quality, fast-produced content was in more demand than ever.

Attitudes toward Open Access continue to evolve as the industry explores multiple ways to meet market needs whilst plugging any loss of revenue associated with this initiative.

By contrast, what does remain settled is the role publishers see themselves fulfilling, with 'commissioning new content' topping our poll.

Confidence is high.
Only 20% expect a downturn in 2021.

Open Access is a far from settled topic.

Production Management remains outsourced as publishers retain the more creative soft-skills in house.

Our Conclusion and take-aways

So when the tide suddenly went out last year – how did publishers fare?

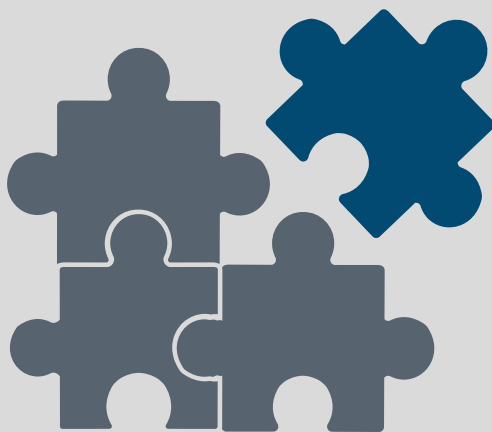
Covid-19 brought many challenges to publishers, but existing technologies and the extent to which production is outsourced made the management of this far less painful than might have been anticipated. Nevertheless, most publishers have recently reviewed or are planning to review their ways of working as they look to collapse siloed hierarchies and break with tradition to find more agile working methods.

Commercial disruption from Open Access and from Covid-hit university libraries is a concern, but the growth and margins enjoyed by the academic publishing industry may offer a safety net and lessen the immediate impact of these disruptions.

What's undeniable is that academic publishers as a whole are reacting to the lessons of 2020 and the great rallying cry is for publishers to modernise their workflows as a priority.

Meaningful change may well be on the horizon and though there appears to be some stagnation in senior teams, new recruits are arriving with technology and data science skills in their armoury.

This change, when it comes, may still be focused on the hygiene objectives of improved speed to market and reduced costs, but publishers are increasingly embracing the OneOffice concept by using technology to drive data-based decision making, and devolving operational tasks and hard skills to a mature and innovative vendor market.



Deanta would like to pass on our heartfelt thanks to each and every publisher who contributed to this survey. These surveys offer a mirror to the modern publishing industry and could not happen without your continued support.

Thank you.



Get in touch

To find out more about Deanta...

pshafe@deantaglobal.com

www.deantaglobal.com

Dublin Office

8 The Seapoint Building,
44-45 Clontarf Road,
Dublin 3,
D03 PR52
Ireland
+353 1 6708040
+353 1 5570665

Chennai Office

Chettinad Chambers,
2nd Floor
No. 39 P.S. Sivasamy Salai,
1st street Mylapore
Chennai 600004
India
+918 7545 02334