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Exploring Lean-Agile Adoption in Publishing: MVBs, Porous Books and Feedback Loops

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EXPLORING LEAN-AGILE ADOPTION IN PUBLISHING: MVBs, POROUS BOOKS, AND FEEDBACK LOOPS

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Abstract

As publishing looks for ways to adapt to a more complex twenty-first-century marketplace, there have been sporadic calls for the industry to adopt lean, agile, or lean-agile approaches as a way of becoming more customer-centric. Despite these calls, which include some existing academic interest in the proposition, publishing scholars have not yet mounted enough of a sustained study of what a lean and agile approach might mean for business models within the industry. To blur things further, it is not always clear whether the calls that have been made thus far refer to an understanding of lean, agile, or lean-agile in the sense of the intentional, proactive feedback-driven process improvement approach that has more recently been synonymous with software engineering and interaction design in recent decades but which predates it, or other senses merely reflecting the general adjective or common noun sense of the terms, or merely signifying a general idea of business flexibility. One problem with this lack of clarity is that it does not acknowledge that it is this former approach that has proven to be effective in handling complex business scenarios involving the kind of uncertainty fostered by fragmented markets and complicates our understanding of whether publishing could or would be able to gain potential benefits through the adoption of lean-agile approaches. This research represents a preliminary attempt to address this gap from several angles. I conclude that a lean-agile approach could benefit publishing as it seeks to navigate the choppier waters of the contemporary publishing marketplace. However, I also note that there are industry barriers that may impede such adoption, concluding that such a move is likely best understood as being only part of a concurrent solution alongside more traditional strategies.

Author's Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

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The Case for a Lean-Agile Approach to Publishing

There have been sporadic calls from different quarters for publishing to embrace lean (Bhaskar 2013, 187; O'Leary 2012, 15), agile (Page B 2012; O'Leary 2012, 10; Bhaskar 2013, 188; Comerford 2020a, 2021b) or, indeed, related frameworks such as Eric Ries' *Lean Startup* (Ries 2011) as noted by Bhaskar (2013) over the last fifteen years. Many of these calls have been premised on the perceived need for publishers to become more customer-centric than they have historically been. As a way to better access and serve customers in a complex and fragmented twenty-first-century marketplace that is said to require more business flexibility. The idea seems to be that agile, lean and other variations can offer a path towards more flexible forms of publication, can offer more flexible business models that move beyond the primacy of conventional trade publishing and can help make better contact with customers directly to put them in a position to engage with them more frequently. Literary agent Jonny Geller's call for publishers to "Be more agile and innovative" (Comerford 2020a, n.p) covers all aspects.

For example, Geller suggests that the traditional product of publishing stymies the industry when it comes to delivering content in whatever form a customer desires, noting that "publishers' 'reliance on print has stopped innovation', and though print books would always be in demand, businesses should seek to 'get involved in TV adaptations early on', and monitor audio, e-book and podcast consumption. 'What people really want is a story, and they don't really care how they get it'". Second, he argues that the traditional trade business model, with its economies of scale, also contributes to the struggle to adapt to niche markets. Here, he trumpets the potential of the "subscription model" as a possible alternative and also of non-standard retail sales, advocating for "kerbside selling and 'books in Homebase'" (Geller quoted in Comerford 2020a, n.p). Closely related to this, he suggests that another way to achieve more customer-centricity is simply for publishers to become better at customer engagement and customer relationships in and of themselves through direct sales and closer relationships. He cites Verso's success with direct sales as evidence of this. This was also reported by Comerford (2020b, 2).

Geller is not on his own in making these kinds of calls. Bridget Shine, chief executive of the Independent Publishers Association, sees agile changes to the business model as crucial for the industry when she reflects on the closure of a large distribution centre in Grantham. Shine notes that the reported closure "feels like a moment for the industry to look afresh at distribution and consider new models and solutions" and recommends that publishers "need to move past piling books high and gathering dust in warehouses and instead print and distribute them based on actual requirements." (Shine quoted in Brown 2023, n.p) She cites the adoption of agile as something that could remedy this. Meanwhile, publisher Dominique Raccah, CEO of Sourcebooks, calls for more agile customer-centricity and more flexible forms of publication too, suggesting that publishers should "start with the customer experience first, and work backwards to the technology, using a process that she terms the 'child of agile', a flexible, iterative approach" (Page, B 2012, n.p). Raccah (interviewed in Greenfield 2013, n.p) has also mentioned the lean startup approach as another tool that she has used to run her business.

It is not difficult to make out the basic contours of the digital revolution as sitting behind such terms as delivering content, customer-centricity, and ideas such as direct selling and printing based on actual requirements. After all, if book publishing still existed in a landscape of predominantly printed books, mass production, mass media and advertising, then there would be no need to deliver content and only printed books, no need to get to know customers or print based on actual requirements when the book trade only ever awaited large print runs and where a mass literary media could promote these books. In this pre-digital world, there would be no thought of publishers either getting to know their customers or selling directly to them. Nor would the market conditions for customer-centricity exist in a mass-production orientated market. Indeed, Gummeson suggests that customer-centricity means "companies should learn about customer needs and wants and satisfy these", further noting that "this is a prerequisite for survival and profitability." He locates its "opposite" in the pre-digital "production or product orientation" of old "where technology, resources, product knowledge" controlled "the behaviour of companies." (Gummesson 2008, 2) In this sense, customer-centricity mirrors changes in the balance between supply-driven versus demand-driven aspects of the economy since the arrival of the internet.

Whilst the contemporary economy can still be supply-driven at times—as Bradley Hull puts it, there are still "make-to-stock (MTS)" supply chains (Hull 2005, 2)—

demand-driven   "make-to-order (MTO) supply chains" nowadays are "almost universal" (1). It is not difficult to join the dots to see this demand-driven approach at work when looking at common aspects of the economy today. A great deal more products are more personalised, individualised, customised. We have our own personalised lists of things to watch or listen to on YouTube, Netflix or Spotify. Moreover, there are more niches than ever for different subject matters when it comes to books. We can setup and just as easily cancel monthly subscriptions to this or that service. We don't go to the bank so often now as much as the bank comes to us via smartphones and internet sites. This has broadly re-orientated our   collective relationship with products and given more choice. Whether this choice is a good thing or a bad thing, or even whether it truly amounts to choice or to paralysis (Schwartz 2015) is another question, but it is difficult to argue against the fact that the trappings of a demand-driven economy are all around us and have been growing in importance as a result of the digital revolution.

Hence more and more calls for more customer-centricity and for businesses to truly divine customer value from older ideas of customer service. Whilst Gummeson's customer-centricity and customer value in general could be regarded superficially as synonyms, the focus of customer-centricity is on the customer gaining *actual* value from a company rather than what a company says is value for the customer. It is also useful to differentiate customer value from its more common manifestation, namely as something related to the cliched idea of customer service or customer satisfaction of which many of us are often rightly cynical. As business theorist Stephen Denning puts this latter, more well-worn, meaning: "As part of their public relations statements, firms often declare that 'our customers are number one'" (Denning 2022, 8) when really they are not treated as such. In contrast, Gummeson's definition of customer-centricity is clearly about putting the customer at the centre of the internal business strategy rather than putting the internal business strategy first and merely paying lip service to the customer, as in the more well-known idea of customer service. Having better defined these calls, then what can we make of them?

Whilst industry calls for agile, lean, or lean-agile show that there is enduring interest in the perceived ability of agile, lean, or lean-agile to help publishing become more customer-centric, many of them remain, as insider calls often do, quite limited in their analysis and mostly played out across the pages of trade journalism publications such as *The Bookseller*. Moreover, it is unclear what being agile or lean truly signifies in these

accounts. Is it mere flexibility or litheness in the common noun, adjective, or adverb senses? Or are these calls referring to process improvement approaches that are much more specific, such as the agile of "The Manifesto for Agile Software Development" (2001) or the lean theory associated first with the Toyota Production System (TPS) and its involvement in the formation of post-industrial capitalism (Womack and Jones 2003; 2013)? Meanwhile, what of Raccah's mention of the Ries' *Lean Startup* (2011), a combination of lean and agile, a lean-agile approach? If we are going to assess whether or not agile, lean, or lean-agile can benefit publishing, then we need to get a better sense of just what these terms mean. The usual course of action would be to turn next to what publishing scholarship has made of these calls but it is here that we encounter our main problem.

Existing Publishing Scholarship

Unfortunately, we find minimal publishing scholarship on this topic. Moreover, what work there is remains piecemeal and fails to get to grips with lean, agile or lean-agile approaches in any comprehensive sense. This is in contrast to the much larger body of work on agile, lean, or lean-agile that exists elsewhere. For example, in software engineering (Cockburn 2009; Jiang and Eberlein 2009; Highsmith 2010; Poppendieck and Poppendieck 2010; Kniberg 2011), in business and management studies (Takeuchi and Nonaka 1986; Goldman et al. 1995; Dove 1999; Ries 2011; Rigby et al. 2016; Humble et al. 2015; Tsigkas 2022), in design and design studies (Buchanan 2001; Gothelf and Seiden 2021; Torres 2021), and in studies of manufacturing (Reinertsen 2009; Womack and Jones 2003, 2013). Moreover, this latter work defines process improvement approaches such as agile, lean, or lean-agile carefully and in ways that may apply to book publishing. Given the interest that some publishing insiders have had in adopting these kinds of approaches, it seems there is a significant gap in publishing scholarship that is thwarting this industry interest in some way rather than generating more work on it that may be pertinent to publishing studies.

In reviewing the existing work in publishing studies, I will identify three main ways in which enquiry seems to be being thwarted. First, and in a general sense, a focus on agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches often seems to have gotten lost in debates around traditional print forms versus digital forms and traditional publishing versus digital

publishing. Here, peripheral mentions of lean and agile seem to be generally perceived as being properties of the kinds of disruptive digital startups theorised by Christensen (2013), an idea that has gained popular currency. This link to startups also means that this publishing scholarship is generally reserved in publishing scholarship for mention of new kinds of small independent publishers or entryist publishing startups alone. Second, and as already touched upon, part of the problem of a lack of comprehensive scholarship on the topic is that lean, agile, and lean-agile approaches are difficult to define and publishing scholarship does not yet seem to have risen to the challenge. Third, even amongst the work that does begin to engage with the topic in some way, there is generally a failure to make much headway in terms of understanding how a lean, agile or lean-agile approach might be adopted or implemented in publishing. All three of these limitations illustrate potential barriers to further study. I will begin with a quick summary of the minimal scholarly work on offer and then take these limitations one by one.

Lean-agile as an intentional, proactive process improvement approach derived from equally intentional and proactive forms of agile and lean as a process improvement approaches constitutes the version of lean-agile that I consider my topic in this research. It is important to make this distinction because there is so much definitional blurriness around these terms. Although I will devote my first chapter to untangling these different senses of agile, lean or, indeed, lean-agile here, for now, more briefly, ahead of reviewing the publishing studies literature on the topic, I can note that it is this form of lean-agile that uses feedback loops to drive improvements that holds my interest here. This approach, which, as I will later note, derives from around the nineteen-thirties and has evolved numerous times since, can help benefit publishing. This is in contrast to other senses of the term, which I will later variously differentiate as a use of the terms that more relate to the common noun senses of lean and agile; a descriptive sense that mostly connotes a general idea of business flexibility; and also various missapplications of the approach that sail either closer to or not so close to lean-agile (or agile or lean forerunners thereof) as a process improvement approach.

Aside from passing mentions of lean or agile as common nouns used around discussions of digital technology (often around digital workflows) (Young 2012; Brooks 2017) or, similarly, in terms of the adaptability of small independent presses (Jameson 2017; Bennett 2021), there are only three sources that seem to engage with

something approaching a more specific idea of agile, lean, or lean-agile and each of these have their limitations. Brian O'Leary's (2012) work mentions both lean and agile but only as part of his wider thesis without offering much definition. Michael Bhaskar (2013) vaguely mentions agile, too, but does offer slightly more comprehensive work on Ries' Lean Startup (2011). However, the approach is not central to his thesis and is only one option mentioned amongst many in a review of how publishing might need to change in the current century and whether there is even a need for change. Finally, and most recently, Ina Fuchshuber (2021) offers the only empirical work on publishing and agile. Yet, there is some doubt over what she means by agile. Although she offers an academic definition, this seems to be a usage of agile that speaks more to a general idea of business flexibility that existed in business literature from around the late eighties into the nineteen-nineties than agile as a process improvement approach. Having offered a summary, let me now discuss the limitations of the minimal scholarly work on the topic.

Mistaken Associations with Digital Technology or Digital Disruption

First, there is the problem of agile, lean, or lean-agile being conflated only with the concept of digital technology and frequently with new independent publishing or digital startups alone. Brian O'Leary's essay "Context, Not Container" (2012) offers one clear example of how the study of lean, agile or lean-agile process improvement approaches often seems to get lost in debates around traditional print forms versus digital forms and traditional publishing versus digital publishing, often seen as a property of both digital and small independent publishing. O'Leary peripherally evokes both "agile" (10) and "lean" (15) as he argues that the publishing industry must abandon the constraints of physical containers if they are to be able to serve flexible, containerless digital content. He further warns that publishers must do this if they are not to lose out to "New [digital] entrants" who O'Leary claims are the "real competition" for publishers. Here he is referring to the kinds of startups that, as he puts it, "start with the customer" and who use digital "open source" tools to better serve "current audiences (and all future ones)". Further explaining that these audiences "live in an open and accessible environment" and "expect to be able" to "mix and match chunks of content, and create, seamlessly,

something of their own" to read (11). Moreover, O'Leary predicts that "Failure to meet those needs will result in obscurity" for publishers, "at best" (14).

It is not difficult here to sense in O'Leary's technological optimism that agile and lean are being conflated with digital technology and also conflated with Christensen's (2013) quite popularly known theory of disruptive digital startups, especially the belief that all would eventually be displaced by disruptive startups. Whilst it is true that Christensen's theory suggests that these kinds of startups, unencumbered by older working methods, are nimble enough to take over more traditional industries, it was never a foregone conclusion. One problem with how O'Leary collapses together lean, agile, digital technology, and disruptive digital startups is it leads to a tendency in publishing scholarship to equate agile or lean with something digital alone and sometimes to go further and consider it a property of tech culture and Silicon Valley when, as I will argue later, it is more the case that the two are only closely associated and not dependent upon each other. This association is made all the more problematic in a publishing studies context because traditional print publishing and tech culture-inflected digital publishing (often utilising new media) have been placed in opposition to each other since the death of the book debates that pitted new technology against older, more traditional printed forms (Birkerts 1994; Lanham 1998). Furthermore, the enthusiasm that O'Leary shows for the possibilities of digital technology and the imperilled sense in which he suggests publishers must embrace digital or risk obscurity have invited repudiations from advocates of traditional publishing who are just as enthusiastic about not believing the hype. This unhelpful debate only cements the idea that agile or lean exists mainly as something to do with digital disruption and with Silicon Valley or digital tech culture.

This same tendency has continued in later debates around the likely publishing business model in a digital age. Here two perspectives have been placed in opposition to each other. First, what I will later define as the Order of the Book perspective (Phillips and Kovač 2022; Kovač et al. 2019) and, second, what Michael Bhaskar has already termed the New Publisher perspective beneath which I would array work by Mod (2011), Horne (2012), O'Leary (2012), and Nash (2013). These debates turn on the question of how important digital startups or, at the least, digital technology is to the future of publishing. Whilst they have been less dramatically rendered and more measured than the earlier death of the book debates, they mostly retain a similarly broad tech versus print tenor. Whilst I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter Two, for

now, I will merely note that it is not unheard of for Order of the Book advocates, on the one hand, and New Publisher advocates, on the other, to occasionally lapse into what Adriaan Van Der Weel has termed "The civil war between digital gurus and diehard bibliophiles". One that "causes sectarian sentiments to creep into any discussion." (Van Der Weel, 2010, 47) It is in these lapses that agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches can be tainted by association with either the more conservative ideas of the Order of the Book or else the more extreme digital startup ideas of the New Publisher side.

To make matters more complicated, it *is* a reasonable assumption to imagine lean, agile, or lean-agile as related to digital technology and Silicon Valley, not least since contemporary forms of these approaches have related heavily to the opportunities afforded by digital technologies and have emerged from software engineering cultures too. I will discuss this in Chapter One. However, in another sense, none of these contemporary process improvement approaches can be said to be properties of tech culture or digital technology alone, and treating them as synonymous with now popular images of digital publishing startups intent on disruptive innovation is too simplistic. This is true not least since, in a broader sense, lean and agile improvement approaches pre-date the widespread use of digital technology and have their roots in earlier forms of post-industrial transformation that were not digital. Moreover, even the most mature contemporary lean-agile approaches are still based on principles that precede digital technology. It is more complicated than this though still. For example, in one sense, contemporary lean-agile approaches are merely combined versions of older approaches that have been reconfigured to respond to the complexity of the new information and communication landscape (the internet, smartphones, social media) that has grown up in the digital era.

However, in another sense, and somewhat recursively, these same contemporary lean-agile approaches, especially given their strong and well-known association with the management of software engineering products (Agile Manifesto 2001), have also been constitutive of this new information and communication landscape. Indeed, these new iterations of older lean and agile approaches often emerged first in the software industry before migrating out to other domains. This makes the question of the relation between contemporary agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches and the digital revolution difficult to parse. Whilst these approaches are not a property of the digital revolution, they are both somewhat constitutive and have also gained ground as a response to it. They certainly relate to the digital revolution in these complex ways, but they also encompass it and

sometimes also transcend it. Indeed, they have extended beyond the software engineering industry into new domains that do not always offer purely digital solutions but may be involved in delivering other broader services where digital products may only play a small role. Digital technology here perhaps only extends to a website, whilst whatever service a business renders might still be largely provided in-person, over the telephone, or in some other way.

There is even a good case to be made that more mature lean-agile approaches such as *Lean Startup* (Ries 2011) or *Lean UX* (Gothelf and Seiden 2021) have frequently been applied to solve problems that had been caused by the careless digitisation of services where the technology had unproductively been put before the outcome of the service. As Louise Downe puts it: "Services are [often] so affected by the technology we use to deliver them, that they often retain the ways of working that this technology dictates" (Downe 2021, 24). This highlights just how much agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches can transcend digital technology. Similarly, Eric Ries' book is, at its root, the story of a project that followed the Manifesto for Agile Software Development principles and yet still failed to complete its main aim. In fact, and as I will later discuss, this book is a great corrective to the popular misconception that startups are composed only of small groups of entryist software engineers primarily engaged in creating digital software products to displace older industries disruptively. Aside from the fact that Ries advises startups that they should not make digital products unless they are useful to their users, he also defines a startup more broadly as "a human institution designed to create new products and services under conditions of extreme uncertainty" As he notes, this "means entrepreneurs are everywhere, and the Lean Startup approach can work in any size company, even a very large enterprise, in any sector or industry." (Ries 2011, 8) Presumably, this should include older domains such as publishing.

This expanded definition of startups, one that nowadays informs most mature lean-agile approaches, further puts the claim that such approaches are as one with either digital technology or the popular idea of disruptive digital-only startups in doubt. The fact that these approaches have also been useful for much older domains that have only become partially digital- or internet-adjacent (Aggarwal and Reddie 2018, 293) and not thoroughly transformed by digitization puts more pressure on the same claim. Examples here might include the BBC (Middleton and Joyce 2012), the civil service (Mergel et al. 2021) and traditional publishing. Indeed, the publishing industry is no different to these other more traditional domains in this respect. Penguin Random House cannot be

described as a small disruptive technology startup, nor can HarperCollins or Wiley yet, as Kathy Sandler (2017) has noted, all have used one or more of agile, lean, or lean-agile in their internal operations. This shows that beyond simplistic print versus digital arguments, no distinction between digital publishing and print publishing can be made that leaves print publishing hermetically sealed in its universe untouched by the twenty-first century. Moreover, there is no special divide between traditional publishing companies and digital startups that restricts lean-agile process improvement approaches to one side or the other. Similarly, few publishers are purely internet- or digital-only either. Print is still very much in strong demand (Smith 2021).

Definitional Problems

This brings me to the second reason that scholarship around publishing and lean, agile or lean-agile approaches has remained piecemeal. It has lacked definition. Whilst I acknowledge that these kinds of improvement approaches are difficult to define—indeed, I see this as an important enough factor that I devote the next chapter to doing so—existing scholarship has not risen to the challenge of providing an adequate definition. For example, O'Leary's above essay mentions agile and lean improvement approaches without adequately defining them. While he cites work on lean theory in the form of James Womack and Daniel Jones's "prescient 'lean consumption' model" (O'Leary 2012, 15), he does not discuss this in more detail. Moreover, he defines the term agile even less, making it difficult to know if agile is meant as a common noun that signifies the ability to move quickly and be adaptable or if it is meant in a more specific sense. This is one way in which agile can seem vaguely and variously related to tech culture, digital publishing, new media or disruptive startups. This is especially problematic when we consider that even where agile is defined more carefully in other work, the concept can remain blurry due to its *evolving* meaning.

The nuances of defining agile or agility are to the fore in Fuchshuber's (2021) relatively recent work on agile too. In aiming to find out what "eleven German trade and professional publishers" interviewed "from January to May 2019" (2021, 81) might think about what Fuchshuber variously describes as "organisational agility" or merely "agility" (82), Fuchshuber calls upon the following definition of these terms taken from Ganguly et al. (2009, 411), but which is itself purported to be a quotation that chains back to work from Rick Dove (1999). I will use the version from Ganguly because I can't find the same wording in Dove:

> [Agility is defined as] an effective integration of response ability and knowledge management in order to rapidly, efficiently and accurately adapt to any unexpected (or unpredictable) change in both proactive and reactive business/customer needs and opportunities without compromising with the cost or the quality of the product/ process." (Ganguly et al., 2009, 411)

Whilst there is, of course, nothing stopping Fuchshuber from trading on this definition, which can be traced in her bibliography to the late nineteen-nineties, it does seem an odd choice to make from the point of view of the first years of the second decade of the twenty-first century because the meaning has changed so often since.

The definition itself is reasonable enough and defines a general idea of organisational agility or agility that is quite descriptive, in character, and derived from manufacturing literature and business management literature around ideas of business flexibility. It also contains the general contours of what is often still sometimes defined as agile today. Nevertheless, the reason that I suggest that it is an odd choice is that it pre-dates the "Manifesto for Agile Software Development" (2001), which has since become one of the main influences on modern business agility in the contemporary period (Girod et al. 2023, 10). It also leaves out important and influential developments that begin to alter and evolve the meaning of agility by combining it with lean such as work by Poppendieck and Poppendieck (2010), *The Lean Startup* (Ries 2011), *Lean UX* (Gothelf and Seiden 2021), and *The Lean Enterprise* (Humble et al. 2015). My only thought is that perhaps Fuchshuber's choice of definition is not intended to define agility in the process improvement approach sense that I will later suggest has always been central to agility. Instead, she seems to explain it in terms that, whilst being more well-defined than O'Leary's complete lack of a definition, are still very broadly drawn as an idea of business agility or flexibility. Nevertheless, it does seem as if Fuchshuber has overlooked several evolutions of the concept since.

This is not exactly a criticism. Given what Sherehiy and her co-authors confirm as the "confusion and ambiguity concerning definitions and components of" agility (Sherehiy et al. 2007, 445), Fuchshuber can certainly be forgiven for missing these elements and congratulated for getting through the vast and confusing literature on the topic at all. In one sense, the basic contours of the content of approaches such as the Agile Manifesto are there. For instance, Fuchshuber notes that "To be able to use agile structures and capabilities means to promote internal and external cooperation—especially with customers—and a strong dissemination of knowledge throughout the company about customers and their needs." This sounds like the Agile Manifesto.

Similarly, she also says that agile "refers to a corporate culture that allows experimentation, supports innovative ideas, and thus accepts the possibility of failure" and that agile "also prefers proactive action and constant improvement to reactive crisis management" (Fuchshuber 2021, 83). This sounds like the lean startup, Lean UX, and the Lean Enterprise work I have suggested she has left out. It is odd that she does not cite these key texts. I will return to Fuchshuber's definition of agile in the next chapter.

Perhaps the most well-rendered definition (not of the term agile, which, again, is not well defined or discussed here either) in the small pool of work on publishing and agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches is Michael Bhaskar's (2013) definition of Eric Ries' *Lean Startup* (2011) approach. Although I will wait to define this approach more fully until the next chapter, it is enough to note here that Ries' framework is born from a combination of contemporary incarnations of lean and agile approaches that involve a strategy of creating and releasing minimum-viable products into the world before they are completely fully-featured to gain feedback from early users of them with the aim being to learn about complex markets whilst simultaneously serving them. Bhaskar does justice to all of this, accurately defining The lean startup as an approach to publishing that would mean "not just putting products out there but measuring, learning and then acting in fast iterations" (Bhaskar 2013, 188). He further highlights an important point of contemporary lean-agile approaches that base themselves on feedback, failure or "failing fast" (189) is considered a good and not a bad thing because it improves learning: "Mistakes are made, recognised and eliminated not as a by-product of work, but as its goal." (188)

Bhaskar's definition of lean startup is an improvement on O'Leary's lack of definition of either lean or agile and an improvement on Fuchshuber's quite general and somewhat out-of-date take on business agility too. Moreover, Bhaskar's overall discussion of lean startup offers us our best discussion yet of publishing and the potential for utilising process improvement approaches to manage some of its twenty-first-century complexity. Nevertheless, Bhaskar's take on the approach does appear to spring into life relatively context-free, and because his discussion of it is such a minimal part of a chapter on publishing challenges, there is no room to fully stretch out and fully sketch the trajectory from the early-post-WWII incarnation of agile and lean to their migration to business management in the nineteen sixties, and from there, their adoption in a general sense by business management studies in the nineteen-eighties (i.e. Fuchshuber's more general sense) and onwards towards the incarnations of agile and

lean, and eventually lean-agile that form contemporary incarnations that are often tied up with a move to a more digital society and more complex marketplaces. This is not to say that this history would have to be traced each and every time, but it is to say that there is no current working definition usable in a publishing studies context.

Adopting Agile, Lean, or Lean-Agile

This brings me to my third critique of the existing, limited, work on the subject and the question of how the existing work has approached the issue of the adoption of agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches. We have already noted the potential enmity that can arise from O'Leary's rallying call for traditional publishing to transform itself to conform to an idea of lean and agile approaches for reasons of digital transformation. We have noted, too, the potential for a backlash against such extremity from more traditional publishing quarters. Whilst part of the problem here relates to a lack of understanding of agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches through a lack of adequate definition, there is also an unresolved question about the extent to which publishing would have to change to accommodate these approaches as compared to the degree to which they would have to instead be adapted to publishing. For example. Fuchshuber concludes from her survey that "resources and structures" would need to be "built up in the areas of consumer needs and technology competence, whereas trade customers and employee needs are no major drivers of agility needs." (Fuchshuber 2021, 81). However, as we shall see in the next chapter when I have defined what I term lean-agile lite,   there may well be problems with this kind of picking and choosing of agile, lean, or lean-agile elements.

Bhaskar's take on the issue of adoption of, in his example, a lean startup approach, does at least note these difficulties suggesting that it "would be an enormous cultural and organisational change" (Bhaskar 2013, 188). However, overall, his assessment sits on the fence on the issue of what form adoption might take pending further knowledge of how the challenges that publishing faces in the twenty-first century will pan out. In this sense, Bhaskar's take amounts to a light probing of the possible things that could happen to publishing in the twenty-first century. It is worth noting, and I will cover this in a little more detail in Chapter Two, that much of the work around lean and agile in publishing studies occurred when the print part of the business was experiencing one of its numerous moments of twenty-first-century instability—"A time when existential

questions" were "in the air." (Bhaskar 2013, 190) This means we must read Bhaskar's work in this context. Indeed, for Bhaskar, the lean startup represents only one of a range of options that he covers, all filed under the heading of the New Publisher school of thought mentioned earlier. His examples range from extremes of extinction or irrelevance brought about by the dominance of large Silicon Valley tech companies, their growing dominance, a process well underway at that time, to an alternative to a digital future where a resurgence in print and reading might occur. Where "The uniqueness, craft and physicality of a book" are viewed as "assets in" an increasingly "weightless and intangible world." (191)

Bhaskar's main point was to confirm that "the digital challenge is real" (Bhaskar 2013, 191) and to stake out those extremes in a period of flux before any dust had settled. By this point, just over a decade later, we know a little more about which of the futures flagged by Bhaskar have transpired. We know that publishing has not yet succumbed to the fate of being made irrelevant or extinct at the hands of large social media companies and that print publication is still thriving (Smith 2021). Yet, we know too that the industry has also sometimes had to make changes to thrive in its current form. We also know that many of these changes are related to the growing complexity of the marketplace for books that arrives as a byproduct of the internet and digital technology. Moreover, we know too that publishers have frequently moved towards finding ways to become more customer-centric as a result. Indeed, this leads us back to the original calls for agile, lean, or lean-agile as potential solutions that may be able to help publishing manage the ongoing complexity present in this century.

In conclusion, I have reviewed the limited available literature on the topic at hand and noted several issues with it. Aside from being quite limited, publishing scholarship on the topic has also failed to distinguish agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches from seeming like properties of digital technology and, sometimes, by extension, disruptive publishing startups. Although I have acknowledged complex associations between agile, lean, or lean-agile and digital technology and the world of startups do exist, the existing lack of distinction does a disservice agile, lean, and lean-agile approaches in reducing them in that way and tends to obscure their scope and significance. Beyond this clumsy understanding of these approaches, I also noted a lack of coherent definitions of agile, lean, or lean-agile in general, although, again, I also pointed out the complexity of this. Finally, and most saliently, I noted that the available literature also fails to consider the complexities involved in understanding how agile, lean, or lean-agile process

improvement approaches might be adopted in the publishing industry and the potential barriers to doing so. This involves the question of whether the book publishing industry can gain any benefits from adopting lean-agile approaches. Also, the degree to which publishing would either have to change to accommodate adoption or whether the industry could selectively implement adoption in a pick-and-mix fashion. Having identified the gaps in the literature, I can now formulate my main research problem, decide my scope and offer some definitions.

Research Approach

Despite calls from some publishing insiders over the last fifteen years for the publishing industry to move to agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches as a way of coming to terms with a new and complex twenty-first-century marketplace, most work on this topic exists outside of publishing studies in work around software engineering, business studies, design and design studies, and studies of manufacturing with only scant work emerging from publishing studies itself. Therefore, my aim here is relatively simple. I aim to move interest in the topic forward in publishing studies as a way of moving closer to investigating the potential benefit of agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches to publishing, with a specific focus on the third of the three approaches. As discussed in the literature review, four initial barriers exist to achieving this aim. First, there is no clear definition of either agile, lean, or lean-agile that has emerged from publishing studies literature to date, and there is confusion over how this topic relates to debates around publishing and digital technology and print versus new media. Second, the premise behind many of the calls for publishing to adopt agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches is often tied up with a corresponding suggestion that publishing should be more customer-centric, but we have not assessed the validity of this idea. Third, there is a lack of appreciation as to whether publishing could adopt the most up-to-date agile, lean, or lean-agile as a process improvement approach in any case. Fourth, if it can be implemented, there have been few thoughts about how the industry might adopt it.

Definitions and Scope

To complete this aim and confront these problems, I should first define what I mean by publishing here. Overall, the publishing that this research is engaging with the most is traditional "trade publishing", also sometimes known as "consumer publishing", defined by Clark and Phillips as the kinds of publishing that represent "the most visible part of publishing" (Clark and Phillips 2014, 84). However, I also note that I am keen to problematise the idea that these two should remain synonyms. One way I am looking to problematise them is to suggest that they have existed in internet-adjacent ways in recent decades. What I mean by adjacent is that they likely have internet and social media presence, but they are neither fully analogue nor fully digitised and do not look to be either. This explicit focus on internet-adjacency is intended to differentiate these most visible publishing domains from the idea that either the digital revolution or agile and lean relate merely to ebooks or audiobooks or that they are a property of digital or new media publishing ventures of the kind that might seek to heavily depart from a model that is still dominated by traditional print. In drawing this definition, I am equally uninterested in the idea of disruptive innovation and the related connotations of smaller indie presses unbound from traditional players, as if agile or lean are properties of this kind of disruptive digital approach only.

Similarly, I am not interested in how digital publishing has enabled self-publishing through print-on-demand. However, I don't rule out print-on-demand technology as a potentially big part of the trade or consumer publishing of the immediate future. Similarly. I do note that self-publishing has an important adjacency to the conventional trade and consumer publishing industry in and of itself. Indeed, I will note in Chapter Three how, what I will, for want of a better phrase, term *standard publishing*—namely publishers who are active in the book trade and whose titles "are displayed prominently in high street bookshops and other outlets" (Clark and Phillips 2014, 84)—have sometimes looked to self-publishing for ideas. Seeing these relatively mid-size to large trade publishers, who Clark and Phillips suggest array under trade and consumer publishing, I will reserve the term *non-standard publishing* for the many self-publishers whose books exist perhaps more in the Amazon eco-system than the trade system or the systems of other self-publishing platforms. This fits with the idea of non-standard book publishing retail, which I also utilise in this research. I should acknowledge, though, that this classification is not rigorous and merely gives me a way to name things for practical purposes in this research. Indeed, many independent (indie) publishers could be seen as standard, too, but they may or may not have trouble getting placed in the

main trade's physical retail. Still, indie publishing does not represent my subject here, so I think the fuzziness is justified.

It is in this area of publishing where the call for publishing to be more customer-centric is most acute with this acuteness relating to the high-risk stakes inherent in this part of publishing. As Clark and Phillips tell us, these kinds of publishing represent "the high-risk end of the business: book failures are frequent but the rewards from 'bestsellers' – some of which are quite unexpected – can be great." (Clark and Phillips 2014, 84) One way to illustrate this mixture of high-risk and potential reward is to note that the trade or consumer book can still become a classic for decades but is more frequently more likely to have an extremely short lifecycle. As Clark and Phillips confirm: "paperback fiction written by famous authors may endure for long periods" and "Sometimes the publication of a book creates its own market", especially when an author's work "arouses growing interest" developing a leading them to create "their own markets" (85). Conversely, the "peak sales of most new books occur well within a year of publication. Most adult hardback fiction and paperback titles are dead within three months or just weeks". They also add that: "Few other consumer goods industries market products with such a short sales life."

The reason that these books are often high-risk relates mostly to the difficulty and expense of identifying and understanding audiences for these kinds of books. As Clark and Phillips put it:

> The potential readers are varied, spread thinly through the population, expensive to reach, difficult to identify, and have tastes and interests that can be described generally but are not easily matched to a particular book. Publishers bet to a great extent on their judgement of public taste and interests – notoriously unpredictable." (Clark and Phillips 2014, 84)

They also note that these books "are aimed mainly at the indefinable 'general reader', and sometimes at the enthusiast or specialist reader." Another way of saying this is that these books have generally been produced for a mass readership that is relatively undifferentiated. Indeed, the choice of what to publish is primarily based on the often well-honed, but still far from certain, intuition of commissioning or acquisitions editors, at best, and mere guesses and gambles at worst. However, this trade or consumer publishing has never been as static as it may have seemed. Indeed, it has found itself challenged, in recent decades, by the changes to the information and communication landscape that emerged out of the digital revolution.

This has caused a move away from gambling on too many new books published yearly. Output has been cut, and a greater focus has been placed on marketing. Moreover, the arrival of digital technologies produced new forms of publication (ebooks, latterly, audiobooks and the ill-fated books-as-apps); new forms of production (print-on-demand); new forms of marketing (social media); and new forms of distribution (websites and eCommerce). Clark and Phillips sum all of this up: "From the late 1990s, the major publishers were to reverse their former 'scattergun' strategy of publishing as many titles as possible in the hope that one or two would be hits." (Clark and Phillips 2014, 39) Alongside this, they began to give "greater emphasis to brand authors and series" and "entered into 'licensed' partnerships with television and film companies to merchandise their intellectual properties" (40). They produced new products. Most successfully the kinds of "ebooks" that "are little more than replicas of the print edition – so-called vanilla ebooks" (45) and, less successfully, books-as-apps —"titles which contained rich media (audio and video) along with interactive features" that "proved very costly, initially with six-figure investments." (48) They began to promote their own books on their own websites, becoming internet-adjacent and, more recently, they also began to make use of social media which has created "new opportunities for publishers and authors to hold conversations with readers and potential readers." (51)

Whilst these latter developments have certainly begun to occur more and more in trade and consumer publishing, my overall hypothesis is that they are not as well integrated as they could be. In some ways, publishers have reversed what Clark and Phillips termed their previous scattergun strategy of pushing many titles into the world hoping for a hit and have begun to become more targeted in their approach. Yet publishing's relation to much of what I will more explicitly define as *trade publishing-proper* (books sold specifically through the third-party book trade—physical or digital) means its overall operation remains relatively staid. Moreover, the varied attempts that publishers have made to take advantage of new digital affordances have themselves been fairly scattergun from publisher to publisher and have had little defined overall strategy. Whilst vanilla ebooks have been, rightly, I think, integrated as convenient lower-cost facsimiles of print books, and book-as-apps, just as rightly, debunked, I propose that publishers have failed to make the best use of their internet-adjacency. These publisher websites, including potential direct sales, also publisher social media

accounts and the data that they can yield represents a missed opportunity for what I would more specifically term a form of *consumer publishing-proper*.

I define *consumer publishing-proper* here as publishing that would either sell directly to its customers with publishers acting as retailers or, at the very least, take more control over the consumption context through a more strategic use of websites, social media and customer data. Moreover, I believe this is where a lean-agile approach can hold the most benefits. Although not rendered in the same terms as my suggestion that trade publishing and consumer publishing become two different paradigms of publishing here exactly, there is no shortage of insiders (as already noted) or publishing scholars who find significant problems with the often absurdly short lifecycle of many trade books (Thompson 2010, 266, 2021, 196; Bhaskar 2013, 188, 2016, n.p; Nash 2013, 25, Clark and Phillips 2014, 221) or the trade publisher's gravitation to the frontlist with little thought for what was always the more risk-absorbing backlist which "provides the counterweight to the frontlist" (Berglund and Steiner 2021, 8). There is also the question of whether a new kind of consumer publishing would have to be so tethered to the temporal idea of frontlist and backlist—"The established practice of contemporary publishing" where "backlist is everything published before the present season or older than 12 months" (8)—in a century that is increasingly characterised by the immediacy of internet shopping, twenty-four hours news, or on-demand streaming.

Whilst book lovers may well enjoy the lack of on-demand culture and the overall slower pace attached to a good book, as the Order of the Book scholars that I will discuss in Chapter Two will later attest, there is still some likelihood that most of us in the West—a grouping that likely includes a great deal of potential book buyers—are by now accustomed to experiencing some sense of internet-induced dislocated time as we collectively stream and scroll. Furthermore, it is commonly understood that most sectors of society have now become used to purchasing online at any time and have some sense of a consumption context that is much changed from a culture that previously only offered physical shopping experiences. However, for younger Gen Z readers who grew up with the internet, the idea that things were ever any different might not be understood, at best, glimpsed through those who enjoy analogue revivals (ironically often glimpsed through the internet in some way). Nevertheless, for the rest of us, who are older, unless we have largely taken on the new normal of the internet age thanks to the ubiquity of the information and communication landscape created by digital technology and forgotten older landscapes, there is a likelihood that some of us might

feel that the internet has caused a time dislocation at a certain point in our lives. Given the changes to the information and communication landscape this may be felt mainly as a disclocation from the mass culture society that came before. In that era, mass media broadcast their programming around nine-to-five office and physical retail hours. Indeed, in some senses, what I term trade publishing seems to symbolically still keep those hours and that pace. Although in truth, it is more complicated as most main trade names have their internet stores now too.

Before I move on to argue for the significance of this, I need to further consider my scope here. Given that I am mainly interested in internet-adjacent trade publishing- and consumer publishing-proper, this means that I am also not interested in areas of educational or university journal-based publishing and less conventional, potentially disruptive, digital-only platform-based publishing offshoots such as those discussed by Brooks (2017). I also exclude professional publishing services that offer "information resources for business and professional markets (whether online or in print)" that provide information and data on "market expectations and competitor activity" (Baverstock and Bowen 2019, 82). These are out of scope for me here. Once again, my decisions around scope, in this respect, are influenced by my interest in separating this research from the digital or new media versus physical books debate. Although educational and professional publishing still retains links to print, and although it is well known that there is sometimes some crossover from educational or professional publishing to the general trade for one reason or another, there is little doubt that academic and professional publishing has evolved to make more use of digital and new media platforms than general trade or consumer publishing. For examples of this latter category, consider how academic books and journal articles are now generally mostly available as downloadable PDFs alongside expensive print-on-demand editions. However, I should also note that by ruling such sectors of publishing out of scope, I do not mean to suggest that there might not be anything interesting to say about how lean and agile could (or indeed has begun to) affect these publishing areas and only that I am not resolved to take that line of enquiry here.

However, I should also qualify these decisions around scope in two respects. First, although I am interested in separating this research from the digital or new media versus physical books debate, this is not to say that I am not interested in how agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches might affect forms of publication. Rather, it is to say that I want to move beyond debates around whether publishing will eventually all become digital or

whether the opposite is true and the areas of publishing that I am discussing will continue to see print as dominant with digital eBooks (and, more recently, audiobooks) remaining an add-on to print, as seems to largely be the case in the present moment. Indeed, my work here will approach questions of print and digital form in totally different ways than the print versus digital eBook or audiobook distinction. This work will mostly be concentrated in Chapters Three and Four. Second, although I have stated that I mostly want to rule out the idea of agile, lean, or lean-agile as being mere properties of digital technology or tech startup culture, this does not mean that the digital question will not loom large in other ways.

Significance and Objectives

In terms of assessing the significance of my chosen research problem, readers might well ask why it is necessary to care about the idea of adopting agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches in publishing. Perhaps the limited scholarly work on the topic in publishing studies is down to a reasoned assessment that the insider's calls for such adoption have little useful merit. Perhaps publishing scholars imagine these calls to represent yet another prediction of digital transformation that will not come to be (Murray 2015), or that such approaches cannot be of use to such an old and traditional industry. Indeed, there is some evidence that the premise behind these calls, namely the idea that publishing needs to be customer-centric, may have been overstated since the traditional industry and book trade continue to prosper (Smith 2021; O'Brien 2021). Against such dismissals, I will point to two reasons why my current enquiry should be considered significant. First, whilst agile, lean, or lean-agile process improvement approaches have been valuable to older domains such as the BBC, the civil service and many other similar areas, there is also evidence that they have been entertained by book publishers too. I have already shown evidence (Sandler 2017) that the likes of Penguin and HarperCollins have begun to utilise some of these approaches as part of their traditional operations. Indeed, we do not know to what extent, if any, the effects of these approaches may already have started to bear fruit in helping to drive the prosperous book sales mentioned above, a significant portion of which are made online either via Amazon or the online stores of well-known brick-and-mortar retailers.

Second, there is also good evidence that lean-agile means can grow smaller publishers into larger ones and not in a digital-only fashion alone. The story of Sourcebooks is quite remarkable in this respect and saw Dominique Raccah building her "business with no money and no employees" in her "spare bedroom 36 years ago" (Raccah quoted in Jones 2023, n.p) to become "one of the fastest-growing publishers in the US" by 2022 and also "the sixth largest" in the country (Jones 2023, n.p). Whilst Raccah admits that the most recent growth came after selling 45% of Sourcebooks to Penguin Random House, it is worth noting that Sourcebooks was already "the 14th largest trade book publisher in North America" (Button 2018, n.p) a year before PRH bought their share and all off the back of their lean-agile methods. As Raccah has noted: "Sourcebooks has developed a new model in the book space that is agile, data-centric, and customer-centric". Moreover, this lean-agile approach (as noted earlier, influenced by Ries' *Lean Startup* (2011)) appears to remain intact within the company even with PRH involved: "Sourcebooks retains its majority ownership of 55%, with no changes in its leadership, management, publishing autonomy, or entrepreneurial culture" and "This partnership [with PRH] is a continuation of our new model" (Raccah quoted in Wood 2019, n.p). Surely, Raccah's success with lean-agile should cement the significance of this topic, especially in light of the calls for these process improvement approaches to be adopted in publishing and with the success of adoption in other industries.

Taken together, these insider calls and reported use in traditional internet-adjacent publishing confirm the significance of my project. However, I would suggest that there are still questions about the degree to which publishing should move wholesale towards customer-centricity, meaning there is still an important area of significance to address. There is also the question of how the publishing industry might implement agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches. So, how might I meet my aim? What objectives might I pursue? My first objective will be to offer an overview of agile, lean and lean-agile approaches, defining them and tracing their historical lineage to make them parsable for a publishing studies audience. Second, armed with the knowledge gleaned from this definition, and before delving too deeply into the main topic, I want to briefly explore the extent to which publishing truly does need to become more customer-centric because this is often the premise upon which calls for lean and agile are based. This objective will also include a review of industry and scholarly responses to such an idea. My third objective will be to review how the software engineering industry implements

lean-agile approaches. I intend to create a point of comparison that can help publishing scholars identify barriers to applying lean-agile approaches in publishing, given that the publishing industry differs considerably from the software industry.

I should qualify that this latter objective does not contradict my decision to avoid the discussion of existing work in publishing studies that relate to digital technology and Silicon Valley because, as I have already argued, contemporary lean and agile approaches *are* inextricably linked to the software engineering industry at their root even as this does not mean that they are a property of it or a property of ideas of disruptive innovation either. Having cleared this ground and identified some differences between the software engineering industry and publishing, my fourth objective will be to tentatively propose a hypothetical route to contemporary lean-agile adoption, suggesting that the publishing industry might be able to lightly adapt itself to utilise lean and agile approaches even despite any limitations imposed by the consideration of my third objective. Finally, my fifth objective will be to briefly explore further considerations around my hypothesis for a form of lean-agile publishing laid out in Chapter Four that have not been covered elsewhere. I will pursue these objectives in the order described here across the next five chapters respectively, but before beginning to delve into a fuller definition of agile, lean, or lean-agile, I want to tackle some further epistemological issues that I think may act as a barrier for some publishing scholars when trying to come to grips with this topic.

Epistemological and Cross-Disciplinary Considerations

There are a number of epistemological issues that do not fit into the other chapters, so it seems best to address them here upfront. The main epistemological issue here arises due to what passes as reliable knowledge in the context of agile, lean, or lean-agile and what passes for reliable knowledge in a particular kind of publishing studies context, namely those publishing scholars who might be based in a humanities orientation. When reviewing my evidence base, I note two quite different forms of knowledge. First, a more scholarly mode more familiar from the humanities and, second, a form of knowledge that is more familiar from contexts of making and engineering. The problem is that the two can clash. For example, publishing scholars of a humanities orientation who glance at my bibliography might superficially perceive citations around the agile,

lean, or lean-agile topic as unusual and possibly unscholarly. This is because many of the most important texts of agile, lean, or lean-agile do not originate with a single-authored, definitive text and stylistically often appear to be either textbooks or else the titles may read as if they belong to more popular non-fiction books.

For instance, whilst Boral's (2016) book is a textbook for beginners, although useful for lean-agile overview purposes too, Poppendieck and Cusumano's *Lean Software Development: A Tutorial* (2012), Poppendieck and Poppendieck's *Lean Software Development: An Agile Toolkit* (2010), and Womack and Jones *Lean Solutions: How Companies and Customers Can Create Value and Wealth Together* (2013) are all created by respected lean-agile figures. Similarly, Eric Ries' *The Lean Startup: How Constant Innovation Creates Radically Successful Businesses* (2011) and Gothelf and Seiden's *Lean UX: Creating Great Products with Agile Teams* (2021) can sound rather commercial in terms of their titles. Still, they are well respected in scholarly business and design circles and, in both cases, act to significantly move the lean and agile approach on to become a lean-agile approach. Interestingly, a number of these texts are best summed up as fitting into the genre of handbooks, and this reflects the relationship between agile, lean, or lean-agile and the forms of knowledge that exist in the domains of design and engineering. Whilst Barley suggests that a lot of technical knowledge exists conversationally as stories and pieces of advice passed between colleagues, often in the form of rules of thumb and other similar direct unmediated forms, he also states that it exists as "distributed knowledge" (Barley 1996, 426) in the form of manuals, operating instructions, handbooks, etc

Similarly, Creagher defines handbooks from a book history perspective "Often overlooked, manuals, handbooks and protocols are key tools in the making and managing of knowledge" (Creager et al. 2020, 1). Moreover, they "have a long and cross-cultural history, stretching back to ancient times. Practical knowledge did not need to be written down, as it was usually passed from master to apprentice, thus textual instructions reflect certain cultural conditions of literacy, mobility and circulation of textual media" (1-2). Such texts "are books 'on hand', or held in the hand, for instruction, help, reference, review, even as a place to store additional handwritten notes." (2) As Creagher and her co-authors note in their work on handbooks and manuals: "These instructional and reference texts are distinct from related educational genres such as textbooks and editions due to their focus on practical knowledge". In this sense, handbooks can be jarring when compared to what qualifies as substantive

knowledge in a humanities context. As Creagher further points out: "Modern notions of authorship fit poorly with handbooks and manuals, which are generally derivative of other literature, though they often result in more commercially successful texts than their sources" (Creager et al. 2020, 1).

This also goes some way to explain the blurriness around agile, lean, and lean-agile. These terms and their related approaches are slippery, a moving target, open-ended, difficult to pin down, and explicitly open for extension by others, making them difficult to parse. Although these approaches are, in some ways, essentially no more than a collection of practices based on fairly simple principles, much of the terminology can be both overwhelming and deceptively difficult to grasp for newcomers. This is true not least since some of the ideas are counterintuitive to an often still dominant industrialised mindset (Womack and Jones 2003, 21). One reason for this is that many of the concepts that reoccur in lean-agile contexts are aphoristic. They are adages passed on, principles, and practices in the process of being improved hence the evolving character of lean and agile, etc. The textbook- or handbook-style texts that I often cite frequently serve as correctives to the protean character of these terms. They exist to take account of how frequently these agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches can be misappropriated, misunderstood, misapplied, and ripe for being thrown around as empty buzzwords.

Furthermore, the cross-disciplinary approach that I attempt here is made more complex by the fact that lean and agile approaches do not fit neatly into one discipline. Whilst these approaches tend to show up often in software engineering contexts, they also relate to systems thinking and systems engineering, but also in work on marketing and business contexts, and design studies contexts. Much of this has to do with the close relation between design and agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches. As Richard Buchanan argues "design has no special subject matter of its own", noting that the "subject matter of design is potentially *universal* in scope, because design thinking may be applied to any area of human experience. "Indeed, "in the process of application, the designer must discover or invent a *particular* subject out of the problems and issues of specific circumstances". As process improvement approaches—essentially processes of design —agile, lean, and lean-agile share much of this basis in context-specificity making it very difficult to divine general laws or observations from what is effectively an ever-shifting activity. As Buchanan further notes, design "sharply contrasts with the disciplines of science, which are concerned with understanding the principles, laws,

rules, or structures that are necessarily embodied in existing subject matters" (Buchanan 1992, 17)

One reason that I emphasise the cross-disciplinary character of my research here is that there *are* actual disciplinary barriers. Epistemologically, the lean-agile approach belongs to design and engineering cultures that encourage an iterative, always incomplete approach to hands-on knowledge. In contrast, traditional book publishing has been based around something more like the opposite, as exemplified by the boundedness of the printed book, the timelessness of published works, and the fact that much of the industry is synonymous with authorship and originality. As already noted, the kind of practical knowledge in agile, lean, etc, is reflected in the types of texts which often exist online as distributed knowledge, such as the Agile Manifesto (2001), which exists solely on a website. Furthermore, Parnin et al. (2013) have discussed the propensity of lean-agile software developers to communicate heavily via ephemeral blogs and in online settings too. Overall, in this epistemological mode, the emphasis is often on communicating from professional to professional and from team to team in a practical sense. This is also reflected in the form and style of full-length book texts that discuss agile, lean, or lean-agile.

Creagher's discussion of handbooks and book history is particularly apt when describing the cross-disciplinary epistemological mix at play throughout this research. However, I should qualify this by noting that publishing studies is a cross-disciplinary subject area too. Publishing Studies is not only the preserve of humanities scholars but indeed sits in a sometimes unwieldy position in the academy. As Baverstock and Steinitz have noted, universities have for much of their history "tended to record traditional academic/theoretical research, from a range of long-established disciplines, largely disseminated through academic conferences and journals" with "the pedigree of the publication and its associated peer-review processes" offering "a measure of the value of the associated research." This is changing. In recent decades, the "range of disciplines now available through universities means that colleagues are research-active in previously unanticipated fields and in new ways". Moreover, "their ability to affect thinking within their discipline is achieved through an expanded range of media and formats." In this newer landscape, "the involvements of staff within industry, which indicate the extent to which they are up-to-date in their field, whether captured as practice-orientated research or commentary in professional publications, can both

ensure the organization's research reputation and support recruitment." (Baverstock and Steinitz 2014, 207)

Indeed, "the practical connectedness of teaching staff may be more significant to potential students and those resourcing them than their academic research." (Baverstock and Steinitz 2014, 207) Baverstock and Steinitz go on to suggest that publishing studies, with its mix of professional, practical and theoretical can be seen as a particular exemplar of this. This only deepens the cross-disciplinary character of my research here. Indeed, this closely tracks my own interest in this topic, which emerges from just such a cross-disciplinary orientation sat somewhere between practical knowledge and academic theory. My personal engagement with books and other publications started like most other people's with books as something to read. This continued for around a decade before I began to see publications in other ways, from the inside out. This came courtesy of the work that I did to create them with typewriters, and, at the time, cut-out images (these were magazine layouts) that were then conjured into being through engagements with commercial printers. Not long after, via early desktop publishing, this intensified as I learned typography and how to set type, how to create paperback book covers, and how to understand more about the three dimensions of how books are made. The upshot of this is that I have, for over thirty-four years now, been somebody who does not only read books but who is as likely to browse the shelves in Waterstone's for signs of production variance on the spine, to look at how white space is utilised on the page, and other signs of decisions made at the technical pre-artifact level. I still read and see words but I also sometimes see the shapes of type too.

I have also, although only for the last fifteen years or so, seen books from the perspective of the book publisher. This has been mainly through publishing ventures that I have co-founded and continue to co-found. Much of this entails doing the work *around* the content of books and publications. It is well known that publishers feed and attempt to shape as much of this domain as they can. In this sense, my own experience is slightly unusual in that most publishers whom I have met mainly engage in this part of the job, working with authors, editors, and the various elements that they develop around their books. Their technical involvement mainly extends to invoices for technical work and perhaps a choice of cover type or paper quality mediated through the knowledge of the printer or designer (or both) rather than the technical work of producing the books or the other media around the books. My technical work has also extended to learning how to programme. In my case, this was a natural extension of

building websites and then of trying to ensure that I could use the basic affordances of programming to better make use of my time and for the efficiencies that they bring.

This technical basis is really where I tend to differ from normative publishers of poetry, fiction or non-fiction. Although I have been involved with a great deal of authors, I have never, for one reason or another, been all that involved with their text in a semantic sense and only more in a technical typographical sense and in a more general publishing sense. However, there are plenty of similarities between myself and other publishers too. For instance, as with anyone who has worked in publishing, there have been successes and failures. Some books that I have been involved in publishing have sold very few copies. Others (very few, and with one author only) have been shortlisted for various literary prizes (notably the Goldsmith's Prize). Taken together, I think my background has certainly informed my research here and offers me a unique cross-disciplinary perspective because normative publishers might not come to approaches such as agile, lean, or lean-agile from quite the same angle or stand able to compare software engineering with traditional publishing in quite the same way. However, there are limitations to my experience too and more work would have to be undertaken by people working in publishing to assess gaps in my thinking. If I can use my own experiences to move research into this topic forward here, then hopefully further research can refine my own to assess the benefits (and no doubt pitfalls) of utilising these kinds of approaches in publishing to produce fruitful synthesis.

Outline of Chapters

Perhaps this is a good moment to reveal my main research question. My overall research question then is: How can I move publishing studies research into this topic forward and begin to assess the potential for the adoption of the most up-to-date and mature lean-agile approaches by publishers who find themselves operating in internet-adjacent ways? I will then seek to answer this question from several angles. In Chapter One, I will offer a short but still relatively comprehensive analysis of agile, lean, and lean-agile. This will allow a better understanding of these often difficult-to-parse approaches. In Chapter Two, I will interrogate the premise behind the calls for agile or lean adoption, namely the idea that publishing must adopt more customer-centricity.

This will allow me to confirm that customer-centricity is truly required and the extent to which it is. Moreover, it will be a way of confirming that agile and lean can be some help even in an industry that still runs much of its business along more traditional lines. In Chapter Three, I will review the most well-known implementation of lean-agile approaches, namely those that take place in the software industry. This will allow me to assess the likely limitations in book publishing when compared to the implementation in the software engineering industry. In Chapter Four, I will a hypothesis about how the industry could overcome these limitations without compromising its overall traditional integrity. In the shorter Chapter Five, I will close by considering some other opportunities and barriers not considered elsewhere.

Defining Lean-Agile

As noted in my introduction, agile, lean, and lean-agile have not yet been well-understood in publishing scholarship and have been difficult to parse. Indeed, it is difficult to ascertain whether calls for agile or lean relate to the everyday common sense of the two terms, or else relate to the process improvement approach sense, or even to Fuchshuber's (2021) more general idea of business agility. Moreover, I noted that the protean character of many of these approaches makes it difficult to understand even in a more general sense beyond publishing and that the fact that these approaches often work in quite context-specific ways only adds to this overall blurriness. Another example of this protean character is evident in the difficulty in considering the relationship between business contexts, digital technology and agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches. This is especially difficult when considering differentiating agile, lean, or lean-agile from general business flexibility as a response to post-industrial markets that were further rendered complex by digital technology, which itself could, in turn, be considered both constituted by the most up-to-date iterations of lean-agile approaches as well as it is true that these newer lean-agile approaches were also a response to both complex business markets and also the digital technology that such approaches often had a hand in helping to create too.

The challenge then is to define agile, lean, and lean-agile as process improvement approaches and also to go further and provide more of an analysis. To ascertain exactly what they are, what their purpose is, to consider their form, to note the various splintered frameworks that have formed from them, and, above all, to consider their principles and practices. Given that these approaches have evolved over several decades, beginning in the post-WWII era and still evolving today (Rigby et al. 2016), we must consider that too. Moreover, we must stake out the most mature lean-agile approach that combines lean and agile, for it is this lean-agile approach that will be of most interest to me in ascertaining what potential benefits it can have for publishing. Finally, it is very important to be aware of the various instances of misapplied or misunderstood agile, lean, or lean-agile that exist when some organisations try and fail to adopt them because these approaches are notoriously prone to misadoption. This phenomenon sometimes reveals itself as agile-, lean-, or lean-agile theatre, where teams

performatively say they have adopted one or more of these approaches but have not truly done so. Other times, organisations can feel they are benefiting from these approaches because they have adopted some practices when they are not truly implementing them at all through not following the principles (Brizard 2015).

Why is it significant to address this problem as part of my overall research question? In some ways, this is extremely obvious. If I am to figure out how to move publishing studies research into the potential benefits of adopting agile, lean, or lean-agile forward, then it follows that we need a solid understanding of these approaches that can be used as a basic template for future work. I hope to do the cross-disciplinary work here so that publishing scholars do not have to do it a second time and can begin to delve into the significance of the topic for publishing. Of slightly less obvious significance is the fact that publishing academics also need to know what is truly agile, lean, or lean-agile versus what is agile-, lean-, or lean-agile-lite. If this is not well enough understood then there is a chance that future work will misapply these approaches to various aspects of publishing to no good effect, possibly even having a deleterious effect. Finally, and as already touched on in the introduction, it is important to understand exactly the complex relationship that these kinds of process improvement approaches have to the digital revolution to head off naive readings of these approaches as unduly related to disruptive startups or tech culture in general.

My question for this chapter then is simple: What would pass as a short but comprehensive analysis of these approaches that would be usable for publishing scholars looking to further consider work on this topic? My answer to this question is that all three approaches can be considered process improvement approaches and closely related to a broad idea of design in general. Even though each is relatively specific, there is considerable overlap between them. Their form is difficult to ascertain as they are best considered to be systematic. In terms of their function, they are best applied to the management of complex problems where the aim is to achieve maximum value for whoever is the recipient of the effort (often a customer, an end-user, an internal user, but other stakeholders too such as regulatory bodies, for the benefit of climate change, any stakeholders who may have an involvement). Whilst the focus has been primarily on generating customer value or user value first, there are often multiple actors who are meant to benefit, and mature lean-agile approaches have tended to try to align business outcomes and value to the business too. I will try to outline all of this in

this chapter. I will open with a definition of the most mature combination of these approaches, namely the lean-agile approach and work backwards to note its origins separate agile and lean approaches.

Lean-Agile: What is it? What is it for? How do you do it?

What is Lean-Agile?

Whilst it is not easy to define, my short definition of lean-agile is that it is a holistic approach to probing complex problems that grew from a combination of lean and agile approaches. It is multifaceted and encompasses design thinking (Gothelf and Seiden 2021), systems thinking (Meadows 2009) and design and engineering knowledge in general. Prominent lean-agile approaches might include Eric Ries' *Lean Startup* (2011) approach, Gothelf and Seiden's *Lean UX* (2021), and Jez Humble, Joanne Molesky, and Barry O'Reilly's *Lean Enterprise* (2015) approach. I realise this suggests significant breadth, so let me begin to break this down. To begin, what kind of thing is lean-agile?

Approach or Methodology?

I term lean-agile as an approach and not a methodology as others (Cockburn 2009) sometimes do. Others term it a "process tool": Tool = anything used as a means of accomplishing a task or purpose. Process = how you work." (Kniberg 2010, 23) Whilst I like the term process tool, I think the term approach best captures the overall sense of lean-agile. Andiappan and Wan place the term *approach* hierarchically above *methodology,* the latter of which they define as something required to "realise" an "approach". They define an approach as a way "to address a problem based on a set of assumptions" that themselves "originate from a collection of theories, concepts and working ideas" and that "play a big role in determining how a problem would be solved." They further suggest that approaches "serve as a practitioner's outlook towards addressing their problem." (Andiappan and Wan 2020, 551) This category seems suitably all-encompassing for articulating that lean-agile approaches have a typical way

of responding to certain kinds of problems and that they emerge from a technical practitioner's or a maker's outlook.

Lean-Agile Form

So what does a lean-agile approach look like? There are no easy answers to this question, and much confusion can arise. The actual form of a lean-agile approach is difficult to ascertain because it is essentially systematic and possesses no fixed form, making it difficult to see and understand. Importantly, this lack of visibility does not mean a lean-agile approach has no coherence. Systems theorist Donella Meadows' definition of systems bears this out:

> A system isn't just any old collection of things. A system is an interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something. If you look at that definition closely for a minute, you can see that a system must consist of three kinds of things: elements, interconnections, and a function or purpose. (Meadows 2009, 11)

Meadows further notes that: "The elements of a system are often the easiest parts to notice because many of them are visible, tangible things." (12), but also warns that, in trying to understand a system, it is better to "start looking for the interconnections, the relationships that hold the elements together." (13) because the best way to get a sense of a system it "to see how" it "behaves." (14) This is because systems are more than the sum of their parts meaning that they can "somehow transcend the level of the" parts "that nevertheless produce it." (de Haan 2006, 293). In other words, systems often exhibit what are termed emergent properties.

The term approach also sits well with the fact that there are a host of frameworks or methodologies—Scrum, XP, Kanban, Crystal (Boral 2016), the aforementioned lean startup, Continuous Delivery (Humble and Farley 2010), Lean UX (Gothelf and Seiden 2021), and Lean Enterprise (Humble et al. 2015)—which sit beneath or alongside a lean-agile approach in a taxonomic sense and which are each built from lean or agile components, often combining them in a variety of ways. This brings me to the fact that it is lean-agile that is the focus of my study here and not the specificities of those other frameworks and methodologies. So, there will be no talk of Scrum, perhaps the most well-known framework. Although I do sometimes talk about lean startup, Lean UX or

lean enterprise because as I will shortly outline, these have become something more akin to evolved, and still evolving, equivalents of a lean-agile approach.

A Brief History of Lean and Agile

There is no neat trajectory for how lean and agile came to combine, but we can identify some basic contours. Put as briefly as possible, contemporary lean-agile begins as an idea for process improvement in the nineteen-thirties (Rigby et al. 2016). It then goes on to drive new flexible forms of car manufacturing in Japan in the post-war reconstruction period of the nineteen-forties. Such ideas go beyond car production, however, and are seen as laying the ground for post-industrial capitalism, offering a model for a shift from the nineteenth-century mode of mass production to a more flexible post-industrial mode of operation (Dertouzos et al. 1989). Such a move also precipitates new customer-centric marketing and business management practices in the nineteen-fifties (Drucker 1955). The lean-agile story then seems to skip a few decades, temporarily resurfacing in the context of product development in the 1980s (Takeuchi and Nonaka 1986) before finally taking up home in the newer domain of software engineering at the beginning of the current century and onwards, where, according to some, it is beginning to constitute a new mode of "customer capitalism" (Denning 2020) characterised by the formation of complex, customer-driven markets with either lean or agile, and sometimes a combined lean-agile seen as an appropriate means for the management of said complexity. So how do these approaches manage this complexity?

Both lean and agile take an iterative or cyclic approach to managing complexity through incremental improvement. Put simply, this approach to improvement eschews large-scale projects and large-scale redesigns of processes whose lifecycle may exist on the order of years to instead deliver improvements in very short cycles (one to two weeks). They do so because such large improvement projects may be risky, costly and possibly ineffective in the face of problems that exhibit a greater degree of complexity. Rigby et al. note that a "reasonable starting point" for this approach "might be the 1930s when the physicist and statistician Walter Shewhart of Bell Labs began applying Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles to the improvement of products and processes". According to Rigby and his co-authors, "Shewhart taught this iterative and incremental-development methodology to his mentee, W. Edwards Deming, who used it extensively

in Japan in the years following World War II." This provided the main link to what would become lean when "Toyota hired Deming to train hundreds of the company's managers, eventually capitalizing on his expertise to develop the famous Toyota Production System — the primary source of today's "lean" thinking" (Rigby et al. 2016, n.p). In this reading, it seems that lean manufacturing (then known as the TPS) and agile (then merely known as PDSA cycles) might have been linked for some time.

If we are to get a fuller understanding of why these iterative and incremental improvement approaches work, it will be instructive to first offer a more precise definition of what is meant by complexity. Dave Snowden's "sense-making" (Snowden 2005, 49) framework provides a good means for defining complex problems as compared to other kinds of problems which he describes as simple, complicated or merely disordered. Snowden's framework operates partly through the analogy of traversing a mountain, using the different variegated conditions of mountain climbing and hill walking as an analogy for his discussion of different problem spaces. Of these different kinds of space, Snowden suggests there are two ordered domains. The first is the simple or obvious problem space, or as he also sometimes terms it, the "visible" problem space. This space exists where "relationships between cause and effect" are "visible and self-evident to any reasonable person within the population being considered" (50). This is the realm of "known knowns" (Snowden and Boone 2007, n.p). It is analogous to something like a well-maintained mountain path or, in more everyday terms, a recipe book that details the ingredients and steps to prepare a certain dish.

Snowden designates the second of these ordered problem spaces (or domains) as "complicated" (Snowden 2005, 50). These complicated problem spaces are synonymous with most conventional academia because they exist anywhere where experts must deliberate and make judgements. The problems in these spaces "require analysis and expert knowledge to understand them" (Snowden 2005, 50). We might analogise the complicated domain in general to traversing a more intricate part of a mountain that requires mountaineering skills to cross and good practices based on tried and tested expert mountaineer understanding. This is the realm of "known unknowns" (Snowden and Boone 2007, n.p). In contrast with simple and complicated problems and their ordered nature, Snowden also identifies two unordered problem spaces: the complex problem space and the disordered problem space. The prefix "un" here "is being used

not to indicate a lack of order, but to flag up the existence of a different kind of order" (Snowden 2005, 50).

Beginning with the complex problem space, Snowden tells us that this domain has some counterintuitive properties. Here, "systems are [only] retrospectively coherent; that is to say that we can only see the pattern of causality with the benefits of hindsight." (Snowden 2005, 48) This is the realm of "unknown unknowns" (Snowden and Boone 2007, n.p). In the complex space: "We probe the environment to determine what patterns are possible. In effect, we still manage in this domain, but not on the basis of desired or predictable outcomes" (Snowden 2005, 50). A mountain analogy here would be probing the ground in front of you on an unfamiliar part of the mountain. Prodding the ground with a stick to see the extent to which it is firm ground and not something you might fall through is an example of dealing with a complex scenario where matters are not certain. A good everyday analogy for this would be gardening, where growing tomatoes, or anything else, cannot be guaranteed success via some simple process due to the high degree of variability involved but where experimenting with different watering schedules or planting in different parts of the garden might have an effect. With complex problem such as these, "Cause and effect [do] not exist in any conventional sense" (50).

This is not to say that simple or complicated means cannot be used in an attempt to tame the problem of growing tomatoes. The variables can be brought somewhat under control via temperature- and light-regulated greenhouses and maybe the use of pesticides as we might see with industrialised techniques. Similarly, gardening expertise is clearly valuable meaning there is room for expert discussion and opinion. Nevertheless, none of this can guarantee the exact desired result when it comes to harvesting a crop because human life, plant life and organic processes, in general, are not wholly predictable and exist in a realm that has too much complexity for there to be such certainty and only ways of trying to manage problems. One final problem space that Snowden defines can arise is the chaotic problem space. This is the realm of emergencies such as accidental fires or car crashes. Snowden is also careful to suggest that problems do not inherently exist in any one of these spaces but instead that these spaces arise based on how we try to solve problems. Indeed, before we make attempts to define them, most problems exist in a default state of confusion that does not fit neatly into any problem-solving domain.

Snowden calls this a state of default "disorder" where "we are ontologically uncertain and prone to cognitive bias based on personal past practice." Our simple, complicated, complex or chaotic responses are a means to make sense of this. If the problem is simple, we merely need to "sense-categorise-respond". If it is complicated, then "sense-analyse-respond". For complex problems, we "probe-sense-respond" and for chaotic problems, we "act-sense-respond" (Snowden 2005, 50). There are dangers in getting this wrong, both individually and collectively. For example, if in my probing the snowy ground example, the result of this probing was that I felt I had found firm ground and could walk across, this result may not be as true on one day as another. Hence it would be erroneous, if not irresponsible, to move metaphorically over into the simple domain and mark the spot with a sign to say that it was safe for future travellers because a complex part of the path that may be quite variable and subject to many factors may not be safe some hours or days later. Nothing can be taken for granted when one approaches the kinds of problems that belong in the complex domain. This complexity often needs to be probed iteratively rather than speedily pushed into the simple domain too soon. It is in tackling these complex problems where incremental and iterative lean-agile methods are most effective, particularly when married to feedback loops as we can see if we shift to a consideration of classical lean and the Toyota Management System.

From Classical Lean to Agile

I will begin with what Tsigkas terms "classical lean" (2022, 2) to understand how these iterative-incremental processes and feedback loops manifested in the fragmented Japanese post-war car market. Eric Ries offers a good description, so I will rely on that. The classical lean story begins in "the post-World War II economy", where "Japanese carmakers such as Toyota could not compete with huge American factories that used the latest mass production technique[s]" to build "cars by using ever-larger batch sizes". The American car industry "would spend huge amounts of money buying machines that could produce car parts by the tens, hundreds, or thousands. By keeping those machines running at peak speed, they could drive down the unit cost of each part and produce cars that were incredibly inexpensive so long as they were completely uniform." In contrast, the "Japanese car market was far too small for companies such as Toyota to employ those economies of scale". Besides, "in the war-ravaged Japanese economy, capital was not available for massive investments in large machines." Consequently, Japanese

companies faced intense pressure from mass production (Ries 2011, 186) and were left with a complex problem.

As Ries tells it, it "was against this backdrop that innovators such as Taiichi Ohno, Shigeo Shingo, and others found a way to" overcome their straightened circumstances by effectively remaking their factory setups, adapting "smaller general-purpose machines that could produce a wide variety of parts in small batches." Instead "of buying large specialized machines that could produce thousands of parts at a time, Toyota" found ways to "reconfigure each machine rapidly to make the right part at the right time. By focusing on this 'changeover time,' Toyota was able to produce entire automobiles by using small batches throughout the process." In Snowden's problem space terms, the results were achieved by persistent probing. For example, influential Toyota engineer Shigeo Shingo "was so relentless in rethinking the way machines were operated that he was able to reduce changeover times that previously took hours to less than ten minutes." The improvement was driven by a feedback loop, with Shingo learning something new each time he reconfigured the machine and then incorporating that knowledge into the next changeover. Moreover, it was not only Shingo who improved the processes. Toyota accomplished more improvements "not by asking workers to work faster, but by reimagining and restructuring the work that needed to be done" (Ries 2011, 186-187). In lean terms, this *"kaizen* or 'continuous incremental improvement'"* (Womack and Jones 2003, 20) was partially accomplished by engaging all workers in the improvement effort rather than leaving strategy to more senior figures.

One such process improvement method involved incorporating human judgement and intervention into the automated factory processes. As Ries explains, working at a smaller scale of production (although a smaller scale that, as we shall see, did not correspond to a smaller scale result because Toyota later grew through these means to overtake the American mass production paradigm), "quality problems" could "be identified much sooner" when they were spotted and acted upon straight away:

> Toyota's famous *andon* cord [...] allows any worker to ask for help as soon as they notice any problem, such as a defect in a physical part, stopping the entire production line if it cannot be corrected immediately. (Ries 2011, 2)

As Ries notes, the andon cord is a "very counterintuitive practice". It is counterintuitive because "An assembly line works best when it is functioning smoothly, rolling car after

car off the end of the line", so the fact that the "*andon* cord can interrupt this careful flow as the line is halted repeatedly" is unusual. However, as Ries concludes: "the benefits of finding and fixing problems faster outweigh this cost." (187) This obsession with process improvements was aided by the identification of seven wastes to be avoided.

Although the seven wastes of classical lean include the aforementioned attention to detail and the ability to reconfigure machinery and factory spaces to produce the best results, it is important to note that these results are all driven by the idea that anything that does not offer value for the customer can be classed as waste. Even if they sometimes offer only an indirect benefit to the customer by improving things on the factory floor, the concept of customer value is the main goal in all varieties of lean. We have already outlined the waste caused by defects through the example of the Andon cord, so I will briefly list the other six. There is the waste of carrying too much inventory, which roughly translates to too many parts or products unsold or unused in storage, thus not giving value to the customer whilst sitting in a warehouse. Extra processing is another waste. Any extra work completed that does nothing for the customer's experience is a waste. The waste of overproducing goods that people may not want is not valuable to the customer. The waste of transportation relates to a product travelling back and forth too much during a production process, leading to extra costs and a delay for the customer. Waste of motion also relates to the production process. This covers things like poor workstation design or factory design where staff must walk too far or reach or stretch too much to do their job, leading to slower production times for the customer. Finally, a worker waiting for one process to finish with nothing to do suggests there is a lack of balance in the production system (Hänggi et al., 2022).

This relentless pursuit of adding value for the customer and seeing everything that does not do that as waste is a facet of lean that we will meet time and time again in this research. Whilst classical lean typically tackled waste on the factory floor and only offered indirect benefits to customers, other species of lean have mapped the original lean wastes onto other parts of the process. For example, Womack and Jones's Lean Consumption idea maps the lean wastes to the customer's direct perspective when making their purchase rather than mapping indirectly, effectively mapping the customer's journey and not the product's journey through the factory. For example, they map the waste of overproduction to the imagined customer assertion: "Provide exactly what we want". They map waiting to "Provide value when we want" (Womack and

Jones 2013, n.p), etc. As Tsigkas clarifies in his differentiation between classical lean and what he terms modern lean, in "classical lean, value is created through one-way communication" (Tsigkas 2022, 2), but what Womack and Jones began to do with Lean Consumption was effectively to turn the process around to start to empathise from the customer's point of view. This is not quite a contemporary lean approach yet, but it is the beginning of a much more comprehensive relationship and engagement with the customer.

Before moving on to contemporary lean and its association with agile, I should end by noting that the eventual success of classical lean, or post-industrial flexible production as it is also termed, is of huge significance to many contemporary business practices. As Ries sums it up:

> Because of its smaller batch size, Toyota was able to produce a much greater diversity of products. It was no longer necessary that each product be exactly the same to gain the economies of scale that powered mass production. Thus, Toyota could serve its smaller, more fragmented markets and still compete with the mass producers. Over time, that capability allowed Toyota to move successfully into larger and larger markets until it became the world's largest automaker in 2008. (Ries 2011, 187)

This "process of continuously driving out defects has been a win-win for Toyota and its customers. It is the root cause of Toyota's historic high-quality ratings and low costs" (Ries 2011, 187). Indeed, this new post-industrial agenda would render mass production obsolete in the USA and culminate in an MIT lessons learned report that sought to discover why the Japanese approach was so much more successful than American manufacturing (Duguay et al. 1997, 7).

In its "landmark report *Made in America*, the MIT Commission" concluded that it was essential to mimic the Japanese approach if American companies wanted "to deliver high-quality products tailored to each customer at mass production prices" (Dertouzos et al. 1989, 11). Duguay and others describe this report:

> Based on the evidence gathered in its studies of more than 200 firms in eight key industrial sectors (steel, automobiles, semiconductors, etc.), the MIT Commission pinpointed, in the late 1980s, six particularly important characteristics or practices in the best firms. It used these to describe more specifically what is required to realize total flexible production. (Duguay et al. 1997, 7)

These six characteristics were as follows. First, "Simultaneous improvement of three cross-functional performance criteria: quality, cost, time". Second, "Staying close to the customer". Third, "Closer relations with suppliers: reduction of their number; improvement of quality and delivery time; participation in the design of the product". Fourth, "Using technology for strategic advantage". Fifth, "Flatter and less compartmentalized organizations". Sixth, "Innovative human-resource policies: continuous training, teamwork, participation and flexibility." (Duguay et al. 1997, 8)

Given these six characteristics and the focus on rejuvenating American innovation, it is perhaps no surprise that the next incarnation of lean would surface in America. However, I should qualify this by noting that what has followed has also been a global phenomenon spanning quite different societies, such as Sweden (Kniberg 2017). However, this time, it would not be called lean, or at least not at first. It would, this time, be rendered as "agile", sometimes "organisational agility", or else merely "agility" (Charbonnier-Voirin 2011, 122). Charbonnier-Voirin traces this sense back to "four researchers at the University of Lehigh (Goldman, Preiss, Nagel, & Dove, 1991) who had been requested by the American Congress to write a circumstantial report on the strategy of industrial firms in the 21st century." The resulting report "determined that the current system of mass production was not sufficient to ensure incremental improvement given the evolution of the competition, especially in Asia, which had developed a high degree of flexibility." Furthermore, it went on to conclude "that a new system of production must be invented, one that would be based on organizational agility, in order to meet the needs generated by these new factors of competitiveness." (Charbonnier-Voirin 2011, 122)

It is at this moment, at the end of the nineteen-eighties into the nineteen-nineties that we begin to see the first quite general definition of agile emerge that was not yet quite based on Shewhart's Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) feedback loops of the nineteen-thirties but instead on a relatively common idea of *business* or *enterprise agility* borne from manufacturing literature and business management literature that coalesced around the idea that businesses must be responsive and adaptive in a post-industrial era. Whilst this meaning carried the broad contours of the next big evolution of agile, I would suggest that it is not quite agile as a process improvement approach and is more a general preference for businesses to be responsive and adaptive. To return for a moment to consider Fuchshuber's definitions of agile discussed in the introduction as part of my literature review, it is this kind of definition that she opted for in her survey of German

publishers. This is a definition of agile which can tend to cause much confusion because whilst it does carry many of the same meanings of what I will later differentiate as proactive, intentional agile or lean-agile as a process improvement approach—an approach that uses feedback loops and derives from Shewhart's work, and the real focus of my study here—it does so without being all that proactive or intentional and is rather more a description of business or enterprise agility.

The confusion arises because this general idea of *business* or *enterprise agility* at the end of the nineteen-eighties, at that point differed from the *agility as a process improvement approach* that forms my topic here, the latter dating from the post-war years but about to be resurrected in a digital form via Agile Manifesto from 2001-onwards which forms the basis for contemporary lean-agile approaches of today. This definitional difficulty arises because, when the original sense of business agility was being coined, the agile of the Agile Manifesto was merely something based in IT departments that had not yet fully diffused into the business world. It was only later that *business* or *enterprise agility* and the kinds of *agile as a feedback loop-driven process improvement approach* that form my topic here had diffused enough into business agility that they now meant the same thing (Overby et al. 2006, 125). This also came about, somewhat ironically, while it became lean-agile through the popularisation of Eric Ries' *Lean Startup* (2011), which I will briefly cover in a moment. In this sense, Fuchshuber's agility or organisational agility is not *quite* my idea of agility (I will come back to this differentiation in the final part of this chapter). Still, it would eventually fuse with my idea of agility.

Agile, the IT Paradox, and the Beginnings of Lean-Agile

The next big evolution of agile, and the beginning of the developments that I have suggested Fuchshuber has unwisely left out, emerged from the software engineering industry and the Manifesto for Agile Software Development (2001). This online manifesto comprised a set of twelve principles and four values and can be seen as the main starting point for defining more contemporary versions of agile. Its affinity with lean meant that it would form the basis for later ideas of lean-agile such as Eric Ries' *Lean Startup* (2011) and *Lean UX* (Gothelf and Seiden 2021). However, as hinted at the end of the previous section, the results of this new form of IT agility did not

immediately translate to the promise of business agility that expected businesses to adapt quickly in newly complex markets. Part of the reason for this was that agile in the software industry was initially misapplied by businesses as if it were a tool more suited to an earlier, more predictable, more industrialised, mass-market form of business as old, worn-in industrial metrics of productivity proved hard to shift. This was tied up with "the paradox of IT productivity" (Dos Santos and Sussman. 2000, 429) as traditional business managers looked on in puzzlement as their large investments in IT infrastructure often failed to pay off. It would take the arrival of the lean startup approach to ironically transcend—although still include—IT to produce genuine contemporary IT-diffused business agility that could offer business benefits directly or indirectly according to the context of the industry where they were applied.

Before outlining the Agile Manifesto's approach to software, it is worth outlining a broad history of four different eras and one smaller period from the twentieth century through to the present day as read through Louise Downe's "(very) brief history of services". Downe suggests these different shifts emerge from changes in technology that had an impact on how consumers accessed services (with services here incorporating products). Downe's three technologies include "the invention of the postal service", "the growth of the newspapers, magazines and printed advertising that went along with it" and "the telephone", but I would also include television when it was invented. Put briefly, Downe's thesis is that before these technologies, particularly the postal service which enabled catalogue shopping, the growth of periodicals (and I would add TV advertising) which allowed for commercials advertising products for sale, consumers previously had to access services in person and physically take possession of any related products before they could assess the service or products value to them. However, after the arrival of these technologies services were rendered somewhat remote from us all meaning that "choice of service", or related product, was "largely dictated by how well the marketing of that service worked, given that we weren't able to do any [direct] research on a service [or a product] before using it" (Downe 2021, 20-24).

We might term this as being a shift from a *less complex industrial era* to an *industrial mass media and mass production era,* a shift from a time when services and products were delivered or bought in an unmediated fashion that was essentially two-way to an era where they would be mediated and become more one-way. Whilst Downe notes that, at a certain point, the telephone redressed this balance rendering it slightly

less one-way—allowing customers to not only "issue direct instructions remotely, but make enquiries, ask questions and make complaints, all from the comfort" of our own "home (or phone box!)"—I will not mark this as the mass era. Instead, I will suggest that it was not until the next big shift to ubiquitous computing and the internet that services and products became joined once more as one to become largely self-service offerings. As Downe puts it: "With the invention of the internet, the product and the service became the same thing once again, as the process of signing up, signing in and using the service all became part of one continuous journey." (Downe 2021, 20-24). We might term this the shift from an *industrial mass-media and mass-production era* to a *digital self-service era*.

However, there was a caveat to this shift and it was that although it happened relatively quickly, too quickly to constitute an era, the next shift services and their related products were characterised by a *period of poor-quality digitisation* that coincided with the Agile Manifesto for software development but which was caused by older, expensive "heavy-weight or plan-driven" classical software engineering processes such as "the waterfall model" (Jiang and Eberlein 2009, 3733). Indeed, as the UK government's first service designer Downe, was partly responsible for fixing this poor performance, and was well placed to see how early internet services had often merely tended to amount to a poorly implemented lifting-and-shifting of existing offline services online, noting that "the majority of these pre-internet services were 'digitised' in order to be consumed through 21st-century channels, but otherwise remained mostly unchanged." (Downe 2021, 24). Given that the UK government operates at least "10,000 recorded services (not all are known)" with some "over 200 years old" and "the oldest recorded dating back to Henry VIII" (35) then we can imagine this made a considerable mess, but we can also deduce that this was likely the case across many businesses who had been more used to industrial mass media era.

Indeed, the existence of what has variously been termed the IT Paradox or the "paradox of IT productivity" supports the idea that businesses, in general, could not get a tune out of huge investments in IT infrastructure and digital technology, its assumed promise failing to materialise. Dos Santos and Sussman have discussed this:

> Over the past four decades, information technology (IT) has had a profound effect on the US economy, resulting in a shift from a manufacturing to an information economy. This effect, however, has also produced what may be labelled the paradox of IT productivity. While the percentage of a firm's

budget spent on IT continues to increase, there is increasing evidence that firms fail to obtain the benefits of these expenditures within the anticipated time frame. The reason for delays in obtaining the benefits is due to management's failure to strategically leverage the full potential of IT and their failure to overcome resistance to change." (Dos Santos and Sussman 2000, 429)

The problem here was a lack of cultural fit between senior business managers and IT professionals in terms of understanding that productivity was not the most useful metric and also that IT would cause a transformation of organisations rather than being an add-on to an older industrial setup.

Indeed, as Dos Santos and Sussman further argue, the "essence of strategy is to formulate plans that maximize opportunities while minimizing threats. It is an exercise in 'what-if' thinking" but regrettably "the deployment of many IT applications" were implemented as an example of 'now-what' thinking" (Dos Santos and Sussman 2000, 431). The aim was on optimising "the status quo" rather than seeing that what was needed was a change to the "dominant corporate mindset". This mindset "implicitly" understood business commonplaces such as resources such as "time, money, equipment, labor, and materials" and "the relationship between these resources and productivity" but they did not "intuitively understand" (432) information technology. Instead, they mostly viewed it as just another resource or cost-centre and tended to view it "as the domain of IT professionals" therefore never developing "psychological ownership of that technology" (431). In summary, they saw the job of "new IT applications" as being "to improve what is currently done, by doing it in a more efficient manner, rather than thinking about these applications as opportunities to reengineer and/or redefine the organization." (431): "By distancing themselves from the technology and viewing it only as a tool rather than a pivotal resource, senior managers" frequently failed "to probe the strategic implications of how that technology will necessarily affect internal operating decisions and external marketing decisions." (432)

For anyone who lived through this period of poor digitisation and who might still occasionally encounter remnants of it on the internet in the form of unfillable-in forms and the like, it should be noted that most of these expensive failures were due to equally expensive software development paradigms, such as the aforementioned waterfall method, that would soon become obsolete. However, it is also true that the agile software development trumpeted by the 2001 Agile Manifesto also saw itself affected and misapplied as a result of out-of-tune business management techniques in its earliest

incarnations as I will discuss in a moment. The Manifesto for Agile Software Development was essentially an initiative by software engineers to curb some of the issues of business and government mismanagement and to bring some understanding of complex humanity back to the businesses that commissioned software. This can be illustrated by two of the four values of the Agile Manifesto: "Individuals and interactions over processes and tools" and "Customer collaboration over contract negotiation" (Agile Manifesto 2001). If neither of these sounds like the work of the cliched idea of the soulless automation-obsessed software engineer, it is perhaps because it was more the case that it was existing business managers who imagined soulless yet efficient automation as the aim of IT, not software engineers.

Having discussed this caveat, I will return to Louise Downe's story of evolving services and products and the shift from a *less complex industrial era* to an *industrial mass media and mass production era* to a *digital self-service era* to explain why software engineers saw things differently to business managers. Downe noted that this new digital era was something quite different to what had gone before because customers could now download self-service apps or access web services directly which meant they were able to test them out for themselves. This meant that advertising and promotion lost their primacy in this new business era: "Advertising was no longer able to sell us something that we couldn't prove worked, or wasn't useful in the same way that it once did". In this new self-service era, businesses would find themselves "in a world where" they had to "compete on the quality" of their "services, not the strength" of their "messages." Now, "services were once more judged on functionality or the usefulness they could bring to our lives through trial and error, not simply the power of the marketing message." (Downe 2021, 20-24). The job of software engineers was then, paradoxically, not only to produce software and output it at a great rate but to render it usable and this meant putting the customer first in a literal and not a lip-service sense. Consequently, they tended to recognise that user input, the core of self-service computing systems, was deeply complex (Buchanan 1992; Moggridge 2007).

One problem in early agile software development was that some business client-driven software was sometimes written in a supposedly "agile" way when it was not truly agile at all. Agile software development and other later lean-agile approaches work in similar ways to each other and adapt older forms of improvement that leverage the power of feedback loops to either improve or maintain quality. We have already discussed this in the context of Classical Lean car manufacturing at Toyota. Indeed, it is

helpful to begin by recalling the Classical Lean formulation and the two types of feedback loops utilised in the Toyota Production System that helped to offer indirect value to its customers. Systems theorist Donella Meadows defines two types of feedback loops. First, there is the balancing feedback loop, a "stabilizing, goal-seeking, regulating feedback loop, also known as a 'negative feedback loop' because it opposes, or reverses, whatever direction of change is imposed on the system." This feedback loop prevents a system from developing too far beyond its predefined purpose. Second, there is the amplifying feedback loop: "An amplifying or enhancing feedback loop, also known as a 'positive feedback loop' because it reinforces the direction of change." (Meadows 2009, 187) To institute effective feedback loops, short time intervals have to be set in place to make them useful. The idea is to move forward a short distance and then to stop and assess feedback and then move forward again based on the content of that feedback, over and over.

The problem was that Scrum, the most popular and well-known form of agile software development, which "uses a timeboxed approach"—an approach where work is organised into two-week *sprints*—"to frequently deliver product increments and seek continuous feedback from the users, thereby being able to refine the system." (Boral 2016, 1) was open to abuse. When applied correctly, Scrum was (and still is) not greatly different to later lean-agile approaches with some small caveats. Nevertheless, there were two big problems with some applications of Scrum. The first was that it could be misapplied by the businesses who tried to implement it. For example, more traditional industrial senior business managers in charge of a Scrum project could mistakenly think of it as an industrial machine that spewed out software productively on a two-week cycle rather than realise that the two-week cycle was actually meant to create a feedback loop that was capable of offering software after two-weeks, testing that software with usually a customer representative or proxy, and then using those responses to either go ahead with a new feature or keep working on a one that the customer did not quite work yet. This use of a customer proxy was the second problem because, frequently, this customer might be an insider to the company rather than existing in the form of actual customer data.

This meant that the shift from a focus on productive *output* to ascertaining what *outcome* a customer or user was getting and what they might want to have improved (Gothelf and Seiden 2021, 48) was operating in a manner that was too remote from the customer. It had not yet gotten close enough to the customer for agile feedback loops to

be as beneficial as they could be. Still, agile was an improvement, and it was improved by the introduction of other lean ideas into agile, too. Indeed, customer value in agile IT development had an affinity with the earlier Classical Lean approaches in this way— "agile and lean can be seen as cousins with common values" (Kniberg 2011, 156). Both classical lean and agile have customer value as their main aim, as in the first agile principle: "Our highest priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery of valuable software". Similarly, they are both adaptive. For example, the Agile Manifesto also resolves to "Welcome changing requirements, even late in development.". Both want to remove extra processes such as overly heavyweight documentation, as in "Working software is the primary measure of progress" and "Responding to change over following a plan". Both try to avoid overproduction, too: "Simplicity—the art of maximizing the amount of work not done—is essential" (Agile Manifesto 2001, n.p). Still, some work had to be done in software development processes to truly cement lean and agile together as one with much of this undertaken by Mary Poppendieck and her husband and published in her book *Lean Software Development: An Agile Toolkit* (Poppendieck and Poppendieck 2010).

The Agile Manifesto and, soon after, the incorporation of lean into agile software development can be seen as the beginning of a long period, one likely still ongoing, that saw uneven adoption across industries. During this period, both software engineers and business managers have been gradually converging on the idea that they must get closer to the customer and both *discover* and *deliver* customer value. The Classical Lean notion of customer value is perhaps most borne out in agile software definitions of the term *product* which begins to resemble something more like a creation of a self-service experience than a product alone. For example, the Scrum Guide defines the term as follows: "A product is a vehicle to deliver value [to a customer]. A product could be a service, a physical product, or something more abstract." ('Scrum Guide' 2020, n.p) Similarly, on his website, agile consultant Mike Cohn (2016) defines "a product as something (physical or not) that is created through a process and that provides benefits to a market". Both definitions reveal that agile approaches do not disregard the traditional idea that a product—physical, abstract, or otherwise—has some output deriving from some activity (a process). However, it is important to note that they do not emphasise the *output as the product*. Instead, they emphasise the more *abstract quality of the value or benefit to the customer that exists beyond that output, but often due to that output as the product.*

In business circles, the way that business scholar Peter Drucker defined a business in his book *The Practice of Management* (1955) came back into vogue as a good fit for this new digital self-service era. Drucker's definition of business and business management was heavily customer-centric and differed from the more traditional internally-focussed industrial productivity worshipping business management mindset that we discussed earlier and that was, and in some ways, still is quite dominant to this day. Instead of productivity and profit, he was adamant that "a business cannot be defined or explained in terms of profit", which was a result of doing business, not its purpose. This is not to say that he meant that "profit and profitability" were "unimportant", but only that he did not believe "profitability" was "the purpose of business enterprise and business activity". As he put it: "Profit is not the explanation, cause or rationale of business behaviour and business decisions, but the test of their validity" (Drucker 1955, 57). Instead, his feeling was that the customer was at the centre and that validating their needs would bring profit:

> If we want to know what a business is we have to start with its *purpose*. And its purpose must lie outside of the business itself. In fact, it must be in society since a business enterprise is an organ of society. There is only one valid definition of business purpose: *to create a customer*. (1-2)

He continued in this customer-centric vein: "It is the customer who determines what a business is. For it is the customer, and [the customer] alone, who through being willing to pay for a good or for a service, converts economic resources into wealth, things into goods." (2)

Drucker was also firm in his insistence that the business should not follow its own internal agenda: "What the business thinks it produces is not of first importance—especially not to the future of the business and its success. What the customer thinks he is buying, what he considers 'value', is decisive—it determines what a business is, what it produces and whether it will prosper." (Drucker 1955, 59) Drucker's suggestion suggested that it was his business philosophy that would make more sense in the new digital self-service era. Indeed, it was pure outcome over output, where common measures of productivity might indicate the successful completion of an internal business goal, this internal business success does not necessarily reflect customer value, or indeed business success in Drucker's terms. Put simply, there is no point in upping the productivity of the production of a good if the customer does not perceive any value in it and thus does not buy it. Furthermore, the fact that digital technology made it

cheaper to produce more virtual output at a lower cost and that it could scale up with relative ease—involving more servers in a room and not a requirement to build a whole new factory or manufacturing plant—meant that Downe's message of competing on quality of outcome rather than on volume of output chimed with Drucker's ideas. This brings me to the next, and in many ways, the latest incarnation of lean and agile, namely lean-agile approaches which used customer data as a way to finally get close enough to the customer to understand what outcome they were receiving.

Lean Startup and the Beginnings of Product Discovery

The first true incarnation of a lean-agile approach was *The Lean Startup* (Ries 2011) methodology. It had its roots in Ries' experience of the wastes of overproduction, overprocessing, and waiting that the Poppendiecks had identified. Ries was a software engineer and co-founder of a software business that spent months working on a product only to find that nobody wanted it. Whilst business failures are common enough, it was not the failure that haunted Ries but the manner of it and what he deduced from it, as he recounts:

> Here's the thought that kept me up nights […] Is it possible that we could have discovered how flawed our assumptions were without building anything? For example, what if we had simply offered customers the opportunity to download the product from us solely on the basis of its proposed features before building anything? Remember, almost no customers were willing to use our original product, so we wouldn't have had to do much apologizing when we failed to deliver. (Ries 2011, 48-49)

Listening to Ries reflecting on his failure this way, a marketer or a business planner might suggest that the problem could have resulted from a lack of planning, but Ries deduced that it was more like the opposite.

Instead, he reasoned that the time spent on internal business planning and marketing had been a large source of waste in his company's process—essentially a matter of output planning, not outcome thinking—as it tried to get to grips with a complex marketplace. He explained: "The first problem is the allure of a good plan, a solid strategy, and thorough market research. In earlier eras, these things were indicators of likely success" to the extent that the "overwhelming temptation is to apply them" to today's complex markets too, "but this does not work" because businesses today

"operate with too much uncertainty". They "do not yet know who their customer is or what their product should be". He further suggests that "As the world becomes more uncertain, it gets harder and harder to predict the future. The old management methods are not up to the task. Planning and forecasting are only accurate when based on a long, stable operating history and a relatively static environment." (Ries 2011, 9) In a nutshell, this is the basic position of the lean startup approach, and it has spread rapidly, with most in the tech industry moving towards it as well as many other business domains too, including, as we have already seen Dominique Raccah's Sourcebooks and instances of use at larger publishers such as Penguin Random House.

Ries realised that what he should have done was to probe the complex market with feedback loops "rather than make" many over-elaborate "plans that are based on a lot of assumptions" (Ries 2011, 22) at a point when little was known about what his business's customer might want. Ries' idea was to *drive* his business, probing and using feedback loops to ascertain which course to set in next. These feedback loops were not unlike the ones that were used in classical lean and earlier agile software development, but the difference here was that he sought to effectively drive his business forward even before it had fully launched. In this sense, the lean startup represents a step away from the working software as a measure of progress in agile software development and instead emphasises learning about customer value as the main goal. For example, Ries was serious about the idea of offering his software for download even before it existed, reasoning that if zero customers were to download it, then it was not valuable enough to build, and the business idea (and the product) must change to capture something that a customer did want. Indeed, Ries was able to find extremely minimal ways to use the internet to let customers gain access to the product without making the full product.

What lean-agile termed these minimum-viable products (MVP) were based on existing forms of prototyping in agile software development. In existing agile software development terms an MVP was what Poppendieck and Poppendieck define   as iterations:

> An iteration is a useful increment of software that is designed, programmed, tested, integrated, and delivered during a short, fixed timeframe. It is very similar to a prototype in product development except that an iteration produces a working portion of the final product. This software will be improved in future iterations, but it is working, tested, integrated code from the beginning. Iterations provide a dramatic increase in feedback over sequential software development, thus providing much broader communication between customers/users and developers, and among various

people who have an interest in the system. (Poppendieck and Poppendieck 2010, 28)

The problem was that these *various people who have an interest in the system* might not always be direct customers and may represent a largely internal or business-to-business feedback loop. Moreover, it required some small commitment to create software to gain feedback and even two weeks of software development could be relatively expensive.

Ries' intervention was to begin to offer a kind of live prototype, a minimum viable product and to put it in front of not only internal stakeholders or customer proxies but external customers too to create what he termed validated learning:

> I've come to believe that learning is the essential unit of progress. [Any] effort that is not absolutely necessary for learning what customers want can be eliminated. I call this validated learning because it is always demonstrated by positive improvements in [a business's] core metrics. As we've seen, it's easy to kid yourself about what you think customers want. It's also easy to learn things that are completely irrelevant. Thus, validated learning is backed up by empirical data collected from real customers. (Ries 2011, 49)

At an early stage, before a business had clearly understood what customer problems they were solving, Ries was happy to even put the mere *idea* of his product or service, or a new feature of it, to test potential customer feedback, often finding lightweight internet-based techniques to do so. In this sense, the lean startup effectively supercharged Drucker's call for customer value to be placed at the centre of everything but with data as a proxy for customer value.

In an odd sense, this means that, in some ways, lean startup transcends software development as its main aim and opens up lean-agile approaches to any business whether they are a software business or not. However, at the same time, it depends upon software, the internet at the very least, in more indirect ways and can only happen in a world where it is possible to gain data on what customers are doing because it is this data which drives its feedback loops. This is not to say that software companies whose product is software cannot use the lean startup approach, the vast majority do, but it is to say that as long as a company can gain access to data and as long as they can produce something to put in front of users to collect data, they can use the approach too. This will be important when I return to the subject of publishing later. Whatever the business domain, the customer was effectively, although not necessarily knowingly, co-creating the product with the producer and steering its development. Tsigkas confirms this distinction between classical and modern forms of lean, such as lean startup: "While in

the case of classical lean, value is created through one-way communication, in the case of modern lean, it is two-way communication." (Tsigkas 2022, 2)

Furthermore, lean startup and the Lean UX grew out of it, relaxing the two-week agile sprint cycles to make the feedback loop as fast as possible. Two final terms to introduce here, that capture the sense of this almost continuous feedback loop are *product discovery* and *product delivery*. Agile consultant Teresa Torres defines these two concepts as follows: "Let's start at the beginning. All product teams do a set of activities to decide what to build and then do a different set of activities to build and deliver it [...] In this book, I'll refer to the work that you do to decide what to build as discovery and the work that you do to build and ship a product as delivery." (Torres 2021, 13-14) What Poppendieck and the lean approach began to indicate to senior business managers, although to varying degrees of success, was that a focus on internal business signals such as productivity metrics represents a focus on product delivery (or output) whereas a focus on different metrics which represented what the customer felt about the product or service or focused on gathering data on how they used it represented a focus on product discovery Whilst product discovery alone was maybe workable in a relatively straightforward market where there was relative certainty about who would likely buy what—such as a seller's market—in a buyer's market the equation changes and it becomes more important to focus on product discovery (outcome) over product delivery (output) to ascertain the value of a product before sinking too many costs into producing it. As Tsigkas further noted in his definition of what he terms modern lean, such a shift in focus "completely changes the value creation cycle. In contemporary manufacturing, the customer becomes part of the value creation cycle (value co-creation), production becomes customer-driven, and the customer becomes a prosumer." (Tsigkas 2022, 2)

In concluding this section, I hope I have gone some way towards defining a lean-agile approach through a discussion of various lean and agile antecedents. I have suggested that lean-agile is effectively a way of working, an approach, for trying to come to terms with complex problem spaces that are very difficult to parse, where cause-and-effect can not be easily pre-judged. This is illustrated by the discussion of the Ries' lean startup approach. The mistake that led Ries to write his book was to manage his business as existing in what Snowden would term a complicated problem space, in the age-old way that businesses had managed their business when less complex marketplaces had been the norm and when they could be managed more

straightforwardly. Ries realised that he should have approached his business with the complexity it warranted and laid out a way to effectively probe the problems that he faced driving his business this way or that according to what he could learn about customer value. Whilst making prototypes to learn is nothing new in engineering circles in general—prototypes have been made and tested practically, in action, for decades as indeed they were in Classical Lean and earlier software development too (Jiang and Eberlein 2009)—the difference in Ries' lean startup approach to lean-agile is that his prototype was the product and the product was never really complete but delivered live to his customers and made to change course continuously based on the feedback his business receives from them.

Further Problems: Lean-Agile Proper, Descriptive Lean-Agile, and 'What Lean-Agile is Not!'

So far in this chapter, we have learnt about the complex relationships between agile, lean, and lean-agile, noting that although they were born at a similar time in the nineteen-thirties and nineteen-forties as feedback loop-driven process improvement approaches, they have each since taken precedence over each other in different historical periods before becoming reunified as the lean-agile approach exemplified by Ries' lean startup idea, the latter growing out of, encompassing, lean-agile software development, as described by Poppendieck and Poppendieck. However, we have also noted other senses of these terms that do not seem to quite relate to proactive, intentional, process improvement approaches, such as Fuchshuber's use of organisational agility, agility, or merely agile. We have also touched on misapplications of some of these approaches too. Furthermore, there is the general common noun sense of lean and agile that confuses things further. These are only a few of the senses in which these approaches can be misunderstood in ways that will have an impact on the quality of research on this topic. If publishing scholars are to be able to rely on an understanding of these approaches for future research, then it feels important for me to try to make some differentiations to take forward to my future discussions and also to offer to future research on the topic.

I will begin by differentiating two quite common noun ideas of lean and agile that I think it possible to extend to lean-agile too, not least since both the meanings and approach of agile and lean are closely related. First, we have lean in the common noun sense of being without fat. There is a relation here to waste since excess fat can equate to an idea of unnecessary fat that serves no useful purpose. In a book publishing sense, a book might be released concurrently in numerous formats and numerous co-editions in different languages, complete with a well-executed marketing operation and this could be described as a lean operation, but it is lean in a common noun sense. Its speed of operation might make it agile too, or even lean-agile when considered all of a piece, but this would still be agile or lean-agile in the sense of the common nouns or compound nouns, or indeed adjectives or adverbs. There is a lot of room for interpretation in lean or agile, or lean-agile as common nouns because they are a lot more general than what I will describe as proactive, intentional agile, lean or lean-agile as a feedback-loop-driven process improvement approach, which I identify as the main sense that concerns me here.

For instance, and by way of illustrating the level of slippage between terms, there is also, in the common noun sense of lean, a more negative sense of leanness as in lean times, times of poverty and malnutrition, and in this case, excess fat can connote wealth. The more positive sense of lean described earlier relates to the common noun sense of agile through the synonym streamlined, where the two add up to faster and lither, more responsive movement or performance in ways that the more negative malnourished sense does not, perhaps suggesting not enough energy to move fast. Womack and Jones have noted a common misunderstanding about lean on the part of a certain kind of American "business school–trained senior executives" who "routinely greet" Womack and Jones in their capacity as lean consultants, with "a slick presentation about their organization, their technology, their core competencies, and their strategic intentions" before later speaking "about their short-term competitive problems (specifically their need to garner adequate profits in the next quarter) and the consequent cost-cutting initiatives", which often "involve clever ways to eliminate jobs, divert revenues from their downstream customers, and extract profits from their upstream suppliers". Womack and Jones term this particular misunderstanding of lean principles as "mean" rather than "lean". (Womack and Jones, 2003, 15-16)

However, there is a second common sense of agile that we have already come across too, namely the organisational agility or agility discussed by Fuchshuber. As I noted

earlier, here the distinction comes from business literature and describes a general need in contemporary post-industrial business to be responsive and adaptive. This sense sits somewhere between what I will term the proactive, intentional lean-, agile, or lean-agile as a process improvement approach that I identify as my topic and the extremely broad-based common noun senses of agile, lean, or lean-agile. This organisational agility is more specific than the common noun sense because it pertains to certain requirements of how a business should be set up or able to behave in volatile and complex market contexts, but it is not quite the same as the more specific feedback-loop-driven process improvement senses of agile, lean, or lean-agile either. For example, the requisite responsiveness that it evokes could easily become mean rather than lean as discussed by Womack and Jones, in ways that agile, lean, or lean-agile process improvement processes would not mandate. I will differentiate this sense, by terming it descriptive agile, lean, or lean-agile meaning a general idea of being more lean or agile, etc in the business sense as compared to proactive, intentional agile, lean, or lean-agile which I reserve for the process improvement approach.

Next, we have what I will term agile, lean, or lean-agile lite which I reserve for cases where lean or agile are effectively misapplied or poorly implemented, sometimes with more deleterious effects and sometimes to little effect. The choice to add the suffix -lite to these versions of proactive, intentional agile, lean, or lean-agile denotes the fact that although there is intention and proactivity in these approaches, it is not all that metaphorically nutritious for the adopting organisation or business and also, in some cases, downright unhealthy. I would identify two main sub-species of this: agile, lean, or lean-agile theatre and sub-optimal agile, lean, or lean-agile. We have already noted an example of the first of these involving the early misapplication of agile software development that led to poor software delivered at a quicker rate rather than the intended improvement of software through speedy iterations. In this case, it seemed likely that agile practices, such as creating software in short two-week sprints, were adhered to but principles were either not understood or forgotten leading to a situation where the team might have felt they were performing agile but it was merely a theatre version of it. Tim Brizard's book *Broken Agile* (2015), which merely looks at misadoptions of agile in the software industry, details several situations where the most visible aspects of an agile approach are mistaken for agile overall.

Sub-optimal agile, lean, or lean-agile is slightly more difficult to articulate but is worth mentioning too. The problem here relates to the fact that proactive, intentional agile, lean, and lean-agile that exist as process improvement approaches are all related to design. As discussed in the introduction, they are all "potentially *universal* in scope" (Buchanan 1992, 17) and frequently heavily context-specific. Whether a product or a service, almost all agile, lean, or lean-agile initiatives of this kind will be trying to solve a problem in a domain that is not their own. For example, desktop publishing software must engage the domain of printing and typography, Microsoft Excel must relate to the business intelligence domain, software for a shipping logistics company must relate to the world of shipping, and air flight controller software must relate to airports and air travel. At a smaller scale, a software package made for an internal government service or small business, say, would have to relate to the specific context of that service. This separate sub-optimal lite version occurs when an adopting organisation or business recognises this open-ended character, an open-ended character which *is* designed to make room for the organisation or business's local context, and over-optimises this local adoption to the extent that they bend agile, lean, or lean-agile as a process improvement approach out of shape to such an extent that they are effectively no longer doing it, resulting in agile, lean, or lean-agile lite. These nuances illustrate how easy it is to move from implementing these process improvement approaches properly to implementing them in less nutritious or lite ways.

Finally, a short word on my chosen referencing and capitalisation of these various terms. When I refer to the Agile Manifesto or the various frameworks that spin from it, I will capitalise all as proper nouns (Scrum, Crystal, etc), but when I refer to agile software development, the idea that came from it, I will treat it as a common noun. Similarly, when I refer to the concept of the lean startup, I will leave it uncapitalised to reflect the fact that it has become something of a common noun, but given that it was introduced partly in a book by Eric Ries when I refer to the book I will reference, capitalise and italicise accordingly—i.e. *The Lean Startup* (Ries 2011). When I reference frameworks that have later derived from Ries' lean startup idea, such as Lean UX, Lean Enterprise or, even, The Spotify Model, I will keep these as proper nouns because they have not become a common noun so much as the lean startup concept and are often based on its general principles. However, when one of these began life as a book (many of these approaches effectively copied the lean startup publishing

trajectory), such as, say, referring to Gothelf and Seiden's *Lean UX* (2021), I will reference it in the normal manner.

Conclusion

In concluding this chapter, I have aimed to offer a short, but fairly comprehensive analysis of agile, lean, and lean-agile approaches, covering what they are, what they look like, and their function. Moreover, I have also covered what they are not and differentiated various senses of them. For example differentiating proactive, intentional agile, lean, or lean-agile as process improvement approaches (hereafter merely agile, lean, or lean-agile meaning proactive, intentional agile, lean, or lean-agile as a process improvement approach) that are my main topic here, from common noun ideas of agile, lean, and lean-agile and also from what I term a descriptive agile, lean, or lean-agile which refers merely to the need for business to be streamlined, responsive, adaptive or flexible. I also differentiated various sub-species of agile, lean, or lean-agile lite which covers the many cases of poor implementation of agile, lean or lean-agile as process improvement approaches. We can also add the already discussed conflation of lean and agile as a property of digital technology that has been common in publishing scholarship and which I discussed in the introduction because this is another misunderstanding about these approaches. Having offered this outline, I will be able to go on to better assess the possibility that the publishing industry can reap benefits from the form of agile, lean, or lean-agile that I intend here.

Chapter 2: The Long Tail: From Less Complex to More Complex Markets

I noted in my introduction that most calls for agile or lean adoption have rested on the premise that such process improvement approaches could help the publishing industry become more customer-centric. Having reviewed what agile, lean, and lean-agile approaches are and their different senses, we know this is likely correct. Still, what we have not yet considered is whether or not the publishing industry truly does require more customer-centricity. When looking at it in a certain light, there are signs that the industry should look towards transforming itself toward customer-centricity (Robinson 2021, 2; Thompson 2021) due to how the digital revolution and the internet have altered many key dynamics (Anderson 2009). However, in another sense, there is also an argument that the industry also seems relatively unchanged (Thompson 2021, 483). Furthermore, there are existing schools of thought in publishing scholarship that show benefits and drawbacks for both more customer-centricity (Horne 2012; O'Leary 2012; Bhaskar 2013, 2019; Nash 2013; Page 2013) and less (Phillips and Kovač 2022; Kovač et al. 2019).

These two quite different publishing industry pictures and two quite different schools of scholarly thought on the matter can present a dilemma in terms of charting a pragmatic way forward since both have their requisite dangers. On the one hand, publishers could choose to make a big shift to customer-centricity, but this could come at the cost of their existing business set-up. After all, the logical conclusion of a heavy push for customer-centricity might see publishers adopting direct sales, as called for at the outset by Geller (in Comerford 2020) seeking to effectively become retailers, but there are obvious potential drawbacks to this such as potentially alienating their relations with the book trade and the need to learn a whole new skillset (retailing) in the meantime. This could be a costly mistake if not carefully managed. On the other hand, there is the lost opportunity cost of remaining with the book trade alone which may see publishers giving more and more money away in already expensive retail discounts (Thompson 2010, 238) and perhaps missing opportunities for producing titles that booksellers may not be willing or able to carry. Moreover, even though most trade booksellers have online operations these days meaning selling through the traditional

trade does not miss out on online customers, I know from my own publishing experience that these operations often cost the same for publishers in discounts but do not create the same visibility as print books in physical shops.

It seems important to try to offer some way out of this binary if the publishing industry is to protect its long-term future. There are two levels to this importance, one for the industry in general and one for my current research. Whilst we have already mentioned elsewhere that book sales are currently booming, suggesting there may never be a need for publishers to move towards customer-centricity and that it may be folly to spend too much time thinking about this issue, there is not saying that another crash could not hit the bookselling market (Thompson 2021, 57) as it did towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, and this time the industry could end up without a lifeline for sales, perhaps leaving only Amazon as the main player in the online retail market. We do not know from where this crash might emerge or even that it will emerge, but it seems prudent to prepare. It might be from plain old capitalist mismanagement or, perhaps, the climate crisis could damage the current book trade either logistically or in terms of reputation (Charkin 2023). Shifting to the second level of significance, this question has huge and obvious significance for me here because it is the premise behind the presumed requirement for the adoption of agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches.

My question for this chapter then is to what degree should the book publishing industry seek to transform itself in the direction of customer-centricity? My response to this question is that—yes the industry should look to move towards cultivating more customer-centricity because the internet has ensured a more complex marketplace for books. Its effects have split some parts of the market into many smaller niches, altered how books can be made visible to the public, and also played a significant role in flooding the market with non-standard books, not to mention, along with the growth of smartphones and social media, altered the information and communication landscape moving most of us into a digital self-service era. Nevertheless, I also argue that publishing should not rush headlong to develop customer-centricity to match this era. One reason is that even though digital affordances have augmented the main product set with digital ebooks and audiobooks, book publishing remains an industry predominantly rooted in a less complex industrial business model that produces mainly physical books through a physical supply chain that can still serve relatively large market segments.

Although both the supply chain and the market have become more complex, there remains the possibility that these physical products and channels represent one way in which the book publishing industry can differentiate itself from the tech industry.

My main aim in this chapter will be to investigate the current state of publishing to assess if there is a need for the industry to shift to a new mode and, if so, to assess what degree of shift is required. My objectives will be, first, to consider the question of whether there is a complex market for books. Second, to ascertain what is required in a more complex market and also how the industry has responded to it. Third and fourth to discuss two separate, and often opposing, scholarly responses to this situation. My fifth objective will be to try to synthesise the strong points of both scholarly perspectives and the dilemma existing in the industry response to customer-centricity as a way to begin to sketch what I will term a concurrent publishing paradigm, a paradigm that seeks to evolve the traditional model of publishing whilst maintaining the basic shape of the industry. This concurrent paradigm will seek to split trade and consumer publishing as synonyms into the *trade publishing-proper* and *consumer publishing-proper* that I defined earlier and to think about how to manage them concurrently. It is the *consumer publishing-proper* part of this concurrent publishing paradigm that I will then take forward to later chapters and it is this form of publishing that I will eventually seek to test the benefits of a lean-agile approach against.

The Internet and the Long Tail: From Simpler to Complex Markets

Is there truly a more complex marketplace for books, and has it affected publishing? My aim in this section will be to investigate this question from a high level of abstraction, which is only apt when discussing the potential for such a large-scale shift. I argue here that the market for books has become a lot more complex due to various aspects involved with the arrival of the Internet, and that the future direction of travel may well move towards more complexity over time. However, I suggest too that this is no longer the older and more well-worn fear of the internet as a danger to copyright protection or anything like the, by now, almost quaint fear attached to the death of the book that has been threatening the industry for decades. Instead, the problem is how a confluence of

factors arising from Web 2.0 has conspired to change the character of the marketplace for books in a manner that challenges the traditional business model in publishing. Aside from adding ebooks and audiobooks as new types of books, the effects of Web 2.0 have brought new complexity through online retail innovation. This has had implications for the traditional publishing business model, too, as the combination of existing digital technology and Web 2.0 has unveiled the artificially created market conditions that the industry had broadly depended upon since the nineteenth century.

If we were to think of the modern publishing industry as if it were a landscape, then for most of the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth century, the overall environment of book publishing resembled an island, one that had a noticeable hierarchical organisation, but generally, a well-manicured terrain surrounded by an ocean. The authors stood at the highest point; their names had top billing. Publishers and editors lived on the second level, and reviewers and media outlets also made it onto dry land. These were the creative people. The publishers tended to this organisational hierarchy. Finally, booksellers dotted the perimeters of the island. The booksellers' shelves created the waterline and were partially circumscribed by the size of the island. Informal deals were made between publishers, the media and booksellers to ensure the shelves did not become too heavily stocked with too many book titles. The pathways on the island were mostly safe. In Snowden's problem space terminology, they were simple and only occasionally complicated. In no way did it seem like this landscape would ever have anything in common with Dave Snowden's craggy Welsh Cynefin mountainscape.

The process of publication revolved around the people on the island. The only complex activity came from the authors and their creative musings, pens probing human complexity as they sought to find a way to articulate it and record it for posterity. Literature resulted from this and was the unique expression of the author's ideas bound in the book's permanent form to validate and protect it. In many ways, it began with them and ended with them. The island was given its elevation by economies of scale because it was built on a large volume of printed book copies composed of comparatively few single book title texts. Once the authors, publishers and editors were done, they passed this special expression in manuscript form to a much larger and undifferentiated mass of book producers who laboured unseen in the caves below. Once they received the volume of books back, they passed copies to their friends in the mass

media, who could promote them through daily, weekly or monthly publications that were heavily differentiated from books and not as monumental—tomorrow's chip wrappers. Through this mass media, they beamed the message of a new book title to the mass of readers who swum around the island in an undifferentiated mass.

This is all a simplification, of course, but it will do for presenting the general shape of the industry at an extremely high level of abstraction. Besides, I am not the only one to present the book world of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in such bald terms. Indeed, my island analogy is similar to what Mod terms the "pre-artifact system" and "post-artifact system" that I first introduced at the outset of this research.

> The pre-artifact system is where the book or story or article is made. It's a system full of and fueled by whiskey, self-doubt, confusion, debauchery and a general sense of hopelessness. Classically, it's a system of isolation, involving very few people. The key individuals within the classic manifestation of this system are the author and the editor. A publisher, perhaps. A muse. But generally, not the reader. The end product of this system is what we usually define as 'the book' — the Idea made tangible. (Mod 2011, n.p).

We can see the parallel between the pre-artifact system and the inhabitants who live on the surface of the island through the forms they leave behind: the book (the publisher), the story (the author and editors) and the article (the media) are all represented. Interestingly, too, the isolation of these groups is made explicit. The only complexity occurs with the whisky, self-doubt, and debauchery of artistic genius.

In terms of the various people swimming around the perimeter of my island, this is redolent of what Mod terms the "post-artifact system". Although he captures these readers at their leisure, moving beyond my image of their undifferentiated swimming, noting that when they received their books, they were primarily solitary, and their experience was, for the most part, privatised, barring the odd exception:

> Finally, the post-artifact system. This is the space in which we engage the artifact. Again, classically this is a relatively static space. Isolated. Friends can gather to discuss the artifact. Localized classes can be constructed in universities around the artifact. But, generally, there is an overwhelming sense of disconnection from the other systems. (Mod 2011, n.p)

Again, he emphasises the separation of the two systems. The neater surface of the island was maintained effectively by a mass of reverent readers and book copies put together efficiently by the hidden hordes of printers, copyeditors, and proofreaders. The problem

for the surface inhabitants was that, like most island hideaways or paradises, for that matter, this neatness was not to last forever. It would soon be lost to disorder as another parallel island and parallel form of publishing grew up amidst the island of modern publishing.

When the internet arrived to complicate and threaten what had previously been a relatively free reign over the market for long-form text-based publishing, the publishing industry's first fear was for the integrity of the book and the book's copyright-protected content. Before the Internet, the book industry was well differentiated from other text-based media such as periodicals (magazines, newspapers), so the Internet's arrival was an understandable concern. It was perhaps even more understandable given the form that Web 1.0, the earliest fully public Internet, took. Variously "referred to as the Web of Documents, Web 1.0, the Web of Cognition, or the Read-only Web" (Kumar 2018, 65), its hyperlinked nature and open user-generated authorship seemed to threaten the form of the book and its content, which was the closest analogue to Web 1.0's early read-only incarnation. At this point, the Web resembled text-based publishing more than it resembled anything else. Moreover, it was not long before these worries were confirmed, but from a different angle, as pirates on the Web began to threaten the copyright of the music industry, a closely related and nearby island of its own that had taken on a similar copyright-driven model to book publishing with the birth of recorded music during the twentieth century. As Bhaskar puts it, this new "digital technology [had] troubling implications for the model of intellectual property" that had served "publishing for 250 years" (Bhaskar 2013, 171).

Despite this early threat, the internet had done little damage to publishing as the end of the new century's first decade approached. As Bhaskar puts it, "No one's sure about the extent of copyright infringement". Whilst he noted that "A search for an author name followed by 'epub' or 'PDF'" revealed there was some cause for alarm, he also reasoned that the industry had been able to respond to shore up its operation as a result of the lessons learned from the problems in the music industry: "Book publishing was able to learn from the music industry and moved immediately to closed retail-driven systems wherein purchasing is easier than pirating." (Bhaskar 2013, 72) As I will later note, this move back towards physicality would prove to be a double-edged sword and a risky move on all sides as the physical retail trade came under financial threat. Indeed, at this point, it seemed as if the early panic about the death of the book had been

overblown. In fact, these early incarnations of the internet had mainly resulted in something positive for the industry: a new book format, the ebook. For a time, as the financial crisis began to threaten not the book but the physical book trade, most notably causing the bankruptcy of large retail chain Borders, the internet was proving more of a boon than a problem, offering a new revenue stream under challenging circumstances. However, the Internet continued to evolve and created more subtle problems for the publishing industry around new consumption contexts. Web 2.0, "referred to as the Web of people, the Web 2.0, the Web of Communication, or the Read-Write Web." (Kumar 2018, 65), created online retail, which brought a new complexity to the marketplace for books, one that publishers have been pondering how to deal with ever since. Although these effects were relatively invisible initially, the Web 2.0 era, when combined with existing forms of digital technology, would affect all businesses and society in numerous crucial ways and reconfigure all marketplaces, too. This was especially true for publishing and the recording industry because both had long relied upon selling a single kind of product, made visible through a mixture of mass circulation newspaper and magazine review pages, bestseller lists, and television chart shows. This ability of mainstream publishers and record companies to tap this mass visibility for their works had become as much of an accepted part of the industry as their industrial business models based around economies of scale. Surprisingly, one of the most significant changes came from the new type of shelving of their online retailers.

The more virtual form of online retail to which Web 2.0 gave birth, introduced a new consumption context with quite different physical properties than the conventional publishing business, which was based around physical bookseller shelves and physical books. Most notably, this new kind of retail boasted an infinite shelf space, meaning online store owners did not face any fears over opportunity costs. They could stack their virtual shelves with whatever they wished without worrying about taking up space for some other item that may sell better. The effect of this infinite shelving led to Chris Anderson's identification of what he termed The Long Tail. The Long Tail refers to the parts of a statistical distribution that can be graphed based on popularity on the y-axis and instances of specific book titles or, in Anderson's music industry example, individual songs on the x-axis. In such a distribution, the hits or the bestsellers, the most popular titles or songs that Anderson essentially suggests had tended to rule the publishing and the music industries before the internet (Anderson 2009, 2), from the left

side of the distribution. They dominate to such an extent that the graph tails off, leaving the much smaller distribution that composes the right side of the graph to seem almost insignificant.

This Long Tail distribution graph resembles my earlier island paradise analogy with the authors, publishers, editors, and media with their bestsellers visible on the left looking down into the undifferentiated ocean of the Long Tail on the right, a mass so insignificant there seemed to be no need for island's surface—the publishing industry—inhabitants to pay much attention. For example, there would be no need for the publishing industry to offer this mass of readers a service of any kind because the booksellers would cover that. There would be no need to engage these individuals because the authors were the only notable individuals from the point of view of the publishing industry.

Yet, Anderson did begin to dig into this right-sided tail, and what he found was that online retail, which was relatively novel at the time, had already started to affect what we had thought was the book market, as represented by the physical booksellers that dotted the island's coast. From a commercial point of view, Anderson's surprising discovery was that due to the increase in virtual shelving space on the internet, the Long Tail had begun to comprise a whole shadow market in its own right:

> From the perspective of a store like Wal-Mart, the music industry stops at less than 60,000 tracks. However, for online retailers like Rhapsody, the market is seemingly never-ending. Not only is every one of Rhapsody's top 60,000 tracks streamed at least once each month, but the same is true for its top 100,000, top 200,000, and top 400,000—even its top 600,000, top 900,000, and beyond.

Moreover, "As fast as Rhapsody adds tracks to its library, those songs find an audience, even if it's just a handful of people every month, somewhere in the world. This is the Long Tail" (Anderson 2009, 22).

This Long Tail effect had already begun to dilute the established market for books and music, the one agreed upon by the people of the traditional publishing industry who lived on the island and still believed their pre-artifact system paradise was functioning unproblematically. Indeed, it was difficult to appreciate the significance as the types of items sold within the Long Tail tended to be obscure items that few bought. These were not rival bestsellers. They were the kinds of books or records which may have been invisible before the internet arrived. The problem for traditional publishers was that

once eCommerce stores started to fill their infinite shelves, the competition between the big hits and The Long Tail steadily grew to the point where the latter even began to cannibalise the sales of hits and bestsellers, as Anderson put it: "Number one is still number one, but the sales that go with that are not what they once were" (Anderson 2009, 2). Another problem was that this new mode of commerce gradually revealed the relatively complicated interplay between publishers and record companies, the mass media, physical retail outlets and industrial-style business models that leveraged economies of scale. The various affordances of the web effectively attacked each part of this existing mixture at once, rendering all less stable.

In Chris Anderson's evocative image, the tendency to imagine the longer right-sided tail of the distribution as insignificant had imposed a kind of waterline. Industries such as publishing and the recording industry had been able to live a relatively settled high life somewhere near the top of the left side of the distribution, on an island of mass media-supported physical bookshelves full of only the bestsellers or hits. As I have already stated, this had been the case for much of the twentieth century and much of the nineteenth. These products were, as Anderson put it: "the products that [were] popular enough to be above [….] the waterline [which represented] the economic threshold for that category" and the ones which were therefore "profitable enough to be offered through distribution channels with scarce capacity, which is to say the shelf space demands of most major retailers" (Anderson 2009, 25). These were the products that many readers and music listeners in the twentieth century had effectively believed to be *the* (only) products. With its infinite shelving space, the arrival of eCommerce effectively drained the surrounding ocean, revealing "much, much more under the current waterline than above it" (25-26).

One effect of the sudden visibility of The Long Tail has been to slowly degrade the prestige of the bestseller and the artists behind them, revealing the more prosaic reality behind the assumed popularity of the few genius authors or rock stars who everyone believed had topped the charts and bestseller lists through their skill and talent alone. Whilst such bestsellers presumably did have some genuine talent, their success was revealed as partially resulting from a carefully managed marketplace distortion. Indeed, such authors and rock stars owe much of their success to what publishing scholar Richard Nash terms "humanity's first stab at artificial scarcity" (Nash 2013, 21). One that was "artful enough that we forgot it was a contrivance." (21) Other publishing

scholars endorse this idea, with Bhaskar terming it the "creativity myth", the myth being "the idea that creation and creativity are intrinsic goods" (Bhaskar 2016, n.p). This myth elevates the author and their works in line with the high volume of books produced through economies of scale. Moreover, Nash's phrase artificial scarcity is a good fit for the normative business model of the traditional book industry and how the profitability of its island paradise had more accurately derived from several strategic moves in a carefully orchestrated playbook.

If we list the island's secrets, we can see how this happened. Richard Nash's "What is the Business of Literature" (2013) offers a good commentary on these secrets, so I will rely on him. The first move of any self-respecting modern publisher involved leveraging economies of scale to ensure a low cost per printed book copy—"marginal cost always declines (that is, the cost to print each additional book falls)…". This meant that if book prices remained relatively stable, as they tended to in the industry, then "the more you print and sell, the more profitable you are…". The second move was to ensure a lack of competition for the book titles that publishers released onto the market by creating an illusion of scarcity. Nash suggests that this was achieved through fostering the idea that only a select few authors had the talent when, in reality, the idea of scarcity was carefully imposed for commercial reasons, with publishers building the artifice around authorial genius and the resulting copyright. The third move was to leverage publishers' privileged access to the mass market, affording them a vast audience for the many copies they printed. The fourth move was to keep the book's production out of site, which was helped by the prohibitive cost of book production. (Nash 2013, 22-23).

The problem for the industry was that a mixture of pre-existing digital technology and the newer paradigm of Web 2.0 was about to challenge the traditional publishing model from several angles, rendering the benefits of economies of scale potentially toothless and creating a problem of an abundance of book titles to rival the carefully arranged scarcity. We have already seen how the Long Tail served to destabilise the prestige of the authors and rock stars to some extent, so leaving aside the economies of scale point for the moment, I will begin with the third and fourth aspects of the modern publishing playbook and the story of how the internet changed them. One way in which Web 2.0 destabilised the mass media was by building on Web 1.0's read-only internet, which was nevertheless a lot more distributed than the comparatively few mass media titles, and then adding a component of two-way engagement that prised people away

from their televisions, their national radio stations, newspapers and magazines and in offering a much more distributed hyperlinked collection of websites. As Thompson puts it, this great migration of everyday focus from mass media to micro media is well enough known to most of us (Thompson 2010, 246-247).

From a commercial perspective, at least, the health of the publishing business required large sales to pay the bills and to gain the benefits of the economies of scale that they set out to profit from. The mass media would beam the results of the country's latest five to ten long-awaiting releases to the readers who swam around the island, but this was now in jeopardy. As Stephen Page, chief executive of Faber and Faber, put it: "Control of the market—expressed mainly by publishers' access to the mass market—has been undone to some degree, this time by the digital revolution.". Standing as evidence that this happened at all, Page also gives us a year, further noting that, in his view, "2011 may have signalled the beginning of the end of the era of publishers-with-access-to-the-mass-market as the dominant model for book publishing" (Page, S, 2012, n.p). While Page struck a defiant tone in the same article, noting that it "did not signal an end to the opportunity presented by writing or publishing more generally", his admission of the loss of privileged access to a mass market was a significant marker of the new complexity in the market for publishing products.

The loss of mass media did much to drain the ocean levels around the island upon which modern publishing had been built. Still, it is perhaps more accurate to suggest that the whole edifice had already sprung a leak thanks to another aspect of digital technology: digital desktop publishing (DTP). Although DTP had been around for some time, with Web 2.0, it joined two other elements that allowed the number of people writing or producing books to grow. The first element was the large number of tutorials that now littered the more social Web 2.0 incarnation of the internet. The second element came in the form of internet-based services such as print-on-demand. These completed the puzzle by adding distribution possibilities. All of the above made it relatively easy to become an independent or even a self-publisher. Alison Baverstock has noted this latter aspect: "[A] much wider range of people are becoming acquainted with the publishing process through self-publishing (Baverstock 2015, 33). This ease of production has begun to upend publishing in ways that compound the new difficulties of making readers aware of new books. As Thompson puts it, citing the testimony of one of the publishers he studied: "It's become easier to publish and harder to sell – that's the

paradox. Any old sod can publish a book now, but actually getting it out to the public has become much trickier." (Thompson, 2010, 238-239)

So, where did this leave the publishing market after the pool has been drained? Instead of a relatively modest traditional book market based on traditional publishing, this influx of small press publishing, self-publishing, and print-on-demand publishing meant an even greater abundance of new book titles were now published each year. As Thompson puts it, a new challenge for the publisher has become "how to get your books noticed among the mêlée, picked out by readers as sufficiently worthy of their time and attention to be bought by them." (Thompson 2010, 243) Citing the "number of new books published in the US each year before 1980 [as being] probably under 50,000…", he tells us that, by 1998, "the number of new books published greatly increased, reaching nearly 200,000 by 1998." This number continued to grow: "By 2004, the number had risen to over 275,000 […] reaching an estimated 316,000 by 2010." However, importantly, he also notes that "the full picture is more complicated than these figures would suggest because there has also been an enormous increase in the publication of reprints and titles printed on demand—what [US ISBN issuer] Bowker classifies as 'non-traditional' outputs" (239). Indeed, it is in these non-traditional outputs that the abundance of books today begins to show through.

Non-traditional outputs are explicitly driven by production techniques that mix computerised desktop publishing and the internet, with the latter acting as a distribution mechanism and offering new printing arrangements. As Thompson confirms, "The non-traditional outputs include books released by companies specializing in self-publishing, like Lulu and Xlibris, but the vast majority of these non-traditional outputs are scanned versions of public domain works that are being marketed on the web and made available through print-on-demand vendors" (Thompson 2010, 240). It is these scanned versions, in particular, but also the newly written and self- or independently-published book titles that are heavily redolent of the vast ocean of publishing that formerly sat closer to the metaphorical Long Tail seabed. At the same time, the internet has also made it easier for traditional publishers to keep existing books in print via print-on-demand technology (Gallagher 2014), so they effectively add to this. Thompson's figures are for the US market, but he suggests the "pattern for the UK is very similar..." (Thompson 2010, 241). Returning to the numbers for America, another shocking insight, this time from Greco, suggests that out of the "4,437,308 new books [that] were published between

1911 and 2011 […] almost half [had been] released between 2000 and 2011." (Greco 2013, 33)

In concluding this section, I have suggested that the primary way the Internet has contributed towards a more complex marketplace is through the Long Tail effect that resulted from the Internet-driven ability for online retailers to surpass the relatively limited shelving space of physical retailers. When deciding what books to place on their shelves, this expansion of virtual retail real estate was able to bypass any fears around opportunity cost. The effect on the market was to grow the number of previously invisible non-standard book titles available. This was not that significant on its own, but the combined impact of Web 2.0 has been. For example, when Web 2.0 also started to distract customer attention from the mass media and direct it to their smartphones, laptops, favourite websites, and social media accounts and to offer the information and tools to publish content themselves, a vast abundance of published literature began to surface that upset the delicate and less complex eco-system of the traditional publishing world. Essentially, this led to a situation where a publisher could not rely on mass media visibility for their book titles at the expense of all others on the market and where the market itself had grown so fast that traditionally published book titles jostled with ever more competition from an increased number of both standard and non-standard titles. As this picture developed during the early years of the current century, the industry found itself in a dilemma as to whether to ignore the more complex market and carry on as usual or change to accommodate it.

Industry Responses to the New Complexity

We can illustrate the two sides of this dilemma through the industry's response to this new complexity, a response that has involved a split between some in publishing who consider it wise to try to engage with this new complexity and others who think it best to ignore it and to go back to business as usual. So how can it be that both orientations can co-exist and what does this mean for the question of whether more of a complex marketplace automatically means more of a requirement for customer-centricity? Is the current situation a mere blip, a crisis that has passed and resolved in favour of the traditional print and book trade model? Or is this model on its way out in favour of an increasing requirement for more customer-centricity? Finding an answer to these

questions is important to be able to later assess the potential for the adoption of lean-agile approaches in the industry. By way of an answer to the first question, I argue in this section that although the book market has become more complex in ways that require more customer-centricity, the book trade still offers a place of visibility for the printed book of the traditional publishing industry and a way to differentiate their wares from non-standard releases. This explains why some in the industry have not felt the need to shift their business too drastically whereas there have also been moves to move towards more customer-centricity too.

In the years around the end of the first decade of the current century, publishers first seemed to wake up to the problems of the new complexity. This was a time of much upheaval as the financial crisis took down a significant key physical retail partner. This was also a moment when the ebook was making waves and when some of the earliest calls for publishing to become more agile were issued. All of the above suggests that this was perhaps the first point at which parts of the industry started to at least think about their relationships with their end customers. However, this was far from the only response, with some publishers doing little to respond. As Thompson notes, "Publishers were slow to wake up to the fact that readers were migrating to [the] new pastures [of the internet]…". He suggests this is because "They struggled to understand the lay of the land". Indeed, "Stuck in the old publishing world, most publishers still thought of retailers as their customers and paid little attention to readers. They had failed to see that the information environment of which the old publishing world was part had crumbled around them and was being replaced by a new information environment in which communication flows were more fluid and data was becoming a new source of power" (Thompson 2021, 214).

Why does the Long Tail mean an increased need for customer-centricity, though? One way to think about this is to take an analogy from relational database design and consider it a matter of changed cardinality that involves the number of elements in a given set and the relationships between them. In the traditional business model for publishing, the publisher and their proxy, the author (plus agents, etc), acted as one unit, drawing many eyeballs to the one book title through the mass media in a one-to-many (1:N) relationship. As the ocean around my metaphorical island of modern publishing drained away, the ability to produce new books and keep old ones in print via print-on-demand grew, revealing many books that might never have been published in the old publishing system. Now these manuscripts were given form and began to surface.

Richard Nash (2013, 17) has talked about how unpublished manuscripts have sometimes been given a second life due to what I am describing as the abundance of the Long Tail. As a result, the 1:N relationship of the traditional publisher to their audience began to flatten out into something less hierarchical and more rhizomatic beginning to resemble the one-to-one (1:1) relationship of an unsuccessful self-publisher to their audience. Once the water level had diminished, publishers found themselves diminished too as they arrived back fresh from the printers with a huge volume of books to sell to a Long Tail of people who were already publishing their own, each with their own social media and web-based broadcast channels.

If we map this problem to Dave Snowden's Cynefin problem spaces, we can see that what had metaphorically happened here was that the previously well-manicured paths of the modern publishing island had grown over to become the much more treacherous territory of the Long Tail, making a more uncertain and variegated landscape. Here is a parallel with the fall of the mass manufacturing paradigm in the car industry, which was discussed in the opening chapter when reviewing the history of the Classical Lean paradigm. This is apt because, as Maxwell notes, modern publishing has long been tied to the industrial mode of manufacture and benefits from the "economic advantage or efficiency in scale" that comes from "mechanized industrial production", meaning "the unit cost in a run of 1,000 is much less than in a run of 100 because the sunk cost of preparing that first page is amortized over the whole run." (Maxwell 2019, 6) However, economies of scale are not infallible. For example, what happens when only a hundred or fifty or twenty people want to buy a published book on its launch day, as has sometimes begun to be the case, and as happened, by analogy, in the American car manufacturing industry of the nineteen-sixties? What good is setting up the machines to make a thousand books to gain a small discount on a print run when most of that print run goes to waste?

It is perhaps at this point, when publishers had surveyed the more fragmented market, done their maths in a new way and worked out the decreasing value of the once unassailable benefits of an economy of scale, that we began to receive calls for more customer-centricity, calls to learn more about niche customers, and indeed the point where some publishers and publishing insiders might have been likely to stumble across lean or agile along the way. This is unsurprising because, as discussed in the opening chapter, lean-agile is very much built to probe this new kind of barren landscape. Moreover, the Classical Lean that it had a relationship with had dealt with how to

operate as a business without access to the mass production resources that had previously been required to access the mass market, working in small batches. More recently, agile software development and the lean startup approach have learned to deal with this in the current economy, using the internet and digital technology tools to do so. Metaphorically speaking, the lean-agile approach knows how to learn the names of the people it meets and how to engage with them in a manner that probes new smaller niches. This is likely to be relevant for publishers because there are now, in these complex markets, a lot of people to belatedly introduce themselves to, having required little in the way of customer relationships historically.

This is a shift from coveting the bestsellers list to coveting customer relationships and customer engagements. Publishers may still obsess over bestsellers but their influence is partially waning. As Chris Anderson puts it: "...although we still obsess over hits, they are not quite the economic force they once were". Moreover, on the question of where best to reach customers post-mass market, he offers the following: "Where are those fickle consumers going instead? No single place. They are scattered to the winds as markets fragment into countless niches. The one big growth area is the Web, but it is an uncategorizable sea of a million destinations, each defying in its own way the conventional logic of media and marketing" (Anderson 2009, 2). As Snowden's Cynefin framework shows, there are different rules for managing the kinds of complex landscapes (Snowden 2005, 47) that the now-drained territory around the island is now akin to, than there were for modern publishing. Indeed, this dilemma is at the centre of the problem that I am trying to explore here. The new market landscape is based on a network of complex one-to-one relationships or, to stretch the cardinality metaphor further, one-to-one-small-segment relationships, with many of these one-to-one-small-segments running together in parallel. This scenario is far from the simple cause-and-effect of the one-to-many relationship of old.

So contemporary publishers have a decision to make. This itself is not new. Having to juggle resources to make a profit is not unusual for publishers. They have always done it, but this particular kind of decision—whether to continue to work within their traditional publishing logic—is newer. Robinson sums this up in a recent issue of the publishing studies journal *Logos*:

> Some new commercial methods in publishing processes, which make more extensive use of digital techniques, are showing the possibility of changing conventional habits profoundly. These methods relate to consumer

relationships, collaborative communities, and commercial ecosystems. Although the changes may sound revolutionary, 'evolutionary' would be more accurate, because the new approaches still fulfil publishing's mission. Only they do so a bit differently. This shift of focus, towards consumers, communities, and ecosystems, is proving valuable in other industries. Finding ways to adapt them may be one of the leading opportunities facing publishing today. (Robinson 2021, 2)

Robinson's point captures the way that this probing of complexity must be done through customer relationships but it is also notable that he also sees it as another evolution that the industry must undertake and as an opportunity rather than a whole revolution in publishing mission.

Some longer-term benefits likely exist for publishers who want to move in this direction. One benefit of moving towards more customer-centricity is the potential to address wasteful business practices. As noted in my introduction, the chief executive of the Independent Publishers Guild, Bridget Shine has suggested that the industry needs to become better at printing to "actual requirements" and "to move past piling books high and gathering dust in warehouses" (Shine quoted in Brown 2023, n.p). Still, it is notable that, like Robinson, she did not speak in revolutionary terms either, noting that "Traditional distribution is clearly still essential" too. We can take both Robinson and Shine's contributions as a hint that there may be a need for some kind of concurrent publishing paradigm here rather than a move towards customer-centricity only. In economic terms, this amounts to a fundamental trade-off between reducing costs by economies of scale as has always been the trick or of finding new ways to print fewer books more precisely for those who want them. If a publisher, say, got to the point, as I'm sure some do (this is not the kind of thing a publisher would shout about), where their cost savings on the discount from leveraging economies of scale were outweighed by their costs of warehousing and pulping returns, then common business sense would suggest that this was not economically sustainable. This represents one kind of economic waste.

However, there are other types of waste too that may gradually come to concern the industry more and more, namely the environmental waste caused by traditional publishing practices, a side-effect of their industrial trappings (warehouses, large print runs). There is evidence that removing this kind of waste, too, can have benefits for publishers, although perhaps counterintuitively at first. Indeed, publisher Richard Charkin acknowledges that whilst one "potential barrier to reducing emissions in the

publishing industry could be associated with higher costs" (2023, 31), he also points to research by Ambec and Lanoie that suggests otherwise: "improving a company's environmental performance can lead to better economic or financial performance, and not necessarily to an increase in cost." (Ambec and Lanoie 2008, 45) In this context, the argument that traditional publishers cannot move on from economies of scale begins to look more like a wilful creation of waste based on a cultural reluctance to change than a truly economic issue. Indeed, Charkin notes that although the "typical cost of distribution is [only] 6–10 per cent of net sales", such a percentage "takes little account of how many times a book is handled from manufacture to purchase." Indeed, Charkin estimates "that on average a book in the United Kingdom is handled at least 20 times". If this is correct, this indicates an incredibly wasteful process. As he puts it, this "may be okay for a £50 book but makes little sense for a £10 paperback." (Charkin 2023, 31)

Given this evidence, it can seem that a move to customer-centricity is a no-brainer for publishing. This perhaps explains the evangelical nature of some of the calls. Still, the issue is more complicated than this. We can see this in how when print sales and booksellers began to do well financially again, as they are presently (Smith 2022), the issue of a move to customer-centricity seems to find itself put to the side. Indeed, it has even begun to seem like it was perhaps overblown in the first place. Thompson pondered this just after the last economic recession.

> Are the difficulties experienced by many trade publishers in the period since 2008–9 just a temporary blip, a brief period of structural readjustment from which the publishing industry will emerge stronger and fitter than before, ready to continue on the path of ever greater output and growth? Or is this something of a watershed—a moment in the long history of the book when the path of gradual evolution tips over into something else, when the key players in the field find that their customary ways of doing things no longer work and they no longer have the wherewithal to meet the new challenges they face? The truth is that no one knows—this is an industry facing an uncertain future. There are arguments – signs would perhaps be a better word – that could incline you in either direction. (Thompson 2010 404-405)

So do the improved book sales in recent years suggest that the dilemma of whether publishing needs to change can now be put to bed? Or is this more of a temporary blip?

Revisiting the same question more recently, Thompson, for one, remains unconvinced that the effects of the digital revolution that motivated the industry's half-turn towards customer-centricity represent only a temporary blip. However, he does acknowledge that the traditional industry has done well.

> Despite the disruptive potential of the digital revolution and the turbulence that has characterized the book publishing industry since the dawn of the third millennium, this industry has fared remarkably well—and much better than many other sectors of the media and creative industries. Book revenues have not collapsed, print books have not disappeared and even brick-and-mortar bookstores have begun to make a modest comeback: counter to the predictions of many prophets of doom, the book publishing apocalypse has not come to pass (or, at least, not yet). (Thompson 2021, 483).

This is counterintuitive but seems to be true. So, how have traditional publishers continued to use economies of scale and keep their ageing mass machinery running in the face of the newly complex market wrought by the Long Tail? One clue is that the booksellers who were dotted around on my metaphorical island still survive as local branches of Waterstone's today. Even with the loss of the mass media, they were already pitched on fairly high ground and were almost as well loved and as parsable to many as printed books.

This continuing physical bookshop visibility perhaps explains why many publishers have largely fallen back onto the book trade as their last hope of gaining something like mass visibility. Their agreements with booksellers are long-standing, and the two share a symbiotic relationship. Besides, these booksellers are free of non-standard competition. This is not just because they do not have the space physically but because both bookshops and traditional publishers want to retain a sense of differentiation for the industry. It is possible (just about) to stand in a conventional bookshop such as Waterstones and to believe yourself to be dealing with the genuine, authentic book publishing world. The potential for visibility and differentiation offered by the large book chains that grew up in the nineteen-eighties has aided this. The economies of scale still largely make sense in this realm, although I will debate this as a recurring theme. The front table and opportunities for display in these physical stores *have* proven effective for publishers in some senses. As Thompson confirms, when you enter one of these stores as a prospective book buyer, the "front-of-store area that is in your field of vision is a thoroughly commodified space". However, he also adds that "most of the books you see will be there by virtue of the fact that the publisher has paid for placement, either directly by means of a placement fee (that is, co-op advertising) or indirectly by means of extra discount" (Thompson 2010, 238).

Therein lies the kicker. These spaces of visibility have helped drive revenue and differentiation for publishers but they have also eaten into publisher's profits. It is the

high retail discount costs that provide the main downside to this visibility strategy. Speaking in a US context, Thompson tells us that "Roughly speaking, it costs around a dollar a book to put a new hardback on the front-of-store table in a major chain, and around $10,000 to put a new title on front-of-store tables in all the chain's stores for two weeks (typically the minimum period)" (Thompson 2010, 238). However, not every medium-to-large publisher can afford these prices. There is little chance that many publishers beyond those in the business of signing expensive big-name authors or shipping huge palettes of hardback books off to supermarkets, as the biggest big-name trade publishers still do, are in the business of anything like this kind of mass production. Yet, the wider book publishing industry remains somewhat profitable too. The trick is for publishers to find ways to squeeze enough out of specific large-ish market segments to make economies of scale work in the present day. Indeed, there is no reason why the craggier, more complex marketplace for books cannot still have some elevation, some high points that represent more significant sub-mass customer segments. One question that arises from this for publishers is how long they can or should continue with this strategy.

There are numerous problems with falling back on the trade from a cost point of view. For example, Thompson further notes that the per unit economics of the arrangement quoted in the previous paragraph means that "the publisher is spending 8 per cent of the revenue from [a book on a front table] just to put it on the table at the front of the store—and that's assuming that the book is actually sold. Visibility does not come cheap." (Thompson 2010, 238) Moreover, Thompson also notes not only the expense but also the short window of opportunity that such retail book placement strategies have to be effective: "Today a book has just a few weeks—typically no more than six, and in practice often less—to show whether it's going to move". Furthermore, "if it's not moving, then it will be pulled out of promotions and the marketing spend will be wound down or cut off. It's simply too expensive to keep a book on a front-of-store table if it's not selling pretty briskly" (267). Given the rate of returns in the book publishing business, which "For most large trade publishers […] average [at] around 30 per cent" (285), this arrangement involves not only a lot of expense but much financial risk as well.

The reason that physical bookseller real estate is so expensive, of course, is because of the opportunity cost on the part of the bookstore. They have always had limited space and do not want to pass up the opportunity to make their retail discount. However, it is

also the case that well-known physical bookstores do have less expensive virtual shelving these days to augment their physical space. Could publishers benefit from this? The signs are not good. As Thompson points out, virtual shelving space is not as differentiated as physical spaces (Thompson 2021, 214). The same goes for Amazon's online space. Moreover, publishers do not have much control over these spaces (190-191). Furthermore, the internet marketplace is a place of much broader commercial distraction for readers. Publishers know that the industry is now not merely competing for book, music and film customers but new media too: "Books are just one type of media product, jostling for attention with many other flashier, noisier, brasher products of the electronic age" (243). This shows there are answers for publishers, but none as easy as the answers that existed before the internet, and it could get worse.

For example, one wonders what would happen if some new financial crash were to occur, a financial crash that for some reason took most book chains with it, this time leaving publishers selling primarily through Amazon, not least since publishers still frequently have no sales structure of their own. Or what if a new law restricting or levying the movement of vast amounts of books back and forth was to come into effect? Indeed, Richard Charkin (2023) has raised potential environmental issues that may be ahead. There is also no saying this could be more than a moral imperative and become financial too. There is certainly a reputational risk here. This is not to say that publishers are not alive to any risks, they generally are, and they are generally trying to grow, but it does seem true that they are not as alive to the risks of not moving towards more customer-centricity and not necessarily placing too much emphasis on finding a way to set up their own direct sales structures. Indeed, one recent adaptation has been to adapt to more not less physical third-party trade.

Indeed, some publishers have begun to search for new customer relationships in places further afield than the physical or online stores of more traditional established trade booksellers by embracing more non-traditional retail. In an article in *The Bookseller,* Caroline Carpenter noted that "Book sales through non-traditional retailers" were "booming" as recently as 2015, when "publishers and retailers" began to sell into retailers such as Anthropologie" (alongside curtains, cushions and hardware) and other high-street stores not known for books such as "Urban Outfitters" and "T K Maxx" (Carpenter 2016, n.p). Jon Stefani, a representative of Quarto Publishing confirmed that these moves to non-standard outlets were a bid to foster new customer relationships for seller and publisher-alike noting that the idea was "to put stuff before people that they

haven't seen before." (Stefani quoted in Carpenter 2016, n.p). Much of this idea conforms to literary agent Jonny Geller's idea, discussed at the outset in my introduction, that one way for publishers to be agile would be to sell to non-traditional outlets.

Whilst this is a case of publishers being more sociable beyond the book trade, this does not necessarily make much of a move past a third-party retail trade and, in effect, just broadens the retail trade model. In terms of marking this as a lean-agile move, it is likely more a form of descriptive agility that merely signifies more business flexibility, more akin to Fuchshuber's definition of agile than the efforts taken to become more customer-centric that are characteristic of lean-agile approaches. Given that we have already discussed the potentially high costs and high risks of trade publishing, drawbacks that notwithstanding the advantages of visibility and differentiation from both non-standard books and the prevailing tech industry that bookshops can provide, then I would argue, along with Robinson and Thompson, that making no move towards customer-centricity through digital technology remains a missed opportunity. After all, internet-adjacent customer-centricity and the potential for direct sales *are* other options for publishing. Even though this involves taking on the vagaries of the internet, selling directly would give publishers at least sixty per cent (the standard third-party retail discount, online and offline) back on each sale.

In concluding this section, I have suggested that the new complex markets created by the Long Tail, with their barren and craggy metaphorical landscapes, would require publishers to find a way to become more customer-centric if they want to reach these smaller market niches. Such complex markets require a different form of management —fostering closer relationships and increased engagement with customer niches. Yet, I also noted that there are still large enough customer segments and opportunities to differentiate publishing from other industries available through the book trade meaning that a rush towards customer-centricity at the cost of moving away from the book trade is likely overly reckless and naive. Finally, and complicating this issue further, I also noted that although working through the book trade provides benefits, it is also costly for publishers and can be somewhat limiting whilst remaining the core of the business. If certain pitfalls were to occur in retail as part of some financial or environmental crisis or legislation, publishers could find themselves working only with the likes of Amazon to sell books, a fate few publishers would relish. Here, a move towards using the internet and digital technology to better take more control of their consumption context

seems an eminently sensible proactive direction to move towards. All of this points to a path to which publishers could create an innovative yet realistic concurrent publishing paradigm that could build on Robinson's idea of developing customer-centricity through digital technology as a form of evolution without drastically ripping up the playbook via some kind of digital revolution.

Scholarly Responses 1: The Order of the Book Perspective

One way to sketch the possible contours of an innovative yet realistic concurrent publishing paradigm would be by closely examining how publishing scholars have responded to these calls for more customer-centricity. Indeed, I will break down the various issues along four thematic lines to give more clarity to my argument from this point. These four thematic lines will question how the term product is understood in publishing, how business models are understood, what is meant by customer relationships, and how customer engagement is understood. The following two sections will reverse the sequence of the last and open with a discussion of a perspective in publishing studies that broadly goes against the need for more customer-centricity and is certainly wary of a perceived need to get too close to the internet. I term this the Order of the Book perspective for reasons I will come to in a moment. Most broadly, the general position of this perspective is that publishing should remain quite traditional as a way to differentiate itself from the rival publishing platform of the internet. In this sense, the Order of the Book perspective is a useful corrective to moving too far away from the traditional make-up of the industry and points to one side of the concurrency that I wish to sketch, the realistic side.

The Order of the Book, at least as I present it here, is not a well-known perspective but rather a heading under which I collect several similar perspectives shared by a few publishing scholars. In making this classification, I do not mean to fix these scholars beneath some definite umbrella forever and do so merely for my current purposes. I acknowledge that their work is quite nuanced and diverse in its own right. Although I will certainly attend to these differences where relevant, I am primarily concerned with staking out quite broad orientations here. Nevertheless, if I were to make an educated guess as to whether the scholars whom I place beneath this umbrella would likely object, I would guess that they would not object too much because their work has

substantial overlaps. Indeed they often work together. For example, Angus Phillips and Miha Kovač, often write in tandem (Phillips and Kovač 2022; Kovač et al. 2019), sometimes do not (Phillips 2014). Moreover, they are united behind the idea of the Order of the Book which belongs to their colleague and sometimes co-author Adriaan Van Der Weel (2010).

Before reviewing this perspective, I should clarify what I mean by it. To this end, I will begin by describing the basic contours of the Order of the Book perspective. Although the *phrase* Order of the Book derives from Adriaan Van Der Weel (2010), the Order of the Book *perspective* that I define here derives more from the collective work of Phillips (2014), Kovač et al. (2019), and Phillips and Kovač (2022) than from Van Der Weel's original phrase. The actual phrase relates to Van Der Weel's idea that much of our understanding of information in the twenty-first century is still influenced by the form of the book: "Even today, amid the turbulent speed at which digital communications are usurping roles previously played by the book, most of our information habits remain book based." Van Der Weel further states that he uses the phrase Order of the Book "to indicate" the "extent to which we are still governed by the book and its institutions" (Van Der Weel 2010, 254). Whilst that general sense still sits behind what I term the Order of the Book perspective, I would instead suggest that what I mean by this perspective relates to more recent work of Phillips and Kovač, in particular, work that often focuses more narrowly on how the publishing industry in the current century should ideally not stray too far from the single-product of the book, or from the book trade.

Indeed, Kovač and Phillips have gone some way towards debunking the idea that the Order of the Book should be thrown out of shape too much by the digital revolution. Their idea is that this order should remain intact even despite the arrival of digital technology. To this end, they take steps to protect it by redefining the book to incorporate ebooks and audiobooks as belonging to a continuing sense of books in the book industry rather than something more akin to the internet. They differentiate the book from the internet by suggesting that all books have the following characteristics. To qualify as a book, a published artefact must have "A minimum length", an "Emphasis on textual content", "boundaries to its form", and a linearly ordered "book information architecture" with a beginning, a middle and an end (Kovač et al. 2019, 324). Moreover, they cite the fact that the more linear book-like "vanilla ebook" (Phillips and Kovač 2022, 6) has retained more popularity than the less fixed "enhanced

ebooks" or "books as apps" (Thompson 2021, 69) that were trialled a decade ago as evidence that readers prefer even the digital ebook in a more conventional book-like form: "The book in digital form has been the subject of much experimentation, but what is striking is that the most commercially successful format is the vanilla e-book, mirroring the structure (architecture) of the printed book." (Phillips and Kovač 2022, 6)

In terms of what they view as the central product of the industry, the Order of the Book perspective insists that the book (in print, ebook or, latterly, audiobook format) should remain the central product of the publishing industry. Whilst there is no evidence that they would necessarily rule out other kinds of products, the fact that their overall interest is in shoring up the book, in particular, indicates that they see it as central to the industry. Also, the fact that, as we shall see, their work spends so much time differentiating it from the internet suggests that they are wedded to creating an updated version of traditional publishing where the main aim is to co-opt digital books into the normative, traditional book publishing world and to remove them from their partial context as a product of the tech industry. What they term their "three-body model of the book" confirms this through the mention of its bounds set by the printing press: "There are three elements to the three-body model of the book: an information architecture represented most closely in the physical book but also apparent in the vanilla e-book and audiobook; the book's position within the Order of the Book as a carrier for the communication of knowledge and information; and the business model of the book which offers boundaries largely set by the economics of the printing press." (Phillips and Kovač 2022, 61)

In terms of business model, this reference to the boundaries of their three-body model of the book as largely being set by *the economics of the printing press* suggests they remain faithful to the traditional trade business of publishing, too. Although this also ties it closely to product form. Indeed, the idea of beginning to tamper with the boundedness of the printed book gets short-shrift: "Book authors are rarely keen to update their works every five minutes, and most prefer the book's linear narrative structure." They also suggest that this is true for readers: "In turn, readers still want something apart from the Internet that is fixed and internally coherent—they want to read text that has been reworked a number of times to achieve something that is considered and well structured." (Phillips and Kovač 2022, 64) Although this type of response can seem to hint that the Order of the Book perspective is overly romantic about publishing and perhaps not thinking enough about the business context, I would

caution against such a conclusion. There are plenty of signs that the publishing scholars behind this perspective are thinking about the place of traditional publishing in a twenty-first-century context and are working hard to consider how to differentiate the industry from a tech industry that could easily co-opt it.

For example, Phillips reminds us of the reinforcing relationship between the completeness and concreteness of the book and the effectiveness of copyright protection. Noting that the "tension in the copyright system is that it has to balance access to content against the rights of the creator", he further notes that: "This tension is eased by creating a distinction between the idea of a work and its expression. Ideas cannot be copyrighted and are therefore free to all; the expression of the idea in whatever form is protected." In this sense, what form a book arrives in matters when it comes to protecting copyright because it is the fixity of the special expression rather than the special expression which adds up to copyright. Moreover, its fixed form matters too because if it did not then the copyright could be changing all the time. To offer an example of the latter: "extensive editorial work on a novel would not allow another person to claim co-authorship." (Phillips 2014, 52) or to renew the copyright iteratively. I should note, too, that this holds for both vanilla digital books and printed books in ways that it does not hold for other forms of more open publication on the internet where copyright is much more open to question. In short, this is one very good business reason to keep the publishing industry differentiated from the internet.

Whilst there is nothing about publishers building *customer* relationships here, Order of the Book theorists do consider how the *reader* forms a relationship with the book in opposition to how they form shallower relations with the tech industry. Indeed, they frame the existing, conventional reading experience as a selling point for the industry. They signal this through their extended and carefully nuanced focus on reading modes and use these modes to differentiate the publishing industry from the tech industry further. For example, Phillips and Kovač note the difference between the "functional" reading type that is "necessary to obtain information or to communicate for work." This style of reading is composed of the "thousands of words" read "each day [that include] work and home emails, texts, social media posts, news bulletins", words that are often read "at great speed" (Phillips and Kovač 2022, 14). Elsewhere, Kovač and others note that this style of reading—which they term "skimming"—differs from "immersive reading (long and medium-sized linear texts, read on screen or paper, such as genre fiction); and deep reading (short and long-form cognitively demanding linear texts such

as poetry, literary fiction and serious non-fiction, predominantly read on paper)." (Kovač et al. 2019, 322) These reading modes offer a productive way for Order of the Book perspectives to differentiate more traditional book-based forms of publishing, augmented with digital books, from the internet and the tech industry more generally.

In terms of customer engagement, Order of the Book scholar's interest is not in a publisher's engagement with their customers but in the depth of the engagement between a community of readers and a richer, slower-paced life lived through books that, again, sits in opposition to how the tech industry keeps people engaged. In a community sense, they suggest books can be owned but also lent out: "A physical product can be owned and passed around friends and family". They can be gifts: "Giving a physical book as a present says something about the recipient and also about the giver." (Phillips and Kovač 2022, 7) Also, books can be a chance to escape smartphones and laptops: "In the digital era" books have become "a refuge from screens for office". They mine the same kind of theme to suggest the idea of a slow book movement:

> If books in digital form enable us to read faster, this may not necessarily be a good thing. To relax, to engage in deep thought are not encouraged by rushing through at speed. Just as we have a movement for slow food—in reaction to fast food—we should be advocating slow books—read aloud to children, broadcast on the radio, or taken at a leisurely pace in whatever format." (Phillips 2014, 45)

In this sense, the Order of the Book perspective is somewhat reader-centric at least, just not via the Internet, and in fact in opposition to it.

Beyond relations with the book itself, Order of the Book scholars extend this differentiation of the book as an alternative to the tech industry to the physical bookseller too. This offers some small nod to the consumption context. Indeed, it brings up an important point about the difference between how information is found online compared to how information is found in bookshops, suggesting that "the Internet works well if you know what you want or are happy to be guided by algorithms", but if this is not the case then the reader can enjoy the "delights of serendipity come from a visit to a physical store" (Phillips and Kovač 2022, 66).

I will close my introduction to the Order of the Book perspective by offering a brief critique of it. In terms of its strengths, this perspective is synonymous with a side of the normative publishing industry that does have its eyes open to the future but wants to

find ways to continue to find a place for the traditional business. This adds up to the realistic side of the innovative yet realistic concurrent publishing paradigm that I argue that the industry needs. To this end, the scholars behind this perspective make some extremely valid points that, taken together, offer a strong argument for a kind of modified continuity of the traditional industry. Arraying digital books more clearly beneath the remit of the publishing industry is smart in this respect. In terms of the publishing business model, it is a signature move of this perspective to respond to twenty-first-century challenges by offering new forms of differentiation from the internet and its proxy, the tech industry. Playing up the reading modes inherent in existing book products and the idea of books being a refuge from screens is also intelligent as a differentiating point. Importantly, these moves do represent a move towards thinking more about the customer, in the narrow sense of what is good for the book reader at least. The perspective also avoids a rush towards the internet or digital technology as a solution for complex markets. It is mindful that the tech industry is a competitor of kinds and one with deep enough pockets to decimate nearby sectors such as publishing.

The weaknesses of the perspective, though, are partially based on some of its strengths. While it is true that arraying all behind their modified version of the book as a primary differentiating strategy does the job offline, it is still limiting for the industry when there are so many opportunities online to increase visibility, even if these ways require a different approach to the customer and do not conform to the same kind of visibility supplied by the trade. Indeed, Sorensen has discussed the magnitude of potential customer sales available in hidden Internet markets (Sorensen 2017, 99). These would go untapped by being too differentiated from the Internet. There is also no discussion of the high costs of remaining wedded to the physical trade alone, serendipity or no serendipity. Besides, the relatively straightforward categorisation of books in any branch of Waterstones is not particularly adventitious when compared to the ramshackle charm of, say, secondhand bookshops where serendipity does rule. Nor do they say anything about the logistic difficulties or the industry's carbon footprint in the context of the economies of scale that attend the trade. Finally, whilst they show some customer-centricity, it is for quite a traditional reader only, perhaps missing many other potential readers, and paying little attention to creating new consumption contexts by which readers might be able to discover new books.

In concluding this section, I have suggested that the Order of the Book guards against becoming too enamoured with internet-based customer-centricity or shifting the core of the publishing business too radically. In a business context, it also caters to many offline selling points and is mostly pragmatic, a realist mode. Nevertheless, there is a nagging sense, particularly when it comes to its suggestion that the book's trade-based business model should remain unchanged, that there is maybe a touch of what Richard Nash would term "Exceptionalism" to this perspective:

> It is the Exceptionalists, the ones who claim the mantle of defender of the book, who undermine the book by claiming that it is a world unto itself, in need of special protection, that its fragility in the face of the behemoth or barbarian du jour (Amazon, the Internet, comic books, the novel, the printing press, illiteracy, literacy, to name but a handful of purported sources of cultural decline) requires insulation, like the skinny kid kept away from the schoolyard and its bullies." (Nash 2013, 16)

Whilst we can discount the idea that Order of the Book theorists are against the printing press, the special protection from the internet is apt. Although, to their credit, adherents to this approach admit that this is their intention. Nevertheless, if potential customers do spend vast amounts of their time staring at screens, might it not be an idea to find new ways to capture some of that attention for the book publishing industry through those screens?

Scholarly Responses 2: The New Publisher Perspective

In contrast to the Order of the Book (OOB) perspective, what I term the New Publisher perspective is extremely keen to capture some of the online attention that the latter eschews. My naming of this approach has its provenance in a conference discussion on the subject of The New Publisher that also culminated in an article by Faber & Faber Chief Executive Stephen Page in the Guardian entitled "The Way Forward for Publishing" (Page 2013). This New Publisher idea was further discussed by Bhaskar (2013), and indeed I would include Bhaskar (2013, 2019), along with Horne (2012), O'Leary (2012), and Nash (2013) as scholars who have evinced New Publisher perspectives. Compared to the OOB perspective, this grouping has differing levels of alignment. Nevertheless, I group them based on the fact that they all advocate for some

accommodation towards making customer-centricity a priority through an engagement with the affordances of the internet. Moreover, they all either directly endorse Page's article, as Bhaskar (2013, 184) does or do that work tallies with it. Having reviewed this perspective, I will close out these latter two sections by asking how I would synthesise the strongest parts of both perspectives to arrive at my model for a concurrent publishing paradigm.

In contrast with the Order of the Book approach, and in terms of defining the product of the industry, Stephen Page does not truly define a concrete product, such as the book, as being at the centre of the industry. Instead, in his *Guardian* article "The Way Ahead for Publishing" that emerged from the New Publisher conference panel, Page leads with a more abstract prescription, suggesting that the work of publishers lies in: "The demonstrable creation of value and the fair sharing of it." (Page, S 2012, n.p) The other writers whom I group under this perspective are less abstract than Page but similarly open to the idea of the industry producing products without being limited by the book. Some remain close to the normative business of the industry and close to the editing of textual content by defining content as the industry's main product, not books. Bhaskar is in this camp: "by, erroneously, defining their role as makers of books, publishers have straitjacketed themselves, missing new formats ripe for publication and so backing themselves into a corner." (Bhaskar 2013, 4) Moreover, his further assertion that "a great deal of publishing's complexity lies in its traversal of media forms." (28) further confirms his disavowal of the book as a limit, suggesting that the sale of rights is also important to the business.

Meanwhile, Nash and Horne go beyond the book and text-based content and list some non-book product possibilities: "We've seen Penguin deepen their merchandising; if Marc Jacobs can sell books, why can't publishers in turn partner with designers to create shoes inspired by particular characters?" Or, "Publishers could partner with wine wholesalers to offer wine clubs, with caterers providing literary-themed events, with boutique travel agencies to offer tours." (Nash 2013, 27) Horne (2012) takes on a position somewhere between Nash and Bhaskar. He suggests the product of the industry might, in the future, tend towards some kind of aggregation of products rather than a single product: "By incorporating live events into a new, more encompassing business model—one that treats digital, print, and live events as part of an organic whole—and by producing new types of product that satisfy the greater desires of certain types of reader, the industry may find a way to survive the fall in revenues prompted by the

move to digital." (12) All of these ideas go towards liberating the industry from the book alone in a manner contrary to the Order of the Book but without ruling the book out.

In terms of considering how the New Publisher perspective views the business model, most scholars grouped beneath it endorse the idea that publishing should move towards more customer-centricity via online activity (Horne 2012; O'Leary 2012; Nash 2013; Bhaskar 2013). Moreover, all seem to agree it is likely that there will, at some future point, a need to remove or at least loosen the limitation on the industry that the conventional trade business model with its reliance on the offline (and online) third-party book trade maintains. However, there is a point of consensus with the Order of the Book perspective around copyright. Still, Page stretches this beyond the physical container of the book: "The ability to imagine the life of a copyright in three dimensions, from book, to ebook, to app, to audio, to enhanced versions including extra content. This, along with the ability to do so dynamically as technology and behaviour change rapidly, will be crucial." (Page 2012, n.p) Of course, for copyright to be able to gain value and to hold on to it, content, in whatever form, must find attract customers. Indeed, the theorists grouped around this perspective perhaps indirectly extend their interest in copyright from copyright protection alone to a concern with copyright value, too.

This concern with copyright value mainly manifests through a concern within this perspective to find ways to become closer to readers and for publishers to take more control of their consumption context. After all, a copyright of a book that can gain no visibility or traction is less valuable than one that can or already has done. Before the internet, copyright was partly given value not only because the industry could command one-to-many mass media visibility but because it was only they who could produce books for sale. In a new, more complex Long Tail market, forging more granular customer relationships becomes essential for not only protecting but also building new copyright value. Stephen Page's article is direct about the means for doing this with his suggestion that the industry must begin to have more of "A focus on the consumer, rather than the book trade. Expertise in consumer marketing that contends for attention in all digital spaces". Although notably, he also balances this with a suggestion that this must exist "alongside strength in working with both bricks and mortar and online booksellers". This call for customer-centricity comes with a greater call for customer engagement, too, with Page noting that engagement should be facilitated by "Excellent

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communication with authors and readers (not just trade and media). This comes in many forms, some well-established. Social activity goes for offline as well as online" (Page 2012, n.p).

Again, it is interesting to note Page's hedging around the need to deal with digital *and* physical booksellers. Of the other scholars grouped under The New Publisher perspective, Brian O'Leary is the most strident about the need for publishers to better conduct customer relationships and customer engagement online. O'Leary argues that publishers have been unnecessarily hemmed in by their obsession with media containers to the extent that they have not thought enough about the context of *selling* books or the consumption context: "The way we think about book, magazine, and newspaper publishing is unduly governed by the physical containers we have used for centuries to transmit information.". He continues: "The process of filling containers strips out context. In the physical world, intermediaries like booksellers, librarians, and reviewers provide readers with some of the context that is otherwise lost in creating a physical object." (O'Leary 2012, 7) but this changes with digital forms of selling. In a sense, this is an indirect argument about the building up of copyright value in a period when the more traditional means of selling books were being challenged. As he put it: "When content scarcity was the norm, we could live with a minimum of context. In a limited market, our editors became skilled in making decisions about what would be published. Now, in an era of abundance, editors have inherited a new and fundamentally different role: figuring out how 'what is published' will be *discovered*." (12)

O'Leary's basic thrust chimes with Page's call for more focus on the consumer rather than the book trade and also calls for expertise in consumer marketing in digital spaces. Similarly, Michael Bhaskar directly supports O'Leary's idea to make more of the consumption context:

> Recall Brian O'Leary (2012) and his argument that publishers should move from containers to context. While I would argue the nature of content framing means we can never wholly move on from containers (an unhelpful metaphor) O'Leary's context-oriented publishing has much to recommend it. He sees the New Publisher as not only publishing work but actively managing the context of consumption – in content-abundant scenarios, so the reasoning goes, context has equal if not more value than content itself." (Bhaskar 2013, 188)

Bhaskar's point underlines my earlier suggestion that the industry is not only dealing with copyright protection in a more complex market but also with the creation of new

customer value, from which new copyright value can emerge. Whilst Bhaskar feels there will always be some kind of container that will always restrict its content in some way, which seems accurate, he warms to the idea that publishers could improve their consumption contexts. This partly leads him to the notion that lean and agile approaches, and the lean startup more specifically, could benefit publishers.

As I suggested when reviewing the meagre publishing scholarship on the adoption of agile, lean or lean-agile approaches, Bhaskar does offer a description of the lean startup approach that manages to grapple with many of its nuances:

> Publishers might begin to think like the 'lean start-ups' advocated by entrepreneur Eric Ries (2011). In essence, this means gearing their workflows around learning to an unprecedented degree. Ries argues effective start-ups have a goal of learning, as quickly as possibly, what the (consumer wants and where the company adds value. This means not just putting products out there but measuring, learning and then acting in fast iterations—what he calls 'validated learning'. Mistakes are made, recognised and eliminated not as a by-product of work, but as its goal. All business assumptions are interrogated; innovation is, as a result, constant and the focus on the customer, the end user – the reader – is absolute. (Bhaskar 2013, 187-188)

This reading of Ries' method touches on the connection between lean-agile approaches and customer engagement here, suggesting that a lean startup approach to publishing would cease the pattern of readying books first and then hoping they take off with an otherwise unsuspecting audience. Instead, it would begin to put out products as tests of what a customer does and does not want, as fast as possible, to learn from them, and to validate that learning. In terms of the consumption context, Bhaskar also floats the possibility that publishers could mount "customer-facing initiatives" and take "ownership of the retail channel" to "harness the value of communities" (Bhaskar 2013, 178).

To sum up, the strengths of the New Publisher approach lie in their call for finding new ways to become more customer-centric. In this sense, they champion the innovation part of the innovative yet realistic concurrent publishing paradigm that I am identifying. Their ideas include taking more control over the consumption context as a way of augmenting the traditional industry by leveraging the affordances of the internet to get closer to customers, engaging with them on a more intimate level, and seeing them not only as readers but on their own specific terms, and indeed also seeing them as customers. Another strength of the New Publisher perspective is in how it allows for a

greater product mix. Whilst Nash's wider set of non-book products is perhaps too broadly rendered, Horne's idea that the category of "product" might be extended to cover an aggregation of elements is something that chimes with more contemporary thinking around business models. Meanwhile, Bhaskar draws this product mix more carefully than Nash but still quite broadly through the lean startup idea, suggesting a turn towards "the growing value of brand equity"—this could be the publisher as a brand, a series of books, an imprint even. His talk of ownership of the retail channel and the discipline of customer relationship management (CRM)…to harness the value of communities formed around brands" (Bhaskar 2013, 178) also brings the consumption context into play rather than leaving it purely the responsibility of trade booksellers.

There are weaknesses, too, but they are less pronounced, perhaps as much because this perspective is more loosely drawn than anything else. Still, just like how the Order of the Book can sometimes be too restrictive in its attempts to differentiate the industry from the internet, some strands of the New Publisher perspective can threaten to go too far the other way and become too unrestrictive in ways that perhaps leave the industry too much in thrall to the internet. Whilst O'Leary is most guilty of this, the New Publisher suggestions, taken together, possibly suffer from placing too little focus on protecting the core business of the industry and too much on new growth, the exact opposite of the Order of the Book. The advocacy that some in this perspective have for non-book products is a case in point here. It begs the question of whether it is wise for the industry to throw lots of unproven product ideas at the wall, risking a confused and potentially loss-making mix of potential solutions and gambles on product kinds that they are less familiar with. Especially when they already have their hands full with the complexity of the book market, a product they do have a lot of experience with.

In an extended conclusion to this section, I want to spend a few paragraphs considering how I can synthesise the stronger parts of both the Order of the Book and the New Publisher perspectives to arrive at a model of concurrent publishing paradigm that I can take forward to later chapters. In terms of product, on balance, I would suggest that if a concurrent publishing model is to maintain the industry's differentiation from its competitors, then the book (plus vanilla ebooks and vanilla audiobooks) should remain the main focus for any innovative yet realistic concurrent paradigm rather than any new kind of book-as-app or other altogether new form. However, I would suggest that it may be possible to further extend the book in slightly different ways than the Order of the Book theorists have begun to do in their efforts to

fit digital books into their model of the book. This could involve effectively extending it by way of fostering a stronger connection to the internet which, in turn, could help the book to be extended to include some sense of its consumption context beyond leaving that all to the traditional trade bookseller. The challenge here is to find a way to maintain the integrity of the product whilst simultaneously rendering it more adaptable in this way.

In terms of how to move forward with the business model, I have suggested that the Order of the Book perspective makes a weak point by championing the serendipity of the physical book trade alone as the main way to sell books to readers. However, its insistence on remaining wedded to the economics of the printing press does seem to be a good way of limiting the business model. In terms of reforming the business model, the New Publisher's perspective has stronger ideas and is more customer-centric and willing to use the affordances of the internet to identify and engage with customers. This is positive because the idea of leaving problems of visibility in the industry to the arrangement with the book trade seems shortsighted, although it does remain part of the solution. In terms of customer relationships and customer engagement, the Order of the Book does score highly with its focus on the reader's experience and the selling point of providing a refuge from screen time meaning this aspect should be largely preserved. Still, this does not have to go as far as totally turning away from the internet. Indeed, the internet-driven customer-centricity advocated by the New Publisher perspective could be an essential part of ascertaining what we will recall Bridget Shine termed the customer's *actual requirements*. The challenge here is to think about what form the online identification of customers would take and how to engage with them more to the benefit of the industry without producing a software product. It is also a challenge to try to formulate some kind of business model that can balance the traditional with the more customer-centric.

Putting this together, I think it is possible to identify five red lines or limits that should not be crossed when formulating a form of concurrent publishing. First, the bounded book (print and also existing forms of digital books) should remain at the centre of the industry without entering into the realm of brand-new forms of products. Second, the concrete form of the product should still protect copyright. The normative book reading mode, influenced by the book's linear information architecture and emphasis on deep and immersive reading modes must not be compromised. Fourth, book publishing should seek to differentiate itself from the tech industry by playing on

its unique selling points. Fifth, the industry's business model should remain largely related to the economics of the printing press. I propose that these five limits to my hypothetical concurrent publishing can honour many of the concerns of the Order of the Book perspective whilst curbing the digital excesses of the New Publisher approach.

Conclusion

In concluding this chapter as a whole, I have suggested that the book publishing industry should take steps to move towards customer-centricity but it should do so cautiously and only to a certain extent. The first section of this chapter sought to answer the question of whether the marketplace for books had grown complex enough to warrant a move to customer-centricity. I concluded that numerous effects of the internet leading to the Long Tail effect had indeed rendered a complex enough market to warrant customer-centricity. However, I also noted that this did not yet spell the end of the more typical form of trade publishing-proper because there still seems to be large enough customer segments to warrant its existence. Physical books and bookshops remain popular. A similar mixed pattern was found in responses to this question in publishing scholarship. Here, New Publisher scholars make good arguments for more customer-centricity but, at their most extreme, can be too quick to dismiss the existing traditional relations with the book trade. In contrast, Order of the Book scholars caution against too much customer-centricity, arguing that traditional modes occupy an important role in differentiating publishing from other tech culture-owned forms of digital technology but, at their least nuanced, place too little importance on competing online and have too much faith in the existing book trade.

So how has this chapter moved the problem forward? The main lesson that I take from the analysis in this chapter is that although customer-centricity and finding ways to get on board with the new digital information and communication space is important to mine complex niche markets to good effect, physical books remain a differentiator from the prevailing tech industry and physical book shops remain a space of book publishing visibility that is differentiated from the internet and tech culture too. Nevertheless, one thing that *has* largely changed is that book publishing—an industry that emerged from a less complex industrial era to embrace what became a traditional mass media era during the twentieth century—can no longer be beholden to mass media mores. Conversely, it

cannot transition to a software-based digital self-service era either. Indeed, the short-lived books-as-apps phase likely means that the vanilla ebook and audiobook, which largely mirror the print version, are as close to a digital self-service era as the industry gets in terms of their concrete product set, although I will complicate this slightly later on too. What is required is for publishing to find some way of balancing its approach to micro-media with its existing industrial tendencies which are based on volume. To this end, I would propose that the concurrent publishing paradigm that I have been sketching perhaps involves a split between trade publishing and consumer publishing as near-synonyms—a differentiation between *trade publishing-proper* and *consumer publishing-proper*—with the former retaining existing tactics to serve large enough customer segments through economies of scale and physical bookshops whilst the latter could pursue more customer-centric, niche avenues.

In terms of my main question for the research as a whole, namely how can I move publishing studies research into this topic forward enough to make an assessment, I would suggest that this chapter has laid to rest any overexcited notions that publishing insiders may have had about book publishing rushing to push customer-centricity as its main aim. Indeed, I have argued here that the industry will forever be partially rooted in older forms of industrial production. Still, there is also a sense that publishing has never been static. Publishing has had to previously adapt to mass media forms of working, it has already adapted to the digital revolution in terms of augmenting its product set with ebooks and the like. There is a possibility that the climate crisis will eventually cause a reckoning in terms of the industry's carbon footprint and the issue of logistics and book returns, too. Moreover, having reviewed the scholarship around these themes, I think I have offered a stronger scholarly basis upon which to connect work around lean-agile and work in publishing studies than the minimal attempts to consider agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches in publishing scholarship thus far have done. To that end, I am now ready to consider how publishing can become more lean-agile in the context of the innovative yet realistic concurrent publishing paradigm that I sketched when reviewing existing debates in publishing studies between the Order of the Book perspective and the New Publisher perspective. This means that the next question to ask is *could* this form of concurrent publishing adopt a lean-agile approach?

Chapter 3: Assessing the Feasibility of a Lean-Agile Approach in Publishing

So far, we have established that book publishing today has to sell into a more complex marketplace as a result of the digital revolution and the arrival of the internet, also noting that visibility for books and customer attention is at a premium. However, we have also identified that digital technology and some of the affordances of the tech industry exist as both an opportunity, as Page and the New Publishing school of thought argue, and a threat for the book industry, as the Order of the Book perspective counter-argue. Moreover, Order of the Book scholars also argue that the publishing industry should be able to list both deep reading and the unique affordances of the book as something that can be accessed off-screen and offline as a unique selling point that differentiates publishing from tech businesses. A respite from the ubiquitous culture of screens that features heavily in much of contemporary life these days. In attempting a synthesis of these two positions, I have begun to propose that an innovative yet realistic concurrent publishing paradigm (hereafter concurrent publishing model, concurrent publishing paradigm, or merely concurrent publishing) that is limited by the five red lines discussed in the last chapter might be able to benefit from a lean-agile approach in some way.

However, there is a problem. How might I account for the form of this concurrent paradigm publishing given its hypothetical nature? First, because the idea is new, we have only an initial sense of the shape of it. Second, it is therefore difficult to know how a lean-agile approach might be applied to it. Fortunately, there are ways forward from this position. We do know the basic limits or red lines that I have identified from the Order of the Book perspective and the opportunities of the New Publisher perspective. Moreover, although there is scant evidence of the publishing industry adopting a proactive, intentional lean-agile process improvement approach, and rather more cases that would better be described as descriptive lean-agile, I can draw on an understanding of how lean-agile approaches have been implemented in other industries. This would allow me to compare how these red lines might hold up if compared with the lean-agile approach in these other domains. For example, there is much understanding of how lean-agile approaches have been implemented in the software engineering industry.

Indeed, I consider the way that the software industry has implemented the most up-to-date lean-agile approaches as my point of comparison here.

So why is it important to tackle this problem? Put simply, if I am to argue that publishing is to adopt lean-agile approaches in such a way that they can combine their traditional selling point with their relatively newfound digital- and internet-adjacency, then I will only be able to consider if this is possible by first assessing whether concurrent publishing, limited in the ways that I have already discussed, could feasibly adopt the kinds of lean-agile approach that have been successful elsewhere. However, there is another good reason for using the tech industry as my example. The concurrent publishing that I have been developing is to maintain many aspects of book publishing as it currently exists without moving too much in the direction of that particular industry because, in that direction, publishing might lose ground to a far larger competitor as well as lose its USP. Indeed, achieving this balance is at the heart of the lean-agile-driven concurrent publishing paradigm that I am beginning to more fully sketch here. So, not only is it good to assess the lean-agile part of the equation where such approaches are common, but it is also good to describe the limits by which concurrent publishing should do this. The overall balance will then depend on the degree to which lean-agile approaches can either be cut and pasted over to traditional yet internet-adjacent publishing unproblematically or be, at the very least, translatable to it in some way.

This brings me to my question for this chapter. Could concurrent publishing adopt the kinds of product delivery and product discovery strategies favoured by lean-agile methods such as Ries' aforementioned lean startup idea, or are lean-agile strategies of this kind truly more applicable within the software engineering industry where they have been most honed and most successful? My overall response to the main question about feasibility is that—no, the specific kind of lean-agile approach taken by the software industry would not be compatible with a concurrent form of publishing in terms of a direct one-to-one fit. There are four reasons for this. First, lean-agile approaches in the software industry utilise forms of product that can be flexible enough to adapt to a lean-agile approach but product form in the publishing industry is more limited. Second, there are issues with the different kinds of business models involved in the two sectors because the kinds of lean-agile business models deployed in the software industry also depend on the product's affordances. It follows then that book publishing business models are more limited too. Third, lean-agile approaches, in

general, are heavily based on ideas of design that require companies to have close relationships with their customers in ways that are quite alien to what most existing book publishers consider design. Fourth, lean-agile approaches are based on feedback loops that require regular customer engagement and, once again, require certain product affordances to be successful. In contrast, existing trade book publishing sometimes does not even know who its customers are let alone be able to prioritise regular engagement with them.

Lean-Agile Software Products

So why would it not be feasible for concurrent publishing to adopt the same kind of lean-agile approach found in the software industry at the product level? If we accept, as I do here, that the book, in either print or in existing digital form, should be at the forefront of a concurrent publishing paradigm, then it is difficult to imagine this tallying with implementing lean-agile approaches in the software industry. For example, it is difficult to reconcile the open and modular software product with the bounded book. The software product is constantly evolving and built to allow itself to be extended and updated in its form in ways that neither print nor digital books offer, not least since copyright protection means that the content of the bounded book must be finished and fixed at the point of sale. These differences between the different affordances of the respective products point to one of the biggest challenges to concurrent publishing, namely that in terms of product development in the software industry, a lean-agile approach rests on the degree to which a product can be released in an incomplete, extensible minimum-viable state. The fact that software products are frequently servitised—offered as part of a service—only compounds this lack of feasibility.

Turning first to the question of product form and the differences between the products of the two industries, I will begin by noting that software products exist as modular systems: "Modules are units in a larger system that are structurally independent of one another but which work together. The system as a whole must therefore provide a framework—an architecture—that allows for both independence of structure and integration of function." (Baldwin and Clark 2000, 63) In contrast, books of all varieties, as the Order of the Book theorists who I discussed in Chapter Two were at pains to point out, are bounded entities and should remain so to protect the USP of the

publishing industry. This means that there is no way that concurrent publishing could adopt a lean-agile software product strategy in any kind of one-to-one fashion. Although both kinds of products—like all products—exist as systems, they exist as different types of systems based on two different types of coupling: loose coupling and tight coupling. A fuller discussion of the relative advantages of loose rather than tight coupling in system design can be found in Pautasso and Wilde's (2009) conference paper on the subject, but for now, I will offer a simple interpretation of it.

Put most simply, tight coupling occurs when a system's parts are so tightly dependent on each other that the overall structure would collapse if one element were removed. In contrast, a more loosely coupled system involves leaving room for contingency in the system design. Transferring this idea to books, we see that printed books are a tightly coupled system, and intentionally so. Rip out of a few pages and you have often done irreversible damage to the copy of a book as a whole. Although pages cannot be ripped out of digital books, ebooks and audiobooks too are mostly very tightly coupled systems. A reader buys them whole as a one-shot effort and they are frequently designed as a whole one-shot effort. Whilst audiobooks can be streamed on a digital device and so are effectively not received whole, the stream itself is heavily controlled by the company who created the audiobook to ensure the integrity of the said book and to protect it from piracy. This understanding of products as loosely coupled modular things, in software engineering, or tightly coupled bounded finite things, in book publishing, represents two completely different ways of thinking about, realising and releasing products.

The reason for designing loosely coupled modular systems is to allow for changeability—the ability to be updated—and extensibility. This relates to the idea of modularity and how parts can be swapped in and out so that products can change but also that the product must allow the addition of new parts too, extending the overall system. For this to work, the product and the extensible elements that may be plugged into it must have interfaces that are compatible with each other. Basic Lego, in its original less commoditised form, is a good example. Each brick can be joined to each other via the studs and anti-studs that connect them. Another would be the basic standard plug and socket that links to the electricity network. In a more tightly-coupled system, your Lego brick constructions would be stuck together forever, and lamps effectively melded with sockets, meaning you can never unplug your lamp to plug to, say, plug in a hair dryer. All of these elements are favoured features of software

engineering too. They can be seen most readily in the object-oriented paradigm of programming, a still dominant paradigm in the industry. Here, and simplified somewhat, lines of code are effectively grouped into building blocks called objects with each object having some kind of interface that allows (or does not allow) itself to be connected with other blocks.

In contrast, the book products that sit at the centre of concurrent publishing are built for permanence and physical transport and so are not modular, easy to regularly update, or extensible, typically arriving bounded and whole. Whilst it is possible to scribble marginalia into the margins of a book, thus extending it somewhat, turning down its pages, or adding a bookmark, there is not much more that can be updated. Similarly, in an eBook, although the reader might be able to change a typeface size or type of font, change colours, and also add virtual marginalia, there is not much more that can be updated or changed about an eBook either. Part of this is officially constrained by the rules of the ISBN agencies which state that: "A (substantial) change of text requires a new ISBN, and if revisions have been made then the reverse of the title page should state that the book is a revised edition, and the new ISBN should be printed there." (ISBN-International.org, n.p). So this is not to say that a book cannot be re-issued with a new cover or even abridged and be extended in those ways, but it is to legislate against the kind of continuous changes to products that operate in a lean-agile software sense.

These disparities between the different affordances of the respective industry products point to one of the biggest challenges for a form of concurrent book publishing that observes the limits that earlier put onto it, namely the difficulty of being able to develop products iteratively and incrementally as constantly evolving minimum viable products (MVPs)—or minimum viable books (MVBs) if you like. A lean-agile approach to product development in the software industry fundamentally rests on the degree to which a product can be released in an incomplete, extensible minimum viable state. I will return to this when considering customer relationships and customer engagement later, and also in the next chapter. For now, I will turn to another factor that would affect lean-agile software-book publishing feasibility. The software product is a software-as-a-service (SaaS) product in ways that the book is not. This is not to say that a book does not render a service to its readers, in fact, the Order of the Book perspective flags up the deep and immersive reading habits as one of the selling points of books. However, it is to say that the book itself, as a product, does not offer as wide of a service as software products.

Software products differ from books in that software products carry many extra elements *within* them. For instance, they often carry a sign-up system that allows customers to log in to them. In some senses, this means they carry their customers with them much of the time along with the ability to capture customer actions in the form of data from within the product. In allowing payment from within apps, they also often carry their consumption context with them. This allows the products themselves to be designed as customer journeys, showing successive screens that help a customer to access this or that bit of functionality, or more likely, add some new feature to their paid monthly plan. This effectively means that many customer relationships are formed within the product. This is often not a one-way scenario either because many software products allow, even frequently encourage, customers to make a criticism or report an outage or a bug in the software from within the software. This too can be tracked meaning that the software company can act on customer-reported problems to further continuously improve their software. Essentially, then, software products are as much offering a service as acting as a product, the two becoming blurred in the process.

This is the reason that many software products are also known as software-as-a-service (SaaS) products, meaning they are, at once, both product and service hybrids. Vandermerwe and Rada long ago named this process "servitization" (Vandermerwe and Rada 1988, 314) dating back to a time just before the commercial internet, although they did relate it to computing:

> [Services are] dominating the economies of the world and much of the strategic thinking of business. We only have to look at the switch in emphasis in computer technology from hardware to software to appreciate that more and more corporations are adding value to their core corporate offerings through services. And in the process many industries and firms are experiencing a shift in their core business and revenue generation." (Vandermerwe and Rada 1988, 314)

This move towards bringing service elements and products together is not new in software engineering. Indeed, it had long been a feature of commercial software where the aim was generally to encourage the user to serve themselves. Vandermerwe and Rada were merely noting that this had been taking hold more widely in many business contexts at the time that they were writing: "Services is no longer a separate category for managers to consider and [the] best companies of the future will be those who find

ways of developing services to create and keep customers and thereby sustain a competitive advantage." (Vandermerwe and Rada 1988, 314)

Another odd feature of software products, one that arises from both their modularity and their extensibility is that each part of the software application (the product) does not have to change all at once meaning that its features can all have come into existence or been updated at separate times in a product that otherwise seems whole. As lean-agile consultant and former Spotify employee Henrik Kniberg revealed during his agile conference talk (Kniberg 2015, 15:54), the Spotify app effectively changes regularly behind the scenes, in small ways, even as a user uses it, but it is not all of it that is necessarily changing. Indeed, it may be that an update has happened in one part of an app but not another. For instance, with Spotify, the search section of the app (the small magnifying glass and the large set of code that aids the search behind it) might have had an update. Meanwhile, the buttons that play and pause the songs might not have changed for weeks, months or years. Spotify is not necessarily that unusual in this way in the software world. Although publishers can release updated elements or correct typos for books too, and add new introductions, a new version of a book has to be purchased to see these updates and the whole process is less intentional than in software products.

This points to the fact that software products frequently exist in different personalised states. This was noted by Kniberg in his talk on Spotify (Kniberg 2015) when he discussed how different software engineers can have different versions pushed to their smartphones to test them, but this is likely parsable by anybody who has ever tried or purchased a digital software product too. These different states result from factors such as their preferred default settings, the level of service paid for, the degree to which the customer allows apps to update on their laptops or smartphones, etc. This is not to say that a book cannot also be personalised through, say, writing a name in a book, turning a page down or scribbling physical or digital marginalia, but it is to say that it does not go as far or be as flexible as software products. For software products, each instance of a product is keyed to each user at the level of the *software session* with the user able to set themes in-app and determine how they want their instance of it to be set up. Moreover, this also allows software companies to send in-app prompts to their users, offer feedback based on user actions, offer in-app tutorials, and all in real time. This means that the product is not merely read-only but can be user-updated and can

update the user in a two-way process. Moreover, different customers can be targeted differently from each other allowing for much granularity in terms of customer relations.

Before closing, I should add two qualifications to my claim that it would not be feasible for publishing to replicate the kind of lean-agile approaches that software companies at the level of product form and its various affordances. First, the book industry has already tried its hand at creating books-as-apps and, of course, being able to produce them renders them somewhat feasible. Nevertheless, books-as-apps have had no long-term feasibility. John Thompson offers a full account of this, noting the fast rise and just as fast failure of books-as-apps citing the difficulties in convincing consumers and industry insiders to buy the idea of these books, their high retail price points and the difficulty in attracting (or being able to afford) software engineers to produce them (Thompson 2021, 68-100). There were even cases where extremely good-quality books-as-apps were rejected but paved the way for successful print versions suggesting it was the form and not the content that failed. Indeed, Baverstock and Bowen note that "UK children's publisher Nosy Crow" produced whole app experiences "not existing books squashed onto screens" and instead "specially created deliverables to take advantage of the devices to tell stories and provide information to children in new and engaging ways", even going as far as "commissioning really strong design, audio, animation and writing". Yet somewhat "ironically", this "venture mainly created demand for (until then non-existent) printed versions of the digital books, for which customers had established buying routes and were found to be much more willing to pay." (Baverstock and Bowen 2019, 27)

My second qualification involves whether or not Nosy Crow can be said to be operating in the kind of proactive, intentional lean-agile terms that are my specific topic here or whether they were merely being flexible in a more generalised descriptive lean-agile sense. On the one hand, and in lean startup terms, they appear to have been learning from data and pivoting as a result of learning that customers did not want the book, adapting their business model. As Eric Ries puts it:

> Every entrepreneur eventually faces an overriding challenge in developing a successful product: deciding when to pivot and when to persevere. Everything that has been discussed so far is a prelude to a seemingly simple question: are we making sufficient progress to believe that our original strategic hypothesis is correct, or do we need to make a major change? That change is called a pivot: a structured course correction designed to test a new

> fundamental hypothesis about the product, strategy, and engine of growth. (Ries 2011, 149)

This may well mean they were behaving in the lean-agile manner that I have been assessing here. In another sense, however, this may be merely a case of descriptive lean-agile where businesses merely adapt to changing circumstances in a general sense in a complex market. It is, unfortunately, a limitation of my current desk-based study that I cannot ascertain this.

In conclusion, I have argued that it would not be feasible for concurrent publishing to adopt the same lean-agile approach to products as the software industry. This is because the main products of the book (print or digital) do not possess the affordances to render themselves servitised in the same way or to carry their customers within them. The books-as-apps and Nosy Crow examples do not change my argument too much. It remains unlikely that books-as-apps would have been able to develop the full multi-million dollar affordances of a fully-fledged product such as Spotify or Netflix, making it unlikely that the Nosy Crow apps were sophisticated enough to carry their customer relationships with them or to foster customer engagement within the app to any kind of similar degree. Moreover, the fact that the book-as-app product category never made it into the now standard ecosystem of print books and eBooks (with audiobooks perhaps on their way to completing this triumvirate) suggests this book-as-app experiment was more of an anomaly. All of this begs the question of whether there is some possible way to conceive of the printed book as a minimum viable book (MVB) in such a way that it does not cross the limits that we have placed upon concurrent publishing but which could be rendered, to some extent, more modular, extensible, and updatable. I will revisit this question in the next chapter.

Lean-agile Business Models in the Tech Industry

Next, why would it not be feasible for concurrent publishing to adopt the same lean-agile approach found in the software industry at the product level? Once again, the affordances of the software product play an important role in ensuring this is not feasible here since the lean-agile business models of the software industry frequently mirror the flexibility of software products discussed in the previous section. In contrast, the book products of concurrent publishing are fixed, bounded, and arrive with the

customer in a complete form, putting similar flexibility into doubt. This is not to say that there have been no attempts in the book publishing industry to find new business models. However, it is to say that many of these have not involved the book as something sold to readers and have instead been focused on offering new services *around* the book (Clark and Phillips 2014), often aimed at finding a new customer base in authors who might wish to utilise editing services and the like (Baverstock 2015). Remaining with the book and with sales to readers, there *is* some evidence from self-publishing business models that it may be possible to learn better what customers want, and indeed, publishing has embraced more marketing to improve their understanding of what audiences want in the hope of providing it for sale (Baverstock 2015). This is what I termed product discovery earlier. However, this is not as easily done through the book as it is done through software products due to the affordances mentioned earlier.

Let's begin by defining the term business model here in general. As Alexander Osterwalder and his co-authors define it: "A business model is a conceptual tool containing a set of objects, concepts and their relationships" that express "the business logic of a specific firm." (Osterwalder et al. 2005, 4). However, it is also important to note that a business model can be a design tool for designing new business models and a descriptive tool for summarising a company's business model. This former design element is apparent in Osterwalder's Business Model Canvas (BMC) tool which was influenced initially by his PhD work on business models. The BMC tool breaks the business model concept down into nine boxes with costs and resources making up the left-hand side boxes and revenue and marketing on the right-hand side boxes. An overriding value proposition then ties together both the left and right sides.

This value-proposition is defined by Osterwalder and his co-author Yves Pigneur as "the reason why customers turn to one company over another. It solves a customer problem or satisfies a customer need." Effectively, each "Value Proposition consists of a selected bundle of products and/or services that caters to the requirements of a specific Customer Segment. In this sense, the Value Proposition is an aggregation, or bundle, of benefits that a company offers customers." This is not to say all value propositions involve something "new or disruptive". Indeed, some "may be similar to existing market offers, but with added features and attributes." (Osterwalder and Pigneur 2010, 22) The fact that businesses are said to be offering relatively abstract value-propositions here rather than being in the business of producing and selling concrete products, as older business orthodoxy might have had it, is an important indicator that new ideas of

business models are often more flexible and more service- rather than product-led. They are services that frequently use products as a part of a wider service delivery, at one with a digital self-service era where businesses must sell on a mixture of the quality of what they offer as measured through data to ascertain what customers want.

Osterwalder and his co-author's business model definition and its descriptive and proactive character are both backed up by Joan Magretta's take on the same topic. Citing the arrival of "the spreadsheet" as the reason that business models came "into widespread use", Magretta suggested that spreadsheets allowed the logic of a company, or an aspect of a company, to be actively modelled (Magretta 2002, 5). Further suggesting that a "good business model answers Peter Drucker's age-old questions: Who is the customer? And what does the customer value? It also answers the fundamental questions every manager must ask: How do we make money in this business? What is the underlying economic logic that explains how we can deliver value to customers at an appropriate cost?" Furthermore, she suggests that business models have a numbers element and a narrative element: "When business models don't work, it's because they fail either the narrative test (the story doesn't make sense) or the numbers test (the P&L doesn't add up)." Whilst the reference to spreadsheets covers the numbers test, the narrative test exists more akin to Osterwalder's value proposition: The "plot" of "a new business model" may turn "on designing a new product for an unmet need" or "it may turn on a process innovation, a better way of making or selling or distributing an already proven product or service." (Magretta 2002, 4)

One difference between the business models in the software industry versus the business models in the book industry is that the former follows a plot line that operates in the open manner of a 'Choose your own Adventure' story whilst the latter has a fixed and bounded beginning, a middle and an end. Indeed, the form of the software product has an influence on this. The possible business models available to software companies can mirror the product's flexible affordances. They can offer modular, extensible business models, or business models that can be updated. This means software business models are truer to the flexible and differentiating notion of a value proposition than the book publishing industry's main copy-sale model. For instance, a software company's business offering can consist of a base offering, sometimes free, that allows a customer to upgrade or downgrade to other features, as in the freemium model. Different service tiers can offer different revenue streams. Moreover, software offerings can be extensible by adding new pricing models or pursuing new market segments through the

repurposing of features. Moreover, these can all be updated to reflect the changing character of the market. Anyone who has ever paid for a digital subscription will be aware of these factors.

In contrast, it will be equally apparent to anyone who has ever bought either a digital or a printed book that the technology, in this case, either limits or effectively renders modularity, extensibility and the ability to update their offering impossible. This, in turn, limits and circumscribes the main copy-sale business model. One reason for this is that all of the features of the book are already there and fixed and bounded at the point of sale. There are few options for more engagement with a customer where a customer can chop and change between this chapter and that sentence. Moreover, for reasons of either print fixity and the ISBN or, at the least, the mandate of the ISBN, the book is also not very extensible. Indeed, reprinting a new book to perhaps orientate it towards a new audience or to take advantage of something in the news will require extra investment post-publication. Moreover, new editions and updates to a book title are extremely slow compared to software products meaning that business models too cannot so easily update to capture market movement.

Despite this, I should note that the book publishing industry has entertained some new business model ideas in recent years even as they have mainly remained tied to their copy-sale model. Clark and Phillips make the former point:

> Constant experimentation forms an important part of navigating successfully the transition from print to digital publishing. Business models may vary from giving content away free to encouraging subscriptions, to pricing ebooks cheaply to gain market share, to bundling content together into a service." (Clark and Phillips 2014, 24)

The problem is that many of the subscriptions and ebook activity have involved tech company partners (or competitors) such as Scribd and Amazon, so they do not quite fall under the full remit of the book publishing industry. Baverstock notes that publishers have sometimes explored hybrid publishing options as publishers "have sought to monetarize their industry experience, exploiting a demand for guidance" sparked by the growth of self-publishing that sits to the side of the industry (Baverstock 2015, 36). Many of these attempts, however, have not typically focused on improving the product at the centre of the industry. Instead, they have focused on areas around it.

Still, this is not to say that there has not been some movement in that direction. Baverstock notes that self-publishing has also shown some signs of belatedly improving

the industry's understanding of readers. Where once the "traditional industry assumed a decision to self-publish to be the end of serious ambitions", self-publishing increasingly acts as a way to provide "the proof of concept and the initial delineation of a market to give a traditional publisher confidence to invest." To this end, self-publishing "has also created a wider understanding of the market and what people want to read about. For example, the traditional industry may have underestimated the extent to which people are interested in soft porn, fantasy, and gentle memoirs in which not a lot happens". Moreover, "the metrics of the buying and reading habits of readers of such material have shown that diversifying our understanding of what subject matter appeals may expand understanding of the market." (Baverstock 2015, 34-35).

Such self-publishing and other independent non-standard publishing have potentially shaken up traditional retailers. Baverstock notes this in the same article: "There are implications here too for specialist book retailers. Advertised online, self-published titles promote a linear route to online purchase, bypassing traditional outlets." (Baverstock 2015, 36) This raises one interesting—seemingly obvious and yet not all that well explored—possibility. What if publishers were to become hybrid publishers in a new way by becoming retailers and selling directly to their customers? There has been some notable enthusiasm about this in publishing trade press. For instance, publishing agent Jonny Geller, in his call for publishers to "Be 'agile and innovative'" in The Bookseller (Comerford 2020), cited an earlier article that discussed how publisher Verso had seen "a 300% increase in its e-commerce sales" over one quarter during the pandemic. Although we must, of course, attribute this volume to the privations of the pandemic, Rowan Wilson, Verso's UK director, noted that it was the fact that "Verso has spent years developing its D2C e-commerce business to its enthusiastic and supportive readers", meaning this was no flash in the pan during the pandemic. Indeed, he further noted that their D2C strategy "was already responsible for one-third of our sales" during the previous year and that it had been "key for our long backlist as well as our frontlist" (Wilson quoted in Comerford 2020, n.p).

That such a direct-to-customer model took much long-term hard work to put in place tells us that D2C is something that does not happen overnight. Although anybody can easily utilise off-the-peg software tools such as Shopify or Square to set up an e-commerce operation for little cost, this does not mean that customers will automatically flock to it. After all, book publishers would then effectively compete with much more well-known online trade names such as Waterstone's, Barnes and Noble, and Amazon.

These online e-commerce stores have much more name recognition for book buyers, sometimes already holding a returning customer's payment details and are in the habit of offering books from more publishers than Verso. Still, Verso's D2C success does suggest there is life in this new business model, and it is a business model that largely keeps the rest of a publishing operation intact—this is still merely the copy-sale model —whilst taking more control over the consumption context. Indeed, this is a common pattern in independent publishing as distinct from the mid-size and larger players and as distinct from non-standard self-publishing. However, there is little doubt that a wider move in this direction would require more of a sustained market research effort to make it pay. Nevertheless, it would be an alternative to publishing as a predominantly customer data-free zone.

I should note that there is some debate over whether large publishers should sell directly. Calvin Reid in Publisher's Weekly summed this up when reporting on the effort by HarperCollins efforts to sell directly. He notes, "While most publishers offer some form of direct sales to consumers, the big houses prefer to avoid competition with retailers". He further suggests that "publishers with deep expertise in specific genres […] can do well selling direct", but in interviewing some industry insiders, they conversely note that it is a concern that consumers are not looking for publishers but are looking for retailers to filter and package the many books published per week for them (Reid 2014, n.p). Although, at the time of writing, there is still a disparity between the Penguin Books website and the Penguin Random House website, with the former pointing to retailers and the latter to third-party retailers and to their own shopping cart, Reid reports that "Random House spokesperson Stuart Applebaum said RH has sold physical books directly online since 2005 and added that 'in the future we plan to bring together our respective Penguin and Random House catalogues in a consumer-facing site.' He was quick to emphasise that this new consumer site will be a 'potential convenience for our consumer visitors, not a high volume business.'" (Applebaum quoted in Reid 2014, n.p) On this evidence, it seems clear that publishers are interested in this prospect but mindful of their partnerships with their traditional retail partners too.

This move from playing curator-alone to becoming more customer-centric through data captured from book sales is a move that some, such as publisher Dominque Raccah of Sourcebooks, see as long overdue. In some senses, it is perhaps no surprise that Raccah, one of the only publishers to provide direct and explicit evidence of having

adopted lean-agile approaches, has also been the one to "urge publishers to invest in data collecting to make their titles more successful" (Comerford 2020, n.p) whilst making an appearance at an International Publishing Guild event. Bemoaning the number of books in publishing that fail—"Our failure rate in publishing is extraordinary — 60% to 70% of the books we publish are not commensurate with the effort we put it in"—Raccah noted that data could offer publishers the chance of "competing in a new way" suggesting that she thinks it is "something every publisher can do" and asserting that publishers should "be aware that this could make a real difference" (Raccah quoted in Comerford 2020, n.p). Although I have already suggested that it would be difficult in some senses to compete in this new way in the normative trade side of the business, Raccah's call aligns with my own call here for competing in a new way through what I have termed consumer publishing-proper.

As discussed in Chapter Two, one reason the industry might split to offer a concurrent form of publishing that manages the most normative trade publishing-proper on one side and a more customer-centric consumer publishing-proper on the other is that the information and communication landscape has changed, and the brick and mortar retail trade do not have the shelf-space for everything. This perhaps warrants a need for publishers to look towards their own websites. Meanwhile, their own e-commerce offerings are not as well filtered as their physical shops. As Wall and Spinuzzi note: "Although an advertiser could reach a significant portion of the American public with a single television commercial in the 1950s, the modern media landscape is comparatively fragmented." (Wall and Spinuzzi 2018, 138). To tackle this, the focus is increasingly on the kind of "inbound marketing" where "customers are drawn into conversation with a brand" (139). This frequently "involves the cocreation of value by companies and consumers" (139). Moreover, because |the structure of the Internet amplifies this division of attention", it is important for inbound marketers (content marketers) to see their websites less "as a monolithic, hierarchical whole, and more as a collection of valuable, consumable bits." This is because, on the internet, "Content is networked together with links that often bypass 'homepages' to land directly on relevant information." (138) Unlike self-publishing, their website is directly in their control. However, publishers have yet to make the most of this.

In conclusion, I have argued that the publishing industry could not implement the same kind of lean-agile approach to business models as the software industry because the business models in the software industry are heavily tied to the affordances of

software products. However, some interesting possibilities have emerged from business models that sell directly to the customer (D2C). Self-publishing offers one indication of this, but many self-publishing platforms emerge from the tech industry and not the book publishing industry, so they are not in the control of publishers. Closer to the standard publishing world, the fact that indies often sell directly and that some larger publishers have started to sell directly too, albeit in limited ways, mindful of not upsetting their concurrent retail partners, suggests that there is some slight interest in the industry in mounting what I have earlier termed consumer publishing-proper. However, such business models would be quite marketing intensive if they were to gain traction. Where the software industry can reach its market with little effort by collecting data from users who use their software products and can adjust its business models accordingly, the book publishing industry has no such affordance through the product on which to base innovative new business models keyed to product discovery. At least, not unless there is some way of conceiving a minimum viable book that does not depart too far from the existing book.

Lean-Agile Customer Relationships in the Software Industry: User Stories and Deep Customer Focus

Moving on to discuss the feasibility of the idea that concurrent publishing can adopt the kinds of lean-agile approaches to customer relationships implemented in the software industry, I suggest that this would likely not be feasible either. Again the differences between the affordances of a software product compared to the book continue to be a barrier, but more than that, all lean-agile approaches require a close and relatively direct relationship with the end-customer as the basis for the approach. Indeed, it is through this relationship that what constitutes customer value can be ascertained. To achieve this, companies implementing the most up-to-date lean-agile approaches utilise a specific form of design aimed at fostering customer relationships and getting to know them and the problems that they face. This is no different for software companies who have long embraced a newer form of design that, whilst paying attention to aesthetics, is based on identifying and forming deep and lasting relationships with customers based on human-centred design and content marketing (Wall and Spinnuzi 2018). In contrast,

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a book industry that still tends to mostly sell through a third-party trade views design as a matter of graphics and typography that aims to attract passing customers via the hook of a colourful and impressive book cover which is a form of advertising or marketing of a product that is based on its packaging alone.

So, what is this newer form of design that dominates the software industry and why does it differ from design in book publishing? Whilst the concept of design in book publishing typically means ensuring that the "printed book should have aesthetical appeal" (Clark and Phillips 2014, 192), complete with "an appealing cover design" and "an appealing interior design as well" (Barker 2020, 37), ideas of design in lean-agile software companies exist in a much broader way than graphic design and typography. This new form of design exists far away from the previous design centres of the last century—"Milan, London, New York, and perhaps Tokyo"—and instead emerges from "world famous corporate design offices (Apple, Amazon, Adobe)" with Silicon Valley design historian Barry Katz suggesting that "there are arguably more design professionals working in Silicon Valley and its Bay Area environs than anywhere else in the world". The graphic design elements of software notwithstanding, this kind of design is less about aesthetics and more about user research and building customer relationships in a bid to ascertain user or customer needs. As Katz puts it: "Making [things] work has been the historic task of engineering; making [things] useful is the job of design." (Katz 2015, xxii-xxiii)

The principles behind this form of design are not only to deceive or flatter through graphic style but to ascertain what customers and users want and then to deliver whatever that is in a human-centred manner. Whilst it is currently popular to think of the sometimes intrusive ways that larger and heavily monopolistic tech companies have *gotten to know* their customers, something that I will cover in the short rundown of further considerations that will appear before my conclusion, it is worth remembering that, initially, the tech industry's desire to know customers emerged from HCD as a more positive development in engineering and engineering design that Steen defines as "an approach to counter *technology push* which can lead to products or services that people cannot or do not want to use." (Steen 2021, 328) This new approach involved taking genuine care to find out what customers wanted and needed rather than merely trying to sell technology to them because the company had produced it to sell. If software engineering aims to, in an oft-repeated lean-agile phrase, *build the thing right* (to deliver working software as its output) it is the designer's job to *build the right thing*

(Kniberg 2017) so that the customer achieves an outcome that matches their problem. So how is this achieved and where does a lean-agile approach fit in?

To achieve this, software companies tend to subsume what might otherwise be viewed as a combination of market research and direct and continuous product testing under the heading of design. Aside from the engineer's job to *build the thing right* and the designer's job to *build the right thing*, the lean-agile product manager's job is often said to be to *build the thing fast*. In a more fully qualified lean startup or Lean UX sense, what this means is not to build something fast that is of low quality—indeed it is well established in lean-agile cultures that it is important to "build quality in" (Poppendieck and Cusumano 2012, 28) to every minimum viable product —but it does mean to build minimum viable products at a fast pace to place them in front of customers as fast as possible to gain feedback. This feedback is then incorporated back into ongoing design research and effectively forms the basis of direct relations with the customer. At the same time, and because the product is out in the world, this process of design tends to either overlap with or replace in-house marketing efforts in the form of content marketing. This is a form of marketing that involves "selling without selling" as Wall and Spinuzzi describe it: "Content marketing generally refers to a method of marketing a product or service by creating and distributing free informational or entertainment content" around it, "especially online." They further note that companies "produce blogs, white papers, social media posts, videos, images, websites, microsites, webinars, and other content" (Wall and Spinuzzi 2018, 137) to achieve this.

Rather than marketing as selling, this content "is designed to be valuable or interesting to consumers on its own merits" (Wall and Spinuzzi 2018, 137) and augments and supports more direct testing processes with the product itself. In this sense, the aim is not to sell but effectively to research customers, although it is through this research that selling can happen in an extremely targeted fashion. All of the above takes a significant effort, and lean-agile software companies deploy a wide range of techniques to foster empathy for the users with whom they are interested in forming a relationship. This often begins with the construction of user or customer personas— essentially, "a narrative, picture, and name, a persona [that] provided product designers with a vivid representation" (Miaskiewicz and Kozar 2011, 417) of the person whom a company is designing *for*. Given its feedback loop-driven provenance, this design process continues to evolve in the industry too. For instance, although creating user personas was a step in the customer's direction compared to company-centricity,

identifying demographic characteristics was soon found not enough to drive the kinds of customer relationships that could bring benefits. This meant that further approaches had to be sought to serve the customer.

One example of this arose from Claydon Christensen's concept of "jobs to be done", which not only defines who the user is but also tries to ascertain what problems they face in everyday life. As Christensen and his co-authors put it: "Never have businesses known more about their customers. Thanks to the big data revolution, companies now can collect an enormous variety and volume of customer information, at unprecedented speed, and perform sophisticated analyses of it". Despite this, Christensen and his co-authors still note that: "Most people would agree that the vast majority of innovations fall far short of ambitions." What Christensen and company suggested was missing was a sense of what these personas wanted as framed in terms of the daily problems they were trying to solve. As they put it: "We all have many jobs to be done in our lives", and it is these that should be the target of innovation: "Some are little (pass the time while waiting in line); some are big (find a more fulfilling career). Some surface unpredictably (dress for an out-of-town business meeting after the airline lost my suitcase); some regularly (pack a healthful lunch for my daughter to take to school)" (Christensen et al. 2016, 4).

Furthermore, the industry soon coupled user identification with user outcome to achieve what Vandermerwe terms "deep customer focus" (Vandermerwe 2004, 26). Deep customer focus combines user personas with Christensen and his team's idea that "When we buy a product, we essentially 'hire' it to help us do a job. If it does the job well, the next time we're confronted with the same job, we tend to hire that product again. And if it does a crummy job, we 'fire' it and look for an alternative." (Christensen et al. 2016, 4). The deep part of Vandermerwe's phrase can be contrasted with a shallow customer focus and is meant as a corrective to the longer-standing process of businesses forming relationships with customers that amounted to little more than lip service. This shallowness is something that Vandermerwe suggests businesses should still guard against if they want to compete: "Today's managers acknowledge the importance of customer focus for growing a business and competing. Yet the often costly customer efforts they have implemented have not led to the expected gains". She goes on to suggest that the reason for this arises from "a superficial understanding of what customer focus really means", noting that "Deep customer focus is" something

that is not gained by merely "buying customer-relationship-management software that tracks customers' purchases." (Vandermerwe 2004, 26)

From the amount of ink spilt on it in work on lean and agile (Poppendieck and Poppendieck 2010; Ries 2011; Gothelf and Seiden 2021; Torres 2021), we can divine that the overwhelming tendency in the tech industry is to believe that deep customer focus is worth the effort to win favour with customers. Indeed it has often been the case that implementations of a lean-agile approach in the tech industry have been cited as one reason such companies are so successful (Poppendieck and Poppendieck 2014, 14). This deep customer focus is effective because, as Vandermerwe puts it, "companies" who implement "deep customer focus are constantly thinking about better, quicker, easier ways of doing things that customers need, they ultimately become indispensable". Furthermore, "the company with deep customer focus excels at offering the outcomes each customer seeks. Through constant innovation, customer feedback and the use of knowledge […] truly sustainable gains ensue." Effectively, she suggests that the company's "activities become so interwoven with its customers' activities that clients end up spending more money with the company on a greater variety of offerings over longer periods. Thus, customers reward the enterprise, giving it many opportunities for profitable growth." (Vandermerwe 2004, 26)

One technique for achieving deep customer focus that emerged from early agile software development is the practice of writing user stories. Whilst Sumanta Boral confirms that "User stories are a fundamental concept in agile methods." (Boral 2016, 213), agile consultant Mike Cohn defines the tool as follows: "A user story is a short, simple description of a feature told from the perspective of the person who desires the new capability, usually a user or customer of the system." (Cohn n.d, n.p) Boral further suggests that "the 'role-feature-reason' template" where "the focus is on Who (the user), What (the desired goal) and Why (the end result)." (Boral 2016, 213) is the most popular user story form. Max Rehkopf of the well-known (in tech circles at least) agile company Atlassian offers more details on how to do this best. He notes that the Who part allows the person making the product to foster "empathy" for the user. Meanwhile, the What part should remain a more abstract goal and not a technology or product that we have already decided to make: "Here we're describing their intent — not the features they use. What is it they're actually trying to achieve? This statement should be implementation-free — if you're describing any part of the UI [user interface] and not what the user goal is, you're missing the point." Finally, Rehkopf suggests that the Why

parts relate to the question of "How […] their immediate desire to do something this fit into their bigger picture? What's the overall benefit they're trying to achieve? What is the big problem that needs solving?" (Rehkopf n.d, n.p).

The user story strategy tends to keep these stories reasonably open and, in Rehkopf 's terms, *implementation-free* to aid adaptability towards an outcome. User stories nowadays are often created using a tool such as Jira (produced by the company Atlassian) or other similar digital solutions where they can be easily created, modified, and deleted. However, this was not always the case. Mike Cohn describes their historical form:

> Historically user stories were deliberately kept informal, written on index cards or sticky notes, stored in a shoe box, and arranged on walls or tables to facilitate planning and discussion. Their impermanence made it easy to tear them up, throw them away, and replace them with new stories as more was learned about the product being developed. (Cohn n.d, n.p)

What the two forms of user stories have in common is that they have always been throwaway items, not meant to be set in stone but instead used for conversation starters. They have always been a case of what Barley terms distributed knowledge, as defined in my introduction.

The difference between a well-written user story and a poorly written one is the degree to which its author leaves room for interpretation. Let me offer two examples of a user story that imagines a busy parent who wants to find more time to learn new things about the history of cookery. First, a well-written user story: "As a busy father with a keen interest in culinary history, I want to find time each day whilst washing the dishes, tidying the house or commuting to work to learn about the history of cookery so that I can prepare to begin a PhD on the subject when my children begin school next year." A less well-written story might be: "As a busy parent, I want a mobile app that sends me daily notifications at 9 pm to remind me to spend 15 minutes reading about the history of cookery so that I can make a career change". The well-written example leaves the story implementation-free, whereas the poorly written example has already decided what is to be built (to be output) from the point of view of the business and thus really only pays lip service to the assumed customer's problem. Here, the latter story depends on a concretion and not an abstraction and thus represents a company-centric decision that is now looking for a customer rather than a customer problem looking for a solution.

As discussed earlier in my overview of lean and agile approaches and how they evolved to become lean-agile, the better user story example is keyed more to product discovery than product delivery. As also noted earlier, the lesson to move towards the former over the latter had to be learnt the hard way in the software industry with many poorly written user stories often producing software output that nobody wanted to buy instead of probing what the customer truly wanted. In the example of the well-written user story about the busy father, the better user story held more detail about the busy father's context (need to clean the house, etc) which could lead to being able to discover what product the user might want rather than assume they merely want an automated notification from an app. For instance, the user story might have more closely hinted at a hands-free solution to use whilst washing dishes and doing chores, perhaps an audiobook or a podcast. Alternatively, perhaps something portable (maybe a short read paperback or audiobook) could tackle the commuting part. There are clearly many possible combinations. This illustrates that what a well-run product discovery process can teach about *what* to make can be much more valuable than simply pre-deciding to make something that *the company* wants to make in the hope of a customer liking it.

When deploying mature lean-agile approaches such as the lean startup, this product discovery sense continuously *drives* the course of product development, changing course when customer dissatisfaction is encountered and continuously improving the product through up-to-the-minute insights. Here experiments and data to validate those experiments become all the more critical. Indeed, when pushing product discovery this far, there is a requirement to validate the user story through Ries' term "validated learning", which he defines as follows:

> [Businesses] exist not just to make stuff, make money, or even serve customers. They exist to learn how to build a sustainable business. This learning can be validated scientifically by running frequent experiments that allow entrepreneurs to test each element of their vision. (Ries 2011, 8-9)

He further suggests using what he terms the "Build-Measure-Learn" feedback loop to drive the process. Further suggesting that the "fundamental activity of a" business "is to turn ideas into products, measure how customers respond, and then learn whether to pivot or persevere". Moreover, insisting that "All successful [business] processes should be geared to accelerate that feedback loop" (Ries 2011, 8-9). Here, we begin to

understand how this deep customer focus can be operationalised through not only the identification of customer relationships but by continual customer engagement, too.

In concluding this section, I have argued that book publishing would not be able to replicate the lean-agile approaches to identifying and forming customer relationships that the software industry has implemented, at least not in terms of a one-to-one fit. I suggested that, aside from this being affected by disparities between software products and publishing products, the way in which the two industries understand the concept of design plays a huge role, not least since the ability to foster relatively direct customer relationships sits at the centre of all up-to-date lean-agile approaches. However, I should qualify this by noting that I am not suggesting that the book publishing industry could not learn how to begin to utilise the form of design that exists in lean-agile approaches to software development in some sense. Whilst I established earlier in this chapter that book publishers would not likely be able to feasibly develop the kind of software products that allow them direct access to their customers through their book products themselves, it remains an open question as to how book publishing might be able to use other forms of digital technology to foster customer relationships with its customers in this way. Certainly, publishers would need the appropriate conceptual and practical tools to do this.

Feedback Loops and Customer Engagement

Finally, on the question of whether it would be feasible for the book publishing industry to adopt the same lean-agile customer engagement as the software industry, my answer would, once again, be that no, it could not do so on a one-to-one basis. Aside from the fact that a software product's affordances again represent a barrier compared to the available affordances of the book, another barrier makes it unfeasible for book publishers to adopt a lean-agile software industry approach. A lean-agile approach not only mandates a close relationship with customers at its base but is also driven by regular customer engagement to ensure continuous improvement for those customers. Given that I established in the previous section that book publishing might often find it difficult even to foster close relations with their customers due to historically being sold through third-party trade partners and sometimes through an existing bias towards publisher- or editor- or author-centricity as over customer-centricity, it seems unlikely

that publishers can find ways turn such patchy customer relationships to schedule even more regular customer engagement without making a concerted effort to augment their normative practice with a move towards an intentional consumer publishing-proper mode, at least not unless they can make a few cultural accomodations.

Software companies use almost continuous customer engagement sessions to run feedback loops that enhance the possibility of being paid every month and act as course corrections for their product by listening to feature requests and fixing bugs reported by their users. In short, they are used to support product discovery and delivery, which exist in a symbiotic relationship. The aim is to build on the habit of fostering customer relationships discussed in the previous section by seeking frequent contact with customers to measure typical UX metrics. These metrics typically "measure something about people and their *behavior* or *attitudes"* in an attempt to "reveal something about the user experience—about the personal experience of the human being using a product or system." (Tullis and Albert 2013, 7) In collecting these metrics, this software approach to customer engagement is effectively led by the customer and is based mostly on taking advantage of feedback loops. In this sense, tech products are more like an ongoing service offering involving one product typically bought repeatedly. Moreover, the feedback loops ensure that the software product is not only created by the software company but, in many ways, co-created with customers.

Whilst product discovery is externally focused on end-customers, much trade and consumer book publishing has typically remained internally focused to some degree. Indeed, as recently as the early nineteen nineties, the idea that books were an altogether different prospect from other businesses shows that the idea has a long history. In her book *Are books different? Marketing in the Book Trade*, Alison Baverstock (1993) explored this enduring idea. On the one hand, she gives causes for scepticism: "It is perfectly possible to argue that books are no different. Publishing is a trade that seeks to sell its wares, like any other, and a book is a product with a price, just like a can of baked beans." Further noting that "producing lots of different product lines" as publishers do "is not completely unheard of in other industries", notably, in "the shoe trade […] every half size, in every width fitting, of every style, of both left and right shoes counts as a different product." Meanwhile, The horticultural world changes fast, too. Meanwhile, "the fluidity of stock movement between bookseller and publisher, whereby what is on sale is effectively on load, and what does not sell can be returned

for a refund, is not unique". Indeed, "paint is supplied to many retail outlets on that basis". (Baverstock 1993, 13).

Although she then goes on to list many reasons why books could be said to be different, Baverstock ultimately concludes: "In the spirit of realistic compromise, and bearing in mind the history of the industry, I must conclude that books still are slightly different, but are fast becoming less so." (Baverstock 1993, 159). Most relevant to my own point here is how Baverstock notes that "Publishing as a medium of communication, ideas, and above all civilisation, has sustained all involved in the book trade with a rather elevated view of themselves. A long-term snobbism persists about what many are unhappy calling an industry." (Baverstock 1993, 26). Backing this up with an opinion from HarperCollins marketing director Nick Well who called the industry "elitist, complacent, unprofessional and out of date" with "a lingering contempt for the marketplace where books have to be sold" (Wells quoted in Baverstock 1993, 26).

In this sense, marketing has been deployed as an add-on and, latterly, as more of a parallel collaborator in book publishing First, and historically, this was editorial-, author- and trade-centred—"One marketing director speculated chat many publishing houses are editorially led" (Baverstock 1993, 23). However, more recently, the situation has shifted slightly to become author-, author-agent, editorial- and trade-centred, with marketing sitting somewhere across all of this. As Baverstock, together with Bowen, has more recently described this shift:

> Publishing companies used to be run by editors; today they are largely run by marketers. There has also been an accompanying, and significant, cultural change, with an industry formerly characterised as one run by gentlemen opening up to the realities of business, including the social connotations of involvement in trade. The merits of this are debated." (Baverstock and Bowen 2019, 7)

Indeed, they further note that "marketing is" now "included within the publishing process from the outset, with particular attention paid to branding both lists and authors, in order to promote recognisability and perpetuate longer-term sales." Meanwhile, "Cover designers seek to offer category-clues to the buyer in a hurry; signalling through cover layout and supporting quotations that this is the type of book they have enjoyed in the past." (Baverstock and Bowen 2019, 6)

This shift in publishing almost, if not quite, mirrors iterative changes in marketing more generally moving from what Kotler calls Marketing 1.0 through to Marketing 2.0. Kotler cites 1.0 as existing back "during the industrial age—when the core technology was industrial machinery" meaning that "marketing was about selling the factory's output of products to all who would buy them." This was the traditional mass production era that I have already discussed in Chapter One. Here, the "products were fairly basic and were designed to serve a mass market. The goal was to standardize and scale up to bring about the lowest possible costs of production so that these goods could be priced lower and made more affordable to more buyers." In this era, product differentiation based on customer-centricity was not really an issue. As Kotler puts it, citing a famous example: "Henry Ford's Model T automobile epitomized this strategy; said Ford: "Any customer can have a car painted any color that he wants so long as it is black." This was what Kotler terms "Marketing 1.0" or otherwise "the product-centric era." (Kotler, 2010, 2)

Kotler suggests that Marketing 2.0 was much more customer-centric than its predecessor due to coming of age in a much more post-industrial information-based era: "Marketing 2.0 came out" of "today's information age—where the core is information technology" and where the "job of marketing is no longer that simple. Today's consumers are well informed and can easily compare several similar product offerings." In this new iteration: "The product value is defined by the consumer" and not by the manufacturers and engineers that had most control over the product during Marketing 1.0. Moreover, customers were seen to now "differ greatly in their preferences", meaning that the "marketer must segment the market and develop a superior product for a specific target market". During Marketing 2.0, the "golden rule of 'customer is king'" worked well "for most companies" and customers were "better off because their needs and wants" were being better "addressed" meaning that they could "choose from a wide range of functional characteristics and alternatives." One problem with this era, according to Kotler was that the "consumer-centric approach implicitly assumes the view that consumers are passive targets of marketing campaigns. This is the view in Marketing 2.0 or the customer-oriented era." (Kotler 2010, 2-3)

I said earlier that the book publishing industry has "*almost, if not quite*", moved to Marketing 2.0 because, despite the changes noted by Baverstock and Bowen, the connection to the book trade does not seem to have always led to a more customer-centric mode. Indeed, it is worth noting that Kotloer's changes have been uneven across

marketing departments in different industries. For example, it seems the book marketing department has perhaps been constrained from changing even to Marketing 2.0 at times, perhaps only occasionally making it to 2.0 in some companies, which I will offer evidence for in a moment. Indeed, Baverstock and Bowen note that "Marketing in publishing has a more recent history". However, they also suggest that "in the past 40 years, there has been a complete revolution". Beginning with an outline of what looks like Marketing 1.0, at least, they state that: "40 years ago, most firms had only publicity departments—and no formal marketing responsibilities; marketing activity was generally product-orientated rather than market-orientated". This aligns with Kotler's notion of Marketing 1.0 of being one where, as Baverstock and Bowen put it, the plan is to "commission products and then think about whom to sell them to rather than base commissioning decisions on what markets want and need". Indeed: "What we would today recognise as marketing activities were spread out between various other departments and largely viewed as an end-stage in production; processes applied to the finished product rather than integrated within its development. " (Baverstock and Bowen 2019, 6)

However, they also note that "the relationship between the publishing industry and marketing has long been ambivalent" in this respect: "[S]hould the industry look for the best content available, and try to find a market for it – or rather publish content it knows will find buyers, whether or not it stretches them emotionally or intellectually." (Baverstock and Bowen 2019, 3) This shows that something of the older publishing world that Baverstock encountered back in the early nineties still holds some sway. As she put it back then, publishers feel they have a "familiarity with, and confidence in, judging a new project on past experience." This means that: "Many publishers argue that, given the creative nature of the industry, market research would be unable to predict bestsellers as effectively" as the kinds of "experienced hunch" that publishing editors were capable of, noting as an aside—"we already employ brains, what is the point of paying for other people's". One rationale for this used by publishers was "that if you only produce what people have said they want you are not anticipating trends and hence shrinking the potential market." (Baverstock 1993, 23) Of course, this cuts both ways. Indeed, there were others in publishing who were of the opinion that "If we judge only by our own attitudes, we will be self-deluding and unrepresentative." (Glover quoted in Baverstock 1993, 23)

For evidence that these attitudes still exist and that publishing may only have partially moved from Marketing 1.0 to Marketing 2.0, we can still detect this schism between internal publishing knowledge and external marketing in more relatively recent discussions of market knowledge captured through either qualitative or quantitative market research versus what Thompson (2010, 93) terms the "hype" and "buzz" that occur amongst publishers and agents when constituting what is and what is not considered "a big book":

> So what are big books, exactly? Simple, you might think: big books are bestsellers. Intuitively plausible though that may seem, in fact it is wrong. Big books are not bestsellers for the simple reason that, for most big books […] at the time when they are being sent out by agents and bought by publishers and are being treated by both as big books, they have not yet been published and no one knows whether they will actually *become* bestsellers" (Thompson 2010, 193)

Having made this distinction, Thompson further notes that "big books are not bestsellers but merely hoped-for bestsellers", meaning that "there is a great deal of room in the field of trade publishing for what we can call buzz". He defines buzz as "talk about books that could be big" and hype as "the talking up of books by those who have an interest in generating excitement about them, like agents; buzz exists when the recipients of hype respond with affirmative talk backed up by money." (194) Together, Thompson terms these considerations the *"web of collective belief"* (Thompson 2010, 194, emphasis in original).

It is interesting to compare this way of designating a big book in the publishing industry with the most up-to-date strategies of lean-agile, Lean Startup or Lean UX-style product discovery. Indeed, what both hype and buzz, as defined by Thompson, have in common is that the customer is missing altogether from the equation. This would be deeply disturbing in a lean-agile context because it would mean that the business was relying on internal guesswork at a time when empirical data should be foremost. That these discussions would be going on in the context of sparking potential author-advance auctions, where lots of money was in the process of being placed on the table, would be even more troubling to a lean-agile advocate. This is not to say that the same lean-agile advocate would not already baulk at the trade publishing-proper habit of deciding on a product and then taking months or years to deliver it, to get it in front of customers, but a would-be bestseller conjured from the enthusiasm of agents and

editors would represent a sunken cost that is far too risky. There is a substantial ontological difference between the two domains regarding temporal expectations and definitions of success here. In lean-agile software industry terms, a web of collective belief would be a red flag, something to make as an MVP and then to put in front of customers first and only then to make a more substantial publishing decision.

Lean-agile is not altogether unusual here. It just looks unusual from the point of view of the publishing industry. Indeed, it is perhaps book publishing which is unusual in taking these gambles and succumbing to this hype in the wider business landscape. It is ironic that book publishing can still claim to be so pure in creative intention when such hype abounds. It is doubly ironic that publishing insiders seem to be going in an alternate direction when even marketing, whose Marketing 1.0 was once the bastion of dodgy double talk and potentially misleading advertising copy. Whilst publishers place bets on whether this or that book will become a bestseller with little thought to the end customer, the marketing industry has headed toward progressive customer-centricity, more precisely human-centricity, that resembles a lean-agile approach. Kotler describes this as a shift from Marketing 2.0 to 3.0 and onto 4.0. Describing Marketing 3.0 as an improvement upon 2.0's habit of "treating people simply as consumers", instead "marketers" in the 3.0 era "approach them as whole human beings". Although, notably there is still a recognition of them as consumers. (Kotler 2010, 3).

Marketing 4.0, on the other hand, began a movement from traditional marketing to digital, but, notably for my interest in internet-adjacency here, this was not a move to online marketing, but instead Kotler "differentiated 'marketing in the digital world' from digital marketing": "Marketing in the digital world does not rely solely on digital media and channels. The digital divide still exists; thus, marketing requires an omnichannel—online as well as offline—approach." (Kotler 2021a, n.p) Most recently, whilst discussing his even newer human-to-human marketing, Kotler has completed a convergence with lean-agile approaches, at least as far as the lean part is concerned—although there has also been talk of agile marketing (Accardi-Petersen 2011)—with his mention of Lean Content Marketing. This new form of marketing builds directly on Eric Ries's book *The Lean Startup* (2011): "Lean Content Marketing builds on the idea of the lean start-up and follows the principle of 'Build, Measure, Learn'. At first, a company starts with small content units and waits for user feedback, which it then analyzes". From here, in "a constantly repeating loop, new content " is "created and adapted, always based on the findings of the market feedback." In following this

schema, Kotler notes that rather than the "minimum viable product of the lean start-up method, a Minimum Viable Content (MVC) is generated, which is then tested on the customer according to the aforementioned principle, in order to learn from it" (Kotler et al. 2021, 197).

That Kotler here focuses on the minimum viable content means that this content remains separate from the product itself. This means that even if the most up-to-date marketers began to utilise these MVCs in the book publishing industry, this would still not amount to the situation in the software industry where such product discovery is largely able to progress often almost entirely through a product that carries its consumption context and its customers within it. So, overall, book marketing is typically nowhere near as connected to either the product or the product's consumption context as it is for software industry designers and marketers because, here, all are geared to an externally focused product discovery that can be effectively carried within the software product or, at best, carried adjacent to it via the companies website which typically includes internally created login and billing possibilities plus other content marketing information. There is thus little gap between the companies and the customers themselves in software. This lays the ground for regular customer engagement through customer data, which can improve the product.

I should acknowledge that publishing has, more recently, begun to use more data, too, because BookScan data has become available. For instance, Thompson notes that the "track record of an author was a contestable variable that was known to some, surmised by others and always subject to exaggeration in the interests of inflating value" for a long time until the Nielsen BookScan service came along:

> Nielsen launched BookScan in the UK in December 2000 and in the US in January 2001. In essence, BookScan works like this: Nielsen purchases point of sales data from as many significant book retail outlets as it can, collates, regularly updates and manipulates this data so that it can be presented online in a clear and easily navigated way, and then sells access to the collated data by charging subscription fees to publishers and other clients in order for them to access the data on their website, varying the fee according to the size of the company. (Thompson 2010, 197-199)

However, it is instructive here to note that publishers must pay for this data because it is effectively an aggregation of data purchased from book retailers. Moreover, this author-sales data is not customer data and is only indirectly reflecting the customer through the filter of author sales at a number of removes.

Whilst it is likely that book marketing departments do sometimes collect their own data—Raccah provided an example earlier—it seems as if marketing data can still sometimes be viewed as something of a luxury, as something disconnected from revenue. Clark and Phillips quoted Alastair Horne, then Social Media and Communities Manager at Cambridge University Press opining that it can be difficult to obtain data:

> The biggest problem for publishers with social media is their dependence on third parties. It can be difficult to extract data from such platforms in useful quantities, and the ability to reach an audience is often dependent upon the latest version of the algorithm that governs precisely who sees your content – only a small proportion of the people who 'like' your page on Facebook will actually see your latest post, for instance." (Alastair Horne quoted in Clark and Phillips 2014, 236)

In my own experience, there is little doubt that this is true. Whilst it is possible to advertise with social media companies and, from what they promise, target certain demographics, this is quite different from publishers collecting their own data. A publisher's website running Google Analytics is another matter, however. Here, it is possible to gain basic data for free, something a little more granular for free, and potentially to augment this with more qualitative data culled from web forms or calls-to-action from a publisher's website.

Indeed, Horne also noted that "some publishers are building their own online communities, undertaking the considerable expense involved in return for greater control over the data created. The most successful of these communities offer members something they won't get elsewhere." (Alastair Horne quoted in Clark and Phillips 2014, 236). Whilst I take his point about the expense, Google Analytics are free, so much depends on the skillsets of users. Whilst Baverstock and Bowen note that some publishers "fuelled by a firmer desire for data on which to base decisions […] a new range of publishing roles are now standard within the industry – data analysts, futurists, trend analysers and market investigators" (Baverstock and Bowen 2019, 67), it is also true that Microsoft's Power BI tool (BI short for business intelligence) is becoming as ubiquitous as its much older Excel spreadsheet product was and is as user-friendly. Indeed, visual insights can easily be obtained from it and patterns can be identified without having to pay much money for staff who can understand much more complex programming languages such as Python. Moreover, Horne also points out that some of these "communities may ultimately become financially self-sustaining, funding

themselves from user subscriptions." (Alastair Horne quoted in Clark and Phillips 2014, 236)

However, Horne also acknowledges that: "For most publishers" such attempts at online community building "currently remain a marketing expense, a costly but rewarding exercise in gathering market intelligence and building brand loyalty" (Alastair Horne quoted in Clark and Phillips 2014, 236) and therein lies the rub. As Baverstock and Bowen warn, when considering the value of market research: "While [this] information can be hugely useful and their reports a valuable prompt to business decision-making, an important skill for any successful publishing house is how to balance information on market trends with a gut feeling for what the market wants – or might want if they were both informed and offered." Indeed, it is a question of "whether there are no sales within a particular market because there is no existing product—or no market." That this market research is still, as cited in the previous paragraph "fuelled by a firmer desire for data on which to base decisions"(Baverstock and Bowen 2019, 67) begs the question of what kinds of decision. Are they the usual decisions about what books to enter into an agreement to publish? With no sense of a minimum viable book (an MVB) in sight, then it seems likely that a large proportion will be. If this is so, then this likely means that unresolved tensions in book publishing might remain that mitigate its moving to a more customer-centric mode. This could keep the industry locked into a mode that is focused mainly on internal product-centred concerns perhaps in line with trade publishing-proper as set against a move towards more dedicated customer-centricity and a move towards a consumer publishing-proper.

In concluding this section, I have shown that customer engagement in lean-agile contexts is central to how such approaches work, but that book publishing has historically suffered from, and, in some areas of the industry and in certain departments, can still suffer from an over-focus on its own internal concerns ahead of forming relationships with customers. This can be summed up by hype or buzz that sometimes attends a decision-making process that often does not consider customer wants. However, more recently, marketing departments have grown as a partial corrective to this, particularly as marketing has changed to augment its existing externally focused mode to become more customer-centric too. In contrast, software companies are intently customer-focused and regularly engaged with their customers, often through the affordances of their products in ways publishers could not easily achieve in any case.

For publishers wanting to become more customer-centric who were willing to overcome their internal focus to improve their customer engagement, it seems likely that one of the only ways to begin to be able to foster regular customer engagement would be if publishing could somehow find a way to take more control over its consumption context and perhaps begin to identify and to sell directly to its customers.

In concluding this chapter, I have sought answers to the question of whether implementations of the kind found in the software industry can be feasible for the publishing industry and resolved to identify limits and barriers to adoption. My response to this question has been that—no—an exact one-to-one replication of the kind of implementations of lean-agile approaches in the software industry would not be feasible for concurrent publishing limited by the red lines discussed in the previous chapter. The main reason for this is that the software-as-a-service product structure found in the software industry is not readily translatable in the same form in a publishing industry dominated by the finite form of the printed book and its derivatives. This affects everything from the business model to the ability to form customer relationships and to further engage with these customers. However, there are other difficulties too. First, book publishing and the software industry have different understandings of design that are important for successfully implementing lean-agile approaches. Second, and related to this, there is a difference between how the two industries understand marketing. Although marketing has gained stature in book publishing in remains slightly disconnected from more internal publisher-, editor-, or author-centric modes in the industry.

This chapter has sought to answer the question of whether implementations of the kind found in the software industry can be feasible for the publishing industry and resolved to identify limits and barriers to adoption. In answering in the negative and suggesting it would not be feasible to offer the exact kind of lean-agile approach that the software industry adopts, it might seem as if I am saying there are likely no benefits to lean-agile in the publishing industry. However, this is not the case. Indeed, whilst my analysis has revealed the limits by which book publishing could not adopt a lean-agile approach, there is still room for the industry to adapt to a lean-agile consumer publishing-proper with some adjustments. So, whilst there is no comparable MVB in book publishing that precisely matches the modularity, extensibility and ability to

update the software product, this does not mean there might not be a way to think about the conventional book in new ways to render a similar idea. If there is some way to do this, it might unlock new business model possibilities. Moreover, whilst book publishing has a different understanding of design, there may be a way to offer conceptual tools for the industry and to review their existing practice for a potential fit with the kind of design practiced by software companies. However, challenges remain in overcoming potential skepticism in the industry and in considering how such a hypothetical consumer publishing-proper that sits to the side of the more established and normative trade publishing-proper might be profitable.

Where does this leave my broader argument as it stands? In the second chapter, I identified the need for traditional publishing to not only become more customer-centric but to find ways to foster a concurrent publishing paradigm, one that could handle both the traditional business model of publishing—which I have renamed trade publishing-proper— and also pushing to forge a more internet-driven customer-centric mode of consumer publishing-proper alongside this. This chapter has been able to ascertain that whilst it is not feasible to deploy the kind of lean-agile approach found in the software industry, it is likely that there is some appetite, spread unevenly amongst some publishers and perhaps even unevenly amongst different departments within publishing companies that a consumer publishing-proper could happen, but for it to be able to benefit from a lean-agile approach that has been so beneficial to other businesses facing a complex marketplace then there is still the question of *how* it might be able to happen. Although it will be largely hypothetical, my next chapter will seek to answer this question. Much depends on the balance between finding a way to conceive of a minimum viable book through which to drive a lean-agile approach, find better ways to reach customers and open up a more regular dialogue with them without compromising the publishing industry's traditions.

Chapter 4: MVBs, "Porous Books" and Modular Release Strategies

So, how might it be possible to envisage a lean-agile consumer publishing-proper as a customer-centric alternative to the other side of concurrent publishing, namely trade publishing-proper? Whilst the idea of hypothesising a new publishing paradigm can seem far-fetched in an industry that has historically styled itself on stasis and permanence, in truth, innovation is nothing new in publishing (Sandler 2017). Indeed, publishing has always evolved and has never been the same for long, although we might argue that the *pace* of this change might be speeding up. We know well enough that the modern publishing industry took shape in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, building on the development of the printing press that had arrived centuries earlier and its business model based on new copyright laws. We know, too, that publishing became more and more industrialised over time, a form of mass production to serve a mass audience. We also know that the modern hardback and paperback formats grew out of this into what we understand as the form of modern publishing today, with the B-format or trade paperback a relatively new kind of format dating from the second half of the twentieth century. What we do not yet know is what old-new shape the trade and consumer industry might be able to take on to position itself best next as the traditional, still print-based, industry casts off any idea that print will vanish into the digital ether and instead takes up a role that is both traditional and internet-adjacent.

The problem is figuring out how to manage this process in less of an ad-hoc way. My working hypothesis to this point has been that a lean-agile approach can help with this, as it has already helped so many other older industries, companies, and government agencies (the BBC, the Civil Service). My suggestion is that the trade and consumer publishing that have long been synonymous should give way to a differentiation that sees trade publishing remain largely untouched, remaining its risky self, but that publishers could create a new consumer publishing-proper paradigm as a counterweight to the vicissitudes that could afflict the trade model at any time. Moreover, my suggestion is that this could be done through the less expensive affordances of digital technology and should take a lean-agile approach. The problem, then, is how to do this.

The last chapter showed that there is no possible one-to-one fit between the book publishing industry and the most successful implementations of lean-agile approaches in the tech industry. Yet, my comparison also suggested that there may be ways that the book industry might be able to find new business models, find new ways of fostering customer relationships and new strategies for maintaining an engagement with those customers through digital means. However, I noted that one big barrier to this was that they would have to transcend the limitations of the normative publishing product set to do so because a lean-agile approach cannot take shape unless we can find a way to conceive of the minimum viable book.

It would perhaps be understandable for some in the industry to ask whether we should care about creating a more customer-centric consumer publishing-proper. For example, we have already noted how Order of the Book scholars suggest that publishing is enough of a selling point and differentiator from the tech industry just as it is, reasoning that digital technology has merely become a well-integrated matter of digital ebooks or audiobooks. Whilst I applaud the insight that certain affordances of the book and traditional publishing can act as a counterweight against the prevalence of tech culture, selling itself as an alternative to social media and a refuge from screens, and want to offer an idea of a consumer publishing-proper that respects those limits, I would argue that it seems unlikely that many publishers would want to settle for this alone if there were also opportunities to push the same USP online. After all, readers who want a refuge from screens also tend to frequently use screens as a shop window too, and as a way to gain information. In looking to differentiate trade from consumer publishing, my intention is not to dilute the overall USP of publishing, creating a kind of class-bound prestige and difference such as the one that once existed between hardback and paperback. Instead, I intend to posit consumer publishing as a form of publishing that can mine the niches. These can be literary niches or non-fiction niches, but the idea is that they use the consumption context of the internet and digital technology to do so. This is not about inventing some new form of minimally viable digital books—some book-as-app but instead merely making better use of the internet as something adjacent to the book trade, creating a second shop window onto a publisher's products

My question for this chapter then is as follows: How could a new type of lean-agile approach help to create a consumer publishing-proper to sell a more flexible book product (print or digital) that could, in turn, help foster new business models in a way

that could practically help publishers overcome the limitations discussed in the previous chapter? My overall argument here is that although there is no way to replicate a one-to-one implementation of lean-agile that follows the example of the software industry, there are ways to modify certain aspects of the traditional publishing approach without unduly bending it out of shape and also have high compatibility with how the traditional industry works. First, it is quite possible to conceive of a minimally viable book that does not unduly affect the form of the normative printed book, and indeed, this is partly available through work that already exists in publishing studies and literary studies. Second, it is possible to develop new, more flexible, business models by way of this MVB. Third, it is also possible to delve into lean-agile forms of design to explore the problem of how publishers might be able to move beyond thinking about output alone and to begin thinking about outcome-based user experiences too. Fourth, publishers can utilise quite straightforward no-code tools that would allow for more customer engagement to create a customer-centric publishing-as-a-service form of consumer publishing.

Minimum-Viable or "Porous" Books

The immediate question for this section is: How can we create a minimal-viable book (MVB) that can be produced and utilised iteratively and incrementally in a lean-agile manner without damaging the physical book's integrity as we have long understood it (or the ebook's completeness either)? The challenge will be to create a form of the book that can be at once open enough to stimulate regular, even potentially continuous, at the very least, continuing forms of customer engagement whilst remaining as closed and bounded and finished as printed books (but also ebooks and audiobooks) tend to be in the trade and consumer publishing industry. A book that can be quickly scaled up in print to be sold through what I posit as the normative trade publishing paradigm but also one that can simultaneously make the most of the internet-adjacent consumer publishing paradigm. In short, a book that can deliver two seemingly contradictory outcomes. My claim here is that we can create an MVB in three moves. First, by applying the logic of two software development principles—the Dependency Inversion Principle (DIP) and the Open-Closed Principle (OCP). Second, through a better formulation of internet-adjacency. Third, through work from publishing studies that itself builds on older work

from literary studies. What is surprising is that we do not need to alter the actual physical structure of any existing instance of a printed book to achieve this.

So let us remind ourselves of the challenge. We noted in Chapter Two that Order of the Book scholars have championed a new definition of the book that subsumed the vanilla ebook whilst also policing its boundaries to ensure their definition kept its normative bookish integrity and did not dissolve in a web of hyperlinks. They suggested that "the printed book" has become "the core of a cluster of derivatives." (Phillips and Kovač 2022, 24) as the book has become stretched in form from print-alone. This core, which maintains a linear book architecture that is "self-contained, non-porous, static with boundaries" (64), ensures that any derivatives of it must mirror this architecture. For instance, they note that the "reason for the success of the vanilla e-book and dedicated reading devices is" because "book readers prefer to follow linear narratives and do not wish to be distracted by hyperlinks to outside the book." (63) Moreover, they also argue that "readers still want something apart from the Internet that is fixed and internally coherent – they want to read text that has been reworked a number of times to achieve something that is considered and well structured." As for books that have static text that does not change, this works too because "Book authors are rarely keen to update their works every five minutes, and most prefer the book's linear narrative structure." (64).

This outline provides my limits when trying to concoct my minimum-viable book so there must be nothing in my proposed MVB that effectively upsets the internal structure of the print book or the ebook, nothing that renders it as non-linear as the internet. As Phillips and Kovač put it: "If non-linear forms of text could so easily accomplish what the book format accomplishes, such as in the transmission of knowledge and culture, the book as we know it would exist only in museums" (Phillips and Kovač 2022, 63) and my aim here is to not suggest anything that would allow that to happen. Still, I also need to find a way to conceive of a book which can be an MVB. Summing up then, I am pursuing two contradictory aims. First, my definition of the book must maintain the integrity of the book in a normative book publishing sense as a bound and printed artefact. Such affordances help to protect its copyright, but it must also remain capable of maintaining its deep or immersive reading affordances (as earlier identified in my discussion of the Order of the Book perspective in Chapter Two). Second, it must be able to be developed iteratively and incrementally over time and beyond its existence as a bounded book that is out in the world, effectively existing as an open-ended product

capable of being modified and extended over time and also able to offer a service to the customer through ongoing data collection, including carrying its consumption context with it.

Before offering my version, I should note that my call for a minimally viable book (MVB) is not altogether new in publishing studies. Although he did not use the MVB term, Bhaskar has already identified the need for better MVPs in the industry, stating that "Part of the problem for publishers is that their minimum viable product (MVP), the essence of a lean learning process, always comes too late, after significant investment." He further identifies the lack of product discovery in the publishing industry as a problem: "Peer review and user feedback are parts of the publishing process, but nowhere near as much as for digital businesses, where techniques like A/B and multivariate testing dictate strategy" are used. As Bhaskar puts it, publishers are "always shipping a finished version with unproven demand." To this end, he suggests that: "Finding better MVPs, or at least better ways of iteratively releasing products without the full weight of sunk costs, would not only partially de-risk the process in tough times but gradually improve [publishing] through learning, in volatile and competitive" markets. As we have noted earlier, he concludes, "The alternatives are either doing nothing or continuing to learn the hard way." (Bhaskar 2013, 188) Bhaskar rounds off on a positive note that although "responsive publishing would be an enormous cultural and organisational change, it could also be an exciting journey for readers. Publishers would benefit not just strategically but also from closer, more collaborative relationships with their end customers" (188).

Bhaskar's description of this lack of an MVP is clear. Indeed, the only problem with his analysis is that he does not offer potential solutions to this practical problem. Hence, I will attempt one here. To begin, we need to find a way to extend the book in some sense without physically extending it. There are two software engineering approaches that can help us to think about how to do this. These are the Open-Closed Principle and the Dependency Inversion Principle. This is not to suggest that to create an MVB we need to write some code to accomplish it as if there were a kind of digital technological fix. Instead, I merely call upon these principles as a logical way of thinking about the problem because these principles refer as much to ways to think about how to create systems in general as they do to software systems. They are applicable beyond programming. Although the language of these principles refers to modules and software

artefacts, they can be understood in more generally applicable terms to refer to dilemmas in product development in general rather than anything specifically digital.

Vaskaran Sarcar defines the Open-Closed Principle as follows: "The Open-Closed Principle (OCP)" states that "A software artifact should be open for extension but closed for modification." (Sarcar 2022, 12) He further explains why the principle came to be defined: "openness [of some modules is] useful for software developers because they can't foresee all the elements that a module may need in the future. But [at the same time] 'closed' modules will satisfy project managers because they want to complete the project instead of waiting for everyone to complete their parts." (13) From an engineering point of view, this is all about the desire to create loosely coupled systems, but it can also be applied to the MVB problem. Essentially, the OCP principle requires a hybrid product-service design that is simultaneously modular and open for extension at some later point whilst other parts remain unmodifiable. A restaurant menu with added specials could be an analogy for this. Where a menu is fixed (printed) and the ingredients are sourced for a few weeks, there is no way to freshen the menu to attract new customers even though there may be new fresh produce available per day that could add value for our customers. If we were to apply the open-closed principle, we may be able to achieve the best of both worlds. For instance, adding a chalkboard with some specials that can be changed daily into the equation would do this. This principle is mainly about flexibility and, having defined it, I will come back to it in due course.

The second principle that I will introduce is the dependency inversion principle (DIP). Sarcar defines it as follows. When conforming to the DIP, "Abstractions should not depend upon [concrete] details. Instead, the details should depend upon abstractions." (Sarcar 2022, 54). Whilst this sounds rather abstract, indeed it is all about abstraction, it is quite easy to understand through the simple everyday analogy of making a cup of tea. If a tea producer's system for tea preparation were so rigid as to mandate that a teapot must be involved for a cup of tea to be produced, then this would be a case of effectively depending on a concrete detail (the teapot) which is not essential for a cup of tea to exist rather than simply thinking how to produce what is, in effect, the broader and more abstract concept of what constitutes tea. Under the tea producer's plan, a cup of tea could not then be made *unless* a teapot was involved. This would mean that a lower-level detail (the teapot) of tea-making was blocking the potential for

tea to be made in some other manner. If we move up a level of abstraction and just say that the tea-making system must only be able to produce a cup of tea by whatever means are available and mandate some extremely basic rules for what constitutes tea (hot water, tea in some form, some crockery) then we can use everything from boiled water in a saucepan, or water poured straight from the kettle onto a teabag in a cup without a teapot to achieve tea. So, how do I apply this to the concept of book production?

One way to think about this is to follow the Order of the Book idea of considering the printed book as the core of a cluster of derivatives, as our base state, and then work to extend that definition. This idea maintains the printed book sits at the core of the more abstract concept of a book but it is abstract enough to allow that a book does not have to be defined by the printed book specifically since there might only be an ebook release. This Order of the Book definition already obeys the dependency inversion principle because it is no longer mandating that a printed book has to exist but that something that is based on the architecture of a printed book has to exist. So, now the book (the book title, to be accurate) has become more of an abstract concept but is still named after the printed book, which remains at the core. The Order of the Book definition says nothing about whether the *print* book must ever actually exist and only that the rule is that it must be able to exist unimpeded. So, as a derivative, an ebook that was a mess of hyperlinks and could not be rendered in print would break the Order of the Book definition. Whilst the current normal practice is to create a print book and offer a mirror of it in ebook or audiobook form at the same time or later, there is no need for the industry to perform this exact sequence in all cases.

However, it is worth noting that this is less true for what I am terming the trade publishing paradigm because the trade *does* rely on a print book existing and not remaining in potentia. This is one reason why it would likely be a good idea to think of trade publishing-proper and consumer publishing-proper as two different paradigms. I will come back to this in the next section. For now, we are still honouring the Order of the Book's definition of the book and we have noted that it has become more of an abstract concept served by various print or digital formats. My next question is: would we still be honouring the Order of the Book definition if we admitted the particular book title's webpage as part of the concept of the book too? To answer this, we might think a little bit more about how the publishing industry became internet-adjacent and

what effect it had on books. For instance, the arrival of the internet caused the printed book—whether hardback, B-format trade paperback, mass market paperback, or whatever else—to undergo a major change in a way that has not often been noted by adding one or more web pages online that represent it too. This is to say that any kind of printed book in, for example, 1986 *was* different from the same kind of book in 1999 due to the internet.

The reason for this had nothing to do with enhanced ebooks, digital books, or anything of the kind and instead had to do with the fact that all books became what I term *partially hybrid books* once the public internet arrived. Essentially, this happened virtually overnight, or at least it happened as speedily as publishers created their websites. The same instance of a printed book title that, in 1986, was merely a printed copy had transformed into a partial hybrid even without needing to be picked from the shelf by its owner. This is because it had become what I had begun in my thinking to term *internet-adjacent* by dint of the almost too-simple-to-be-noticeable fact that most books, and indeed most products these days, have been extended virtually in some senses through their dual appearance in physical reality and online—at least if they involve a physical product that has a presence on the internet via the publisher's website. This *internet adjacency* seemed, in my thinking, to bridge the gap between the world of print and the fully digital ebook.

I subsequently found out that this term, internet adjacency, was already in use in a cybersecurity context. As Aggarwal and Reddie note here, it carries the same sense as I had been previously grasping for myself:

> [T]here are internet-adjacent firms whose products have internet-based components but that have core business interests outside of the technology sector. We consider firms working in the 'Internet of Things (IoT)' space such as General Electric, Kenmore, and PG&E as well as 'big-box' stores that rely on the internet to sell 'real-world' goods, such as Walmart, Tesco, and Target as examples of these types of firms. Increasingly, most firms besides the two other categories we have identified, are becoming internet-adjacent as they increasingly rely on the internet as a marketplace to meet customers, carry out logistics, and track consumer data." (Aggarwal and Reddie 2018, 293)

Although I do not wish to flag up a printed book on anybody's shelf as a cybersecurity risk, it is interesting to see how far this definition stretches because, clearly, given the size of the internet and the fact that most things are on sale there, internet-adjacency

represents an extremely broad grouping of things. For my purposes, it also offers a way to think of physical book titles as extended beyond their print counterpart.

Although most of us have continued to think of a printed book title as a different thing from the webpage which may be dedicated to it, almost as if the webpage was akin to an advert in a third-party magazine or newspaper, it is quite possible to look at it through a different conceptual lens and imagine it to be an extended part of the book title. This is true not least since the publisher of the book creates or curates (or pays someone to create or curate) these pages. In only slightly extending the Order of the Book definition, we have been able to add more flexibility through extensibility because we are not allowing a concrete detail—the particular format of the book— to dictate the wider idea of the book. This also allows us to deploy the open-closed principle because whilst both trade and consumer publishing broadly do still depend upon the physical book being bound and complete as the main event, like the restaurant depends upon the menu being ready in this way too, the specials board allows for new ways to freshen the menu, weekly, daily, etc because of how it sits adjacent to the menu and is far more malleable. In the same way, the publisher's webpage for the book title, both of which sit adjacent to their book titles, plays the role of the board with the specials chalked upon it. Thus the partially hybrid "book" becomes partially updatable and extensible.

This idea of products as something broader than their physical structure chimes with the literature on how the internet has reconfigured products and services too. Even before the lean startup idea began to look towards co-created software-as-a-service products released continuously and informed by data interrogation, earlier pre-internet computerisation had already redefined the kinds of traditional products familiar to us all since the Industrial Revolution. Brännback and Pukakainen tell us that traditional products are "basically tangible" and possess the following characteristics. They can be "stored, displayed and communicated; "production and consumption [are] not continuous"; they are "suited to mass production"; their "quality can be controlled"; and any interaction between customers and employees of a firm does not affect the final result of the product itself. Moreover, traditional products lend themselves to "supply and demand". They can be "returned [or] destroyed" (Brännback and Pukakainen 1998, 50). Indeed, this latter point is something that publishers know all too well. In contrast to the traditional product, the traditional service was typically the opposite.

Traditional services were viewed as being "intangible". They typically could not easily "be stored, displayed or communicated". However, this is not to say that communication would not typically be part of a service. A person-to-person exchange was often the form that a service took. In fact, traditional services often depended on customer-employee relations, which affected how the service played out. This meant quality could not be controlled, and the service depended "on many uncontrollable factors", a defining feature of traditional services. In short, it was the *form* of the service itself that could not typically be stored, displayed or communicated rather than the communication that took place during the service. This is because traditional services were essentially live—"simultaneously produced and consumed" rather than discretely separated in time and space as traditional products were. This also meant that such services were not previously suited to supply and demand because they could not "be returned [or] destroyed" (Brännback and Pukakainen 1998, 50). They were, to all intents and purposes, "performed" (Vandermerwe and Rada 1988, 315). Either face-to-face or voice-to-voice (if on the telephone). This mostly meant services were available only during business hours, although mail-order and telephone services could render them somewhat asynchronous in a limited way.

This all changed with computerisation. Moreover, it changed again soon after when delivering products over the Internet became a standard practice. At this point, there was an increase in products and services that merged into one. Print-on-demand—a printing service and a physical book—offers a good example of how products, previously always physical and spatial, have begun to blur into services. These services had been temporal but. once computerised, they existed as physical or digital products, too. These new hybrid forms of product and service, which lean-agile practitioners typically abbreviate to become just "product", could not exist without digital technology and the internet. Brännback and Pukakinen's discussion of what they term electronic services offers a good overview of these changes. Electronic services *are* "tangible", "can be displayed, stored and communicated", and "the job" formerly "performed by employees is now transferred to the customer". Moreover, "mass production [of the service] is easy" (Brännback and Pukakinen 1998, 50). Effectively this means that products and services can now exist as virtual hybrids that differ from conventional forms. For example, a hybrid product such as a banking app does not now depend on the presence of a staff member to deliver the banking service, thus removing the need for live and direct human-to-human service in many aspects. This live interaction is

instead replaced with a software simulation of the same service but one that is delivered via a third-party hardware device through which the customer interacts with the business.

If we add the continuous development of many of these hybrid software-as-a-service products today, such systems can often now be simultaneously produced and consumed in the manner of services. This means that services can also now be mass-produced as if they were traditional products. The key to replicating something like this for book publishing and physical books would be to better apply the concept of internet-adjacency in publishing. This involves recognising that all physical products that have any presence on the Internet have been changed by being adjacent to it. Although they are not software-as-a-service apps, then they have all now become partial hybrids, at least, due to their coexistence in physical reality and their existence on the Internet. Moreover, they are all, to some extent, representative of a kind of digital service in some way. This service is often very limited in the case of mere read-only website listings, which remains the most dominant way of using websites in the publishing industry. Nevertheless, these websites are a form of service. For example, if we consider the extended existence of books on the Penguin Books website, they exist there as a wayfinding service to point to various third-party online retailers where the books exist for sale. Other parts of this Penguin *service* might include interviews, blurbs, or whatever else but they too are primarily read-only. Can this webpage truly be understood as the book, too, though? Or does the book have to continue to be output alone? One way to think about this is to think about the lean-agile definition of products as outcome- rather than output-based.

The output-outcome terminology that is often quoted in lean-agile adages comes from the idea of logic models, which McLaughlin and Jordan define as "programs for change". They suggest that such programs are often used to manage progress in the third sector concerning funding applications where change rather than profit is the aspect that requires measurement. Put simply, logic models describe the process of taking an input or some collection of resources and then feeding them into some process, which then produces some output. The next part of the logic model, though, represents the aspect most missing from our traditional understanding of such things: the outcome. (McLaughlin and Jordan 2015, 62-87). Outcomes occur after the product rolls off the metaphorical production line, *after* a sale, or at least when the output is used for something. They exist in a largely unexplored zone for producers, businesses

and, indeed, traditional trade book publishers, whose involvement often typically stops or at least slows at the point of sale or even the point of shipping to the trade. Moving to consider outcomes as a definable part of the product, as lean-agile cultures do, begins to render products as something quite different from the simple traditional output. Indeed, an outcome is an abstract quality. In contrast, the output is concrete, meaning defining products via outcome is akin to defining them abstractly and satisfying the dependency inversion principle that explicitly prefers abstraction over concretion.

Does this talk of openness and promiscuousness of books overly loosen the Order of the Book's rules for the book though? Does it begin to hint at the excesses described by Craig Mod with his evocation of the openness of digital books and the various marvellous new things that could be done with them if they were more akin to something non-linear:

> To sort by them. To order them and share them. Use them as pivots for discussions. Comment around them. Draw lines from them and the books to which they were connected, to other books and the thoughts of other designers. To unlock, as it were, the marks of [an author's] telepathic experiences. This is the post-artifact system. A system of unlocking. A system concerned with engagement. Sharing. Marginalia. Ownership. Community. And, of course, reading. It's the system that transforms the book from isolated vessel for text into a shared interface. (Mod 2011, n.p)

Whilst my suggestion to incorporate the webpage in our concept of the book *does* mean we might now be able to sort, order, share, discuss, and comment around books if we were to share webpages around on social media, etc, thereby abstractly transforming the book from an isolated vessel for text into a shared interface, my specific rendering of the book as something internet-adjacent *does not* need to transform the actual physical book output at all to do so.

So how does this meet the challenge that I set earlier? To reiterate some of the rules of the Order of the Book and juxtapose them with Michael Bhaskar's idea of the possibilities for minimum viable books, we might note that merely by extending the idea of the print book as the core of a source of derivatives to include a book title's webpage as part of the book itself and to include the ability to share details about the book title on social media, the printed book (or any of its derivatives) remains closed-ended, bounded and complete. The reader need not worry about being sent out of the text by hyperlinks. The author need not worry about being asked to update it every few minutes. Yet, adding the webpages and social media posts that share that webpage to

the idea of the book title, means the book is effectively open-ended too. In this sense, and in Bhaskar's terms, we can now get around the idea that "responsive publishing would be an enormous cultural and organisational change" and focus on it being "an exciting journey for readers". Creating a scenario where "Publishers would benefit not just strategically but also from closer, more collaborative relationships with their end customers" (Bhaskar 2013, 188).

The kind of extended internet-adjacent definition of the book that I offer here does not negate the output of the printed book and disrupt its finite state, but at the same time, it does not restrict the book to some odd disembodied, distributed digital existence either because there is no outcome without some deliverable output (whether completed print or digital book). The concrete form of the book is self-contained and static with boundaries and non-porous, as mandated by Order of the Book advocates, but the wider idea of it does begin to open it up—to render it porous— as a much wider concept. If we think about the book in this extended way, less in terms of its output form and more in terms of its overall concept, then minimally viable books become much more possible as a reality and easily so. There is still output, but it is the outcome that we look at when defining the book. In this sense, the open-closed principle can apply and fit the requirements I set earlier for MVBs. For example, the MVB book output can remain closed for modification, whilst the MVB book (the wider, extended product architecture) can be open for extension. We already know which part is to be closed for modification—the printed book itself. The only question that remains in sketching this concept is how might we find a way to name the parts of the overall system of a book that can be open for extension.

Although I stated earlier that Bhaskar did not offer a solution to the MVB or MVP, it seems he may have had part of the answer to this latter question two years before his work on the lean startup approach in his paper on what he terms paracontent. Indeed, his concept of paracontent offers me a way to answer the question of what part of the rapidly evolving MVB will be open for extension. Bhaskar opened his paper "Towards Paracontent" (2011) with a description of Penguin's ambitious multimedia marketing campaign "We Tell Stories" (Bhaskar 2011, 25), an example of the paracontent of the paper's title, Bhaskar's overall thesis here is that the book, bounded and complete as it tends to be in its released state, is much more open than it might seem. He suggests that, on the one hand, its completeness is a large part of its appeal: "the virtue of a book could precisely be seen in its bookishness—the pleasure comes from the text, the pages,

the word" (26). Yet, he also notes that this "image [of the bounded book standing alone] doesn't fully cohere with the structures and products of modern publishers, which often include a large amount of multimedia output" that surrounds the book. He also suggests that when looked at from a certain angle, books have long been both bounded and finite and yet open and non-finite too: "While we have long regarded books as being porous in terms of the contextual, biographical, psycho-social, intertextual pressures upon them, the book has also formed a unitary whole within itself. Texts have been theorized as the most malleable and impressionable of entities, yet, faced with a book, we are ultimately faced with what is, by dint of physicality, a coherent thing." (34)

Bhaskar wanted to conceptualise the paracontent that sits to the side of the main content and take it more seriously as both "operationally and culturally significant" (Bhaskar 2011, 26) when considering the book. Akin to Kovač and Phillips' attempts to redefine the book for the digital age discussed earlier, this was Bhaskar's attempt to alter our "definition and understanding of the book", something he suggests "has to change in line with new digital and commercial transmutations" (34). The concept of paracontent, he suggests, is "useful both analytically and practically for those involved with the production and marketing of content." (34) For my case here, it also offers the best means to imagine the shape of the extensible part of an MVB and its relation to the wider idea of book architecture as I have begun to think of it. This concept of paracontent and the idea of porous books offer the chance to conceive of books that can be produced iteratively and incrementally since the paracontent can continue to be released and re-released endlessly, irrespective of the lifecycle of the actual physical book; it is also copyright free so it can live on the internet adding copyright value to its physical counterpart. It can be used in many ways, but I will return to that in my next section on business models and in the final section of this chapter too.

However, before I make this further connection to its utility as an MVB, I want to offer more detail on what Bhaskar suggests are the defining features of paracontent and some background on its antecedents. I will begin with the defining features. Bhaskar suggests the first of these involves the dual "External/Internal" (Bhaskar 2011, 32) character of paracontent:

> The key feature of paracontent lies in its fundamental ambiguity of location; of at once being part of a work and the experience of a work, yet also external to it. This is so both in literal terms, in that it does not form a unitary whole (physically and digitally), and also in the sense that it is conceptually distinct—it pushes the boundaries of a work further than it would otherwise

go. Paracontent, then, is marked by an indeterminacy of identity that underwrites its dual functionality. We must always think of it as simultaneously (and not oxymoronically) being exogenous and endogenous to the work in question. (Bhaskar 2011, 32)

This is an intriguing idea suggesting a type of content that forms part of the surroundings of the main content and retains its externality. It chimes with my application of the open-closed principle to the MVB.

Despite this ambiguous internal externality, Bhaskar's second distinctive feature argues that paracontent is not wholly out on its own: "Paracontent is not, as with the purest forms of transmedia storytelling, acephalous, but rather there is always a central text—the canonical element—around which the paracontent works: precisely what it's 'para' to in the first place" (Bhaskar 2011, 32). It "exists hierarchically situated in a subordinate position; it takes cues from and works towards another, more central work in an orbital relationship." (33) Third, Bhaskar suggests that although paracontent often comes without a direct price tag, it exists as part of a "Commercial rational". Even if a form of paracontent may not be "necessarily conceived with market-making objectives in mind", it "can always be, construed as a publicity generating device." He further notes that: "Certainly, in the publishing industry, publisher-created content is produced alongside, or even as, marketing materials, and if the paracontent antedates publisher acquisition, the paracontent is readily co-opted as marketing." Finally, and importantly for what I intend to make its role in customer-centricity as part of an MVB: "Paracontent is an active player in an economy of attention" (Bhaskar 2011, 33).

Finally, Bhaskar notes that his definition of paracontent tends to have a "Digital bias". Whilst he insists that "There is nothing foundationally digital about paracontent", it is true that "much paracontent is digital and, moreover, much of the concept derives from the creative possibilities and cultural shifts engendered" [by] digital technologies, whose openness, ease of content creation, cultures of camouflage, play, user interactivity, and so on encourages" it (Bhaskar 2011, 33). Offering this digital bias as a distinctive feature acts to update paracontent slightly and to make it partially distinct from the older idea of paratext, Gérard Genette's concept (Genette 1997), the original idea upon which Bhaskar's paracontent concept is clearly based. Indeed, I would argue that Bhaskar's term is only really separated from Genette's work by its rebadging of para-*text* into a more multimedia-encompassing para-*content*. However, Genette's version has some extra nuance that will be useful to me in my next section on how to develop business models through this new idea of minimally-viable porous books so I

will introduce it there. Otherwise, this digital bias seems apt given my discussion of changed products through internet adjacency, but I would also note that this is something quite different from what is usually termed a digital versus analogue book, a view that assumes the two can be so easily divined.

In concluding this section then, I believe I have succeeded in conceiving a way to create a modest minimum viable book by considering how all printed books have already been rendered slightly less bounded and have been extended in subtle ways as a result of the arrival of the internet. I did this with the help of the dependency inversion and open-closed principles taken from a software engineering context. I then read this through the idea of internet adjacency and through the fact that most products these days have been extended to be given some limited service element through their existence on the internet, an extension that often includes some sense of a consumption context but which also offers the chance for other extended features of it to exist. Overall, this loosened the bounds of the book further, mostly conceptually, but enough to find a gap by which the book can be defined in terms of its outcome rather than in terms of its output, a move which, importantly, does not negate the output but merely de-emphasises it. Whilst this is subtle, it does mean that publishers could begin to define books by placing their focus upon the more abstract quality of outcome and not the output which might more usually dominate the definition. In this sense, they could begin to create the book afresh as an MVB with some parts—the printed output—closed for modification and copyright protected, whilst other parts could be open for extension to support and build copyright value via the internet. Bhaskar's idea of paracontent and the porous book offered further incentive and further terminology for thinking in this way.

Modular Release Strategies

So, we now have our working definition of a minimum viable book, still as bounded and as unchanged as ever, but porous too, thanks to its coexistence on a publisher's webpage for the book. Indeed, it remains so normative that it would not be unreasonable to challenge my newly minted MVB concept by asking: "So what? What is different about this MVB compared to a normal book? After all, all publishers already have links to their books online in various ways". To this, I would acknowledge that nothing is

new about this book title or MVB until it allows for the creation of new business models to augment the existing normative business model. For the MVB to truly show its worth, it must offer new business models for the industry that themselves deliver publishing-as-a-service (PaaS) because it is this service-like behaviour that is required for a lean-agile approach. This brings me to my question for this section: How can this MVB product help provide new forms of business model in a publishing industry that continues to remain primarily related to "the economics of the printing press" (Phillips and Kovač 2022, 61) without creating business models which the tech industry can cannibalise? Also, by what means can these business models be executed? My answer would be that publishers could better utilise their internet adjacency to create a consumer publishing-proper that amounts to publishing-as-a-service. Moreover, with its more hypothesis-driven approach, I would argue that Lean UX could be a good means to implement this.

I should begin with the acknowledgement that there are, of course, no direct examples of these kinds of consumer publishing-proper business models to draw upon because I have only just sketched their potential basis in the MVB. Fortunately, I can turn to my own current practice as a serial founder of different publishing ventures to offer up what is, at the time of writing, a hypothetical publishing business idea that my partner and I are in the process of setting up. This can offer an idea of how this could work. Indeed, my thinking about minimum viable books has been influenced by both this research and the possibilities taking place in the context of my practice. So, for my example here, I will draw upon the example of an aptly enough, as yet hypothetical new publishing venture named Rapid Transit. I will begin with a short description of Rapid Transit and its business model. Rapid Transit will publish short books on design and lean-agile subjects aimed at a niche audience of designers, software engineers and product managers. For the business model, we plan to use the affordances of the MVB sketched in the previous section, particularly its modularity, to help formulate different types of book releases. This business model will use the various potential states of the MVB to keep our overall release strategy open, keying it to the aim of either product discovery or product delivery.

Although I will discuss different potential combinations of MVB release types in the final section of this chapter, I will begin by outlining one key type of release—what we term the *optional book release*. This strategy utilises the most minimal form of the

minimum viable book that I sketched earlier. Optional releases are book releases that consist only of the webpage (blurb and book cover) part of the MVB. Although they may seem at first glance like they are pre-orders, this is actually a form of release that is released in this extremely minimal form even before the decision to go through with the publication of a book is made. In fact, this book may never get past this stage and may remain only an option for future release. We will be upfront about the fact that this will be the case and will make it part of how we are understood as a publisher. The reason for this approach is not to deliver a product, at least not at that early stage, and maybe never to deliver it, but to begin to gather data on the possibility that anyone will have any interest in it. The optional book title's website show page can be posted on social media, and sign-up forms on the site can help track interest and collect email addresses from readers who may be interested. Google Analytics data attached to the webpage would also be leveraged to offer insights.

Why might this optional release strategy be valuable? One way in which it might be valuable is in testing for potential market niches. For example, for Rapid Transit we have two main niche customer segments in mind. Our nicknames for these two potential customer segments, in keeping with our rapid transit underground rail motif, are "Daily Commuters" and "Weekday Explorers". Daily commuters are practitioners who already work in lean-agile product development environments and who may be au fait with the terminology but who may seek new and interesting content on the subject beyond the boilerplate content found online, and who may seek it off-screen. In contrast, weekday explorers are more numerous and are composed of professionals in various areas of knowledge work who are dimly aware of lean-agile modern improvement processes but who do fully understand them. At present, these two customer segments only exist as a hypothesis too and may not exist in reality at all, but this is okay because the strategies such as optional release offer a low-cost, low-effort way to help identify whether they might exist through the data gathered or, if they turn out not to exist, other possibilities may emerge from the data.

The question of whether each book will ever be released will derive from the continual testing of paracontent through blog posts, social media posts, etc. Indeed, any paracontent form that we see fit to experiment with. Each piece of paracontent will tend to lead back to the individual webpage for each relevant attached book title, where we will monitor interest through Google Analytics data. In terms of the authorship of these

books, we will be free to begin the process of deciding to author some ourselves based on the data coming in or to use the process to commission authors for them from within the community that we will be seeking to build through paracontent release, and later through physical book output release. My guess is we will likely author and release a couple of them to get the ball rolling because they are very short, so it will not take too much effort, and we have a related professional interest in doing so anyway. At the website level, it will look no different to most publishing websites. Outwardly, Rapid Transit will merely look like a publishing company that produces straightforward B-format paperbacks and ebooks, although there will be no need to pre-decide format for each title either. We might use print-on-demand, ebook-only, small batch printing, or larger print runs. Each format will relate to the data collected. We will be open about the fact that if books do not meet a certain threshold of interest they may never be released.

The main thing to understand about the Rapid Transit business model is that it will build on elements of Genette's concept of paratext but extend it through Bhaskar's notion of paracontent. Indeed, Genette offers the template for Bhaskar's internal-external feature of paracontent by labelling the whole field beyond the text as "paratext". What is interesting for me from the point of view of the Rapid Transit release strategy is how Genette also usefully divides the elements of paratext into spatial and temporal dimensions. For instance, Genette terms elements that sit closer to the text as "peritext": "elements such as the title or the preface and sometimes elements inserted into the interstices of the text, such as chapter titles or certain notes". In contrast, he gives the name "epitext" to "The distanced elements" that comprise "those messages that, at least originally, are located outside the book, generally with the help of the media (interviews, conversations) or under cover of private communications (letters, diaries, and others)". However, beyond spatial elements alone, Genette also offers a "temporal" concept of paratext too: "If we adopt as our point of reference the date of the text's appearance—that is, the date of its first, or original, edition—then certain paratextual elements are of prior (public) production: for example, prospectuses, announcements of forthcoming publications, or elements that are connected to prepublication in a newspaper or magazine" (Genette 1997, 5).

These terms enrich Bhaskar's take and offer more possibilities for defining new business models. Indeed, Genette's ideas have played a role in how we conceived the first iteration of Rapid Transit's business model because it is Genette's temporal

paratext, rendered by him in terms of the book publishing industry of his day, that we can now reconfigure to create the various forms of release that could exist in the present-day book industry. Historically, releases have been based on format—paperback, hardback, ebook, etc, in other words on physical output—representing the main evolution of release strategies for publishing. However, the idea behind the Rapid Transit business model is to experiment with the fusion of Genette's temporal paratext with Bhaskar's paracontent. In adapting the original context that tends traditionally to either place physical release first and the promotion and marketing of the release second or times the initial promotion to coincide with pre-orders, Rapid Transit's method allows an even earlier pre-commitment release to exist. Indeed, optional releases offer an outcome-based release that can gather data to find out what the potential readers who show themselves to be interested want from the book and then develop the book content around that. Although these elements are already somewhat lean-agile at their base, one further question might be how is this optional release strategy servitised rendering publishing-as-a-service (PaaS)?

As I noted in the first section, traditional products were always tangible and could be displayed, stored and communicated. This emphasized the user's own use of the product. In contrast, traditional services were typically live. They could not be displayed or stored, and the details of their live activity could not be communicated. This emphasizes employees' actions when offering live service. When electronic services such as software-as-a-service came along, services (such as a banking service) could now be both live and displayed (via an app interface), stored (via an underlying database) and each live engagement with the service could be communicated after it had ended (again this is recorded by the app and stored in the database). This emphasized the software product and the service element undertaken behind the scenes by software developers. With the MVB, we have a partially hybrid form of electronic service. At the very least, an MVB consists of a website listing but with the addition of the regular release of paracontent, the idea is that we are making regular service offerings to the customer over time and measuring the response to the idea of a specific book-title. Meanwhile in a book production sense, if enough interest is generated, this can scale all the way up to being normative a printed book, a short print run or a larger print run.

Here, whilst the printed book is akin to a conventional product, its internet adjacency means that, to some extent, the product can be displayed in both physical and electronic (internet) form. Whilst no details of actual product usage can be ascertained

from the printed book, the customer's interest in it, tracked via web statistics and promoted by social media, can offer publishers some understanding of the reader or potential reader's consumption context at the very least. Meanwhile, this data can be stored and used to offer an ongoing service to different customer segments now that customers have been identified. Moreover, their website use could offer further understanding of user behaviour. Indeed, if a publisher went as far as implementing a fully-fledged consumer publishing-proper and allowing customers to buy directly from their websites, more data could be collected, and potential repeat business for similar titles could be sought later. In this sense, this hybrid form of an electronic service can have the best of the physical affordances that the printed book, in particular, has to offer whilst also drawing on data from the parts of the book that existed as paracontent online.

So, how could this PaaS service, operated through these new business models, be managed? The Lean UX evolution of the lean startup approach offers one possible answer to how we might begin to think about the management of this type of service-like release strategy, which I will investigate here. Jeff Gothelf and Josh Seiden, the originators of this approach, introduce it in their book of the same name, noting its origins beyond its nod to Ries' *The Lean Startup* (2011):

> Besides Lean Startup, Lean UX has two other foundations: design thinking and agile development philosophies. Design thinking helps us widen the scope of our work beyond interfaces and artifacts. Design thinking looks at systems and helps us apply design tools to broader problems. It relies on collaboration, iteration, making, and empathy as core to problem-solving. Perhaps the biggest takeaway from design thinking is its focus on building empathy—teamwide—for the end user. (Gothelf and Seiden 2021, 24-25)

In bringing design thinking explicitly into the lean startup process, the Lean UX method puts product discovery ahead of product delivery in terms of importance but finds a way to combine the two in parallel in a lean-agile manner. To this end, its main emphasis is on learning as quickly as possible through what I would term paracontent, but what they would define as different categories of MVP.

The Lean UX approach finds a way to unite user outcomes with business outcomes by adapting the user story template and turning it into a hypothesis story template. Instead of the standard user story approach as characterised by the form—As a [add user persona], I want [add some goal], so that [some reason]—the Lean UX hypothesis

story shifts to the following template: "*We believe we will achieve [this business outcome], if [these personas] attain [this benefit/user outcome] with [this feature or solution]*" (Gothelf and Seiden 2021, 141). This shift to this hypothesis-driven development format is a closer fit for the lean startup process that evolved out of the agile software development that had most frequently taken on user stories. In many ways, this hypothesis-driven mode represents an evolution of the user story by uniting the business outcome element with the user element. It focuses on adapting agile software processes to the product discovery process, a process which involves building empathy for the customer in line with the business goal. Lean UX advocates put this in the following terms: "Practicing Lean UX means the entire team builds this empathy. Agile refocuses software development on shorter cycles, regular delivery of value, and continuous learning. It seeks to get ideas (oftentimes as working software) to customers quickly, sense how these ideas are received, and respond frequently to new learning along the way." (24-25).

However, the phrase "oftentimes as working software" is slightly misleading because as we have already discussed earlier, lean startup and, subsequently, Lean UX can often be applied outside of industries that are software-centred even as they do tend to at least utilise some digital software-based method of collecting or storing data to do so. We can see this in the kinds of MVPs that Lean UX advocates define. The first of these MVP types, and the one that they focus most on, is not made of software but is essentially the creation of something like paracontent. I will call these Value-MVPs based on Gothelf and Seiden's idea of "Creating an MVP to Understand Value" (Gothelf and Seiden 2021, 153). The definition of value here is underpinned by Seiden's more specific definition of *outcome* in his solo-authored book, where he defines outcome as "a change in human behaviour that drives business results" (Seiden 2021, 10). Although I will come back to the idea of changing human behaviour in the next section, for now, the main thing to note about Seiden's (and the Lean UX approach, too, because their co-authored book adopts this same definition) is that the user outcome must be prioritised ahead of the business outcome, with one driving the other. In other words, what we have been defining as product discovery is the operative value being chased here, the product delivery—whatever the business sells as the output—is secondary, and as the reader will remember from my brief discussion of logic models in the last section, an outcome always involves some output.

In the case of the Value-MVP, the Lean UX approach further refines the process of creating an MVP. Where, at one time, an MVP was a subset of a product rendered through an early design of a software product created by software engineers, Lean UX Value-MVPs are even more minimal in their form. What I mean by this is that Lean UX practitioners find any way to get ideas out to the user to test them as fast as possible. They list a whole array of these, including basic paper prototypes: "Made of the most accessible components—paper, pens, and tape—paper prototypes give you the ability to simulate experiences in a quick" way where "No digital investment is necessary." (Gothelf and Seiden 2021, 169) The idea here is to elicit knowledge from the customer, user, or potential customer as quickly as possible so it can be done again, the value-MVP re-released and again iterated and refined. In this sense, a blog post on some existing easy-to-use platform like Medium.com could be a value-MVP, a social media post, or a conversation with a customer. It does not matter what form it takes as long as it is lightweight and as easy to achieve as possible. Gothelf and Seiden discuss ideas such as the Feature-Fake and the Wizard of Oz MVP as examples of this.

They describe the "Feature-Fake" type of Value MVP in the following terms. A "Feature Fake (aka the Button to Nowhere) [is useful when] the cost of implementing a feature is very high" but where there may be interest. In the case of the feature-fake value-MVP type, the relatively speedy ability to preview ideas on the internet is leveraged in place of the development of the software product, software feature, or in the case of Rapid Transit, the most minimal website-only optional release discussed earlier. Moreover, they note, "it is cheaper and faster to create the appearance of the feature [or product or MVB] where none actually [fully] exists. HTML buttons, calls to action, and other prompts and links provide the illusion to your customer that a feature exists. Upon clicking or tapping the link, the user is notified that the feature is "coming soon" and that they will be alerted when this has happened" (Gothelf and Seiden 2021, 159-160). As shown in our strategy for Rapid Transit it is relatively easy for a publisher to test the demand for a book series by creating early book covers or some other non-book cover adorned webpage in a Coming Soon page on their website before deciding whether to publish it.

It is worth pausing here to acknowledge that this type of move seems, at best, quite alien to book publishing and, at worst, a source of reputational risk. The authors of Lean UX are alive to this latter problem and have advice for those thinking of using feature-

fakes: "If you feel they might negatively affect your relationship with your customer, you can make it right by offering a gift card or some other kind of compensation to those who found your mousetrap" (Gothelf and Seiden 2021, 160). Despite noting how different this is from much conventional publishing, there are ways of thinking about this kind of release in a contemporary publishing context that suggests there are, at least, partial precedents. For example, there is some precedent in contemporary book publishing that can serve as a model for this type of optional release Value MVP. This comes in the shape of the Unbound publishing platform and the use of the crowdfunding model to decide which books to publish. Thompson has previously discussed this: "The crowdfunding models systematically build readers' responses into the decision-making process, as a decision to go ahead with a book depends on the extent to which individuals are willing to back the project with firm commitments of financial support." (Thompson 2021, 468)

I suggest that Unbound is only a *partial* precedent for Rapid Transit because, with Rapid Transit, we do not intend to open the forum to readers in a public voting style but instead to offer a different kind of narrative based on the optional release. For instance, once we explain that we plan to work in a lean-agile way, we know our particular audience will understand what we are doing. However, this does not suggest that this can only work for publishers who serve this type of reader. It tells us that it would be up to any publisher who chose to adopt our model to explain the process and tweak the business model as they see fit for their audiences. This need not apply to the whole of a publishing company and could be restricted to certain lists, imprints, and book series. There is no reason it should not work for something like fiction, either. We know already that it is becoming standard in publishing, for good or for bad, for publishers to interrogate the author's social media platform as part of their deliberations of which books to publish, as Thompson notes: "[one way in which] the editor can use to form a judgement and build the case for a book is the author's platform." (Thompson 2010, 204) It would not be difficult to imagine some arrangement where the author provided the paracontent for a release even as the author is forewarned the book may not happen to pre-build the book. Indeed, as noted in my previous publishing experience, pragmatic authors increasingly do this anyway.

When weighing up the value of this model, another factor that may concern publishers might be the cost and management of the process. As a way forward for publishing, Thompson clearly likes the kind of model where decisions can be made

pending demand, noting that it "turns the traditional publishing model on its head: it is no longer 'publish the book and then try to find a market for it' but, rather, 'try to find a market for the book and then decide whether to publish it.' It's a terrific model that takes account of readers' preferences and greatly reduces publishers' risk". However, he does suggest that such processes are "time-consuming and administratively complex and […] difficult to scale up to a large publishing operation releasing thousands of new books a year" (Thompson 2021, 468). Whilst I understand why Thompson, whose scholarly expertise is in traditional book publishing and not in lean-agile approaches, judges this to be the case, and I would agree he has a point, I would disagree that product discovery is necessarily as time-consuming or difficult to scale up. For instance, in the Lean UX process, the *lean* that modifies *UX* refers to doing as little work as possible and as speedily as possible to accelerate learning. However, the difficulty in overcoming cultural gaps between traditional publishing and this kind of work may be another story, as I will briefly explore in my further considerations that follow this chapter.

In conclusion, the reader can perhaps by now grasp that part of the intention of the Rapid Transit business model that I have used as my example here is to utilise a mixture of Genette's temporal paratext and the Lean UX hypothesis-driven development approach to offer MVB books on our website as a way of offering publishing-as-a-service for customers who engage with the webpages for the books online. Unlike the feature-fake idea, but similar to it, we plan to build optionality into the process for these optional releases. By labelling each "release" as such and then running paracontent experiments that lead back to the webpage where the book is listed, we can use optional releases to gather data via Google Analytics. This will allow us to see what is getting the most traction. Some of this is not new in publishing and exists in the aforementioned Lean Content Marketing (Kotler et al. 2021, 197), but the overall business model is new, and I will add more to it shortly. Based heavily on Lean UX, this adapted business model plays with the idea of temporal paratext to open up new ways of thinking about releases beyond *new* and *old* (frontlist and backlist releases). Overall, we have aimed to create something that utilises Bhaskar's description of the MVP and tries to mitigate what he terms the "enormous cultural and organisational change" of what he terms responsive publishing". Moreover, we have tried to use optional releases to create what he terms "an exciting journey for readers." Our hope for this business model is that it once again satisfies Bhaskar's idea that "Publishers would benefit not just strategically

but also from closer, more collaborative relationships with their end customers"
(Bhaskar 2013, 188).

Customer Relationships and Publishing as a Service (PaaS)

Before coming back to consider some further release strategies that can be attached to
the Rapid Transit business model in the final section, I think it useful to change tack for
a moment to consider how we might solve the problem of publishers being unaware of
the kind of human-centred lean-agile service design used in the software industry to
foster closer relationships with their customers to be better able to track and access
customer outcomes and orientate their consumer-publishing. One that seeks to foster a
deeper connection with the customer and which relates to Josh Seiden's definition of
outcome as: "a change in human behaviour that drives business results" (Seiden 2021,
10). This has particular relevance to the idea that a lean startup-influenced, human-
centred design approach such as Lean UX can be used to manage new consumer
publishing-proper business models. After all, if publishers cannot move beyond their
conventional understanding of design as a matter of two-dimensional graphics and
aesthetics alone, they will have trouble adopting human-centred approaches such as
Lean UX. One conceptual lens through which publishers might be able to begin to
understand this new kind of design is Richard Buchanan (1992, 2001), whose work on
the four orders of design (Buchanan 2001) informed the development of Lean UX.
There are other more practical ways to begin to consider this, too. One of these—design
thinking—comes from outside of publishing but is also a method that has been lightly
mooted by publishing insiders. We must also not overlook the notion that some of these
human-centred design principles may already be active inside the marketing
departments of publishing houses, but this will depend on the style of marketing
pursued within these departments.

I will begin by contextualising Josh Seiden's definition of outcome because human-
centred design is very much outcome-based design. Seiden is one of the architects of
Lean UX and Lean UX is very much a design-driven strand of lean-agile. This can be
evidenced by Seiden's background, which he discussed at a recent design conference,
noting his experience as, first, an interaction designer, later, a user experience designer,
and finally, a designer of behaviour (Seiden 2021). Furthermore, he pointed to Richard

Buchanan's theory of three orders of design theory (Buchanan 2001) as an influence upon this trajectory. Indeed, it is this theory that informs Seiden's definition of outcome. My first suggestion for this section is that publishers learn the differences between the kinds of designs they are typically familiar with and differentiate them from human-centred design through Buchanan's theory. This way, publishers and publishing scholars might be able to move past their historical understandings of design towards a new understanding that better considers how to offer Publishing-as-a-Service (PaaS) rather than merely offering published books as an output and design as an aesthetic part of that output.

Designer and design theorist Richard Buchanan's theory suggests that there have been four orders of design, of which I will discuss three here, with the third order of design gaining belated relevance only around the turn of this century. The "first order of design" was, loosely, graphic design:

> The first and second orders of design were central in the establishment of the professions of graphic and industrial design. Graphic design grew out of a concern for visual symbols, the communication of information in words and images. That the name of this profession or area of study has changed over the years only serves to emphasize the focus: it has evolved from graphic design, to visual communication, to communication design. Initially named by the medium of print or graphical representation, the introduction of new media and tools, such as photography, film, television, sound, motion, and digital expression, has gradually helped us to recognize that communication is the essence of this branch of design, independent of the medium in which communication is presented." (Buchanan 2001, 11-12)

The *loosely* here holds because, as the passage above shows, it later evolved into something more abstract (communication design).

This partial dematerialisation, partial because there was always still some deliverable concrete output upon which communication design was displayed, is interesting here when considering the publication of the printed book because roughly two-thirds of the printed book involves just this mixture of graphic design (front cover design and the interior typography) and also works just as well if we term it communication design. The remaining element of what publishers normally understand as a book is taken up by what Buchanan terms the "second order of the design", namely industrial design. This is the bound book formed via industrialised processes. As Buchanan notes, this kind of design has had no comparable evolution as the first order but has often been too

narrowly named: "There is no comparable evolution in the naming of industrial design, except that some people refer to 'product design' when they mean the special segment of industrial design concerned explicitly with the creation of mass-produced consumer goods." Against this narrowness, Buchanan prefers to define "industrial design" more broadly as growing out of "a concern for tangible, physical artifacts—for material things." To conclude his introduction to these first two order he notes that "*symbols* and *things* are what I mean by the focus of first- and second-order design in the twentieth century." (Buchanan 2001, 11-12)

This brings us to what he terms the "third order of the design". This is the kind of design found in the lean-agile approach and in the software industry. It is more abstract and difficult to grasp because there is no simple way to name it for its output. Instead, this third-order design is named for its outcome, which, as we have already seen, is more of a shifting experience that differs from customer to customer and user to user and essentially exists in a sense in the eye of the beholder. As Buchanan renders it, this third-order exists in terms of their experience. This is a move that he saw to be accelerating in the first years of the current century.

> The process of ordering, disordering, and reordering design is revolutionary, and I believe we are now in the midst of such a revolution. Instead of focusing on symbols and things, designers have turned to two quite different places to create new products and to reflect on the value of design in our lives. They have turned to *action* and *environment*. (Buchanan 2001, 12)

Whilst he notes that it remains "important that designers know how to create visual symbols for communication and how to construct physical artifacts", he suggests they must also consider how such designs "become part of the living experience of human beings, sustaining them in the performance of their own actions and experiences" (Buchanan 2001, 12).

Buchanan further notes that in third-order design, designers must "consciously consider the possibility that our communications and constructions are, in some sense, forms of action." However, once again, he also acknowledges that, in saying this, he does not deny the importance of information and physical embodiment". Indeed, he suggests that thinking in a more outcome-driven way holds the potential for designers to become "more sensitive to how human beings select and use products in daily life. In fact, from this point of view, we may discover aspects and features of successful products that have eluded us in the past." (Buchanan 2001, 12) Having offered this

initial background, I suggest that it is this latter point that very much sums up the service element that publishers could begin to utilise if they want to find new ways to deliver more of a service to customers. Moreover, in a business sense, it is this latter element that can allow them to be able to collect their own data on what customers want and need from publishers so that they can make better decisions about what to publish and maybe also how to publish. This idea of action also links us to Seiden's definition of an outcome as involving a change in human behaviour.

Far from anything ominous, this change in customer behaviour refers to finding out more about, to use Buchanan's words from the previously quoted passage: "how human beings select and use products in daily life" and how product and service designers (and I would include publishers in this category) might be able to "discover aspects and features of successful products that have eluded us in the past". The link to services comes from how Buchanan suggests this nascent strand of design was named at the time that he was writing:

> Out of such concerns has emerged a new domain of design thinking and new directions of professional practice. We call this domain "interaction design" because we are focusing on how human beings relate to other human beings through the mediating influence of products. And the products are more than physical objects. They are experiences or activities or services, all of which are integrated into a new understanding of what a product is or could be. (Buchanan 2001, 12)

This idea of a "new understanding of what a product can be" has since emerged through the activities of the evolving lean-agile approach. Indeed, it is noteworthy that 2001 was also the year of the Agile Manifesto for Software Development.

The growth in third-order design perhaps provides a rationale for why most lean-agile teams in the software industry are made up of both software engineers and what would have been previously termed user experience or interaction designers but which tend now merely to be termed designers in the tech industry, and in a way quite distinct from how design is perceived in a graphic design sense. Meanwhile, industrial design often takes place, although not exclusively, in countries outside of the West (such as China) that took over the industrial base, effectively leaving a mixture of first-order and second-order design in place, as discussed in more detail in King and Chang (2016). This has become more commonly understood some twenty-odd years since Buchanan revealed his orders of design. We are now quite familiar with the fact that Apple products, for example, are made in China but that the experience of them is designed in

the USA. The smartphone itself, its physical form, is put together in China to various physical specifications set in America, a product of second-order design, but the overall look and feel and also the experience of using the phone's operating system is designed and developed by software engineers and designers in Silicon Valley.

This brings us to another point that Buchanan makes that is relevant to my earlier discussion of internet adjacency: although interaction design grew in importance thanks to computing, this does not make it in and of itself *digital.* This is a point that Buchanan took up as far back as the beginning of the century:

> There is a common misunderstanding that interaction design is concerned fundamentally with the digital medium. It is true that the new digital products have helped designers focus on interaction and the experience of human beings as they use products. However, the concepts of interaction have deep roots in twentieth-century design thinking and have only recently emerged from the shadow of our preoccupation with 'visual symbols' and 'things. (Buchanan 2001, 12)

The fact that terms such as digital design and industrial design (as in the distinction between ebooks and print books) are still stubbornly with us today suggests that it remains an intuitive habit to name things after their concrete outputs. Still, Buchanan is keen to emphasise the main motivating point of the kind of third-order design that most animates lean-agile practice, namely that it is all about how designers consider how to "create the concrete form of experience" and "evaluate the consequences of action" (12).

This leads me to propose that for publishers who want to think more deeply about customers, this lean-agile or third-order design offers an opportunity and terminology for doing so. Unsurprisingly, given their dual provenance, this kind of design chimes with the design required to make the kinds of Lean UX value-MVPs discussed in the previous section. Moreover, it is a form of design that depends upon a deep customer focus. As seen in my idea of the MVB, it does not necessarily supplant the earlier first- and second-order forms of design that still give us the printed book. Still, it does suggest a re-emphasis on other aspects, such as the customer experience. In Buchanan's terms, this involves a changed view of the product from the kind of design theory of "the early and middle decades of the twentieth century" when "products were often understood from an external perspective", "the focus of attention" on "the form, function, materials, and manner of production" to a focus on the "use of products" in the third-order realm.

A chance to "understand products from the inside—not physically inside, but inside the experience of the human beings that make and use them in situated social and cultural environments" (Buchanan 2001, 14). In the case of the MVB, we can get a partial view of this from the book's internet adjacency.

Indeed, what Buchanan terms a "new understanding" that he felt would arrive "through an investigation of what makes a product *useful*, *usable*, and *desirable*" (Buchanan 2001, 14) seems to have come to pass in the present day. For example, Lean UX, like all such product discovery strategies in lean-agile approaches, is user- or human-centred by default. As Gothelf and Seiden note in their Lean UX book: "Lean UX is the evolution of product design and team collaboration, taking "the best parts of the designer's toolkit" and combining that "with agile software development and Lean Startup thinking" Overall, it "allows teams to exploit this new reality to maximise learning, continuously discover the best path forward, and amplify the voice of the customer." (Gothelf and Seiden 2021, 36) Meanwhile, the UX part of the name Lean UX further backs up the fact that the framework is user-centric because it stands for the discipline of User Experience (UX) design. As Gothelf and Seiden note, UX design draws "on roots in the fields of human factors and ergonomics as well as the human-centred design ideas that emerged in the 1950s" (40). They further note that "the heart of UX practice is that it begins by identifying human needs—the needs of the users of the system" (40).

Design thinking is another useful practical way in which publishers might be able to approach third-order design and implement a lean-agile approach. Indeed, Gothelf and Seiden also confirm that "Design thinking" as a practice is important here. Design thinking is an approach that "emerged in the academy in the 1970s and 1980s and was popularised by the design firm IDEO in the early 2000s" and has proven influential upon Lean UX. They describe design thinking as "a way of applying human-centred design methods to a wide range of problems" and suggest it is "important for Lean UX because it takes the explicit position that every aspect of a business (or any other system) can be approached with design methods. It gives designers permission to work beyond their typical boundaries". At the same time, it encourages the involvement of non-designers, too. For example, the authors note that design thinking "encourages non-designers to use design methods to solve the problems that they face in their roles." (Gothelf and Seiden 2021, 40) This means that the entire Lean UX framework is suffused with a broad idea of design overall, and when it is applied to a context, all in

that context becomes an act of design to some extent. Much of this is helpful for publishers wanting to build better customer relationships, and not least since the various design thinking tools would be open to anyone across a publisher's organisation.

While I have presented Buchanan's ideas as if the industry has little idea about the kind of trajectory they represent, there are plenty of indications that some areas of the industry are already considering of these newer ideas of human-centred design and its association with increased customer engagement through data. One example would be a relatively recent article in *The Bookseller* titled "Publishing needs more design thinking", which begins:

> Ask an author who they write for, and you're likely to get as many answers as there are authors. But when we're planning campaigns and strategies, we really need to keep one person in mind: the reader, or audience. In reality, this isn't always the case. The look, feel and content of creative strategies are all influenced by many factors, especially within publishing: multiple stakeholders with competing priorities, the wishes of the author or IP owners, keeping up with the competitors and following the latest trends. Design thinking offers us a way to cut through all of this. (Fulwood 2019, n.p)

Whilst it is good to see such calls emerging from the industry, they too often remain, like the calls for publishing to be leaner or more agile, too piecemeal and lacking in actionable practicality.

Although there are other parts of publishing that may be more practically involved in this kind of work, too. Book marketing provides one such example. As Alison Baverstock and Susannah Bowen argue, customer relationship marketing may be "a sound strategy" for publishers, particularly since publishing is an industry where "Most customers only buy a single title once", meaning that "persuading them of the value of your brand and general output can motivate them to be in longer-term relationships". They go on:

> In building the relationship and thinking from the customer's view, marketers are encouraged to think in terms of the customer journey or customer experience. In customer journey mapping, marketing segments the key customer types and for each major customer persona, maps the main interactions and experiences they might have with the business. Their journey can be drawn as a literal map as they proceed through each engagement with the business. This helps marketing understand the customer's experience with the business and improve how they experience every interaction. (Baverstock and Bowen 2019, 19)

Here some marketing departments aim to "understand the customer's experience with the business and improve how they experience every interaction", noting that everything from "the recyclability of their packaging and environmental sustainability" to "the ethics of their wider sourcing of manufacturing; the public behaviour of their senior executives; their willingness to contribute to corporate taxation" (Baverstock and Bowen, 2019, 19) could all encourage customers to trust and value the publisher.

In concluding this section, I have suggested that Buchanan's order of design model offers an opportunity for publishers to augment the first- and second-order thinking that creates their output and to begin to think afresh about ways to move beyond the mindset of first- and second-order design alone. The aim would be to switch to creating not only books but also experiences for readers that arise through deep-focus studies of customer requirements. As the next section will show, such a customer orientation could be a valuable and actionable way to utilise the affordances of the value-MVP, which in an MVB sense means using the affordances of paracontent to identify and form better customer relations and to collect and respond to customer data. Indeed, this process of building upon the modular form of the minimum viable book, leveraging its flexibility to create new business models and utilising its internet presence as a way to form direct publishing-as-a-service relationships with customers is only enhanced by the frequency of customer engagement that can drive feedback loops aimed at evolving and building on this initial basis.

The Truth-Build Curve: Lean-Agile Customer Engagement in a Publishing Context

Traditional publishers surveying the ideas outlined in the first three sections might be forgiven for wondering how these optional MVBs and books that are not truly physical can make economic sense. This begs the question of whether a consumer publishing-proper would be profitable enough. Whilst publishers looking to turn to directly learning more about the consumer might welcome the optional release, for example, this is still only a way to learn more and to connect more with customers, it does not suggest that they will part with their money, and it is revenue that the industry requires to remain afloat. Whilst there is a broader question of how a medium-sized or larger-sized

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publisher who already has all of their traditional processes in place for trade publishing might balance these more customer-centric ideas, a question that I will cover in my further considerations in the next section, for now, my focus is on how the more flexible business model that drives this hypothetical customer-centric side of concurrent publishing could be of financial benefit. This final section asks, at what point does an optional release become an actual release, and how is that decided in terms of the possibility of not only gaining more customer knowledge but of earning more revenue, too?

Before answering these questions, let me begin with a quick recap on why customer engagement is important. In the previous chapter, I discussed how software industry implementations of a lean-agile approach construct MVP products and business models around the central purpose of adding value for the customer. This is typically achieved through simultaneous, iterative, incremental, continuous product discovery (previously defined as trying to ascertain *what* the customer wants) and product delivery (*how* the product is delivered to the customer). I noted that this *continuous improvement* in lean-agile cultures has tended to be partly delivered through positive feedback that has an additive effect and is generated through regular customer engagement. At the same, negative feedback loops were put in place using the same customer engagement process that sought to put a brake on anything that seemed to be a waste of time for the customer. This is because, in lean-agile terms, a waste of time is by extension, a waste of money for the business. I have already touched on how these feedback loops would operate when describing the Rapid Transit business model in the second section of this chapter when discussing the idea of an optional book release, but I have not yet discussed other forms of release or how these forms of release relate to revenue.

To move as quickly to the revenue question as possible. One answer to the question of how this optional book release can make financial sense would be that it could help to de-risk the overall publishing process by improving the way that publishers make decisions on what to publish. This first point speaks directly to the earlier discussion involving publisher Dominique Raccah and her evocation of publishing's high failure rate as set against effort put in. However, it also chimes with Richard Charkin and Bridget Shine's comments in my introduction and in Chapter Two which were both concerned in some way with the rate of returns and cost of warehousing that arises from miscalculated print runs. In this sense, the financial benefits accrue by shifting resources

from the mass production of books to shifting to a product discovery effort. Whilst this sounds like it would be merely a marketing effort, it would be a marketing effort that could make money by reducing expensive failures. Finding a way to test a book title without having to go to the great expense of actually producing it to find out. In Bhaskar's terms cited earlier, it would be a way "of iteratively releasing products without the full weight of sunk costs". Furthermore, it "would not only partially de-risk the process in tough times but gradually improve" what publishers know about their audience through "learning" about what works and what does not "in volatile and competitive digital markets" (Bhaskar 2013, 188).

This plays into Baverstock and Bowen's earlier question about whether the industry should "look for the best content available, and try to find a market for it—or rather" to "publish content it knows will find buyers" (Baverstock and Bowen 2019, 3). To gloss Paul Weller and The Jam's pop-punk antimetabole, this amounts to: Should the public want what the public gets? Or: Should the public get what the public wants? Back in 1993, Baverstock found much evidence that many in publishing favoured the former. Moreover, she also found that publishing insiders at the time were also suspicious of paying market research firms to gather data on public attitudes for fear that this might lead to too much of an undifferentiated market. They also wondered why there was a need to pay for the data of marketing research firms when they doubted that such research could match their skilled editorial hunches. Whilst these remain valid concerns, it should be noted that much has changed with market research since 1993. First, the contemporary product discovery approach is something far more refined than that which was on offer from market research firms in the pre-internet era. Furthermore, the large-scale economies of scale-based book titles that still existed in the early nineties were still supported by mass media before the effects of the internet diminished the chances for something more like a mass audience so the question was somewhat less urgent.

Lean-agile consultant Jez Humble and his co-authors back this up when they offer four reasons why the more expensive, larger-scale fuzzy-frontend traditional upfront market research process could be suboptimal in an older software product context. Broadly, their research has shown that "it's typical for 50% of total product development time to be spent [doing] 'fuzzy front end' activities" prior to having a product out in the world. Moreover, they conclude that "this leads to poor investment decisions and needlessly long product development cycles" which, in turn, "create multiple negative outcomes". They take these reasons as follows: First, "long product

development cycles dramatically reduce the potential return on investment we can achieve from successful new products". Second: "Most perniciously, long development cycles delay the time it takes to get customer feedback on whether we are building something valuable.". Third: "Typical market research activities are poor at predicting a product/market fit, especially in new product categories. Research said that minivans and iPods would not be successful." Finally: "In the absence of good data, people tend to get their pet projects funded. Particularly in enterprise IT, we often see spectacular amounts of money poured down the drain on systems replacement projects — even (perhaps especially?) in organisations operating in highly regulated sectors" (Humble et al. 2015, n.p)

Conversely, MVBs could simultaneously be revenue-producing factors too. This is because the combined weight of regular paracontent produced for a certain book title would effectively be out there on the internet and on social media platforms, potentially gaining traction and thus producing future copyright value before the book that might eventually be copyright protected would even exist. Although I acknowledge that paracontent tends to be given away free, I also noted how Alastair Horne has suggested that it does not necessarily need to be free if publishers could find a way to monetise parts of it. Indeed, one interesting way of looking at this, a way that could render more ready-profit, would be that backlist books could be reanimated in this optional release way by periodically concentrating some promotion of them long after they have been published in a kind of post-optional release strategy. Here, promoting books that have already paid off their direct costs would mean that any new interest in a print-on-demand run or a small or larger print run would be pure profit. This is akin to what happens more adventitiously with older books that have suddenly become popular through TikTok (Currenti 2023). The difference is that the publisher guides the process, seeding the potential virality through paracontent, perhaps linked to some notable current issue but without necessarily going to reprint unless the data warranted it. The fact that data is always collected in lean-agile approaches could be important here too.

As we touched on in an earlier chapter, many people involved with the publishing industry take the opportunity to gather data where they can aside from publishers. Amazon clearly gathers customer data, physical bookstores do, too. Why not publishers? Thompson ponders this possibility:

At the most basic level, publishers could seek to build a database of email addresses of readers and potential readers, together with information about their interests, tastes and preferences, and use this as a resource to market directly to consumers. The great advantage of doing this is that now, thanks to email and the internet, publishers can develop a cost-effective way of reaching out directly to readers who may be interested in the books they're publishing. (Thompson 2021, 466-467)

The product discovery process and the regular engagement with customers through paracontent releases would facilitate this practice. In terms of revenue, Thompson does not advocate doing this "to sell advertising to third parties", but this would ultimately be down to the individual publisher. There are arguments for and against. There are reputational arguments against harvesting data in the manner that larger social media sites are perceived to do (that scale would likely not be available to publishers in any case), and there are arguments for it being okay to pay for data (physical booksellers sell to BookScan, for example, and publishers pay BookScan).

Moving to the question of how such a process could be managed and whether it might cause reputational damage, we heard earlier from publisher Dominque Raccah that suggests that data should hold more importance in the industry not less. Moreover, we all exist in a technological environment where no-code data tools exist in a state where they are as easy to set up as they have ever been. This is important with regard to setting up the feedback loops to regularly gather it. In many ways, this is something that marketing departments and digital departments are likely to be familiar with already. In fact, in recent years, some in marketing have taken steps to curb the habit of spam-style emails that some customer relationship management software can make all too easy and move to a more responsible mode suggesting they are already using customer relationship management software in sometimes problematic ways. To continue to use this software but to do so more responsibly would be something that the ethos of a lean-agile approach would be in harmony with. For example, Kotler has talked about improvements here in terms of preferring "permission marketing" over "interruption marketing", with the former "an antidote to unwanted spam emails, phone calls, and banner ads flooding people's daily lives and constantly interrupting their attention flow." Instead, this would be replaced with finding creative ways to ask "people for permission to educate them on products and services instead of overpowering them and bruteforcing a way into their minds, for which especially the digital space provides plenty of opportunities." (Kotler et al. 2021, 6)

However, there is also a broader point of how to decide when and how to try to make money from an actual book sale compared to merely gathering knowledge. At what point does an optional release become an actual release, and how is that decided? We can go back to the Lean UX strand of lean-agile and its hypothesis-driven mode for an answer to this. The main thing to note about this hypothesis-drive mode is that it does not suggest throwing paracontent out into the world indiscriminately, this is not an interruption-marketing method. Instead, it has a feel-forward quality that is more tactical. Lean theorist Mike Rother suggests that such processes are "a little like when you walk at night with a flashlight and can only see as far as its light shines into the dark. To see farther you have to take a step. Then the light shines on things that you couldn't see before". Here, each "experiment is [like] taking a step with the intent of learning something". He goes on to cite design theorist Donald Schön, who compared such processes to an ongoing conversation: "The magic of this approach is that you don't have to know all the steps in advance. Donald Schön called experiments a conversation with the situation. You test your idea via an experiment and the focus process talks back to you, which will often surface something you didn't know before" (Rother 2018, 154).

The Truth Curve is a popular way of considering this in the Lean UX community. The diagram (which can be found [here](#)) not only shows the effect of iterative and incremental development but also best describes the interplay between product discovery and delivery whilst providing the rationale behind how they interact in lean-agile development. As can be seen from Constable and Gothelf's rendering of the two similar Truth Curve graphs at the link above, the graphs consist of an x-axis, which represents an increasing amount of effort, and a y-axis, which represents a degree of evidence. To take a mixture of both Constable's and Gothelf's rendition of the diagram, we can see that the terms arrayed across the x-axis represent the degrees of effort that have gone into producing the outcome-oriented product state over time. These range from very low-fidelity to relatively ideal states of the product. Beginning as a mere conversation about the product or a paper test (i.e., a back-of-the-envelope sketch of the product), the scale moves up to include more high-fidelity concretised product states right up to a pre-order stage and on to a fully featured prototype or feature-complete live product that can be released to all.

A simple interpretation of this Truth Curve shows that when an outcome-oriented product is merely an idea in someone's head and has taken no output form, there is also

often no evidence to back it up. At this point, it essentially exists in the realms of, as Constable and Gothelf respectively label their diagrams, "fantasy" or "the land of wishful thinking" (Gothelf 2022, n.p). We might think of something like Thompson's Web of Collective Belief in a publishing context as an example of this. Crucially, however, the diagram also shows that a decision to produce a high-fidelity product too early is, as Gothelf labels it, "stupid (i.e., unnecessarily risky)" (Gothelf 2022, n.p). This aligns with lean-agile thinking and with common lean-agile adages such as "Deliver as Fast as Possible" and "Decide as Late as Possible". It is also in line with the idea that lean-agile approaches offer a strategy for devising a way to develop products in what Snowden would term a simple environment versus a complex environment. Put simply, the lean-agile idea suggests that when a company is operating in a simple environment where lots of aspects are stable and certain (i.e., backed up by strong evidence and existing knowledge), then it is possible to make earlier decisions confidently. If evidence is lacking, it is a good idea to work in a lean-agile fashion and to probe and run experiments.

This brings me to the idea that the optional release or the post-optional release are not the only business model ideas here. Indeed, there is room for as many experiments as publishers wish to run. For example, there could be an idea of different types of book releases that play with the idea of the form of an actual book but stay within the normative limits of the book but not the normative trade limits of release. In terms of my business model for Rapid Transit, I have already noted that we can keep this open. For example, despite not seeing great take-up in the trade sector, print-on-demand is clearly one way to push the process on from paracontent once some evidence has been gathered. Clark and Phillips note that POD already plays a role—"The ability of printers to deliver smaller quantities quickly has also ameliorated the publisher's risk of over-stocks, while print-on-demand and ebooks enable books to remain available without inventory costs." (Clark and Phillips 2014, 256) Still, it could play a larger role. Another possibility is to go ebook-only or some other short-run option. I should also remind the reader that the optional release that I discussed earlier will be a release in its own right despite having no accompanying book. This optional state could exist for a long period, culminating in either no publication or publication, so it is important not to think of that form of release as a simple marketing precursor to the main event later because that would not take proper advantage of the idea. What is happening with the optional release is akin to what is happening with the Unbound model, except the

publisher is managing it themselves through their own data interrogation and not via a decision from a broader but undifferentiated crowd.

Recent work on consumption contexts in the record industry could inform new release strategies too. For instance, Sophie Whitehouse's work "explores lost vinyl consumption practices that traverse time and space via consumers' nostalgic recollections" via "semi-structured interviews" that she "conducted with 14 active consumers of vinyl who are members of the UK indie pop music scene using their chosen album artwork as props to stimulate discussion." Whitehouse's work demonstrates "that the appeal of vinyl transcends its physicality and extends to wider consumption practices that traverse time and space," and there is every reason to expect some version of this to relate book consumption too, albeit in its own specific way. Much of this relates to alienation from what were, ironically, mass consumption and mass media approaches of old. Even for a relatively small genre like indie-pop, the customer segment was presumably significantly larger than any customer niche today when a one-to-many mass communication cardinality ruled the day. Whitehouse's respondents identify a number of consumption rituals that are lost to digital music streaming cultures. These include pre-purchase rituals that often involved hearing about a record's release and the adventitiousness of hearing something new on the radio or ITV's The Chart Show programme (Whitehouse 2023, 64-74).

This led to shopping for physical products in physical retail stores, the artwork of record covers, the search for whole albums and not a huge database of albums disaggregated into playlists, all of which tend to be lost to streaming cultures. The "constraints of the medium" were found to be important too: "the build-up to a record release day, a momentous and long-awaited event for music fans that had been waiting for months to not only purchase but also hear vinyl records for the first time." (Whitehouse, 2023, 71) The mass-media weekly music press and its shared provenance between friends was another factor (72). Following purchase, even the lack of immediacy was remembered fondly:

> The thing I miss is, sitting on the bus on the way home looking at the record, cause, that was a huge part of it as well, just sort of reading all of the sleeve notes while you were travelling home from town because you'd gone and bought this LP you'd been saving up for weeks. (Mark quoted in Whitehouse 2023, 74).

Also related to this was the commitment to the single purchase—"Mark went on to explain the effort it took – repeatedly listening to the entire record – until he became 'hooked.'" (74)

Surely this can hold some lessons for publishers, particularly in certain genres. When we hear indie fans such as Mark explaining how, for him, "the immediacy of the Internet has replaced the charm of the uncertainty about the content of a record" then surely this chimes with the USP of book publishing. Whilst in some senses, the book trade still captures these possibilities, large chains such as Waterstone's do not have the charm of second-hand bookshops or older local record stores, although indie bookshops might. In an online context, Amazon or ebooks certainly go against this romantic image and slower book pace. The question for publishers would be—Are there ways to harness this slower pace for their consumer publishing-proper efforts, through paracontent adjacent to physical products? Can the temporal release be adapted to simulate these older forms? They could even use paracontent—book catalogues made cheaply for sale or mailed out rather than PDF—to act to bring back the excitement of the wait for a release, to build it up with interviews ahead of time. Furthermore, carefully calibrated content marketing could be utilised to recuperate what music fan Mark termed "the experience and learning to like music" that "has been lost in the age of music streaming." (Whitehouse 2023, 74) Something akin to this could work for books, too. Perhaps in a "Newtro" (Tapper and Ahmed 2024, n.p) form making better use of internet adjacency meets physical product.

In conclusion, I have argued that the optional releases that I discussed in section two are only part of the story but that they too can make financial sense, and if only in how they can save money on unnecessary gambles. In terms of gaining revenue, there may also be a way for publishers to find a way to sell paracontent as well as content via some kind of monthly subscription to other agencies, although this is not in relation to the main idea of selling book products to customers. In terms of maximising revenue and minimising loss, the Lean UX-derived truth-build curve offers a tactical way to once again probe the market in ways that cannot be achieved merely by releasing books that a company has already decided to release. Finally, following Whitehouse's description of the alienation of some music fans in the age of the internet and the increase in revenue that has accompanied this in terms of higher sales of vinyl and even, more recently, cassettes and cassette players, I also noted that such Newtro attitudes

would seem apt for driving revenue in the book publishing world too, especially given the USP identified by Order of the Book scholars in Chapter Two.

Conclusion

In concluding this chapter, I have offered a way to render a minimally viable book by drawing on a combination of the dependency inversion and open-closed principles that derive from a software engineering context, mixed with thoughts on the evolution of products in general as a result of the arrival of the internet, and rounded this off with Michael Bhaskar's idea of paracontent and porous books which itself is based on Genette's concept of paratext. I was then able to show how this MVB could be deployed to help develop a modular business model that has the potential to de-risk book publication decisions by offering optional release styles that, in line with the dependency inversion principle remove the dependency upon the physical book format as the main way of signifying a book's release. Instead, these webpage-only releases can act as a form of optional release to gather data on the potential interest in a potential book title without necessarily deciding whether to publish the book until more data can be ascertained. The customer engagement process that interrogates whether the optional release is worth publishing or not can itself cut costs by removing the effort of working on books that may never find an audience by trying to establish a potential one upfront. It can also create potential online interest in books ahead of producing them or even deciding whether to agree to publish them, whilst potentially reviving backlist titles, and exploring new (maybe even Newtro) content meets paracontent combinations, too.

The lean-agile consumer publishing paradigm that I have hypothetically sketched here does seem to offer one possible solution towards implementing a lean-agile approach to create more customer-centric publishing. Furthermore, I only had to lightly stretch the limitations set by the Order of the Book school of thought to achieve this. However, questions remain about balancing what I am now naming as a customer-centric lean-agile paradigm of consumer publishing against the normative trade-led publishing paradigm when the two are more usually synonymous. While I have suggested that Lean UX manage the process, how does this gel with existing organisational structures in publishing? For example, how might an already busy industry balance these two approaches, and what problems might there be in doing so?

Could a pivot towards data run a risk of creating some kind of soulless, Facebook-style tech trust issue? What book genres would benefit from being promoted under a consumer publishing-proper paradigm, and which would not? I will attempt to answer these questions in the abbreviated considerations chapter that follows.

Further Considerations and Qualifications

Organisational Design Issues

So, even if I have suggested that Lean UX can provide a framework for helping publishers wishing to test out the form of lean-agile consumer publishing-proper hypothesised in Chapter Four, how does this gel with existing organisational structures in publishing? One nagging doubt could be that this lean-agile approach and extending the book conceptually to become a minimum viable book sounds more complicated than the conventional model and may not be worth the effort. Part of this plays into the debate about whether book publishers should move to direct sales and to what extent. For example, on hearing that his former company HarperCollins had overhauled its web offering to sell directly, Jack McKeown, "a former executive at both HarperCollins and Perseus Books and now president of Books and Books, a bookstore in Westhampton, New York" (Reid 2014, n.p) seemed fairly negative about the idea of selling directly in too much of a concerted manner saying that "Publishers do need to engage consumers and offer buy buttons for their convenience. But an aggressive pursuit of direct sales, I think, is misguided and a misallocation of resources." He further noted that "an overemphasis on direct selling is a mistake for large general interest publishers" on the grounds that "Consumers are not looking for publishers, they're looking to retailers to aggregate and recommend titles." (McKeown quoted in Reid 2014 n.p)

However, we might wonder whether his objection relates more to the idea that his main role at the time, as the president of a bookseller that has since closed its doors, had something to do with not upsetting the balance between physical trade and online offerings in the industry. Indeed, McKeown switched to discussing *our,* as in *our bookshop audience*, when further reflecting on HarperCollins' activities: "Harper is

disaggregating our audience. They can't offer an array of topics and publications. While I do understand what they are trying to do, they should be working to amplify their existing retail channels." (McKeown quoted in Reid 2014 n.p) These comments are interesting in that they *may*, I only hedge here because KcKeown had clearly been experienced in the publishing world too, reflect the idea that the audience for books is really a bookshop audience and no place for publishers. My objection to this would be to argue that while this is historically true, in a world where physical retailers frequently have an eCommerce store online to go alongside their physical store, then it is clear that history has moved on to some extent. Moreover, if the point was about the fact that a publisher could only offer their own books and not an array of topics and situations, then may very well not be true for publishers who disaggregate their various publishing lists and offer them online.

To further argue this point, then if McKeown is right and "Consumers are not looking for publishers, they're looking to retailers to aggregate and recommend titles." (McKeown quoted in Reid 2014 n.p), consumers presumably would not care, or perhaps even notice either, if one publisher disaggregated, say, their non-fiction lists and sold them online. Moreover, beyond those consumers who remain tied to physical retail purchases, there is no saying whether consumers are truly looking to *retailers* in particular to aggregate and recommend titles and may just be looking to anyone for whatever it is they want. Besides, a consumer publishing-proper does put the publisher in a retail business anyway. They become retailers. It is possible to use a similar logic, as a bookseller, to argue that even a new and rival bookseller should not start up because their own bookshop already offers customers what they want. However, this would not be considered valid, so why would it be so with publishers setting up this way? However, there could certainly be some issues with publishers setting up as retailers because they have not been so before. First, in many cases, publishers might have organisational structures to mitigate against it. Second, a consumer publishing-proper that added the kind of lean-agile approach I have suggested might well tip this complexity over the edge when looked at in a certain light.

To pick up the first point, in many publishing companies, product development and project management (sometimes called production) have some elements that would mitigate against a lean-agile consumer publishing-proper approach. In terms of definition, product management in traditional publishing is not labelled consistently,

perhaps reflecting the various approaches that likely exist in different companies. It is sometimes marked in a broad sense as "project management": "In a publishing project the specified activities include the entire publishing process: upstream, from authorship through editing, design, sales, marketing, promotion, to downstream with distribution, and the final outcome being the publication of a book." (Bullock 2012, 2) Elsewhere, and in a manner that extends the process a little more, Clark and Phillips term it the management of the "the value chain" and describe it as follows:

> Once a book is acquired from an author, it has to be edited, designed, produced, marketed to the book trade and readers, and sold to bookshops or the end-purchaser. Once produced, it has to be stored in print form or the digital file made available through key intermediaries, orders are taken from retailers or consumers, and the book is then dispatched from the warehouse, downloaded onto a device, or made available through a cloud service." (Clark and Phillips 2019, 116)

They also break it into two stages. The first stage may be characterised as "product development" (Clark and Phillips 2019, 191)—roughly running up until the edited stage in the description of the value chain above—and the second stage as "production management" (225)—denoting everything afterwards.

Whilst the product development stage is already somewhat iterative in that editors and authors work with iterations, too, in the context of revisions, the production management stage is markedly different. To make the first point, Susan Greenberg, in her study of editing, notes that "…editing is conceived as a decision-making process", its aim being "to select, shape and link the text, thereby putting it into a context that helps to deliver the meaning and significance of the work to its readers." (Greenberg 2018, 15). In contrast, Bullock's description of the downstream activities of production management is a whole lot more restricted and linear and based on output. As Bullock puts it, it is a "process made up of a series of specified activities (or tasks) used to convert inputs into outputs". The suggestion that a final product is produced tallies with this, too. Indeed, Bullock describes a book project as "a one-off effort" that creates "something new" and one that "operates under a set of constraints". He also suggests it has "a defined lifespan, with a beginning, middle and end" (Bullock 2012, 1). Further describing it as having a definable "project outcome" that ends with a "punctual delivery to the warehouse of finished stock, produced at an agreed price, to an agreed standard, and in the correct quantity." (3) This description conveys well enough the

differences between an iterative, feedback loop-driven lean-agile approach and the workings of the production department.

On this evidence, the tried and tested formula of book production is clearly keyed to output efficiency and so not likely to mesh well with a lean-agile approach. Furthermore, despite the fact that editing and authorship are iterative, I noted in Chapter Three that publishing can still tend to be driven by its own internal logic and internal hunches, particularly in terms of editorial matters it does not follow that an author-editor iterative process would automatically fit with a lean-agile approach that was more customer value-driven. In more recent incarnations, author agents may be seen as a potential barrier to this process, but then again, I would suggest (and I will come back to this) that author agents who represent very established authors and who are looking to auction large advances may not come into the consumer-publishing proper side of the business and really sit more on the riskier trade side of concurrent publishing. Conversely, all of these potential disparities may turn out to be too pessimistic or too cautious. Although, as I will later note, agents may well be interested in this from their own angle for earlier career writers. Consumer publishing-proper would only lightly touch the established book production side because it is clear this part of publishing is keyed towards efficient delivery of books to the book trade. Editors, too, may find it a creative process to test out new lists on the consumer publishing-proper side.

In terms of the question of whether this is all too complex, I would suggest that I have acted here to wade through the complexity of lean-agile approaches so that others may not need to do so. This is true for publishing scholars who I hope will now be able to study this topic without full recourse to its complex history, but there is no reason to confuse the many caveats of agile, lean, or lean-agile discussed in Chapter One with the idea that lean-agile principles are complex to understand. In fact, the main lean-agile principles are relatively straightforward and they are only unintuitive because, as noted in the context of the IT Paradox, much of business still retains something of an industrial output-based mindset, the fact that products and services can effectively follow a customer home (and I will come onto trust and privacy issues in a moment) and that they stand a better chance of ascertaining the outcome that the user had with the product, then all that lean-agile approaches do is to set up feedback loops to effectively research the user, form relationships with them through the proxy of

qualitative and quantitative data, and engage with them to continuously improve the product for them.

I have already discussed in Chapter Three how book marketing departments might sometimes be able to tie all of these elements together, given how they may have experience in lean marketing. So, depending on the kind of marketing department employed in any given publishing house, it is certainly not impossible for marketing to take a lead role in the process, especially if the marketers in question are influenced by anything from Kotler's Marketing 3.0 upwards. There would be a need to integrate small teams of editors and marketers, and perhaps authors, together, depending on the type of book being produced. One reason for this is that, although I have not had the space to cover it here, in terms of organisational design, agile, lean, and lean-agile approaches favour a self-organising, cross-functional team approach to work. Boral describes this in terms of agile: "Agile teams do not need to be directed and tracked on a plan by a manager in a supervisory role. As the team is competent and in an operating rhythm, they know how to approach a requirement or a problem and resolve it in a coordinated manner." For this reason, "almost all decisions around priorities, values, estimates, decision on a sprint goal, design, metrics and tools are taken in a group environment. Self-organised teams enjoy the freedom to plan and execute in a style that best suits them." (Boral 2016, 175)

There would have to be work on the likelihood of this kind of organisational structure working in publishing. Indeed, it is difficult to say because, as David Barker has noted, the title of his book chapter "The Structure and Workings of a Publishing House" is something of a misnomer because it "implies that there exists, somewhere, such a thing as a standard publishing house. There doesn't." Nevertheless, in going on to conjure one, for demonstration purposes—"'The Ludlow Press'. Although founded in the Shropshire town of that name in the late nineteenth century, it long ago moved its headquarters to London and now has offices there as well as in New York, Sydney, and Toronto." (Barker 2020, 22) —still opts to describe its Senior Management Team as retaining much control. Noting that the " key function of the Senior Management team at The Ludlow Press is to provide a strategic vision for the company – and to communicate that vision to all staff. " (23) This is not to say that there are no founders in normative tech industry contexts where self-organising, cross-functional teams are common but it is to say that the success of a lean-agile approach is often premised on devising small teams that have a lot of autonomy.

Part of this work would have to consider an organisation's typical size and style. For example, I acknowledge that my Rapid Transit example involves a very small two-person operation, allowing much autonomy over strategy without layers of management, making it easier to experiment. However, this does not mean that Rapid Transit might not scale up. We noted in the introduction that Dominque Raccah's Sourcebooks press has used data-driven decision-making to scale up. Once scale has been achieved, or in the case of already large publishers—along the lines of Barker's indicative idea of The Ludlow Press—much depends on the extent to which a lean-agile consumer publishing-proper side of the business would have the autonomy to experiment. This is something that has been covered in the lean-agile literature on lean-agile at scale in the *Lean Enterprise* (Humble et al. 2015, n.p) book. Indeed, Humble and his colleagues call on Ron Westrum's work on different types of organisations. Westrum divides organisational mindsets into three categories. "Pathological organisations are characterized by large amounts of fear and threat. People often hoard information or withhold it for political reasons, or distort it to make themselves look better." Meanwhile, "Bureaucratic organizations protect departments. Those in the department want to maintain their 'turf,' insist on their own rules, and generally do things by the book—their book." (Westrum 2014, 59)

In contrast, "Generative organizations focus on the mission. How do we accomplish our goal? Everything is subordinated to good performance, to doing what we are supposed to do" (Westrum 2014, 59) to achieve the aim. Humble and his co-authors find that the necessary autonomy and flexibility required to perform a lean-agile approach means it thrives better in generative-style organisations (Humble et al. 2015, n.p). The degree to which this is the case or not in medium-sized to larger publishing houses, if we presume an unswerving focus on a historical trade publishing model, then it seems unlikely that such companies would look to setting up a customer-centric consumer publishing-proper side of their business in any case. On the other hand, for those who want to try out this mode, we can perhaps take the fact that some of these publishers have been able to integrate "an entirely separate Digital Production department" (Barker 2020, 41) into their operations, then if there is relevant customer relationship management experience in the marketing department and what John Thompson has discussed as new forms of commissioning that could become more "reader-centric". This could mean "building readers' interests and preferences more

directly into [their] own commissioning and publishing processes." (Thompson 2021, 468)

This plays into the question of what book genres might benefit from being promoted under a consumer publishing-proper paradigm and which might not. The most obvious use for a consumer publishing-proper side of a publishing business would be to be more subject-driven than author-driven. This is not new: "Publishers have always published books for people sharing common interests, termed vertical communities." (Clark and Phillips 2014, 21) Still, it has grown in importance over the last few decades since the internet. Mike Shatzkin discussed this some years ago, suggesting that "in the 21st century, the Internet is flipping" the publishing "business model" on account of how "The Internet tends to self-organize us by subject niche, so that the eyeballs and human bandwidth are linked to the niches, which are vertical, not horizontal." (Shatzkin 2008, 56) A consumer publishing-proper could be very good for developing, mining, and experimenting with niche book lists and potential imprints. The work provides a focal point around which fans of certain topics could gather and is a rich source for developing content marketing and producing paracontent. This might also be more profitable for the publisher and help them retain more rights to these books. As Clark and Phillips consider: "A publisher which has the idea for the book and contributes much editorial and design effort" in a book "has a strong case for acquiring wide territorial and language rights and the sharing of other rights." (Clark and Phillips 2014, 135)

This is not to say that fiction could not be developed or served this way. I have already suggested that a very lightweight consumer publishing-proper could focus only on re-promoting and seeding interest in backlist titles. This is another profitable activity because direct costs and royalties may often have been recouped already, meaning most reissue profit goes to the publisher. In terms of the development of authors, many authors these days have their own online brands which could work in partnership with publisher-based paracontent. Thompson has noted how some publishers already collaborate in this way when speaking to members of the industry who spend "a great deal of time […] helping authors create their own websites and blogs so that they can help to generate interest in their books" (Thompson 2010, 254-255). One pertinent question might be to ask whether author agents would be on board with this. There is some evidence that at least some would. For instance, Porter Anderson in Publishing Perspectives (2013) reported experimental approaches amongst literary agents to

publish short-term editions of books themselves to try and seed an audience before trying to sell the book to a publisher-proper having done so. This suggests partnerships *could* be possible.

Alchemy of Growth: Balancing Trade Publishing-proper with Consumer Publishing-Proper

Moving onto another consideration not covered elsewhere: How might an already busy industry balance trade publishing-proper and consumer publishing-proper, particularly in the context of medium-sized to larger-sized publishing houses, which have been my main concern throughout? Again, Jez Humble and his co-authors have tried to consider how lean-agile approaches might scale, noting that it is difficult to scale up such approaches across organisations in the most ideal manner mandated by lean-agile approaches in the tech industry, where the whole organisation can tend to follow them natively (Poppendieck and Poppendieck 2014, 14). As Humble puts it, with regard to adoption in different domains: "…everyone finds it difficult to implement these ideas successfully." Noting that in "most cases" that he and his co-authors had studied "it was impossible to realize anything more than incremental improvements because only part of the organization changed [in the direction of lean-agile]— and that part still needed to work with the rest of the organization, which expected them to behave in the traditional way." (Humble et al. 2015, n.p)

However, there is one way that Humble and company have been able to begin to consider this and that has been through considering the possibility that lean-agile in large organisations could follow the Alchemy of Growth approach, a turn-of-the-century business strategy introduced by Baghai, Coley, and White (2000). The Alchemy of Growth strategy suggests that the problem in most established businesses is that "most managers are preoccupied with their existing businesses" and "must learn to focus their attention as much on where they are heading as on where they are today". They identify one difficulty as arising from the fact that "companies often lack a way to talk coherently about current businesses, new enterprises coming on stream, and future options." In a bid to "fill this gap", the Alchemy of Growth framework offers "a way of thinking about growth that balances the competing demands of running existing

businesses and building new ones, and that offers a language that leaders at all levels of an organization can use." (Baghai, Coley, and White 2000, 1) In the context of publishing, where I have already identified potential challenges between different departments and specialisms and the potential schism between the more internally focused tendencies of some areas within a publishing house compared to the more externally focused area of marketing, say, then perhaps this approach could be pertinent too.

Baghai and co-authors suggest there are "three horizons of growth." (Baghai, Coley, and White 2000, 1) in a large organisation and use a gardening metaphor to describe them:

> Our thinking about growth and decay is dominated by the image of a single lifespan, animal or vegetable. Seedling. full flower and death. 'The flower that once has bloomed forever dies.' But for an ever-renewing society the appropriate image is a total garden, a balanced aquarium or other ecological system. Some things are being born, other things are flourishing, still other things are dying - but the system lives on. (3)

As the authors of this theory suggest, even if a company's business dies, it does not mean that the company has to die, too: "A business, like a flower, is born, flourishes, and withers. But the fact that a company's business blossoms and then fades does not mean that the company must die." Instead, they offer the idea that "Successful companies can and must outlive their individual businesses." (3) This seems like an apt way to characterise the idea of a concurrent publishing paradigm. I have established that there is a need for traditional publishing to get to grips with new complex markets and suggested that a lean-agile approach offers the chance to do so, but its principles and practice, which are geared to the new landscape, are likely to remain quite alien to many in the traditional core business.

The three horizons idea represents a way for medium- to large-sized businesses to begin to orientate themselves to new horizons rather than merely remaining in what the Baghai and company term Horizon 1. These different horizons are defined as follows: "Horizon 1 encompasses the businesses that are at the heart of an organization—those that customers and stock analysts most readily identify with the corporate name." (Baghai, Coley, and White 2000, 4) Moreover, "these businesses usually account for the lion's share of profits and cash flow. Horizon 1 businesses are critical to near-term performance, and the cash they generate and the skills they nurture provide resources

for growth." This offers one compelling reason why a jump to customer-centricity and away from economies of scale would make no immediate sense in publishing, as I covered in Chapter Two. As Baghai and co-authors note, these businesses "usually have some growth potential left, but" might "eventually flatten out and decline". In contrast, "Horizon 2 is about building new streams of revenue. That takes time and demands new skills. Without horizon 2 businesses, a company's growth will slow and ultimately stall." (5)

Meanwhile, what they term "Horizon 3 contains the seeds of tomorrow's businesses — options on future opportunities. Although embryonic, horizon 3 options are more than ideas; they are real activities and investments, however small." (Baghai, Coley, and White 2000, 6) With Horizon 2 and 3, we find a place for the more customer-centric lean-agile approaches of the sort that I discussed in the previous chapter, particularly Horizon 3:

> They are the research projects, test-market pilots, alliances, minority stakes, and memoranda of understanding that mark the first steps towards actual businesses, even though they may not produce profits for a decade, if ever. Should they prove successful, they will be expected to reach horizon 1 levels of profitability. (6)

Although it is doubtful that many medium-sized publishers might have all of these horizons at the same time, it seems likely from what I have discussed so far that most reasonably-sized publishers should perhaps be managing their core businesses whilst at the same time trying to find ways to explore possibilities through Horizon 3. Such is the complexity of Horizon 3 as they describe it, it also seems that this area is an ideal fit for a lean-agile approach in an already existing business.

Data, Reputation and Privacy

Finally, given that a lean-agile approach is driven, at least in part, by data-driven decision-making, I want to close by briefly considering whether a pivot towards data risks creating some kind of soulless, big tech-style tech trust issue. For example, the idea that publishers should plot how to change human behaviour might well sound rather ominous, particularly when situated adjacent to the concept of collecting data. Indeed, many publishers themselves might well baulk at the idea. This might

particularly be the case given the headlines around large tech companies such as Facebook, meaning publishers could even see it as a reputational risk. As Cheung confirms:

> [W]hile recent statistics indicate that Facebook is present in every major global market, in many cases with remarkable levels of penetration (Statista 2014), time has exposed the fact that some aspects of it are not as perfect as they seemed at the outset. User privacy, in particular, is a key point of contention. Users' negative reactions toward the service are increasing as Facebook tries to communicate the notion that there is a naturally occurring acceptance of social transparency, while its own wealth is sustained through the commodification of personal information generated by its users. (Cheung 2016, 332)

As to whether this would likely be a risk for publishers, my own argument is that it is not and that, as long as publishers remain close to privacy legislation such as the GDRP, conflating the collection and use of customer data with the extremities of big tech would be a mistake.

First, not even the largest publisher would likely come anywhere close to the resources, or data to replicate problematic issues in the tech industry, even if they wanted to do such a thing. Second, publishers already use data. As I noted in my research, publishers already use data from Nielsen BookScan. Also, publisher Dominque Raccah uses it and has urged more publishers to improve both customer outcomes and business outcomes. Furthermore, publishers who have begun using customer relationship marketing in their marketing department will likely use data to some extent, if not in a lean-agile mode. As stated earlier, as long as marketers are working to enact, as described by Kotler, permission-based rather than interruption-based marketing (Kotler et al. 2021, 6), then publishers should remain on the right side of data usage. By suggesting that this issue is not likely to be a problem, I do not mean to downplay it. It is certainly true that when I discussed, in Chapter Three, how publishers might follow Vandermerwe's advice and try to *get to know their customers* with the aim of fostering a deep customer focus, I am aware that this could be taken both positively and negatively.

Indeed, we must not paint too rosy a picture of the tech industry's track record when it comes to forming these customer relationships. Like most businesses, tech businesses are capitalist entities that are frequently looking out for their own advantage. Moreover, some have been willing to take shortcuts to gain this advantage. In the tech context, this

has often come in the form of what Cornell University's computer science journal terms "dark patterns" (Bongard-Blanchy et al. 2021, 763). Dark patterns are the flipside of the deep customer focus bequeathed to software engineering through human-centred design, and whilst they are often viewed largely pejoratively in the software engineering and design communities—"Design practitioners have been the first to voice their concerns over these questionable practices." (764)—tech business owners are not always so minded to disallow their use. Dark patterns are defined as: "Online services pervasively employ manipulative designs to influence users to purchase goods and subscriptions, spend more time on-site, or mindlessly accept the harvesting of their personal data." (763) There are a whole host of these dark patterns, and many will be familiar to any of us who regularly use the internet.

The category includes patterns such as "forced consent": "Coercing users into accepting fixed legal terms in exchange for access to the service"; "Auto-play": "Automatically loading one video when the previous ends"; "false hierarchy": "An option is selected by default prior to user interaction, even though it is against" the customers "interest or may have unintended consequences"; limited-time messaging": "Indicating that a deal will expire soon without specifying a deadline"; "high demand-messaging": "Indicating that a product is in high demand and likely to sell out soon" (Bongard-Blanchy et al., 2021, 768). Whilst most of these patterns are specific to the internet, the last two on the list are recognisable from pre-internet television adverts and physical retail sales, revealing that dark patterns pre-date the software industry and perhaps have origins elsewhere despite the current popular sentiment. Indeed, it may be more fitting to blame dark patterns upon the efforts of older advertising and marketing habits than laying them at the door of any particular domain and conflating them with the idea of deep customer focus. As noted earlier, in the discussion of various iterations of marketing, some marketing experts have agreed with this logic. For example. Philip Kotler argues that it is primarily marketing which must clean up its act so that it can move to support the kinds of deep customer focus typical of the software industry: "Marketing suffers from a lack of trust, which is fatal, as trust is the lead currency for a sustainable business practice" now that the "business world as a whole is experiencing a shift from product centricity towards service centricity." (Kotler et al. 2021, 22),

Whilst it is not popular to say so, software engineers and designers, if not necessarily always the companies that they work for and sometimes their marketing departments, are alive to the issue of dark patterns and there is much interest in finding

solutions to design these patterns out rather than in. Some solutions include "bright patterns" which involve "design nudges" to reverse the direction of dark patterns and steer users' consent decisions towards the privacy-friendly option (e.g., pre-selection of "Do not agree" option)." There is also the idea of reversing the usual idea of making user experience in frictionless about certain important areas (such as consent) and creating "friction designs" that counteract dark pattern mechanisms in purchase decisions (e.g., disabling urgency and scarcity messages)." (764) Regardless of this, there is no doubt that the tech industry itself and not marketing has tended to bear the brunt of the popular outcry over dark patterns, perhaps because the tech world is the most visible business domain in this century. However, reading between the headlines, it is more likely that Vandermerwe's idea of deep customer focus originated from the human-centred work that initially emerged from "the field of information and communication technology" (Steen 2021, 328) and it is this which should characterise Vandermerwe's idea of deep customer focus.

Final Conclusion

To conclude this research as a whole, I will begin by assessing the extent to which I have met my broad aim. In aiming to move publishing studies scholarship on the subject of agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches forward, building on the limited scholarly engagement with it to date, I have made some headway. Given the difficulty of divining different senses of agile, lean, and lean-agile, my first chapter offered definitions and an overview of each approach to better understand the topic. Following this, and before more fully making a tentative attempt to investigate what potential benefits such approaches could have for internet-adjacent trade and consumer publishing, I set out to interrogate the premises behind the various calls that some publishing insiders had made for the adoption of agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches. Having cleared a path to begin to assess benefits, I proposed that trade and consumer publishing might cease to exist as synonyms and instead split to form a concurrent publishing paradigm consisting of trade publishing-proper, that could continue to serve the book trade in a normative manner, whilst also setting out to foster a more customer-centric consumer publishing-proper that could adopt a lean-agile approach to mining smaller niches that the usual economies of scale might not be able to reach. Furthermore, I offered a hypothesis based on my publishing practice to outline some ways this could happen.

My first chapter offered definitions and an overview of agile, lean, and lean-agile approaches. I noted the close relationship of these terms and their status as an approach to managing complex problem spaces. Moreover, I covered their origin in the post-WWII landscape, their influence on Japanese car manufacture at Toyota and later influence on post-industrial production in general and how this spread to certain customer-centric business contexts, particularly those championed by Peter Drucker, and the way in which this post-industrial production landscape also gave rise to a general idea of descriptive agility that later gave, too, to Agile Software Development, and beyond that, to a combination of lean and agile approaches through the concept of the lean-agile approach lean startup and its successors and derivatives. In offering this background, I believe I have used my experience in both publishing practice and lean-agile approaches to offer a clear understanding of the topic of agile, lean, or lean-agile that can help to differentiate the many different senses and render the topic more

parsable for both publishing scholars and, perhaps, even for anyone interested in the topic in any domain. I think this chapter offers a sound basis for future work on the subject.

Given that a number of publishing insiders and some publishing scholars have suggested that book publishing could adopt agile, lean, or lean-agile approaches as a way for book publishing to become more customer-centric in the twenty-first century as it faces an ever-more complex marketplace for books, then, in Chapter Two, I set out to interrogate this possibility now that I was armed with my newfound understanding of the three approaches. I wished to interrogate this premise because if it did not hold up, then there would be no real reason to push forward to try and assess the benefits of taking a lean-agile approach to the industry. I found that changes to the information and communication landscape precipitated by the availability of digital technologies and the arrival of the internet had changed the market for books, rendering it more complex by dividing it into smaller niches and altering its cardinality one a mass market one-to-many to an internet-driven many-to-many in ways that began to alter the efficacy of economies of scale. However, I also found that big enough customer segments remained that could often be accessed through the conventional book trade to warrant caution in terms of moving too speedily in the direction of a more granular customer-centricity. Instead, I suggested that a more prudent approach for the industry would be to move towards a concurrent publishing paradigm aimed at balancing normative trade publishing with some form of more customer-centric publishing.

My third chapter switched its focus from a concern with the book publishing market to a concern with the feasibility of adopting such an approach in book publishing. Given that almost all of the most successful implementations of a modern lean-agile approach have occurred in the software industry, my aim in this chapter was to compare the different ways in which the respective software and book publishing domains handled product definition, business model development, customer relationships and customer engagement as a way to tease out potential limitations to the adoption of a lean-agile approach in a book publishing context. My conclusion here was that there was no one-to-one way to adopt the kind of up-to-date lean-agile approach found in the software industry in the book publishing industry. This was largely due to differences between the main book product of the book industry and the main software product of the tech industry. Software products were better suited and had better affordances for adopting

feedback loop-driven lean-agile techniques and process improvement approaches. Moreover, there were other differences between the two industries such as their differing understanding of the concept and function of design and their respectively different internally-focused versus customer-centric cultures. However, I also noted that it could be possible for book publishing to adopt a lean-agile approach if some light adjustments could be made through a consumer publishing-proper model.

Chapter Four attempted to address these limitations and partially did so through the hypothetical example of a nascent publishing project named Rapid Transit that I have been developing with my publishing partner outside of the bounds of this research. This chapter sought to make some initial headway towards considering how a lean-agile approach could be adopted in a book publishing context. Here, I was able to overcome the problem of how to create a minimally viable book (MVB) through a cross-disciplinary mixture of ideas from computer programming, product design, publishing studies and literary studies that sought to maintain the boundedness of the printed book whilst at the same time allowing it to be iteratively and incrementally developed over time continuously, mainly through the deployment of paracontent. I also discussed the modular business model that we intend to use for Rapid Transit, which partially grew out of the MVB product and is calibrated towards helping publishers to de-risk their publishing decisions through the discrete release of a mixture of paracontent and actual publications on a sliding scale according to the customer feedback collected through the regular release of paracontent. The whole system intended to work together to replicate the feedback loops that are typically the hallmark of lean-agile approaches to product discovery improvements.

Finally, I closed with some further considerations that I had not had space to discuss. These sought to consider the likely barriers to my hypothesised implementation of a lean-agile approach to publishing covering issues such as problems of organisational design in medium- to large-sized publishing houses, how to balance the two different modes of the concurrent form of publishing that I have proposed, and potential issues around data, privacy and trust. Whilst none of these considerations ruled out my hypothesised idea of adopting a lean-agile approach to publishing, I close by suggesting that more work could definitely be done around how this approach could be implemented. Moreover, the flexibility of the minimum-viable book sketched in Chapter Four effectively clears a path towards developing a consumer publishing-

proper that could take many more forms. This indicates that further research would certainly be required to build upon the basic skeleton that I have offered here in this preliminary research. For example, more of an empirical approach that sought to investigate the extent to which these kinds of approaches may already be in use or the extent to which publishers might find them valuable would be welcome.

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