

# Building a Culture of Openness

This morning, I saw this exchange on my Twitter stream between [Dennis Whittle](#) and [John S. Bracken](#):

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Storified by Eugene Eric Kim · Wed, Oct 31 2012 07:35:11

Great conf on how open data can hold govt to account. @ethanz alone would be worth price of ticket: <http://openup12.org/agenda/> @OmidyarNetworkDennis Whittle @EthanZ @DennisWhittle @OmidyarNetwork I have emailed to ask for an invitation, though doubt I am high profile enough. Humm...Mark Simpkins @marksimpkins @ethanz @omidyarnetwork How ironic if it is conference on open data that is closed to the public!Dennis Whittle @DennisWhittle why ironic? topic doesn't alter factors like capacityJohn S. Bracken @jsb @DennisWhittle Seems counter to the potential of open data. Not everything has to be open, but it's a great opp. to build culture.Eugene Eric Kim @eekim @DennisWhittle no connection between a conf theme and conf logistics. Why does a data meeting need be open but not one on coffee?John S. Bracken

To expand on what I wrote on Twitter, one of the points of open data is to tap into the power of emergence. If your data is available and compelling, then other people will find useful and interesting things to do with it.

That's the theory, at least. Open data helps create the conditions for emergence, but it's not sufficient. Without a culture of openness, your data will likely lie fallow. If you already have that culture, you're lucky. If you don't, you have to build it. Building culture is hard.

There are lots of ways to build culture. There are no set formulas, and so my rule of thumb is to take every opportunity you can to do it.

That brings me to the original point that provoked this conversation: Should a conference on open data also be open to any participants? No, it doesn't have to be. No set formulas, right? But it's an opportunity to build culture, to get people out of the comfort zone of closed. And I generally think that people overrationalize the need to be closed.

The beauty of this little ecosystem we live in is that pockets of closed can beget openness, just as [Foo Camp](#) inspired [Bar Camp](#), which launched the [unconference movement](#). That's what openness is ultimately about.