The Scholarly Commons: a systems perspective of the past and present

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Robert Pirsig: If a factory is torn down but the rationality which produced it is left standing, then that rationality will simply produce another factory. If a revolution destroys a government, but the systematic patterns of thought that produced that government are left intact, then those patterns will repeat themselves.... There's so much talk about the system. And so little understanding.

In order to change the culture of scholarship, we first need to understand what that culture is. Through an interactive analysis of the past and present "systems" of scholarship, this session will help us to come to a better understanding of the complex system that we call "scholarship". A system is more than the sum of its parts. To come to a deeper understanding of this system we must also include its interconnections and purpose.

We will start by identifying and relating the elements of historic and modern systems of scholarship using the terminology and models from systems theory, such as stocks, flows, and feedback loops that have created and still motivate current incentives, workflows, business models, thought patterns, and forms of communication of scholarship. After a brief introduction to these concepts, we will alternate between group work and plenary discussions as we analyze how the current system came about and implications of the forces and interactions that are at play.

A systems perspective will help us to systematically remove the blinders, making the invisible visible, so we can see the system for what it is and recognize both the traps and opportunities of our current situation. With a real understanding of how the system works, we then will be armed with the knowledge and power needed to truly create something better.

This is a leading exercise to help lay a groundwork for future discussions.