



Open Scholarship and the need for collective action: Executive summary

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Lead Author and editor: Cameron Neylon, Curtin University, Australia

Contributing authors:

- Rene Belsø, DEIC, Denmark
- Magchiel Bijsterbosch, SURF, the Netherlands
- Bas Cordewener, Knowledge Exchange
- Jérôme Foncel, University of Lille, France
- Sascha Friesike, Berlin University of the Arts and Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society, Germany
- Aileen Fyfe, University of St Andrews, United Kingdom
- Neil Jacobs, Jisc, United Kingdom
- Matthias Katerbow, DFG, Germany
- Mikael Laakso, Hanken School of Economics, Finland
- Laurents Sesink, Leiden University, the Netherlands

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Executive summary

Aim and background

Background and rationale

The aim of this book is to enhance community understanding of the mechanisms and processes that can enable Open Scholarship to reach its full potential. The book is the result of a **Knowledge Exchange (KE)** (knowledge-exchange.info/about-us) activity to explore the economy of Open Scholarship across six European countries (Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK) and beyond.

In September 2018, Knowledge Exchange brought together eleven experts from across these countries. These experts are all currently involved in exploring the development of Open Scholarship, and include researchers, policy makers and information systems providers. Through the medium of a five day 'book sprint' we prepared a first draft of the released document, combining our different perspectives and experiences into a coherent text that could aid progress.

The discussions and findings in this book are inspired by KE's Open Scholarship Framework². It models Open Scholarship as a combination of levels (micro-, meso- and macro-level actors), arenas (political, economic, social, technical) and research phases (discovery, planning, project phase, dissemination), in order to better understand the challenges to make scholarship more open.

A focus on the economic arena and on meso-level actors

Many of the challenges in navigating the transition to Open Scholarship are economic, either in the sense of being directly financial, or in the sense of being related to incentives. We therefore focus on the *economic arena*. Our conclusion is that it is challenging to capture the full details of the economy of Open Scholarship in terms of existing models. Application of economic theory and analysis techniques to Open Scholarship needs further exploration and development.

An important aspect of the scholarly landscape and the transition to Open Scholarship is the diversity of actors involved. These can be described as 'micro' (individuals such as researchers, or support staff, users of research or employees of service providers), 'meso' (groups, communities or organisations such as universities, disciplines, scholarly societies or publishers) and 'macro' ('system-spanning' actors that provide structure to whole countries or regions, such as funders and governments). Insufficient attention has been paid to the incentives, actions and influences of *meso-actors*, and therefore a major focus of this book is on *meso-actors*. We conclude that the key to making progress is to better understand and overcome challenges of collective action.³

Footnotes

² knowledge-exchange.info/event/os-framework

³ A variety of publications on (aspects of) community and collective action have been published, this book refers to several of them. In general, collective action refers to action taken together by a group of people whose goal is to enhance their status and achieve a common objective (see Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_action).

The shaping and organisation of research

Our systems of disciplinary organisation, research communications and publishing, as well as of organisations that house scholarship, evolved together with many significant developments taking place in the 18th and 19th centuries. The legacy of this history is a complex system of values with significant interdependencies between a diverse set of meso-actors. Open Scholarship introduces new values that challenge the roles, responsibilities, motives and ambitions of these actors.

When values and motives clash

Meso-actors will clash when their individual incentives do not align with one another. This may be due to a division of responsibilities, particularly when new work and roles are needed (eg who will be responsible and gets credit for curation and review of digital data resources), or it may be due to differing financial incentives or revenue sources (eg in debates over the appropriate costs of scholarly publishing and who should pay these). Our analysis of changes in practice and culture towards Open Scholarship indicates that clashes are an inevitable part of change, so understanding them is crucial.

Analysing scholarship with economic models

Many of the changes in scholarship are driven by the shift from physical determined prints to digital available information. This has changed the nature of scholarly 'goods' generally making them less exclusive and therefore more like 'public goods' (which are neither exclusive nor rivalrous). The development of shared digital repositories and the persistent identifiers that support them are an example of this shift in the nature of goods. Competitive markets are not predicted to provide such goods; to achieve change we need to find new economic models.

Analysing action at the community level

Community and collective action provides one such model for the provision of 'public-like' and collective goods. Institutions that support such collective action are a form of 'community capital'. The current disruption is an opportunity to rebuild community capital. To do so we have to recognise the much broader sets of exchange, goods and capital in play including prestige, reputation and trust.

Institutions and collective action

By default, network effects and returns to capital will drive the creation of 'gravitational hubs' like Google, or Facebook⁴. To counter these we need to build (or rebuild) our own community institutions that have their own network effects and hub-characteristics. The key to distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' gravitational hubs will be standards of governance.

Footnotes

- 4 In 2005 Lorcan Dempsey in a blog on 'Systems in the network world' made this observation about public platforms such as Google, Amazon and eBay: "They make data work hard: they extract as much intelligence as possible from growing reservoirs of data, and their services adapt reflexively based on accumulated data about users. They are massive gravitational hubs for consumers. <http://orweblog.oclc.org/systems-in-the-network-world/>"
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The literature on collective action includes Ostrom's principles on the community governance of collective goods (including community capital and 'hubs') and Olson's guide to how the challenge of collective action for change can be organised. By applying these principles we can outline a set of consequences for key stakeholders including:

- ▶ The need for more effective community organisation and development of nested hierarchies of community governance, particularly for scholarly communities
- ▶ A need to distinguish clearly which members of the scholarly community are subject to rules and which are not (such as commercial service providers), and the appropriate forms of relations with such outside actors. For instance, there is a need to define carefully which parts of the publishing process are community activities, which are appropriate to be left to a market of service providers, and what the relationship between those should be
- ▶ A critical role for funders as the main actors in a position to drive change in response to societal demands, but also for that position to be supported by trust from the communities that are being subject to the changes

The key to understanding change is that it is meso-level actors, communities and groups, and their responsibilities, interactions and output that ultimately bring change about.

- ▶ For change to be sustained it requires both **community institutions** that support the new status quo (establishing clear definitions of requirements, clarity on the process for selection, and transparency and trust), and **communities themselves** (that support change – not only in statements but through actions eg funders, research performing organisations and scholarly communities)
- ▶ A supportive infrastructure, both technical and social, is key to ensuring long term sustainability and also to enabling communities to engage in the shift

This book is meant to help increase our understanding of research moving towards Open Scholarship. For a successful transition, collective action approaches and establishment of a supportive infrastructure are important. These conclusions are explained in more depth and detail in the following chapters. We hope the book will inspire all involved in research to contribute to realising the full potential of Open Scholarship.

Knowledge Exchange Office
C/O Jisc,
One Castlepark,
Tower Hill,
Bristol, BS2 0JA

t: 0203 697 5804

e: office@knowledge-exchange.info