Mental models of the organization of scholarly information across the Academy

A theoretical framework

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This study explores the disciplinary similarities and differences in researchers’ mental models of knowledge, and how this might affect their information-seeking behavior.

The theoretical approach proposed in this study is a holistic, critical, and people-oriented one.

A holistic paradigm

The holistic paradigm is Interpretivist, qualitative, and critical. (Polkinghorne and Given, 2021)

It tries to take into account...

• whole people, experiences, and perspectives
• culture, social norms, practices, and micro- and macro-scale social “arrangements”
• the coexistence of multiple agents and agencies
• that people, ICTs, institutions, and practices are co-constituted (Talja and Hansen, 2006)
• the “universe of knowledge” (Wilson, 1981)

The Library as a contact zone

Contact zones are “social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power”. (Pratt, 1991)

Libraries can be seen as “contact zones”, spaces in which individuals, groups, information systems, organizational structures, tools and technologies, and information resources—each with their own agency—interact, negotiate, and co-create conditions and practices.

All of these entities are seen to shape one another in an academic library setting, even in the face of unequal power relations.

Taken together, the holistic approach and the concept of the contact zone provide this study with the perspective that, in order to understand disciplinary similarities and differences in mental models of knowledge, the researcher needs to consider whole people with their own subjective experiences, acting in complex situations and contexts, even in the face of structural inequality. This interpretivist, qualitative approach embraces the dynamic interactions and negotiations between multiple agents, and views these entities as co-constitutive.