

# **The Tangible Value of Knowledge Workers: A Value Mapping Approach to Assessing Knowledge Assets in Organizations**

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## **Abstract**

The most important knowledge assets for contemporary organizations are people with the right combination of training and skills that enable them to perform critical tasks for the organization. In light of this, two relationships are key: the one between the types of knowledge and particular organizational structures and the other between the types of knowledge/ organization combination and the career trajectories of the people who embody knowledge. The study of these relationships has been of interest to an important antecedent of knowledge management, namely, the management of scientific research. Science has an obvious role in the creation of theoretical knowledge and there has been a long standing interest in determining the most effective environment not only for its development but also for the application of its results.

In this paper we generalize results from a fairly long standing research program, the Research Value Mapping Program, into the creation of value through research activities to show both how knowledge goals and organizational structures interact and how the knowledge/ organization arrangements affect the most important knowledge assets, namely, the knowledge holders as reflected in their career trajectories. The generalization applies to all relevant knowledge, not only scientific research, via common epistemological notions applicable to all knowledge that is ultimately validated by public means. Our research also shows that the external context of the organization, as represented by the field of links to outside knowledge activities, is also extremely important to understand the value that these knowledge assets have for the

organization itself. The organization can only get a sense of the measure of such value by understanding the field of links for its knowledge assets. We apply a theoretical framework developed in the Research Value Mapping Program that considers two entities for approaching this environment. The first is the Knowledge Value Collective (KVC) that determines the validity of the theoretical knowledge the knowledge worker possesses and also constitutes the broad resource environment for its further development. The second is the Knowledge Value Alliance (KVA) that represents the changing configuration of application oriented activities which will lead to creation of tangible value for the organization. The results are based on a combination of case studies of organizations in which research takes place and a survey of professionals in various organizations. We suggest that patterns of knowledge/ organization combinations with the nature of their field of links can be detected and that these affect the career trajectories of knowledge workers. The patterns of the latter, in turn, provide an analytical tool to approach the dynamics of the intangible value of knowledge workers according to the way their participation in various knowledge-organization settings determines their professional profile over time.