

## **Scholarly communities in the research on knowledge work**

The past decades have witnessed a proliferation of research about the phenomenon of knowledge (-intensive) work. According to previous research, the number of publications on knowledge work has peaked especially since 1998. Instead of engaging in classifications of specific knowledge-work occupations, these recent studies of knowledge work often define it through different descriptive characteristics, such as processing of large amounts of information, use of information and communication technologies, problem-solving capabilities, non-routine work, increased autonomy over work, or collaboration. These characteristics often seem to distinguish work that is comparatively complex, analytic, and even abstract, because it makes use of tools that generate symbolic representations of physical phenomena.

Although the topic of knowledge work has received considerable interest in the past decade, there is still much conceptual confusion around the concept. This has led to problems in consolidating the research field. There are some recent attempts for more over-reaching conceptualizations of knowledge work, but consensus behind any single view on the phenomenon seems difficult. There are high levels of disagreement about the relevance and need for distinguishing knowledge workers from the rest of the workforce, that some scholars see as 'knowledgeable' as knowledge workers themselves. If all work then involves knowledge in one form or the other, it comes difficult to evaluate and draw a line at the level of the 'intensiveness' of knowledge needed for knowledge work per se. In addition to these theoretical disagreements, scholars are disagreeing over the different characteristics related to the work tasks and the knowledge workers themselves as well, complicating e.g. the comparison of different empirical studies to one another.

This paper suggests that although a common conceptualization of knowledge work could consolidate the research field, the existing diversity and fragmentation of the field does not yet provide a shared understanding on which to build this conceptualization. Research on knowledge work stems from different scientific fields such as management, applied psychology, sociology of work, information systems research, and information and library sciences. There might also be different scholarly communities involved in the field with diverging centers of interest. For example, management theorists are often interested in knowledge work based on the idea that knowledge is a key source of competitive advantage in the modern economy, whereas managers tend to have a more human resources oriented perspective. At the same time, more sociologically oriented academics look at knowledge work as a new and intriguing type of labor, a new workforce that has a specific role in building the information economy of the future. Thus, in order to build shared understanding about knowledge work, we need more understanding about how the research field is structured: what different scholarly communities are there, how they see knowledge work, and how do they relate to each other.

This paper addresses these questions by mapping out the structure of the research field by identifying different scholarly communities. The paper presents a bibliographic study on the research on knowledge work, based on a data set of all the articles published during the last 10 years in leading journals in the field of social sciences. Based on the bibliometric principle that knowledge of disciplines is concentrated in only a small proportion of important journals, I retrieved citation data from Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) of ISIWeb of Science. SSCI indexes 1750 journals over 50 social science disciplines, adding approximately 60,000 new cited references per week. The time-

frame was chosen to start in 1999 as that year has been established as the peak year in publications on knowledge work and to end in 2008 to have the most recent full-year data available. The final data set consists of approximately 270 articles with references to over 8,700 sources. The bibliometric analysis method of co-citation analysis is used to identify the highly cited groups of prior work, seen to represent the scholarly communities in the research field. Co-citation analyses the 'paths of ideas' presented by citations to represent the structure of scientific literature. Thus, the groups of co-citing works can be seen as 'invisible colleges' where authors interact and draw on each others' works: scholarly communities.

The preliminary results of an ongoing analysis confirm the assumption of fragmentation in the research field. By examining the highly cited groups in contemporary research, the paper evaluates the level of fragmentation of the research area, the particular topics of interest, and the temporal trends in these interests. Based on a more detailed content analysis of the identified influential work, the paper describes these scholarly communities in detail. The results of the paper will consist of the reporting of the different scholarly communities and their characteristics. The paper will also discuss how these different groups relate to each other and the trends in citation patterns across the groups.