

Introduction

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The present edited volume of chapters is our second attempt to capture a snapshot of the evolution of the concept of global knowledge work and workers and theoretical and practical implications of this phenomenon. Back in 2007, we edited a special issue on global knowledge workers, which was published by the *Equal Opportunities International* journal. That special issue aimed to circumscribe the concept, delineate its dimensions, discuss the several ways in which global knowledge workers appear in the economy and the workplace, and highlight the tensions as well as challenges they are faced with. Our purpose at the time was to fuel the academic debate and research on the intersectional diversity and relationality of the career and life trajectories of global knowledge workers. Over the last four years, the developments in the practice of global knowledge work and the academic debates surrounding the issue have proven that our initial interest in creating an interdisciplinary body of knowledge and research in the topic were worthwhile, while the topic itself is still timely, relevant and increasingly prominent.

The term ‘knowledge economy’ often refers to a transformed economy where investment in ‘knowledge-based assets’ such as intellectual property (or manufactured capital), design, R&D, and human and organisational capital have become far more crucial compared with investment in physical assets (Brinkley et al., 2009). This shift has transformed the nature of work, strategies and actions of organisations and thus it has changed the nature of competition in global scale. As a result, ‘knowledge work’ has become associated with innovation and competitiveness in contemporary organisations.

Many scholars, including the contributors to this volume, maintain that knowledge work and knowledge worker remain elusive concepts due to the difficulty of providing universally applicable definitions. The term ‘knowledge worker’ was coined back in 1968 by Peter Drucker, who was presumably the first scholar to acknowledge knowledge as the main asset for investment by organisations. He argued that the knowledge worker

is the person who applies ideas, concepts and information rather than manual skills to productive work. In this earliest definition of the term, there is an emphasis on the shifting nature of work, and on the use of different types of capital and skills for enhancing productivity and gaining competitive advantage.

In the interim report of the Work Foundation's Knowledge Economy Programme, Brinkley et al. (2008) make a useful distinction between knowledge and information on the basis of the human agency involved. They argue that knowledge empowers actors with the capacity for intellectual and physical activity by enabling them to think, act and reflect. Information, on the other hand, is rather passive and does not carry much meaning without suitable knowledge. Knowledge, according to the authors, is required to interpret and enact information.

Expertise and specialised knowledge, as well as the innovative application of such knowledge, have become increasingly significant for sustainable organisational performance and competitiveness, particularly in times of economic crisis and slowdown. In this light, Manolopoulos and Sakellariou, in their Chapter 2 summary of a report by Stanton Chase International, look to the 'new era', characterised by many as 'the new normal', where having 'survived' through the turmoil of the 2009 deep recession, the senior executives in the Middle East begin to develop the balances and requirements that will allow them to further advance their careers within a regional emergent context. Now, more than at any other time, the report highlights that companies seek from their executives competences such as the ability to lead and advocate change; innovative solutions and delivery; strong personal values and principles; multicultural communication leadership; knowledge of the market; and speed in delivering growth. The attraction and retention of talent remain key topics even in the current socio-economic conditions.

Contemporary organisations seek 'knowledge workers', which are considered by some scholars (e.g. Reed, 1996; Scarbrough, 1996; May et al., 2002) as expanding occupational groups, such as financial and management consultants, corporate social responsibility (CSR) consultants, IT analysts, project engineers, network engineers. The key point is the use of knowledge by these people. These occupations might provide good examples of knowledge workers. However, the thrust of the argument is that individuals who carry knowledge as a powerful intellectual resource which they, rather than the organisation, own, are described as 'knowledge workers' (Drucker, 1989; Alvesson, 2000). In this sense, for example, academics form a typical group of knowledge workers.

Following Alvesson (2000), Horwitz et al. (2003) conceptualise knowledge workers on the basis of high educational qualifications, competencies

and cognitive power. They suggest that 'knowledge workers have high levels of skills/education, with technological literacy, high cognitive power and abstract reasoning. This includes the ability to observe, synthesise and interpret data, and to communicate new perspectives and insights to lead to more effective decisions, processes and solutions for the organisation' (Horwitz et al., 2003: 31). The attributes, motivations, mobility, capitals and organisational commitment of knowledge workers are now at the forefront of academic debates on the subject. In an earlier discussion, Reed (1996) highlighted the importance of autonomy and flexibility for knowledge workers. He argued that 'knowledge workers specialise in complex task domains, which are inherently resistant to incursions by the carriers of bureaucratic rationalization and control' (Reed, 1996: 585); and therefore, they are not tied to one particular organization. They build and grow their knowledge and skill domains by working with a high degree of work autonomy and decentralised flexibility.

For the sake of the present edited volume, we requested book chapters internationally and invited international scholars who have been progressing with their interest in the topic from a number of perspectives, the common theme among them being an interest in the concept of global knowledge workers. The international approach taken highlights the relevance that the concept often has for personal and academic life trajectories.

We have found our initial relational framework of macro-meso-micro dimensions (Ozbilgin and Tatli, 2005; Nicolopoulou et al., 2007) to be still relevant for structuring and presenting the contemporary literature on global knowledge work and workers. This framework had initially supported our thinking about the topic and helped us expand the scope of the field of engagement with the concept from a theory and practice perspective.

In the present volume, the macro-meso-micro dimensions support the themes that have emerged from the papers. The themes include the following:

Part I: Socio-economic context of knowledge work Chapter 1, by Adelstein, offers a re-conceptualisation of the 'knowledge society' by drawing a parallel between pre-industrial and industrial societies. The author looks into ways in which the dynamics that printing and publishing created in Renaissance times are similar to those that we currently consider as important in shaping and defining the 'knowledge society'. Manolopoulos and Sakellariou, in Chapter 2, present a summary of a report prepared by Stanton Chase, which highlights the importance of the socio-economic conditions in the Middle East, where the impacts of

globalization are often more distinctively present, in attracting and developing global knowledge workers as senior executives.

Part II: Mobility, migration, and diversity management of knowledge workers Chapter 3, by Harvey, elaborates on a comparison of the reasons why British expatriates would immigrate and emigrate from Canada. Job opportunities, family and friends, as well as social networks, are all found to be key factors in influencing the decisions of this category of global knowledge workers. In Chapter 4, Lange and Schröder focus on a case study in East Germany in order to highlight ways in which criteria of cultural, social and ethnic diversity act as decisive location factors for transnational workers in the creative and knowledge industries. Chapter 5, which presents the findings of a cross-cultural study of ICT small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in three European countries, is by Nikolopoulos. He explores ways in which culture, innovation and entrepreneurship impact human resource management (HRM) practices in such firms. In Chapter 6, Psoinos focuses on how organisations in a host country can value or devalue the professional and life experience of educated refugees, while tapping into their skills as global knowledge workers. The final chapter of Part II, Chapter 7, by Malish and Ilavarasan, looks into the contemporary dynamics of the workplace in 'information capitalism' by studying online job advertisements in the Indian software industry.

Part III: Relationality, social networks and knowledge work Chapter 8, by Chalkiti, examines the emergent property of social networks and the ways in which they facilitate knowledge sharing in knowledge-intensive environments through a case study in Australia. Chapter 9, by Kyriakidou, explores factors of relationality that impact global knowledge workers to stay in touch within a global team setting for effective team work; while, in Chapter 10, Al-Jenaibi looks into prevalent gender differences in work practices in the world of public relations (PR) in the context of a Gulf country.

Part IV: Knowledge workers, technology and skills development Chapter 11, by Harris et al., seeks to understand the impact of new technologies, such as social networking, on the skill set and incumbent employability of students/graduates and their readiness for 21st century jobs as knowledge workers. Chapter 12, by Warren, on the other hand, proposes ways in which the new digital literacy contributes towards the possibility of instances of disruptive innovation. The chapter also explores the ways in which educational systems are currently dealing with this phenomenon.

Part V: Motivations and forms of capital in the context of knowledge work Chapter 13, by Christensen, revisits the idea of global knowledge workers as high achievers who are best left alone in order to maintain their creativity. The case of project-based work demonstrates the autonomy constraints that knowledge workers are facing. These workers defined their work as high strain rather than as an active type of work. Consequently, the concept of global knowledge work is unpacked, and reconceptualised in a range from freedom-inducing to stressful work in this chapter. In Chapter 14, Santos, on the other hand, focuses on different conceptualisations of work-family relationships in the context of knowledge work and explores the various forms that this can take, from complete segmentation, to total integration of the work-family domains. Moreover, she examines how gendered discourses account for different experiences of such phenomena.

The chapters in this edited collection build on a wide range of theoretical bases and employ a diversity of methodological approaches, demonstrating the depth, breadth and diversity of the literature in this field. Future research on knowledge work and knowledge workers will further benefit from new multi-disciplinary frameworks and perspectives that will lead to further advances in the field. The current volume also reflects the contextual depth and diversity of the work in the field by including chapters from Australia, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Greece, India, Denmark and Portugal. As the editors of this collection, we hope that this book will fuel debate in academic and practitioner domains alike by offering contemporary perspectives and fresh insights.

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