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The Knowledge Worker: Mapping the Field and Trending Topics

El trabajador del conocimiento: mapeo del campo y temas de actualidad

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ABSTRACT

This study adopts a rigorous approach to mapping trending topics among knowledge workers to guide researchers in selecting future research directions. Word network analysis and strategic diagrams were applied to examine the comprehensive database of bibliographic references in the Web of Science (WOS) and SCOPUS databases from 1977 to 2022, from which 694 articles were selected. The unit analysis was based on the titles, summaries, and keywords. The word network analysis revealed five distinct communities: competitive advantage and organizational performance, work engagement, human resource management, knowledge creation, and work environment, and the strategic map identified three central themes with significant development potential: Competitive advantage, organizational performance, and organizational commitment.

KEYWORDS

Knowledge workers, trending topics, bibliometric analysis, network analysis, PRISMA, WOS, SCOPUS.

JEL CODES

M10, M12, J24.

RESUMEN

Este estudio adopta un enfoque riguroso para identificar temas de tendencia en el estudio de los trabajadores del conocimiento, a fin de guiar a los investigadores en la selección de futuras investigaciones. Se utilizaron análisis de redes de palabras y diagramas estratégicos, herramientas importantes en el campo, para examinar una base de datos completa de referencias bibliográficas publicadas en las bases de datos Web of Science (WOS) y SCOPUS desde 1977 hasta 2022, de las cuales se seleccionaron 694 artículos. El análisis de unidades se basó en los títulos, resúmenes y palabras clave. El análisis de redes de palabras reveló cinco comunidades distintas: ventaja competitiva y desempeño organizacional, compromiso laboral, gestión de recursos humanos, creación de conocimiento y ambiente laboral, y el mapa estratégico identificó tres temas centrales con potencial de desarrollo significativo: ventaja competitiva, desempeño organizacional, y compromiso organizacional.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Trabajadores del conocimiento, temas de actualidad, análisis bibliométrico, análisis de redes, PRISMA, WOS, SCOPUS.

CÓDIGOS JEL

M10, M12, J24.

1 Introduction

In the 1960s, post-industrial society was replaced by a new information-intensive, knowledge-based, learning-oriented economy known as the knowledge economy. Existing jobs require workers to create, distribute, or apply knowledge to achieve innovative results in their organizations (Farkas & Török, 2011; Ferreira et al., 2022; Óskarsdóttir et al., 2022). In this economy, knowledge is a key asset or resource for organizations to achieve sustainable competitive advantages and improve organizational performance (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Drucker, 2012; Wiig, 1997). Consequently, these organizations must apply knowledge management, which comprises strategies that enable them to generate, store, transfer, and apply knowledge (Alavi & Leidner, 2001).

This type of worker, whose work is based on intellectual productivity and information-processing skills, is categorized as a knowledge worker (Davenport, 2005; Drucker, 2001).

According to Berg and Gmyrek (2023), the International Labor Organization reported that 20% of global employment is monopolized by knowledge workers, with their representation being better in high-income countries and at the continental level in Europe and Central Asia. The value generated by these workers through appropriate knowledge management enables the existence and permanence of knowledge-intensive organizations, which are characterized by achieving their strategic objectives, consolidating their competitive advantages, and achieving optimal organizational performance (Bassi, 1997; Hosseini et al., 2022; Latilla et al., 2018; Lloyd, 1996; Óskarsdóttir et al., 2022; Petruzzelli & Savino, 2014; Rao & Thakur, 2019). The need for knowledge workers in organizations is a current fact.

Academic publications on aspects linked to knowledge workers are diverse (Khan et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2020; Muhammed & Zaim, 2020; van Ingen et al., 2021; Wu & Yu, 2022) and are supported by theories such as the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991; Barney, 1990), theory of the knowledge-based firm (Grant, 1996a, 1996b), theory of knowledge creation (Nonaka et al., 1996), self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), social exchange theory (Blau, 2017; Emerson, 1976; Homans, 1958), job demands-resources (JD-R) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001), and person-organization fit (Kristof, 1996).

Systematic literature reviews have examined punctually aspects of knowledge workers such as their productivity (Óskarsdóttir et al., 2022; Tapasco-Alzate et al., 2022), leadership (Issahaka & Lines, 2021), and work well-being (Charalampous et al., 2019). These studies have focused on knowledge management concerning its measures (Ragab & Arisha, 2013), academic production (Handzic et al., 2017), linkage with human resource practices (Majeed, 2009), and relationships with organizational performance (Latilla et al., 2018). Conversely, there is a bibliometric study on knowledge worker mobility (Ferreira et al., 2022). Based on the review of publications about knowledge workers in the Web of Science and Scopus databases, no study was found regarding the holistically examined knowledge workers as a research topic. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by mapping the trending

topics of knowledge workers based on conceptual analysis and a strategic map to guide researchers in selecting future research whose development adds value to the area and is of interest to academic journals.

2 Methodology

A two-stage approach was used to examine the knowledge workers comprehensively. First, a conceptual analysis was conducted to map the main topics (Chang et al., 2023). The second step elaborated a strategic map of trending topics (Bolaños, 2022).

The conceptual analysis employed a co-word network in which nodes represented terms, and edges represented their co-occurrence relationships. The co-occurrence of two terms within a scholarly document can be inferred as a thematic linkage (Callon et al., 1983). Consequently, as the frequency of co-occurrence increases, the theme tends to consolidate (Ding et al., 2001). The authors followed the four-stage methodology proposed by Cobo et al. (2011). This methodology identifies strategic diagrams and trending topics. These stages are described below.

Detection of research themes: Recognizing research themes entails creating a network based on the terms extracted from the documents using a co-occurrence matrix and normalization technique. This network is then partitioned using clustering algorithms, such as simple centers, single links, complete links, average links, or sum links, to unveil a group of closely related terms that comprise the primary themes (Vasiliev, 2020).

Visualizing research themes and thematic networks: A schematic representation of the two dimensions is based on the arrangement of centrality and density measures. Centrality assesses the external connections between networks by evaluating the significance of a topic in the research area. By contrast, density gauges the network's internal cohesion by determining a theme's development.

Themes can be classified into four categories: (a) motor themes that are highly developed and pertinent to the research area, (b) basic and transversal themes that are relevant to the research area but not fully developed, (c) emerging or declining themes that are poorly or marginally developed, and (d) highly developed and isolated themes that are well developed but not relevant to the research field. The themes were plotted on spheres, with sizes proportional to the documents or bibliometric performance indicators (as shown in Figure 1).

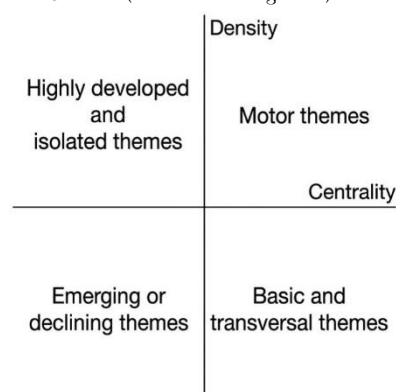


FIGURE 1. Examples of Strategic Map.
Source: Cobo et al. (2011).

Thematic networks, also known as network graphs, are labeled with the most significant keywords of the theme or manually assigned depending on the chosen clustering algorithm. The size of each term is proportional to the number of documents or bibliometric performance indicators. In contrast, the line thickness between two keywords represents the strength of the normalization technique (as depicted in Figure 2). In this study, the most relevant and productive themes were identified by analyzing various documents and bibliometric performance indicators.

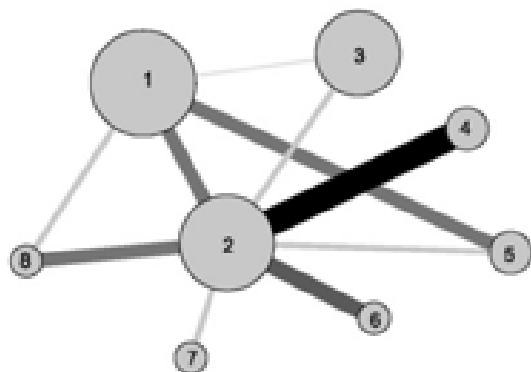


FIGURE 2. Example of Thematic Network.
Source: Cobo et al. (2011).

The applied methodology was based on the standard PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) (Page et al., 2021). A co-word analysis was used for the conceptual structure, establishing that the terms of an article reflect its content; that is, if two terms appear within the same document, they belong to the same topic (Callon et al., 1983). Consequently, the greater the number of co-occurrence term pairs, the greater the linkage of their topics (Ding et al., 2001).

The research question was as follows: What topics on knowledge workers have been trending between 1977 and 2022? For this research, all publications on knowledge workers indexed in the SCOPUS and WOS databases in the business area until January 5, 2023, were considered using the following search equation:

(TITLE-ABS-KEY ("knowledge-worker") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("knowledge worker") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("knowledge-workers") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("knowledge workers")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "busi"))

An ad hoc script was implemented based on bibliometrix (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) and Tidiverse. The former formatted the raw files from the search filter, and the latter deduplicated the records from the two bibliographic databases. The output of the ad hoc script was an Excel file showing the title, abstract, authors, journal, type, and year of publication. The two databases collected 2155 references, and 1761 documents were retained after the deduplication process. The authors excluded those without abstracts (46) and those whose publication category was book or editorial (35). In the second step, the abstracts of 1680 papers were reviewed and discussed to select only those aligned with the topic of interest (knowledge workers). Finally, 694 articles were selected for analysis (Figure 3).

The units of analysis were the titles, abstracts, and keywords. A script created in Python-based Spacy was implemented (Vasiliev, 2020) to extract noun phrases from titles and abstracts. In our study, a term could be a noun phrase or a keyword. Therefore, we gathered all the terms by applying a rigorous cleaning process based on an ad hoc script.

The initial corpus comprised 554 terms; however, the subsequent removal of stop words reduced the number to 457. Consequently, systematic general terms were eliminated, and those with comparable syntactic or semantic meanings were standardized, culminating in a final set of 229 terms.

The authors used VOSviewer (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010) to draw the network in the conceptual structure. A co-occurrence matrix was created and transformed into the VOSviewer network format. The matrix had the term frequency and co-occurrence as previous inputs. Thus, they chose values of two and one for term frequency and co-occurrence because the co-word network had the best representation of the 694 papers. Association strength was implemented for the normalization of the network because, according to Eck and Waltman (2009), it is the most suitable normalization measure for co-occurrence data. For the layout, the authors selected an attraction of two and a repulsion of one. For the community detection, they chose the value of 0.1 for the parameter resolution because after assigning different values, this value identifies the themes that best describe the topic.

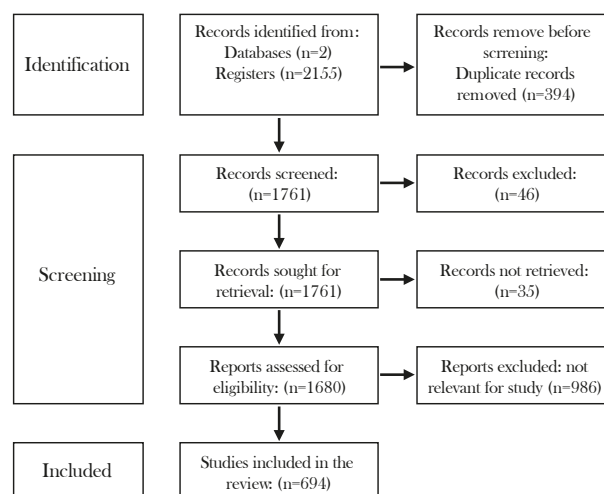


Figure 3. PRISMA Flow Diagram.
Source: Author's elaboration.

SciMAT software was used for trending topics (Cobo et al., 2012). It creates a script that accepts the CVS file using software based on 229 terms. Normalizing the terms is unnecessary because they were previously created in the co-occurrence matrix. An equivalence index was used to normalize the matrix. Then, the simple center algorithm with a maximum network value of 12 and a minimum network value of 3 was chosen as the clustering algorithm. Finally, thresholds of two and one for network and data reduction, respectively, were selected. The authors chose these setting values because they best captured the subtopics after trying the different values. The size of the spheres is proportional to the number of papers. The settings described above are by the recommendations of Cobo et al. (2011).

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Conceptual Structure

An analysis of 694 articles revealed a significant growing interest in knowledge workers. Notably, 60% of these publications were published between 2011 and 2022, with an average of 43 articles generated annually over the last three years. This trend underscores the importance of this study. Figure 4 presents a co-word network of five communities, each representing a vital aspect of the evolving field.

Community 1 (red, Figure 4) focuses on knowledge workers as pivotal elements of an organization’s competitive advantage and performance. This largest community in the co-word network features nodes for competitive advantage, job satisfaction, and organizational culture (Table 1).

TABLE 1. Community 1: Main nodes

Id	x	y	weight <Links>	weight<Total link strength>
competitive advantage	0.425	0.0034	26	65
job satisfaction	-0.132	0.1432	15	40
organizational culture	0.1306	0.1336	12	32
Kbv (knowledge-based view)	0.4107	0.1892	10	24
Km (knowledge management) practices	0.2752	0.1479	9	20
km (knowledge management) processes	0.4059	0.0953	8	19
sustainable competitive advantage	0.3189	-0.0968	7	18

Source: Author’s analysis.

Knowledge workers are recognized as true custodians of knowledge, a role that significantly influences organizational outcomes (Latilla et al., 2018); therefore, their individual knowledge is integrated into the organization to create organizational capabilities (Grant, 1996b) and become critical resources for creating value and achieving sustainable competitive advantages in their companies (Barney, 1991), thereby improving their organizational performance (Rao & Thakur, 2019). This integration process requires the support of organizational culture, understood as common knowledge that delimits the conditions under which knowledge workers voluntarily share their knowledge with other members, teams, and areas of the organization (Grant, 1996a; Petrov et al., 2020). This, in turn, is also enhanced by their job satisfaction (Kucharska & Erickson, 2019) and contributes to organizational learning and knowledge (Grant, 1996b; Singh & Sharma, 2011).

Effective management of knowledge workers' intellectual capital is imperative for companies to maintain a competitive edge, succeed, and perform their best. This involves efficient acquisition, processing, storage, and application. This study provides valuable insights and recommendations in this crucial area (Gold et al., 2001; Wiig, 1997).

Community 2 (blue, Figure 4) relates to studies on knowledge workers, their work engagement, and organizational commitment. The most representative nodes of this network are work engagement, turnover intention (TI), job crafting, and organizational commitment (Table 2). Some studies of this community are supported by three theories: Ajzen (1991)’s theory of planned behavior (Ng et al., 2022; Ranasinghe & Dharmadasa, 2013; Wang et al., 2015), the social exchange theory of Blau (2017) (Davis, 2013; Memon & Ghani, 2020; Wang et al., 2015), and the job demands-resources theory of Bakker and Demerouti (2007) (Moulik & Giri, 2022; Wojtczuk-Turek, 2022).

TABLE 2. Community 2: Main nodes

Id	x	y	weight <Links>	weight<Total link strength>
work engagement	-0.6972	-0.0328	21	48
Ti (turnover intention)	-0.2827	0.2587	8	24
job crafting	-0.7265	0.2022	10	23
organizational commitment	-0.4654	0.2666	6	19
Psycap (psychological capital)	-0.7764	0.1538	7	17
ks (knowledge sharing) behavior	-0.5695	0.4569	6	15
Pos (perceived organization support)	-0.4897	0.2695	5	14
personal resource	-0.9254	0.1598	6	13

Source: Author’s analysis.

The application of job crafting by knowledge workers enhances their work engagement and increases their performance, satisfaction, and sense of well-being in the workplace (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Rounak & Misra, 2022; Witt, 1991; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Combined with knowledge-sharing behavior, it generates higher levels of identification and organizational commitment and consequently lowers turnover intention (Lakshman et al., 2022). This result is possible because the interactions of workers, which can become high-quality relationships that evolve towards trust, loyalty, and mutual commitment and are supported by rules and norms of

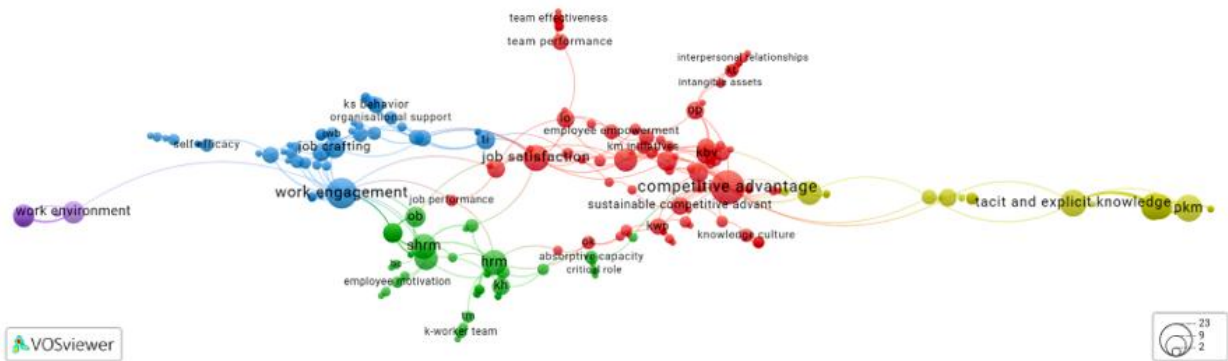


FIGURE 4. Knowledge Worker: Co-word network of communities
Source: Author’s elaboration.

exchange that lay the foundations for their behavior in the workplace (Ajzen, 1991; Blau, 2017; Emerson, 1976) and strengthen perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986), are predictors of organizational commitment (Settoon et al., 1996; Wayne et al., 1997).

Community 3 (green, Figure 4) relates to studies on knowledge workers and human resource management. The most representative nodes of this network are human resource management (HRM), strategic human resource management (SHRM), and organizational behavior (OB) (Table 3). Some publications on this network have been prepared using two theories: Deci et al. (2017)'s self-determination theory (Gagné et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2022; Zhang & Min, 2021) and person-organization fit (Kristof, 1996) (van Ingen et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2022).

TABLE 3. Community 3: Main nodes

Id	x	y	weight <Links>	weight<Total link strength>
Hrm (human resource management)	-0.1867	-0.3784	14	34
Shrm (strategic human resource management)	-0.4459	-0.2782	14	33
Sdt (self-determination theory)	-0.5309	-0.323	12	24
Ob (organizational behavior)	-0.5001	-0.1411	9	19
Kh (knowledge hiding)	-0.3313	-0.4479	7	16
perceived organisational purpose	-0.5889	-0.2218	8	16
perceived organizational purpose and work engagement	-0.5586	-0.2016	8	16
p-o fit theory	-0.5908	-0.2033	8	16
p-op (personal organizational purpose)	-0.5694	-0.2185	8	16

Source: Author's analysis.

Knowledge-based business sectors are constantly changing and evolving; consequently, other organizations can demand workers. Hence, the human resources area must focus on practices that not only cultivate knowledge workers' identification with their organizations but also promote their autonomous motivation, high-quality performance, job satisfaction, and well-being and increase their retention rate (Deci et al., 2017; Turulja & Delalic, 2021).

Furthermore, strategic human resource management is characterized by focusing on the knowledge worker and relying on four dynamic components: leadership, learning, culture, and networking, to facilitate the flow of knowledge in the organization (Zhang-Zhang et al., 2022); promotes intrinsic motivation in collaborators, which is positively predictive of the intention to share information; and mitigates the behavior of hiding knowledge (Foss et al., 2009). In short, organizational performance is significantly affected by the practices and policies of human resource departments because they directly influence human capital, a means by which they gain competitive advantage (Delery & Doty, 1996; Huselid, 1995; Sheldon et al., 2003).

Community 4 (yellow, Figure 4) encompasses studies on knowledge workers and knowledge creation. The most significant nodes in this network were personal knowledge management (PKM), tacit and explicit knowledge, and

knowledge management systems (KMS) (Table 4). The only theory included in this network is knowledge creation management (Nonaka et al., 1996).

TABLE 4. Community 4: Main nodes

Id	x	y	weight <Links>	weight<Total link strength>
Pkm (personal knowledge management)	1.7036	-0.1228	16	37
tacit and explicit knowledge	1.377	-0.0921	16	34
Kms (knowledge management system)	0.7	-0.0541	13	31
Okms (organizational knowledge management system)	1.6303	-0.1266	13	31
fruitful co-evolution	1.6155	-0.1463	13	30
individual sovereignty	1.6226	-0.0813	13	30
knowledge society	1.6244	-0.1042	13	30
career phase	1.5974	-0.0714	13	26
decentralizing km (knowledge management) revolution	1.5926	-0.1251	13	26
knowledge creation theories	1.5933	-0.0995	13	26

Source: Author's analysis.

Knowledge creation management offers two approaches: explicit and tacit knowledge. With the support of knowledge management systems, knowledge workers can merge these two approaches through four modes of knowledge conversion (socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization). This empowers them to create new knowledge and foster innovative solutions for their organizations (Natek & Lesjak, 2021; Nonaka et al., 1996). For workers' personal knowledge to transform into intellectual capital, organizational leaders must incorporate both formal and informal knowledge management processes as part of the organizational culture of knowledge and learning (Kucharska, 2021). Knowledge transfer and application processes are further bolstered by knowledge management systems (Alavi & Leidner, 2001) that empower knowledge workers in their roles.

Community 5 (purple, Figure 4) focuses on studies of knowledge workers and the work environment, although it is the least developed network. The most prominent node was the work environment (Table 5).

TABLE 5. Community 5: Main nodes

Id	x	y	weight <Links>	weight<Total link strength>
work environment	-1.4039	-0.2167	11	22
axiological work priorities	-1.5421	-0.2404	9	18
organisational improvements	-1.5165	-0.2737	9	18
professional realization	-1.5142	-0.2473	9	18

Source: Author's analysis

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations that recognize the importance of uninterrupted knowledge creation have created hybrid work environments available to their knowledge workers, allowing them to work from home or office (Reindl et al., 2022). In particular, millennial knowledge workers, driven by their career aspirations, seek organizations that offer growth

opportunities and work environments that empower them (Aydogmus, 2019). When a knowledge worker is provided with an appropriate work environment, the productivity of knowledge-based work is significantly enhanced (Palvalin, 2019), underscoring the crucial role of the work environment in knowledge management.

The five communities obtained for the knowledge worker as a research topic showed a close relationship; in particular, community 1 (red) was directly connected to communities 2 (blue), 3 (green), and 4 (yellow).

In Community 1 (red), the knowledge worker is not just a resource but also a fundamental one for organizations to achieve sustainable competitive advantages and outstanding performance (Barney, 1991; Grant, 1996b). Their integration and contribution to knowledge are crucial. This underscores the importance of knowledge management processes, practices, and systems, all supported by an organizational culture that fosters knowledge flow and job satisfaction. It is important to note that the organization does not generate knowledge; its workers' individual knowledge nourishes organizational knowledge. Knowledge creation theory (Nonaka et al., 1996) supports this connection with Community 4 (yellow), which amplifies individual knowledge and crystallizes it as part of the organization's knowledge system.

Communities 1 (red) and 2 (blue) are linked by knowledge workers' job satisfaction, resulting from the fact that their interpersonal relationships with other peers have evolved satisfactorily, generating subjective norms that guide the ideology of exchange (knowledge sharing), which is supported by trust, loyalty, and mutual commitment, as indicated by the theories of social exchange and planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Blau, 2017; Emerson, 1976). When this ideology is realized, the link between worker performance and perceived organizational support is strengthened.

Therefore, if a knowledge worker considers that he/she has the support of his/her supervisor, his/her organizational commitment is strengthened and, consequently, his/her turnover intention is diminished (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Wayne et al., 1997; Witt, 1991). Furthermore, according to the demands-resources theory (Demerouti et al., 2001), knowledge workers should be provided with a working design that allows a work environment with adequate demands and resources, which encourages their performance, satisfaction, and work engagement, complemented by supervisors who are transformational leaders distinguished by their charisma, empathy, and support of their employees (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

Regarding the relationship between communities 1 (red) and 3 (green), human resource management, through its policies and practices, plays a pivotal role in shaping the performance of organizations (Deci et al., 2017). Strategic policies and practices significantly contribute to human capital formation. Human capital, composed of satisfied and high-job-performance knowledge workers, is closely aligned with the organization's purpose according to the person-organization fit theory (Kristof, 1996; Sheldon et al., 2003; Zhang-Zhang et al., 2022). Furthermore, as per resource-based theory, human capital enables organizations to gain sustainable competitive advantages

and integrate knowledge at all levels (Barney, 1991; Delery & Doty, 1996; Grant, 1996b; Huselid, 1995).

Communities 2 (blue) and 5 (purple) are connected by the positive influence of the work environment (purple) on knowledge workers' work engagement (blue) (van Ingen et al., 2021). The work environment significantly affects the degree of collaboration, interaction, and construction of the corporate culture of knowledge workers, as well as their empowerment and career development (Aydogmus, 2019; Reindl et al., 2022). A good work environment fosters these aspects and strengthens knowledge workers' work engagement, underscoring its value in organizational success (Demerouti et al., 2001).

3.2 Strategic map

Figure 5 shows a strategic map of the research on knowledge workers. Well-developed topics relevant to the area of interest include work engagement, learning organization (LO), and human resource management (HRM). At the same time, knowledge management (KM) processes and the work environment are considered highly developed but less relevant topics. The work environment is the least developed (Figure 4). OM (organizational maturity), organizational success, and performance measurement are topics categorized as poor or marginal. Finally, three topics are relevant to the area of interest and are not yet fully developed: competitive advantage, (OP) organizational performance, and organizational commitment. Therefore, they are considered to be trending topics.

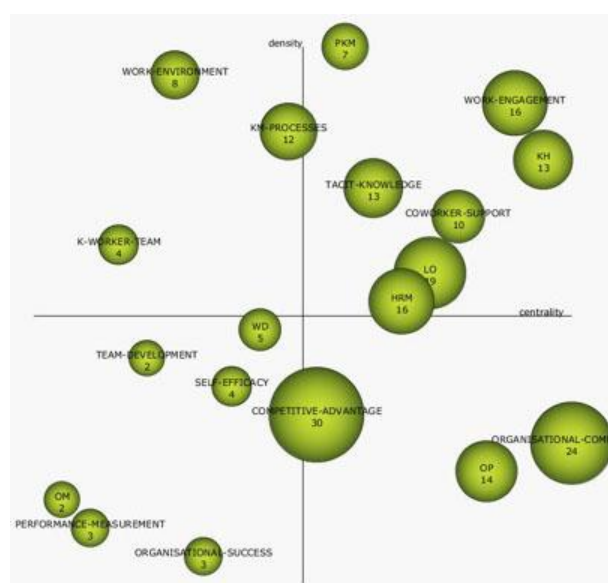


FIGURE 5. Strategic map.
Source: Author's analysis.

In the Competitive Advantage cluster, the pivotal role of the knowledge worker, a valuable resource and generator of value, was examined. This role is integral to the implementation gear of knowledge integration in the organization, necessitating the support of a knowledge management system and favorable organizational culture. Thus, the individual knowledge of collaborators is consolidated as organizational knowledge, which serves as a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Chandra, 2019; Hosseini et al., 2022; Petrov et al., 2020; Subramani et al., 2021).

The Organizational Commitment cluster is a compilation of studies that delve into the influence of Human Resources professionals. Through their policies and practices, these professionals significantly impact knowledge workers' development, empowerment, commitment, propensity to share knowledge, and turnover intentions (Lakshman et al., 2022; Sheidaee et al., 2022; Shujahat et al., 2021; Turulja & Delalic, 2021).

In the Organizational Performance cluster, studies focus on the aspects of knowledge workers that contribute to organizational performance, such as work well-being, worker performance and satisfaction, and knowledge management (Farooq Sahibzada et al., 2021; Muhammed & Zaim, 2020; Óskarsdóttir et al., 2022). They also focus on the transfer and translation of knowledge, which is linked to the exploitation of knowledge's competitive advantage (Assensoh-Kodua, 2019; Latilla et al., 2018; Lombardi et al., 2020).

4 Conclusions

Worldwide, one of every five workers is a knowledge worker (Berg & Gmyrek, 2023), who makes it possible for knowledge-intensive organizations. These are references for other types of organizations because they have competitive advantages and achieve high organizational performance (Bassi, 1997; Hosseini et al., 2022; Latilla et al., 2018; Óskarsdóttir et al., 2022; Petruzzelli & Savino, 2014; Rao & Thakur, 2019). The demonstrated relevance of knowledge workers in organizations and the finding that there are no publications supported by bibliometric analyses that holistically outline their research tendencies were the motivations for this research.

The results identified five interrelated communities, each representing a vital aspect of the evolving field: Community 1 (knowledge workers and organizations' competitive advantage and performance), Community 2 (knowledge workers, work engagement, and organizational commitment), Community 3 (knowledge workers and human resource management), Community 4 (knowledge workers and knowledge creation), and Community 5 (knowledge workers and work environment). The predominant theories by community are also observed, as well as how these communities and their theories are linked to each other. The theories of Grant (1996b) and Barney (1991) are linked to the theories of Ajzen (1991), Blau (2017), Bakker and Demerouti (2007), Deci et al. (2017), Kristof (1996) and Nonaka et al. (1996).

In knowledge-intensive organizations, organizational knowledge is built on the individual knowledge of workers. To integrate this knowledge into the organization, they implement knowledge management processes and systems and forge an organizational culture that encourages the flow of knowledge. Hence, knowledge workers are a key resource for these organizations to achieve sustainable competitive advantages and improve performance.

However, the flow of knowledge depends on the satisfaction of workers, having good relationships with their colleagues, and perceiving that they have the support of their supervisors, which positively affects their productivity and work performance; that is when their organizational commitment is achieved, and their intentions to leave the organization or hide information are

reduced. This is when the Human Resources area plays a vital role so that policies and practices applied in the organization contribute to the formation of human capital and a work environment that promotes the exchange of knowledge between collaborators and areas of the organization.

Furthermore, a strategic map of research on knowledge workers was developed, and three themes were identified as trending topics: competitive advantage, organizational performance, and organizational commitment. In addition to identifying the subtopics, each cluster of topics of interest showed their relationships and degrees of development in the reviewed literature. These clusters can guide future research on knowledge workers.

These findings help authors understand the interrelations between the topics addressed in the literature in the study of knowledge workers and the selection of new research topics that have the potential for development.

Regarding the limitations of this study, the search for references was limited to the WOS and SCOPUS databases and included all available sources published since 1977. Besides, only academic articles in the business area were considered, excluding editorials, books, and chapters. Furthermore, author bias must be considered when evaluating article eligibility. However, a rigorous procedure was followed to reduce this bias, allowing for an exhaustive bibliometric analysis of the selected papers.

Because the scope of this research ends in 2022, the results do not account for changes in the role of the knowledge worker, driven mainly by the use of Artificial Intelligence and access to diverse intelligence tools that support daily activities in content creation and validation, as well as data analysis.

5 Authors contribution

MEA-G: Project administration, conceptualization, validation, writing – original draft.

FB-G: Methodology, data curation, formal analysis, visualization.

AP-C: Writing – review & editing.

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