



Toward a taxonomy of career studies through bibliometric visualization [☆]

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ABSTRACT

One of the greatest strengths and liabilities of the career field is its diversity. This diversity allows for wide coverage of relevant career dynamics across the lifespan and across levels of analysis. However, this diversity also reflects fragmentation, with career scholars failing to appreciate how the insights from other thought worlds can advance their own work. Using advanced bibliometric mapping techniques, we provide a systematic review of the 3141 articles on careers published in the management literature between 1990 and 2012. In doing so, we (1) map key terms to create a systematic taxonomy of career studies within the field of management studies, (2) provide a synthetic overview of each topic cluster which extends prior reviews of more limited scope, and (3) identify the most highly influential studies on careers within each cluster. Specifically, six local clusters emerged – i.e., international careers, career management, career choice, career adaptation, individual and relational career success, and life opportunities. To classify a broad range of research opportunities for career scholars, we also create a “global” map of 16,146 career articles from across the social sciences. Specifically, six global clusters emerged – i.e., organizational, individual, education, doctorate careers, high-profile careers, and social policy. We describe and compare the clusters in the map with an emphasis on those avenues career scholars in management have yet to explore.

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1. Introduction

Career studies is an active area of inquiry which cuts across a variety of disciplines, domains of work, and levels of analysis. CEOs, surgeons, politicians, actors, scientists, and line workers all have careers, where a “career” is defined as an “evolving sequence of work experiences” (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989a, p. 8). The career literature draws from and contributes to a variety of disciplines, with clear links to management, psychology, sociology, economics, and education. This diversity of research reflects the reality that peoples’ careers are determined by multiple factors at various levels, with various stakeholders involved.

Despite a plethora of strong scholarship, the very virtue of conceptual and methodological diversity within career studies is also an obstacle to accretive progress. Critics have pointed out that the career field includes various disjointed research streams, which do not systematically connect to each other even when they concern the same phenomena (Arnold & Cohen, 2008; Arthur, 2008). This suggests that serious attention should be paid to evaluating the extent to which career findings from across research communities

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might be integrated (Arthur, 2008; Arthur et al., 1989a; Gunz & Peiperl, 2007). Importantly, we do *not* advocate reducing the variety of approaches or presenting a single over-arching theory on careers. Instead, we posit that a systematic taxonomy of career studies, which groups together related concepts, would go a long way toward providing the intellectual architecture for bridging thought worlds. In other words, we believe that it is possible to make accretive intellectual progress and retain diversity, but only within a framework that facilitates the exchange of concepts, methods, and findings across streams.

The purpose of this paper is to present a systematic overview of the career literature using the bibliometric technique known as *science mapping*. Science mapping offers a visualization of the relationships between scientific objects, such as research topics (Callon, Courtial, Turner, & Bauin, 1983). We employ science mapping to create local (i.e., management) and global (i.e., all of social science) maps of the research topic clusters of peer-reviewed journal articles on careers. This allows us to provide a structured overview and synthetic taxonomy of the state of the career literature in management and in the social sciences more broadly.

2. Reviewing the literature through science mapping

Several past reviews provide a high quality overview of the streams of career studies within management (e.g., Baruch & Bozionelos, 2010; Feldman, 1989; Sullivan, 1999). In addition, a small number of reviews go beyond the field of management (e.g., Maranda & Comeau, 2000; Özbilgin & Tatli, 2011). In both cases, however, the reviews rely on the authors' subjective view of the field. Other notable contributions to understanding career studies come from edited volumes (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989b; Gunz & Peiperl, 2007; Inkson & Savickas, 2013a,b,c,d). These collections let the structure of the field emerge from the input of several selected scholars. Still, such contributions are dependent upon how the scholars are selected and on the idiosyncrasies of these scholars' sensemaking. In an effort to achieve standards of rigor comparable to primary researchers (Cooper, 1989; Fitzgerald & Rounds, 1989, p. 106) we use science mapping to conduct a comprehensive analysis of thousands of studies on careers and develop a *taxonomy* of the career literature. A taxonomy is a classification based on *empirical* evidence of correspondence between characteristics (Bailey, 1994). Taxonomies can be contrasted with typologies, which are based on the comparison of *conceptual* categories across more than one conceptual dimension (c.f., Baruch & Bozionelos, 2010). As such, our scientific mapping approach reveals topics and relationships between topics that have been absent from others' frameworks.

Science mapping employs innovative bibliometric techniques to create visual representations of academic research. Much like an architectural drawing, maps of academic literatures can help create shared understanding and bridge diverse knowledge domains (Carlile, 2002). Science maps can help scholars with highly specialized knowledge overcome barriers to discussion and collaboration across disconnected research communities, which can advance theoretical and conceptual progress (Börner, Boyack, Milojevic, & Morris, 2012; Fitzgerald & Rounds, 1989, p. 107; Rafols, Leydesdorff, O'Hare, Nightingale, & Stirling, 2012). Finally, science maps provide a tool for creating synthetic reviews and complement meta-analyses. Indeed, whereas meta-analyses focus on a particular research topic, science maps have the capability to zoom out further, and empirically capture the relationships between multiple topic areas.

Science mapping has been around for several decades. However, early science mapping generally relied on manual coding of articles (e.g., Fitzgerald & Rounds, 1989). This introduced evaluative criteria into the process and was laborious; limiting the number of articles that could be incorporated into a map. Recent advances in information technology enabled the introduction of text extraction and normalization techniques for science mapping, which has removed these limitations. Within the field of management, novel mapping techniques have been used to visualize research in areas like international management (Acedo & Casillas, 2005), strategy (Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruiz-Navarro, 2004), and business ethics (Özmen Uysal, 2010). While these science maps are still relatively rare, those published have been well received within the academic community.

3. Methods

As stated above, we created maps of "local" (management) and "global" (social science) career topics. Our sample for both maps includes all articles published between 1990 and 2012 containing the term "career" (plus any suffix) in the title or abstract. Studies published before 1990 were excluded because these rarely have an abstract in the Web of Science database. Studies after 2012 were left out in order to prevent preprint bias. The local map is based on all journals listed under the management category in the Web of Science (hereafter WoS) or under the Harzing (2013) category "Organization Science/Organization Behavior, Human Resource Management/Industrial Relations". The search resulted in 3141 publication abstracts and titles related to careers within management journals. For the global map, we obtained the articles published in any social science journal from the WoS containing the term "career" in the title or abstract. Articles that used the term "career" in ways that were unrelated to work (c.f., Arthur et al., 1989a, p. 8) were excluded by discarding those containing terms that signify non-work careers — i.e., the terms "treatment careers", "drug", "abuse", "diagnosis", "illness", "cancer", or "AIDS". This article identification process resulted in 16,146 relevant journal articles in social science journals. The interested reader can find both search phrases online (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2014.08.008>) where they are provided as Supplementary material.

We created the science maps using the VOSviewer software developed by van Eck and Waltman (Van Eck & Waltman, 2011; Waltman, van Eck, & Noyons, 2010). Various studies have successfully utilized the VOSviewer software for science mapping, including visualization of the research on renewable energies (Rizzi, van Eck, & Frey, 2014), the relations between journals in the business field (Rafols et al., 2012), and the topics covered in the editorials of Nature and Science (Waaaijer, van Bochove, & van Eck, 2010, 2011). Indeed, VOSviewer combines the most advanced and valid techniques for every step in the science mapping process, including: (1) term extraction and selection, (2) visual mapping of relatedness, and (3) clustering of science objects. Across our maps, we use the default settings in the software, which generally represent the best practice in the science mapping literature.

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