

Knowledge Work and Organizations: Property and Management (19th-20th centuries)

As a major factor of economic development, knowledge is an essential topic of economic history and of economics. Some scholars in management have linked the emergence of the “knowledge worker” to the development of the knowledge economy, whose origins are laid out in Fritz Machlup’s book *The Production and Distribution of Knowledge in the United States* [Machlup, 1962]. However the history of professionalization insists on a more long-term dimension. Strong debates on the recognition of “intellectual labor” occurred already during the Interwar period. Moreover, the term “intellectual worker” conveys an economic meaning, which dates back to the 19th century when learned professions became more and more important.

The purpose of this session is to contribute to such a long-term history of “knowledge work” by insisting on some particular aspects. Knowledge has to be managed by organizations (firms, universities and research institutes, non-profit associations), which tend to guarantee their ownership. What is the relationship between the development of “knowledge work” and the specific ways of management and of ownership?

To answer this question, two main issues could be tackled:

1. Intellectual property right as institutional framework

The rise of the “corporate intellectual property” [Fisk, 2009] is a major feature in the history of intellectual property rights. Do organizations allow their employee to take patents? Is the legislation about employee invention a way to recognize “knowledge work”? These questions concern not only technical invention but also marketing and design, for example. Comparative approaches would be appreciated, particularly about Europe, United States and Japan.

2. The management of knowledge work(er)

Current management approaches insist on the autonomy of knowledge worker inside the organizations. But this is not a “late twentieth-century invention of [...] “knowledge economy”” [Shapin, 2008]. At the beginning of the 20th century, some managers already understood that the emerging R&D could not be totally constrained by the search for performance. Moreover, as early as the 19th century, controlling the knowledge resulting from the industrial practice and the manual workers’ know-how was an important purpose for managers.

Ultimately, this session intends to provide the opportunity to historicize the notion of “knowledge work” by analyzing the ways of controlling knowledge by organizations.

Up to eight papers will be accepted (four for each block time); they will circulate in advance and will be presented by a reviewer in order to receive intensive discussion at the session.

Proposals for papers are welcome and should be sent to the corresponding organizer no later than on 15 February 2012. Proposals should contain a paper title and an abstract of 300 – 1000 words. Accepted proposals will be notified on 1 March 2012.

Corresponding organizer: Gabriel Galvez-Behar, Université Lille 3, France, gabriel.galvez-behar
<at> univ-lille3.fr