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The troubadour of knowledge
A knowledge worker for the new knowledge age

Abstract
The landscape of what is here called “the new knowledge age” includes radical developments in the following areas: information and communication technology, the rethinking of the sciences and scientific work, the new emphasis on the ecology of the information phenomenon, and the re-articulation of what it means to be human in this new age of the electronic media. The drastic and dynamic changes related to these developments confront knowledge workers, also working in the area of knowledge organisation (KO), with dramatic new challenges. Therefore the focus of this article will be on human persons and their qualities as the decisive, key aspect of KO. For humans to adapt and respond in significant ways to these challenges pertaining to a variety of activities in our field, require the development or re-development of certain specific, uniquely human, qualities. The breakdown of disciplinary boundaries demand the ability to act between the disciplines (the instructed third), to navigate all the dimensions of the knowledge networks, to willingly become an eternal learner, to read more and differently from the usual ways, to display an uncompromised commitment to thinking in a new key, and to continuously participate in an infinite conversation. These are the required qualities for the new dispensation, and can only materialise when the much neglected imaginative noetic (spiritual) capacity all humans possess are wholeheartedly embraced and also cultivated. Together these well-developed qualities should have only one outcome: inventiveness – the invention of new and appropriate knowledges for special needs and actions in societies. The name selected for such a qualified knowledge worker or information professional is “the troubadour of knowledge”.

1: Introduction: the new knowledge age
The knowledge worker is a central or key figure in knowledge organisation (KO). It was always the case and will always be the case. Currently, however, this figure becomes even more important in view of the new dispensation of knowledge where knowledge becomes the characterising factor of our age, where theoretical developments regarding knowledge and its nature force us into the direction of a new knowledge dispensation, where inter-disciplinarity and multi-disciplinarity form such defining notions of our age, and where knowledge networks under the compelling impact of information and communication technologies are such influential resources. A new culture has been established, called “cyberculture” by Lévy (2001). These developments put enormous pressure and pose fascinating challenges to all activities related to KO. From such a perspective it becomes an imperative to take a close look at and rethink this key figure, and the qualities required from such a figure, that will enable this person, or such persons, to make significant contributions in this context and domain of activity.

As point of departure I wish to posit the notion of the troubadour of knowledge, or, the configurer of knowledge, as the most adequate name for the anticipated new characterisation of the figure of the knowledge worker or the information professional. The intention is to sketch this figure as the most needed figure for our turbulent times – turbulent both with regard to socio-cultural, economic and political issues as to the burning issues of knowledge as sketched above. This figure is needed with respect to information and knowledge related science and research, the knowledge work in business and organisations, and it is equally needede for cultural, social and political directions to be taken. Another case in point is the growing in importance of the political economy of knowledge. Any sensible response to these challenges demands
special qualities: who is in possession of these qualities, or, what should be done to cultivate the capacity to cultivate these qualities?

The one who meets the requirements is the troubadour of knowledge, the one who takes very seriously the primary issues, the fundamental issues, and thereafter succeeds in getting the focus just right, who can ensure the spontaneous flow of knowledge by deepening, linking, configuring and disseminating it. This figure reflects Michel Serres’s identification of the figure of the troubadour with the third-instructed and his equation of learning and knowing with finding and inventing (Serres 1989; 1995; 1997). Throughout his study knowledge, learning, and philosophy are linked to travel, to seeking, to encountering, to the intersection of genres and of disciplines, and to the felicitous use of language. The troubadour refers to the poet-musicians who travelled through medieval Provence (in France), collecting materials from all kinds of sources for the eventual enriching and entertaining of communities with their performances.

But what can such a person use to do just this? Insight in terms of understanding the audience and its needs, and instrument, especially given the range of instruments currently available!

The troubadour can do precisely this because this figure is a progressive learner and learns everything; does not specialise or does not only specialise; does not learn only what falls within the academic ambit; the eternal learner who learns everywhere; and then the configurer, the facilitator who can and wants to bring to life every kind of knowledge at every place and time and make it available for a wider range of contexts and needs. This person is in truth a key figure; every organisation needs at least one of them. The information and knowledge profession in fact needs many of them – all of its workers should be such figures. People need to be educated for this. Every institution and organisation which has realised the value of such a figure has begun in some cases or should begin as soon as possible to ensure its future. Higher education, in order to make significant contributions, should consider the cultivation of “the instructed third” in every teacher, educator, scientist as its ultimate objective.

Not only Michel Serres, but also Michael Gibbons (2000), Gibbons et al. (1994), Nowotny et al. (2004), Davenport (1999; 2005), and Kuhlen (2004), from our own field, have articulated some ideas in this direction in an exciting way where they have been indicated to what extent the dynamic nature of knowledges and the sciences and the special figure of the knowledge worker are intricately related or should deliberately and planfully be related. A new and vast field has been opened up due to the rethinking of the sciences, including the information sciences.

The intention with this presentation is to focus mainly on the very personal qualities of this person. Can there be talk of KO in separation from the organiser of knowledge? Some of the main characteristics of this figure will be identified, highlighted, and articulated in order hopefully to show to what extent this is precisely the figure we need in contemporary knowledge work and knowledge management and KO situations. Knowledge work remains a human endeavour in the first place and not a technical endeavour. Davenport (1999), Von Krogh (1998), Von Krogh et al. (2000), Wersig (1990; 1993) and Wiig (2004) are of the most important contributors to this uniquely human focus in knowledge work that includes, of course, KO. Stewart (1998; 2001) highlighted in this context the decisive importance of the notion of “intellectual capital”. No one can display this importance better than the cultivated knowledge worker.
It will be an exciting exercise to try and demonstrate to what extent these identified and briefly described characteristics are exactly the requirements for useful and significant knowledge work related to KO at this point in time. To start with: what is useful and significant knowledge work? It is certainly work related to the information professions. In these professions there are a number of fashionable approaches depending on one’s background, interest and ambitions: KO, information retrieval, information/knowledge management, library management, information seeking and behaviour, user studies, readership studies, and so on. Look at the common denominator. They are all sub-divisions of information science. All these subfields are interrelated. KO, information retrieval, knowledge management are linked and so is information philosophy. These observations are confirmed by the standard handbooks and their contents, the curricula for the information sciences world wide, the invitation to conferences and the foci of these invitations. Moreover, what is emphasised in KO literature are things like information retrieval, user studies, and knowledge management (cf. Rowley & Hartley 2008).

Moreover: all people involved in these different subfields with their different foci are referred to as information professionals or knowledge workers. Sometimes they are also called information professionals, or even informaticians (see Mason 1993; Ward 1999). In this paper they are called for specific reasons “troubadours of knowledge”, especially in view of the very dynamic “new knowledge dispensation” in which we find ourselves (De Beer 1996; see also Bonaventura 1997; Dixon 1999; McInerney 2002). This figure is confronted with all the classical and traditional challenges, but immensely expanded and intensified by new developments in the sciences, techniques, knowledges and conceptions of humans and societies. They need special qualities. For purposes of this paper some of these qualities have been identified and briefly discussed. It is not so much a matter of new qualities but much more a matter of the re-invention of old qualities – the qualities of the troubadour.

2: New qualities or qualities to be reinvented

2.1. This person is called the instructed third, competent and very able to link the sciences (the instructed first) with the humanities (the instructed second), while taking him/herself the third position, that is the position between the two, with the ability to move from the one to the other and back again – a kind of traveller or voyager, hence the troubadour. The instructed third is the person who knows how to weave together the truth of the sciences with the peace of judgement; she/he is able to blend cultural heritages and legacies of knowledge since she/he is deeply rooted in both. Such a person is an expert in formal or experimental knowledge, well-versed in the natural sciences of the inanimate and the living; at safe remove from the social sciences, with their critical rather than organic truths, and their banal, commonplace information; preferring actions to relations, direct human experience to surveys and documents, traveller in nature and society. The instructed third is facilitating communication between scientific knowledge and the humanities; is archaic and contemporary, traditional and futuristic, further removed from power than anybody else and closer to ignorance of the multitude; knows well how to encourage invention, which is thinking, rather than reproduction and repetition (see Serres 1989; 1995; 1997).
One thing seems to be clear: whoever wants to work in the knowledge field, whether it is called KO, knowledge retrieval, information behaviour, etc. needs to honour the interdisciplinary nature of this engagement that is emphasised in almost every relevant source in our field.

2.2. The troubadour needs to be a *traveller*, a voyager, a navigator who needs space, the space of knowledge, which is currently no longer a mere physical space, but a virtual space, also referred to as cyberspace (see Lévy 1998). That this is part of our field is self-explanatory. Knowledge networks, due to computer networks, are creating this space to be navigated. The navigation activities are in use in knowledge and information work circles for some time now where knowledge networks are relevant. Navigating computer networks for new knowledge is not new in the contemporary field of information and knowledge work and extremely important especially in view of the fact that we have entered into a new knowledge dispensation for quite some time now. In this dispensation the local and the global must be linked. What is required is people able to move around in this space, comprehensively navigate it, not afraid of disciplinary boundaries, fully aware of the value of all disciplines, and then collect whatever may be relevant from whatever source and configure these findings into meaningful knowledge entities that can make a difference to situations.

2.3. In order to qualify in the above sense the troubadour is, or should be an eternal *learner*. The portrait of the instructed third is informed by a learning process resembling a voyage, motion, bifurcations, becoming, and changes. Being a learner means becoming manifold, developing a capacity for all meanings in diverse directions, being a human person on its way to an adulthood of thought and invention. In the business world the notion of learning organisations that certainly also involves individuals in the organisations are not new and of high importance (cf. Argyris 1993; 1998; Ellis 1988). Libraries are in a unique way learning organisations of a kind. This is a special requirement for knowledge workers should they want to cope with challenges related to this culture of learning organisations. Wenger (1998) in his emphasis on communities of practice has chosen as subtitle: learning, meaning and identity.

2.4. In order to learn properly and to the maximum the troubadour will be and should be a *reader*, not in the generally accepted sense only, but in a very special sense: reading dynamically with non-linear concepts, focussing on the dynamical quality of texts as a whole which may be called non-linear, and with a careful reflection on all the above-mentioned issues. The reader is therefore well-advised not to concentrate on preferred fragments only since she will then miss the inventive creativity of the multiple whole and thus fall short of an unpredictable but complete understanding of poetic beauty and inventive imagination. In this regard understanding is of the utmost importance, understanding of users and of their needs and of knowledges. If knowledge workers want to deliver a sensible service to clients they certainly have to be adequately informed about diverse aspects of knowledge and information and understand the dynamics of these notions well. Reading is one ability that will enable them to perform well in this regard. There are many modes of reading and one special feature in this context is the work done on rhizomatic reading by Burnett (2002), a colleague in our
What is self-evident is a sensitivity to matters of language as something much more than a mere tool.

2.5. Moving around through learning and reading stimulate another uniquely human ability, namely thinking, but again a special kind of thinking: we must make a qualitative leap to and into a new way of thinking. We have to appreciate the fact that being exposed to a virtual knowledge reality with global dimensions and implications, in addition to a different scientific dynamic, will most certainly expect or insist on a new kind or mode of thinking adequate to articulate what we encounter.

Thinking must here be understood not in the traditionally accepted sense of representation and repetition alone, but in the sense of freedom of movement, of transgressing boundaries, of linking the un-linkable, of leaving the marked roads and moving into the unexpected and the unpredictable.

Our normal understanding of thinking does not create room for a thinking that can deal with the virtual, while this is exactly what is required from this new mode of thinking. Virtuality does not refer to some false or imaginary world. On the contrary it is the very dynamic of a shared world; it is that through which we share reality. A thought that accommodates virtuality is able to discover and explore new forms of truth that accompany the dynamic of virtualization (see Lévy 1998, 183-187). In this way opportunities will be opening up for inventions.

In the related field of knowledge management the knowledge worker has been described as thinker in the sense of making a living through thinking (Davenport 2005). In view of the systematic efforts of the killing of thinking as has been highlighted by Evans (2004) we have to re-possess our ability to think at all costs. For Wiig (1993) “thinking about thinking” constitutes the foundations for knowledge management. For these reasons knowledge workers should cultivate their capacity to think.

2.6. All these qualities are communal qualities and do not find expression in a solipsistic way or sense and for this reason the quality of infinite conversation (Blanchot 1993) should be added. No knowledge worker can proceed without conversation of a kind. Quality of conversation is required and Blanchot proposes conversation rather than dialogue because it means literally “to turn to one another” and to move forward together despite differences. Von Krogh et al. (2000) add their voices to this idea with the emphasis on “managing conversations” but then conversations as a care-full activity and initiative. These ideas are immensely reinforced by the emphasis on “community in the context of knowledge work (Davenport & Hall 2002; Levy 1997; Wenger 1998).

2.7. These six characteristics of the troubadour converge in the imaginative noetic capacity, or, alternatively, these characteristics emerge from the cultivation of the noetic capacity, the supreme but currently neglected capacity of humans by which they are emitted in all directions in order to keep the human world moving, just like a prism which collects and emits by means of culture, science, technics, thought and action which are continuously subjected to the interactive autopoietic spiral of existence and the dynamic spiral of imagination in the process of establishing intelligent communities that calls for commitment, practice and justice (cf. Lévy 1997, 245-255). What this really means is that wisdom is required, guaranteed by the imaginative noetic capacity.
For wisdom to materialise the embracement of this capacity is a condition and the only way to defeat the fatal neglect mentioned above. To honour our profession it would be wise also to embrace the work done in this regard by Melot (2004) in his articulation of “the wisdom of the librarian”. In other words, this idea of the noetic imagination is not at all foreign to literature in our field. And let us never forget: the much-mentioned information pyramid of data, information, knowledge, wisdom can never reaches fulfilment unless knowledge workers act wisely.

2.8. The outcome of what has been discussed up till now takes us to what we need most: invention – the ultimate in human action. Soon after I became intrigued with the term invention, as if it is something new, thanks to Michel Serres’ explicit remarks on it with his significant statement: “I invent therefore I am”. I discovered how many texts have already recently been written on this theme. To name a few: Invention is a social act (Lefevre 1987); inventing humans (Bloom 2002) and reinventing spirituality for our day and age (Stiegler et al. 2006). It should not be forgotten that Hannah & Harris (1999), from the heart and core of the library and information sciences, wrote about inventiveness, especially the invention of the future.

3: Conclusion

The term invention, that is my suggestion, is the real focus of “the instructed third”. Human knowledge is in any case about action. The above paragraphs on the qualities of the knowledge worker sketch the conditions for inventions on a grand scale, especially the inventions of new knowledges for special actions. Complying with these conditions will make the appearance of new things a natural happening. When inventiveness is combined with the dynamics of virtualization, where the virtual is understood as “a fecund and powerful mode of being that expands the process of creation, opens up the future, injects a core of meaning beneath the platitudes of immediate presence” (Lévy 1998, 16), then new worlds, new futures, new human situations, new human dispositions and relations, new sense of values, new commitment to justice, and new meaning in life will irrefutably emerge. But only if the spirit of invention is embraced and pursued in intelligent communities which are at the same time communities of commitment and communities of practice, and here it can be added: communities of justice.

Is there a possible socio-cultural and political significance of this figure besides the obvious economic implications? Let us give the word to Michel Serres:

“Can one delay the inevitable confrontation between the North - happy, knowing, blessed – and the wretched South by means of invention of this instructed third culture? It is at once a question of wisdom, in the intellectual sphere, of justice in economic matters, of the protection of the Earth, as well as of peace, our supreme good.” (Serres 1997, 45)

The troubadour of knowledge is desperately needed.

References


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