



Chapter II

Intellectual Basis of Research on Alliances: A Bibliometric Study

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Abstract

The disorder that is apparent in the literature on inter-organizational relationships makes this field ideal for conducting quantitative studies that clarify the conceptual map and complement existing qualitative research. These latter studies only reflect the point of view of a small number of expert researchers, and hence provide a somewhat biased perspective on inter-organizational relationship research. In this context, a bibliometric study should contribute to giving form to the state of the art. In this chapter, a bibliometric study reveals the theoretical fragmentation of the literature on inter-organizational relationships; maps the most relevant studies and theoretical approaches; and highlights the topics that have been addressed most in this field.

Introduction

In chapter one, Medina, Martinez, and Ruiz conducted a review of the research on alliances and other types of inter-organizational relationships. This chapter, similarly to other known works (see García Falcón & Medina Muñoz, 1998; Grandori & Soda, 1995; Gulati, Nohria, & Zaheer, 2000; Oliver & Ebers, 1998; Osborn & Hagedoorn, 1997), attempts to clarify this field of study from perspectives that frequently diverge. Those works are qualitative in nature and reflect the point of view and experience of only a few expert researchers. Thus, they provide a somewhat biased view of the field, although no less valuable for that.

In this context, a bibliometric study could serve to complete the state of the art from a more objective perspective. In this chapter we analyze the most representative citations from a collection of research works on inter-organizational relationships, as well as the frequency with which two of these citations appear in different works together (co-citation), as an indicator of the proximity between them. This may allow us to identify schools of thought in the field. The validity of this technique for exploring the intellectual structure of a scientific discipline has been demonstrated in numerous works (Culnan, O'Reilly, & Chatman, 1990; McCain, 1986; Ramos & Ruiz, 2004; Small, 1973; White & Griffith, 1981; White & McCain, 1998; Ying, Gobinda, & Schubert, 1999).

A graphical representation based on the co-citation of the most influential works in the discipline replaces the criterion of a small group of experts (as occurs in qualitative literature reviews) with that of as many experts as there are works being analyzed. The intention is not to provide a substitute for qualitative analyses of the state of the art, but rather to complement them with a more objective technique. This is considered necessary for relatively unconsolidated fields of research, which, like this one, are highly fragmented (García Falcón & Medina Muñoz, 1998).

Documents with high co-citation frequencies tend to cluster together when they are mapped. These maps can be regarded as a picture of the field in terms of the works of its main authors. They can reveal the evolution of the researchers, show relations between fields, and establish how closely related some disciplines are to others. The maps identify which scientific topics have been investigated most actively, and which individuals, publications, or institutions are currently preeminent in a particular area of research (Garfield, 1986).

This chapter offers two main contributions to the literature. First, it attempts to demonstrate how a bibliometric analysis can contribute to clarifying the state of the art in a little-explored or developing discipline. Second, it aims to shed some light on the research on inter-organizational relationships.

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