Knowledge Integrators or Weak Links? Inventor-Authors: An Exploratory Comparison of Patenting Researchers with their Non-inventing Peers in Nano-Science and Technology

Martin Meyer

m.s.meyer@sussex.ac.uk
SPRU, University of Sussex, Freeman Centre, Brighton BN1 9QE (United Kingdom)
Steunpunt O&O Statistieken, K.U.Leuven (Belgium)

Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between scientific publication and patenting activity. More specifically, this research examines for the field of nanoscience and nanotechnology whether researchers who both publish and patent are more productive and more highly cited than their peers who concentrate on scholarly publication in communicating their research results. This study is based on an analysis of nano-science publications and nanotechnology patents of a small set of European countries. While only a very small number of nano-scientists appear to hold patents in nanotechnology, a considerable number of nano-inventors seem to be actively publishing nano-science research. Overall, the patenting scientists appear to outperform their solely publishing, non-inventing peers in terms of publication counts and citation frequency. However, a closer examination of the highly active and cited nano-authors points to a slightly different situation. While still over-represented in among the highly cited authors, inventor-authors appear not to be among the most highly cited authors in that category with one notable exception.

Introduction

Science and technology were originally viewed as autonomous, at times interacting systems. This division of labor has become increasingly blurred. Work on a new mode of knowledge production (Gibbons et al., 1994), the entrepreneurial university (Clark 1998, Etzkowitz, 1983), and the Triple Helix of university-industry-government relations (e.g. Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 1997; Leydesdorff and Meyer, 2003) point to a greater focus on application and commercialization in academic research. At the same time, analysts observe that firms rely increasingly on external sources of scientific knowledge. Both trends appear to have resulted in an increase in science-technology interaction.

There are several ways of measuring this interaction with informetric means, such as the analysis of patent citations, co-publications of industrial firms, or university patenting. Another approach is inventor-author analysis. The purpose of this paper is to explore for the field of nanoscience and nanotechnology the role of co-active knowledge producers who both publish and patent.

More specifically, this paper explores to what extent these researchers measure up to their non-inventing peers in terms of their publication and citation performance. Ultimately, the question this study addresses is whether there is a trade-off between scientific and technological activity. Are patenting authors equally, over- or under-proportionally prolific and cited in comparison to all authors in their community of practice? Are co-active knowledge generators strong in terms of publication activity or do they resemble weak links between science and technology?

Methodology

This paper presents the results of a pilot study that compares publication and inventive activity of researchers in nanoscience and nanotechnology for a small set of European countries (United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium). Nanotechnology and nanoscience were selected as fields for analysis

http://www.tuta.hut.fi/units/Isib/publications/working_papers/working_papers.php

¹ The full paper contains an extended review of the previous literature and a discussion of various approaches linking science and technology. For space limitations, this discussion had to be taken out. The complete version of the paper is available for download at this website:

since they are perceived as relatively closely related fields of science and technology (e.g. Meyer and Persson, 1998; Meyer, 2001; 2000; Kuusi and Meyer, 2003).

There are many different approaches as to how one can define nanosciences and nanotechnology (e.g. Budworth, 1996; Malsch, 1997, 1999; Meyer et al., 2002). Attempts to come to a generally acknowledged characterization of nanotechnology have proven futile. As a consequence, actors in the field adopt working definitions for the task at hand. One of the more broadly accepted definitions is the one proposed by the US National Science and Technology Council this is the working definition:

Research and technology development at the atomic, molecular or macromolecular levels, in the length scale of approximately 1 - 100 nanometer range, to provide a fundamental understanding of phenomena and materials at the nanoscale and to create and use structures, devices and systems that have novel properties and functions because of their small and/or intermediate size. The novel and differentiating properties and functions are developed at a critical length scale of matter typically under 100 nm. Nanotechnology research and development includes manipulation under control of the nanoscale structures and their integration into larger material components, systems and architectures. Within these larger scale assemblies, the control and construction of their structures and components remains at the nanometer scale. In some particular cases, the critical length scale for novel properties and phenomena may be under 1 nm (e.g., manipulation of atoms at ~0.1 nm) or be larger than 100 nm (e.g., nanoparticle reinforced polymers have the unique feature at ~ 200-300 nm as a function of the local bridges or bonds between the nano particles and the polymer).

Not surprisingly, the diversity in opinion about how to define nanotechnology is reflected and matched by the number of search strategies bibliometricians and patent analysts have developed to capture the field. Hullmann and Meyer (2003) as well as Schummer (2004) present more detailed discussions of the topic.

This study adopted a set of search strategies that evolved from consultation processes with domain experts at the European and national levels. Details on search strategy and data retrieval are described in Glänzel, Meyer, DuPlessis, et al. (2003, 14-18). More specifically, the study exploits a publication database of nanoscience publications retrieved from the SCI-Expanded by ISI Thomson-Scientific and a database of nanotechnology patents granted by the US Patent and Trademark Office. The publication database contains more than 100,000 SCI indexed papers topical to the nanosciences while the patent database comprises about 4,000 US patents that can be related to the area of nanotechnology. Both cover the time period 1992-2001. Table 1 provides an overview of the databases and presents publication and patent data for selected countries.

US Patents Country **Papers** Papers/ **US** Patents Count Rank Count Rank Ratio Rank **United States** 29574 2043 14.5 2 1 1 16437 2 1200 2 13.7 Japan 1 Germany 13427 3 326 3 41.2 8 France 7909 4 168 4 47.1 10 PR China 5 16 7688 12 640.7 17 **United Kingdom** 6671 6 107 5 62.3 13 33.2 **Belgium** 1128 20 34 6 World 100593 3969

Table 1. Selected Publication and Patent Data.

Source: Steunpunt O&O Statistieken

The purpose of this study is to explore interdependencies between publication and patenting performance of authors and inventors. To this end the study draws on both databases to identify inventor-authors through a matching procedure based on inventor surnames and in initials. Forming such pairs poses considerable challenges for the analyst. Bassecoulard and Zitt (2004) compare expected properties of various indicators of science-technology linkage. They assume the silence, i.e. 'true' linkages that are not found, to be rather high in comparison to patent citation, subject and category sharing. However, the authors see noise, i.e. linkages that are unduly detected or 'false'

linkages to be rather low. The latter expectation holds probably only if co-activity analysis is carried out within intertwined science and technology communities. Homonyms pose a major challenge in name-based matching procedures (e.g. Noyons et al., 2004, or also Meyer et al., 2003, for a discussion in the context of university-related patents). If one defines the communities of scientists and engineers and the related publication and patenting universes too broadly, the homonym issue will lead to what Bassecoulard and Zitt (2004) call 'unduly detected or 'false' linkages'.

Restricting the publication and patent universes in a restricted manner may lead to the exclusion of important links. Figure 1 attempts to illustrate the challenge in the context of this study. Using two given search strategies to delineate nanoscience papers from other scholarly publications and nanotechnology patents from other patents will identify subsets for nano-authors and nano-inventors who can be linked in several ways. For instance, there are nano-inventors who also publish nanoscience papers (or vice versa). This establishes a straightforward link between nano-science and nanotechnology as depicted by arrow #1. However, researches publishing papers not defined as nanoscience may also become active as inventors in nanotechnology (#2). Conversely, inventors who are not identified as nanotechnology inventors may just write papers contributions to the field of nanoscience (#3). Other inventor-author links include nano-authors patenting non-nano inventions (#4) and nano-inventors publishing papers on non-nanoscience topics (#5). Apart from these links, researchers outside both the fields of nano-science and nanotechnology may engage in both patent and publication activity (#6).

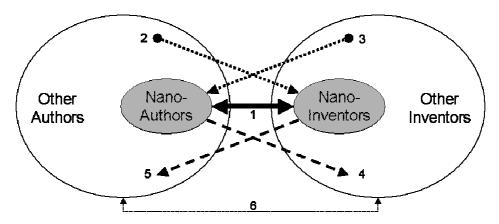


Figure 1. Choices in linking publication and patent data.

To ensure that the level of 'silence' is kept at a reasonable level this study only proceeds with a matching procedure between nano-authors and nano-inventors (which was depicted as type #1 linkage in Figure 1.). Other studies illustrated that tracking even this link can lead to a considerable number of unclear and possibly 'false' links.³ A matching procedure at the level of the entire databases would not have been feasible. 100,000 papers with multiple authors matched with 4,000 patents with an average of 2-3 inventors would have let to a vast number of (often 'false') matches.

Therefore, (standardized) inventor and author names were matched on a within-country basis to reduce the number of irrelevant matches further. Furthermore, the number of countries was restricted to initially a set of three countries (Belgium, Germany, and the UK) in which the author knows networks and actors rather well. This allowed for a more effective validation of the matches and was aimed to

² Work in progress on the Nordic countries has illustrated that there are hardly any name matches to be traced at the level of nano-inventor and nano-author names. Only if one widens the scope of potential matches to all inventors, one can identify 'inventor-authors' who are related to the nano-sciences. Their inventive work, however, lies outside the boundaries of 'nanotechnology'.

³ See e.g. the discussion in Noyons et al. (2004)

⁴ Within-country approach means names of Belgian authors are matched with Belgian inventors, UK authors' with UK inventors', etc. This is an approach another group has adopted more recently within a European Commission mapping of excellence exercise in nanotechnologies (Noyons et al., 2004).

reduce homonym bias as much as possible. 'Full matches' where last name and initials of the inventor/author pair were identical were generally accepted as such, unless they were very common names in the respective countries. Partial matches with matching surnames but only partly matching initials were traced further (by affiliation/address/research theme). A rather conservative approach was adopted: If in doubt partial matches were not considered valid.

After this, publication and citation frequencies were calculated to determine the position of co-active knowledge producers in the national nanoscience community. Publication counts were calculated on the basis of full and fractional counts. Authors were then ranked and grouped into five classes (quintiles) according to the respective frequency measures. For instance, the first quintile contains the most prolific (or the most highly cited) authors accounting for the top 20% of the publication counts (or citation counts, respectively). The fifth quintile comprises the least prolific or cited authors. The representation of inventor-authors in the different frequency classes was compared to the overall pattern. Data for the most active and most frequently cited class of authors (the first quintile) was examined in more detail.

Results

This section gives an overview of the findings. First, basic data on the results of the matching procedure is presented. Then co-active researchers' science productivity and citation records are compared to those of their non-inventing peers. After this, the performance of inventor-authors among top-ranking authors is explored.

Relative Importance of Co-activity

First, this section examines the importance of individuals in relation to the colleagues who either only publish or patent. Table 2 presents an overview. On the technology side co-active inventors account for a relative large share amongst the countries' nano-inventors ranging between 27% to 40%. This observation is in line with earlier findings by Schmoch (2004) and colleagues who found that the share of patents linked to the public sector via author affiliations is considerably higher than the share of university patents in overall patenting activity would suggest.

The situation on the science (publication) side appears completely contrary. Co-active researchers seem to be a marginal group. In the three countries studied, co-active authors account for 2% or less of all nano-authors. Due to technical reasons⁵ the national nano-author sets also include international collaborators of the respective country's authors. Therefore, one needs to interpret the observed shares with considerable care. Nevertheless, the share of co-active authors among nano-scientists is at such a marginal level that one can assume that their share is still considerably lower than the observed shares of co-active among all nano-inventors.

United Kingdom Belgium Germany #Authors 2652* 22.2427 13.235 #Inventors 44 890 185 #Coactive 12 301 75 (0.6%**; 40.5%***) (1.7%**; 27.3%***) (1.5%**: 33.8%***)

Table 2. Basic data on authors and inventors.

Notes: * This count also includes foreign-based authors collaborating with domestic authors since the SCI does not allow to personalized assignation of author addresses. ** Indicates the share of coactive amongst all nanoauthors (see also note 5) *** Indicates the share of coactive among all nano-inventors.

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⁵ The SCI does not contain address information pertaining to individual authors. This raises problems in assigning nationality to particular authors within an author team. Within the context of this study, the choice was twofold: Either include all authors within a then extended set of national papers or consider build a strictly national set of nano-authors using only addresses of corresponding authors. About 71%-77% of the papers had a first author with a national address. The remainder includes papers with a corresponding author in another country than the one studied while national authors were included among the other authors. Naturally, also papers with a national corresponding author most likely include other nationals as co-authors.

These observations may invite some speculation as to why the co-active share among nano-inventors is so relatively high. Other studies pointed to the relatively high share of public research organizations in patenting also in other areas of emerging (sub-) fields of science and technologies. Can one observe this high public share because established firms are sceptical about the commercial potential of the inventions? Have they missed out on a technological development? Are different propensities towards risk-taking be an

Research Productivity and Citation Performance

This section compares the publication and citation performance of co-active researchers to their non-inventing peers. All in all, the findings suggest that co-active knowledge producers are typically not at the bottom end of publication and citation rankings. A considerable number of inventor-authors are prolific in terms of publication frequency and have achieved a position of considerable centrality in national networks. Co-active researchers were over-proportionally represented among highly cited authors as well. Figure 2 and Table 3 present the findings in detail.

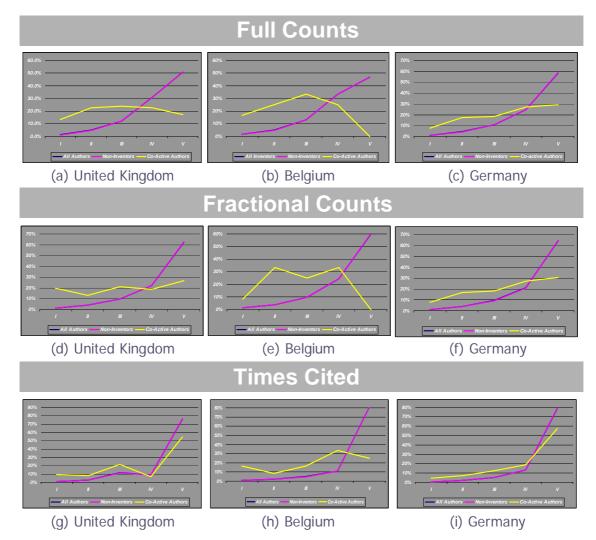


Figure 2. Cross-country comparison of researcher productivity and citedness: co-active versus non-inventing authors.

Note: Authors are grouped in five performance classes (I: highest performers, V: lowest performance) along the x-axis while the y-axis displays the share of the respective author types (co-active, non-inventing and all authors) in a given quintile.

As the distribution of author and inventor types across performance classes illustrates (Figure 2), coactive authors are over-represented in the better performing classes. In terms of publication frequencies (calculated on the basis of full counts), about 7% (Germany) to almost 17% (UK) of the

co-active researchers are in the top performing class while only slightly more than 1% of their non-inventing peers are in this category. Similar observations were made when examining publication frequencies on the basis of fractional counts. About 7% (Germany) to 20% (UK) of all co-active authors are to be found in the top quintile whereas only 1.0% - 1.4% of non-inventing authors are in that class. The results for Belgium point in the same direction.

If one includes citation performance as an additional measure, the observations point in the same directions even though they are less pronounced. About 4% (Germany) to 9% (UK) of all co-active inventor-authors are represented among the top cited authors, compared to 0.4% (Germany) to 1% (UK) when examining non-inventing authors. The Belgian results are more skewed with 16.7% of the co-active authors being in the top category compared to 0.8% of their non-inventing peers. So far the data seems to suggest that co-active inventor-authors are over-represented in the better performing classes. Table 3 illustrates this point more clearly by presenting the co-active researchers' share in the respective performance classes vis-à-vis their over- or under-representation in that class. Over/under-representation is calculated as the quotient of the co-active researchers' share in a given performance class in relation to the overall share of co-active researchers.

Across all performance categories (publication frequencies based on full and fractional counts as well as citation frequencies) in the two large countries studied, co-active researchers seem to be overrepresented in the top performance class by a factor of 6 to 15. Inventor-authors are also strongly overrepresented in the second-highest performing class (by a factor of 3 to 4) while they are underrepresented in the lowest performance class (the factors vary between 0.4 and 0.8). The Belgian data again points in the same direction as the observations for Britain and Germany.

Table 1. Share of co-active amongst all authors in performance classes.

Country	Full Counts		Fractional Counts		Times Cited Counts	
Quintiles	Co-Active Share	Over/Under- Representation	Co-Active Share	Over/Under- Representation	Co-Active Share	Over/Under- Representation
United Kingdom						
1	5.5%	961%	8.2%	1449%	6.7%	1172%
II	2.6%	457%	1.8%	320%	1.8%	312%
III	1.1%	195%	1.2%	218%	1.1%	186%
IV	0.4%	74%	0.5%	83%	0.4%	75%
V	0.2%	34%	0.2%	43%	0.4%	72%
Total	0.6%	100%	0.6%	100%	0.6%	100%
Germany						
1	8.6%	632%	8.8%	654%	12.1%	898%
II	5.2%	385%	5.7%	418%	4.9%	364%
III	2.3%	171%	2.6%	192%	3.1%	232%
IV	1.5%	110%	1.7%	129%	1.9%	140%
V	0.7%	50%	0.6%	47%	1.0%	73%
Total	1.4%	100%	1.4%	100%	1.4%	100%
Belgium						
1	4.3%	940%	2.6%	582%	9.1%	2009%
II	2.3%	498%	3.8%	834%	1.8%	402%
III	1.1%	254%	1.1%	250%	1.5%	340%
IV	0.3%	75%	0.6%	136%	1.4%	303%
V	0.0%	0%	0.0%	0%	0.1%	31%
Total	0.5%	100%	0.5%	100%	0.5%	100%

⁶ The Belgian observations correspond to this but the overall number of observations is low, which needs to be borne in mind when interpreting the results. Only 34 patents in total could be identified for the country with 12 of the inventors being co-active.

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A closer look at high performers

While co-active authors apparently outperform their non-inventing peers in terms of both publication and citation frequencies, the question still remains as to whether co-active researchers are really top of their league. Performance classes are defined rather broadly in this study. Top-performers are defined as authors who account for the top 20% in terms of publication output and citation counts. This definition is suitable for an overall comparison with the overwhelming majority of non-inventing authors.

However, such a definition may not capture what some analysts called the 'super-excellent' (Zitt, 2004). As Table 4 illustrates, the spread between the best and the 'worst' performer in this class is wide. The lowest ranked among this class of most prolific authors achieves a publication output that reflects about 11% in the UK and just 6% in Germany of the papers the most prolific author has published, respectively. In terms of citations, the situation is not quite as pronounced. Yet there is still a considerable gap within this class of top performers. The least cited authors in the class get 21% (Britain) and 11% (Germany) of the most highly cited authors respectively. Therefore, a closer look at co-active researchers' standing within this broad class seems appropriate.

This section explores the question as to where co-active researchers stand within the top performance classes. Such an examination of the highest performing class only points to a slightly different view on co-active researchers (see Figure 3). In the case of the UK and Belgium, the data indicates that co-active researchers were not to be found at the very top of the most prolific and highly cited authors. This would suggest that combining publication with patenting activity does come at a (small) price. Data summarized in Table 4 exemplifies this. For instance, in the UK the most prolific co-active researcher achieved less than half the publication frequency than the most active author overall. In terms of citations the highest-ranked inventor-author received about 60% of the citations of the most highly cited researcher. The Belgian data points in a similar direction.

However, one notable exception could be observed in the case of Germany where the most prolific author (with a total of 408 publications) is also an inventor. The second-ranked author, a non-inventor, has a total of 325 publications. The next ranked co-active researcher has a publication record of 159 papers, corresponding to 39% of the total publication output of the most prolific author or 49% of the most prolific non-inventing author.

Table 4. Highest and lowest ranked (co-active) authors in top performance class.

	Highest ranked author	Highest ranked co-active author	Lowest ranked co-active autho	r Lowest ranked au
United Kingdom				
Papers	163	77	21	18
	100%	47.2%	12.9%	11.0%
Citations	2255	1349	608	469
	100%	59.8%	27.0%	20.8%
Germany				
Papers	408	408*	24	24
	100%	100%*	5.9%	5.9%
Citations	7969	5578	898	897
	100%	70.0%	11.3%	11.3%
Belgium				
Papers	53	34	18	14
	100%	64.2%	34.0%	26.4%
Citations	377	224	143	143
	100%	59.4%	37.9%	37.9%

Note: *The next highest ranking co-active author published 159 papers which amounts to 39% of output by the most prolific authors

Future research needs to explore possible reasons for this. An explanation may be the specific organizational structure established in Germany for funding nanotechnology R&D. These academic-led centers (networks) of competence around technological themes with obligatory industry participation may have resulted in an extension of activities of 'super-excellent' researchers into the technological domain.

An alternative explanation could view the top-ranked scientist as an outlier. While he is the highest ranked author in terms of publication frequency, he is not the top-ranking author in terms of citations. However, at 70% or with more than 5,500 citations this co-active author still finds only one (non-inventive) author who is more cited.

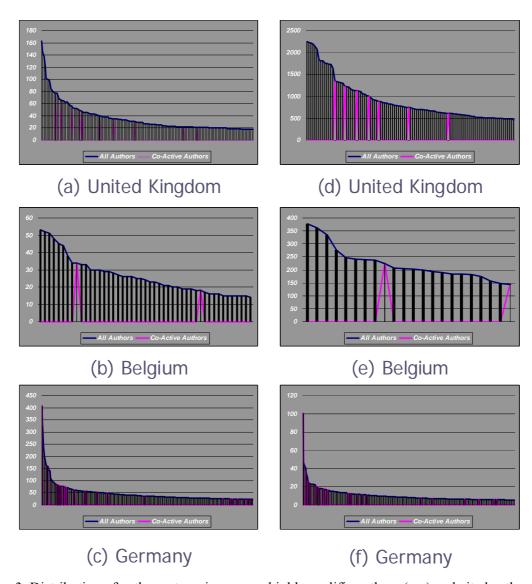


Figure 3. Distribution of author categories among highly prolific authors (a-c) and cited authors (d-f).

Note: Authors are ranked in descending order of their publication citation frequency on the x-axis while the y-axis points to publication (a, b, c) and citation counts (d, e, f) respectively.

In any case, it would be interesting to explore in future research whether citation rankings corrected for the publication volume of researchers would yield similar results.⁷

Conclusions

This research illustrated that inventor —authors, or co-active knowledge generators, can play an important role in both scientific research and technological development. Co-active researchers tend to be both over-proportionally active and comparatively highly cited. The findings indicate that combining scientific with technological aspects of research and development activity does not have any strong adverse effects on how patenting scientists perform in terms of publication and citation ratings. Researchers who are 'driven' appear to find another outlet for their work rather than sacrifice science for the sake of technology and commerce. This would support research by others (e.g. Azagra-Caro and Llerena, 2003) who observed in case studies of universities that patenting activity tends to be associated with prestigious groups and labs.

To some extent, co-active inventors even seem to 'drive' technological development if one looks at the considerable share they have among all inventors across all countries studied. While co-active authors remain a marginal group in terms of scientific publication activity, author-inventors feature prominently among nano-inventors with shares in the three countries ranging between 27% and 40%. However, one must beware of strong conclusions in this respect. Patents are an indicator of technological activity rather than a proxy for innovations that are successful in the market place. Not everything that has been patented will be commercialized. Some of the universities in the countries studied launched intellectual property activities quite recently and are undergoing a steep learning process. To some extent, this may raise questions as to the value and commercial promise of the patented technology tracked in this study. In some instances, individuals rather than companies or other organizations are involved. Research elsewhere (e.g. Whalley, 1991; Astebro, 2004; Meyer, 2004) pointed to lower rates of commercial utilization of these types of inventions.

While patenting researchers are clearly over-proportionally represented in higher performing classes of authors, there remains some ambiguity with respect to their share among the 'super-excellent' or top-performers. This study suggests that there may be a trade-off between publication and patent performance at the very top. The top-ranked co-active researchers achieve between 48%-70% of the performance levels of the highest ranked researchers, with the notable exception of a German co-active inventor who accounted for the highest publication frequency overall.

Future research needs to explore whether this is an exceptional case or other, institutional factors have an impact on the observed pattern. As the data illustrated, there is also a relatively strong second-tier of co-active top-performers in German nanoscience and nanotechnology. A closer inspection of the data indicated that many of these author-inventors headed nanotechnology 'centers of competence'. These academic-led centers (networks) of competence that are built around technological themes with obligatory industry participation may have resulted in an extension of activities of 'super-excellent' researchers into the technological domain.

Nanotechnology is a heterogeneous and diverse field, so is nanoscience. Both nanoscience and nanotechnology integrate knowledge from a variety of disciplines and sectors. Future research should address the question as to whether the sub-fields that resemble 'nanotech' follow different innovation

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⁷ The initial research design was in part inspired by Zucker and Darby's (1996) notion of 'star-scientists'. The authors observed that a small minority of researchers accounting for a high share of publications (with a productivity of more than twenty times above the average) had an intellectual capital base of extraordinary value. To reflect the cumulative aspect of the knowledge generation and reception, the initial research design included citation counts that were not normalized by an author's publication frequency. This counting method favors authors with a longer publication history – typically eminent scientists – and tends to bias somewhat against 'rising stars' – younger scientists with a (shorter and more recent) publication record that has not attracted quite as many citations. Also note that citations received from across all papers in the SCI (and not just nano-papers) were counted. For a more detailed discussion of this aspect, see the conclusion section of this article.

and co-activity patterns. Also more sociologically oriented work may prove insightful. Are there different types of inventor-authors? Do they follow their invention through the entire innovation process from conception to commercialisation? Are leading (both highly active and cited) scientists 'co-opted' inventors? Are less cited author-inventors engineers in development who publish the occasional paper with peers in academe?

This study addressed measured citation performance by times cited counts. These counts capture citations received from all papers in the Science Citation Index and are thus embedded in the universe of all (indexed) science but do not recognise the community of nano-scientists and technologists. It would be interesting to explore to what extent results differed if one looked at the community level only. An overall high standing in the overall community of science may not translate into high visibility amongst nano-scientists only.

Finally, a question this paper did not address regards the centrality of co-active individuals in the different worlds: Do inventor-authors play a central or marginal role in both networks of scientific communication and the technology community, or do they achieve prominence only in one of the two? This research so far indicates that patenting researchers are among the more prolific authors and also tend to achieve considerable visibility in terms of citations. A closer examination of inventor data is required to see whether this high standing is met on the technology side.

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