Ubiquitous but invisible – public librarians' self-imposed professional information practices as articulation work

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Abstract

Introduction. To do a good job, public librarians must stay informed and updated on matters related to their work. Seeking and making use of information is ubiquitous in librarians' everyday work life but this part of their work is elusive and hard to identify. This paper presents a study of how Swedish public librarians keep updated with professional information. It aims to elucidate the parts of this work that occur silently and often outside of formal working hours.

Method. The empirical data consists of recorded and transcribed interviews with librarians at Swedish public libraries.

Analysis. The activity focused on in the study is conceptualised using the theoretical concept of articulation work, which is used to describe and analyse how various tasks are linked together into an overarching whole recognised as the abstract phenomenon of work.

Results. The analysis shows how information seeking and use constitute a fundamental part of the work but also plays a significant role in the library's efforts towards direction and development.

Conclusion. Failing to make visible this information practice may contribute to reducing the legitimacy of the activity, ultimately leading to this fundamental element not receiving the time and space it seems to require.

Introduction

Research in the field of work and learning consistently shows that much of what professionals need to know to handle their tasks is learned on the job (e.g., Gherardi, 2006). In a seminal text, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) argue that learning is situated and primarily occurs through participation in what they term communities of practice. According to their reasoning, we learn alongside others by belonging to a specific community where we share interests, experiences, and work tasks, such as in a library work team. Actively engaging in work helps us develop knowledge deemed essential for doing a good job. For most individuals, this process involves gradually becoming more accustomed to and capable of performing the work. Thus, a significant portion of professional knowledge is developed by actively participating in workplace activities.

Work, in many respects, is shrouded in ambiguity (e.g., Star and Strauss, 1999). Even if someone working in a particular job generally has a clear idea of what they are expected to do at the workplace, it is not easy to articulate how the work proceeds or to specify the parts that collectively form the whole. These components are often hard to discern; they change and vary over time and depend on the context, background, and specific aims under which the work is conducted. For most individuals in the workforce, it is evident that job tasks shift from day to day and sometimes from hour to hour. The nature of these shifts and changes varies between professions and workplaces. Previous studies of library work in regional library development (Pilerot, 2022) and in university libraries (Pilerot and Lindberg, 2018) indicate that variation is an almost constant element.

While the literature on public librarians' preparedness and strategies for continuous learning is not extensive, there are current examples highlighting how this learning depends on willingness and the ability to navigate the environment (e.g., Stephens et al., 2022). This ability is often mentioned alongside other '*soft skills*' (Williams and Saunders, 2020, p. 290), like communication, writing, cultural competence, and the ability to reflect on one's work; skills that can be described as elements holding together other, more tangible, recognised aspects of library work. The study presented in this paper aims to elucidate a particular aspect of work that could possibly fall into this category of '*soft skills*'. Specifically, it deals with seeking and using information to stay well-informed and updated on matters perceived as valuable for a librarian to know to perform their job effectively.

The empirical data on which this study is based was created in connection with a comprehensive investigation of Swedish public librarians' work-related information seeking and use (Lindberg and Pilerot, 2023). In short, the previous study showed that there are many diverse ways of staying updated in library work. Often, this work is based on individual habits rather than specific methods, but it also occurs collectively in various workgroups and networks, more or less structured. Although designated time for this work exists, sometimes referred to as reading time, it is more common for these activities to be integrated and, so to speak, embedded in other, more clearly defined, tasks.

In this study, we have confined ourselves to a portion of those data to specifically highlight an aspect of this activity, namely what we conceptualise below as a kind of (often invisible) articulation work (cf. Strauss, 1985; 1988). More specifically, it concerns the work that the participants in the study dedicate to finding out things, staying updated and informed, but which tends to occur in the background, often integrated into other tasks, or during leisure time, and thus may not be very visible to someone trying to observe the work.

Literature review

It is a challenge to delineate the literature on the subject of this study because it is spread across different areas and employs various concepts to describe different aspects of the activity at the centre. One area, focusing on learning, delves into what is often referred to as continuous professional development (CPD). In a fairly recent literature review (Shone, 2020), it is concluded that CPD is '*crucial as it upgrades employees' skills and has the potential to increase productivity and improve customer service*' (p. 1).

However, in the same study, it is also shown that there is little research on CPD, which, in extension, may lead to libraries having '*an unskilled and irrelevant workforce that does not meet the changing demands of the 21st century users*' (p. 1). In the same area of learning, we also find literature pertaining to self-directed, work-related learning (SDL), which can be explained with reference to those employees who have the '*capacity to learn constantly and quickly [...] without formal training*' (Varlejs, 1999, p. 173). Yet another area of this literature is more oriented towards organisational dynamics and relates to organisations '*where it is the norm for employees to be continually learning how to work together collaboratively for constant improvement*' (e.g., Sinclair, 2017, p. 684). Closely related to this literature on organisational dynamics are studies on knowledge sharing in workplaces. For example, Kaffashan Kakhki (2020, p. 19) and co-authors, in their study of knowledge sharing among public librarians, posit that '[n]*o organization can survive without knowledge, and it is vital for successful organizations to share it*'. When the seeking and use of information are brought into focus, we encounter terms such as environmental scanning (e.g., Choo, 2001), which according to Sobel (2020) includes the ability to identify and gather information about emerging issues and factors that may affect a particular environment. She describes the environment of public libraries as both complex and multilayered where librarians need to gather information on issues such as their users and the sociopolitical setting in which they work.

In a previous study (Pilerot, 2022) on how regional librarians stay updated in their work, it was concluded, based on a survey of this diverse literature, that the activity can be described using a set of polarities, along which the activity appears to shift on a sliding scale. The study demonstrated that librarians tend to stay informed and updated through individual engagement rather than collective efforts. Their approach is more consistently ongoing rather than sporadic. Likewise, librarians exhibit a greater outward focus than an inward focus, directing their attention towards their own organisation.

Even though it is not entirely recent, Jana Varlej's (1999) study indicates that a significant portion of public librarians' work is dedicated to what she terms as self-directed learning. She notes that three-quarters of the 521 members of the American Library Association that she surveyed '*spend much more time learning on their own than they do in formal*' (p. 192) continuing education.

The activity of keeping up to date often revolves around notions of rationality and efficiency, which, for example, is reflected in the literature on evidence-based library work, where the activity aiming to find evidence for action and development in work is often described in prescriptive, step-by-step models (e.g., Hallam, 2018). In contrast to this assumption, our conceptualisation of this activity resembles the ways in which Marcia Bates (2002) views information seeking as an activity that, beyond actively and purposefully searching, also includes the ability to be attentive, to be ready to notice things worth knowing or learning by being in a certain context.

Lindberg's (2019) study on children's librarians serves as an illustration of our view of keeping up to date as a multifaceted and elusive activity. There, the image emerges of a professional group that works intensely to stay updated, primarily through monitoring literature releases and through personal reading in various forms. However, the rich output of children's literature is described as a moving target (p. 15) because it involves an ongoing, but winding, process that demands constant attention from those working professionally with literature and reading. Lindberg (2019) further shows how this group of professionals tend to engage in this activity outside of their regular working hours (cf. Pilerot, 2022). The blurring of boundaries between work and leisure is well-documented in research today (e.g., Mullan and Wajcman, 2019).

Regarding one of the central aspects of our study, namely that the work of the librarians appears invisible in several respects, it can be noted that there are a few studies that are focused on shedding light on the kind of information work that can be considered invisible. With a particular focus on

methodological strategies, McKenzie and Dalmer (2020) demonstrate how invisibility can be related to four different themes. They thus observe that the location where the work takes place can render it invisible, for instance, when it is conducted at home rather than in the workplace; that the activity itself can occur '*under the radar*' (p. 11); that the workers themselves are not in the spotlight; and finally, the theme they refer to as structural invisibility, which concerns the kind of work that is not included in any job descriptions but is crucial for the functioning of the workplace. In a similar vein, but with a particular focus on the mediation work of librarians, Ehrlich and Cash (1999) identify three perspectives from which library work appears as invisible: to the library visitor '*who has no reason to be aware of the complex skills associated with finding the requested information*', within an organisation, and at managerial levels, '*which may lead to misguided attempts to create "better" or "less complex" information management schemes*' (p. 151). Hanell and Ahlryd (2023) also employ the concept '*invisible work*' in their study of hospital librarians' work. They conclude that a significant portion of their work is invisible to clinicians. The authors explain this by referring to '*the secondary, supportive nature of hospital librarians' information work*' (p. 82).

Theory

For our exploration of the elusive phenomenon in focus of this study, we have employed the concept of *articulation work*, which refers to the kind of work that cannot be captured by formal job descriptions and usually does not find much, if any, space in professionals' narratives about work. It is the kind of work that Dorothy Smith succinctly has described as everything done to make work appear to flow smoothly and effortlessly. It may, for example, involve waiting, gathering materials, thinking, and planning (Smith, 2003, p. 61) or, as we will show through our analysis, looking for information. The concept was originally developed by the sociologist Anselm Strauss (e.g., 1985; 1988) to describe and analyse how various tasks are linked together into an overarching whole that we recognise as the abstract phenomenon of work. A frequently cited concise explanation of what articulation work involves emphasises that it is the kind of work that "gets things 'back on track,'" holding together and providing direction in work, a kind of behind-the-scenes fine-tuning that contributes to modifying and reconciling the unforeseen (Star and Strauss, 1999, p. 10).

Strauss has highlighted aspects of articulation work in several texts, and the overall picture indicates that, at a comprehensive level, it involves coordination and integration of work efforts (Hampson and Junor, 2005, p. 167). However, as emphasised by Star and Strauss, '*The important thing about articulation work is that it is invisible to rationalized models of work*' (Star and Strauss, 1999, p. 106). Another concise definition of articulation work is offered by Lucy Suchman (1995, p. 407), who suggests that it involves the ongoing efforts required to hold together disparate elements so that, collectively, they form a functional arrangement – a somewhat cohesive effort carried out by collaborators in a given direction. According to Suchman (1996), we can observe this articulation work on several levels: overarching within an organisation, on a small scale in professional practices, and in relation to all the tools (computers, systems, and other artifacts) we use when working. Strauss (1988) is also presenting articulation work as a complex phenomenon that includes several layers of activities. It involves establishing, maintaining, and revising ideas and projects, as well as employees being able to weave together perceptions and experiences, which may include negotiating, compromising, and sometimes forcing different positions and attitudes to align in a common direction. He further advocates the idea that people move within what he describes as different social worlds or groups with shared beliefs, combining different resources and strategies to achieve their goals and create common perspectives. Moreover, he points out that the boundaries between these worlds or groups are not only crossed in the workplace, and different societal segments are interwoven in collaborative action lines. It also occurs in life in general, and just as the boundaries between these worlds are fluid and negotiable and must be maneuvered through articulation work, so

do the boundaries between work and non-work appear in the same way. Accordingly, the answer to the question of where the boundary lies between work and non-work is therefore not self-evident.

Method

As previously mentioned, our empirical data consists of a subset of data from a previous study on the ways Swedish public librarians stay informed and updated (Lindberg and Pilerot, 2023). In that study, we relied on extensive survey data (792 respondents) combined with eight qualitative interviews.

In the present study, we have solely focused on the interview data. The participants in the study are six women and two men working in different public libraries of varying sizes in different locations in Sweden. The interviews were conducted based on an interview guide that, through its various questions, connected in different ways to the overarching written introduction all participants received before the interviews:

> *The questions revolve around the kind of information seeking and use you do in your daily life for your own or your work team's sake, not about information seeking for others, such as library visitors. It can involve actively seeking answers to questions by turning to someone you think can answer or searching for information online, perhaps on social media, about things you are curious about or want to know more about. But it can also involve participating in some form of professional development, taking a course, attending a seminar, or participating in a conference.*

The sound from the interviews, which lasted an average of 45 minutes, was recorded and then transcribed. The total material consisted of over 160 pages of transcriptions. The analysis was both theory- and data-driven, insofar as we were guided both by the aim of the study and our theoretical reasoning about articulation work. In presenting the results, our analysis is accompanied by supporting quotes from the empirical data. The participants have been provided with pseudonyms.

Results

In the following, the results of the study are presented. The section consists of two parts, where the first part illustrates how the activity of keeping up to date is seamlessly embedded in other work tasks and therefore virtually invisible. The second part focuses on the tension field that we have identified between work and leisure.

The presentation of results is, of course, designed with consideration given to our theoretical perspective, and there are instances where explicit connections are made between the reasoning around our results and the concept of articulation work. It should be noted, however, that this connection also extends into the concluding discussion.

The activity of keeping up to date as seamlessly embedded and invisible

The data strongly supports the portrayal of keeping up to date as an activity that is largely embedded in other work tasks. For instance, participant Claes acknowledges that the job is '*extremely varied, so I find it difficult... for myself even to sort out what I'm doing [...] you adjust the activity of keeping up to date according to [what you're doing at the moment]*'. Apart from illustrating the variation in work, the quote emphasises that the activity of keeping up to date is adapted to other tasks, which likely contributes to its integration within the broader scope of work. Claes continues by affirming '*that it is very difficult to differentiate between what constitutes keeping up to date in the job and what is being... interested in societal occurrences in general. It's a bit difficult to separate the two concepts*'. Here, it becomes evident that not only does the variability in work and the alignment of keeping up to date with specific tasks create a seamless and embedded character, but also, from the above quote and several other passages in the empirical data, it becomes clear that the objects of professional information seeking and use might appear diffuse. That is, what library employees monitor to perform their job as they perceive it should be done. Claes talks about the difficulty in distinguishing between tasks explicitly related to their job and those he,

personally, deems interesting from a societal perspective.

A strategy mentioned by several participants during the interviews, perhaps seen to highlight the activity of keeping up to date, is to discuss specially allocated, scheduled reading time. The impression from the empirical data suggests that talking about designated reading time is important from the participants' perspectives because they often feel they do not have time to check things, explore, and navigate the surrounding environment relatively aimlessly. By earmarking time for it, it might appear easier to protect and justify. However, as indicated by the following quote, not all participants necessarily embrace the idea of scheduled time for information seeking and reading.

> *Reading time exists... I am not one of them, but some are quite strict about sticking to the schedule... it's probably sensible, to have these hours. I take some hours now and then, and I don't think I have significantly fewer hours than the others who make sure to schedule it. I take an hour when I sit and read for a while or delve into something, or when I'm sitting on the way to or from work, and it can be a gray area there... (Henrik)*

Henrik implies that the strategy of dedicated reading time might not necessarily result in more time for keeping up to date, but the quote also suggests what was previously observed through Claes' statement, namely, that the practice of keeping up to date – described here as reading or delving into something for a while – is preferably conducted when possible or when the inclination arises.

As mentioned in the literature review, our conceptualisation of the practice of keeping up to date and staying informed resembles the ways in which Marcia Bates (2002) views information seeking, which includes the mode of '*being aware, being conscious and sentient in our social context*' (p. 4). The following quote from one of the participants echoes Bates' perspective.

> *[O]ne learns a lot just by being in it, being at a library, meeting visitors, dealing with... direct questions that must be solved on the spot, and from that, understanding what needs to be found out or... also with tasks like purchases or weeding. That's what you have to start with when you understand what tasks you have and how you want to perform them well; that's when you understand what you need to find out. (Anna)*

Here, the emphasis lies on the importance of being present in the workplace, interacting with visitors, and dealing with '*questions that must be solved on the spot*' as a means to notice what one needs to know or learn. However, as expressed by Anna in the latter part of the quote, it is only when one begins to comprehend what is expected in the job that '*one understands what needs to be found out.*' This clearly underscores the close connection between professional information seeking and use and other work tasks.

The activity's invisibility is associated with its seamless and embedded nature, seeming to blend into other tasks, dispersed across time and space. However, its invisibility can also be related to another dimension of work. A salient feature in the notion of articulation work is that it is invisible to rationalised models of work, which tend to include, for example, various norms according to which things must or should be done (e.g. Pilerot and Lindberg, 2018). Not only does what one engages in, in terms of keeping up to date and seeking for information, appear invisible because it is seamlessly embedded in other tasks and scattered across time and space. It can also be seen as something that one might feel sneaky about. Anna thus states that '*if you're sitting in the room and reading a longer text, it feels like... 'am I doing something?' or how does this look if someone comes into my room? That feeling might arise*'. We understand this statement as an expression of an assumption pervasive in library work practices, namely, that sedentary or seemingly inactive activities run the risk of not being perceived as "real" (rational) work. According to this assumption, keeping up to date, as Eva puts it in the following quote, could be considered a '*kind of luxury*', perhaps not an entirely necessary addition to the "real" work.

> *It's absolutely an ideal to be a learning organisation, I often hear. At the same time,*

it's... sometimes within library culture, I experience that... we should move forward, things should happen, but it's also a kind of luxury, it's... the daily tasks must be done, newspapers must be stamped... one who goes too far... you shouldn't have too much fun. (Eva)

In addition to Eva's testimony that one should not '*have too much fun*' at work, thus aligning with the moral element expressed through Anna's previous quote, we can also sense a kind of tension between, on one side, the daily concrete tasks, and on the other side, the activity of keeping up to date, which in the quote appears through the notion of the ideal '*to be a learning organisation*'.

Work and leisure

A theme with a strong presence in the study, both through influences from previous research and through the participants' accounts, revolves around how the conditions for the practice of keeping up to date are shaped in the relationship between work and leisure.

Following the book market, often seen as a central part of librarians' work, is frequently depicted as both an interest-driven and demanding task. It directly raises questions about when, where, and how this type of keeping up to date can be conducted. As already mentioned, the term *reading time* is commonly used today, but keeping up with new literature involves more than just trying to read as much of the current books as possible – it also involves staying updated on things such as publishers' offerings, various industry news, different authorships, and prevailing trends. This study's participants offer numerous examples of this as well.

In this study, we also observe that this more or less constant flow to keep up with – this '*moving target*', as Lindberg (2019) puts it – can be applied to other parts of library operations than just those directly related to literature. Several participants testify that the news flow, in a broader sense, can trigger work-related thoughts at any time. As Maria notes: '*It often happens... perhaps when you're at some dinner one evening and talking with someone... you start*

talking about your job and realise that this could be something we could do'. The world never takes a break. With news flows and social media constantly accessible, both at work and during leisure time, perhaps it is not obvious to try to maintain a clear distinction between what belongs to work and what belongs to leisure.

A recurring reflection among the participants concerns the possibility of contemplation and reflection at work. If the news flow can be perceived as difficult to control concerning time and space, the human mind is hardly easier to govern. '*The moment for reflection and just sitting and pondering on what one wants to do [at work], often comes during leisure time*' (Lena).

Reflection and the impulse for '*what one wants to do at work*' can involve both processing events at the workplace and generating new ideas for library activities. Lena in the above quote is one of several participants who note that insights related to work often emerge only with some distance from the work situation. The anticipation of high activity in specific work tasks during work hours is well-documented in the empirical data.

Public libraries can also be viewed as active players in various social media platforms. Social media serves as a showcase towards colleagues and users (e.g., Carlsson, 2012) but they are also used as rich sources for keeping up to date and trend-spotting in the library world.

The participants in the study express various approaches to the fluid boundaries between work and leisure, often exemplified by social media as significant elements. Some participants describe the communication between work and leisure practices as unproblematic or enriching, while others perceive the blending as stressful. Several participants also mention personal strategies to differentiate or cross-fertilise work and leisure interests. For example, some opt for different social media platforms or separate accounts for work and leisure.

Lena, who is a relatively active Facebook user, talks about how her media usage relates to her ways of keeping up to date:

What I'm thinking about is that my Facebook account is my private one, so there's a lot of work-related content on it, and it's difficult to manage... if I'm at home in the evening and come across something that I think I need to check at work, it's challenging to handle. In those cases, I usually email it to myself.

Interviewer: ... Is it a way to keep things more separate?

Lena: Both to keep them separate and to remember. The optimal thing would be to have a work-related Facebook, but I'm not there yet.

Interviewer: Why do you think it would be optimal to make a clearer distinction, what's the problem with one overlapping the other?

Lena: That's the problem, that work spills into the private and leisure time. I don't spend time on Facebook... I don't engage in this kind of keeping up to date during work hours; I do it in my free time at home or during lunch at work. I don't do that during working hours [...] it could become a problem.

The concluding part of Lena's reasoning can be seen to confirm the previous observation of the importance of not giving the impression of engaging in something too casual like personal reading or using private Facebook during work hours. Therefore, maintaining this boundary (in front of colleagues, management, and users) appears as a reason. At the same time, Lena and several other participants strive to limit the influence of work during their leisure time. It seems harder to maintain this boundary, and moreover, the consequences of trying to keep up to date during leisure time can also be perceived as positive from a workplace perspective. None of the participants question that the library benefit from the part of the work done during leisure time.

Another observation in Lena's quote is the duality in the activities surrounding the information activities related to Facebook and emailing. Lena suggests that these activities assist her in sorting out work interests from her private flow, yet the email also helps her remember when she is back at the workplace.

In this respect, we can see that social media in this case partly blurs the boundary between work and leisure, but the information activities around the Facebook account also contribute to structuring the practice of keeping up to date. So far, she has also not chosen to acquire what she refers to as 'work-Facebook'.

Isabella expresses a similar approach, but she also makes an interesting conceptual distinction between the work-related impulses she gets during leisure time and work hours:

If I come across an article in my feed during my free time, then I'll read it, or if I see that... the Swedish Library Association has posted something on their Instagram, then I see it and engage with that content. I am a passive recipient of professional information in my leisure time, but I try not to actively seek it... you read your morning newspaper and then it talks about the municipality's budget for culture this year. Of course, you start thinking about what it means for the library." (Isabella)

Isabella, therefore, seeks a more passive work-related information practice outside working hours. With Bates (2002), again, we can understand this attitude as an expression of information seeking in the form of a kind of latent attention within a relatively well-defined area.

Interviewee Claes has chosen a more radical sorting of his information channels, consciously channelling work-related information flow to his email inbox:

It's difficult for me to speak about social media and the library sector because I'm not part of that flow. [...] maybe it's a personality trait, I'm not particularly keen on social media privately either even though I have used it, but at work, I don't see it. I might feel it takes too much time; I already think that... one has the inbox. (Claes)

To more or less consistently opt out of social media as a source for work-related information is therefore one among several prevalent ways of maintaining the fluctuating boundary between work and leisure. Claes's method of creating a sort of demarcation between

different types of information flows can be understood as a way to purify work-related information and, at the same time, as a means to ensure the quality of incoming information and avoid noise. Various forms of mixing work-related and more personal interests are described in the interviews. An illustrative example demonstrates how specific tasks and responsibilities sometimes consume personal resources. In the following quote, Eva describes how, to meet the needs of a specific target audience, she felt compelled to join a particular interest group – all to stay updated on the specific issues advocated by and for that target group:

> I've joined [an interest association related to one of the workplace's specific target groups], but I did it privately even though it's actually for work [...] I want to receive their membership magazines. Therefore, I've often tried to keep it separate, it's private and it's work, but it's difficult because it's so easy to click and join things even if it costs three hundred kronor [...] it's such a long process when you need to ask a manager, it takes weeks instead of a click. (Eva)

The quote also illustrates the directness and simplicity of approaching an area as a private individual rather than taking the more bureaucratic route through the workplace with its specific procedures and decision-making processes. The proximity of the personal mobile phone and the familiar purchase procedure clearly invites a crossing of boundaries between what has long been considered as distinctly separate spheres of life – the professional and the private.

Keeping up with the external environment is carried out because the tasks require it; one wants to perform 'good work' and provide service 'in the best way possible'. The following quote also testifies to something similar.

> I don't know if it's in the job description, but it's part of the position, of the profession, to keep an eye on the external environment; you can't work if you don't... you have to have a finger on the pulse, otherwise it doesn't work. It's both that the tasks require it and,

of course, there is an expectation if you're going to keep up. (Claes)

Here, the activity of keeping up to date – having a 'finger on the pulse' – is portrayed as an absolute necessity, as part of the job, even if in this case, there does not seem to be any mention in the 'job description' that it must be this way; this latter point resonates with Star and Strauss' (1999) assertion that articulation work is not visible in rationalised models of work.

Concluding discussion

Examining the results of the study from our theoretical perspective, that is, when conceptualising professional information seeking as articulation work, it can be observed that, in accordance with Suchman's (1995) analysis of such work, it seems to take place at different levels. Especially the survey data generated in connection with the larger study (Lindberg and Pilerot, 2023), from which the present study emanates, indicate that activities to stay updated and informed permeate the Swedish library sector. However, they also (often) silently exist in individual workplaces. Without necessarily discussing these activities or having them included in job descriptions, employees weave together perceptions and experiences through their efforts to stay up to date. Like the articulation work described by Dorothy Smith (2003), this kind of professional information seeking and use seems to be engaged in to make work flow smoothly and effortlessly.

In the results, there is a reference to a specific 'library culture' that can be perceived as prescribing a certain way of performing work. According to this "culture", it is not a given that specific time or space is dedicated to staying updated, as seen in several examples from the empirical data. Quite the opposite, in fact. Several participants testify that when engaging in information seeking for their own professional purposes or reading during working hours, it is not (always) considered "real work". However, as many participants point out, this is an activity that is absolutely necessary, despite its relegation to the background. It can be seen as the kind of work

that, as described in the theoretical section with reference to Star and Strauss (1999), is a behind-the-scenes fine-tuning that contributes to modifying and reconciling the unforeseen.

Similar to other rationalised models of work, such as prescriptive step-by-step models linked to evidence-based library practice (e.g., Hallam, 2018), there is a potential drawback in that they may overlook several crucial aspects of articulation work in the form of staying current and updated. Likewise, viewing this activity solely as one of several '*soft skills*' (Williams and Saunders, 2020) runs the risk of decreasing the potential importance of this work.

The results regarding the tension between work and leisure also demonstrate how the aspect of articulation work, particularly emphasised by Strauss (1988), namely that it can involve moving between different social worlds, is prevalent in connection to the activity of keeping up to date. The invisible work of staying updated and informed is thus often conducted outside of the established working hours.

Based on previous research (e.g., Lindberg and Pilerot, 2023) and the present study, it seems clear that the kind of work highlighted here – engaging quietly and in conjunction with other tasks in continually seeking, searching for, and reflecting on information to develop on the job – constitutes a significant and meaningful part of the work in Swedish public libraries. It seems to constitute a crucial element that not only involves individual employees staying informed and updated but also, on a broader level, contributes to the coordination and management of library activities. Yet, as we have demonstrated, it mostly takes place quietly, in the background, embedded in other tasks.

Our results are in line with previous research that has shown that information work is often invisible (Ehrlich and Cash, 1999; Hanell and Ahlryd, 2023; McKenzie and Dalmer, 2020). The theme of invisibility that McKenzie and Dalmer (2020) identify with reference to the location where the work takes place, for example, at home, also occurs in our study. We can also see similarities between their theme named structural invisibility and our observations regarding how work that, so to speak, is embedded in other tasks tends to be shrouded in obscurity.

In conclusion, it appears evident that the work that is not visible and not talked about much needs to be identified and brought to the forefront. Otherwise, this invisibility can lead to a decrease in the legitimacy of the librarians' work, ultimately leading to this fundamental element not receiving the time and space it seems to require.

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