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Experiences of serendipity in knowledge work

There are many kinds of coincidences at work. Sometimes these coincidences are real strokes of luck, while at other times they are less important, but they can still be useful or relevant. These lucky coincidences, or accidental discoveries, are experiences of serendipity. The purpose of this study is to find out what kind of accidental discoveries are encountered in knowledge work and where these discoveries are made (i.e. the trigger). In addition, we explore what value accidental discoveries can produce. The theoretical framework of the study is the research tradition of serendipity. The study is based on three types of qualitative data collected in the spring of 2019: interviews, workshop data, and open-ended questionnaire responses. A total of 437 accidental discoveries were identified in the data. In the study, social interaction and face-to-face encounters with people in one's own workplace proved to be the most important places for experiences of serendipity in knowledge work. Accidental discoveries gave rise to both small insights into one's own work, such as new uses of a program or application, and significant observations or solutions. The study shows that serendipity is not a rare phenomenon, but rather a natural and integral part of knowledge work.