

Independent Together:
Community among Independent Workers in Coworking Spaces

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To those bold enough to teach and those brave enough to learn

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCING COWORKING

In recent years, the nature and organization of work has shifted from stationary offices and cubicles in bureaucratic organizations toward mobile working conditions and flexible forms of employment. Information and communications technologies such as wireless internet, smart phones, and remote file sharing have enabled salaried employees and independent workers alike to work from home, coffee shops, or anywhere with an internet connection. Although these newer forms of work can offer greater independence and autonomy to workers, they also reflect a larger trend of social isolation in modern life. In the sphere of work, this isolation can deny individuals occupational resources they might gain from regular face-to-face interaction with a network of peers and colleagues.

In response to this increasing isolation, independent software programmer Brad Neuberg published a post on his blog on August 9, 2005, advertising a part-time “coworking” space he was starting at a feminist collective in San Francisco called Spiral Muse (Neuberg 2005). He reposted text from a flyer he had created:

Do you work for yourself from home?
Do you miss community and structure?

Join Spiral Muse and Brad Neuberg in creating a new kind of work environment for free spirits!

Traditionally, society forces us to choose between working at home for ourselves or working at an office for a company. If we work at a traditional 9 to 5 company job, we get community and structure, but lose freedom and the ability to control our own lives. If we work for ourselves at home, we gain independence

but suffer loneliness and bad habits from not being surrounded by a work community.

Coworking is a solution to this problem.

Although Bernie De Koven, a computer game designer, is credited with first using the term “coworking,” he applied the term to describe “working together as equals” using collaborative work techniques and technologies (De Koven 2013; Neuberg 2014). Despite other earlier efforts at forming coworking-like spaces or communities, such as hackerspaces like C-base in Berlin (Deskmag N.d.) or work clubs like Gate 3 WorkClub (Gate 3 WorkClub Inc. 2004), Neuberg’s 2005 blog post is widely cited as the first use of the term “coworking” to refer to the collaboration of independent workers in a physical space and the start of the coworking movement¹. In fact, members and founders of coworking spaces around the world celebrate “International Coworking Day” on August 9 to commemorate the start of this movement toward building communities of workers.

Many of the members and founders of early coworking spaces were software developers, computer programmers, Web designers, or other types of workers in technology-related fields who participated in Bar Camps – “unconference²” conferences related to technology and open-source Web applications – which begun in Palo Alto in 2005. The development of open-source software, such as Apache or WordPress, relies on a collaborative model of user-generated content that is offered typically without remuneration. Coworking has also been linked to the emerging “sharing economy,” or “collaborative consumption” (Botsman and Rogers 2010; Gansky 2010), a network-enabled “marketplace

¹ I use the term “movement” here, because coworking space founders, the Coworking Wiki, and even many coworking members I interviewed tend to refer to the spread of coworking as a movement. For instance, Tim Butcher (2012) refers to coworking as “a global movement rooted in local narratives of community.” The usage does not signify a claim that coworking is a social movement in the sociological sense.

² “Unconference” is a term used to describe a participant-driven conference that has a more grassroots and participatory, rather than top-down, organizational structure.

that brings together distributed networks of individuals to share³ or exchange otherwise underutilized assets” (Koopman, Mitchell, and Thierer 2015: 531). This focus on sharing and collaboration as opposed to competition or, in other words, social capital rather than financial capital, is a foundational principle of the coworking movement (Coworking Wiki, N.d.; Kwiatkowski 2013).

Coworking is a work arrangement involving the use of a shared workspace by independent workers who are not typically employed by the same agency or organization. It may involve a dedicated desk or a shared desk, often in open-plan workspaces, but what differentiates coworking spaces from rented executive suites is a focus on building a community among workers. Kwiatkowski and Buczynski (2011) describe coworking as “a phenomenon that happens in shared, collaborative workspaces in which the emphasis is on community (not space), relationships, and productivity.” The goals of coworking may include cost reduction and access to a community of peers, as well as what has been termed “accelerated serendipity” – a spark of creativity, knowledge exchange, or a productive boost achieved through unexpected interactions that spur productivity (DeGuzman and Tang 2011; Olma 2012; Kwiatkowski 2013).

Corporations have latched onto the idea of coworking, as well, with some companies offering extra office space as coworking space for non-employees. Additionally, some companies have begun funding new coworking projects. Recently, Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh announced that the company would be moving its headquarters to Las Vegas and unveiled a \$350 million project aimed at revitalizing the city’s downtown and transforming it into the coworking capital of the world (Downtown Project 2013). A presentation of his project plan mentions the company’s desire to build a headquarters campus that is

³ Critics of the term “sharing economy” point out that the goods and services exchanged in the sharing economy tend to involve little sharing. Rather, they comprise what could more accurately be described as a modern rental economy with the majority of transactions handled online or via mobile apps.

integrated into the surrounding neighborhood, encouraging serendipitous interaction between employees and the larger community (Groth 2012). This dissertation analyzes coworking spaces as both a new way of working and a strategy to promote productivity, collaboration, and social solidarity. The research examines how both aspects of coworking relate to meanings of work and notions of community.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Classical sociological theorists focused the bulk of their work on explaining the social consequences of the transformation from traditional to modern societies. Marx wrote extensively on the causes and consequences of capitalist modes of production, including how the changing nature of the worker's relation to the means of production impacted human relations and ideas. He argued that modern capitalist production processes estranged the worker from the product of his labor, from the act of working, and even from himself and his fellow human being (Marx [1844] 2007; McLellan 2000). In Marx's view, work processes under modern capitalism were dehumanizing and devoid of intrinsic affective value.

Weber was a bit less pessimistic in his assessment of the development of modern societies, in which he perceived the increasing rationalization of all areas of human life. Rationalization, Weber believed, would result in bureaucracy and greater efficiency in social organizations. In his ideal type of bureaucracy, work is characterized by increased predictability, calculability, formal regulations, abstract allegiance, technically competent experts, and hierarchical offices (Weber [1922] 1978; 1946). Weber remained wary of the disenchantment of the world and the constraints of rationalization on human creativity and individuality, however, as individuals become trapped in the "steel-hard casing" of a system based on control and technical rationality.

Whereas Weber acknowledged human agency and believed that individuals were free to act in ways that conflict with dominant social values and norms, Durkheim was less attentive to agency and more concerned with the social facts that constrain human behavior and produce solidarity. Durkheim believed that the division of labor in modern societies produced a different form of solidarity. In *The Division of Labor in Society* ([1893] 1984), Durkheim argued that, while individuals in traditional societies experienced “mechanical solidarity” based on similarity and kinship, individuals in modern societies are connected through complementarity and the division of labor, which produces interdependence. However, Durkheim feared that if regulations and social norms could not change apace with rapid technological, organizational, or societal change, modern industrial society could produce anomie – a lack of regulation or sense of normlessness – resulting in a failure to inhibit the insatiable appetites of individuals. Durkheim believed that the occupational group could serve as a moral force capable of imposing a normative system on individuals in modern societies (Durkheim 1962; Salaman 1974).

The transition from traditional to modern societies has had profound impacts on the nature of work. C. Wright Mills’s ([1959] 2000) notion of the intellectual craftsman harkens back to the pre-industrial era craftsman who takes pride in his work and finds intrinsic value in the work itself, with little separation between the realms of work and leisure. Industrialization separated work from home, bringing work into the factory. There, efforts at profit maximization resulted in increased division of labor, Fordist mass production, and a Taylorist model of production characterized by highly specialized and routinized work tasks, which isolated individual workers from the complete product of their labor and a sense of themselves as producers of that whole product. Work in a Taylorist regime is completed in exchange for monetary reward, rather than pride in one’s work (Baldry et al. 2007). Fordist-era bureaucratic forms of work emphasized workers’ relationship to their employing organization, a stable relationship in which

workers progressed within a hierarchy of increased responsibility, seniority, and benefits through loyalty and commitment to their organization (Whyte [1956] 2002). In contrast, post-Fordist, post-bureaucratic employment relations emerging in the new economy are marked by a rise in alternative work arrangements and increasing numbers of self-employed, contract, and independent workers, as well as a focus on identification with a team and specific project rather than with an organization (Cappelli 1999; Katz and Krueger 2016).

Advances in production technology have changed the social organization of work through the ages, from craft work (e.g., woodblock printing) to machine-powered work (e.g., textiles) to assembly-line work (e.g., auto manufacturing) to continuous process production (e.g., chemicals) (Blauner 1964). More recently, information and communications technologies have transformed the nature of work, enabling faster information processing and communication across great distances. These recent technological advances have paradoxically enabled increased social isolation, as more and more individuals are able to work remotely. In this age of technological connectedness but social disconnectedness, how do individuals form satisfying, intimate social bonds? This dissertation focuses on the classic Durkheimian theme of community, within a contemporary setting: a post-bureaucratic form of employment called coworking. Three bodies of scholarly literature formed the framework for this study: post-bureaucratic employment relations, meanings of work, and occupational community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

POST-BUREAUCRATIC EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS AND THE NEW SOCIOLOGY OF WORK

The concepts of risk, insecurity, and uncertainty permeate the literature on post-bureaucratic employment relations and the new sociology of work. Research in these areas seeks to map out the nature of restructured workplaces⁴ against the backdrop of macro-level political-economic shifts. Recent work has examined the role of temporary or flexible work arrangements in the management and experience of risk, insecurity, and uncertainty; the social construction and framing of these concepts; and their relationship to inequality and perceptions of opportunity. Conceptual puzzles and questions addressed by this research include: the impact of workplace restructuring on workers, social and economic inequality, and the nature of the workplace (Cornfield, Campbell, and McCammon 2001); changes in employment relations at the turn of the twenty-first century and the social dynamics of “contingent labor” (Barley and Kunda 2004); the “strategies and structures of contracting at the turn of the twenty-first century” and the defining elements of a good job in the new economy (Osnowitz 2010:5); how workers perceive change and uncertainty, and what risks they are willing to take to acquire jobs and success in the restructured economy” (Smith 2001:3); why people have been so willing to accept risk and how they have adapted to the increasingly individualized and privatized burden of risk through their career choices and approaches to work (Neff 2012); and the nature of entrepreneurial activity (Ruef 2009).

With some exceptions (e.g., Ruef 2009, who used a two-wave panel study of entrepreneurial dynamics and analyzed the data using quantitative methods), most work in this area uses qualitative, often

⁴ Cornfield, Campbell, and McCammon (2001) conceive of restructured workplaces as a three-pronged process, including the devolution of decision making, an increase in contingent work, and a shift from collective bargaining to individualized bargaining.

ethnographic, methods for investigating these questions. Barley and Kunda (2004), Neff (2012), Osnowitz (2010), and Smith (2001), for example, used interviews and observation in their studies. Smith (2001) completed case studies of three corporations and one job search club, conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 80 individual trainers, managers, and workers, informal interviews with individuals at the three corporate firms, and 16 interviews with job search club members; observing workers on the job in 18 different work sites; attending team meetings; studying organizational documents; and attending weekly member meetings and participating in the orientation at the job search club. Similarly, Neff (2012) conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 54 workers of all position types in the New York-based Internet industry (“Silicon Alley”), as well as attending office parties, touring companies, and socializing at after-hours events. She also used social network analysis in her case selection as part of a “network ethnography” method (Neff 2012). Osnowitz (2010) interviewed contractors in one of two occupational groups associated with the information technology industry: (1) writers and editors or (2) programmers and engineers, and she observed contractors at work with colleagues and clients at several work sites. Barley and Kunda (2004) started their study with six months of participant observation at a medium-sized staffing agency, followed by three-month stints at two smaller agencies with different business models. They also interviewed 71 contractors about their careers and experiences and conducted interviews at client firms with contractors and permanent employees involved in software development or information technology projects.

Beck’s (2000) *The Brave New World of Work* also employs a qualitative approach, but one distinct from others’ approaches. He examines the shift from a work society, based on full-time work and “its guiding ideas, institutions, economic and political organizations, and cultural identities,” to a risk society based on flexibility and insecurity (Beck 2000:8). Using a method that does not tacitly assume that existing models of work will continue in the future, Beck writes what he calls “visionary non-

fiction,” which uses all available data, concepts, and models to describe present and future and to offer his “embryonic vision of a post-work society” based on an engaged citizenry performing civil labor (2000:9). He envisions civil labor, such as domestic work, club work, and volunteer activity, being offered the same social protections as paid labor and offering individuals an alternate source of identity from work.

Most of the recent literature on post-bureaucratic employment focuses on contingent labor in the technological and creative industries, particularly during the dot.com boom. Osnowitz (2010), for instance, focused on contractors in two technology-related occupations: writers and editors working in print and web communications and programmers and engineers in software development. Barley and Kunda (2004) concentrated on staffing agencies and some of their client firms in Silicon Valley. Smith (2001) studied both the white-collar service sector and blue-collar service and production sector, including photocopy workers at a photocopy and technology services company, timber-supply workers at a timber-processing plant, assembly and office workers at a technology company specializing in hardware and software products, and unemployed individuals at a job search club. She selected organizations enacting work reforms and innovations, such as employee involvement programs and the use of contractors. Her research objective was both to describe the range of strategies and innovations transforming the workplace and hiring practices in the new economy and to proffer explanations for the rise of this new era of employment relations. Similarly, this dissertation research employs qualitative methods and seeks to describe and offer explanations for new forms of workplace communities. In particular, I investigate how individuals working in coworking spaces experience work; how their choice to work in these spaces relates to their values, identities, and views on collaboration, creativity, opportunity, and risk; and how coworking spaces reflect and influence broader trends in the shifting nature of work and community.

MEANINGS OF WORK

Sociologists have long observed the significance of working to social identity and how individuals view themselves (Hughes 1951, 1958; Leidner 2006). Symbolic interactionist approaches to work emphasize the influence of social interactions and reference groups on the way people view their work, the meaning they derive from it, and how they evaluate the value of their work to society (Leidner 2006). Influenced by symbolic interactionism, Everett C. Hughes (1958) sought to understand the social arrangements that make work more agreeable and meaningful for individuals. Identifying how individuals imbue their work with meaning sheds light not only on their identities, but also on the role of occupational groups in serving as a reference group for shared norms, values, knowledge, and expectations for work.

In a classic study of the meaning of work, Morse and Weiss (1955) found that a majority of working men work for more than solely economic reasons, a finding supported by many successive scholars asking variants of their interview question regarding whether interviewees would keep working if they won the lottery and had no financial need to work (Baldry et al. 2007). However, Vecchio (1980) reexamined Morse and Weiss's (1955) study and found that a greater proportion of people at that time worked solely for economic reasons than before. Survey research by the Meaning of Work International Research Team (hereafter MOW Team), a collaboration of several national research teams, focused on the "meaning of working," that is, "the significance, beliefs, definitions and the value which individuals and groups attach to working as a major stream of human activity that occurs over much of their lives" (1987: 13). The MOW Team (1987:65-66) outlined five major variables of importance to the study of the meaning of working:

1. *Work centrality*: the relative importance of working in a person's life compared to other life roles;

2. *Societal norms about working*: the obligations and entitlements of work, what behavior is considered appropriate;
3. *Valued working outcomes*: the outcomes an individual seeks from working, such as status, income, interpersonal contact, societal service, or intrinsic value;
4. *The importance of work goals*: the relative importance of various work goals, such as the opportunity to learn new things, interesting work, a lot of variety, good job security, or good pay; and
5. *Work role identification*: which work roles individuals consider important, such as task roles, organizational roles, product or service roles, occupational roles, or professional roles.

Based on the scores from measurement of these variables, the MOW Team (1987) used six indices – work centrality, entitlement norm, obligation norm, economic function of working, intrinsic or expressive working outcomes, and interpersonal contact through working – to develop four clusters of meaning of working patterns. These four clusters are the instrumental MOW pattern, the expressive work centrality MOW pattern, the entitlement and contact orientation MOW pattern, and the low entitlement MOW pattern. The latter is the modal pattern for the United States.

Using work meaning patterns operationalized as combinations of scores on the meaning of work indices identified by the MOW Team (1987), Claes and Ruíz Quintanilla (1993) examine the determinants of work meaning patterns, the stability of these patterns over time, and the behavioral outcomes of different meanings of work patterns. They derived five meanings of work patterns from their data: (1) Moderately work-centered, non-economic, low rights workers; (2) non-work centered, high expressive and economic, non-duty workers; (3) work centered, high rights and duties, economic workers; (4) non-work centered, economic workers with balanced moderate societal norms; and (5) highly work-centered, low expressive, low rights workers.

More recent scholarship on the meanings of work has examined the impact on workers of contemporary trends such as neoliberalism, globalization, the decline in production and rise in service work, restructured workplaces, alternative and precarious employment, union revitalization and transnational labor alliances, and increased workplace flexibility. Though some of these changes –

particularly greater precarity – may impede workers’ ability to forge durable work identities, a number of studies have nevertheless revealed the ways in which work and entrepreneurship continue to shape identity and meaning (e.g., Adams and Crafford 2012; Leidner 2006; Korczynski 2007; Walsh and Gordon 2008; Zhang and Chun 2017). As occupations decline in importance as bases for identity, so, too, may they decreasingly serve as the primary means of worker solidarity at work.

With an increasing share of U.S. workers in the service economy, scholars of work have observed changes in the meanings of some service jobs. Traditional artisanal and craft jobs, in particular, have experienced a revival, while jobs traditionally considered low-status have acquired new meanings. Lloyd (2006) emphasizes the importance of spatial context in cultural meanings of work, demonstrating how artists working in service jobs at bars, coffee houses, and restaurants in the Wicker Park neighborhood of Chicago in the 1990s garner local prestige and cultivate their own aesthetics through their work. In his study of barbering, bartending, butchery, and distilling, for example, Ocejó (2017) suggests that one reason young workers who otherwise may have been knowledge workers choose to distill artisanal spirits or make craft cocktails is that they find more meaning in producing a tangible product than engaging in abstract knowledge work. In other words, these workers enter these manual labor and service jobs because they are able to derive meaning from them.

Tausky (1995) discusses three levels of abstraction researchers have used to assess the meaning of work: individual level, societal level, and macro level. In individual level analyses, individuals “provide attitudinal or behavioral data in surveys or interviews that address the meaning of work, or simply relevant items” (Tausky 1995: 16). Societal level analyses examine a broader historical, economic context to discern the meaning of work for a population, whereas macro level analyses invoke universal human tendencies or socio-biological drives to describe the meaning of work. The research that follows here focuses on the individual level of analysis. Although the meaning of work is not the primary

focus, this dissertation project investigates the impact of communities formed within coworking spaces on the meaning members derive from their work.

OCCUPATIONAL COMMUNITY

Scholars of work have identified several key components of occupational communities. Van Maanen and Barley (1984: 295) define occupational communities as:

a group of people who consider themselves to be engaged in the same sort of work; who identify (more or less positively) with their work; who share with one another a set of values, norms, and perspectives that apply to, but extend beyond, work related matters; and whose social relationships meld the realms of work and leisure.

Similar to Van Maanen and Barley's concept, Salaman (1974) focuses on three elements that define occupational communities. First, for members of the community, work is central to how they view themselves. Second, members of the occupational community serve as a reference group for the other members in terms of their values, attitudes, and expectations. Third, members' work relationships and activities permeate their non-work lives.

In his analysis of ethnographies of work, Hodson (2001: 203) observes four major functions of coworker relations: "(1) socialization to occupational norms, (2) solidarity and mutual defense, (3) resistance to authority and role distancing, and (4) the affirmation of occupational, class, and gender identities at work." Further, the ethnographic data describe four primary elements of solidarity – mutual defense, cohesion, group leadership, and the enforcement of norms – and suggest that solidarity is vital to productivity, worker well-being and satisfaction, and meaning in work (Hodson 2001). However, Hodson (2001) argues that solidarity should be conceptualized differently from in the past, as less of a consequence of conflict between employees and managers than of positive relations between them. As employment relations continue to evolve and we enter an era of more independent, self-branding

employees, in which employers and employees relate to each other more as a business-to-business relationship (Gershon 2017), work scholars' concept of solidarity may again need to change. New scholarship on occupational communities and workplace solidarity should, therefore, attend to the work processes and conditions that promote solidarity between workers, as well as the role that occupational communities play in this.

Occupational communities may also help create and circulate meanings of work. As work moves from large, rigid, vertically structured firms to smaller, more agile horizontal networks, workers have had to adapt and seek different occupations or work arrangements. Some new service sector jobs such as Uber drivers or Shipt grocery shoppers have emerged, while others like craft brewers and artisanal butchers, as noted above, have taken on new meaning. Perhaps central to the production of the meaning in these (re)emerging professions are “occupational communities whose members recognize them and their work as good” (Ocejo 2017: 8). In the new “networked society” (Castells 2010), marked by “the shift from *centralized* large corporations to *decentralized* networks made up of a plurality of sizes and forms of organizational units” (Castells [1989] 2002: 280, emphasis in the original), these communities may prove central to workers' meaning making.

As Sandiford and Seymour (2007) point out, the concept of community in sociological analysis was first used to discuss loss of community in the transition from traditional societies to more complex, heterogeneous modern societies, building on the work of Émile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tönnies. As mentioned above, one of the central themes pervading Durkheim's work is a concern with social cohesion. To produce social cohesion, the social organization in modern societies – “organic solidarity” – depends upon the efficient management of tasks and work activities, equality of external conditions to ensure that individuals can work in their ideal social functions and that contracts are just, and a clear set of rules guiding individuals' behavior and obligations to society (Jones 1986). That is, social justice,

scientific management, and social regulations help to ensure that the division of labor serves as an integrating force, rather than an atomizing one. Because the division of labor in modern societies entails increasing specialization, which can isolate individuals, rules of conduct help individuals to guard against “anomie,” a sense of normlessness or lack of social integration and regulation, which derives in part from a failure of social systems to limit the passions and needs of individuals.

Whereas Ferdinand Tönnies ([1887]1955) bemoaned the transition he observed from more familial, informal relationships in traditional communities (*gemeinschaft*) to the more instrumental, contractual relationships in modern societies (*gesellschaft*), Durkheim remained optimistic about the potential for social solidarity in modern societies. In *Socialism*, Durkheim argued that “professional groupings, or corporations,” could serve a regulatory function to guard against anomie in the modern world of work (1962: 245). As Lincoln and Guillot (2006: 95) put it,

Durkheim specifically believed that the atomizing thrust of modernization might be blunted with various cohesion-building mechanisms, among them: ceremonial activity; new moral ideology (e.g. of individualistic humanism: the ‘cult of man’); and participation in membership organizations, occupational groups, in particular, such as guilds, unions, or professional associations.

Around the 1960s, the concept of community began to be applied to sociological studies of work (Sandiford and Seymour 2007). These early studies (e.g., Goode 1957; Horobin 1957; Hughes 1958; Salaman 1971b, 1974) examined employment relations with the assumption “that work and the relationships formed in workplaces replaced the wider communities in pre-industrial society in providing a sense of identity and belonging and that some features of these communities could provide important insights into the behaviour [sic] of workers in and out of work” (Sandiford and Seymour 2007: 210).

Recent research in the sociology of work and organizational studies also draws upon the classical Durkheimian theme of community. Korczynski, Hodson, and Edwards (2006) identify six dimensions for scholars to consider as they examine various social theories of work, including whether contemporary

work “civilizes or degrades” (p. 18). As they note, the Durkheimian approach to that question “is to consider whether contemporary work tends to promote organic solidarity or whether it promotes anomie” (Korczynski, Hodson, and Edwards 2006: 19). Sennett (1998) argues that in contemporary workplaces, anomie is increasing concomitantly with rising employment flexibility and a cultural distaste for dependence on others: “All the shibboleths of the new order treat dependence as a shameful condition: the attack on rigid bureaucratic hierarchy is meant to free people structurally from dependence; risk-taking is meant to stimulate self-assertion rather than submission to what is given” (1998: 139). As many scholars have noted (Beck 2000; Cornfield, Campbell, and McCammon 2001; Hacker 2006; Neff 2012; Ruef 2009; Smith 2001; Sennett 1998; Sweet and Meiksins 2013), flexibility in work has meant increasing autonomy, but also the increased individualization of risk, rising worker marginalization and isolation, and a breakdown of traditional workplace relations.

The shift from a stable, predictable work environment to one of increased uncertainty and risk has also resulted in increased employee anxiety and competition (Putnam 2000). Putnam (2000) argues that, as performance-based pay and job security increases competition among peers, these changes consequently undermine the strength of work-based social ties. As coworking groups typically include workers employed by different organizations, coworking members do not compete with other members for pay or job security. This dissertation research examines whether, in the absence of this type of competition, closer, more *Gemeinschaft*-like social relations can flourish in the workplace.

The impact of the economic restructuring of the last quarter of a century has reverberated beyond the workplace, as stable employment relations have undergirded, to a great extent, many features of American society: “Long-term individual investments such as home ownership and college educations for children, community ties and the stability they bring, and quality of life outside of work have all been enhanced by reducing risk and uncertainty on the job” (Cappelli 1999: 14). As community ties erode with

the stability of employment relations, scholars have considered the importance of the workplace in building solidarity. In *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (2000) shows that Americans' rate of participation in civic and professional organizations has declined since peak membership in the mid-twentieth century. Putnam considers the hypothesis that American society has merely experienced a shift in the key site of social interaction from "residence-based [to] workplace-based networks," in other words, "from the front porch to the water cooler" (p. 85). However, the survey data on worker satisfaction⁵ indicates that, net of the effects of greater earnings, American workers' satisfaction in the workplace has not increased as their civic engagement has declined in the last three decades, and may have even decreased, providing little support for "the hypothesis that the workplace has become the new locus of Americans' social solidarity and our sense of community" (Putnam 2000: 91). Further, as the sphere of work is typically characterized by instrumental social relations (Putnam 2000; Shamir 1981), the utility of work-based social ties for building a sense of community and solidarity among workers may be tenuous. Still, Putnam (2000: 91) notes that in the area of work, "we lack definitive evidence one way or the other."

Within the sociology of work, contemporary research on the classical theme of community has investigated how occupational communities may enable workers to guard against some of the negative consequences of workplace restructuring and uncertainty within a broader cultural context of individualism and independence. In his study of live-in hotel workers in Britain, for example, Shamir (1981) examines whether occupational communities may help workers resolve tensions arising from the "over-segregation" of the spheres of leisure and work, which he views as characterized, respectively, by *Gemeinschaft*- and *Gesellschaft*-type relationships. In other words, he asked whether occupational

⁵ Putnam (2000: 90) indicates, given the lack of data on the frequency of civic discussions in the office and close social connections at work, job satisfaction can serve as a proxy measure for social capital at work, as friendships with coworkers have been shown to be a strong predictor of job satisfaction.

communities might foster *Gemeinschaft*-like relationships in the workplace. The findings of his study revealed that occupational communities in a workplace do not guarantee employees a more ideal balance between work and leisure nor a high level of attachment to the workplace; however, they do suggest that many hotel workers have an expressive or social orientation to work rather than the instrumental orientation maintained by previous research findings, and that occupational communities can encourage the extension of work into leisure even for non-skilled or semi-skilled workers (Shamir 1981). In fact, Salaman (1971a) suggests that one of the determinants of occupational communities is that the relationships, values, and interests that members foster through their work carry over into their non-work lives. Putnam (2000: 91) sees this integration between work and non-work lives as the key to combating anomie and waning solidarity, arguing that, “any solution to the problem of civic disengagement in contemporary America must include better integration between our work lives and our community and social lives.”

In addition to guarding against anomie and influencing leisure activity, occupational communities can also offer sources of informal support for workers. In his research on service workers in American and Australian call centers, Korczynski (2003) argues that employees form “communities of coping” to help each other deal with the emotional labor of the job. This type of support can also endure beyond the physical boundaries of a shared organization, as workers move from one job to another. For instance, in his ethnography of technologists working in a software development start-up company, Marschall (2012) examines how their shared values, identity, and connections cultivated during their time as a place-based occupational community at the company endured after the fall of the company. He shows how the community members maintained a network occupational community through online exchange that provided ongoing support, information, and a sense of shared identity (Marschall 2012). The research herein also examines informal support provided by work-based communities, but the nature of these

communities differs from many previous studies of specific occupations, as the members of coworking groups often work in different occupations and for different companies.

Studies on occupational communities have often focused on either one specific occupation, such as accountants, internet technologists, and software developers (e.g., Elliott and Scacchi 2008; Lawrence 1998; Marschall 2002), or groups of workers within the same organization, such as workers in a hotel or ‘public house’ (e.g., Lee-Ross 2004; Salaman 1971b; Sandiman and Seymour 2007; Shamir 1981). Salaman (1974) identified two types of occupational communities: local and cosmopolitan. Local occupational communities are composed of members of the same profession who work in the same location; cosmopolitan occupational communities are based on the shared status of the occupation as a whole rather than co-location. Similarly, Shamir (1981: 46) points out two types of occupational community in the literature: the profession as community (Goode 1957), which is similar to Salaman’s (1974) cosmopolitan type, and the “local occupational community, which includes members of different occupations who share the same workplace.” The distinction between Salaman’s (1974) and Shamir’s (1981) types is whether members of different occupations are included within one community.

Scholars whose work concentrates on Salaman’s (1974) former type offer rich data on these professions and insights into the features of occupational communities generally, while those focusing on the latter type have enriched our understanding of how these groups communicate with each other, share knowledge, and resolve conflict and misunderstandings. For instance, in her study of engineers, technicians, and assemblers on a production floor, Bechky (2003) shows how the resolution of communication difficulties between these occupational communities that arise from different languages and conceptualizations of their product can transform how members of these communities understand their work. That is, she examines how occupational community members’ knowledge and understandings of their work transform and diffuse across different occupational communities within one organization.

Research on coworking groups stands to contribute to the literature on both types by testing some of the defining features of occupational communities based on a single profession and by offering a novel context in which workers may not only have different job functions or occupations, but also might work for different organizations.

While existing literature on occupational communities has demonstrated the impact of community membership on solidarity and workers' experience and perceptions of their work, much of the research has centered on workers employed by the same organization or in the same occupational category. As a context in which most workers typically work for different organizations and often have different occupational categories, coworking spaces can offer insights into how employees from different occupational backgrounds work together despite different occupational norms, as well as how and why independent workers collaborate even when their work does not necessitate it. The present study also considers how the communities formed in coworking spaces can offer a source of deep social connections and solidarity, influence members' perceptions of their work, and help members derive a greater sense of meaning from their work.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Why do individuals create coworking spaces? Why do they choose to join a particular coworking group? How do coworking spaces vary, and what are the consequences of this variability for members and/or the coworking arrangements themselves?

Given that coworking is a relatively recent phenomenon and very little academic research has been conducted on it, one task of this research is to describe sociologically the fundamental features of coworking spaces and the ways in which they vary. Guided by the conceptualizations below, I discuss various reasons interviewees cite for choosing to open or join a coworking space, connecting these with

broader socioeconomic shifts. I then seek to explain how space founders' intentions relate to members' intentions and how different coworking arrangements affect members' experience of work and the level of meaning they derive from it.

2. How do coworking communities differ from other workplace communities? What norms, values, and practices constitute the boundaries of these communities?

A central focus of this research is to investigate the nature of coworking communities, whether they represent a sub-type of occupational community or another form of community. The data address how the levels of intentionality, resources, and interactivity of a coworking group contribute to the formation and maintenance of these communities. The discussion considers expressed norms and values that are common across individuals in each space and how interactions among members instantiate or contest these shared norms and values. Observations at my research sites focused on identifying shared practices among members and paid close attention to discursive boundaries coworking members construct, such as "community member," and whom these boundaries exclude.

METHODS AND DATA

DATA COLLECTION STRATEGY

In a broad sense, my research focuses on how large-scale changes impact individuals, particularly with regard to issues of community and identity. In line with symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969), I take the ontological perspective that social interactions and the attributions, or meanings, we ascribe to them, are meaningful elements of the social world. Epistemologically, my stance is that micro-level interactions comprise multiple layers of meaning and that examining these interactions and attributions can reveal individual and shared attitudes, beliefs, and values, as well as some of the features of the larger

social context that structures these interactions and the process of meaning making for these individuals. Consistent with this theoretical perspective, I chose methods capable of generating data on interactions, meanings, and values.

Thus, to answer my research questions, I conducted ethnographic field research, including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and a questionnaire. Ethnography emphasizes cultural settings as data sources under the assumption that immersion in these settings is the best way of generating knowledge about them (J. Mason 2002). This method's focus on "thick description" (Geertz 1973) and assessing community life from the perspective of participants (Berg 2001) makes it an appropriate method of inquiry for the research questions above.

RESEARCH SITES AND SAMPLING STRATEGY

Coworking is a relatively new phenomenon, as the very first self-described coworking group began working out of a dedicated space in 2005 (Neuberg 2005). Since then, over 800 coworking have opened in the United States and over 2,500 worldwide (Foertsch 2013). As coworking began in Riverport⁶ in 2010 and has since grown to over a dozen coworking spaces, it offered a city with a relatively young, but flourishing coworking movement. Further, many studies of knowledge workers in post-bureaucratic employment have focused on information technology workers, often in Silicon Valley in California or "Silicon Alley" in New York City, where work is corporations-based (e.g., Barley and Kunda 2004; Neff 2012; Osnowitz 2010). In contrast, Riverport lies well outside these major cities, yet still possesses a growing reputation as a creative city with a work culture of strong occupational identities, bringing together artists, producers, technologists, and academics. Riverport has also garnered attention

⁶ Riverport is a pseudonym for the town where I completed fieldwork.

in recent years as a small, affordable city that offers a cadre of knowledge workers and fertile ground for entrepreneurs and start-ups. Riverport's recently created center for entrepreneurs also symbolizes its growth as an entrepreneurial city where start-ups thrive. As such, Riverport offers a broader community that reflects the goals of coworking and a large pool of independent workers and start-ups representative of typical coworking members. For these reasons, I selected Riverport as my primary observation site, with participant observation conducted at four coworking spaces in Riverport, as well as meetings of the local coworking alliance at various coworking spaces in the city, and the Global Coworking Unconference Conference (GCUC) in Kansas City, Missouri.

As there is no comprehensive list of coworking spaces in the U.S. or in my observation city, Riverport, I used a two-stage sampling strategy to create a quasi-sampling frame (Blee 2012). I first created a sampling frame of coworking spaces in the city by internet searches for websites and Facebook pages; reviewing lists of coworking spaces on the coworking Google Group, coworking wiki, *Deskmag*, *Desktime*, and local sites; news articles; and word-of-mouth from individuals at coworking spaces. Based primarily on the intentionality dimension of coworking, I then selected four coworking spaces that represent a range of coworking configurations, following Smith's (2001) research design. These four research sites vary as to whether they intend to provide a workspace mainly for profit and regard coworkers as tenants who rent out spaces (tenancy focus), a workspace that fosters community among members (community focus), a mix of a for-profit model with a focus on community-building (tenancy-community focus), or a space with a larger staff that provides a high level of services and resources to members and also aims to build community among members (mentee-community focus). The sample includes one site with each type of focus and comprises a range of resources, interactivity, and status as an independent entity or part of a chain of spaces, as depicted in the tables below (Table 1.1 and Table 1.2).

TABLE 1.1: ANTICIPATED INTENTIONALITY

Anticipated Intentionality				
<i>Focus</i>	Tenancy	Tenancy-Community	Community	Mentee-Community
<i>Name</i>	ProShare ⁷	IndySpire	Alloy	Cosite

TABLE 1.2: ANTICIPATED RESOURCES AND INTERACTIVITY

Anticipated Resources and Interactivity	<i>Low Resources</i>	<i>High Resources</i>
<i>Low Interactivity</i>	ProShare (independent)	IndySpire (chain)
<i>High Interactivity</i>	Alloy (independent)	Cosite (chain)

Shortly after initiating fieldwork, IndySpire closed its doors. I selected another coworking space, Workmine, to replace IndySpire. Although not a chain, Workmine had an established community outside of its space because of its offerings of courses for entrepreneurs.

In addition to these four coworking spaces, I conducted observations at meetings of the local coworking alliance and attended the 2014 Global Coworking Unconference Conference (GCUC) in Kansas City, Missouri. I solicited participants for interviews and questionnaires at each observation site to obtain a stratified sample of approximately seven to nine members, founders, and staff at each

⁷ All coworking spaces have been given pseudonyms in this dissertation.

coworking space in Riverport (32 total) and eleven founders and staff at other coworking spaces, for a total of 43 participants. Starting with the space managers, founders, and members who I observed in the coworking spaces, as well as space founders I identified from the GCUC website before the conference, I used snowball sampling to identify additional participants, as this sampling method enables researchers to find participants with the desired attributes (Berg 2001). I secured interviews through in-person and email requests (Appendix D).

GAINING ACCESS TO RESEARCH SITES

I gained access to my research sites by becoming a member of each space. To gain access to ProShare, I emailed the founder to get approval to do observations and interviews in the space. I also emailed the founder of Cosite before meeting him in person to discuss doing research there. I connected with the founders of Alloy and Workmine by dropping in during the day and attending an open-house event, respectively. At all four, I obtained approval from founders before beginning observations and becoming a member. Membership enabled me to work in each coworking space at least several times per month to complete observations for a total of approximately 300 hours of field work. Depending on interviewee preferences and availability, I completed most interviews in these four coworking spaces or at the GCUC conference, as well as some in coffee shops or restaurants, two in other coworking spaces, and several over Skype or on the telephone. Questionnaires were distributed to all interviewees, as well as GCUC attendees. Most interviewees submitted questionnaires online, while GCUC attendees completed paper copies.

INTERVIEWS

I conducted 43 semi-structured interviews, roughly seven to nine at each coworking space and the coworking conference, to get a range of perspectives. Interviews were conducted between May 2014 and July 2015. My sample size was determined by the number of interviews necessary to achieve data saturation (Charmaz 2006; M. Mason 2010). The average (mean) age of interviewees was 31.3, the median age was 30, the mode was 24, and the range of ages was 22 to 60. For coworking members I interviewed (24 total), ages ranged from 22 to 38. The mean, median, and mode for members were 28.9, 29, and 24, respectively. Coworking space founders (14 total) ranged in age from 26 to 60. For this group of interviewees, 37, 36, and 36 were the respective mean, median, and modal ages. The 5 staff members I interviewed ranged in age from 25 to 30, with a mean age of 26.8, and median and modal ages of 26. Appendix E contains individual interviewees' ages and other demographic information.

My questions for members addressed their occupation, the nature of their work and work environment, reasons for selecting their current coworking space, experiences with coworking, their social interactions with other members, and their views on the meaning of work (Appendix A). For directors, managers, and founders of the spaces, I asked additional questions concerning their intentions for the space, their reasons for opening a space and choosing a particular location, and their views about their role at the space (Appendix B). The questions were ordered to start with more general, non-threatening questions to develop rapport and to make participants more comfortable answering the more personal, probing questions that follow later in the interview (Babbie 2013; Berg 2001). Similarly, I designed the wording of the questions to be as clear as possible and to elicit detailed, thoughtful responses, for instance by avoiding "double-barreled" questions and by including transition statements between sets of questions to allow participants time to reflect on the questions I was about to ask (Babbie 2013; Berg 2001; Foddy 1993; J. Mason 2002).

QUESTIONNAIRE

After conducting each interview, I administered a brief, written questionnaire, or sent members a link to an online version of the questionnaire. The questionnaire contained items adapted from the MOW Team (1987) survey to assess meanings of work. This format was included to allow participants a greater sense of anonymity for more sensitive questions, such as experience with unemployment, race, parents' education, and future plans (Berg 2001). As with the interview questions, the questionnaire items were structured and worded to minimize participant confusion and discomfort (Babbie 2013; Foddy 1993).

OBSERVATION

The third source of my data collection is observation, conducted from February 2014 to July 2015 and totaling approximately 300 hours. Because what people say they do or intend to do often differs from what they actually do (Foddy 1993), observation data can complement and enrich analyses of interview data. In my observations, I paid close attention to interactions between members in each coworking space. To mitigate reactivity or the *Hawthorne effect*, I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible in my observations to minimize participants' sense of being monitored (Babbie 2013; Berg 2001). Attempting to achieve this in the intimate environment of coworking spaces made the 'participant' part of the participant observation method especially important. For instance, I brought work to do during my observations, such as grading or editing, so that I was working in the coworking space alongside other members, rather than simply observing them. I typically took "jottings" and condensed field notes while I was in the site, followed by more detailed full write-ups of my field notes after leaving the field (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995).

RATIONALE FOR METHODS

My aim in conducting interviews was to allow participants to talk at length about their experiences with coworking. I used an interview guide to explore the concepts of occupational community and the meaning of work, tailoring interview questions to different categories of interviewees. However, the interview questions themselves were designed to be open-ended to allow for deeper probing and follow-up questions based on individual participants' responses. My aim in the analysis of responses to these questions about coworking, the nature and meaning of work, and what is important in a workspace was to reveal not only the types of resources and work environments interviewees prefer, but also their values and what they want out of their work lives in a deeper sense. Although I applied a sociological analysis to interview responses and other observations, I nevertheless attempted to do little interpretation of responses in the dissertation discussion to enable respondents to speak for themselves to the greatest extent possible. In other words, I tried to represent the context in which comments or observations were made to make the meaning clearer to readers. In this dissertation, I also present quotations, when possible without compromising identity, instead of paraphrasing.

Another key goal of this project is to define the type of community that forms in coworking spaces. Observing conversations and interactions between coworking members as they worked, as well as during social events, helped me to home in on that. Additionally, comparing observations of participants' interactions with their responses to interview questions helped reveal any differences between participants' perceptions and their actions, as well as between what participants say they want out of their work generally or coworking specifically and what their actual behavior suggests. Thus, through these observations, I gained insights into the differences in resources and interactivity between each coworking space and the impact of these differences on individual members and the community within each space.

Additionally, by studying social interaction in coworking spaces and what people say about their interactions with others, I learned about the meaning participants attribute to the social aspect of their work lives. Although my interview questions do not use the term “community,” I anticipated that participants would mention or evoke this concept in their responses. As they often did, I asked follow-up questions to ascertain their understanding of the meaning of community, such as how it differs from network. Additionally, analyzing the language participants use to describe their views about social interaction or community helped reveal the values and priorities that undergird decisions about work and about what constitutes an ideal workplace; what they want out of their work lives; what distinctions they make between work life and social or home life; and the importance of community to deriving high levels of meaning from their work.

The questionnaire was administered on paper or online, after participants had completed their interviews. Additional paper questionnaires were administered at GCUC. In both cases, I did not ask for participants’ names. For interviewees only, I assigned a code to each interviewee to enter in a field in the online questionnaire. I sent interviewees this code when emailing them the link to the questionnaire. The questionnaire contains more sensitive items, such as questions about ethnicity, experiences with unemployment, and future plans. Because the questionnaire did not ask for participants’ names, it was presumed to give participants a greater sense of anonymity than a recorded interview, which some may have found more reassuring. Further, these written and online formats may have alleviated concerns participants may have had about potentially being overheard answering personal questions, particularly for interviews conducted in the coworking spaces.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND PROTECTIONS OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

In accordance with Vanderbilt University Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements and ethical standards for qualitative research, I sought informed consent for all interviews and questionnaires. Miller and Bell (2012) argue that what is meant by “informed” may change during research, as what the researcher and participants anticipated may differ from the result of the research. For this reason, they suggest that consent should be an ongoing and renegotiated process between researcher and participant (Miller and Bell 2012). Thus, I encouraged open communication with participants throughout the research process by making myself available to engage in discussions about the progress of the research and answer any questions as they arose. I also tried to ensure that participants understand that, although I may discuss my initial impressions with them and may even offer them the option of reviewing their own interview transcripts, I retain the responsibility of analyzing the data from a sociological lens. My objective in this approach was to promote informed consent; generate richer data through engaged participation; and to foster an open dialogue so that, even if participants do not agree with my final analysis and interpretations, they will still feel that the final research product adequately and fairly represents their values, perspectives, and actions.

I safeguarded confidentiality by securing identifying information with passwords and retaining it only as long as necessary (Babbie 2013; Berg 2001). I attempt to conceal the identity of participants to the greatest extent possible, as well, by using pseudonyms for each coworking space and all interviewees and study participants. For recognizable public figures, such as coworking space founders, whose identities may be more difficult to conceal, I made certain that they understood the possibility that pseudonyms alone may not ensure confidentiality. All coworking space founders I met at GCUC agreed to having their real names used in this dissertation; however, to comply with the IRB approval obtained for this research, all participants were assigned pseudonyms.

My primary concern was to protect participants from potentially negative consequences associated with participation. Since the coworking community is relatively small in Riverport, concealing participants' identity from others in the community took extra care. I also had to remain sensitive to the fact that participants may have employers whose views about work differ from theirs. So, protecting the identities of individuals who are not self-employed was particularly important. In general, to preserve confidentiality, I avoid describing distinctive physical features or other identifying characteristics.

Finally, I view as part of my responsibility as a researcher to give back to the communities where I conduct research and to the research participants themselves. As I conducted in-depth interviews, which entailed a considerable time commitment from respondents, I endeavored to make the interview process rewarding for participants. In addition to offering a small financial incentive, I hoped that offering participants an opportunity to discuss their views about and experiences with work would be meaningful for those who do not often contemplate the significance of their work lives, enjoyable for those who see positive impacts of coworking, and perhaps therapeutic for those who worry about the precarity of their employment. I was glad to receive comments from many interviewees that they enjoyed the interview process and felt that the questions I asked gave them an opportunity to reflect on issues they had not previously considered and on views that they had not previously put into words.

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

This project focuses on how individuals seek out and form community in a period of diminishing social engagement. More specifically, the research addresses how, within a context of a shift toward post-bureaucratic employment and increasingly precarious and isolating experiences of work, individuals cultivate meaningful connections through their work and how these social connections relate to and

influence their experience of working and what they want out of their work environment. The specific context in which I examine these questions is coworking spaces.

As a style of work in which workers work independently together, coworking is emblematic of both post-bureaucratic employment and individuals' desire for community. Additionally, as coworking represents a post-bureaucratic employment arrangement in which members typically work for different organizations and may or may not share the same occupation, it differs from the research settings typical of the literature on occupational communities. The definition of coworking community that guides my research agenda builds upon definitions of occupational community by Van Maanen and Barley (1984) and Salaman (1974): a group of people who regard themselves as doing similar work, for whom work is a central element of their self-concept, who share a set of norms and values, and whose [coworking] relationships and activities permeate their social, non-work lives. Building upon this definition, my conceptualization of the communities that form in coworking spaces involves three dimensions on which communities can vary: nature, quality, and strength.

Nature of Community

I conceive of the nature of coworking communities as a function of the occupational diversity within a community – in other words, the variety of occupational categories represented in coworking spaces. Building on Gusfield (1975), Van Maanen and Barley (1984) define the boundaries of an occupational community according to members' self-definitions; in other words, they consider an occupational community to be composed of individuals who consider themselves members of the same occupation, regardless of whether external accounts would group them under the same occupational category. Using this distinction, I ask participants to define their occupation and their work tasks, rather

than using extant occupational categories, as well as to compare the work they do with the work of other members in their coworking space.

Based on occupational diversity, the nature of a coworking community can be described as more *homogeneous* or *heterogeneous*. Rather than a dichotomous variable, I consider occupational diversity within coworking communities to fall along a scale from homogeneous to heterogeneous. More homogeneous communities consist of a significant majority of members who regard themselves as sharing the same occupation or major group of occupational categories as other members, such as web developers, programmers, and database administrators or related occupations such as web developers, technical writers, and graphic designers. In other words, members typically regard themselves as doing generally the same type of work as other members in their coworking space. More heterogeneous communities comprise a range of occupations, according to members' accounts, such as web developers, lawyers, and photographers. For members who consider themselves engaged in similar work, I also attend to the level of abstraction at which they claim a shared occupational category, that is, whether members are engaged in similar occupational tasks or work in a common industry (lower level), or whether the members share only their status as an independent worker (higher level). I examine how this level of shared status, in turn, influences the nature of the community and their shared experiences of work.

Quality of Community

The dimension of quality in this model is measured by the types of business-related interactions most common among members in the coworking space. This results in either an *affective* community, *instrumental* community, or a blend of the two: a *hybrid* community. As Chapter 5 examines in more depth, the key types of business-related interactions that occur in coworking spaces are collaboration,

feedback, guidance, instruction, and networking. In affective communities, feedback, guidance, and instruction tend to happen more frequently than collaboration and networking. The reverse is true in instrumental communities: collaboration and networking exceed feedback, guidance, and instruction. Hybrid communities strike more of a balance between all types of business-related interactions or fall somewhere in between. The distinction between network and community – explained further in Chapter 4 – also proves important to the quality of community.

Strength of Community

I consider the strength of coworking communities – *conflicting, cooperative, or cohesive* – to vary according to the degree to which community membership helps members to identify positively with and derive a high level meaning from their work, and enables members’ coworking relationships and activities permeate their non-work lives. I measured the relative strength of different coworking communities by calculating the net balance of positive interactions between members and negative interactions between members. What members regard as the values of coworking, the impact of coworking on their own values, and the roles of founders and members in making the space successful all factor strongly into assessing the strength of a coworking community.

In high strength communities, members feel a sense of ownership over the space and tend to maintain a more permeable boundary between their work and home lives. To illustrate, an indicator of a strong community would be members whose discursive practices (e.g., their style of dress, manner of speaking, social customs, etc.) reflect their community’s values, norms, and perspectives; extend into both their work and leisure activities; and influence how they interpret social phenomena outside the presence of other community members. In lower strength coworking communities, members tend to disagree on the social norms of the space (e.g., whether it is appropriate to drink during the day or acceptable limits

for the volume and length of telephone conversations in common areas of the space) and espouse disparate values about work and coworking. They are also unlikely to feel that coworking has impacted their own values.

Other concepts central to the study include *intentionality*, *types of resources*, and *interactivity*. I define *intentionality* as the extent to which coworking spaces form a deliberate community as opposed to a passive facility that offers shared resources, interpreting it as a function of the intentions, desires, and actions of both the founders and managers of a space and its existing members. *Types of Resources* can include both material resources (e.g., factors of production, architectural elements) and human resources (e.g., professional development, client referrals), and may be offered by the coworking spaces (formal) or by the coworking members (informal). *Interactivity* describes the extent to which coworking members regularly interact with others who work in the space.

TERMINOLOGY

In this dissertation, I use *founders* and *owners* somewhat interchangeably, as the people who found or co-found coworking spaces also usually own the coworking space. Ownership refers to the coworking space as a business entity or organization, but may also include the building in which it is housed. In the case of Cosite, the owner, or person running the space, was not the original founder of the space.

Coworking staff includes community managers and others compensated in some way for their work at the coworking space. In one case, staff included an intern, but staff members refer primarily to a community manager, alternately referred to as a concierge, operations manager, space manager, or a similar title. I use the term *community manager* to describe the role of those whose job is to tend to the

needs of the community members, greet prospective members, and foster connections between members, although different spaces may have different terms and associated duties.

The phrase *work environment* describes the general office space and set-up where one typically does their work. For instance, a remote worker's work environment might be a desk in a guest bedroom, outfitted with wireless internet, a laptop, and printer, with only a roommate or a spouse, kids, and pets around. Another worker's work environment might be a laptop at a table in a coffee shop, surrounded by other patrons. Thus, the phrase encompasses the physical environment, the people sharing that physical space, and the resources available in the space.

I use the term *coworkers* in its traditional sense, to describe work colleagues who are employed by the same organization. In contrast, I created the term *comembers* to describe members who work in the same coworking space, but not necessarily the same company or organization.

CODING AND ANALYSIS

To analyze the data from transcribed interviews, field notes, and questionnaires, I used the qualitative data management software Atlas.Ti and Microsoft Excel. Applying a version of Blee's (2012) data analysis strategy, I coded my data in Atlas.Ti using an iterative process. First, I used inductive codes derived from my own close readings of all my data to identify new themes and categories. Second, I compared the inductive codes to deductive codes gleaned from prior research on post-bureaucratic employment relations, meanings of work, and occupational communities, as well as existing information about coworking. I used these comparisons to think about overarching categories and relationships between themes, and recoded and adjusted categories, as I felt appropriate.

I then used those inductive categories, such as *collaboration* and *guidance*, to code my data using Excel tables and charts. For instance, I reviewed my coded interviews with members to document the incidence of each inductively derived category of interaction. Applying these frequencies, I then created measures for each of my conceptualizations: nature of community, quality of community, and strength of community. The discussion that follows is the result of these analyses.

Comparisons between coworking communities do not represent an evaluation or critique of their relative success as coworking spaces, but rather a sociological analysis of the words and actions of those in the spaces. As stated above, I paid close attention to my observations and interviewees' descriptions of interactions in the space. In my analyses, I also consider the effect of various coworking arrangements, including layout, location, design, activities, and resources. However, as with any qualitative field work, the data captured represent a moment in time. Coworking spaces and the communities within them are dynamic. They change as members leave and new members join. They grow and expand, rearrange their interiors, offer new resources, create different activities and events, and sometimes they close their doors. The coworking spaces where I conducted field work varied in many ways, as described more fully above and in subsequent chapters, and they changed over the course of my time in the field. While Alloy and ProShare were more established spaces, Cosite and Workmine had just opened when I started my field work there. Workmine had operated as a course provider before opening the coworking space, but Cosite was just getting off the ground and increasing its membership base. Consequently, Cosite was in the earliest stages of its development – both socially and physically⁸ – when I started my membership with them. Thus, evaluations about the nature, quality, and strength of these communities should not be

⁸ I began my membership at Cosite early in its development, during a soft launch, when the buildout of the space was still in progress, and there were not yet doors between the space and the hallway of the building. The founder was also still in the process of acquiring additional furniture for the space, such as standing-height desks, and determining the most appropriate furniture layout to best meet the needs of members.

viewed as immutable attributes of these individual spaces, but rather an analysis of the factors that influence coworking communities more generally.

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CHAPTER 2

MEMBERS' INTENTIONALITY: WHY WORKERS START COWORKING

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen a meteoric rise in the number of people who work remotely or in alternative employment arrangements, including contract workers, entrepreneurs, freelancers, full-time employees, and independent workers. Concomitant with these changes, waning job security and stability engender a broader employment environment characterized by rising risk and diminishing gains. Whereas scholars previously used job security to distinguish between “regular” and contingent work, recent workplace restructuring has made many regular jobs less secure, while alternative arrangements can prove more stable and long-term, making insecurity less useful as a means of classifying work arrangements (Cappelli and Keller 2013). Despite a lack of consensus around what constitutes a regular job or standard employment, scholars of work tend to agree that many features of the standard employment relationship (SER) predominating in the post-World War II period – a bilateral employment relationship; a standardized work schedule, usually full-time and at the employer’s place of business; collective bargaining rights; and a mutual expectation of continuous employment (Kalleberg 2013; Kalleberg, Reskin, and Hudson 2000) – have eroded in the contemporary era.

The rise of contingent, precarious employment has undermined key elements of the SER, as more workers – even in high-wage, professional occupations – become involved in the gig economy and part-time, temporary, remote, or other alternative work arrangements (De Stefano 2016; Ross 2009; Ruckelshaus, Smith, Leberstein, and Cho 2014; Smith 2001; Vosko 2011). Though contract, or gig, work may offer employers and workers more flexibility, it also presents greater risk and insecurity for

individual workers (Neff 2012; Osnowitz 2010). Further, whereas the SER was sustained in part by traditional gender roles and the conception of workers' membership in a community, changing employment relations and growing precarity have also impacted workers' families and communities, as the stresses of insecurity diffuse from the workplace into these domains (Kalleberg 2013; Webster, Lambert, and Bezuidenhout 2008). Although, as a group, independent and remote workers are comparatively privileged white collar or "creative class" (Florida 2012) workers, remote work can exacerbate the challenges of post-bureaucratic employment. Not only do these workers typically find themselves on their own in terms of locating sources of ongoing training, providing for their professional development, and demarcating the boundary between work and their private lives, but many also work alone, isolated from potential professional resources. Similarly, workers in the gig economy, along with other independent workers, lack access to many employment protections and benefits (Adams and Deakin 2014; De Stefano 2016), and those who work outside of traditional workplaces also work outside of the protection of occupational health and safety regulations (Friedman 2014). The restructured workplaces and increased precarity experienced by these workers have also coincided with a low point in collective bargaining (Drache, LeMesurier, and Noiseux 2015). Falling outside traditional employer-employee relationships – the foundation of the bulk of workplace protection statutes – these workers, thus, have diminished capacity to shield themselves from workplace abuses and limited recourse in the face of employment law violations (Carlson 2001; Cunningham-Parmeter 2016; Friedman 2014; Ruckelshaus, Smith, Leberstein, and Cho 2014; Stone 2004).

With a rise in alternative employment and gig work, previously full-time jobs are being divvied up into smaller and smaller parts or "microtasks" and contracted out to various specialists (Irani 2015). Technologies such as online crowdsourcing platforms and mobile apps for on-demand labor have enabled an increasingly scalable, "just-in-time" workforce (De Stefano 2016). With this increased commodification

of work and division of labor comes alienation and the potential for anomie (Durkheim [1893] 1984; Marx [1844] 2007). Although not confined to the gig economy, some features of independent work and on-demand labor may exacerbate the deleterious effects of commodification; for instance, a rise in virtual labor transactions and reduced human contact contribute to an increase in “invisible workers” (Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft 2014; De Stefano 2016; Irani 2015). Like the industrial era assembly line worker who spends his day repetitively making the same cog, today’s on-demand worker increasingly spends her day engaged in the same task, albeit for potentially several different employers. Whereas during the era of the Organization Man – when long-term employment was the norm, union membership was at its peak, and participation in religious or social clubs was higher – organizations provided regulation and social integration sufficient to guard against anomie, the post-bureaucratic era – of alternative employment arrangements, restructured workplaces, waning public engagement and club membership, individualized risk, reduced regulation, and rapid technological change – lacks such durable countervailing forces against anomie.

Within this context, coworking spaces emerged, offering access to resources and social interaction that so many independent and remote workers lack. What prompts these workers to seek a different work environment and to choose coworking spaces over other options? The section below expands upon the context and unique challenges faced by these workers, and frames the subsequent discussion in the chapter. This discussion centers on the intentionality of coworking members: the reasons these workers cite for choosing to join coworking spaces. It also includes members’ rationale for selecting particular spaces. The data in this chapter derive from in-depth interviews with coworking members, as well as my observations at four coworking spaces. The purpose of the discussion below is to typologize members’ reasons for coworking and to demonstrate how intentionality varies.

THE CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES OF REMOTE AND INDEPENDENT WORK

RATIONAL ACTION IN POST-BUREAUCRATIC WORKPLACES

During the era of the organization man (Whyte [1956] 2002), organizations were largely hierarchical, with a vertical organization structure built on increasing levels of knowledge and status. In exchange for status deference and a commitment to gaining knowledge (through training provided by the organization), workers could generally count on progressing in salary and responsibility the longer they worked in an organization. Moreover, their years spent working for one organization typically culminated in a pension that workers could depend on to support them during their retirement. As workers' loyalty to the organization was rewarded with professional and material benefits, loyalty to the organization was rational. Organizations' investments in their employees' career advancement was also rational, as organizations received returns on these investments in the form of limited employee turnover, organizational stability, and the retention of institutional knowledge.

As the stability of these organizational arrangements declined, so, too, did the implicit contract between workers and employers. Loyalty to an organization no longer ensured job security. Though still obliged to build their knowledge and competence in order to progress in their careers, workers could no longer depend on receiving the necessary training from their organizations, nor a commensurate increase in pay and responsibility if they stayed with an organization. To survive in a less secure working environment and to ensure continued progression on their career paths, workers had to look out for their own professional development by changing companies when necessary to gain new training, experience, and opportunities. Complete loyalty to an organization was no longer rational; instead, investment in one's own competence and expertise became more rational. For organizations, flexibility to hire and fire as needed became more rational, transferring more risk onto workers.

Loyalty between workers and their organizations has not dissolved completely, though. Organizations continue to demand a certain degree of loyalty from their workers. Hanson and O'Donohue (2010: 103) suggest the term “organizationality” to describe the “attributes, skills, knowledge, and willingness to make mind/body compromises” (such as working long hours) that contemporary organizations require of workers, and loyalty remains one such attribute. For instance, workers must at least not reveal insider information and so must put their organization's success above other organizations'. However, post-bureaucratic organizations do not offer the same rewards in exchange for loyalty that organizations once did. When their organization no longer reciprocates that loyalty, workers now “must be willing and able to change firms, and may do so if they feel like it” (Hanson and O'Donohue 2010: 103). Post-bureaucratic workers may be loyal to organizations only insofar as they perceive themselves to be economically dependent on them. Their loyalty may, thus, relate inversely to the acquisition of new skills and experience: once they have acquired new skills and abilities sufficient to make them marketable for new opportunities, their loyalty may wane.

RISK

The economic restructuring of the last quarter of a century, which transformed the workplace from one of stability and predictability in which loyalty and seniority accrued benefits, to one of flexibility and risk in which recent performance and continually-assessed value added to the company figure most prominently in job remuneration and security, has also resulted in increased employee anxiety and competition among peers (Putnam 2000). As Putnam (2000: 90) argues,

All these structural changes in the workplace – shorter job tenure, more part-time and temporary jobs, and even independent consultancy – inhibit workplace-based social ties. Three quarters of all independent contractors have no regular work colleagues. ... Friendships at work decrease with job instability, even when the job changes are voluntary.

As noted above, flexibility for employers has generally equated to more risk for employees. However, entrepreneurs and independent workers in particular may benefit from the type of flexibility that coworking spaces offer. Flexible membership options with short-term contracts, mostly month-to-month, can help these workers better manage the risk inherent in their work. For instance, those engaging in contract- or gig-based labor can choose to pay for membership while they need it. When they do not have as many current projects, they can choose to reduce their membership to a lower level or suspend their membership if needed. Entrepreneurs and small business owners can adjust their membership as their companies develop. They may start with two part-time memberships, for example, and then expand to a shared table or private office as they hire more employees.

As the social capital that accrues in communities and social networks often translates into economic capital (Bourdieu 1980, 1985), coworking communities can help members realize financial benefits. For instance, coworking enables members to pool resources and reduce the start-up costs of entrepreneurship and independent work. When asked about the resources most valuable to coworking members, Owen, founder of Cosite, mentioned cost savings as one of the resources. He provided this illustrative example:

So, I'd say there's very obvious tangible benefits, that's, when you do share resources, there's always a win, right? So, the copier, printer, scanner, coffee and tea, even sharing Wi-Fi, electricity, insurance, all that stuff allows me to charge you less than you would pay to get those same things. So, there's that group buy-in aspect. I think that's a very, very tangible benefit.

Somebody was talking to me about if they get to 10 people [they would leave the coworking space]. So, I realized that I have an extreme opinion, but if I have a 10-person team, I still want to work out of a coworking space. I mean, some people see that as kind of crazy. Some people would say, at that point, you really should...some people say, coworking's a transitional period for a business. I disagree. I think it's a, not a life style choice, but a work style choice.

If I have 10 people for [my company], I want them in that space, because we are able to get more space, more resources, more opportunities, just by being a part of a coworking space with other businesses. I don't have to work next to you. You can go work off with, maybe even friends, from other businesses. Maybe you get different perspectives, different ideas, those are more of the intangibles. And I think that's what is even more valuable than pure cost.

But if you look at pure cost... So, somebody said, if I have 10 people, I'm going to have to move out of here, and I've actually convinced them. They're planning on building their company still in [Cosite], because we went through it, and they said, "well I need 1,000 square feet for 10 people, probably. And I was like, "okay, that's going to cost you 1,500 a month roughly. In [Riverport], who knows? Good luck finding it for \$1,500.00. So, then you're paying \$1,500 a month.

You're not talking about electricity, you're not talking about gas, insurance. You're going to have to have insurance if it's a business. Coffee, and then we're not even talking about, you have to buy, upfront costs, so you've got a fridge, microwave, things like that. You're already at, past \$2,000 a month for your 10 people, which is actually going to end up being about the same, probably even more than what you're going to pay to be a part of [Cosite]. So, pure cost I think is a real tangible benefit.

But the intangible is the different perspectives. Other examples of that are we're more of a marketing, consulting, strategy company. We do websites. It's not our...it's more of a means to an end for us, but we hit a hurdle one day where we didn't know how to do something with a WordPress website. Well, there's a WordPress development company in [Cosite]. Yeah, so I thought about it, and I was like, you know I know I can find this answer. It's probably going to take me around 10 hours to figure it out, because I'm going to go on Google, I'm going to read through forums. I'm going to try all these different things. I really think around 10 hours.

But, I went over to them, and I was like, "This is my hurdle. I'm trying to figure this out. What are your thoughts?" They could've easily pointed me in the right direction, which would've saved me time, but typically I'm finding people are actually willing to do what they did, which was spend 15 minutes and actually help me do it. That's a huge time save, 10 hours. I mean, maybe I'm a \$15.00 an hour employee. I'd like to think I'm more but, okay, so \$15.00, that's \$150.00 that you just saved, purely by being in that space with somebody who is more skilled at a different need that you had that day. That's not your everyday need; it's a very specific one.

Other intangibles are the events and resources that you're talking about. So, as we continue to grow, we'll have more events, because people want to be a part of that community that we're building here. They think the culture's cool and the representation of all of these different businesses and industries is valuable to them. So, we also have people talking to us about building mentorship, investments, things like that, which you wouldn't get by being in the corner office of this building or that. They're purely interested in [Cosite] because of that collectiveness.

By starting and growing their company in a coworking space, start-ups and small businesses can avoid many of the upfront costs associated with starting a business, while benefitting from the coworking space's shared physical resources, like printers, scanners, coffee, and even infrastructure like Wi-Fi and electricity. Coworking spaces enable the pooling of human resources, as well. Members benefit from having access to comembers with skills and expertise relevant to their work, potentially saving them time and money.

In this way, coworking may represent a strategy for collectivizing or re-socializing risk in an era of individualized risk and precarity. In *Beyond the Beat*, Cornfield (2015) demonstrates how “artist activists” manage the risky, increasingly entrepreneurial art-making era by constructing occupational peer communities that help to socialize and minimize risk for themselves and their fellow musicians.

Cornfield (2015: 4-5) explains it this way:

In Durkheimian terms, reconstituting a post-bureaucratic community of artists entails the development of a new “social solidarity” or sense of togetherness based in a simplifying occupational division of labor. In a community built around a complex division of labor of occupational specialists, “organic social solidarity” was achieved from the interdependence among specialists. In contrast, “mechanical social solidarity” was achieved in a community based on an occupational sameness that prevailed in a simple occupational division of labor.⁹ In Nashville, artist activists are creating a “mechanically solidary” community of entrepreneurial artists alongside and partly from the ranks of an older, organically solidary corporate-era artist community. Nashville entrepreneurial musicians constitute themselves as a community by producing and performing for one another, showing up to each others’ showcases, and extending mutual aid during trying moments in their lives.

Coworking members similarly extend mutual assistance and support to one another. Owen recounted how members of Cosite attended a talk by their comember, Justine. When describing the culture of coworking, he had this to say:

Very much community. So, I’m always telling people, make sure you introduce yourself to other members. If you can pass business, pass business. If you can help each other, help each other. If you can support each other, support each other. So, if somebody has an event, go to it. So, [Justine] is one of our members. ... She did a talk at [a program for entrepreneurs]. ... Her and her business partner... were doing a talk last Wednesday. So, a few of the members [from Cosite] went to her talk and she told me, she was like, multiple times, she was like, “It meant so much that you guys came.” And I was like, “of course, we would come see you talk.” I wanted to hear what she was learning, talking about, and I knew it would be important to her. So, obviously I was going to go.

And I think it’s easier, that’s again that corporate versus coworking. In a coworking space, it’s all very open-minded. Most of them are self-employed. Some of them work for businesses that are very open-minded, so they have that flexibility to go on a Wednesday morning versus, “Oh, I have to be at the office. I have to be doing this.” Maybe they have to work an extra hour later into the evening or whatever, but that’s always a possibility with coworkers at coworking space to do stuff like that.

⁹ Émile Durkheim, *Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Free Press, 1964 [orig. 1893])

This flexible, supportive, caring culture produces solidarity and a workplace community¹⁰ that helps insulate workers from the consequences of risk, precarity, and isolation common in remote work and the gig economy. For instance, working around other independent workers seems to help some members grow more comfortable with risk. Teresa spoke about this benefit when asked about how her work had been affected by the other people at Workmine. She commented:

Oh, it's definitely affected. I've noticed definitely, since my main focus in info-graphics, I have a sort of data background, I have the stuffier background. I always have had a tendency to keep things very organized and not too risky and I think just talking to other people and seeing what they're doing and hearing how excited they are to try crazy new things it just makes me feel a lot more comfortable with, well why don't I just try something crazy, like what's the worst that can happen? I know I definitely work faster, and I don't know why that is. I guess it's just because I focus.

Teresa had made a big move from another city at the same time she decided to quit her job and go freelance. She spoke about sharing information with other members and gaining a different perspective on risk as she was around comembers doing similar things:

I see lots of people around me who've also either gone part-time or quit their job or they have a job and they're doing something else entirely in addition to it or starting their own thing or whatever, who've all kind of taken these risks doing totally different things and it's working out. It might not be the fastest thing for everybody, but the world hasn't opened up and swallowed me whole. So, I guess the more that happens the more I realize, okay, it's nothing to panic about.

Although coworking does not completely protect independent workers from risk, the flexibility coworking spaces typically offer in terms of membership options, combined with a community of workers with similar experiences, may provide these workers with effective strategies for coping with and managing risk.

¹⁰ Chapter 4 will consider in more depth the kind of community that emerges in these spaces.

VISIBILITY

Whereas attendance and work effort are easily visible to managers in bureaucratic employment arrangements, “in a post-bureaucratic workplace, effort and attendance would turn on personal choice” (Sengupta, Edwards, and Tsai 2009: 48). Coworking members often cite flexible work hours and the freedom to come and go as primary benefits of coworking. This type of flexibility is often most available to either those who manage their own work (i.e., solo-preneurs, entrepreneurs, or business owners) or those who work remotely from managers. Yet, those who work remotely can struggle with making their work effort visible to their off-site managers.

Many remote workers relish the freedom of being away from the watchful eye of managers and feeling, in a sense, like their own boss. William – a remote worker who has previously worked in coffee shops, a “cubicle farm office,” his home, and his colleague’s home – enjoys the flexibility and autonomy of coworking. Asked how those various workspaces compare to working at Workmine, he explained:

This is my favorite, I think. I completely don’t enjoy the cubicle experience. No shock there. I’m like a raging creative type, you know, just like, doesn’t like rules, doesn’t like boundaries, freedom, like... My company’s really good about letting me be very, what’s the word? Autonomous. It’s like... like on projects they’re like, “Here’s the client, here’s the brief, here’s the budget. Go do it.” You know, it’s kind of like I’m a one-man show sometimes. So, the autonomy is good for me. I like to be able to... I have, like, the perks of being my own boss here. I feel like a lot of people are their own bosses, but I’m technically not. So, I can have the perks of that. Like, I don’t check into an office, I don’t punch a time card.

Although he has a boss who works in another city, by working remotely from a coworking space, he benefits from the “perks” of being his own boss. When asked to expand on what it means to have the perks of being his own boss, without actually being his own boss, he elaborated: “I don’t have someone looking over my shoulder, like, physically looking over my shoulder.”

While some workers may feel more monitored or micromanaged by their bosses when they work, many express that working in the same office as one’s manager and coworkers can alleviate a lot of the

pressure of having to prove one's productivity, or work effort. When in the office, their physical presence is often enough for managers to know they are working. Workers collocated with their bosses may, thus, feel less pressure to show their bosses and teams they are working and are available for collaboration or questions. Conversely, while working remotely, workers must exert extra effort to demonstrate their productivity, or show that they are working at all times. Workers must find ways to illustrate that they do indeed work when working remotely, even though their managers cannot physically see them working.

In this way, working remotely can bring more stress about appearing productive than working in a traditional office. When working in an office, workers can readily demonstrate they are at work and working, while also seeing firsthand that their coworkers do not “work” every minute of the day while at the office. For instance, Landon, a Web designer and member at Alloy, expressed surprise at how little it seemed like his onsite coworkers worked in relation to the amount of work he felt pressure to engage in when working from home. Asked what surprised him about the experience when he first began coworking, he explained:

That was actually the first time that I started working full-time, so some of the surprises were just work, full-time working things. I was surprised at how long eight hours was to work. And then like I've said, whenever I go to [my onsite office] to work, I'm surprised at how much less it seems like everyone else is working. They work hard, and they're not being lazy or whatever, but just by being in the office with everyone, going to lunch, just diversions around the office, whenever I'm there, I always feel, always...let me rephrase that. Whenever I'm home, I'm always worried that I'm not being productive enough, but whenever I'm there, I feel no worries about whether I'm productive enough at home.

In contrast, when working remotely, workers often feel compelled, either by their bosses' prodding or their own internalized anxieties, to show they are working every minute they are expected to be “at work.”

Many could satisfy their managers' need, or their perceived need, for visibility into their work effort through technology-mediated means of demonstrating their online availability or communicating with team members. Landon, for example, showed he was “at work” by logging onto HipChat, an online

messaging and virtual collaboration program his company uses. He explained how this satisfied the requirements of his managers, while also contributing to a sense of pressure to be “on”:

Like I said, we work on HipChat and the way HipChat work is, there’s a little green light next to your name if you’re online, there’s an orange light next to your name if you’re idle and you’re like, and then it’s off if you’re off. So, I feel like everyone – it’s not true, but – I feel like everyone’s looking at that light, and if it’s not green, everyone’s wondering what the heck I could possibly be doing. So, there’s this pressure to always be available and always be online that isn’t really there when you’re in the office.

He also feels the need to work longer hours when others in his company are online, especially because his company is located in another time zone. When working remotely, Landon feels more pressure to display he is working by keeping the light next to his name on HipChat green, indicating he is online and active, a pressure he does not feel when onsite with his company. Although he likes his current company and enjoys the freedom and flexibility of remote work, his ideal working situation for his next job would entail going to the office every day and working face-to-face with his boss and coworkers. Landon explains why:

I think part of it, honestly, kind of with a small, a minor thing that I mentioned earlier with being on HipChat and wanting people to see that I’m online or whatever. That’s actually a larger source of anxiety for me than it probably should be. I don’t actually think people care that much, but there’s this kind of pressure. ... I’ll sometimes feel like I should stay later...even if I’m at a stopping point or I don’t have a ton of work to do, just to keep that green light on long enough.

I feel like if I were in an office it would be clearer, because a lot of times, like at [Alloy], people look... like, you always look like you’re working so hard¹¹. Or, when I’m at [my company’s office], people will see that [I’m working]. So, I think it would be a little more comfortable for me at this point to actually be in the office and not have to deal with all these peripheral non-work things that get associated with it, because I’m remote.

For Landon, digital communications technology enabled the freedom to choose his work location, away from the physical presence of his managers and their supervision. As he could receive project requirements and complete and submit his work online, Landon did not need to work in the office with

¹¹ Landon and I sat in view of each other at Alloy, which offers assigned desks for members. In this quote, “you” refers to me, the author.

his bosses and coworkers. His bosses agreed to his remote work, in part, because they could keep in touch with him over HipChat, a program their company already used. However, the online program that facilitated remote work also facilitated remote management supervision. With online tools that enable panoptic surveillance of employees' virtual presence, managers can perhaps more readily trust that their employees will work even when not actively observed, because employees' online presence is always *able to be* observed. For Landon, this sense that his presence and work engagement was always observable to his managers and coworkers served to enforce his continual online availability and work engagement. In this way, the trust necessary for remote work is perhaps tentative and predicated on the continual display, real or perceived, of physical proof of remote work effort.

While some remote workers I spoke with, like Landon, perceived continuous digital surveillance, others expressed that their managers seemed not to think about them until they needed something or until someone in their off-site office mentioned their name. At these times, if managers could not get ahold of their employees, they would sometimes assume they were not working, rather than that they were at lunch or some other reason they might have thought of and allowed if the employee were on-site. Although not constant, these were moments of anxiety for their managers that these workers had to figure out how to deal with effectively. Keira, for instance, mentioned issues she had when she first began working remotely for her company. She found that some of the digital tools her company now uses for keeping workers in contact with each other, like Google Hangouts, has helped. Asked about whether her manager expects her to keep a regular schedule, Keira explained some of the challenges she has dealt with:

Keira: Generally. I know my boss's shtick was "I don't care when my employees are working or where they're working, just as long as they get the work done." But when it came down to it, if somebody was like, "Where's [Keira]?" he would get very stressed out and be texting me, "Where are you? Where are you?" And like, "I'm on my lunch break. It's 12 o'clock." So yeah, that can be a little unnerving, but usually, rarely has that ever happened where it's actually been an urgent issue or an issue at all. It's just, like, that they tried and they can't get in touch with you.

Sandra: So they stress out a little bit?

Keira: Yeah. And the funny thing about that is that I may just be sitting right there [in front of my laptop], but focused on something. You're developing and you don't want to drop everything, because you'll have to start over. So yeah, so it's really not much different. It's just the perception.

Sandra: How do you manage that?

Keira: Just soothing words to my supervisor. You know, it's doing my best to check in and actually alerting people when I do have an appointment or I'm heading out for lunch or I'm going to work later tonight and right now I'm a little distracted. That sort of thing. I've grown a lot with that over time, being very clear and direct about my schedule.

Some workers, like Keira, deal with their managers' anxiety by establishing regular meetings or "check-ins" with their managers, while others relied on shared web services, like Basecamp, Slack, or HipChat, which indicate when they are online.

The degree to which workers must manage the tension between freedom from manager oversight (or micromanagement, in some cases) seems to vary greatly according to how well-established remote work is in their company. Members like William, who works for a company with a large number of remote workers, may have a smoother experience working remotely, as their managers and coworkers are generally accustomed to using digital tools like Slack or conducting meetings via online hangout spaces. In contrast, Keira and Landon had to create their own systems for checking in with managers.

When discussing how his coworking space, Alloy, compared to other places he has worked, Landon mentioned the impact of being the sole remote worker at his company. He enjoys working at his company's main office, but feels somewhat alienated from the culture of his workplace community as a remote worker:

I pretty much feel the same about [my company's main office] as I do about Alloy: I feel pretty comfortable. In terms of the actual space itself, I think I tend to enjoy being in [my company's main location] a little bit more just because I think that really has more to do with the fact that I work remotely for a company where no one else works remotely. So, there is a real distinct culture and attitude in the way people relate to each other that I'm not really a part of because I'm remote.

Although his company "is really awesome; they are very accommodating and really friendly," he still finds that "practically, it's just hard being the only remote worker, and I'm not the kind of person that's

going to ask them to change a ton of things to make things easier for me, because it would really only make things easier for *me*.” Although disinclined toward asking for broad changes to his own company’s processes for solely his own benefit, Landon has seen examples of how remote workers can be better incorporated into company culture through standard processes that encourage more regular communication between remote and onsite staff:

I think other companies that I’ve looked at who’ve done remote [work] really successfully, they have it kind of figured out, because they have tons of remote workers, maybe even they’re primarily remote, or some aren’t primarily remote but they still act remote. Like, when they have team meetings, everyone’s meeting in Google Hangouts, even if people are in the office, which I think is a really cool idea, and based on my experience is maybe a better way to handle it.

Thus, companies that have many remote workers often have institutionalized work processes and communication methods that facilitate the inclusion of offsite workers.

Technology-mediated communication

Regardless of how proficient their managers and coworkers may be with digital communications applications, the majority of remote workers must rely on these technologies to communicate with off-site workers and managers. Many workers I spoke with contrasted technology-mediated communication and in-person communication with coworkers and comembers. Yet, even when they find these processes helpful for communicating with managers and coworkers, some remote workers find them more cumbersome than in-person communication. A common feeling was that technology tended to formalize communication, whereas face-to-face conversations could be formal or informal.

Landon disclosed that there are instances when he would much rather have a quick in-person conversation than a technology-mediated conversation. When asked how coworking might constrain his ability to get what he wants out of work, Landon spoke about the contrast between in-person and technology-mediated communication. He had this to say:

The main way it constrains is with communication. There are aspects of what I do that rely on clarity and conversation with other people, and I'm reasonably comfortable doing that when I'm visiting [my company's office]. I don't mind asking someone to talk to them or go to them, but it just feels...all remote communication feels more formal, so whether it's email or even like a [Google] Hangout, it's a thing we had to schedule and all that.

So, the one thing that I haven't actually talked about as much is sometimes... dialogues can feel kind of strained. For instance, I had a circumstance a while back where a meeting was scheduled a week from this day, and I knew that I was going to be busy at that particular moment at that day. It was like three o'clock or whatever. Just some random thing had come up. I wasn't going to be losing time working or whatever, but it was just going to be hard for me to be in that one particular meeting. So, I emailed my boss about it, trying to...First, I called my boss about it. I didn't really get anything. And, then, emailed him, and then whatever. And, by the time he finally got back to me, it was "we're not going to be able to change that thing." And, I don't know what his attitude was, but the tone of it felt like he thought it was impertinent of me, or not...he thought that maybe I shouldn't have been persistent in asking about this thing. Whereas if I'd been in the office, when I got the email about the event, I probably would've just shouted out, like literally shouted, like, "hey, can we change the time of that thing, because I've got this thing?" And, so, the way that email is formalized, is all online communication just makes it harder to have the type of beneficial dialogues that aren't necessarily as formal.

In this way, Landon feels that information and communications technologies that facilitate remote work also create constrain workers' ability to communicate in the way they prefer or to adapt their means of communication to the situation. Technology-mediated communication creates a social distance that tends to formalize conversations. As remote work relies primarily on online communication, Landon feels that the formality of these tools impedes his ability to have "beneficial dialogues" with his manager or team when necessary.

Other workers regularly use online communications and project management tools for their work and find that they offer a more efficient means of communicating and collaborating with coworkers.

Connor, a member of ProShare, describes his work as a Web developer, which involves mostly independent, self-directed work:

Connor: Basically, my whole workday revolves around typing out computer code for making websites mostly. A lot of it is, we have a communication board online, it's this forum called GitHub. Through that, my employer and our clients. I'm a contractor; [and] I work for a contractor, and he has clients. And the clients and my boss put a lot of assignments up, requirements for what needs to happen on the site, next steps to take, things like that. So, I just go through very methodically, and pick out a chunk of work that I want to knock out and go code all that. That could take anywhere from an hour to a week, just depending on the particular assignment. So, it's mostly just computer code going back from my indecipherable

gibberish back to the web browsers to see what it all looks like. That's basically it, not a huge deal of variety. ...

Sandra: Who do you typically interact with?

Connor: It's mostly pretty solitary. Sometimes, I'll interact with people around me [at ProShare], or if I'm going to refill my coffee, I might have a really brief conversation. For the most part, it's pretty solitary.

Connor works primarily from ProShare, remote from his manager and coworker, who work in another coworking space in town. He joins them about two to three times a week at their coworking space, Flex-Exec. Yet even when collocated with his team, he typically chooses to use online tools to communicate. When asked about his interactions with his boss at Flex-Exec, he explained his typical communication with coworkers and clients:

Connor: Yeah, that's a few days a week [at Flex-Exec], two or three days a week, and then I'll interact with my boss. I have a small handful of other coworkers who work for my employer, as well, and we'll pretty much only see each other when we go to the office.

Sandra: So, you don't have to collaborate with them to get your work done?

Connor: No, and when we do, it's mostly online anyway. Even when we *are* working in the same office, we're usually doing more of a chat online kind of setup, not to be unsocial, but just because it's more efficient just to post data and post "we need to get this, this, and this done," rather than saying it verbally and someone trying to remember things, and they're going to forget things. So, it's far more communicative just to post it online and say, "hey, I just posted this thing online and you might want to check it." For the most part, it can be a kind of solitary job, so I welcome the human interaction part whenever it comes in. And, actually, maybe once a month, I'll meet with our clients that are hiring us out, and they'll give us feedback on what we're doing, and say what they want to see next.

Some workers, like Connor, find online communications channels more efficient for daily work, regardless of where they are working from. Others, like Landon, feel that in-person communication can often be more efficient.

Like Keira, Landon made an effort to communicate more regularly with his manager. He felt this was especially important because of the nature of his work, as his work products tended to belie the amount of work effort they required.

Sandra: You mentioned Google Hangouts. Are there other sorts of things that you could change that would make you feel more integrated as a remote worker?

Landon: Yeah, I think part of it is just more regular communication. I kind of have this tendency to hole up and not really, I don't know, if left to my own devices I think I wouldn't share my work very often, I wouldn't share my process or whatever and I wouldn't reach out for communication a lot. And I think maybe a little bit of that is the nature of the work that I do, but also a lot of that is just my own personality and it would be helpful for me to talk to people more and get feedback and stuff. So, I find when I do that, like the past couple of days I've had short Hangouts with my project manager and it's been helpful for the stuff I'm working on and it's also been helpful, well let me try to figure out if I can break it down for you.

It's been helpful for the stuff that I'm working on because she gets to see that I'm making progress and I get to, sometimes if I don't really communicate very well for the few days or for a week then I feel a lot of pressure for the next thing I show to look like I did a lot of work. And sometimes that's almost contrary to design because you're looking for a solution that is elegant and isn't necessarily super clever or whatever, but just almost seems obvious when you get there, you know?

Sandra: So, it kind of hides the amount of work that went into it, [being] more simple and clean?

Landon: Yeah, exactly. I mean, there's a certain, especially interface design, you don't really want to design something that someone looks at and says, "wow, that designer must've worked super hard on this." You don't want them to think about *you* when they're doing whatever they're doing. You just want them to be able to think about their task.

So, anyway, regular updates with her take some of that pressure off me, gets her to see what I'm thinking about and the progress I'm making and all that. And then it also just, it makes it easier on both of us for that reason, is what I'm saying.

Because the nature of his work tends to conceal work effort, Landon deals with an exacerbated lack of visibility, in addition to that inherent in remote work. By communicating with his manager more regularly, Landon could compensate for the lack of both types of work visibility.

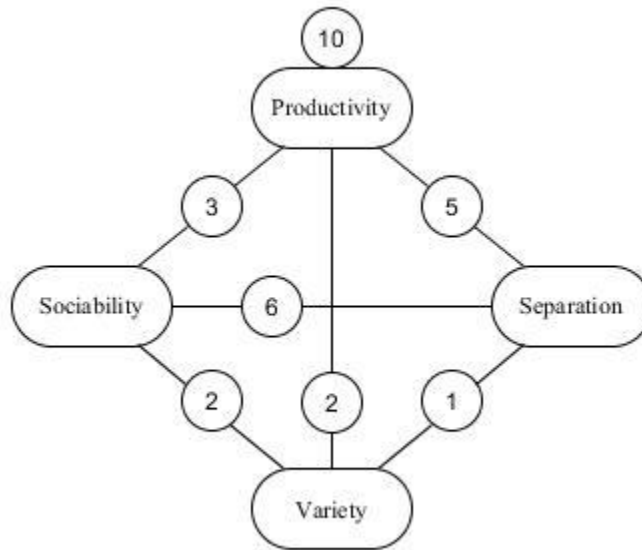
For Keira, this lack of visibility had positives and negatives: she noticed she was given less "busy work" and, therefore, benefited from more time to focus on her own projects. On the other hand, she may have had reduced access to opportunity, as managers might have thought of her less for projects simply because they saw her less often. For Landon, the lack of visibility was more a source of anxiety, as he worried about having to demonstrate to his boss that he was working. Although they both worked for companies that use online communications tools like HipChat, they both were initially the sole remote workers in their respective companies. While coworking cannot solve all the problems independent and remote workers deal with, having access to reliable internet and quiet spaces to work can help.

WHY WORKERS CHOOSE TO START COWORKING

TYOLOGY OF MEMBERS' INTENTIONALITY

Based on in-depth interviews with coworking space members in four different coworking spaces, I found that workers' reasons for choosing to start coworking fell into four main categories of member intentionality. In order of frequency, these include: productivity (17), sociability (10), separation (9), and variety (3). The connecting lines in the diagram below illustrate cooccurrence between the reasons. For example, the line connecting productivity and sociability indicates that some members who cited productivity as a reason for coworking also sought sociability. The circles on those lines designate the frequency of cooccurrence, so that the number "5" on the line between productivity and separation, for example, signifies that five people cited both productivity and separation between work and home as reasons why they started coworking. For members who cited only one reason (ten total), that reason was always productivity and professionalism, illustrated by the number "10" in the figure below.

FIGURE 2.1: RELATIONSHIPS AMONG MEMBERS' INTENTIONALITY



Productivity includes reasons for coworking such as wanting a workspace where they could focus on work and be more productive, wanting to work in a more professional space than a home office or a coffee shop, and choosing to work in the same space as one's employer or colleague. Sociability predominantly refers to members' desire to quell the sense of isolation they experienced in remote or independent work. Separation, a reason most commonly cited by those who previously worked from home, reflects a wish for greater separation between work and home. Lastly, variety expresses the need for variation and flexibility in one's workplace or a different way of working. In the sections below, I discuss in greater detail these categories and their impact on coworking communities.

SOCIABILITY: COMBATING ISOLATION

Remote workers, who do not have onsite coworkers and most often worked from home or a coffee shop prior to coworking, most often indicate that they started coworking to combat isolation or

loneliness. Particularly for workers who previously worked at home, coworking offers interaction and a group of coworkers to get to know on a deeper level. One member of ProShare, who had formerly worked from home, coffee shops, and a private office in a sublet condominium, felt that working in a coworking space made her feel less isolated. When asked how she thought coworking had impacted her work, Summer spoke of social interaction:

My first thought is [coworking] just makes me a little more upbeat, and it helps me not feel so isolated in my work. Because in the past I had to kind of depend on setting up lunch dates. I don't set up as many lunch dates as I used to with my friends, which is not easy because not that many people have schedules as flexible as me. So, in the past I used to joke, that my friends are people that can go out to lunch in the middle of the day. Because it's like, I take breaks and I'm like, 'oh, [I] want to do something fun. Who's free on a Tuesday at 3:00 or whatever?' Yeah, I don't feel as isolated in my work, because before I had to kind of depend on, especially even before I got into real estate, when's my next program, where I'll have a lot of people gathered in one room together, to get some of that work social interaction. And it's like, here, any day that I show up it's available."

As she works in the real estate industry and as an entrepreneur, before Summer had started coworking and particularly before she had onsite coworkers, much of her day involved independent work. She had to seek interaction outside of work during social engagements with friends. Coworking provided her the opportunity for more social interaction at work, thereby alleviating the isolation she experienced working from home or even coffee shops.

Even members who do not routinely engage in conversation with their comembers enjoy having people around them while they work. Comembers change the work environment for them. Landon, at Alloy, reported that he "wanted to be around people," because "I don't talk to people all the time there, but it's nice to have people there, and you don't feel like you've been holed up in a room all day."

Similarly, Emily, a member with a private office at ProShare, commented that she enjoyed having people around, even if she tended to keep mostly to herself:

So, it's nice to be able to live closer to where I'm working, work in a place that has younger people, and I don't really do anything very exciting, but I know a lot of people are very creative here. I mean my work's not creative, but it's just nice to be able to be surrounded by stuff that feels a little bit more like energetic rather than a bunch of grumpy people that aren't interested. ...

Even though I don't have coworkers, I don't have people dropping in saying "oh, how was your weekend?" And I'm not super friendly so I don't really necessarily know a lot of people, but the people that I've seen repetitively I've started to kind of say hello to. So, kind of makes that a little bit more, a little bit... Like, someone like me who I just kind of to keep to myself and do my own stuff, it's nice to be able to see the same faces, and have people be friendly and things like that. Like the guy across the way and [Izzy] and [Summer] next door, they've both been here since I moved in, I think. So, seeing the same people, it creates kind of a nice buffer for me, instead of kind of just walling in and not speaking to anyone. Or being in a coffee shop where people are doing work that's totally different than me and they're literally right next to me. And so, I'm like, I don't really want to listen to you writing songs to my data analysis. This feels silly. So, it's nice to have a buffer, but to still feel moderately connected, even if it is just symbolically.

Emily enjoyed having comembers around while she worked, but she also made a clear distinction between comembers and people in a coffee shop. Chapter 4 will explore that theme – the distinction between coffee shops and coworking spaces – in more depth. It merits noting here, though, that when members talk about having people around them while they work, they most often mean people engaged in similar work or people who they could reasonably approach to engage in conversation if they desired.

For members who described themselves as introverted, coworking spaces felt like a "safe" way to be around other people. They could choose whether and how much to interact with comembers on any given day. William explained how, although the impetus behind his starting to cowork in the first place was to gain some distance from home, as his wife also worked from home, he also viewed coworking as a "social experiment" for him. He expressed it this way:

This is also a little bit of a social experiment for me, because I'm very much an introvert. So, I was just finding myself a little holed up. So, this is kind of like a way to get out and work with other people rather than just starting at a computer by myself all day.

I asked how he thought his introversion affected his experience at Workmine. He reflected:

I don't know. I feel like a lot of people here are probably on the introvert scale. A lot of people aren't, of course. But I feel like [Workmine] hasn't just like compiled a bunch of extroverts who want to hang out. You know, I don't feel like that's happened. I feel like a lot of people in the creative industry especially, are probably introverts.

Maybe I'm wrong, but I feel like a lot of the people I work with are introverts. So, I don't know. I kind of feel like it's a safe place for an introvert, if that makes sense. Like, you can come and put your headphones on and stare at your screen, and your experience is generally the same, but also if you want to have those moments where you branch out and talk to other people, it's not like going to a party where you've got to

be social for four hours. It's like you kind of have your spot, and you can go back and forth, and I feel like it's a safe introvert spot.

And then as you get to know people and meet people, like, you know, I'll talk to [Tom], or I'll talk to you, or I'll talk to you know, people, and I know a lot more names and faces than I do now, so... I'm not like a capital I introvert, but I'm like a maybe 60/40, 70/30 type. So, like, I like getting out and seeing people, but it's like, I do have to make that initial push, personally.

For more introverted members, coworking can provide a “safe” place to “push” themselves to socialize a bit more, without forcing them to interact more than they feel comfortable with.

PRODUCTIVITY AND PROFESSIONALISM

Entrepreneurs and freelancers, most of whom have onsite coworkers, more often cite productivity or professional reasons as the motivation for choosing to start coworking. They may want a more professional space to meet clients or simply a place to focus on work away from distractions. Dana and her business partner, Valerie, founded a music management company. They had previously worked from home and sometimes coffee shops. As their business grew, they needed a more professional space, a “neutral zone,” where they could meet clients and be more productive than they felt they had been at home. Valerie commented:

We weren't as efficient with our time [at home]. We were working really, really long hours when we were working out of our house, because it was comfortable and we could take longer to make lunch or kind of get cozy on the couch and just sit there for hours. And then we also wanted to invite people over for meetings and have conference meetings, and it was just better for us to have the space where we could...[where] it wasn't a personal space. It could be a neutral zone for everybody to go.

Valerie had anticipated that she and Dana would be more productive in a coworking space, and she confirmed that they indeed had been more productive since working at Alloy.

Ethan chose to start working full-time at Cosite, because his business partner, Owen, is the founder. He felt “it made sense purely from a convenience point of view.” Before working at Cosite, he

had worked at Alloy, also because the company he worked for at the time, *Ilk*¹² magazine, was located there. When I inquired about how the two spaces compared for him, he contrasted them this way:

My experience in [Alloy] was quite different. I was doing a [job¹³] while I was working there for [*Ilk*], which was like the anchor tenant in [Alloy]. I was there mostly for internal meetings with [*Ilk*]. It felt very much that the coworking space was dominated by the magazine because it was the largest tenant. Most of my conversations were with people that were also coworkers of the magazine, coworkers as in we work in the same company not at the same coworking space. It was very different. ... Because there are, like, 12 [*Ilk*] employees working there, which made up like at least half or more than half of the total coworking community, definitely more than half I would say. It was very different.

Asked how closely Alloy or Cosite represent his ideal workspace, he continued:

Ethan: If you are new to the coworking environment, it can be distracting, because there's lots of things going on. I think [Cosite] is definitely more conducive for productivity than [Alloy] was for me, just because there's a lot of different things going on. I also...the structure that I've set up for our business, I feel like it's more conducive to my personal productivity than where I was working with [*Ilk*] before, working with different people.

Sandra: How is it different to where you are now? Would you have less running around?

Ethan: I guess it's less moving parts. It's easier for me to set and maintain my schedule. It's more dictated by what I prioritize versus what other people prioritize for me. I feel, maybe it's perceived productivity, maybe is the only thing that is increased, not actual, true productivity.

For me, an ideal coworking space has a lot of different things. Obviously, low cost, it's like community-driven, and it's not like a private office. It's like anything else. If you have a gym membership, you're working out with other people versus private training sessions. Costs and then amenities. I would consider, like, the things we need for productivity to be amenities, so maybe that's a sound system or white noise that helps kind of provide a baseline for sound absorption, enough private spaces to not be crowded, on top [of each other], enough personal space. I think you don't need a 300-square foot private office to be productive. You need really just a desk where you have your own personal space and enough room to maneuver, whatever you need to maneuver. Obviously, every business has its own different requirements. ...I think [Cosite] probably has the best combination out of the two of the different amenities that would be required for my personal productivity.

Ethan considers amenities to be the things members need for productivity. For him, those amenities include a system for sound absorption and enough space “to maneuver,” or not feel crowded by other members.

¹² *Ilk* is a pseudonym.

¹³ I redacted the type of job Ethan mentioned doing at *Ilk* to help maintain his confidentiality.

Other workers took a different perspective on the issue of productivity. Kyle, a freelance accountant who worked at both Cosite and Workmine, linked productivity with the need for flexibility. While discussing productivity, he asked me about my research and whether I knew about the origins of the traditional eight-hour workday:

[You know] about how it was established in the industrial revolution and that it was for factory workers primarily? That just doesn't apply as much anymore in this creative age. The way it was in that office, it was like, "You have to be productive from eight to five. You have to be productive. You can talk a little bit, but you've got to be productive. We're paying you for production."

It is hard in this kind of society now where we're really idea-driven, creative, and I'm not productive at nine o'clock in the morning. That is when I'm sitting around enjoying life. When it hits ten o'clock I can be productive until like two and then I need a break. I have surges about eight o'clock at night where I'm really focused and I can do work. So, the office felt very entrapping like I was in a box, whereas a place like this just feels free. When you have freedom, you do much more productive, better work I guess.

For Kyle, working a set schedule at a traditional office felt confining and restrictive. Flexibility to determine his own work hours enables him to achieve greater productivity and more quality work.

Creative and knowledge workers often speak of getting into the zone or getting into a flow of uninterrupted work. This can prove difficult in traditional offices in which interruptions from coworkers and meetings may disrupt and fragment work flows. As Fried and Hansson (2013: 13) note:

“Meaningful work, creative work, thoughtful work, important work – this type of effort takes stretches of uninterrupted time to get into the zone. But in the modern office such long stretches just can't be found. Instead, it's just one interruption after another.” For remote workers especially, who often work from home or coffee shops before beginning to cowork, coworking spaces may offer a workplace absent of many distractions common to those locales, like television, household chores, or screeching espresso machines. Additionally, working remotely from bosses and coworkers may make workers more comfortable “getting into the zone” and signaling to those around them that they do not wish to be disturbed, often by wearing headphones or sitting at a more isolated workspace, both strategies typically unavailable or inappropriate in traditional office settings.

The desire for a professional space to work and meet clients in also holds a good deal of importance to many entrepreneurs and freelancers. For women, it seemed to impart special meaning. As women in a male-dominated industry, Valerie and her business partner, Dana, often find themselves in meetings surrounded by older men. Although they have had many positive work experiences, Valerie disclosed that sometimes, “you get people that will work with you, that want to cooperate with you, but then you end up doing most of the work, and this is something a lot of women have [to deal with], I think.” Dana reiterated this point. When our conversation turned to her experience as a female entrepreneur with a female business partner in a male-dominated industry, she contrasted her experience as a young married woman with Valerie’s experience as a younger, single woman:

I just literally had this conversation with a friend of mine who he is a booking agent and we’re both, you know, same age, I guess, about 29. And I’m glad I’m doing this at my age, that I’m not five years younger than I am, because I would really have a hard time. I think because I’m married and, you know, I’m a little bit older, I think that, even though I am a female, I do get a lot of respect from people that might not have the level of respect for me if I was younger or not in a relationship. You know, their interest may just, you know, be kind of scattered. But, I’m able to have really great relationships. Like, where we’re at now, I have a lot of great friends that I’ve [become] acquainted with through business dealings, and we’ve become really incredible friends. Whether they’re male or female, married or not, we have strong relationships with them and have a really clear and honest line of communication, and there aren’t any blurred lines. And there are no... nobody can have any expectations of me, like personally, other than, like, “okay we’re doing this business together and, oh yeah, you want to grab a coffee or a drink or a burger or whatever it is?” “Cool.”

I grew up with brothers, and just playing in a band for so many years, that I’m able to fit in as one of the guys. But when I was younger, when I wasn’t married, it’s just possibly like, you know, the lines are blurred all the time and not just because I wanted them to be, but because guys would make it kind of awkward. I kind of have a little bit of shield that I can sit behind now, which is kind of comforting. So, it allows me to feel more secure in my own shoes, you know?

It’s definitely interesting, just, it’s something that [Valerie] and I talk about a lot, because she’s kind of dealing with what I’m talking about, with what I would’ve dealt with five years ago because, you know, she’s very sweet, but she’s a very smart, driven girl, and she works her ass off. But guys try to take advantage of her all the time, and she’s not in a relationship.

Avoiding “blurred lines” may prove more challenging for younger, unmarried women, and avoiding working with people “who try to take advantage” may not be an option for a growing company like

Valerie and Dana's. Yet Alloy provides them with an affordable, professional workplace where they can meet clients and helps them to expand their business and network.

Dana and Valerie exemplify not only the challenges that women in business face, particularly in a male-dominated industry like theirs, but also the substantial impact of mentor relationships for new entrepreneurs. The pair met through mutual friends. Valerie had contacted Dana about meeting, and Dana followed up after seeing her at a party one night:

She just gave the sweetest, most dear hug. She [had] hit me up about a week before, but I had so much going on, though, so I wasn't paying attention. You know, it was just like, "Oh yeah, well, we can grab a coffee sometime." But after that, she had hit me back, and she was like, "I know you're really busy, but I just, I see you doing so many things. I just really want to talk, to just kind of pick your brain and tell you about some of my ideas and just, you know, whenever you get time." And so, I pretty much just said, "Hey, yeah, actually, why don't you come by my place on Thursday, and let's just talk." And she ended up being there for eight hours.

And the next day, I went and got like this big, like, white construction-like tablet that I could put up on my easel, and I just started going through and teaching her things. Just trying to share my knowledge with her. I didn't know what it was going to result in, but she said she wanted to, like, collaborate with me and help me and learn from me. And I knew that she could do it, you know, she had a skillset of certain things, like certain kind of things that I didn't, and together that we would be able to make a louder ruckus if we were just working alongside one another. It's turned out very well.

Before connecting with Dana, Valerie worked in a job where she felt her skills were underutilized and undervalued. Dana recognized that Valerie had a valuable skillset that could complement her own and that, with some mentorship, they could make a big impact together. She decided to mentor Valerie and take her on as a business partner. In turn, as their company continues to grow, Valerie serves as a role model and mentor for other young women. She explained:

I am one of the only people I know right now that's my age that has just dropped everything else and started my own company. And I'll have friends email and text me like, "Hey, how did you do it?" or "I'm scared to leave my job, but the situation is terrible for me. My boss is like a masochist, and he's narcissistic, and he treats me terribly and all this stuff." And I'm like, I feel like really lucky that I'm like... they can confide in me, and that I can, like I'm this person that shows them that you can do it. ...

But it's sad that a lot of them are like, "Well, I don't know what to do." I'm like just...just do it. You know what you can [do]. You know what needs to be done. You have the tools. They just like for a man to tell them how to do it or they're scared they're going to do it the wrong way. It's like, I mess up all the time, but I'm not... I don't feel like that. I used to get so hung about emails and stuff, but I don't care

anymore. I mean it happens, you know? So, yeah, I mean I like being able to represent women in a positive way in the workspace. And the women that are powerhouses in the industry are like idols to me, because they don't get a lot of recognition, but they are behind it all. And they are so cool, and they are so scary, and I love it. They're just so powerful. I wish there was more information on them. I sometimes look at a spread in a magazine or something, and they just look so cool. I'm like, "yeah, that's what I want to do."

Valerie finds inspiration in other "powerful" women in the music industry, and she appreciates the opportunity to encourage other young women to go after what they want in their careers. Having her own company along with Dana, Valerie found herself able, for the most part, to break out of the bounds of gendered expectations for what she can do. This, along with having a professional office to bring clients to, seems to provide her a sense of validation and a great deal of meaning in her work and her personal life.

Zack, who works at ProShare, also spoke about the increased productivity and sense of validation that comes from working in an office versus at home. Although he finds his home office more ideal for focusing on his work, particularly because he has two monitors at home, he appreciates the close access to his coworkers that ProShare provides, compared to his prior experiences in more traditional office environments. In his company's office suite at ProShare, he works in close proximity to his coworkers, as well as up to four people who rent out desks in their suite. He made this comparison between his relationship with his coworkers at ProShare and his relationships with previous coworkers:

I definitely feel more comfortable, or less hesitant, to be like, "hey, one sentence question." You know? Like, just to interrupt somebody and that kind of thing, than I did at the last, you know, like the temporary e-commerce thing that I was doing, which was in sort of cubes, because it was like, okay I got to get up, walk around, knock on the side of the cube, just to be, you know, polite or get the person's attention or whatever. And here it's just like, "hey." It's a lot quicker. That's the biggest difference I can see.

The proximity to his coworkers in their office suite removes some of the formality from interactions. On the downside, Zack also mentioned that he had to work at one of the chairs in the suite, or whatever desk happens to be empty; he did not yet have his own desk, as his company was in the process of setting up a

work station for him. I asked how it was working out, squatting¹⁴, so to speak, at coworkers' desks. He replied:

Yeah, exactly. It's been, it hasn't been a big deal. I definitely am really looking forward to having my own desk, I mean, just for obvious reasons. You know, "oh, this is a place to call my own." Because that makes me feel like I have finally made it, since I have sort of worked my way from writing a couple of blogs a week to doing a lot more stuff at the company. Having your own space is, in any form, whether it is a desk or an office or whatever, obviously, that is important for validation.

As many freelancers, independent contractors, and remote workers work from home or coffee shops, they become removed from the social capital available in traditional offices¹⁵. For many of these workers, as Zack and Valerie articulated, having a workspace outside of one's house or a desk of one's own in a coworking space gives them a feeling of pride in their work and a sense of validation that they have "finally made it."

“HOME ISN'T WORK”: SEEKING DISTANCE BETWEEN WORK AND HOME

Though much of the sociological literature examining the relationship between work and family life takes for granted the categories of “work” and “home,” workers socially construct and continually renegotiate their meanings as new forms of work emerge and new technologies develop. For instance, Nippert-Eng's (1996) study of personnel workers, machinists, and research scientists at a scientific research facility shows how these workers enact “work” and “home” and the boundaries between them through their daily practices and routines. New information and communications technologies make it even easier for workers to take their work home with them, as they enable workers to connect remotely with virtual private networks or answer work emails from their phones. Further, scholars have suggested

¹⁴ I used “squatting” here in the sense of occupying an uninhabited space, not crouching or bending down.

¹⁵ This theme is explored further in Chapter 4.

that new mobile technologies, like smart phones, allow workers more freedom to choose how much to separate or blend work and home (Gant and Kiesler 2002). While both remote workers and entrepreneurs cite the separation of work and home as a reason for coworking, those who have previously worked from home more often name this reason.

For some members, separation of work and home combines with other reasons for coworking, often combating the isolation of home-based work. Christina, a member of Workmine, had been living in Philadelphia¹⁶ working full-time as an account manager in the hospitality industry and part-time managing a charitable organization for service workers and their families. She had been traveling back and forth between Philadelphia; Riverport, where many of her college friends live; and her mother's home in the South. She decided to move to Riverport when she began working full-time for the non-profit organization. At first, she worked from home and attended a non-profit leadership program at a nearby college. She soon realized, however, that the graduate program was not offering her much knowledge beyond what she had already gained through experience and that working from home was not ideal for her: "I'd been working from home and realized I talk way too much, and I'm too social, and I love people and energy, and I can't be in my house" (Christina, interview). She paid for the first month herself, and then the board of the nonprofit she works for agreed to pay for a full-time membership. She described her decision to work at Workmine:

I didn't need my own office. I don't want to be stuck in my own office. It was just nice to have a table to sit at or a couch. I can put my headphones on, but feel the energy of people around me. And, then if I need to talk to somebody, I'll just go talk to somebody and ask them for help. I like the set up. It was nicer when the coffee shop was in here and free, but yeah, just somewhere to put my lunch. Like, I felt like I was going to a big office. Like, I felt accountable here that someone knows I need to be here every day.

¹⁶ Some details, like where interviewees previously lived or attended school, have been changed to protect their privacy.

Christina wanted to work in a coworking space to be near people and away from the distractions of home, but also realized that having a space to go to everyday gave her a sense of accountability, as well.

Additionally, her comembers at Workmine offer more than just social interaction. As a remote worker in the non-profit sector, Christina enjoys having people around to bounce ideas off of, particularly other members who also work for a non-profit. When I asked about how closely her home office and Workmine resemble what she would consider an ideal work environment, Christina replied:

Christina: At home, I found a place that's a two bedroom, two bath, because I needed to have the office, but it's also a guest room. I mean, I have a trundle in there. So, it feels like I'm working in a bedroom. And, then, I have to do laundry and clean and things can't get done until I work, because a cluttered space is a cluttered mind. So, I was constantly doing that. But, I mean, it was nice. I had gotten an ergonomic desk, a standing desk, a printer, and everything, and it was set up nicely, but it's *home*, and home isn't work. And, that doesn't make sense. So, being able to come here... You know, I bought all these things at home so I could have this office feel, and here I just have my computer, and it feels more like an office.

Sandra: Why do you think that is?

Christina: Because I have no other distractions around me. And, I'm separating my... I have to compartmentalize my life. This needs to be work. And when I'm home, I need to be home. It needs to be relaxing.

Sandra: What do you think that gives you, that separation? How does that affect your work and your home life?

Christina: It turns my mind off. My mind constantly runs. At the time, my boyfriend didn't have a job yet. He doesn't live there, but he'd get up in the morning, and he wasn't as rushed. And, I need to get up and get going, and make coffee and get out the door. Like, I needed a routine of some sort, you gain weight, because you're just wearing your pajamas all the time or workout clothes, and that's okay. Or, you're working in your bed. And, it's depressing. And, I mean, I have anxiety, and I'm prone to depression, and I realized being there was really bringing me down, and it was affecting my quality of life. So, being in ... it's just funny...for another space, you know, same kind of walls and everything else, but it let my mind... I think we're trained that you go to work. And, I had someone always expecting me to be there on time. Like, if you go to an office, you need to go there and you need to be there at that time. So, having that 'I need to get up and go somewhere' so that [Quinn, the community manager of Workmine] knows that I'm going to walk in the door and feel like I have coworkers, but also that I don't owe them anything. I mean, it's nice. And, since I've started coming here, a couple different people are also non-profit oriented, and in the industry, we don't have a lot of money. I mean, you can't spend a lot of money on overhead as people think, which is a whole different sociological conversation. But, yeah, I mean, we need places to go work together. We're usually teams of one or two or three. So, even just having a girl over there to say, "hey, have you ever written a grant letter? Can I see it?" Or, "Hey, can you look over this? Am I saying this right?" Because I don't have a team. It's just me; I'm the only employee.

Coworking gave Christina the social interaction and separation between work and home that she desired, but also provided coworkers, a routine, and a sense of accountability, which positively impacted her work and personal life. The separation, or compartmentalization, of work and home allowed her “to turn [her] mind off” and experience her home as more relaxing.

Dana and Valerie, business partners and members of Alloy, also listed several reasons for deciding to start coworking. They sought separation from home, but also needed a professional space to bring clients. As noted above, Valerie felt they had achieved greater productivity at Alloy than they had working from Dana’s home. When asked why she thought that was the case, Valerie elaborated:

It’s like if you’re an artist and you’re painting on a canvas, you have the border. You have the ends of the canvas that you can’t paint on. You know you can’t continue to paint on it. Like you have this much space, and you can create your masterpiece within that space. And I think the same goes for what I do. It’s like the frame around my art is the time I show up and the time that I leave. And so, if within that time I can create my masterpiece or whatever, I can get as creative as I want, get as much done as I can, and, hopefully, by the end of the day, I’ll have a piece. In my head, this is how I am seeing it. At the end of the day, I have something to show for all the work that I’ve done.

So instead of just waking up and going really slow and then sitting at my kitchen table and then working on stuff and then cleaning the house and then sitting back down or then going to a coffee shop and then having to end up spending a lot more money on coffee than I’ve ever had in the last year and then feeling obligated to buy [the client’s] coffee for meeting you. It’s like, it gets expensive and, you know, I just think that having the confines of, like, leaving my home, showing up at a certain time and then leaving at a certain time, I can rest my head, like rest my brain and that way I can come back to this work space and know that this is where I do work. This is my productive time, even though I still work a lot from home. It just makes a difference to be able to, like, turn your brain off when you leave the office.

In this way, having a delineated physical space in which to work also reinforced a temporal boundary for work that had not been as prominent when Valerie and Dana worked from home. For Valerie, this spatial-temporal boundary between work and home made her more productive during work hours and more able to rest and relax during her personal time at home.

Hallie, a former member of Alloy, and her business partner, Harper, both attending college when they started coworking, wanted a separate space where they could go to do work for their growing non-profit. They had previously worked at coffee shops and various locations, but moving from place to place

while balancing their course work, social lives, and organization work made them feel like everything was blurring together:

We wanted to be in a coworking space because we had been at coffee shops jumping around, and I felt like our lives – between school and being a college kid in general, having a social life, and everything else – were all kind of coming together. So, we really wanted a space where we could go there and get it done and focus on it and everything like that.

Hallie and Harper wanted some separation; they looked for a single space where they could come together and focus just on organization work. Hallie had learned about coworking spaces through her brother, who worked in commercial real estate in another state and was thinking of starting his own space there. So, she and Harper looked for a coworking space that could meet their needs and settled on Alloy.

Maggie, also a former Alloy member, had worked remotely from home for about four years before coworking. Working at home felt isolating, and she desired more separation between work and home:

After about four years, I was pretty tired of working from home, and I was feeling really isolated. So, I decided that I needed to get out of the house. Also, it was partially for finding kind of a community, and then also partially to help me separate work and home better, because I was just finding that I was just thinking about work constantly at home. ...It was like being able to go to work like a normal person would. Go do it, and then you turn it off and you have a commute home and then you can just go home.

Maggie continues to work from home about 15 hours per week, but she prefers working at a coworking space. Whereas before she began working at Alloy, her work in an office and work at home felt like “drudgery,” coworking helped her “turn off” work when she returns home.

Landon, a member at Alloy, likewise expressed a desire for separation between work and his personal life. As several coworking space founders also stated, not having a boundary around work had been “exhausting and not very productive” (Landon, interview). As an established remote worker for his company, when Landon and his wife first moved to town, and he had to decide where to work, he knew he did not want to work at home or a coffee shop. Alloy provided a separate space where he could get his

work done and not take it home with him. Coworking helped him maintain that division and reinforced a sense of accountability, as he explains:

Because in school, I was always kind of working, I always kind of felt like I should be working on something and if I wasn't working I felt guilty about it. But mostly, a side effect of that was that my work never had my full attention. I was rarely locked in for five hours. So, it was like, I was always kind of one foot in and one foot out of work. It was exhausting and not very productive. And that's a really easy state to get in. I think especially when you're working remote[ly] and you're kind of the only one that is holding you accountable.

His wife's expectations helped him not to bring work home, as well:

Landon: But my wife, thankfully, it would not fly for me to go work at [Alloy] or halfway work at [Alloy] and then come home and be like, 'I didn't get enough done, so now I gotta work on my computer.' So, she kind of helps me draw that line between when I'm working and [when] I'm not. So, whenever I work late, generally I'm staying at [Alloy] and if I'm home, then I'm home, which is actually really great.

Sandra: So, you like that division of work and home?

Landon: Yeah. It's actually really important for me to have that division, and that's one thing that's great about [Alloy] is being able to have a physical space that emphasizes that there is that division. Which means that a lot of times, if I'm working on something on the weekend, whether it's a personal thing or work, I go to [Alloy] to do that rather than work from home, even though I tend to also work at home. When I am working on something at home, it's generally... like lately I've been working on this side project, learning some new things, but that's something that I really enjoy and isn't stressful for me at all. So, it doesn't feel like I'm working or whatever.

Dana, also married, remarked that Alloy helped her “find balance,” as she had tended to work 100 to 120 hours per week from her home. Like Landon and Dana, half of the members who wanted separation between work and home were married, and the majority worked at Alloy. Only two members at Workmine and one at Cosite expressed a desire for that separation, while none at ProShare spoke of it.

For workers who expressed the desire to enforce a boundary between work and personal life, coworking helps maintain that division, but the division may still be permeable. That is, interviewees often stated that after they began coworking, they still worked from home on occasion. However, having a separate space dedicated to their professional work changed the work tasks they chose to do at home. Instead of the routine work required for their job, they tended to do “fun” work they enjoy, as Landon mentioned above. Valerie similarly expressed that once she and Dana had moved from their home office

to Alloy, the work she did at home took on a different character. She describes how even the air and energy at home felt different:

Sandra: When you are working from home now, how is that different from when you worked from home before?

Valerie: It's like I'm... it's like extra credit.

Sandra: It's like a choice?

Valerie: Yeah. It's a choice now, and it's more fun. It's like, 'oh, I'm getting ahead' or something versus staining my home and where my brain and body go to rest with all the work that I need to do. Like I feel like all that air and that energy is really cleared out and I can really just be at peace when I'm at home and then feel good when I am working.

Thus, some members sought a coworking space to help reinforce the division between their work and home lives. Yet, even after they began coworking, many still reported working from home.

Christina also values the separation of work and home, but continues to work at home on occasion. Like Landon and Valerie, though, the work she does now at home differs from the work she does at her coworking space. Part of her job involves planning trips, and she saves that task for home. She does not "mind doing that at home, because it's kind of the fun part of the job." Although workers like Christina, Landon, and Valerie need separation between work and home, that boundary is somewhat permeable. However, they each make distinctions about the kind of work they do at home.

In addition to affecting the nature of home-based work, some interviewees also felt that maintaining a work-home boundary through coworking also positively impacted the quality of their work and personal relationships. For instance, Valerie stated:

That's really helped like my relationships, which then help my work relationships. You know, like I can better separate things because I found that last year I was working while I was at friends' houses and just not being able to get enough done. And I think it strained some of my relationships, but I think having this space and telling my friends, like "Hey, I can't come over. I'm at the office," instead of, "Yeah, I am at my house," and then they just come over or something. It's just easier to separate a lot of things when you have your office.

Having a dedicated workspace away from home can help workers focus on work at their workspaces and focus on their friends and family when at home or in leisure spaces.

It may also help workers clearly indicate to others that they are “at work” and, thus, not available for personal visits or phone calls with friends, as those who work from home sometimes face the challenge of getting others to recognize their time at home as work time. Christina commented that when she worked from home, friends did not always understand that, even though she was physically at home, she was not necessarily available to talk on the telephone: “Well, first of all, people think when you work from home, you’re not working, which is really frustrating, and that you can always answer the phone” (Christina, interview). Being able to tell friends she is at work or going to work helped Christina protect her work hours. For instance, on the day of our interview, Christina had received a call from a friend who works as a teacher and was on summer break. She had called Christina in the morning and assumed that because she thought Christina worked from home, she would be “just waking up” (Christina, interview), rather than getting ready for work. Having a physical workplace to go to helped Christina make it clear to others that she was not routinely accessible during the day. In this way, separate workplaces like coworking spaces bolster a spatial-temporal boundary that enables workers not only to keep professional work from encroaching on their personal space and time, but also to keep their personal lives from encroaching on their professional space and time.

VARIETY, FLEXIBILITY, AND FREEDOM

A small number of workers I interviewed spoke about seeking out a coworking space because they wanted variety or a different way of working. Keira, a former member of Alloy, needs stimulation in her work environment, which she gets, in part, from having a variety of workspaces. Similarly, Kyle, a member of Cosite and Workmine, appreciates the flexibility of having several different workspaces

available, both different coworking spaces and different spaces within the coworking space. He explained it this way:

I do love the aspect of, if I want to work from home this day, I don't have to come here. I can work from home that day. If I want to get out of the house and talk to people and be productive, I can come down here. It is the freedom of either working from home or working from this space, but then there is also freedom in the space.

In the office, I had my one office, my one chair, my one space where I was supposed to work. You sit me in that spot, and I'm here for eight hours, and I'm supposed to be productive. I can't focus for that long. I get bored. For example, today I worked from that table in there, I worked from the coffee shop, I worked in a room back here, and now I'm working outside. It's just the ability to jump wherever you want that really keeps your mind in a – what's the word I'm looking for – where it doesn't get stale, I guess. The new environments can create new thoughts, and being outside I have more creative...like you mentioned earlier, it can spark new creativity if I'm in a new spot. Honestly, the sunshine just makes me wake up. I feel really alive out here.

So, just the ability to jump around, either within the space itself where I'm not tied to one desk, or the ability to [go] inside/outside, or the ability [to work] from home or office. Does that make sense? It is just the flexibility to work wherever I feel like I should work that day.

Kyle values the flexibility to change his workspace according to his work needs or how he feels. For him, that freedom of choice outweighed having a private office, like he had at his former workplace:

If I was in my office I would be cramped in that one little space at my desk, unable to move, no windows, but of course I have a hundred square feet of my own. I don't care about that. I like the freedom to work where and when I want, if that makes sense.

That desire to work in a different way was part of what motivated him to move from the CPA firm he had worked with to going out on his own. He knew he did not want to work in a traditional office, nor at home. Starting his own business and working out of two coworking spaces offered him the freedom and flexibility he desired.

Many members reiterated Kyle's opinions when talking about what they appreciate about coworking, even if they did not cite variety as a reason for starting to cowork in the first place. These members come to coworking as a means of realizing greater flexibility in their work lives. That is, they begin coworking as part of a concerted shift toward increased work-life balance. For instance, Paul at Alloy thinks the values that coworking members share are flexibility, networking, and saving money.

However, the decision to start coworking may represent only one of several broad changes in the way they work. For instance, Izzy experienced a shift in her priorities after a major life-threatening illness. Before the illness, she worked long hours, skipping meals and sacrificing sleep, and rarely turned down new clients. Now, she sought more of a balance in her work and personal life. She started taking on fewer clients and prioritizing passion projects and initiatives that give back to the community and help others achieve flexibility and freedom in their own lives. She explained:

Izzy: It's like when I had my near-death experience last year, which I'm kind of on the anniversary of it. My perspective shifted in the most beautiful way. It wouldn't have shifted if I didn't get hit that hard. I was on a different path.

Sandra: How so?

Izzy: I was in this path of needing 10 to 15,000 a month in passive income to retire and building this really, really big life and it's like, you know, I don't really need that. ... [M]y perspective on life has shifted, and it's almost there where I can just say it very clearly. Currently it's still... Yeah, in this human experience, what am I wanting? Do I really need to work 40 hours a week? Do I really need to work 30, 20? What do I want to do? And I realized that at 28, I've worked so damn hard and so fast, I've been racing to retirement, which is also means that I'm racing to death, I think.

Sandra: What does that mean to you, when you say retirement?

Izzy: Yeah, so racing to retirement. Retirement to me means you don't have to work if you don't want to. All of your expenses are paid for. I have enough passive income to... if I want to travel for a month, I can. Travel for three months, I can, but my version of retirement, I'm always going to have passion projects. I want to get into hemp farming, I want to do this eco-village, I want to do tiny houses, I want to do all these things. But that's not work to me; that feels like life purpose stuff and just, like, fun.

Sandra: So, it's not stopping work; it's just not doing work that you *have* to do, but work that you *want* to do?

Izzy: That I want to do.

Sandra: Flexibility...

Izzy: Mm-hmm. And, so real estate is amazing and I love it, but if I want to travel for a month, I have to make sure I don't have clients on the books. So being a principle broker, I can potentially travel if there are other people here that are on the ground, that have their license that can do that kind of stuff. So, we're working into that structure, so that I can go, because from [age] 20 to 28, I didn't fuck around. I didn't do a lot of stuff that people did to just have fun and fuck around. So, now I'm really craving that. I need to go live. I mean, I almost died, and that was my first regret. When I was in the hospital, I was like, 'you know what? I work too much.' That was my regret of like, 'oh shit, if I'm going to die right now, that sucks.' ...I mean I could've stopped working a long time ago last year but instead of stopping and going to live my life, I kept taking clients on. So, this year our approach, we don't take on very many clients. We try to keep

it at four or five clients a month, rather than 12 clients a month, because it's just not worth it. And learning that I don't have to be, it's like I don't have to help everybody, which was something I really needed to learn. I really want to help everybody. So yeah, that.

Sandra: Can you talk a little bit about that goal shift for you? When you had this... Before you wanted to work so that you could have all this passive income. That was your goal.

Izzy: Yeah.

Sandra: How has that goal shifted for you?

Izzy: That goal has shifted now, because... So, I still want passive income, but I want to do it in a way that helps people create freedom and flexibility in their own lives.

Coworking may not cause workers like Izzy to seek more flexibility, but it can facilitate this broader change in their work lives. For many workers who previously worked from home or a coffee shop, coworking offers a similar degree of flexibility in their workday. They can come and go when they want, sometimes even after typical work hours. What sets coworking spaces apart from their previous workplaces is that they have comembers who also value and enact flexibility in their own work lives.

The people who decide to open or join a coworking space are very often people who value freedom and flexibility in their work. Yet, flexibility means different things to different people. For many workers, flexibility most often denotes schedule flexibility – the ability to set or adjust one's own work schedule as needed. Coworking members speak of the freedom to choose their workspace or having the flexibility to leave in the middle of the day as something they appreciate about coworking. Although many of the members I interviewed enjoyed tremendous flexibility in their schedules, this is a privilege many workers do not have, one determined to a significant degree by class and gender (Clawson and Gerstel 2014).

In contrast, flexibility for firms or companies tends to indicate the ability to staff workers according to demand. As discussed above, this has led to workforce restructuring to create more nimble organizations that can adapt quickly to change; importantly, this type of flexibility transfers risk away from the organization (Atkinson 1984; Whittle and Mueller 2009). Thus, another way that coworking

spaces differ from traditional workplaces or businesses is that their operational norms often entail assuming more risk by offering their members flexibility. While traditional organizations value flexibility that minimizes their own risk, many coworking spaces choose to operate in a way that increases their risk and minimizes risk for their members.

Many space owners do this by providing their members flexible membership options. When asked about misconceptions people have about coworking, Brooke mentioned that some people, particularly real estate developers, assume that she chose a coworking model over traditional office space rental to generate more profit. She explains how she disabuses them of the notion that she splits the space to increase her revenue:

Actually, no, it's a hell of a lot easier to mark up the rent, rent it to one guy, and not have to deal with it for a year. Then I could run the whole business on the side. I could make money here. I could do whatever I want. They just think that because you're cutting it up and splitting the rates, one, it's ridiculously profitable because you're making a lot more, or that it's easy, and it's neither.

Yeah, a lot of people say, why do you do this it's so much work especially the way the model is designed? You're basically renting the space out every month or every week or every day. ... [It changes] with no notice. 'Oh, we don't have rent this month because all of the members are going on vacation.' All of a sudden, you have an empty space, and you are looking at filling it again. That can happen. The model is you're hoping your members grow out of the space. It happens a lot.

There's a guy then he hires two. Then he's got an office for them. Then there are the two offices. Now they get an investor and they are out with the investors. You just lost two private offices and eight memberships. Now you're like, 'oh that's awesome and we're screwed. It's a challenge. It's really hard work. It's one that is repetitive, but it's exactly what we want to happen. It's kind of built-in frustration. So, that's the opposite of what most people think. 'Hey, cut the space make some more money. It's profitable. It's easy.' It's not. It's not. I mean, it can be profitable. Don't get me wrong. We are there to fill spaces, but that's not the point. I get really frustrated. I get interviewed a lot by real estate people are like, 'oh, I have a space I could totally do this.' That's like the wrong reason to open a coworking space. There are hundreds and thousands of spaces that could be coworking spaces. It doesn't mean they should be.

As Brooke stated, coworking space owners could rent out space for longer periods and make running the space simpler and more stable, but more financial stability for the space would mean offering less flexibility to members. Offering members month-to-month or even daily membership and having to work continually to keep the space filled presents a constant challenge and “built-in frustration” for owners.

They choose to accept more financial risk to provide more flexibility for their members. Owners like Brooke want members to grow their businesses and eventually grow out of the space. Thus, in an era of individualized risk (Hacker 2006), coworking offers more distributed risk for members. Although perhaps a riskier business proposition for owners, this model offers much more security for members.

Paul was launching a local franchise when he and his coworkers began working at Alloy. Having formerly worked for a company whose junior employees had to do “hoteling” – a method of office management in which workers do not have permanently assigned desks, but instead temporarily reserve their desk, cubicle, or office before they come into work for the day, a practice Paul found “demoralizing” – he appreciated having a permanent office. However, he valued the membership flexibility Alloy offered, as he explained:

Yeah, for us this space has been good. I mean, anytime you’re starting a new company, it’s nice to be able to not dedicate a whole bunch of time to securing space so you can do something that’s more flexible and less permanent. So, you don’t have to devote a week to figuring out what lease to sign and whether or not we can afford it. So, there’s definitely some advantages in terms of being a business that’s transitioning to [Riverport] that wouldn’t be offered by the typical workspace.

When I asked him about how his prior work experience and his experience at Alloy would affect what he looks for in a workplace in the future, he had this to say:

I think that the [Alloy] experiment has been a successful one by and large so if I were to start a company next year, the amount of time I would spend looking for office space would be very small. I feel like renting office space has become a big deal. It’s like renting an apartment or something like that.

And I feel like we got away without making it a huge deal. I mean I did go look at a fair number of spaces, but at the end of the day, I appreciate kind of the flexibility that’s offered with this, and I would be inclined if I had an entrepreneurial endeavor in the future to look for something flexible like this as opposed to committing cash to something for a long period of time when the business . . . when that may or not make sense for the business but just because you felt like you had to have somewhere to sit.

Seeing the flexibility that a space like Alloy offers impacted Paul’s views about workspace and what makes sense for entrepreneurs and start-ups.

Hallie and her business partner, Harper, also appreciated Alloy's flexibility, as they, too, were starting up and trying to expand their non-profit. Hallie commented how the month-to-month membership fit their business at the time:

[Alloy] fit us really well at the time because we were new. We didn't really have too much distraction on plate. We were super temporary and didn't really know what was going to happen. So, it was a good place to use. It was month-to-month rent. We didn't have to make any commitments, and it was a fun atmosphere with other people in the room who were inspiring to us, which we needed at the time. We really needed people to lift us up and also just to have somewhere temporary that was cool and fun. So that was really neat at the time.

Most coworking spaces offer at least a month-to-month membership option, and some offer daily or weekly rates. Entrepreneurs, freelancers, and new small businesses especially benefit from the flexibility not to have to sign a long-term lease or contract, as Brooke, Hallie, and Paul described.

Other members mentioned flexibility in terms of workspace and schedule as one of the major benefits of coworking and one of the reasons they decided to start coworking in the first place. For instance, Jake described how members of his space sometimes go surfing during the workday. As low tide is the best time to go surfing, Jake explained: "if the space is particularly empty, and you want to know where everybody is, you just check out your tide table. Oh, it's low tide, that's where everybody is." He continued:

People are able to have those other cues about when and how and why to work that aren't based on what the clock says specifically, but based on, like, 'it's a nice day; I think I'll go for a walk,' or whatever. Or, 'I want to volunteer in my kid's classroom this morning,' so I'm not stuck to that 9 to 5 structure anymore. So, I think that's a big part of what's shifting.

Certainly, not everyone who coworks experiences the same degree of flexibility in their work. Some work alongside their bosses in their coworking spaces, and some remote workers must be online and available to their employer during regular work hours. Still, coworking spaces provide many members a workplace more conducive to enacting flexible work practices than do traditional offices. Coworking members not only benefit from less managerial and coworker oversight of their comings and goings, but

also from seeing other people come and go during the day to surf, exercise, run errands, or go home or to a coffee shop, as this can display a template for work-life balance that they may not have been exposed to or felt empowered to do before.

WHY WORKERS CHOOSE PARTICULAR COWORKING SPACES

THE PRICE IS RIGHT

Price is generally the first factor most members consider when choosing a space; after all, they must be able to afford the cost of membership. At a minimum, all coworking spaces provide the basic resources necessary for work: desk space and wireless internet. Typically, they also offer printing and coffee makers. Beyond these essentials, spaces vary in the types of membership options and resources available to their members. These may be physical resources, such as comfortable chairs and private meeting spaces, or interpersonal resources, such as events or the types of members who typically work there. When members explain why they choose particular coworking spaces over others, it is these resources that factor prominently in their decisions.

PROXIMITY OR LOCATION

Proximity comprises the idea of working within one's neighborhood or within a short commute from home. Members of ProShare and Workmine were most likely to give proximity to home as a reason for choosing their coworking space over other options. William chose Workmine primarily owing to its location within walking distance from his home. The sole member at Cosite who cited proximity as a

reason for coworking, Ian, also felt very “at home” in the coworking space, as if it were his own living room. He thought that the proximity of Cosite to his home had a lot to do with that.

Working at a coworking space in close proximity to one’s home may encourage greater balance of work and home life. For instance, William wanted separation between work and home, as his wife works primarily out of their home. When working from home, he had found that he would drift in and out of work and struggled to draw clear distinctions between work time and personal time. Workmine gave him a place to focus on work away from home, and he appreciated being able to go home for lunch or a break. He continued to work from home more often than he worked at his coworking space, but coworking helped him draw a clearer boundary around his personal time. The proximity of the space to his home facilitating that process.

LIGHT AND OPENNESS

Like Gwen, a coworking space owner who created her coworking space to be “open, bright,” Justine and Paige appreciated the openness and natural light of Cosite, with its open workspace and large, industrial windows. In fact, many members mention natural light as either a reason for choosing their current coworking space or one of the resources they appreciate about it. Justine had been working from home for three to four years before joining Cosite, but at her last office job, although it was a great position, the physical space was far from ideal, “because it was cubes and drop ceilings. You go in and it’s dark in the winter, and you go home and it’s dark. No sunshine. So, this, I would say, is *way* better.” Paige similarly found Cosite’s physical space pleasing. Although she feels more productive at home, where she has fewer distractions, she liked going to Cosite “because it’s an open, airy environment.” Working within a strict budget, Paige had to prioritize cost in her choice of space for her and the group of

fellows she managed, but also needed an open space that could accommodate thirteen people working together when needed. The light and airiness simply made the space a more pleasant place to work.

Ben, the cofounder and manager of Alloy, also emphasized the importance of light and open space when choosing a location for Alloy. He and his cofounders had to move to another space in the building when the rent increased, but he preferred the first space, because “[i]t was a lot closer to the initial idea of having a large shared space that was open and very literally transparent. Having a lot of daylight was important to me.” In fact, some members of Alloy I spoke with who had worked in the previous space also found that they preferred that one over the new space. Maggie, for instance, found Alloy an ideal workspace, until the coworking space moved to another location in the building. She later transferred to another space in town, CO2, but mentioned the importance of the natural light to her satisfaction with both spaces:

I think it’s a little bit may be not as tangible but the fact that both of them had massive windows with a lot of light for me was really important. I really, really love the outdoors, and I love being outside. And so, having an office job, it’s really important to me to have a lot of sunlight. So, both of them had a lot of sunlight, which is really important to me.

In contrast, Keira, another former member of Alloy who also moved to CO2, found Alloy to be too bright and liked that CO2 was a bit dimmer:

I will say that for a lot of people, it’s probably a really great environment because it’s very brightly lit, but I prefer to work in like a dark, dark basement so [CO2] is a little better for me in that aspect. So yeah, [Alloy] is a little bright for me.

Keira’s preference for dimly lit workspaces may be somewhat of a professional norm among Web developers, software programmers, and others who spend a large portion of their time coding. For instance, Nate mentioned a coworking space he described as “basically a coding den; it’s software focused, and they keep the lights low.” In any case, light matters.

DÉCOR AND DESIGN

The layout of a coworking space – whether an open-plan design or more divided space with private offices – and even the office furniture and art on the walls can impact the coworking space potential members choose. When speaking about the elements of the physical space that attracted him to Alloy, Landon mentioned the décor and art:

I mean I wasn't looking for anything in particular. Like there are some places that are like super cool and everything, and [Alloy] just kind of had this, I don't know, I actually feel like it's kind of representative of the people there and of Nate, which is – especially the original space – was pretty minimal and open and lots of white, but kind of random and a little eclectic, you know? So, I don't know. It did feel to me, a little bit more than like, I don't know, that IndySpire¹⁷ had local art on the walls, but I really didn't like the art. Just little stuff like that. It's kind of funny how much, I guess as someone who does visual work, that probably affects me more than most people.

Connor also spoke about the décor in his coworking space, ProShare: “I also really love all the art work on the walls, the decoration. It's something that I really look forward to coming here each day.”

Owners and founders often furnish their spaces with input from early members or with potential members in mind. For instance, in addition to design appeal, Gabriel (ProShare) specifically thought of comfort when he was furnishing his space. When asked what he thought the role of an owner is in making a space successful, he spoke of the importance of finishing the space well:

Gabriel: I'd say finishing it well. I don't want to sound snobby. You can tell when someone finishes a space on the cheap side, and I think it just doesn't feel right. First, the chairs that we're sitting in and the tables, the cabinets, even the doors and the handles on them, they weren't cheap. Just little things like that make tenants feel like they're a part of it. One of my tenants labeled their shelves. It says [Company Name], with a little arrow pointing up. They didn't ask me to do that. I don't care that they did. I take it as a compliment, like “my lunch fork and knife and bowl and plate are here.”

Sandra: They take a sense of ownership?

Gabriel: Yeah, they take a sense of ownership of it. Sometimes I think stories are the best way to answer questions. So, one story comes to mind. Soon after we opened, when we were 100% full, which only took us three months, which was great. There was a party here that my video tenant was holding, and I was

¹⁷ IndySpire is a pseudonym for the first coworking space that opened in Riverport.

talking to another tenant that they did video work for. Another example of the networking. He was kind of marveling at the success we've had. He said, "you guys are full in two in buildings; that's amazing. So, that's the only thing you guys have got to do, is just keep the building full, right?" I was like, "no, not really. I have to make people *want* to stay." I gave him the example of the chairs in the conference room at the building he was in at the time. They're made by Steelcase. ... When I first wanted to get them. My wife works for a furniture vendor. She said, "I think you should get these chairs." She showed them to me. I said, "they look great." I sat in them, and I said, "they feel great." I was like, how much are they? She said, "they're \$400 each." I was like, "what?!" I thought I would just go to Staples. I thought I would get 8 chairs for \$400. Then, she explained to me, "the reason you like sitting in it is the pneumatic device, and it leans back, and it's comfortable. You get what you pay for." That was my learning curve. Then, I explained to him [the member] about the chairs: "You've probably never thought about that chair once, but you know you like having meetings in that conference room, and that's all that matters. You don't have to know why. But, if we make it feel right, and you want to stay, then my job's done." So, that's how I would explain that question.

Gabriel's attention to finishing the space well, as he described, did not go unnoticed by ProShare's tenants. In fact, the comfort of the furnishings was something that one ProShare member cited as a key reason for choosing that space over other options. Connor explained the importance of comfort in his selection of ProShare this way:

I looked at [Workmine], as well. That seemed really great. One issue with that: the chairs didn't really seem that comfortable. It was kind of your standard coffee shop metal, not something that I'd want to have my ass on for 10 hours at time, basically. Other than that, it's really nice. It had a lot of light coming in there. That's nice. I've met at least one of the people that works there often. So, it seems great. But, this is a lot closer, more comfortable.

For Connor, comfort and proximity to home won out over Workmine's good light and the space where his boss works, FlexExec, which requires a longer commute. Keira, a former member of Alloy, also spoke about the importance of having comfortable chairs. Although she did not initially choose Alloy because of its amenities, nor was it a principal factor in her decision to leave, she did appreciate the chairs in her new space, CO2: "[Alloy's] desks and chairs weren't as nice, and I think when you're sitting in a chair all day, it's really important [to have nice chairs], and [CO2] does have nice chairs."

COOLNESS AND CACHET

For some members, more intangible qualities attract them to one space over another. Hallie and her colleague chose Alloy over other coworking spaces to some extent because of its coolness:

We chose [Alloy] . . . I'm trying to think why we . . . well, it was a cool kid place. That was number one. But then also because it was . . . you could have your own space and leave your stuff there, versus other places where we saw you had to come and go and take your stuff. And it was more inexpensive than a lot of the other places we looked at, as well. . . . We went to a couple of other places but we loved . . . the Steelworks¹⁸ building and the vibe of that place and the people who ran the place. So, it just worked out for us.

As Hallie noted, though, other factors like price and assigned workspaces also tipped the scales in favor of Alloy. Still, Hallie asserted that the coolness of the space and the building “was number one” among the reasons they chose Alloy.

Dana and Valerie also chose Alloy in part because of the cachet of the neighborhood, which is recognized locally as a creative hub for those in their industry. They also appreciated the resources available in building complex, Steelworks Mill, which houses a radio station, an art gallery, boutiques, a coffee shop, craft distillery, graphic design firms, and other small businesses. As Valerie expressed:

I think for us being in Steelworks, it was just kind of a status thing. It was like come visit us at Steelworks Mill and people were like, “Oh that’s cool,” or “Oh the space is great.” And it just kind of enhances the experience when they meet us and makes everybody feel cool. As long as they feel cool, it’s like fun.

Steelworks Mill’s name recognition among their clients lent status to Dana and Valerie’s company. Dana emphasized the other people working at Steelworks Mill and the amenities available in the area, as well:

We checked out a couple of different spaces and [Alloy], it’s like kind of . . . it seemed appealing to just kind of be associated with people who are involved in like events and the arts. And it seemed like that would be a good relationship to begin nurturing and just being at [Steelworks], it seemed like it would be, have a

¹⁸ Steelworks is a pseudonym for a former factory converted into a complex of commercial spaces, referred to here as Steelworks Mill.

strong appeal. They have a lot of offices in that building that we could ... there's a coffee shop, soda shop. It all makes sense.

Dana and Valerie chose Alloy partly with their clients in mind. Paul, another Alloy member, also felt that the “less buttoned-up” atmosphere of Alloy fit with his business:

Part of it, too, is what's consistent with the culture of our business. And I'm not the hippest guy in the world, but in theory our company is somewhat hip. So, it's nice to have a hip space I guess.

Although, Paul considered the “hipness” of the space “ancillary” to other concerns, such as affordability and amenities like a conference room.

ACCESS AND AMENITIES

Members generally appreciate amenities like free printing and free access to conference rooms. Some amenities that set coworking spaces apart are 24-hour access to the space; an onsite gym and showers; a variety of workspaces like tables, standing desks, or private offices; free conference rooms; and close access to coffee shops and restaurants. The table (2.1) below outlines the access and amenities offered by the four coworking spaces where I conducted field work.

TABLE 2.1: AMENITIES

Space	24-hour access	On-site gym	Dogs Allowed	Various workspaces	Free meeting rooms
<i>Alloy</i>	All members ¹⁹	No	Yes	Assigned desks and couch only	One meeting room
<i>Cosite</i>	Full members	No	No	Tables, desks, standing-height desks, couch and chairs	Initially, no separate rooms; later, meeting rooms and a classroom ²⁰
<i>ProShare</i>	Office tenants or those with designated desks in cubicles, but not for drop-in coworking	Yes	Yes	Private offices or suites for tenants. For coworking members, one large table primarily, some chairs and tables in lounge areas scattered throughout the building, outdoor seating, kitchen area seating ²¹	Several
<i>Workmine</i>	Operating hours only at first, then began offering 24-hour access to full members	No	Yes	One large table, desks, standing-height desks, couches, outdoor seating, coffee shop ²² /kitchen area seating	Several

¹⁹ There was only one type of membership available at Alloy, which included a reserved desk and 24-hour access to the space.

²⁰ Cosite has since grown to offer access to separate meeting rooms like the other three spaces, and the area around Cosite has continued to develop, but at the time of my interviews, it did not offer separate meeting space, nor many nearby places to grab coffee or lunch. They did offer free coffee in the space, though.

²¹ ProShare later extended their coworking options to include

²² When I first started working at Workmine, a pop-up coffee shop operated out of the large kitchen area during limited hours of the day. The coffee shop later moved to their own space nearby.

THE PEOPLE AND THE “VIBE”

Many independent workers and entrepreneurs take a strong interest in networking. Meeting new people can expose them to new business opportunities by connecting them with potential clients, collaborators, and contacts. For this reason, the existing members of a coworking space or businesses nearby can present a strong draw for potential members. Dana, for instance, chose Alloy over CO2 and other options, because of the presence of *Illk* magazine in the same space and the businesses in the same complex of buildings in Steelworks Mill. She commented:

Really just the relationship, just the idea of being able to nurture the relationship with [*Illk*], I had, kind of like, a point person at each company for, you know, like I was in touch with [the operations manager at the magazine] and then I was in touch with [someone] from [the radio station in the building] and then in touch with some folks from [another] office, and since then it's like nine of us people and now like I'm having daily conversations or grabbing a weekly coffee and we're doing more and more things together and it's just I've seen growth and, you know, opportunity for our artists because of where we're at. Which is why I decided...two reasons for picking [Alloy] were because I thought that opportunity would pan out and because of price.

Although Dana liked the space and meeting rooms available at CO2, she prioritized the potential for making connections with the people at Alloy and in Steelworks Mill. Similarly, Izzy looked at several coworking spaces and business centers before choosing ProShare. Several factors went into her decision – for example, she “didn’t like the parking situation” at IndySpire, located in downtown Riverport – but one of the reasons she ultimately settled on ProShare was because she liked “the vibe” of the space.

HOW MEMBERS’ INTENTIONALITY VARIES

The four coworking spaces where I conducted field work – Alloy, Cosite, ProShare, and Workmine – differed in terms of member intentionality in several ways. As explained above, the three most common reasons members cited for choosing to start coworking were, in order: productivity and/or professionalism, sociability, and separation between work and home. Variety in workspaces also featured

in one members' rationale at each of the four spaces. The table below summarizes the variation in members' intentionality across the four coworking spaces (Table 2.2). Variety is not included, as it did not vary across spaces.

TABLE 2.2: MEMBERS' INTENTIONALITY ACROSS COWORKING SPACES

Coworking Space	Members' Intentionality
<i>Alloy</i>	High Productivity, High Separation, Medium Sociability
<i>Cosite</i>	High Productivity, Low Separation, Low Sociability
<i>ProShare</i>	High Productivity, Low Separation, Medium Sociability
<i>Workmine</i>	Medium Productivity, Low Separation, Medium Sociability

Cosite members were the most likely to name productivity or professionalism as a reason for coworking, the reason provided by a majority of the members I interviewed. Alloy had the greatest number of members (5) who sought a coworking space because they wanted separation between work and home, while Workmine had two, and the other spaces had only one member each. Cosite had the lowest proportion of members who joined for sociability, while ProShare and Workmine had the highest proportion of the four spaces. Chapter 6 examines the consequences of this variation for the quality and strength of coworking communities.

CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the socioeconomic context of the rise of independent labor, as well as the challenges independent and remote workers face. Risk and challenges concerning work effort visibility feature prominently in the work environments and employment relations these workers experience. Remote workers use a variety of technology-mediated communication strategies to increase their work effort visibility and improve communication with off-site bosses and coworkers. For some, perhaps especially women, remote work presents opportunities, in that reduced visibility with management can equate to a reduction in side projects or “busy work.” Coworking may also represent a valuable source of social support and means for independent workers to collectivize risk.

The discussion above also presented four key reasons why workers join coworking spaces: (1) to increase productivity and promote professional development, (2) to combat loneliness and isolation, (3) to reinforce the boundary between work and home, and (4) to pursue a different way of working, characterized by variety and flexibility. For some members, major life events precipitated their turn to coworking. Izzy experienced a major health crisis that prompted her to reevaluate her priorities. She wanted to work less and have more time for other things. ProShare allowed her the social interaction she craved and provided amenities like a gym where she could work out during the day. Teresa also made a major life change after her father became seriously ill, since “whenever big things happen, you start to think, is this really the life I want?” She quit her job in another city and moved to Riverport, where she started freelancing. Kyle also decided to make the leap from working for a firm to working on his own. Membership at Cosite and Workmine facilitated that transition, as it helped him find clients.

Members also varied in the reasons they reported for selecting one coworking space over another. Price led among the factors members considered, while location and proximity to members’ homes also

featured prominently. Characteristics of the space's layout and design, such as open-plan layouts and light, airy spaces, appealed to many members. Some even mentioned art work and seating as reasons they preferred a particular coworking space. For members who planned to meet clients in their coworking space, the "coolness" of the space, as well as the building and neighborhood where it is located, also influenced their decisions. Finally, amenities and access to the space also impacted members' choices, with 24-hour access and a variety of workspaces the most influential.

Members' intentionality has implications for the quality and strength of coworking communities, as we will see in Chapter 6. To the degree that a coworking community precedes the coworking space, members' intentionality can also influence founders' intentionality. Although members' and founders' reasons for coworking differ, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the problem of loneliness and isolation is one shared by members and founders alike. Having previously worked or currently working as independent or remote workers, founders tend to arrive at coworking already empathetic to the needs of these workers. Still, coworking yields unexpected benefits and insights for founders, as well. The next chapter examines founders' reasons for opening a coworking space and the visions they have for what they hope to create in those spaces.

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CHAPTER 3

FOUNDERS' INTENTIONALITY: RATIONALES FOR STARTING A COWORKING SPACE

INTRODUCTION

Building on the previous chapter's discussion of members' intentionality, this chapter examines the intentionality of coworking space founders and owners: why they choose to open a coworking space and their visions for what they want to create. Like regular members, coworking space founders and owners include entrepreneurs, freelancers, and independent workers who are able to work remotely. They do not, however, tend to comprise full-time employees of a small business, unlike some members who work in coworking spaces because their boss chose to. As entrepreneurs, freelancers, and independent workers, they experience many of the same challenges faced by their members. For many, it is these very challenges that compel them to open a coworking space, often after connecting with others in the same situation, as discussed further below. Others saw changes in the market that made opening a coworking space seem like a prudent business decision or even a potential driver of regional economic development.

The discussion in the section below focuses on the various reasons founders and owners cite for creating their coworking spaces. Most of the remainder of the chapter examines differences between founders in terms of the reasons and values that arise in discussions of why founders or prospective founders wanted to open a coworking space, the business of starting and maintaining a coworking space, and the culture of coworking spaces. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the nature of coworking communities and an assessment of the impact of founders' intentionality. The data for this chapter derive

from interviews with fourteen coworking space founders and owners – ten from the Global Coworking Unconference Conference (GCUC) and one each from my four remaining research sites; interviews with five staff members – one from GCUC, one from Cosite, two from ProShare, and one from Workmine²³; observations from fieldwork at GCUC and four coworking spaces; and surveys of my interviewees and GCUC attendees.

WHY DO PEOPLE CREATE COWORKING SPACES ?

NEWCOMERS VERSUS ORIGINALS: DIFFERENT VALUES AND REASONS FOR OPENING A SPACE

For some, coworking offers primarily a profitable way to fill commercial real estate space in the changing market. For others, like Frederick, coworking represents more than mere business strategy, but a conscious effort to create value for coworking members by developing a flourishing coworking community that encourages serendipitous encounters between members, or what Ronald van den Hoff calls “unexpected, relevant experiences” (van den Hoff 2014: 194). Some GCUC conference attendees noticed that newer and prospective coworking space owners tended to have different reasons for opening coworking spaces than many of the originals – the founders of the earliest coworking spaces – had mentioned. While the originals shared desires for community, the newcomers often had more business-oriented aims for their spaces. The questions that came from new and prospective owners at the conference often centered on how to make coworking profitable. Some originals I spoke with at GCUC voiced concerns that as coworking grows and becomes more institutionalized, more and more people

²³ At Alloy, the smallest of the four coworking spaces where I conducted fieldwork, Ben performed both the role of founder and community manager.

become interested in opening spaces, but many of these newer and prospective space owners do not operate under the core values of coworking: accessibility, collaboration, community, openness, and sustainability.

Part of the conflict arises from different understandings of the core values, as they are deliberately vague to allow diverse interpretations and expressions of them. As Sean put it, “the great thing about the core values is that they are open to interpretation; the problem with the core values is that they are open to interpretation” (Sean, interview). Yet, as the proportion of prospective owners in attendance at GCUC grows, so does the fear among originals that many of the new guard do not know the core values at all. Many originals expressed that, whatever diverse interpretations there may be, the values set coworking apart from a pure service model of office space rental.

Entrepreneurial-Oriented versus Community-Oriented

A divide seems to have emerged between the more community-oriented originals and the more entrepreneurial-oriented newcomers. This split becomes particularly visible in discussions about growth. While a concern for both originals and newcomers, session leaders at GCUC – who were most often established space owners – tended to talk about space growth in terms of community growth and growing in a way that preserves the nature of the community. For instance, Lori felt that there was a push to get more members faster and to grow the space bigger faster; she argued for the value in slowing things down, as building a strong community takes time.

In contrast, questions from GCUC audience members, which contained many new and prospective owners, centered on square footage, that is, how to decide when expansion of the space was economically sustainable or how to decide how big a space to open in the first place. This differs significantly from what originals focus on. In fact, when speaking to me about the core values of

coworking, Sean stated, “one of our constraints is never focus on square footage. When we are making a decision, and square footage even comes into the conversation, that’s a clue that we’re about to go down the wrong road.” He discussed the decision to grow and how this has become a recurring theme at the conference in the past few years:

Every time we’ve grown it’s the same thing. We don’t grow because we have to grow. We grow because the community is growing. Together we discuss the pros and the cons of getting bigger. There’s going to be more overage. Is that what we want? There’s more risk. Is that what we want?

Growing for the sake of growing is a big theme at the conference and has been for the last couple of years. If you think you need to make your coworking spaces bigger in order to be more profitable, I think you’ve got your head screwed on wrong. If you can’t look at what you have and see more ways for it to be more valuable, I can’t imagine that bigger is actually going to be better. It will probably be worse. One of our party lines is, bigger isn’t better, better is better.

Certainly, economic sustainability necessarily concerns all space owners. Space owners must decide how much to charge for membership and if and how much to charge for other services to create a coworking space that generates enough income to sustain itself. However, established founders’ discussions of economics most often reference sustainability and value for the community members rather than pure profitability, and are often couched in terms of a commitment to members or the desire to create lasting change through the community. For instance, Harrison highlighted the sense of responsibility founders feel to the people that invest their time and effort into creating the space:

Building a space that isn’t profitable and won’t stay open, you’re asking people to give a lot of their energy and a lot of themselves. That doesn’t necessarily mean that they all will work but to essentially invite and ask people to engage with something that you have no idea, I had no idea how to make Hub work when I started. I think you get the picture. You’ve got to have a model that could emerge that could support it. Otherwise, I’ve seen so many times really good people put energy into things, and everybody only has a limited amount of energy.

Although most space founders must navigate a steep learning curve, especially during the early days of coworking when there were fewer examples of successful spaces, as Harrison explained, a commitment to the community often fuels their drive to figure out quickly how to create and sustain a thriving coworking space. Building relationships is integral to that process.

When Owen took over the leadership role at Cosite when the prior leadership team left, he had not only to manage the logistics of opening the space, but also to rebuild relationships with people who had helped the original leadership, which included a succession of directors. When the opening of the original downtown location fell through, people in the network²⁴ began to lose faith. Working with the existing leadership, several of whom continued to help run the space for several months, Owen coordinated an open house, which had already been scheduled, but “didn’t have food, drink, music, lighting, anything planned. We didn’t have electricity in this space.” He established a firm launch date for the new location and worked to rebuild relationships with people who had helped with the previous effort, including a furniture vendor and the landlord:

It’s always been uphill. So, things just started working out, people helped out, [Aaron] believed in my plan and came back in, so some of that furniture’s actually his that he just gave to me; the two circular tables, the green and white chairs, the conference table. Honestly, the value that he gave me was his belief in me, pulling it off, I think. ... And then [Rick], the landlord, was very helpful.

In addition to Owen’s hard work, the relationships he maintained contributed significantly to the ultimate success of the space.

TYPOLGY OF FOUNDERS’ INTENTIONALITY

Although newcomers to the coworking movement seem to lean increasingly toward the entrepreneurial-focused end of the spectrum, when I started my field work in Riverport in 2014, I selected observation sites that I anticipated would fall along a continuum from more entrepreneurial (what I called tenancy-focused) to more communital (community or mentee-community focus). Yet I was careful not to select sites that leaders in the broader coworking community might consider business centers. However,

²⁴ Cosite was originally part of a network of coworking spaces with several locations, but eventually pulled out of the network and became an independent space. They renamed the space to reflect the change.

ProShare, which I had thought would lean toward entrepreneurial, turned out to fall somewhere in the middle, having a more collaborative focus. Cosite, which changed its status from a non-profit to a for-profit entity, also had a collaborative focus rather than the community-mentee focus I had expected. As a result, none of my sites fell into the entrepreneurial focus category. These sites, along with the sites of founders I interviewed and surveyed at GCUC, helped me derive a typology of founders' intentionality, illustrated in the figure below (Figure 3.1). Where my four observation sites fall on this spectrum is summarized in Table 3.1.

FIGURE 3.1: TYPOLOGY OF FOUNDERS' INTENTIONALITY



TABLE 3.1: RESEARCH SITES CATEGORIZED ACCORDING TO FOUNDERS' INTENTIONALITY

Entrepreneurial	Collaborative	Communital
	Cosite ProShare	Alloy Workmine

RESPONDING TO CHANGES IN THE MARKET

After the economic downturn that followed the dot-com collapse in the early 2000s, many commercial spaces that had housed start-ups or small businesses had lain empty. Unemployment rose, particularly in Silicon Valley. Many software engineers, Web designers, and programmers previously

employed at Internet start-ups began freelancing or working independently as the economy began to recover between 2003 and 2007. As discussed in Chapter 1, Bar Camps²⁵ and the origin story of coworking both have their roots in Silicon Valley and the Bay area during this time period, in 2005. By 2006, there were approximately 30 coworking spaces worldwide. The number nearly doubled in the years that followed (Deskmag 2012). Though the growth rate has slowed, the number of coworking spaces has continued to rise, with approximately 13,800 coworking spaces worldwide as of 2017 and more than one million members (Deskmag 2017).

A similar cycle occurred in the wake of the Great Recession of 2008, though the impact was far greater. Unemployment nearly doubled from 2008 to 2010. As employers downsized, demand for office space declined. By the second quarter of 2010, office vacancy in the U.S. skyrocketed to 17.4 percent, the highest level since 1993, following a mild recession in the early 1990s (Zurich Services Corporation 2011). In the months after the Great Recession, the gig economy began to flourish and move to online platforms: for instance, Airbnb was founded in August 2008 and Uber in March 2009, both in San Francisco. Non-employer, or gig, employment has been steadily increasing since then, though the size and growth of the gig economy has proven difficult to measure, and comprehensive data difficult to come by (Hathaway and Muro 2016). In this context of widespread layoffs, vacant office buildings, and a growing freelance economy, the question emerged of how to use so much empty commercial space when the market need for traditional office spaces had declined.

²⁵ As a reminder, Bar Camps are “unconference” conferences related to technology and open-source Web applications.

Finding a New Use for Commercial Space

It occurred to some founders that coworking could offer a sensible solution. Although the paths to this conclusion differed to some degree, the most common originated through a professional connection to real estate. Many became interested in starting a coworking space because they, a business partner, or client owned empty commercial space. For instance, in response to a survey question asking what made her decide to start coworking, one GCUC attendee stated: “A client had physical space, asked me to provide [recommendations] on usage, [I] did research, discovered coworking. Eureka! Proposed partnership to client – built it!” In fact, many of the founders and owners I interviewed or spoke with at GCUC noted a large increase in the number of real estate agents among that year’s conference attendees compared to prior years. They estimated that a significant subset of prospective coworking space founders currently owned existing business centers or worked in commercial real estate. Several GCUC attendees I surveyed who work in real estate development or currently own a business center stated that they were “looking into it” or “considering adding it to [their] existing business model,” while the president of one real estate consulting firm indicated that she serves as “a consultant to people starting [a] coworking space.”

Other founders viewed coworking as a natural development in the business world. Before opening a coworking space, Frederick had previously run conventions and meeting centers. He decided to open a coworking space after the economic downturn of 2008 had impacted the corporate meeting market. Seeing corporations getting smaller, with fewer staff members, training sessions, and meetings, he “realized that those corporations, whether the economic crisis was over or not, we wouldn’t go back to business as usual” (Frederick, interview). In response to the developments he perceived, Frederick began doing research to develop a new model, more suitable to the new economic reality:

I started to look around me and saw certain developments. ... We have to find out how to design a new kind of concept. We did a couple of prototyping stuff with some of our clients. After three years of researching and doing stuff we opened up [our] first [coworking space] location in [our country in Europe].

Thus, the decision to use existing business space or empty commercial space often intertwines with the perception of a shift in the market toward smaller, more agile companies.

Finding a New Means of Economic Development

Some cities and regional governments have perceived in this market shift new openings for economic development. In recent years, European governmental organizations have directed significant attention toward the transformation of abandoned industrial space for economic revitalization. For instance, the European Parliament initiated the concept of Creative Districts, in order “to demonstrate how such ‘old’ industrial regions can, via their policies and support measures for entrepreneurship and innovation, help to create a supportive ecosystem in which innovation and creativity can have a chance to happen and in which entrepreneurs can develop, innovate, grow and internationalise [sic]” (European Commission 2013). Two creative districts officially launched in spring of 2013 in Wallonia, Belgium and Tuscany, Italy. In the United States, in lieu of the traditional approach to regional economic development through attracting major employers, some have focused on the groundswell of entrepreneurs, solopreneurs, freelancers, and remote workers as a means of fueling economic growth. Richard Florida (2012) argues that the creative class, which encompasses most of these workers, characterizes a major engine of economic growth and development for post-industrial cities and regions. For some founders, creating a workplace for these workers became the driving force behind their decision to open a space.

Jake was the economic development manager for Seaview²⁶, a small coastal city in North America, and one of the cofounders of his space was the city's mayor. Aiming to generate economic growth and opportunity for Seaview, they had to contend with the constraints of the city's geography and limited ability to provide the capital and incentives to attract large companies. Yet they soon realized the growth potential of the area's human capital: the independent workers who were working from home or commuting into the large metropolitan areas nearby, Metroville and Saint Émile²⁷. If they could provide a space for these workers, they imagined, they could entice more workers like them to stay in their city. Thus, they started their coworking space "really as a way to sort of do economic development by other means" (Jake, interview). Instead of attracting one large company, their goal was to attract many small companies who could be a source of growth. Jake explained:

We realized that in a place like [Seaview], which is close to [Metroville], right? But there's a couple thousand-foot mountain range between us and them, and there's a lot of people who drive over the hill as we say, live in [Seaview] but commute over to [Metroville], and they'll sometimes go all the way to Saint Karl to work. We knew that we weren't ever going to be able to recruit or attract a big company to come, like, "oh, we'll get some big company to show up, and they'll bring 250 jobs with them, and there'll be a big ribbon cutting, and everybody will be happy." Right? We weren't going to be able to do that, partly because of geography, partly because we didn't have the tools and the money and the incentive to be able to do that. But, what we realized in [Seaview] is that there's a lot of people that are working in this new way of work, who are freelancers, independent consultants, telecommuters, small entrepreneurs, sometimes entrepreneurs who are big, huge growth streams. And, so, let's put a *there* there for those guys. Let's use, if that's sort of what we have at our disposal in terms of creating a vibrant local economy, let's use that.

So, long story short, I quit my job as economic development guy. We raised a little bit of angel investment capital. We started [our coworking space] really as a way to sort of do economic development by other means. And, our idea was, rather than trying to recruit, attract, or retain one 200-person company, what if we could recruit, attract, or retain 200 one-person companies? So, those one-person companies, if even a few became two-person companies, then that would be a huge job-creation event for our small community. So, let's try to do that. And, we ended up realizing that this was a phenomenon that wasn't unique to just our town. We realized that this was a phenomenon, this notion of people trying to, with the workforce disaggregating, of people re-aggregating on their terms, making a living, making a life on their own terms. ... So, that was our real impetus, and then along the way we realized this was a nation-wide, international phenomenon. That we were on the cusp of a once-in-a-century shift in how, where, and why people worked.

²⁶ This is a pseudonym for the name of Jake's town.

²⁷ These are pseudonyms, as well.

Recognizing a transformation in the way people work, Jake and his cofounders provided a space for these new workers, where they could meet and generate opportunities for each other on the micro level, and economic opportunity for the city on the macro level.

EXPLORING A NEW WAY OF WORKING

Most coworking space owners indicate that they wanted a different work environment²⁸ from what they previously experienced, which ranges from coffee shops to home offices to traditional offices with cubicles. The owners I spoke with typically had experience working remotely and most also had extensive experience working in traditional workplaces. The desire to approach work in a completely different way from their prior experience, both in traditional workplaces and at home or coffee shops, features prominently in owners' and founders' reasons for opening a coworking space. In building a coworking space, founders essentially create their own ideal workspaces, as Gwen explained: "I've built this for me, so it's very much my ideal workspace: open, bright, spacious, has all the tools that I need." For Gwen, this meant preserving what she loved about working from home – a short commute – but reducing the distractions of home. Abby similarly expressed that she "created [her coworking space] to be [her] ideal work environment, so it is. One hundred percent." That means an environment that is "open, inspiring, with the ability to easily go outside, and with great proximity to retail and a restaurant." Brooke likewise indicated that her coworking space "exactly" resembled her ideal work environment. For Brooke, part of what makes the space ideal was the people who work there: "Yeah, it's my ideal working environment. I'm surrounded by ideal work people. I'm also in the unique position of being able

²⁸ As defined in Chapter 1, the term *work environment* refers to the general set-up workers use as their office, including the physical environment, the people in the space, and the resources available.

to train everybody that's around me. They tend to be people I get along with or that are easy to get along with." Thus, most owners start on the journey of opening a coworking space because there was some aspect of their work environment that they wanted to change. Designing their own work space enables founders to keep what they liked about their previous work environments, such as lots of light or free coffee, and change what did not suit them as well, such as closed-off spaces or cubicles.

Most often, founders – especially those who previously worked in traditional offices – cite coworkers as the primary element they miss about former work environments. Indeed, many coworking space owners, as well as members, start coworking because they want to work around other people. As many space founders who had previously worked in traditional offices had subsequently worked remotely, combating the loneliness and isolation they experienced working from home or at coffee shops represents a central motivation for opening a coworking space. When Xavier created his own business and started to work from home, he “thought it would be paradise; it was a nightmare.” He found working at home unproductive and “depressing,” as he never saw anyone. He started working at a local coworking space and ultimately began operating two coworking spaces through his company. Gwen had an analogous experience working from home before founding her coworking space:

At first, I thought I would be productive, but I wasn't as productive. I found I was very distracted, and I got a little bit lonely. You're not around other people. You're just working by yourself. I have to be around other people.

She valued being in “a real working environment,” removed from the small distractions of home, like laundry and dishes, where she could focus and, importantly for her, be around other adults while she worked.

FLEXIBILITY AND A “LESS CORPORATE MINDSET”

When asked about his reasons for becoming involved in coworking, Owen, founder of Cosite, spoke of a desire to “rethink business” and push them to think about having a positive social impact. He believes coworking provides “work-life balance” and a “less corporate mindset.” He described it this way:

Sandra: You said, “corporate mindset.” What does that mean to you?

Owen: Yeah, so I used to think it was obvious to all coworking spaces. I’m learning that it’s not. Something that we really emphasize is that you’re an adult, you’re an individual, independent person, and the old mindset doesn’t have a culture that respects that.

I don’t know if you met our intern, [Francesca]. She’s not here this week. She’s on vacation, but she’s usually sitting next to me, as well. She came from a finance job where she was telling me that she literally had to put in a slip requesting a 10-minute break during the work day. Which is crazy to me, but that’s kind of a lot of the corporate mindset. So, even in a more flexible corporate space, they usually have, you need to be here by this time, you have to stay till this time. ...

I guess we’ll talk about our side of things. I really want people to take ownership over the space, as of it’s theirs. So, that means I’m really trying hard not to, like, calculate hours for people²⁹. So, if they say they’re going to be here 20 hours, if they’re blatantly abusing it, I’m going to know. I’ll have that conversation with them. But maybe one week they’re there a lot longer, and then the next week they’re not really there that much. That’s on them to kind of figure out. Same with guests or if they have guests, we have a two-hour rule, but we’re pretty flexible on that.

So, just really creating a very easygoing, you are in charge of you. This is a space you’re a part of. If you don’t respect the space, then the space isn’t going to be as good as you want it to be. And that’s been really going well for us, I think.

The corporate mindset, in Owens’ view, places more emphasis on adherence to rules. In contrast, coworking spaces offer more flexibility and treat each worker as “an adult, ...individual, independent person.” The latter style places more trust in the worker. As we will see in Chapter 4, trust is a prominent feature of interactions in coworking communities.

²⁹ Cosite has different levels of membership that include a certain number of hours per week.

SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF LONELINESS

In fact, for many founders, working around other people is even more central to why they started coworking. Many coworking space founders speak of a sense of isolation or loneliness as the driving force behind their decision to open a coworking space. When asked what made him decide to start a coworking space, Sean replied, “I was lonely. I didn’t actually want to start a coworking space at all, but I didn’t want to be lonely anymore.” Sean argued that a primary benefit of coworking is combating loneliness:

The number one benefit is solving the problem of loneliness. Loneliness can surface in so many more different ways than I ever thought. I had my perspective of loneliness and what it meant to me. People think they are lonely in lots of different ways. The camaraderie, the support, the difference in perspectives, those are all benefits. The reason those benefits are worth anything is because those things don’t exist when you are alone.

While many coworking space founders set out to create a workspace removed from the isolation of their home offices, where they can work and socialize with other workers, in doing so, they recognize that many other workers feel the same sense of isolation. As a result, providing a community of coworkers for other workers often becomes a central element of founders’ vision for their coworking spaces.

Discovering and Communicating the Benefits of Community

As many founders believe that other workers experience the same loneliness and isolation that they experienced, they often try to communicate the benefit of community to prospective members. Asked what he tells potential members when giving tours of his space, Nate described how he explains the focus of his coworking space:

I usually like to explicitly state that we don’t believe that people are lacking an internet connection and a place to sit. People are isolated at home. They go to coffee shops to be around people, but they’re still isolated. It’s too chaotic. Our focus is combating that isolation. We have internet connections and desks and meeting rooms and coffee and printing. We have all those things, but our focus is really on the community.

As discussed further in the next chapter, coworking space communities represent a significant resource for workers. For some coworking members, particularly those who start coworking due to their own feelings of isolation or loneliness, the value of the community may be clear before they begin coworking. Others realize the benefits more slowly. Space founders who have benefitted personally from working around others seem particularly committed to communicating its value to prospective members.

Lori spoke about how coworking gave her a deeper appreciation for the magnitude and needs of the independent workforce. Seeing the members of her and Nate's coworking space figure out how to manage their work underlined for her the importance of building social support systems for this growing group of workers. Lori explained how these realizations were unexpected:

Sandra: How would you say that coworking has affected the way that you view work more generally?

Lori: In a big way, it definitely opened my eyes to the growing independent workforce. At first my mindset was more like people are going to be more flexible over time, but I don't think I had my eyes on how many people were doing their own thing, either by choice or by force. That's definitely been really fascinating to learn about. I realized about five years into doing this that I was using my sociology degree. This is like social systems, we're figuring it out. I have this cool study playground. That was really interesting to learn, I think.

The other thing that I've just found fascinating over the years is figuring out how it is that people manage their own independent work. I'm definitely learning over time how important support systems are. No matter what type of work you have, if you don't have a support system, watching people trying to figure out how to build those all for themselves has been really interesting, as well as watching lots and lots of people go through big professional transitions. That's been fascinating for me to learn from and to understand and to watch things that work out really well for people and things that don't work out really well for people. I'm definitely learning a lot more about what makes people be able to get things done and not be able to get things done. That's been really fun. That was all very unexpected. I don't know what I thought I was going to learn, but that's what I have been learning, which is good.

Sandra: So, this growing independent workforce, what do you think coworking gives to them?

Lori: Definitely the sense of belonging is one of the more important things. I watched the light kind of turn on for a lot of people. It was like, "oh, I'm not the only one who is going through this." Even though I think lots of people understand conceptually that they are not the only freelancer, they are not the only remote worker in the world. It's a very personal experience to feel lonely or to feel untethered and to have a question that you need to ask somebody, but don't have to go through your work's VPN or Skype to try and get that stuff sorted. Those are all the things that are getting in the way of being able to have a simple and meaningful human interaction.

Founders frequently experience this first personally, and then sympathetically. Lori witnessed “the light turn on” for members as they realized they were not alone in their loneliness, and she realized not only the importance of having a sense of belonging to a community, but also the critical role that coworking space founders can play in providing the foundation for those social support systems to build upon. This theme also emerged when I asked Lori about the “intentional” aspect of coworking communities that she and her co-founder Nate had talked out. She clarified:

I think the unintentional workspace tends to be coffee shops, libraries, places that people are just searching for the thing that they want. I think for us, we are just very clear about this is a place where those things can happen, whether it’s just getting work done or meeting somebody or going out to lunch with folks. There’s an intention behind what we do, and that’s valued space. Having a staff person here who can help you out and having a team of community cultivators who are here to help you out and inviting as much participation as possible, that there’s an intention behind that. The intention is to craft a place where a coworking community can coalesce.

The intention, then, is to supply workers with a space where they can find the resources they want and need. There is value in that kind of space. Thus, while solving the problem of loneliness is a common goal among founders in seeking others to work with and in ultimately opening a coworking space, coworking can also lend founders new insight into the needs common among independent and remote workers.

“THE CLUB WANTED A CLUBHOUSE”

Coworking space founders often help connect a community of workers before having a designated space to work. This is often intentional, in that most established space owners stress the importance of building a coworking community before building the physical space, as discussed below. However, rather than gathering people together with the intention of creating a coworking community and, eventually, a coworking space, this group of people may conversely form the initial impetus behind developing a coworking space.

Before founding his coworking space on the East Coast, Sean had searched for community in his city. He wanted to be able to find workers he could potentially collaborate with or learn from. Sean recounted his experience:

After a failed attempt to move to another area, I decided to hunker down and be like, “all right, if I can’t find a community here, I’ll see if I can at least find a couple of people and go out and scour the city. It doesn’t need to be somebody that I want to...that does what I do or even does web development. Who are the people that care about doing quality work, that care about work?” I said, “Who are the people who care? Who are they? What are they doing? Why do they care? What’s good? What’s bad?” And all those things.

The more people I met, the more people I realized had the same problem that I had not being able to...it was too hard to find the people that were in your own backyard. When you find each other it’s like, “holy shit where have you been my whole life!” We’ve been down the street from each other, but there was no way to discover each other. All the best things I’ve found in [this city], all the most amazing things that have happened [here] comes from the growth of this community over the last several years. The dirty little secret is, the amount of new things we created are very small. It’s mostly surfacing the things that were already there. You’ve got to look. You’ve got to listen. You’ve got to ask questions. That’s what today [at GCUC] was all about. People are so fast to create something that they think doesn’t exist that they don’t stop to see what might already be there that they can contribute to themselves. We did a lot of that. The group of people that were doing a lot of that started feeling a little bit like a club. Eventually the club wanted a clubhouse. That was where the coworking space came to be.

Seeking people who “care about doing quality work,” Sean ended up finding a lot of workers who were in the same situation, looking for the same thing. He realized that the community formed as a result was something each of them could contribute to and develop. Rather than individually searching for an existing community to meet their professional needs, coming together engendered the community that could satisfy their collective needs.

Brooke described a similar phenomenon that compelled her to open her coworking space in North America. When asked what made her decide to open a coworking space, she explained:

Basically demand from my existing clients. Ten years ago, I opened a cultural center that was an art gallery and a work space, event space for the students of [the local] College of Art and Design. It went really well, but those same students once they exited the school system were looking for somewhere to go and they needed assistance with being self-employed. That’s when I created [my company]. That was the first company. They did studio services and support. The studios were very rough and raw work spaces. Those clients that were using the production studios said, “I need somewhere formal to go for a meeting with my client when they are coming to the studio to visit. I need somewhere to do the clean work, working on my computer. I don’t want to bring it here, it’s so crazy. It really isn’t clean when I come; there’s paint and

sculpture stuff everywhere.” We started looking for an event space and a work space that would be much cleaner. It was a demand from existing clients and myself. We all needed somewhere to work, so [I thought,] let’s just do it somewhere where we all can get to, right in the middle of the city.

By working alongside other artists in a communal studio space, Brooke appreciated the need they all shared for an event space and a clean workspace where they could bring their computers and meet clients.

Tom described a similar origin for Workmine. His business started with offering classes in the Riverport community taught by local entrepreneurs, small business owners, and teachers. Eventually, as he talked to the people teaching the classes and the people taking the classes, he and his business partner realized a space would be valuable for them and for the expansion of their business. He explained:

Tom: At some point, I recognized that the business was never really going to grow enough if it was just about those kinds of classes and workshops. There simply aren't enough people in [Riverport]. I couldn't stock a calendar full of enough classes to ever really make enough money just doing classes and workshops.

So, part of it was a realization that something needed to change. Part of it was, as I said, this realization that the people in our community were kind of hungry for other stuff too. I thought, rather than try to figure out how to scale this thing really big, which would have probably required putting it in other cities or putting the classes online, I tried instead to figure out, "How do I deepen the roots of what we're doing here in [Riverport] and serve this community of entrepreneurs in a deeper way?"

That is when we started having conversations about, "what do people want? What do they need?" Space kept coming up. We thought, "What would happen if we opened a space? We could have our classes there." That sounded really appealing, because finding spaces for classes wasn't always easy. It also occurred to us that there could be plenty of other revenue streams coming out of the space. Coworking seemed like a really easy one. Renting the space out for events is another one, though I'm not particularly keen on that, but it is possible. Having the space just opens up a world of other possibilities.

Sandra: Why aren't you keen on renting out the space for events?

Tom: Mostly just that I don't want to be in the event business personally. It is just like a whole other world with catering and people have expectations about rentals and bringing stuff in. I have no interest in that.

I really don't have an interest in – how do I say this? Even as someone who is running a coworking space, I don't have much interest in thinking about the space as the thing I'm monetizing. I think if I wanted to do that, I would have split it up into private offices and just tried to rent them out, and then I'd be essentially a landlord for people, and that's just not the business I want to run. The business I want to run is about the people who are here and what they are doing and what the work is that drives them and how I can support what they are doing and ultimately monetize that.

For Tom and his partner, Asher, having a space for their classes not only benefitted them, but allowed them to provide a service to members of their community. The needs of the latter ultimately drove their decision to open a coworking space.

JOINING THE “CLUB”: CREATING AN INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY

For some founders, as well as some members, the community and not the space is what they need. Sean uses the analogy of a fraternity, in which some fraternity members live in the house full-time and, therefore, pay extra dues, while other members pay dues to be part of the fraternity, but do not need the fraternity house. He describes some members at his coworking space who did not need a workspace, but found it worthwhile to be a member of the coworking space to stay connected with their network:

In fact, when we opened a coworking space, the majority of the people that were in the club were effectively in the community and didn't need a place to work. We had two full time members, and I was one of them. The vast majority who signed up for the basic membership – many of them prepaid for several months in advance – were people who said, “this is going to make it easier for me to stay connected to the people that I'm connected with and connect with more people like them. That is worth \$25.00 a month.” When they said “yes” with their checkbooks, I was amazed and pleased. I said, “okay, then you guys are in it with me.” The entire growth history is that story on repeat.

People who opt to join the community as a member may already have a place to work, but want to have a way to connect with members of the coworking community. As Sean explained, this may be because they work in an office where no one else does what they do, and they want to have people they can confer with. It may also be to connect with people they could partner with on projects or potential clients, as some members I interviewed indicated.

One of the main features that founders feel set apart coworking communities from other workplace communities is that the workers in a coworking community all choose to be there in the space. In this way, founders argue, members also choose their coworkers. Of course, workers in traditional workplaces also exercise some degree of control over their work environment, including their coworkers,

by virtue of the jobs they seek and accept. However, founders typically regard coworking spaces as more flexible than traditional workplaces. Whereas traditional employment arrangements would oblige dissatisfied workers to change jobs in order to change their coworkers or work environment, coworking members can simply change seats or offices, or move to another coworking space if needed.

Jake described this as a “self-organizing” community, in contrast to the communities formed in traditional offices:

The thing about it, you know, you’re not at a coworking space because your boss told you, you have to be. It’s self-organizing. So, I’m there because I want to be there. So, one of the ways I often heard coworking described is sort of like working all in one big company but without the office politics. So, that’s kind of like, I think, a code for like, we enjoy being with each other but we’re all independently doing our own thing. So, like, ‘well, Sandra got the big raise and promotion when I thought I was up for it.’ There’s none of that stuff. Or, like, ‘I’m brownnosing the boss, and so I’m getting ahead,’ because there is no boss. We’re all working for ourselves or for each other. So, it’s a wonderful self-organizing kind of ground-up sort of community. There is community at work, like, the old way of work, but at the end of the day, we’re all there because the same person signs our paycheck, not because we’re all sort of self-organized to be there.

Asked to compare his coworking space to places he had worked in the past, Nate also described this freely chosen, deliberate aspect of coworking communities:

The other thing that’s really important when we talk with our members or when we talk to our community when we are highlighting the difference in our space versus other spaces or like a traditional office environment, is at any given moment, 100% of the people here want to be here, which is not anywhere near what it is like to work in an office. Usually, especially if it’s on Mondays, less than 50% of the people want to be there. Mondays are awesome here, because if you are slow and you don’t want to go in, you don’t show up. The people who do show up are like, ‘I got shit to do. I’m doing my thing, and it’s exciting.’ People are here...Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday are our busiest days. People leave on Friday. Friday is our slowest day. That kind of energy, where everybody wants to be here, is awesome.

Additionally, when explaining why he first decided to open a coworking space, although he “mainly wanted a different career from software,” Nate also talked about making work in the community a larger part of his regular workday, rather than something he does only after work and on the weekends. Getting to choose his coworkers and build an intentional community was an important benefit:

I thought what we do in our work is actually a wonderful way to connect with people and build a community that way. We do it in our offices, but you don’t really get a choice when you’re at your office.

They kind of tell you who you're going to be friends with and who you're going to work with so it's tricky. Coworking represented all those things to me and I really wanted to...I've been in the community...when I bought a house I bought a house with five bedrooms so that I could have housemates. I've been coordinating large art rides here in Seattle that we do every year for the Solstice Parade. I used to work on a free taxi service where I bought an old car, like this old checker cab. We drive people around for free, some things like that. Coworking was kind of a way to bring all that together into one thing and actually make a career out of it.

Both Jake and Nate emphasize choice in their descriptions of coworking communities as compared to traditional office communities. Thus, in their view, traditional coworkers work together by chance; comembers³⁰ of coworking spaces work together by choice.

CREATING “DISRUPTIVE INNOVATION”

For other space founders, the desire to connect their work with broader transformations in society fueled the drive to open a coworking space. They sought to participate in “disruptive innovation.” That is, rather than implementing small, incremental changes, they sought to be part of a fundamental shift in the way people work. Said Harrison, founder of a coworking space in Australasia:

The previous business that I had before this was a small business IT business. We did incremental innovation, not disruptive innovation. I hated doing incremental innovation. It drove me completely crazy. I remember one day trying to sell a small business on why they needed a 2.4 gigahertz processor rather than 2 gigahertz processor. It was kind of like, “actually, you don't freakin' need it at all.” I mean, it's like, this isn't what I, that's not what I like doing. The concept that I'm part of an industry and a movement, which completely and utterly changes the way that we work, that's attractive to me. That does get me out of bed in the morning.

For Harrison, working with incremental change enabled through technological innovation, like a processor with more gigahertz, was unfulfilling. More exciting and meaningful to him was the opportunity to do work at the cutting edge of innovation. Coworking offered him that opportunity.

³⁰ I use the term *comember(s)* to describe people who work in the same coworking space, but are not employed by the same company. I use the term *coworker(s)* in the usual sense, to describe people who are employed by the same company, who may or may not also work in the same coworking space.

In fact, several founders mentioned the term “disruptive innovation” or expressed the idea. Nate felt that his involvement with coworking had “completely revolutionized the way that [he views] work” (interview). Like Harrison, he regards coworking as part of a larger shift in the way people work. Nate elaborated:

Again, it’s kind of, me personally [I think] that it’s kind of this fundamental, once-in-a-century shift, that is... Steve King³¹ talked about this a little bit [at the conference]. It’s that this is not part of an economic cycle. Like, you know, ‘this is all going to go away once the economy’s better.’ He’s like, the economy’s better! It’s not only better, it’s as good as it’s been, by a lot of metrics, in a long time. Even pre-recession. So, this is here to stay, and it’s a structural shift. And, I think it’s a structural shift that is as big or bigger than the last major structural shift, which was the Industrial Revolution, a century or a century a half ago. So, here we are. It’s a much more subtle shift, much less noticeable shift, because giant factories with huge smoke stacks aren’t showing up on the horizon as kind of visual reminders. Instead, it’s Starbucks crowded with laptops. That’s sort of the...So, it’s a much more subtle, but no less huge and socioeconomically disruptive change than that was. So, stay tuned, fasten your seat belts, because we’re just at the beginning of this.

Although Nate’s initial reasons for opening a coworking space, as explained above, related principally to economic development, he soon discovered that the shift in the market toward smaller businesses was part of a broader shift that would only continue.

Abby also experienced a change in her perspective about work after she opened a coworking space. Although she opened her coworking space because she wanted a workplace other than her home, where she had worked for nine years, Abby came to see that many other workers wanted a different kind of workplace. She explained how her view about the purpose of work changed as she perceived this shift in work more broadly:

[Coworking] has really turned it on a dime. I opened [my coworking space] because I needed a place like [that]. I didn’t understand... I knew because I had done the research and gone to coworking spaces, I knew that there was this serendipity people talked about that was awesome and powerful. But I didn’t understand how important that could be in people’s lives. In addition to that, I knew that the shift to mobility was

³¹ Steve King is a Partner at Emergent Research. He presented research at GCUC on business trends relevant to coworking.

driving this, and the shift to telecommuting was driving this. I didn't know at the time the huge shift from being solopreneurs and freelancers and consultants and all that was going to continue to skyrocket.

This whole thing means that people no longer necessarily are going to take being told where they work. They are going to go work where they choose to work. I'm betting that they are going to choose coworking. For me, the future of work is work taking place in all sorts of interesting spaces, of which coworking is one. It's really changed how I think about work because there's been this huge shift to independence, this whole shifted choice. Before, when I was working a perfect job, I didn't really care or think that much about the future of work and what my part was. Now I influence people globally to change.

Through running her own coworking space, Abby learned from her members how impactful choosing their own workplaces could be. For instance, one of the members of her space, who was morbidly obese, had joined the space after having a near death experience. He knew he “needed to go somewhere to make himself get dressed and be around other people” and not “isolate in his home” (Abby, interview). He ended up losing 150 pounds. For another member, who was experiencing turmoil in her personal life, “going to [the coworking space] was her oasis; it was her happy day” (Abby, interview). Seeing how her coworking space had affected not only the work lives of these members, but their personal wellbeing, Abby realized the importance of having a workplace with a supportive community.

Now, the purpose of work for Abby involves providing workers a coworking space as one of many options of places and ways they can choose to work. In fact, for most of the owners and founders I spoke with, creating an environment conducive to interactions, where a vibrant community can take shape, represents a chief goal for their coworking space. This goal influences many of the decisions they make about their spaces, from location of the space to the placement of the furniture, as discussed further below.

THE BUSINESS OF COWORKING

FIRST COMES COMMUNITY

Once founders have decided to open a coworking space, a lot of work goes into actually opening and operating a successful space. Many space founders emphasize the importance of building community *before* opening the space. How do founders attract members to a coworking space before it exists?

Asked how one builds a community that precedes the space, Brooke replied:

It's more about finding the people who would embrace the idea more than the facility, than the new building facilities for those people. It's going to be different for every group of people you find. Really the way to start is inviting people to meet up for what they call Jellies, which is coworking in a random café. If there is someone who gets it enough to know 'I'm going to be more productive sitting in a group of people while I'm working on my laptop, and I can do it because my work allows me to,' then they try it and they find the benefit of the community. Then their only problem is, hey we need an awesome space to do this, where we don't have to buy coffee at and we don't have to listen to the espresso machine. Then you can build the space and meet that need, which is kind of what happened with our community coming to us and saying, 'can you find us a space where we can do this on a regular basis, where we can expand into this?'

I think Meetups are a great way, also the local schools where you can actually reach out to an entire graduating class especially people in the sub-employment programs and things like that. It's a really great target to hit all those people and inviting them to collaborate. It could be coworking in the park. [Max] in New York did coworking at the Met so they would just go to the museum with their laptops and when the batteries die, the batteries die, and it's done. ... I think it just shows people it's not the space. Coworking isn't about the space. It's the community. It's the collaboration. It's the action of coworking, not the location of coworking.

Other space owners also mentioned graduating students as a pre-existing community in need of a space.

In fact, several GCUC attendees I surveyed who were interested in opening a coworking space or had recently opened their own spaces, were representatives of educational institutions, such as a technical college in the northern United States that had started a coworking space. For others, like Ben and Sean, the first community members are their personal friends, friends of friends, or current and former colleagues.

Founders I spoke with, particularly at GCUC, often stated that the needs of the community drove their decision to open a coworking space. Some had no experience with coworking before starting their space. For instance, Tom shared what prompted him to open a coworking space after I asked him about his prior experience with coworking:

Sandra: What experience did you have with coworking before you started this endeavor?

Tom: None. Zero. And I never really wanted to open a coworking space. It wasn't like I had some vision that this would be a great thing to do. It was more so about talking to the people that were in our community around classes and workshops and trying to understand who they were, what they were working on, what sort of things did they need and understanding that having a physical space to house our classes would be great for us, but also having a place that could serve the people in our community in a lot of different ways would be useful to them and thus, useful to us.

I had no experience with coworking unless you sort of think about coffee shops as coworking spaces, or I've spent time at the [local business incubator] and thinking about that as a coworking space. It depends on how broadly you want to think about coworking.

Sandra: When you say "people in the community," who do you think of when you say that?

Tom: Good question. Really the path from the class marketplace that we were to the coworking space that we are kind of really started with us noticing that the teachers that were teaching with us were predominately small business owners. They were teaching classes as a means of marketing their businesses. So, we might offer a book binding class because the person who teaches book binding has a book binding business and wants to promote that, and by working with us, we are promoting them and they are promoting us. It was kind of a good relationship.

But, when we talked to that person more in-depth, we realized they needed a lot of other things. They need space to meet with people, space to pull up a whiteboard, they are tired of meeting clients in coffee shops. And so, when you think about how to broaden our business beyond just classes and workshops and how we serve those people, we realized we could really be serving them in a lot of ways. I guess it started out with a conversation about our teachers and thinking of them as kind of the core of our community.

On the other side, you have all the people that are taking our classes. They don't really fit into one group. It is a little harder to serve that audience, because it is a broader spectrum of people. I would say that we're shifting our model kind of slowly over time so that our classes are a mix of the kinds of classes I mentioned that are taught by creative entrepreneurs. We are peppering in more classes that are for creative entrepreneurs.

It may eventually be that the kinds of people taking our classes fit into a category of entrepreneur in a little more predictable way. Right now, you've got a book binding class, and it is all over the map. Honestly, that is just a harder business to run. It is harder to market that way; it is harder to describe who we serve that way. I like instead thinking of us as a resource that serves entrepreneurs, and one of the ways that we do that is by offering classes taught by entrepreneurs for a larger audience.

That is a long-winded way of saying that we sort of started thinking about our community from the teachers' perspective first, and I think it has been morphing a little bit in terms of thinking of it more as entrepreneurs, and that they are kind of our core audience.

Workmine's community preceded the space, and the needs of that community motivated Tom's decision to open a coworking space. As illustrated above, this reflects a communal intentionality.

THEN COMES THE SPACE

From the location of the space, the selection of furniture, the arrangement of desks, the display of art to the cost of membership, what membership includes, the decision about how decisions are made, and even what to wear, founders are faced with a myriad of decisions. They must remain mindful that the choices they make influence the workers who seek membership in the space, as well as how members interact with one another. One of the first decisions founders must make is where to open their space. Many choose the urban core of their city. This preference of founders' mirrors recent trends in office space tenants' preferences, which tend toward "space that is more centrally located, space that [is] more strongly amenitized, space that's close to public transportation, space that offers retail to tenants, space that offers fitness centers" (Privcap 2014: 0:34-0:55 of video). For example, when opening locations in several different cities in his country, Harrison and his team focused on central business districts (CBDs) in high traffic areas, primarily for transportation reasons.

Founders and members alike often look for an easy commute to their workspace. Many space owners include their initial members in the decision, looking for spaces in neighborhoods close to where they and their members live, as Sean, Nate, and Lori did. Ben noted that both price and location factored into his decision of where to open Alloy initially. He elaborated on the features driving his choice of the original space:

That space used to be a warehouse. It was storage space for a bookstore. It wasn't heated or cooled. It was just racks of shelving and a forklift and a garage door in the back. I saw that, basically the land lord let me...he provided a blank slate to work with and it was very cheap per square foot. It was sort of an old space with a lot of character. Those things made it a lot more attractive than say a nicer space out perforating the town. Centrality was also important. I live less than a mile from here and I wanted to be close to downtown, close to the center of the city more than downtown. It's more about being proximate to as many things as possible as opposed to being close to downtown specifically.

Due to a rent increase, Alloy eventually moved to a small space in the same building. As discussed further in Chapter 5, the new space did not go over well with some members.

Finding an available space in the desired neighborhood is the next challenge. Some owners rent or lease space from a building owner. This brings its own challenges, as some building owners with commercial space to rent may expect traditional businesses as tenants and may not understand the different needs of coworking spaces. For instance, the owner of the first space Lori and Nate considered for their coworking space was unfamiliar with coworking and had certain requirements, such as not entering the building after a certain hour of night, which would have restricted what they could offer in the space. Some founders, like Frederick, have an established relationship with building owners, so renting a space is straightforward. Still others make the decision to own the buildings their coworking spaces are located in. Brooke indicated that this provided a lot of flexibility when they considered expanding, as they already had available space in the building they could grow into. It also allowed them to rent out adjacent spaces to tenants with potential relevance to the coworking space:

Our first tenant was Starbucks. That's interesting, because there are a lot of people that go to Starbucks to work. They are just sitting there on their laptop. Every day, I will go over there, and I will be like, 'you need to learn about coworking, come next door.' It is a really easy way to bring new people into the space.

Not only do her members have a convenient place to get espresso drinks, she is also able to recruit new members from a place where many freelancers work: a coffee shop. Founders who rent instead own their spaces have much less input in the services and amenities offered in the building. For instance, Owen, the founder of Cosite, spoke to the building manager about recycling services, which some members had expressed interest in, but failed to get his approval.

DECORATING AND FURNISHING THE SPACE

After selecting a space, owners must decide how to fill it. Not only can furniture and décor affect how potential members perceive the space, but, as mentioned above, they can also influence the overall atmosphere and how members interact with each other in the space. Founders who rent their spaces have less flexibility in the physical structure and finishes of their space, but they can sometimes advocate for changes. To illustrate, the landlord of the building in which Cosite is located wanted to install fluorescent lighting in the space. Owen managed to convince him to put in drop lighting instead. As the owner of his building, Gabriel had complete control over the finishing and outfitting of ProShare, selecting chairs that members would feel comfortable sitting in for long periods of time, high quality finishes that he felt would project professionalism, and artwork and décor that fit the personality of the building.

One of the major decisions space founders mentioned was the arrangement of furniture and the design and flow of the overall space, in essence, how open they wanted their spaces to be. Nate explained how his and Lori's focus on the community guided their choices about the interior of their coworking space:

Because of [our focus on the community], we make choices like we don't have any private offices. It's all open seating, but we understand that you need flexibility in how you work. All the seating is in pods of four to eight desks. Maybe you don't like where you're sitting one day because it's too quiet or too noisy you can always get up and move. That flexibility is the most important thing. You can make choices on any given moment. You can't make the choice to just go and be by yourself.

Nate and Lori try to get that intention across to members at the first visit, when they come to check out the space before joining.

Because founders seek to cultivate collaboration and mutual support among members, another intentional design choice owners sometimes make is to try to discourage people from sitting by themselves. For instance, they may cluster desks of similar sizes, or mix full-time members with flex

members, so that the full-time members can sit next to different people. Sean explained that part of the need for this is to counteract the behavioral “defaults” that members come in with:

[In] coworking spaces, for some reason people are actively choosing to get up in the morning, take a shower, put on clothes, come in and pay money in spite of the fact that they have to do none of those things, [and they] will still come in and sit by themselves. It’s amazing, but it’s people’s natural response. They do what is the most comfortable. They do what is habitual or because they are not sure what’s normal. We try to create smarter defaults, better defaults, so it’s easier for them to do a thing that is in their best interest than it is to do something that is not in their best interest.

Founders like Sean and Nate understand that even decisions they make about the arrangement of furniture can affect members’ experience in their coworking space. If members’ “default” behavior diverges from founders’ overall intentions for what they seek to create in their coworking spaces, furniture placement, space design, décor, and dress are among the tools at their disposal to adjust. After having worked from home or at coffee shops, many members come to coworking accustomed to low levels of social interaction during work hours yet craving more. Space owners often must help break members of these existing working habits through subtle or not-so-subtle means of fostering social interaction, such as minimizing private spaces or clustering desks together. Most founders I spoke with also emphasized a desire for members to feel a sense ownership of the coworking space. Founders must decide what ownership of the space signifies. For some, it means having members who will empty the recycling bin when they see it overflowing; for others, ownership equates more to a sense of comfort in contributing feedback about what resources or events members would like. Either way, decisions concerning a space’s design and layout typically reflect founders’ and owner’s intentions for their coworking space.

These decisions also provide a means of reinforcing the space’s social norms, such as who greets visitors or who should refill the paper towels in the kitchen area. As most spaces employ a community manager or a similar staff position, enculturation into a space’s preferred practices and values will likely involve educating members about the community manager’s purview. At Sean and Mason’s coworking space, the staff used the layout of the space to help do this, as Sean described:

You walk in [our coworking space], and there's all kinds of cool shit everywhere. The layout is interesting. Sometimes the layout is a little bit weird and jarring. There [are] some intentional things like we don't have a front desk. For a while we did and we actually noticed that it caused more people to treat staff like a receptionist. After a recent reboot, we removed that reception area and folded back into a cluster of desks. What was amazing is members came up to me and said, 'I noticed you did that, is that because we go to [Nicole] for everything?' I was like, 'well, yes that's actually exactly why it was', which was really cool.

Having a reception area had prompted members to treat staff who sat there as they would administrative staff in a traditional office's reception area. Sean and the staff chose to remove the front desk of their coworking space to illustrate to members that their coworking space does not include a receptionist in the traditional sense. By restructuring the traditional workplace configuration, Sean and the staff facilitated a change in the way members interacted with the staff. The community, in turn, shapes the space in both material and interpersonal ways. As Sean contends, "the way the place actually looks is a strange, curated chaos where everything cool that you see is not the result of a master plan for a given aesthetic, but a reflection of who is in the room contributing to the interactions in the room" (interview). Thus, the process can be iterative.

THE CULTURE OF COWORKING

THE ROLE OF OWNERS AND COMMUNITY MANAGERS

Although owners and founders typically view their coworking spaces as their ideal work environments when they create them, they quickly become immersed in the work of running the coworking space. Once the spaces grow, they are sometimes able to hire staff to assist with the business of coworking, as described above. Initially, however, many owners and founders must rely on their cofounders, business partners, or community members to help run the space. From giving tours to prospective members, managing membership and finances, and ensuring the members are happy, to making sure the Wi-Fi works, the printer has ink, and the bathroom has toilet paper, space owners take on

the task of running the space, most often in addition to their other full-time jobs. Consequently, space owners are not typical members.

Tom spoke of not being able to be productive at his own work when at his coworking space, Workmine, because when there, he had to attend to the business of running the space. He interacted with members, engaged in conversations, but rarely had an opportunity to sit down and focus on his work. Brooke talked about having to draw boundaries, because members would often seek her consulting expertise, and sometimes the requests for advice were too cumbersome to give away for free. Nevertheless, despite having to sometimes draw boundaries or remove themselves from the space to be productive, most founders, including Brooke and Tom, seek to remain available and approachable to members. For Owen, the founder of Cosite, the desire to project approachability extended even to his wardrobe choices. He revealed that he dresses for work at Cosite in a thoughtful, deliberate way – professional, but not too dressy – so that Cosite members will see him as accessible and feel comfortable coming to him with comments or ideas.

Each of the founders of the four coworking spaces where I conducted research worked hard to cultivate community and foster connections among members in their spaces. Members I interviewed consistently spoke highly of the founders and their efforts, and most reported interacting with the founders on a regular basis³². These interactions between founders and members have a large impact on the overall vibe of the space. For instance, when asked about the role of the owner in making the space successful, Zara at Workmine said this:

³² Although the data collected for this dissertation does not lend itself to a social network analysis, nor was that the goal of the project, my interviews and observations of the members and founders of these four spaces do suggest that coworking founders function as central nodes in the social networks of their coworking spaces.

So, I mean a big reason why I like working at [Workmine] is because [Tom's] so great. He's sort of, he acts as a mother hen, and I think that's why a space succeeds or doesn't succeed. You know, there's [a business incubator and coworking space] downtown, which has a coworking space; it's also many other things, as well. I guess [Workmine] also falls into that. [Workmine] feels more like a family vibe. Like, [Tom] cares about what each person's working on. He engages in a conversation. He's a smart guy. He just creates a really nice space that feels like thought has been put in behind it, but without also feeling too motherly. You know? It feels like a smart, professional, well-executed space. He'll do occasional happy hours. Things like that. It keeps it light and happy and friendly. I think that plays a huge role. You go to [the business incubator], and it's super unwelcoming. Like, people there that are working at the front desk aren't nice, and like nobody cares. You know, it's just like the caring is really important.

So, I think a coworking space in my opinion doesn't succeed unless you have good leaders there. He's hired a few really great people recently to sort of run point, as well, so that the little bowls of M&Ms are filled, and the paper's restocked, and the mail gets delivered and has somewhere to go. So, yeah, I think it's really important.

Interactions founders have with members can set the tone for their coworking space. As Zara described, many members regard this type of engagement and "caring" as founders' responsibility and a decisive factor in the success of a space. In addition, having staff to "run point," making sure the printer has paper or packages get delivered, helps a space run smoothly.

Community managers and other staff also create and sustain connections with and between members. Francesca, a staff member at Cosite, spoke about her work there and how she initially viewed Owen's tendency to spend a good part of his day engaging with members in the space:

Sandra: Can you tell me a little bit about what you do on a typical day?

Francesca: Sure. I don't really think there is such a thing as a typical day, but I think you know [Owen] and [Ethan] have their own business. And from that, we stemmed off like a little wedding website business as well. It started recently, in the last two weeks or so. So, for the last few months I kind of have been juggling my time between that and [Cosite]. But especially launching the [Cosite] website, I've been doing a lot more design work than I thought I would. The website was mostly [Owen] and I. And he talks to the members a lot. I used to think when I first started there, I was like, "Why is [Owen] always going off and talking? Like, he said we had things to be doing, and he's like over just like talking life, gabbing life." But then you realize that a lot of it is about that community, and whenever we were taking on a logo or something, [Owen] would be like, "Can we go see what people think?" So I was like, "You need to sit here for one minute and focus," but then I started to realize like no, then people start to feel like they really have ownership and it's harder [for them] to say, "You know, no, I'm not going to come here anymore", "I don't really know anyone. The guy really never talks to me, I feel kind of..." Like, whenever you have this sense of community, and people are talking to you, when you feel like you have friends, [it's harder to say that]. So, spending time with the members, answering emails. I'm kind of in charge of events at this space, so coordinating that.

Francesca came to understand the value of engaging members in conversation and involving them in decisions about the space, like the space's website or new logo. As she explained, interactions like these nurture the coworking community and help members feel a part of it.

CURATING MEMBERSHIP

Coworking members come to coworking spaces with different needs and wishes, some seeking a productive environment with a lot of professional resources like printers and conference rooms, others with fewer resource-specific needs but greater desire for socialization. While coworking spaces generally attract a mix of members, having too many members looking to avail themselves of resources without engaging in the community can be detrimental to the community. For this reason, in part, many owners and staff have developed ways to select members they feel will fit their coworking community. Curating membership in this way represents the principal means that coworking space founders affect the nature of community in their space. Curation can range from application processes that get at members' reasons for wanting to join a coworking space and what they hope to contribute, to word-of-mouth recruitment strategies aimed at locating workers in a certain occupational category, such as graphic design or web development.

When asked about the essential elements of a successful coworking space, Dean (space manager, ProShare) spoke about the importance of having good people to staff it, but also about the importance of members, explaining that “a lot of co-working spaces like to try [to] curate their space to have certain kinds of people in there, so if you have people in there that love the space and kind of take ownership in it, that can make it really good” (Dean, Interview). When I asked about members' role in making a space successful, Gabriel, the owner of ProShare, described, in addition to basic “consideration” of other

members, a “screening process” he and his staff go through now to help ensure that the people coming into the space will be good community members. Gabriel expressed it this way:

Gabriel: Consideration, which is hard when you have this many people under one roof. And, I’d say that’s what... my bad days? It’s always that. It’s always someone being disrespectful of us or another tenant. That drives me crazy. Again, that’s a little subjective, and I have to get over it. Because in a way I’m so vested in building this, it’s like a house, another house. So, when people are disrespectful other tenants or to us, because we try very hard to accommodate and to offer great service on a daily basis, that’s discouraging. If a tenant comes in, I hope people don’t come in with the attitude, “I paid for this, now serve me.” I’d like for people to come in with the attitude, I paid for this, I want to be part of something bigger. Most, luckily, are like that. We actually do a very simple screening process now. When you get tenants like that, you can tell it just wears on the energy of the space as a whole.

Sandra: What is the screening process?

Gabriel: I can’t remember the questions, but Jenna is the one who invented that, so she could tell you more about that. I think there’re just five questions, like basic questions. Like, where do you see your business in five years? Why... we definitely want to know why they chose us. What do you think about coworking... is that one? To be honest, the questions help, but [Jenna’s] getting there, she’s our newest employee. But, [Claire³³], [Dean], and [Olivia], if [prospective tenants] are in our presence for more than 5 minutes, they’ve got the gut feeling. We kind of know now. It’s eye contact; it’s mannerisms. You can tell when someone wants to be part of the team. Very often, when it’s a cheerleader tenant who brings them in, we don’t have to screen them, because if you bring in someone just like you, okay.

For Gabriel and his staff at ProShare, screening potential members of a space comes down to fostering an environment in which workers “want to be part of something bigger,” ideally the community of the space.

In a traditional workplace, screening workers in this manner could lead to a violation of Equal Employment Opportunity regulations. Owing in part to racial and gendered patterns in technology-related jobs, still the most common job type among coworking members, white males continue to make up the majority of members in most spaces³⁴, though the percentage of female members continues to increase and has recently reached approximately 40 to 44% of coworking members (Deskmag 2017). Still, discovering whether screening practices result in exclusionary spaces is challenging. Coworking

³³ Claire (pseudonym) staffs the reception desk at ProShare and manages visual media for Gabriel’s company, and Jenna is another staff member.

³⁴ Exceptions to this include women-oriented spaces, such as Hera Hub.

spaces in the U.S. tend to be predominantly white male spaces, and my observational data support that. From what I could observe, the spaces where I conducted field work enjoyed little racial and ethnic diversity.

However, to curate membership does not necessarily mean rejecting potential members. Often, it means simply directing them to other spaces that might offer a better fit. For instance, when Brooke spoke about recruiting new members from events at the space, she explained that she starts by casually telling them about what they do there. This education of potential members about what coworking is also involves telling them about other spaces in the city³⁵:

I always get five or ten people from each event who are like, “I had no idea you were here. I had no idea coworking was a thing. I didn’t know I could do anything other than what I’m doing right now.” We tell them, “yeah it’s a thing, and there’s 25 options. There’s probably one right next to you. Where do you live?” We show them the map. “Here’s one right here.” We’re not afraid to refer to the other spaces. What we really want is to build that awareness and to get everyone who wants to be here, to benefit from the space, into a space. I don’t care which space. Once they are in a space if they move they will probably go to another space. They will tell people that they really enjoyed working in that space. Then maybe someone they know lives near me then they will be in my space. There is always a benefit to educating new people about it.

Gwen believes that most coworking spaces operate this way, referring potential members to other spaces in the area if they might be a better fit, and that this approach benefits the local coworking community as a whole. She stated:

I’ll say this, like 95% [of coworking spaces] are open, and they realize that we all have different things to offer. Maybe we’re located in different places of the city or one space is more of an incubator and the other space is more of a maker space. Everybody has their little niche. I think if you just look at it as that. One of the things that I heard at the [GCUC] conference was that the more coworking places that your city has, it raises the awareness, and all of them become more full [sic]. They each get more members. It’s just relative, that the awareness is heightened so more people are like, ‘oh I want to work there.’ It just brings up that energy and that buzz.

³⁵ Members often select coworking spaces close to where they live. Though it is beyond the scope of my data, future research could examine whether residential segregation relates to racial segregation in coworking spaces, particularly in the United States, where institutionalized racism and racist historical housing practices have produced residential areas that remain severely segregated.

In this way, space owners and staff often use initial meetings and tours with prospective members to selectively build membership and socialize members into the norms of the space. This process entails educating members on not only the benefits of membership, but the responsibilities of membership, or the role of members. This, in turn, ensures that the community of the coworking space, as well as the coworking community more broadly, continues to thrive.

CONNECTING MEMBERS

Many of the people I interviewed talked about the role of founders or community managers have in connecting people. Insofar as the community as a whole represents a resource to individual members, its value depends on the relationships that develop between members. Founders or community managers often make introductions between members, sometimes during an initial visit or tour of the space. For instance, when Kyle first came to Workmine, Tom, one of the founders of the space, introduced him to existing members. Here is how Kyle described that first interaction:

When I first came, [Tom] sat down and talked to me, got to know my business, and then gave me a tour and started introducing me to people. Then he was like, "Hey, you know what? It would be really helpful if you talked to this person. I'm going to introduce you." He walked back there and introduced me to that person and started the conversation. That's what happened to me, and it was awesome.

This introduction gave Kyle an impression of Workmine as a "inviting," "welcoming" place with "a very helpful culture," in contrast to other places he visited that did not do this.

In addition, founders also stress the importance of creating an environment conducive to interactions, where members can create their own connections with other members. For instance, when asked what the essential elements of a successful coworking space are, Harrison, a space founder, explained that "co-creation" is key, meaning that "you build the community before you build the space. Activate the community. You've got to constantly work on facilitating." Although he emphasized that

building the community is a “continual process,” Harrison also explained that space owners and staff should not be the only ones connecting members; rather, they should strive to create a space where members can connect on their own. He described owners’ role this way:

The other one that I’ve seen that is so incredibly important so that your team doesn’t burn out, how I describe it is, it’s not our team’s job to connect A with B. It’s our team’s job to foster a culture where A connects to B without them. If you’re constantly making one to one connections you will be a bottle neck. It doesn’t matter how good you are. At some point, you’re a bottle neck and at some point, you burn out.

Founders and community managers may often start out as the central node in the social network of their spaces. Yet, they aim to foster connections among comembers to encourage more members to connect with each other on their own. Founders and members typically agree that connecting members is the responsibility of space owners and community managers.

ENCULTURATION OF NEW MEMBERS

Owners have a vested interest in ensuring that prospective members understand what coworking offers, not only to maintain or increase membership levels but also to attract the right kind of members to their space. At a GCUC workshop titled, “Building Your Community without Burning Out,” led by Alex Hillman and Adam Teterus of Indy Hall, a participant asked them how they deal with disruptive or toxic members who become a negative influence on the community. Alex replied that when prospective members come into Indy Hall for a tour, Alex and other staff take that opportunity to tell them about how things work there. Introducing prospective members to the coworking space presents the first opportunity to introduce them to the social norms of the space.

For most spaces, the social norms include expectations of professional courtesy common in most workplaces, such as maintaining a polite demeanor with other members and keeping the volume of phone calls to a minimum. Beyond that, founders often refer to the community when they speak about

members' role in making the space successful. Brooke described both basic courtesy and engagement in the community, though the latter is not a requirement, but something members come to do themselves when they have a sense of ownership of the space. She explained this idea when asked about members' responsibilities:

The only part of that as a rule is: don't be a jerk. Really, they are responsible for themselves. Like I was saying before, the more they put in the more they get out. We're not going to force anybody to do anything. If they really want to participate in the community and get something out of it, they don't have to be involved in the event program. They just have to be open to collaboration on a daily basis, not offering to collaborate on a daily basis, but just open to it if someone needs help or if there is a new member reaching out to them and introducing them to someone new. I don't think we require that of them. I think it kind of happens naturally because they have ownership in the space. They all treat like their own office. If you're the first one in, you'll open it up. If you're the last one out, you close it up. Most people do their own thing independently, but they take ownership over the physical space.

Harrison similarly referenced being open to collaboration as part of members' role in the space. He argued:

Members also need to bring that intentionality. It's the member's job when they come to the space to also be thinking, "how I can connect every other member?" Then you distribute the responsibility for connecting and collaborating.

Many founders agreed that openness to collaboration factors largely in members' responsibility.

Harrison's view that members should also cowork with an intention to help connect comembers with each other is less common, though, as most see this as the responsibility of coworking space owners and staff.

Abby also stated that members' "role is to come in and be open to being part of a community and to participate in that community where it makes sense for them, but never to turn their back on it" (interview). For founders and owners, openness to collaboration and connections with other members of the community forms an integral part of what it means to be a coworking member. In this way, the core values of coworking permeate not only their approach to running their spaces, but their expectations for community members. Asked what she gets out of the work she does at her coworking space, Abby said:

People don't realize that it's not just a place to work. It becomes the place that people choose to go to because there are people there that care and that know them, know their kid's names and celebrate their birthday. They want to hear about their day and empathize when something shitty happens in their life.

Abby hoped to cultivate a community based on the core values of coworking – community, openness, collaboration, accessibility, and sustainability – making the space more than “just a place to work.”

A “Fluffy” and “Squishy” Environment

Mason, the community manager at Sean's coworking space, echoed this sentiment about the kind of community he and Sean hoped to create. He spoke about the “fluffy” features compared to other work environments, which involve what members can contribute to the coworking community. This means being valued for what people bring to the community – whether specifically work-related or not – not just for the job they do. When I asked how his coworking space compares to other places he has worked in the past, Mason expressed it this way:

The big difference begins with authority or begins with agency. When you are a part of [our coworking space], when you are a member who comes here – whether it's someone who comes here for a day pass and is just kind of moving through the location [and are] not going to stay, or somebody who is here who would call this place home – they have an understanding of your abilities of what you're able to do in this space. I think that's a large part of the discovery that I think doesn't take place in workplaces that I've ever been in before, whether it's a part time job or a full-time job or any of those things. I have an understanding of my responsibilities and my rights that I need to do [or] to meet in order to maintain employment in my other work environment. Never has it really been a focus for someone to tell me what I'm *able* to do, all the things I'm able to bring and create and share, the way that I'm able to improve upon my space.

It's a fluffy thing. That's one of the hardest things to give to someone else effectively and let them know what that means. It's the major, major difference. You can understand what that feels like when you come to a place like this. When I come to work at [my coworking space], I have this really cool understanding that every single person who is here today has opted to come. They made the decision themselves to come here today, including myself. That's not an understanding that you could have toward another work spot or none of them that I was previously familiar with.

Similarly, Lori argued that people interested in coworking should look for a space, not that they can get the most out of, but that they are the most excited about contributing to. She described this as the “squishy,” emotional elements of the workplace that people miss when they work by themselves:

It's not about finding a service provider that you can gain lots of stuff out of. It's actually about searching for a place that you feel like you want to contribute the most to. That's a much more interesting place to start, I think. There's plenty of places to get stuff and get a great deal, but there's not that many places that you are going to get excited about getting involved with.

I think again, it's squishy, it's hard to engage people on that level, especially when they are like, "You're a for-profit business. You just want to make money." I'm like, "If I just wanted to make money, I would just start something else." This is, it really is a place to just shrink the world a little bit and have a place that feels like yours that you feel excited about and you want to take your parents on a tour of, and bring your kids by every once in a while and show them where Mom or Dad works. I think those are the elements of the workplace that people always talk about missing when they've left a work environment of any sort, even if they thought it was crummy, that there's elements of it that they miss. All the elements that they missed are the social stuff and the emotional connections.

Lori asserted that what makes people want to bring their families to work – the part of their workplace they miss when they leave – is the social connections they have with other workers.

Further, Lori's vision of coworking as "a place to just shrink the world a little bit" suggests an intention similar to what Sean alluded to when he spoke about searching for community in his city. In an ever more fragmented society in which workers must largely provide for their own professional development and personal fulfillment, but which offers few organized ways to locate and access needed resources to do so, coworking can provide that access point, a town square of sorts. Putnam (2000: 91) argues that,

any solution to the problem of civic disengagement in contemporary America must include better integration between our work lives and our community and social lives. Nevertheless, a final note of skepticism is necessary about the workplace as the new public square for American communities. In the end, 'work' entails time and effort destined to serve primarily material, not social, ends. Work-based networks are often used for instrumental purposes, thus somewhat undercutting their value for community and social purposes.

However, coworking communities differ from traditional work-based networks. As will be discussed further in the next chapter, coworking members and founders draw a distinction between network and community, even if they believe that their coworking space offers both, and the quality of coworking communities ranges from instrumental to affective.

Recognizing “Ongoing Crazy Face”: Tours of the Space

In addition, as noted above, the process of enculturating new members can start from the moment prospective members walk through the door for a tour. Giving tours of the space to prospective members represents one of the most routine tasks for coworking space owners, community managers, and other staff, with most leading several tours per week, if not per day. These tours typically involve showing prospective members around the physical space, including workspaces, meeting rooms, and phone booths, and describing other resources the space offers to members, such as events or classes. Explaining the less tangible resources coworking spaces offer, however, can present challenges for owners and staff. Many owners believe the community is the primary resource of their coworking spaces, but struggle with how to “sell” this concept to prospective members. Lori had to learn the best approach for giving tours. It took a while for her to find the right words to connect with prospective members and adequately communicate to them what her coworking space offers. She explained this way:

[T]he least interesting question that you can ask somebody who walks in the door is what they do. That’s not why they’re here. The harder questions and the better conversation starters are like, “what brought you here? Why did you show up?” Usually, half the time you can see it their face, which is like they have the ongoing crazy face. I think recognizing that I needed to start there as opposed to the natural, a-little-bit-anxious-to-meet-a-new-person, default conversation, which is like, “oh, what do you do?” It’s fine; it’s just not necessarily going to lead you to the place where you get to engage at that level that you really need to engage at.

Giving a good tour of a coworking space, then, often entails recognizing that potential members may come into the space looking for a desk and Wi-Fi, but they need more than that to thrive in their work environment.

As Nate and Jake expressed, the challenge many space owners face with prospective members is explaining that although they offer the requisite resources for work, they do not rent desk space and Wi-Fi access. Jake described it like this:

One of the things we train people [on staff] to say is, when people walk in, and they say, “how much do one of your offices rent for? How much do one of your desks rent for?” We say, “well, we don’t actually rent you anything, we sell you membership in a collaborative community.” So, from that, kind of, initial touch point, we get people to understand what [our coworking space] is and what the experience is. So, that, yeah, it is a workspace, that membership comes with certain kinds of privileges to certain types of actual physical workspace infrastructure, but it’s still, no matter what kind of physical infrastructure you get, you’re still buying a membership in a community. So, to start that whole conversation off right away helps to kind of shape people’s understanding and what their expectations are. So, that’s probably the single biggest thing that I think helps to make [our coworking space *our coworking space*] is just to be really consistent with that notion that you’re buying a membership and not renting space.

Instead of rented offices, coworking spaces like Jake’s offer membership to a community of workers.

Although difficult for owners to convey, this concept remains fundamental to the kind of workplace that founders hope to foster and members hope to find in a coworking space. Members may not arrive equipped with a clearly articulated image of what they want or need, but experienced founders recognize the “ongoing crazy face” of workers habituated to isolation and self-subsistence in their work lives and bowling alone³⁶, so to speak, in their personal lives. Conversations founders have during these initial tours can help manage potential members’ expectations for the space and introduce them to the value of a collaborative community in an increasingly atomized age.

NATURE OF COMMUNITY

Nature of community refers to the variation, real or perceived, in the types of work and workers in a coworking space. In traditional workplaces, the degree of occupational diversity that exists within an organization varies from firm to firm. In some small businesses, workers may all do roughly the same job, while in others, each person functions as a department within themselves, with one person responsible for human resources, another for marketing, another for information technology, and so on.

³⁶ In his eponymous book, Robert Putnam (2000) uses the image of “bowling alone” to illustrate a broader trend toward isolation in American society, namely the decline of membership in organizations and clubs such as bowling leagues.

In this regard, coworking spaces do not differ much from traditional workplaces; some offer high levels of occupational diversity, while others are relatively homogeneous. Unlike in traditional workplaces, however, coworking provides workers a choice of how much occupational diversity they wish to have among their comembers, and sometimes even the extent to which they would like their comembers' occupations to resemble their own. By choosing among available coworking spaces, independent workers and remote workers can essentially have the coworkers of their choice, rather than none or just a few in the case of small businesses.

As noted above, space founders can directly impact the nature of community to a certain degree through curating membership, and indirectly through the layout and location of the space, which may attract certain types of workers. In addition to variation in the actual occupational composition of membership (i.e., how many real estate agents, photographers, or graphic designers work in the space), members' perceptions about the nature of community in their coworking spaces may influence the strength of coworking communities. Members make various distinctions among comembers, including: occupation; people who live in the neighborhood versus people who commute to the space; entrepreneurs versus remote workers who are employed by a company; or members whose clients reside in the same city versus members who do not have local clients. For instance, when I asked her how she would compare the work that she does with the work that other people at Workmine do, Zara responded:

So, there's two parts. One is like the actual content of the work that I work on, but also my work situation, which is that I have an office. Like, a lot of people *don't have* an office. That is their office for them. So, there's one other guy that I know of, the guy that, the developer from [an e-commerce company], is in a very similar situation. So, his office is in [the Northeast]. He chose to come work remotely from [Riverport]. They were fine with it. So, I think that's another interesting thing. I think we're the only two people who work for large companies that choose to work in that space. There *are* a lot of other people who work on similar types of things. So, there's another engineer who does web development. Like I said, I work on websites and apps. He works on very different types of content, but it's like similar technology stacks, things like that. So, we'll usually chat about things he's working on. But, then, there's a guy who's a freelance accountant. There's a woman who makes paper flowers. There's... I think there's someone who does tours of [Riverport], like custom tours of [Riverport]. So, you really get the full gamut of different skill sets.

As Zara did, members make distinctions between comembers based on micro-level differences, such as particular skill sets or “people who work on similar types of things;” meso-level differences like occupation; and more macro-level distinctions, such as industry clusters (e.g., healthcare or entertainment) or work situation (e.g., remote worker versus local business). These distinctions, in turn, vary in terms of their importance to the types of interactions that occur among coworking members, as well as the cohesiveness of a space. Chapter 6 will examine the influence of members’ perceptions about the nature of community on the quality and strength of coworking communities.

CONCLUSION

The discussion in this chapter centered on space founders’ intentionality – their reasons for opening a space – as well as their vision for what they hoped to develop in their spaces. Survey and observational data from GCUC suggest that a divide has emerged between more community-oriented originals (founders who established their coworking space years ago and who also tend to have a strong involvement in the larger coworking community) and the more entrepreneurial-oriented newcomers (new or prospective coworking space founders). From this data, I derived a three-fold typology of founders’ intentionality: entrepreneurial, collaborative, or communital. Alloy and Workmine fell into the communital category, while Cosite and ProShare’s founders had more collaborative intentionality.

Entrepreneurial intentionality indicates founders who decide to open a coworking space primarily as a business venture or as a means of profiting from existing real estate. Founders with a collaborative intentionality also operate their spaces for profit, but tend to emphasize creating resources of value to their community members or tenants. These founders seek input from members or tenants regarding business decisions, such as changes in the design or use of the space; plans for expansion or the addition

of new private rooms or communal space; or the creation of new activities or courses run for or by members. For founders with communitarian intentionality, the needs of the community drive the creation of the coworking space and often the configuration or layout of the space, as well as the selection of the space in some cases.

Intentions do not always equate to results, however. Coworking may enable some work goals while constraining others, or the space may change in ways that are no longer conducive to members' work productivity. On the other hand, coworking can bring unexpected benefits to members that even founders could not anticipate. The next chapter examines interactivity – what actually occurs in coworking spaces – and what kind of community these interactions engender. The discussion reveals the unexpected benefits and challenges of coworking, and the impact of interaction within the coworking community on individuals in the space.

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CHAPTER 4

INTERACTIVITY: QUALITY OF COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

The preceding two chapters outlined why small business owners, entrepreneurs, and remote workers seek out coworking spaces and why founders create coworking spaces. As discussed, many of these workers frequently work from home before coworking. Finding this isolating and unproductive, they then try working at coffee shops, where they can be around other people, avoid the distractions of home, and have a more public, less personal space to meet clients in. Yet coffee shops bring their own set of challenges. Meeting clients or business associates in a public space like a coffee shop may feel more professional than meeting at one's home, but many workers find the ambient noise from coffee grinders and loud conversations can hinder their ability to focus on their work or business conversations with clients and colleagues. As many of my interviewees also mentioned, coffee shops provide them the feeling of being around other people – of being social – but do not offer sustained social interactions. Workers may recognize other patrons who also regularly work at the same coffee shop, but do not typically engage in conversations with them. Most often, ordering coffee from the barista is the only personal exchange these workers have in these spaces.

Working first from home and then coffee shops can help workers identify their needs for a workspace. After working at home, they seek the feeling of being around other people that coffee shops provide, but discover they want more interaction with other independent workers. They may hope to escape the distractions of home by venturing outside, but end up merely trading one set of distractions for another – beckoning chores and the temptation of television for the din of conversations and clanging

coffee cups. The desire for a workspace less isolating than home but more professional than a coffee shop represents a key factor in many workers' decision to join (or open) a coworking space. Thus, for many independent workers, coffee shops seem to function as an intermediary step between working from home and working at a coworking space.

Members' experiences working from home and at coffee shops emphasize some of their needs for a workspace in terms of what their existing or previous workplaces lacked – a more professional, less distracting space – but workers may not be able to articulate or even envision their ideal workplace until they experience it. Nate, a coworking space founder, explained it this way:

It gets back to the idea that in the past, the workplace was the thing, as opposed to now, [when] the workplace is a tool that engenders the thing. And, the thing that it's engendering, that it's fostering, is this collaborative community. And, that that's the purpose around why you're there. I mean, you sort of think about it from a Maslow's hierarchy of needs, right? I show up at a [coworking space]. No one walks in the door and says, "I'd like to be a member of a strong collaborative community that's changing the way people make a living and make a life." You know? People come in the door because they're tired of working at home and tired of working at Starbucks. So, that's kind of the basic need they're trying to get met is, "how do I have a professional conference call without a barista foaming milk in my ear?" Right? So, that's often one of the big things that people are trying to solve... But, then, when they get there, they realize that there's something more here.

Like Nate, many space owners and founders commented that the benefits members ultimately derive from and appreciate most about coworking usually go far beyond what initially brought them through the doors of a coworking space. They want the accountability and companionship of working around other people without the distractions and frustrations of working around strangers, or the office politics and obligations of working around traditional coworkers. Simply put, they hope to be less lonely and more productive. Once they begin coworking, however, they discover that the resources available in coworking spaces not only help members realize gains in productivity, but also facilitate their professional development. Prospective members seek a workplace with the basic resources they need to get their jobs done – relative quiet, reliable internet, and relatable people – and find resources that help them to be successful in their careers. The latter type of resources tended to be interpersonal rather than physical resources and

changed members' perspective about what a workplace can offer. For most members I spoke with, coworking transformed what they think of as an ideal workspace and what they want out of work in the future.

Moving beyond members' and founders' intentions, this chapter examines these interpersonal resources and the benefits workers derive from their membership in a coworking space. I assess the social organization of coworking spaces in contrast with traditional work environments by analyzing the interactions between coworking members and comparing them to interactions between traditional coworkers. After first reviewing the concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* in classical political and sociological theory, and collaborative community in the literature on work and organizations, I define the type of community that tends to emerge in these spaces, one characterized by openness, trust, and a low level of hierarchy. I situate this discussion within the context of broader socioeconomic changes impacting work. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the types of assistance and support common among comembers and how the communities that develop in coworking spaces affect members' work. The chapter concludes with an explanation of how quality of community varies.

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN COFFEE SHOPS AND COWORKING SPACES

As noted above, coffee shops figure prominently in the workspace repertoires of many coworking members and founders. For many, they serve as an intermediary step toward coworking. Ben, founder of Alloy, elaborated his view of how coffee shops relate to coworking:

I think that coffee shops have become the default office environment for a huge segment of the workforce. That isn't currently...like I don't think it will always be that way, but I think that is kind of...the economy changes faster than the office space landscape. I think that coworking may be a step in that evolution towards a more perfect work environment for freelancers and self-employed people, entrepreneurs, and stuff like that.

Many of those I interviewed had previously used coffee shops as a de facto workspace. Dissatisfied with her experience working at a business center, Emily often worked at coffee shops before becoming a member of ProShare. She disliked that at coffee shops “people are doing work that's totally different than me, and they're literally right next to me.” The conversations of other patrons distracted her from her work. In contrast, her dedicated office at ProShare provided the privacy she needed to do her research work and have telephone conversations, but she still felt “connected” to her comembers. She again brought up the differences between working in a coworking space versus home or a coffee shop when I asked her about the values of coworking. She remarked:

Emily: I think that there's an acknowledgement, as well, of the importance of being...having sort of membership or belonging to a space that is yours and that you can kind of come back to and use as a resource... And wanting to be connected to people and seeing that as something that's a commodity that you would pay for.

...Where [in] a coffee shop, you're getting people that don't necessarily have the membership there and are just...you're flooded with individuals or groups of people that have not self-selected as workers. Many do but some don't.

And if you're at your house, then you're being flooded with your personal life, being do the dishes, wash my clothes, “oh, maybe I need to cook my...I'll make a long dinner, I'll...” And there's not a separation there. It's a little bit too intertwined.

So, a coworking space is the recognition that you're willing to put a price tag and pay for that, of a specific way of orienting your life that puts a physical distinction on work time. But a lot of people are having to self-initiate that because it's not necessarily, I think for some people, it's not a condition of their field that they must have an office in a specific location. ...

Sandra: So, the people are part of the value? Like [the fact] that you recognize that having a group of people that decided to be here, that want to be here, what do you think that that gives you, that having that group of people that are self-selected, as you said?

Emily: When you go... I used to work at a coffee shop, and it was very difficult for me to motivate myself to work, because I have... My motivation has to come internally. So, to motivate myself from where to work, and I see someone coming in with their children, and another mother, and they're sort of chatting about whatever. And then someone else comes in, and they're a musician, and they're talking about how hungover they are. And it's like, this is not to me what my workday [is supposed to be].

In distinguishing coworking spaces from coffee shops, Emily noted that the clientele of coffee shops often includes many people who “have not self-selected as workers.” As a result, the bulk of conversations in those spaces tend to concern non-business-related topics. For Emily, a preponderance of those types of

conversations disrupts her motivation to work, making the time she spends there not feel like a workday. Working at home allows work and personal life to become a “bit too intertwined,” as housework and the distractions of home creep into work time. Coworking spaces, in contrast, comprise a group of people with membership in the space, who recognize it as a resource for work, and whose presence in the space indicates “a physical distinction on work time.”

Many members and founders continue to work in coffee shops on occasion, though, even after creating or joining a coworking space. For most, coffee shops offer workspace variety, which they value. For members without 24-hour access to their coworking spaces, coffee shops may also remain open at hours when they cannot access their coworking space. Some founders work out of coffee shops when they need to focus on work unrelated to their coworking space, as they often get pulled into many directions when at their space. Tom, co-founder of Workmine, brought up coffee shops when we discussed what he considers an ideal work environment:

Sandra: Besides here at [Workmine], do you work out of any other locations?

Tom: My home a little bit. Coffee shops quite a bit.

Sandra: How closely would you say those places resemble what you would consider your ideal work environment?

Tom: None. Well, coffee shops are probably my ideal. My home is absolutely not my ideal. There are a million distractions at home. Even when I'm alone at home there are distractions at home. When I come here, this is absolutely not my ideal work environment either because I have business owner hat on so I'm often focused on the space and I can't get other work done.

My best place to kind of buckle down and do some work is in a coffee shop. I guess you could argue that when I'm here and I'm focused on this space that is work as well. That is part of my work, but if I need to respond to emails or I need to meet with somebody or I need to brainstorm with my team, the distractions of this space can be a little much. If I wasn't running this space this would be great; I'd get a ton of work done. That's not the case.

Sandra: What makes the coffee shop kind of an ideal work environment for you?

Tom: The coffee for one, and I think I'm someone that thrives on a little bit of buzz like noise and whatnot, and certainly you can get that in a coffee shop. I probably have also developed over the last several years an

association with coffee shops and work. When I'm in a coffee shop I feel like this is my productive work time.

I suppose it would be possible to have a relationship with a coffee shop where you viewed it more as a place to socialize or a place to enjoy coffee or something like that and I don't. My association is, "I'm here. I have X amount of hours. I'm going to work." Which I kind of imagine is how a lot of people view this place who are members here. That's just not how I view it.

Sandra: What happens when you come here when you're wearing your business owner hat?

Tom: I'm just pulled in a hundred different directions. This person wants to ask me about this, the bathroom needs restocking of that, there is something that is spilled; it is just sort of running the space. Part of it is space, part of it is the management of the space, and part of it is just interacting with people, which is I think a part of this role is interacting with people and kind of feeling out the energy of the space, how people are feeling in the space. It is a people business, I think, so I have to plug into that when I can. The time to do that is not when I'm offsite; it is when I'm here.

Sandra: How does it compare to places that you've worked in the past?

Tom: How does this place compare? I know I'm biased when I say this, but this is way cooler than any place I've ever worked. This is cooler than my living room. This is cooler than coffee shops that I go to. It is more flexible. It is more spacious. It feels more relaxed than a coffee shop, but it feels more designed for work than my house. As I said, it's not a place that I feel like I can get certain types of my work done.

Sandra: Can you say a little bit more about that? "Designed for work," what does that look like for you when you think about someplace that is designed for work?

Tom: Everybody's work is different. Everybody's work requires something different. I have to put on a lot of different hats in my work. Sometimes I need a space where I can meet with people. Sometimes I need a space where I can go heads-down and crank out some emails. Sometimes I need a space where I can actually kind of think big picture and brainstorm and whatnot. We built this place to facilitate those different kinds of needs and that different kind of work.

I think there are kinds of work that this place doesn't facilitate. This place doesn't facilitate confidential meetings. This place doesn't really facilitate teleconferencing. There are types of things that we intentionally left out because we know it can't be everything to everyone.

There are ways in which this space serves the work that I need to do really, really well and then there are times when it doesn't. That is probably the case for a lot of people. I sort of assume it is the case for a lot of people. There are days this is a great place for them to work and then there are days when they need something different. If I need to have confidential conversations, I'm not going to have them here. That is really rare in my line of work.

Anyway, all of that to get back to your question about "designed for work," it is really designed for whose work, designed for what kind of work, and trying to leave the space flexible enough that people can adapt it for what they need to do, which is why our furniture is all movable and things are on wheels and we don't have doors. It is meant to be open, flexible space for people to make it what they need.

As Tom conveyed, he and his co-founder designed Workmine to provide members flexibility to adapt the space to their work needs. Still, he recognizes that the space will not work for everyone looking to

cowork, nor will it work at all times for members of Workmine. He differentiates Workmine as “cooler” than coffee shops, as well as more flexible, spacious, and relaxed. Yet, for Tom personally, coffee shops offer a space for “productive work time.”

Other members contrast coffee shops and coworking spaces by noting the differences between the customers at coffee shops and members at coworking spaces. Kyle, a member of Cosite and Workmine, defines coworking as “a collaboration of entrepreneurs,” and describes it to others by comparing it to coffee shops. He explains that “it is a space, let's say similar to Starbucks, where you have all these tables and you would become a member there, you pay a monthly membership, but the other members there are going to be fellow entrepreneurs, as well.” In answer to the follow-up questions he sometimes gets, he elaborates:

One person asked, "So, why not work out of a coffee shop?" I was like, "That's a great question. I do, but I also work out of coworking spaces." I try to emphasize the fact that because you're in a membership of entrepreneurs and business owners and people who are in the same boat as you, so you know the person across from you might have a graphic design business, they might be able to help you out; you might be able to barter something with them instead of paying out cash for a random craft designer. It's like a coffee shop, except everybody in there is an entrepreneur.

Kyle distinguishes coworking spaces from coffee shops in terms of clientele or membership – coworking spaces are filled with business owners and entrepreneurs – and also in terms of interactions. Because members of the space include “people who are in the same boat as you,” interactions include business collaborations and exchanging work.

The difference in interactions between coworking space members and coffee shop patrons extends to casual social interactions, as well. As Emily observed above, conversations between coffee shop patrons can present more of a distraction than a welcome respite from work. Most of my interviewees indicated that, even if they do not have a private office with a door that closes, they generally feel that they can signal to comembers when they do not want to be disturbed. That may prove

more difficult in coffee shops. For instance, Natalie feared that, at a coffee shop, “if you get to talking to someone, they might never shut up.” Ian, a member at Cosite, also spoke about feeling more obligated to talk to people in coffee shops compared to coworking spaces. He worked at coffee shops before coworking and continues to work in coffee shops for about 70 percent of his working hours. He contrasted the two types of spaces this way:

Before here, I did a lot of coffee shop work. And coffee shops can be great. Coffee shops have a little bit more of a bent towards the social aspects of it. Where here, I don't have to talk to anybody if I don't want to. I can just work and say hi. You know, coffee shops are kind of the same, but if I saw a friend in there, I would feel more obligated to talk to them. And it is kind of like going to a coffee shop is saying, “I want to work, but I also want to be social.” And here is a little bit more a different percentage of, “I want to work” and a smaller percentage of, “I want to be social.” Yeah, I would probably describe this place with that, is it is a little more serious coffee shop. The coworking space is where people go to work, but it is a little more serious and more people are working, and working harder or longer and more focused.

In general, my interviewees commented that coworking members came there to work, while patrons of coffee shops could be there for any number of reasons.

Additionally, members and founders I spoke with also noted the greater potential for friendships and collaborations to form among comembers compared to coffee shop patrons. Ian contrasted coffee shops and coworking spaces again when we discussed the meaning of community. He said:

In a place like this, there is a little bit more pressure on conversation even though we all have the availability of distraction at work, all of our individual works, it is a little bit more, or [rather] less transactional. We are here to get our work done or to get our time to work or whatever, but it is a little bit longer, more drawn-out process than just getting a cup of coffee. It has the tendency to suggest that interaction here could build some version of more intimate community or closer relationships than coffee shops.

Ian emphasized the duration of interactions in coworking space, compared to coffee shops, judging that the longer span of time allowed for relationships in coworking spaces might facilitate building a “more intimate community.” When I began to wrap up my interview with Hallie and asked her if there was anything I had not asked her that she considered important for me to know, she also contrasted coworking with coffee shops. This is what she had to say:

I loved coworking. It's fun. I think it's a cool thing. Especially . . . it's a little different for me and [Harper], because there's two of us. So, our purpose is probably a bit different than somebody who's just by themselves. Because somebody by themselves, I think they totally need to be in a place where they have other people doing the same thing. It's so helpful to be able to relate to people in that way and create friendships through that. You don't find that many places. You can't find that in a coffee shop and you can't find that in an office by yourself. So, it's a special place I think.

Coworking spaces, as Hallie describes, represent a special kind of workplace, distinct from coffee shops, because they provide a gathering spot for people who do similar work (though the degree of similarity members perceive varies), a place where members can relate to each other, and which engenders both network connections and friendships.

Members also feel a greater sense of trust with comembers than they do with other people working at a coffee shop. Ethan pointed out that there are questions he feels comfortable asking his comembers that he feels would be strange to ask people in a coffee shop. This distinction emerges partly from the nature of coworking, that coworking members tend to work regularly at their coworking space and, thus, have regular contact with their comembers. In contrast, even workers who visit coffee shops routinely may not see the same people at the space. This inconsistency provides little opportunity to develop enduring relationships that encourage trust, a theme expounded upon further in the section below. Thus, coffee shops' more variable clientele and lower proportion of occupants with the intention of getting work done mark two key differences between coffee shops and coworking spaces.

COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY

Community as a form of social organization has occupied a pivotal area of social scientific study, dating back to classical social theorists. Tönnies's theoretical concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, often translated as community and (civil) society (Tönnies [1957] 1988; Tönnies 2001), proposed a distinction between two types of social organization. *Gemeinschaft* describes a traditional community,

typically rural, whose members are closely connected or related by blood, have a sense of belonging together, and share a fundamental trust; *Gesellschaft* refers to a modern, individualistic society whose members are not naturally bound together, but have chosen to associate (Adair-Toteff 2016; Tönnies [1957] 1988; Tönnies 2001). Although Tönnies viewed both types as guided by some form of rationality, the former can be understood as characterized by affective ties and a sense of fellowship or communion among a necessarily exclusive group, while the latter comprises self-interested relationships in a more open, market-oriented group (Bond 2013; Tönnies 2001).

Tönnies's conceptualization proposes that both types of association exist in societies, although a society may emphasize one type of social relation over the other (Tönnies [1957] 1988; Tönnies 2001). For instance, a more traditional agrarian society in which most members are farmers and relate to each other mostly through affective bonds may nevertheless also have instrumental relationships with other groups or individuals, such as exchanging goods in a market. Conversely, contemporary industrial-capitalist societies characterized by the pursuit of instrumental goals through market exchange of goods and services nevertheless experience affective relationships through membership in smaller groups and institutions like religion and the family.

In contrast, Weber's ([1922] 1978) treatment of his related concepts, "communal" (*Vergemeinschaftung*) and "associative" (*Vergesellschaftung*) relationships, focuses on the orientation of social action and the increasing influence of rationality. In the former type of relationships, social action "is based on a subjective feeling of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together;" in the latter, "the orientation of social action within it rests on a rationally motivated adjustment of interests or a similarly motivated agreement, whether the basis of rational judgment be absolute values or reasons of expediency" (Weber [1922] 1978: 40-41). Weber elaborated these ideal types to theorize the social impact of industrialization in terms of a transition from traditional, affective forms of social

organization and exchange predominant in traditional, pre-industrial societies to more instrumental, rationalized forms of social organization and exchange in modern industrialized societies (Weber [1922] 1978). In this view, *Gesellschaft*-type relationships focused on instrumental goals predominate in industrial societies. The shift toward rationalization is reflected strongly in the economic sphere, particularly in the realm of work, where large-scale production required more complex division of labor and routinization of tasks, but its effects also reverberate into other institutions. In the family, for instance, as industrialization shifted production from family farms and craft labor in cottage industries to coal mines and factory assembly lines, the separation between work and home – economy and family – increased.

However, Weber recognized that both types of relationships coexist and that “the great majority of social relationships [rest on various types of affectual, emotional, or traditional bases] to some degree, while being at the same time to some degree determined by associative factors” (Weber [1922] 1978: 41). Thus, despite increasing rationalization, in Weber’s view, *Gemeinschaft* forms of interaction have persisted through transition periods. Other scholars have also observed hybrid forms of community that incorporate features of both. Adler and Heckscher (2006), for instance, regard the existence of these hybrid forms as evidence of a dialectical tension between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. As the industrial economy developed and pushed production away from craft guilds and small firms in close communities toward more dispersed, large corporations, and social relations became guided by “rational bureaucracy, modern individualism, and *Gesellschaft* association,” they contend that, in response to the inadequacy of purely bureaucratic structures for fostering trust and collaboration between managers and employees, corporations in the mid-20th century developed a mix of hierarchy and community (Heckscher and Adler 2006: 24). Structurally, corporations committed to filling open positions through promotion from within the organization, thus increasing employees’ economic dependence on the firm.

Undergirding this structural dimension, the value of loyalty – a “reciprocal duty” between corporations and employees – provided employees with care and security in exchange for their quality work and obedience to orders. The resulting hybrid structure could be described as a “paternalistic bureaucracy” (Adler and Heckscher 2006; Heckscher 1995). However, they note, this “[loyalty-based community] was not modern, and certainly not rational, but rather *traditional* in its nature, structured around similarities and vertical relations of deference” (Adler and Heckscher 2006: 26).

Adler and Heckscher (2006: 15) “argue that within and between firms, community has been evolving towards a new form [they] call *collaborative* – one that can be interpreted as a dialectical synthesis of the traditional opposites *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*.” They identify three primary principles of social organization important to outlining their concept of collaborative community in relation to *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft*: hierarchy, market, and community:

Hierarchy uses authority to create and coordinate a horizontal and vertical division of labor – a bureaucracy in Weber’s ideal-type form. *Market* relies on the price mechanism to coordinate competing and anonymous suppliers and buyers. *Community* relies on shared values and norms (Adler and Heckscher 2006: 15).

They argue that the form of community that emerges varies according to the strength of these principles in relation to each other. That is, the principle of social organization that predominates corresponds to a particular type of community. Hierarchy, market, and community correspond with *Gemeinschaft*, *Gesellschaft*, and collaborative community, respectively. Thus, collaborative community results from the dominance of the principle of community.

Successful social interaction in each of these forms of community depends on some level of trust between members, based on members’ willing reliance on one other (Adler and Heckscher 2006). The presence or absence of trust does not set one form of community apart from the other. Rather, one of the key distinctions between *Gemeinschaft*, *Gesellschaft*, and collaborative community is what trust is *based*

on in these three forms of community (Adler and Heckscher 2006). According to their theory, in traditional, in-group, *Gemeinschaft* forms of community (where hierarchy predominates as an organizing principle), trust is based on loyalty, honor, duty, and status deference. Hierarchy structures relations between individuals, producing a mechanical division of labor³⁷ and a sharp distinction between community insiders and outsiders. In more business-oriented, associational *Gesellschaft* forms of community, the market structures relations. This produces an organic division of labor³⁸ and a shared value system in which trust is based on integrity, competence, and conscientiousness. Collaborative forms of community, in which community is the dominant principle of social organization, produce an organic division of labor coordinated by conscious collaboration. Trust in collaborative communities derives from contribution, concern, honesty, and collegiality (Adler and Heckscher 2006).

Whereas Adler and Heckscher argue that the dominant principle of social organization in *Gemeinschaft* relationships is hierarchy, I contend that this may apply only to more traditional forms of *Gemeinschaft* prevalent in pre-industrial societies in which hierarchy permeated all forms of social organization. Hierarchy was also very prevalent in early *Gesellschaft* relations. As numerous sociologists and organizational scholars have noted, hierarchy has declined overall since the Industrial era. Rather than viewing this decline as evidence of a new type of social organization, I posit that lower levels of hierarchy in the contemporary era, along with a shift in the basis of authority, have transformed the various types of social organization that have long existed.

³⁷ Émile Durkheim's conceptualization of the mechanical division of labor is based on similarity between members of a community, who have similar occupations, responsibilities, and expertise (Durkheim [1893] 1984).

³⁸ Durkheim's conceptualization of the organic division of labor is one in which interdependence between members of a society is based on difference, in that society members have various occupations, entailing different responsibilities and expertise (Durkheim [1893] 1984).

Pre-modern to early modern historical forms of *Gemeinschaft*, dating from roughly the high middle ages (11th to 13th centuries) and the European Renaissance of the 14th to 17th centuries up to the revolutions of the mid- to late 18th century, can be understood as fitting within a larger hierarchical system roughly corresponding with *Herrschaft*, or lordship. In these feudal systems, authority was typically conferred by birth, as was one's place within the hierarchy of social systems. For example, the king rules his kingdom by divine right, the feudal Lord (Herr) in turn has authority over his peasant farmers and the land they farm, and even the (male) peasant has authority as the patriarch of his family. All of these relationships exist within a hierarchy, the Great Chain of Being³⁹, and were presumed to be natural and determined at birth.

The increasing modernization of the state from the Middle Ages through the industrial era compelled progress toward bureaucratic structures in which authority is based on qualifications and appointment, rather than birthright, kinship, or personal relationships (Höpfl 2006; Weber [1922] 1978; Weber 1994). The revolutions of the mid- to late 18th century in Western Europe and the newly independent United States of America undermined these traditional forms of authority as democratic forms of governance replaced, or at least displaced the preeminence of, monarchic rule. However, authority by birth or inheritance still survives: wealth and the status and power it confers often convey from one generation to another. And even in contemporary democracies, inherited wealth provides access to authority in government. In the U.S., for instance, the wealthy are overrepresented among Congress members and presidential candidates. Still, in general, the modern era is marked by the diminishing significance of this type of authority. In work organizations, information and communications technologies “further undermined traditional authority and bureaucratic seniority, since young people

³⁹ The Great Chain of Being describes a belief in a hierarchical structure of all forms of life, from divinity to nobility, aristocracy, and peasantry, down to animals, plants, and minerals.

often knew more about them than did their elders” (Macoby 2006: 161). To illustrate, a young entrepreneur with expertise in computer programming may have more authority in a contemporary organization than an experienced IT professional. In a true hierarchy, the young entrepreneur would need to climb the rungs of the bureaucracy before acquiring the status of a high-level position earned by years of experience. Authority in contemporary workplaces derives primarily from expertise and knowledge, not necessarily seniority or position. Thus, whereas early forms of hierarchy placed certain people at the top or bottom status level based on birth, modernization and bureaucratization slowly changed authority to status by way of experience and expertise, and technological advances have made expertise paramount, preceding birth and experience in importance.

The widespread decline in traditional authority, and more recently in hierarchy and bureaucratic forms of authority, has extended beyond work organizations. For instance, in the family, the eldest male is no longer the (default) head of the household; couples typically share responsibility for decision making. Parenting, as well, has become less authoritarian. Yet, the family most expediently epitomizes Weber’s ([1922] 1978) “communal” relationships and Tönnies’s ([1957] 1988; 2001) *Gemeinschaft*. Heckscher and Adler’s (2006) view that hierarchy is the key principal of social organization that defines *Gemeinschaft* makes sense if we consider *Gemeinschaft* to be a form of community largely relegated to the past, to an era when hierarchy was generally more prevalent. Yet, as they also acknowledge, hierarchy exists in *Gesellschaft* and to some extent in their concept of collaborative community. They argue that hierarchy merely predominates in, not that it is exclusive to, *Gemeinschaft* (Adler, Kwon, and Heckscher 2008; Heckscher and Adler 2006). This suggests that their interpretation of *Gemeinschaft*, at best, takes the pre-industrial past as its essential context even if it may evolve and exist in the present, and, at worst, miscalculates the role of hierarchy.

My interpretation of *Gemeinschaft* views this and other types of social organization as evolving over time, not necessarily characteristic of a particular epoch, nor confined to rural or urban areas. Like Tönnies's assertion that both *Gemeinschaft*- and *Gesellschaft*-type associations coexist in society, *Genossenschaft* has also coexisted among them. Writing in the mid-19th century, Gierke (1990) focused on the dialectic between *Herrschaft* (lordship) and *Genossenschaft* (association or fellowship), such as craft guilds or fraternal organizations. Rather than emerging from the dialectic between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, as Heckscher and Adler suggest, or between *Herrschaft* and *Genossenschaft*, as Gierke proposed, I assert that *Genossenschaft*-type associations evolve over time like their counterparts, and the collaborative community that Heckscher, Adler, and colleagues describe resembles a contemporary form of *Genossenschaft*. With this in mind, I propose the term *Genossenschaft*⁴⁰ to describe the type of community that tends to emerge in coworking spaces.

In *Gemeinschaft*, community members interact based on **mutual obligation** and work together **for the good of the group**. For instance, Amish community members help their neighbors in a barn raising, and they all expect that their neighbors will do the same for them. Because members tend to regard themselves as the same in some important way, in serving this community, members help people like themselves. A sense of **loyalty and a shared identity** between community members cements their social bonds. **Social norms and beliefs** regulate behavior within these groups.

In *Gesellschaft* associations, **exchange** constitutes the primary basis of their interactions. A classic example of this is trading goods in a market place, such as a dairy farmer bringing eggs and milk to trade for sugar and spices. In modern capitalist societies, this exchange typically takes place within a market-based system in which money is exchanged for goods and services, and regulation and

⁴⁰ Thanks to George Becker for authenticating the meaning of this term in German.

competition in the free market affect the terms of exchange, including prices. Social bonds depend upon **interdependence and difference**. **Contracts and laws** govern behavior within this type of social organization.

The nature of relationships that occur in the *Genossenschaft* setting of coworking spaces lies somewhere in between those occurring in *Gemeinschaft*-like communities and *Gesellschaft*-like civil society or associations. In *Genossenschaft* organizations, **openness and mutual engagement** shape their interactions. Social bonds are based on **a common purpose and shared identity**. **Formal and informal rules** guide expectations for the behavior of members. Despite any demographic diversity – though this is often negligible – coworking members typically regard themselves and comembers as entrepreneurs or creative workers. As with *Gemeinschaft* relationships, individuals with *Genossenschaft* ties can relate to each other in a way salient to their identities. In coworking spaces, that tends to be members' work identities. Yet, like interactions in *Gesellschaft*, *Genossenschaft* interactions often hinge on some degree of difference in terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities. For instance, collaborations between members typically depend on being in related, but different occupations. This will be elaborated further below, in the section on the types of assistance and collaboration that occurs in coworking spaces.

BUREAUCRACY AND POST-BUREAUCRACY

Weber ([1922] 1978) defined a form of social organization that became prominent in the modern industrial age: bureaucracy. In his ideal type, a bureaucracy includes a complex division of labor into discrete offices with fixed areas of activity and assigned duties; offices and the authority imbued within them are hierarchically ordered, with a clear chain of command; there are written rules and files; assignment to offices is based on technical qualifications and expert training, which includes knowledge

of the rules; and the bureaucracy is impersonal, so rules are implemented by neutral officials. More recently, many scholars have observed that society has moved into a post-industrial, post-modern, post-bureaucratic, networked age and have begun to define a post-bureaucratic organizational type (Castells 2010; Courpasson and Reed 2004; Heckscher 1994; Maravelias 2003). The post-bureaucratic organizational type serves to outline how emerging organizational forms differ from the bureaucratic type and to identify broader social changes (Höpfl 2006). There remains considerable debate, however, as to whether we are truly experiencing a new era of post-bureaucracy (Harris and Höpfl 2006). Some find fault, in general, with “epochalist,” or periodizing, concepts that signify abrupt transformation, such as industrial to post-industrial or bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic (e.g., McSweeney 2006). Others simply regard the change to post-bureaucracy as subtler, signaling less a dramatic end to bureaucracy and more a gradual evolution of bureaucratic organization, or even the opening of several possible post-bureaucratic futures (e.g., Maravelias 2003; Reed and Courpasson 2004). Still others argue that Weber’s depiction of bureaucracy inadequately describes contemporary bureaucracies and, thus, is ill-equipped to serve as “a reference point for identifying” post-bureaucracy (e.g., Höpfl 2006). For instance, Höpfl (2006: 18) argues that “Weber provided no way of determining which features of bureaucracy his ideal type properly included, excluded or ignored;” nor did Weber’s works on bureaucracy offer a sense of the “connective tissue” that relate the features of his ideal type to each other; and “without a clear conception of bureaucracy, ‘post-bureaucracy’ is indistinguishable.”

Heckscher (1994) argues that critics of bureaucracy often fail to distinguish between issues that derive from dysfunctional bureaucracies, which could be addressed with better management, and those inherent to the bureaucratic form, which would oblige a different organizational model. He outlines bureaucracy’s fundamental problems: because bureaucracy rationally defines offices in terms of prescribed methods, discrete tasks, and duties in service of the organization’s goals, “*people are*

responsible only for their own jobs” (Heckscher 1994: 20, emphasis in the original). This produces several undesirable consequences. First, bureaucratic offices do not make use of employees’ full capabilities, only those skills needed to fulfill the duties of the office (Heckscher 1994). Second, bureaucracy’s dependence on hierarchy – a vertical, top-down configuration of authority – excludes lateral, peer-to-peer relations and does not have a way to effectively integrate or manage these informal systems (Heckscher 1994).

In defining the post-bureaucratic type, Heckscher (1994) proposes a new term: the *interactive* type. This new organizational form emphasizes dialogue, interdependence, consensus, and high levels of trust. The aim of this chapter (and the following) is not to take a stance on whether coworking communities represent interactive or post-bureaucratic workplaces, nor to evaluate the theoretical validity of post-bureaucracy as an organizational type. Laying out that argument would be beyond the scope of this dissertation. Rather, the discussion here engages scholarship in the post-bureaucratic employment relations literature as it pertains to recent organizational, socioeconomic, and technological changes that contextualize emergent workplace communities and unique features of work in the contemporary era.

THE POST-BUREAUCRATIC ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF COWORKING

The Protestant Ethic (Weber 2002) regarded dedication to hard work and thrift as a moral duty and a sign of one’s salvation. Though work success as a measure of individual worth persists in American culture and mythology, particularly in the narrative of rugged individualism⁴¹, collective identities and organizational alliances have taken on increased importance since the time of the Puritans

⁴¹ Rugged individualism emphasizes personal liberty and self-reliance and advocates individualism in economic and social relations, such as competition in the free market and limited government assistance.

and (romanticized notions of) the traditional craftsman. As work became increasingly situated within large organizations, scholars noted a shift in the national character. The mid-20th century witnessed sweeping cultural, social, and economic transformations in the United States. The post-war economy boomed, union membership reached its peak, and social movements for civil rights and women's rights gained momentum, while social pressures to conform surged. Sociologists like C. Wright Mills, David Riesman, and William H. Whyte⁴² wrote during this time about increasing bureaucratization, the changing American character, and a shift in organizational culture. Whyte's ([1956] 2002: 4) "Social Ethic" refers to a collectivization within the sphere of work, in which workers belong to organizations rather than merely working for them and "see an ultimate harmony" between themselves and their organizations. Whyte ([1956] 2002: 7) defines Social Ethic this way:

By Social Ethic I mean that contemporary body of thought which makes morally legitimate the pressures of society against the individual. Its major propositions are three: a belief in the group as the source of creativity; a belief in "belongingness" as the ultimate need of the individual; and a belief in the application of science to achieve the belongingness.

This ideology, which Whyte states could also reasonably be called a bureaucratic ethic, "rationalizes the organization's demands for fealty and gives those who offer it wholeheartedly a sense of dedication in doing so" (Whyte [1956] 2002: 6).

The Post-Bureaucratic Ethic represents a synthesis of the individual-focused Protestant Ethic and the group-focused Social Ethic: while the individual worker still must conform to an organizational culture in the context of her job, she may nevertheless simultaneously labor toward her own career goals, which may diverge from the needs and interests of the organization. Put more simply, post-bureaucratic

⁴² The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character (Riesman [1950] 2001); White Collar: The American Middle Class (Mills [1951] 2002); The Power Elite (Mills [1956] 2000); and The Organization Man (Whyte [1956] 2002).

workers may still feel pressure to exhibit loyalty to their organization, but they have become aware that loyalty does not reap security. Because organizations typically do not offer a means of pursuing extra-organizational work goals, post-bureaucratic workers must often find ways of pursuing these goals outside of the organization. These workers must find a social group to help ascribe extra-organizational meaning to their intra-organizational work. That is, a community of peers can help workers shape their work experience toward a desired career path or desired work goals, which may include personal meanings of work. In this context, the post-bureaucratic era has witnessed the emergence and exponential increase in coworking spaces (Deskmag 2012), along with labor movement growth and union revitalization (Clawson 2003; Cornfield and McCammon 2003; Levi 2003; Turner, Katz, and Hurd 2001; Voss and Sherman 2000) and transnational organizing (Anner 2011; Armbruster-Sandoval 2005; Gordon and Turner 2000; Kay 2011). Further, new forms of labor activism may begin to break down barriers between the concepts of union and community, linking labor issues with family and community issues (Clawson 2003). Thus, while their work organizations may offer fewer opportunities for meaning, identity formation, and career-building resources, self-organizing groups outside of the firm may present new opportunities.

Coworking spaces may assume prominent roles in meaning making for workers, and collaboration appears to embody a key element of that meaning making process. Collaboration as a source of meaning is not unique to the post-bureaucratic era. Whyte ([1956] 2002: 7) describes the gist of the ideas of the Social Ethic thus:

Man exists as a unit of society. Of himself, he is isolated, meaningless; only as he collaborates with others does he become worth while [sic], for by sublimating himself in the group, he helps produce a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Meaning through work distinguishes the Protestant Ethic from the Social Ethic, as work as a source of meaning and fulfillment, rather than merely a duty or necessity, characterizes work in the post-industrial

era. Certainly, even during the Protestant Ethic era, individuals cooperated for the good of the group, but it is with the rise of the Social Ethic that collaboration, particularly within the realm of work, assumes an exalted status and central role in the meaning of work. In the Post-Bureaucratic Ethic, that meaning abides but relocates to outside the organization. Thus, while post-bureaucratic workers likely regard collaboration within their work organizations as part and parcel of their jobs, they may imbue with greater meaning collaboration in the context of extra-organizational peer groups, such as coworking spaces. That meaning may, in part, derive from the intentional, self-organizing nature of coworking communities.

INTENTIONAL, SELF-ORGANIZING COMMUNITY

Tönnies ([1957] 1988; 2001) relates *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* to types of human will: *Wesenwille* (essential, natural will) and *Kürwille* (arbitrary, rational will), respectively. The former describes actions that derive from a natural inclination; the latter emphasizes freedom of choice and rational reflection (Adair-Totef 2016). As with *Gesellschaft*, *Genossenschaft* leans toward rational, freely chosen forms of association. In fact, when describing coworking, founders tend to emphasize its voluntary nature: members choose to work in a particular coworking space and, by extension, choose their comembers. The term “self-organizing” came up multiple times in my conversations with founders about community. For instance, when comparing the communities in traditional offices with those that form in coworking spaces, Jake said this:

You're not at a coworking space because your boss told you that you have to be. It's self-organizing. So, I'm there because I want to be there. One of the ways I often heard coworking described is sort of like working all in one big company but without the office politics. So, that's kind of like, I think a code for like, “we enjoy being with each other but we're all independently doing our own thing.” So, like, “well, Sandra got the big raise and promotion when I thought I was up for it.” There's none of that stuff. Or, like, “I'm brownnosing the boss, and so I'm getting ahead,” because there is no boss. We're all working for ourselves or for each other. So, it's a wonderful, self-organizing, kind of ground-up sort of community. There is community at work, like, the old way of work, but at the end of the day, we're all there because the same person signs our paycheck, not because we're all self-organized to be there.

Like Jake, the other coworking space founders I interviewed typically framed the self-organizing, or intentional, nature of coworking communities as a radical break from workplace communities in traditional offices, where they maintained that workers do not get to choose their coworkers. However, in terms of choosing one's coworkers, the difference between traditional offices and coworking spaces is likely subtler. In traditional offices, by accepting a job at a particular organization, one could argue that a person in that way also chooses her coworkers. Further, in the same way that hiring managers decide who will work at an organization, founders and coworking space staff typically decide who will be accepted as members of that coworking space, not the other members. On the other hand, a member dissatisfied with his comembers would likely have an easier time changing coworking spaces than would a worker dissatisfied with his coworkers, as finding a new job takes time and often considerable effort, particularly during a depressed economy.

Others I spoke with revealed a different interpretation of self-organizing. Sean, for instance, speaks about coworking as a verb:

Coworking as a verb is an intentional choice to be around other people that intentionally chose to be around other people while doing work. The verb is really, really rooted in a choice. It's not even in the collaboration. The collaboration part comes later, maybe. The verb of coworking is, the jelly as an expression of coworking, is how it affects us, because the only thing you need to do jelly⁴³ is a laptop and a friendly disposition. You show up with the choice of being in a room with other people. You also chose to show up and be in a room with a laptop and get work done. The mood in that room is different because of that. There's value in that mood.

Like Nate, Sean emphasized the choice members make to work with comembers in their coworking space, or that jelly participants make to work around other jelly participants. Having "a friendly disposition" suggests not only a willingness to work around other people in the coworking space, but also

⁴³ Jelly began in New York City in 2006, when two freelancer designers, Luke Crawford and Amit Gupta, decided to invite friends to work at their home with them once a week (Jelly 2017). It is generally described as casual coworking or an informal work event, which takes place at someone's home, a coffee shop, a business, or anywhere that offers Wi-Fi and places to sit. Jelly participants bring a laptop and their work.

openness to interacting with others in the space. The interaction may consist of social conversation, sharing advice or ideas, and possibly collaboration, as Sean indicated.

Openness is one of the values of coworking, but like all the core values, its meaning can vary across different coworking founders and communities. However, the meaning of openness remained rather consistent among the founders and members I spoke with. For instance, when discussing the types of collaboration she sees happening between members in her coworking space, Brooke mentioned openness. She connected the spirit of openness with collaboration:

I think a lot of it is informal collaboration, like the mentorship with open coffee or things that happen just in terms of helping each other out. When you're working at home you can't turn to someone and go, "is this a good idea?" It's just really simple feedback and things like that. It's a collaborative atmosphere. There's kind of like a hybrid of collaboration and openness. It's mostly informal. Like I said, there are some proposals that two companies in the space will make together to get something bigger than they could [on their own].

Brooke emphasized that this atmosphere of the coworking space lends itself to "informal collaboration," such as one member asking another for feedback. However, she noted that other more "formal" types of collaboration happen, as well, such as two independent companies teaming up on a business proposal to win a contract for a larger project than they would be able to handle on their own.

Not everyone used the term "openness," though. For instance, Gabriel, the owner of ProShare, spoke about generosity as one of the values of coworking:

Sandra: You mentioned accessibility before. Can you say a bit about what you think the values of coworking are, the values that people share?

Gabriel: Well, there's a generosity, isn't there? That's a huge part of it. To where, I feel like people who enter into that environment, they're not concerned about someone stealing their idea. Their concern is "help me work through this idea." So, there's a generosity and an honesty that comes along with the coworking platform. And a level of humility, to say, I'm trying this, but I'm not the best, and I probably can learn from other people how to do this better. So, you can kind of get that honesty, generosity, and humility, and that good vibe going.

That sense of honesty and generosity Gabriel depicted sounded a lot like the openness that other founders described, in terms of members' being open to collaboration and sharing information with comembers. Christina, a member at Workmine, expressed a similar idea when talking about developing relationships with her comembers. Pressed further, she characterized Workmine members as "receptive" to interactions with comembers:

So, there's some of us that are always here, and you realize that. I don't know their names or what they do, or I kinda know what they do. So, I need to get better at *that*, but everyone's receptive. I mean, for the most part. If I need to go up to someone, I don't really feel like...there's a couple, when someone's having meetings and stuff, but I don't feel like I'm *bothering* you. Like I feel like you generally would like to help me, are interested in what I'm doing, and that's nice. It's nice just to have someone you can look at every day that's the same face that knows who you are, but kind of is doing their own thing, too.

Having people around who are open to interactions provides Christina and other members with interpersonal resources that can positively impact their work. Access to comembers with relevant expertise saves these workers time struggling with an issue on their own or taking an online tutorial, for instance.

This open, collaborative atmosphere factors into the success of a space, as well. When I asked about members' responsibilities for making the coworking space successful, Brooke explained the importance of remaining open to collaboration:

The only part of that as a rule is don't be a jerk. Really, [the members] are responsible for themselves. Like I was saying before, the more they put in, the more they get out. We're not going to force anybody to do anything. If they really want to participate in the community and get something out of it, they don't have to be involved in the event program; they just have to be open to collaboration on a daily basis, not *offering* to collaborate on a daily basis, but just *open* to it if someone needs help or if there is a new member reaching out to them, and introducing them to someone new.

Members were less likely than founders to offer openness to collaboration as an example of a key component of successful spaces, yet they often cited collaboration as a benefit of coworking. Many members describe receiving help from other members on tasks they were struggling with, such as a certain line of code they could not get to work on a website or a function in Excel, or simply sharing ideas

or soliciting feedback. As Gabriel mentioned, members who discuss their ideas and current projects with comembers do not worry about having their ideas stolen or fear asking for help. This level of honesty and openness requires trust. The sections below examine the importance of trust in coworking communities and the various types of collaboration and assistance members provide each other.

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND NETWORK

In my discussions with space owners and members, the words “community” and “network” came up often. When it did, I asked how they differentiate the two concepts. Tom, the cofounder of Workmine, defined a community in terms of the way a person feels, rather than resources a person gets out of it. At first, he felt unsure whether that answer made sense, but the more he spoke about it, the more confident he became about the answer:

Sandra: What distinction do you see between network and community?

Tom: That's a good question. Social network feels like something I want to use. I want to use my social network to sell something. I want to use my social network to find a job. I want to use my social network to find a contact at this company for whatever. Community feels like something I feel. I feel a sense of belonging here. I feel a sense of trust here. I feel a sense of purpose within this group.

Can you use your community for things? Of course, you can. Can you feel great about something that happens on your social network? Sure, you can. I don't know. I don't know if that is like a totally bullshit answer, but I feel like it is that distinction. I feel like community is something that lifts you up and a social network is something you can kind of make use of if you're smart enough to know how to do that.

Sandra: That's great.

Tom: That could be a terrible answer.

Sandra: It's not at all. It's a great answer.

Tom: I'm trying to think if it is bullshit though. I don't think it is. It is touchy/feely, I guess, to say that community is something you feel, but it is. You walk in here, and you either feel like you're part of this community or you don't, or over some period of time, you feel like you become part of this community or you don't. Whereas, I can go to a networking event and not give a shit how I feel there and still make a ton of contacts or whatever. Ultimately, if you're going to sign up to pay for a place to be here month after month after month, you've got to have more than the feeling that you can just swap business cards. It has got to be more a place you feel welcome, and that to me is community. That is not bullshit.

As discussed above, the ways in which Tönnies ([1957] 1988; 2001) describes *Gemeinschaft*, or community, incorporates the notion of a group of people who feel like they belong together. Tom's description of community as "something you feel" aligns well with Tönnies's definition.

For some owners and members, the distinction between community and network blurs, as they view the coworking members as a community, but one that offers networking opportunities.

Sandra: What do you think the benefit is of having access to people like that?

Abby: It's like someone described it to me the other day and I really like it they said, "It's like sitting in LinkedIn." It's the opportunity to be in a community and network every day, day in day out. The other thing that happens is these serendipitous encounters where people meet each other and they form businesses together. They inspire each other. ... What happens is there is so much more than just a place to work. It starts out as a place where people need to work, but then they meet people and they form all these relationships. Then it becomes so much more than just a place to go to work. It becomes their drive.

Many workers I spoke with also made a distinction between the size and strength of the connections.

Ethan explained it this way:

Ethan: I guess that's a nuanced difference. I would consider...when I would pose a question to some of my LinkedIn [contacts], that's like... a network is maybe more expanded version of a community. It's maybe diluted a little bit or it's less concentrated, but larger. So maybe like [my former university's] Alumni Network, I can tap into for very specific things. It might be more people, but they may not be as willing to spend time helping me work through something just because of the less, the kind of less strength in connection between us, because it's a larger...I don't know, network to me just sounds like a larger and less, I don't know what the word is, less direct, maybe less...

Sandra: Less personal involvement?

Ethan: Yeah, less personal maybe.

Others emphasized the reciprocal nature of the relationships within a community to contrast them with the more one-sided or transactional nature of relationships within a network. In the latter, people connect with others they think could be useful to them in some way, whereas members of a community tend to think about ways they can contribute to other community members. For instance, Dana spoke of joining Alloy to develop relationships with people. I asked how she thought about those relationships. She replied:

Dana: I've put a lot of focus on strengthening my relationships. I think that relationships are very, very important. So, I think that what I was saying is, it's more than just expanding my network of people that I interact with, or people that I do business with, but really creating a solid, yeah, a more solid sense of community and just strengthening certain relationships that I thought would be beneficial both with business and as just as a human being, personally.

You know, being able to sit and brainstorm, and talk about experience and how you're doing things, just like outside of situational things, like with your own business, like your overall business plan. Talking about certain things with other like-minded professionals, I've really enjoyed that. I feel like we're all able to collectively help strengthen our community. ...

Sandra: What's the distinction in your mind between community and network?

Dana: I feel like there's actual personal connections in the community. I feel like it's really more just business in a network. And there's, doing what I do anyway, and I'm just speaking for myself, but I have a lot of heart, and a lot of emotion, and all of my time going into building my business, and I care about each member of each band so much, and I have to have conversations with them about, you know, their relationships when they're thinking about breaking up with someone or they're thinking about moving here or doing this or, you know. Like, I'm very personally involved with all of the people that I work with, and I care about them a lot. People that I do become associated with, I want there to be more depth than it just be we're just trying to make a dollar together. There are definitely certain people that it's like okay, well, we can make a dollar together, and it's all we want to do, great. But it means more when you can sit down and really have a conversation about what you're wanting to do and what your overall plan is when you bring somebody aboard your team. You're actually working as a team, you know, and not just for the betterment of your own situation.

The distinctions both Dana and Ethan make between community and network point to a greater investment of time among members of a community, as well as a potentially deeper personal connection.

When Lori talked about the difference between network and community, she talked about it in the same way that she spoke about the ideal orientation toward coworking. That is, she feels that prospective members who just want to get as much as they can out of a space are not going to be as valuable to the community as those who choose to join the coworking community that they are excited to contribute to. This suggests a connection between the transactional nature of networking and business centers, and between communities and coworking.

Frederick, the founder of several coworking spaces in Europe, takes a different view from many other space owners. He brought up the distinction between his view and others' when I asked about the essential elements of a successful coworking space:

Frederick: The key thing is there is a big difference between a network and a community. The network is just connected people. A community is a group of people with the same purpose. I think that's mixed up, and community has become something like we would say a container type of...

Sandra: Like a silo?

Frederick: Yeah, in a network, within [my coworking spaces'] network, we call it the mesh, you know like Lisa Gansky wrote the book *The Mesh*. You will find there within that mesh, you will have plenty of communities operating. The key thing about the community is that they have a tendency to close themselves off. They sit in a circle with your backs to the rest of the world. It's like the Knights of the Round Table. As an outsider, it's almost impossible to get in.

Frederick regards the community as a closed circuit, composed of workers with similar goals, which makes it very difficult for new members or outsiders to break into. In contrast, Frederick views a network as more open, offering more possibilities for mutual exchange and benefit. Literature on social networks and the negative aspects of social capital (e.g., Cohen and Prusak 2001; Fukuyama 1995, 2000; Granovetter 1973; Portes 1998; Uzzi 1997) largely corroborates this view, as the group solidarity and trust that develops in communities may also reduce cooperation with those regarded as outsiders to the group, thereby limiting the ability of the members of the group to benefit from the exchange of new ideas and information aided by “weak ties” (Granovetter 1973) in networks between tighter in-groups.

TRUST AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

As discussed in Chapter 2, freelance and independent workers operate within reputational networks, which structure opportunities and access to new contracts and clients. By nurturing possibilities for collaboration and networking, coworking spaces serve as sites for building social capital among workers. Although mechanisms other than trust, such as compensation and regulatory frameworks, can facilitate cooperation in society (Cook, Hardin, and Levi 2007), many scholars have noted that trust is integral to the process of developing social capital in smaller groups (Preece 2002). Applying the concept of social capital to collaboration within organizations, Cohen and Prusak (2001: 4) argue that “[s]ocial capital consists of the stock of active connections among people: the trust, mutual

understanding, and shared values and behavior that binds the members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible. Hall (2002: 22) conceptualizes the relationship between trust and social capital this way: “social capital turns primarily on the degree to which people associate regularly with one another in settings of relative equality, thus building up relations of trust and mutual reciprocity.” In a context of increased precarity, individualized risk, and growing demands for flexibility in employees’ work lives, coworking spaces represent unique organizational contexts distinct from traditional workplaces, where flatter, less hierarchal relations between workers augment opportunities for building trust. Further, as employees in nonstandard work positions display lower levels of generalized trust compared to standard employees (Svensson 2011), coworking spaces may serve as sites of trust building for these workers.

Additionally, scholarship on social capital has also demonstrated that trust frequently acquires enhanced significance in situations of risk and uncertainty. For example, Karen Cook (2001; 2005: 9) states that “in highly uncertain and risky environments, transactions occur among actors that are secured either by trust relations or by some form of reliable institutional backing – where, for example, legal enforcement is swift and sure.” As collaborations and cooperative relationships in coworking communities tend to operate informally, that is, without formal contractual arrangements, trust serves as key element of social interactions among coworking members. The sections below examine the theme of trust, demonstrating how trust and social capital function in coworking spaces and affect interactions among members.

Trust Replaces Hierarchy

When asked about the challenges of coworking, Sean recounted the difficulty he faces in trying to help members acclimate to this different style of working. One aspect of coworking that he feels many

members find particularly challenging and “abstract” is trust building. He compared relationships in traditional workplaces with relationships in coworking spaces:

Work environments have trained us to by default distrust basically everybody. We’re in competition for a promotion with peers. You’re my boss and you’re trying to screw me or keep me down if we’re in a relationship. If I’m the boss and you’re the employee, you’re looking for the easy way out. There’s all of these...it’s power dynamics everywhere. It breeds a default of workplace equals a default of, it’s not always mistrust, but at the very least it’s neutral. To remind people that a workplace is a place where if you build trust with the people that you work with, you can get a whole lot more done and, like, quickly order the magnitude, it’s hard to show people how much better it will be. It’s hard to explain it until they experience it and they go, “Whoa! Where has that kind of productivity been all my life!” And I go, “Well, it’s always been there. It’s just that nobody did it.”

In a bureaucratic work environment in which positions are structured hierarchically, workers typically advance in their careers by moving to the next higher position in the hierarchy. As Sean pointed out, this structure means that workers must compete with their peers for promotions. The nature of the relationship between bosses and employees may also be fraught with tension and mistrust. In Sean’s view, this hinders productivity. Removing workers from the hierarchical context offers an opportunity, then, to build greater trust and increase productivity.

The difference in the organizational structures of coworking spaces compared to traditional offices is displayed in the layout and design of these spaces, as well. Whereas traditional offices typically assign employees to workspaces according to rank or seniority, members coworking spaces usually offer members a choice of workspace, or even several workspaces to rotate between. Paige, who had worked in several traditional office settings before working in Cosite, spoke about how her assigned workspace – a cubicle – did not fit her needs:

Interestingly, there was more than enough space in the [East Coast] office, but it was a very hierarchical thing. So, internal offices, you had to have to have a certain number of years, external offices, you had to have even more. And so, it didn’t matter. I was working for [a high-level executive] at the time, and there were times that I needed to have sensitive conversations.

Paige’s company determined workspace assignments according to office hierarchy rather than according to work needs. As a result, her office space did not allow her to do the work she needed to do, and she

had to find other means of getting her work done, such as ducking into empty conference rooms. In contrast, at many coworking spaces (though not all), members can select the workspace that fits their work task.

Harrison similarly spoke of the benefits and impact of having flatter organizational structures, compared to more bureaucratic and hierarchical structures prevalent in traditional work environments:

Sandra: How do you think that being involved with coworking has changed the way that you view work?

Harrison: Wow, I guess it's completely changed it. You engage with people. You engage with projects. You don't so much engage with companies and static organizations. Coworking is incredibly flat, as well. It's not without hierarchy but it's incredibly, it's a significantly more level playing field.

Sandra: Can you talk a little bit about why that is maybe the best model for coworking? Why does that make sense versus the typical bureaucracy or hierarchy?

Harrison: Because amazing things can happen when you don't bring your position title to work. Ideas can emerge from the edges. When you're talking to somebody on the same level it allows possibilities to emerge that might not otherwise had emerged. I think in previous organizations, what you used is processes and procedures and hierarchy essentially to make an organization work because there was a lack of trust. In coworking and collaborative working essentially trust replaces hierarchy, procedures, and processes. That makes for a very different environment and ultimately outcome.

Harrison proposes that trust makes coworking communities function, just as hierarchy, procedures, and processes enable a bureaucratic organization to operate. For instance, in a traditional, bureaucratic organization, workers know who to go to complete a task or get a question answered based on a relatively fixed or "static" organizational structure. In a coworking space, workers know who to go to based on trust and the relationships they have built with comembers. Further, they know they *can* go to their comembers for help, because there is a spirit of openness. In traditional work environments, workers go to their coworkers because they each have an obligation to fulfill the duties of their positions and to work together when necessary to complete work tasks. While work in traditional, bureaucratic organizations can certainly generate trust among coworkers, and coworking spaces often have some degree of hierarchy and procedures, comparatively, the former operates principally on hierarchy and procedures, whereas the latter functions more on trust.

Trust and Relaxed Professionalism

The concept of trust also connects to professionalism in terms of behavior expected of comembers. For instance, Zara, a member of Workmine, invoked the concept of trust and relationships between members when asked about the role of members in the success of a space. She observed:

So, I think one is interacting people and introducing yourself. Like, I'll go run down the street and leave my stuff, because I recognize and know the people who're working around me. If you don't feel like you know and recognize people, it doesn't feel like a coworking space in a lot of ways. I've had people... anyone who's new just comes up and introduces themselves. So, I think the type of personality that comes to coworking spaces is just conducive to that. They're the kind of people that are going to come up and ask you what you're working on and introduce themselves and form a relationship.

Having a sense of familiarity and trust with her comembers made Zara feel comfortable leaving her laptop and personal items in the space while she “ran down the street.”

When discussing what members' role is in making a coworking space a successful workplace, Robin, a member of ProShare, brought up respect and trust. She felt that members were generally respectful of other workers and businesses in the space. However, in addition to a confidence that she would be able to get work done and bring clients to ProShare, Robin remarked that “there's a certain kind of fit, and people either fit or they don't.” When I asked her to elaborate on what she meant by “fit,” she first stated that there was a “relaxed” atmosphere and workers in the space were “casual.” For Robin, this was a benefit over her previous workplace, where she was forced to dress more formally. She appreciated that “here I get to wear whatever I want, and so it's just another thing that's off my mind so I can focus on my work.” Robin invoked the idea of trust as she explained further how she and her comembers were casual, but behaved professionally:

I'm saying nobody's loud, nobody's raucous, nobody's unprofessional. Nobody's going to jump into our office and do anything crazy, which nobody would do in a work environment anyway, whether it's co-working or not. I feel like I trust the people that work here, whether I know them or I don't. I trust that they're not going to do anything embarrassing or crazy if we had a client here.

Thus, in contrast to many traditional workplaces, in which professionalism entails a certain formality of dress, coworking spaces often invoke a more relaxed professionalism, and this intertwines with a sense of trust.

Teresa, a member at Workmine, similarly associated the idea of trust with a more casual, relaxed atmosphere. Like Robin, her coworking space's atmosphere contrasted starkly with her previous work environment in a more traditional office.

Sandra: When you first started here, what surprised you about your experience?

Teresa: I think what surprised me was just, I guess, the casualness. Like, everyone feels really approachable. Everyone. I mean you don't often see people walking around in suits, and people make jokes, and people will talk about their personal lives. And the playlist – there's people putting on crazy playlists that you would never be able to do at normal work. I mean just stuff that you would never see at a normal job environment. ... It's just overall, it just feels so much friendlier and more casual, and it's the antithesis of stressful, like relaxed. Yeah, relaxed is a good word. Because even with the trial. I'm doing a trial of the 24/7 thing, but they're sort of like, "oh, here take this. If you like it, we'll go over it; if not, whatever." Just, it's so weirdly lacking in rules, that I'm just so used to there being rules for everything, both the rules on paper and the secret rules, like "I don't talk to her, because she's going to tell someone else." Or "don't put your name on this, because we're not supposed to be working on this." Or "be careful: he's going to make you work on things that have nothing to do with work."

Sandra: Like politics, office politics?

Teresa: Yes, exactly. Whereas here it just feels like, I guess in a way it almost feels like school where it's just a bunch of people working around each other. And it's not that nobody's doing anything important, it's just no one's being too kind of *precious* about it. No one's being too political or you don't get the sense that this person doesn't like that person, or you gotta be careful because... you know what I mean. Which is always the first thing I'd look for when I started a new job: who do people not like, who do people not trust? Because that's the thing you have to watch out for. And there's none of that here. I doubt there's much of that at any coworking space, because it's like everyone's there for the same reason, even if it's different versions of the same reason. But yeah, definitely the relaxed atmosphere.

Like Nate, Sean, and Teresa, many workers I spoke with brought up office politics, competition, and mistrust among coworkers in traditional workplaces. Having less politics and competition in coworking spaces seems to contribute to their perception of a more relaxed environment overall and likely a more conducive environment for building trust among workers.

Trust and “Work That Doesn’t Feel Like Work”

Members and founders I spoke with often talked about doing work they feel passionate about or work that does not feel like work to them. When they explained what that means, it typically translated to less management oversight (or micromanaging) and more trust. Natalie, for instance, differentiated between projects in which clients “nitpick” and projects in which clients gave her team freer rein and trusted them to do a good job. She brought this up when I asked her about whether she would continue working if she had enough money to live comfortably for the rest of her life. In that scenario, she said, she would still work doing many of the same things she does now, but the decision “whether [she] would do them, when, and how, and for whom, those would all be [her] decisions.” When probed further, she explained:

Natalie: Yeah, if I didn’t have to work for money, then I wouldn’t have to work for clients that I don’t want to. There are some projects that we’ve done where I’ve hated every waking moment of it. I wouldn’t have to do that anymore. The fun projects, like the one we’re doing now, it’s not really work. I’m getting paid for it, and sometimes I still just sort of am hit with the realization that I am getting paid to [do this]. Like, what the hell? And, so, there are some days when it doesn’t feel like work and some days that it does. So, yeah, if I could make that into days like it doesn’t feel like work, then eventually that whole idea of it being work would eventually fade away.

Sandra: What’s different about this project that makes it not feel like work?

Natalie: First of all, that the client is really open to our creative vision. They don’t have a chokehold, basically, on the vision. They are very excited about what we do, which really helps. Some people will say that they’re excited, but then they nitpick you to death. So, you’re like, how excited can you really be right now? They’re, you know, if we come up with something, and they’re not really sure about it, and we explain it to them, they’re like, ‘oh, okay, that’s great. You guys are the experts; we’re going to trust you.’ Trust. They trust us. That’s really what it comes down to. They trust us to do our job and do it well, and we’ve worked with them before, which is probably why. And, the theme is super cool. ... Very sci fi. So, it’s on a topic that we are all interested in personally, but then also they trust us, and they let us do our job, which is great. We’re jiving is what I call it. We’re “in it,” if you’ve watched Garden State.

For Natalie, then, the idea of work that does not feel like work connects to trust.

Quinn also linked the concept of trust to work that does not feel like work and increased job satisfaction. When comparing her current position as Community Manager of Workmine to her previous

job, she emphasized the creative freedom she has in her current role, saying that much of that has to do with her bosses, Tom and Asher, who co-founded Workmine:

We are all very open about what this place looks like and what it should be, but it is all fairly flexible because...try it. Try it and see if it fails. If it fails, try a different thing. They are not going to be, like, mad at me because I did it wrong. So, there is freedom in that to actually be creative and try new things even in my role as [Community Manager].

I asked about the differences in terms of how her bosses manage her work. She spoke about the “unrealistic” expectations her former employers had, given the resources and timelines they provided, whereas the freedom Tom and Asher give her enables her to do better work. She explained:

I think if you're working for people who actually encourage you to explore new ideas and not be so set in *their* ways, is something that *everybody* should want to work for or look for in a company. If you trust me to work for you, I'm going to do great. If you don't because you have your own personal issues and you want to hammer that onto me or other employees, it is a terrible place to be.

For Quinn, having her managers' trust was key to her job satisfaction.

Trust as the Foundation for Interactions

As the community manager at Workmine, Quinn has regular contact with most of the members. We spoke about the interactions she has with members and how often she talks to members about social topics (“Every day!”), as well as her role connecting members to each other. She told me about introducing members to Kyle, a Cosite and Workmine member who works in accounting, and the importance of trust in making those connections:

Yesterday alone I emailed and introduced a few people to the CPA that we use here for [Workmine] who happens to be a member. If I didn't trust him and his capabilities, I wouldn't have recommended him. If I didn't think that these two people were worthy of *his* time, I wouldn't have introduced them or said anything. ... Or if you're just listening to people [say] like, “oh, I really need someone to teach me how to write my bio for my website.” [I tell them:] “We have so many writers here. Let's go introduce you to one of them.” So, there's always opportunities.

Many workers in coworking spaces find opportunities to collaborate with others in the space, and community managers like Quinn often help facilitate introductions.

Interactions between members can take many forms, including teaming up on specific projects, contracting with each other for services, getting business referrals from each other, or offering help and advice on an ad-hoc basis. Brooke sees collaboration among members in her coworking space frequently:

There are also a lot of collaborations that happen among members. Like I was saying, if someone runs into a problem or they get to a point where they are expanding and they need help with event planning, marketing there is someone in the space that does that. They end up contracting each other. They get extra business from each other.

Sometimes they will collaborate on art for a project that they might not be able to get because they are too small. Together they're big enough to handle the contract or something. They will collaborate that way too, which is interesting.

Comembers may find out about each other's work through talking with each other during the work day or at events in the coworking space. For instance, one small company in Brooke's space was stuck for weeks on an issue with one of their web applications. They were going to have to go back to their investors and hire a new team. Instead, after talking informally about the problem they were having over a community lunch at the space, another member who does that task for a larger company was able to help them solve the issue within a day.

Many coworking space founders I interviewed or spoke with at GCUC touched on the increasing importance of collaboration in the workplace of the future, which they typically foresee as closely resembling a coworking space. Harrison, whose company created his coworking space and others in Australasia, as well as a coworking conference in his country, brought up collaboration many times.

When discussing his vision for his company, he had this to say:

[O]ur mission is, how to increase the collaborative capacity of [our] country. What we started on is how to create spaces that support the collaborative working styles that we believe will be how people work in the 21st Century. Once we've done the spaces the idea will be, how do we optimize that experience through

collaborative learning, having a market place and then really attracting and nurturing talent as part of the community as well?

Whether or not the collaborative atmosphere of coworking spaces portends the workplace of the future, there remains an affinity between contemporary trends toward more post-bureaucratic, less hierarchical employment relations and what I refer to as the Spirit of Coworking, the *Genossenschaft*-like openness and mutual engagement characterizing members' interactions.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AND GUIDANCE

As Harrison suggested, collaborative learning often represents a key part of founders' visions for their coworking spaces and an essential element of what makes a shared workplace a coworking space.

When asked about why she works, Gwen specified two things she feels she needs to accomplish:

I want to help other people. I want to learn new things. I can't be a person that just stops learning. I have to keep on going and learning new things and gaining new skills. I want to contribute to the world, my little world. I want to make a difference even if it's just my neighborhood. That's why I work.

Coworking enables her to accomplish her work goals by connecting her with people she can learn from and people she can help. She elaborated on how coworking helps her achieve what she wants to get out of work:

First, I get to meet new people every day. I get to learn from their experiences. I get to make connections that they might help me, or I might help them. In general, it just furthers my want to learn more and furthers my need or want to be able to make a difference in my little community and eventually the world.

Similarly, when Nate spoke about how coworking has impacted how he views work, he mentioned learning. He contrasted his current views with how he saw work before he began coworking:

Work was just mostly this thing that you did, right? You needed money so people had, if you do these things, we'll give you money. It was like, okay. It was just a means to an end versus this idea that we're spending a significant portion of our day working. This is one of the primary tools of our existence of how to make ourselves a better person, how to learn, how to grow, how to enjoy ourselves rather than just I'm going to deal with this for the next eight hours then I will go back to my life. It's like, yeah, so none of that.

Like Gwen, he likes to learn and feels that coworking connects him to people who offer “different perspectives,” from whom he can learn and who can learn from each other: “It’s just being able to connect to people, astrology writers and astronomy writers. They are in the same room having a conversation about the stars. That’s cool, come on.”

At Sean’s coworking space, the staff surveyed their members about why they joined and why they stayed. They found that the people at the space and the community were highest on the list. Learning was in the top ten, but lower down, even though Sean finds that members often talk about how much they learn from other members. He explained:

We ask the members why they joined and then why they stayed. That’s two separate questions. I think we had some expectations of what would show up on that list. Why they joined, people and community were number one and two. They are basically the same thing. Number three is isolation, which is the inverse of people in the community. Points one, two, and three are basically the same thing in different ways. When you stack them on top of each other it gets to the other top seven things. It’s insane. It’s like a giant tower and then everything is really tiny. That is far and above number one.

The thing that surprised me the most is learning was basically number ten out of the top ten. When you talk to people about the experience they have they talk about all the things that they learn. I think the thing is they don’t think about it as learning. It’s not explicit learning. It’s more observational. It’s more subtle. It’s more like mentorship. It’s more like...it’s also not learning about things it’s also learning about people.

The “more observational” type of learning that Sean refers to connects to what some members mentioned about the benefits of seeing the ways that other people work, discussed further below. The more open physical environment of coworking spaces likely facilitates such observations among comembers, whereas traditional workplaces may not allow such learning or mentorship across professions and functional areas. This characteristic of coworking spaces also makes coworking communities distinct from *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*.

This learning goal also manifests through founders’ work to foster coworking communities that encourage fruitful interactions between members and to provide resources that support learning. For instance, Cosite has a member library of books that may be helpful to their members. For many

independent workers, learning and professional development activities take up a portion of their workday.

Ethan articulated the need to continually expand his skills as he spoke about what his typical work day looks like:

It's a lot of different things, which I try to prioritize. There's always urgent tasks that need to be done today and tasks that people say are urgent, but actually aren't. Yeah, it's a combination of a lot of different things and perpetual learning. ...

I try to take a good chunk of my day to figure out where I'm at on certain things that are pertinent to my clients and my work and where I'd like to be and try to make up the distance, whether that's reading up on a new software or new techniques or things that aren't necessarily new but are new to me. That can come in a number of different forms, curated, community publications that are focused towards designers or associated newsletter lists like from those guys, the [Cosite] library, the kind of communal library that's in [Cosite]. There's a couple of books that I mentally earmarked that I want to read. Sometimes I will pick up one of those or sometimes it's *National Geographic* or *Lucky Peach* or *Wired* or *Fast Company*. I'll just pick up an issue.

Like Ethan, many members also cite learning from comembers as a valuable resource they gain through coworking. For instance, although coworking does not figure largely into what they do at ProShare, nor was that Gabriel's original goal in creating the space, his tenants speak a lot about learning from each other. In his view, this learning and mentoring aspect of the space embodies the coworking part of their business. When I asked how he would describe coworking or what happens at ProShare, Gabriel elaborated on how the community there developed out of his original vision for the space:

Here, it's more like this very organic networking community or incubator. I feel like those are buzz words that I refrain from using, because there are so many connotations to the word incubator, and people might get the wrong idea. We didn't build this thinking, "we're going to be a small business incubator" and go to Metro [Riverport] and the state for grant funding. It happened kind of by accident. But once we realized that was happening, and we expanded into this building and the building across the street, and as we continue to expand, we take that into consideration that the way we've constructed this, it inadvertently becomes an incubator, where it's very affordable for an individual or two people to come in and start. The coworking comes in where you might meet people who complement your industry or who might be in the same industry and are a few steps ahead of you who you can learn from. ...

We interviewed one of our tenants for a promo we did, and he said, "quite often, you can just walk down the hall and get an answer to a question you have." That's seriously what happens. So, we're like the accidental incubator.

In this explanation, Gabriel put incubators in the same general category as coworking spaces, in that both provide a fertile environment for new businesses and start-ups to grow and learn from others who have

done similar things. The distinction he made here is that, while business incubators formally develop businesses as part of their *raison d'être*, ProShare served as an “accidental incubator” by serving the same role for many of the tenants there. Not everyone includes incubators in the broader category of coworking. However, the guidance that Gabriel describes as resembling what occurs in incubators does occur in coworking spaces. Entrepreneurs “a few steps ahead” often provide mentorship and guidance to their comembers. Gabriel later emphasized the instruction and networking aspects of coworking, as well:

One other thing is seeing how, getting other people’s opinion, or seeing how other people do it. ... That’s another thing I’ve learned so much about it, because we have so many people who work on website stuff. They just tell me things I never would have learned or introduce me to people who can solve problems for us that I thought were insurmountable. So, in that way, I consider us a true coworking facility, because that happens all the time.

Others expressed similar sentiments about learning from other members. Francesca, who worked with Owen, was surprised to discover the amount of collaboration at Cosite. She had just begun learning how to design websites, so she valued having members around who could help her with coding issues she struggled with, as she explained:

There is a lot more collaboration than I thought there would be. I know that’s what coworking is supposed to be at its core but especially when, you know, there’s like a developer question and it’s like, “Oh my gosh, this coding is going to drive me crazy! What’s wrong with it? I looked at this for an hour. Why won’t it work?” And then a guy comes over and is like, “Oh you just need to change this and this.”

The informal instruction that Francesca described came up often in my interviews with members and founders. Workers typically mentioned how much time it saved them to have trusted comembers onsite who could help them with issues as they arose.

When speaking about who he interacts with on a typical day at Cosite, Ethan revealed that he usually talks to “almost everyone” there. In addition to social interactions, such as “catching up about the weekend,” he mentioned that he will ask other members for their help with business-related topics. He had this to say about how this assistance was beneficial to his work:

I will go to specific people for specific questions if they have free time or if they want to break from the work that they're doing. I ask them for help on what I'm working on, if I know that they are either an expert in what I'm working on or have greater knowledge than I do in a specific area. That can be something very specific, like a very specific question about how Adobe Illustrator works. I was having a problem with the way things were aligning, or rather the way they *weren't* aligning the way I would like them to. [Another member] showed me a great trick that I was unaware of and I hadn't read about or seen it used anywhere else in the tutorial or anything like that.

That helped speed up my work, not by 20% or 50% or anything like that, but it's another little evolution in efficiency and design. That was incredibly helpful. That was like 30 to 40 seconds of his time, which hopefully will save me... it saves me probably five to ten seconds every time I do that specific task. I've definitely done it at least a dozen or two times since. The investment has paid off for me taking a minute or two to ask him...if you think about it by the numbers. It's more than that, because you develop a rapport with these people and connection. I think that's really important for, like, professional happiness, as well. It's like being around people that are engaging and helpful and interested, who not only are interested, but actually *actively* take interest in what you're doing.

In Ethan's view, getting help from other members with problems or issues serves a dual purpose: it enables him to work more quickly and efficiently rather than struggling on his own, and it also nurtures a bond between members. In his view, the business-related discussions he had with other members helped to establish rapport more than social conversations did. He explained:

I would say the conversations are longer when they are business-related than personally-related. Today, it's really my first day back at [Cosite] since the holidays. Most of the conversations are like, "How was the holidays? Did you travel?" Small talk type of stuff. Those conversations are usually short because they're shallower in some senses, not in a negative shallow way, but it's like small talk. The business conversations where I'm asking someone for advice or for help or just on how they do something that I'm having trouble with, those tend to be medium to large talk where the conversations are longer and more in-depth and perhaps will be broken up over a series of continuing conversations. We'll talk, and then I'll go back to work on something. Maybe we'll talk again the next day about if I ran into any more problems.

A lot of times, people will follow up with...So, if I ask someone for programming advice or setting up something, I will go back and work on it, and I will just be working on it. Maybe the next day, a lot of times, they will be the ones to follow up and say, "hey, did you need any more help with that? Did everything work out all right for how you were doing, where we were last talking?" ... I would think that the talks that are about business are definitely longer conversations, like more in depth, deeper conversations than the personal type.

COLLEGIALITY AND COOPERATION OVER COMPETITION

Coworking spaces tend to foster collegiality rather than competition. That is, in coworking spaces, authority tends to be shared and more diffuse, rather than consolidated at the top of a hierarchy, as

well as marked by a sense of camaraderie among comembers. Coworking spaces also tend to promote collaboration rather than competition between workers in the same field. This contrast with traditional bureaucratic workplaces is evidenced in several ways. First, members help each other with their work or offer advice and feedback in ways similar to peers in traditional offices. Yet, there is not a competition for job advancement. Second, as discussed above, workers trust other workers they meet in their coworking spaces more than they do workers they meet at networking events or professional association meetings. Third, the collaboration that occurs between similar workers in coworking spaces differs from traditional between-firm collaboration, in that comembers not working together on a project often share business information with each other.

The majority of workers I interviewed stated that they routinely discuss work-related topics with comembers. Maggie, a former member of Alloy, spoke about how helpful she found these discussions, especially with the founder of the space, Ben:

That was one thing that was really cool, especially at [Alloy], because I started working there when I was kind of still feeling my way through this editorial director role. It was really cool unexpectedly, because they ran a magazine out of there, and so [Ben] particularly was like so open to stopping to chat with me all the time about, like, just communication ideas. And I had worked mostly on the web and I was starting to have to do print publications and so it was actually really cool. He would come and talk with me about how they create their magazine and page layouts and all sorts of stuff. So, that was a very neat, unexpected thing to actually have other people to chat with about my field and the current projects that I was working on. That was really cool.

Many workers mentioned the benefit of work-related conversations with comembers, as well, and also indicated that they disclose business information to and provide or receive mentorship from comembers.

This type of interaction differs from both workplace communities, in which coworkers provide assistance to each other in pursuit of the company's goals, and occupational communities, where workers in the same profession network and may share mutually beneficial information like professional development opportunities. Since workers in the same profession but different organizations are in competition with each other, the assistance they provide each other likely tends toward general advice or

information sharing. Apart from established mentor relationships, they would also be unlikely to offer guidance like Maggie described or specific business information. Justine, an entrepreneur, remarked that she feels greater trust in her comembers at Cosite than she does in fellow members of a female entrepreneur organization she belongs to, as she felt a sense of competition with the latter. Even though members of the organization sign confidentiality and non-disclosure agreements, Justine reported that they still act hesitant to share “their best tips” or other business information.

Teresa, a member at Workmine, shared this opinion. She spoke about her decision to start coworking after moving to Riverport from another city. She had wanted to get away from the distractions of home, become more productive, and have more social interaction. She then turned to how she felt more supported and less competitive with her comembers than with coworkers in her former workplaces:

Teresa: I was in a new city where I don't know anybody here, I didn't know anybody here. And I got here and then I was just pretty much at home all the time. So it was...I didn't mind it for a while, but then I started to go, “it's been a long time since I've had human contact for more than just a few minutes. So, I was pretty desperate and frustrated when I saw that email [advertising a free trial at Workmine]. ...But now I guess I should say, I'm a full-time member and yeah, I think it's been, oh my God, it's been so helpful. It's resulted in a lot of stuff.

Sandra: In what way?

Teresa: Like, I've gotten some clients through working here. And more than that, I mean that's a big deal because most of my clients have been in [the last city I lived in] or else were people that I knew from [there] or had made connections to through someone else [there]. Like I'm fine working non-profit stuff when I'm a consultant, but I don't want to *just* do that. Sort of, it's a little repetitive and there's certain limitations that are, you know...I want to do other things.

So, getting to make contact with other people here who are doing different things that are new and interesting to me because I haven't done them a million times already, and just [Tom] who runs [the space] he's always really helpful if you want to ask him advice or connecting you with other people. So, you keep getting chances to build a network, which is not my strong suit at all. I'm terrible at networking, everything about it; I'm just terrible at it. And I've noticed it's sort of happening despite my lack of much effort. And it's even sort of...it's even kind of becomes kind of a social thing to me, too, where I might not have a whole ton of stuff to do, but I still want to come, because I have friends here and I enjoy being here, which is a weird thing that I haven't experienced at work in a long time.

And I think, I was kind of thinking about this over the weekend, because I knew this [interview] was coming up, and... I think the big thing that I find so helpful about being here is that...when you're an in-house designer, meaning you're in a bigger company that does something else, and you're just a part of the communications department or something..., it's really frustrating the way that there's never enough

resources. No one ever gives you enough time. No one really respects your knowledge of anything. You're always being second guessed. It's really frustrating. You feel like, at least my experience with the places I've worked, regardless of the design part of it, it always feels very competitive. ...I mean, with my friends at work, I might be really happy for them when something good happens to them. I mean, I'm not a jerk. But you always get the feeling that other people are not there to support you and are not looking for you to support them.

You might be sort of friendly, but it is a definite sort of political aspect to it, that feels a little like there's still a competition. If you do well, and I don't do well, then that's a big thing. Or like there's a scarcity of resources, even if there's not, where we can't all work together and be supportive and happy for each other. I noticed that every day at work, through every job I ever worked at. Most of the conversations that weren't just about our personal lives, would be complaining about things, constantly complaining about things. And, you kind of make friends through complaining about things.

Sandra: Right. Commiserating?

Teresa: If you're complaining about the same things, then, yeah, you commiserate, and that's what your friendship would come out of. And then maybe you'd have other things in common that would work out or maybe you wouldn't.

Whereas here, I feel like people are really happy for you when something good happens, and I feel like people are interested in supporting you and interested in hearing your ideas of ways you could even support them. Or brain storming with you, or just talking to people doing lots of different things who love talking about it and are excited. I mean, there might be things that we complain about, but it's not complaint-driven. It's sort of idea- and excitement- driven, which is so foreign.

But once I, even when I started here, I still planned on eventually leaving freelance down the road. But now, I mean a few months in, now I literally over the weekend I had a nightmare that I had to stop freelancing. I literally, which is so weird, but now I'm pretty much, yeah, I'm pretty much planning on sticking with it, because it's just, it's really pleasant. I feel like my quality of life has gone up so much. I don't get up and go, "Oh, God, I gotta go in." I can stay late.

Sandra: Could you say more about that shift between your fear of being a freelancer and what you thought it entailed, the risk and potentially not having benefits and insurance, and then your perspective now of fearing *not* being a freelancer?

Teresa: Yeah, so I've just always had this sort of fear of not having enough. And I don't know where it comes from, but I've always just felt like a fear of rejection of putting myself out there, fear of not having enough money or not having enough say in what I do during the day. Or the insurance thing, like dear God, I think if Obamacare⁴⁴ hadn't have happened, I don't know what I would be doing for insurance. It's a life saver.

Sandra: Wow and that happened since you...yeah, I guess that covered all the time you've been freelancing?

⁴⁴ Several independent workers I interviewed stated that they had directly benefitted from the Affordable Care Act, known colloquially as Obamacare.

Teresa: Yeah. I had something else for a little while before that kicked in, and it was terrible. It was pretty much worthless, but very expensive. So, stuff like that, just shifts in that way that made such a difference.

But more than that, I think just the way that I started freelancing where it wasn't so much me seeking other people, but other people saying, can you help me with this? And me going, "I should probably be making some money. Okay, well I need this for my portfolio, so I can later go and get a job." An then just seeing how different it actually is, is part of it.

But I think another part of it is, just over the last year, realizing that my overall wellbeing, my emotional wellbeing, is more valuable than the amount of money I was making before. That's probably more than anything the big thing, the big shift. Because, I mean, I think on paper, just this first year, I doubt I made, I haven't done my taxes yet, but I haven't made...God if I had told myself two years ago that I was going to make this made much, I would've been just sick thinking about it: "How am I going to live? How am I going to...?" And I know I'm not the only person who has kind of been in that situation this last year, switching things around.

But, you know, you realize, "I can still totally live. It's fine." And I actually feel better this way than I did before. So, the risks don't seem as scary because I couldn't...I know I won't make *nothing*, so I'll manage somehow, and I can see it getting better over time.

Teresa felt that work in coworking spaces felt more idea-driven and excitement-driven, compared to the complaint-driven, competitive environment of traditional offices, which impacted the experience of working for her. She no longer dreaded work, and her overall quality of life improved. In addition, the support and collegiality she experienced among her comembers at Workmine helped her not only gain new work projects, but also become more comfortable with the risks inherent to freelancing, so much so that she had nightmares about *not* being able to freelance.

Victor, a member of Alloy, also brought up the theme of competition among coworkers when contrasting traditional coworkers with coworking members. He had this to say:

Everybody is kind of vying for each other, and there is a hierarchy, and it is dog-eat-dog. It is not so much that here. It is more collaborative. That is in the name, "cowork"; everybody is working together. You're not going to down somebody. You don't care how much they get paid. That's the big thing: I don't give a shit how much the guy next to me is getting paid. We don't do the same thing. We're not even in the same company. If he was doing something similar to what I do, then maybe I'm a little bit curious, but I don't really care. He's not my competition. We know totally different people. We're working on different things. None of these people are stopping my clients in the hallway, and being like, "Do you work with them?" It is nice like that. Whereas in another company, they are not vying for each other's clients, but they are vying for each other's jobs, to impress the boss if there is a boss.

In Victor's view, competition among coworkers operating within a hierarchy often characterizes traditional workplaces. If coworkers are not competing for clients, they compete for each other's jobs or to "impress the boss." In contrast, comembers in coworking spaces do not feel that competition with each other and work in a more collaborative way.

In coworking spaces, workers often share a collaborative rather than competitive orientation toward other workers in the same or similar professions. Ethan illustrated the uniqueness of this type of open exchange and the effect it has on his work:

Sandra: You talked a little bit about how you interact with people in the space. Can you say a little more about how your work has been affected by the people you work with?

Ethan: Yeah, it's nice because you feel... I have like a level of comfort with the people that are fellow members like you would in anything that you both have a membership to. People are very much open with their business and showing you an inside look at the gears that turn the business and make it function. People are very much open to sharing numbers on what they charge for certain things, what they pay for certain things, how they approach filing taxes or who their accountant is, things that being a small business owner you need to figure out. There's not necessarily a class you can take on it or a guide that's a definitive guide that you could know. That level of comfort that I have with other [Cosite] members and they have with me allows for...if I just went up to someone I saw working as an illustrator at a coffee shop and said, "hey, how much do you charge for a logo?" They would look at me like I was reading their mail. I feel like that camaraderie is very important for my professional development and where I'm at professionally right now. That's where I think that membership has a very positive effect in my business.

Francesca and Owen also solicited and provided advice about pricing. Francesca recalled a few examples when speaking about questions members come to her with:

There have been a few times where it's just kind of general, like, just throwing out business questions, like especially with the graphic designer and web developers when they're like, "Someone – a client – came to me and they asked me to do this, this, and this. How much should I charge them?" You know, because it's such... pricing can be so subjective, and so if you don't know what the market's like or what, you know, how to value your time... And it's interesting to see, like, I think [Owen] had a price in mind for something, and then he asked another guy who was doing similar what he would charge, and it was way more than what they were thinking. Like, "Wow maybe we should start with that," and they presented that larger figure, and the client accepted it. So, it was super beneficial for them just to realize, you know, pricing and evaluation and having all those people to bounce that off of. And it's gone the other way, too, when they were going to charge a certain number for something and were like, "Oh no. I'd charge like this much." And I was like, "Really? Okay."

Encouraging comembers in the same field to charge more may also function to benefit workers themselves, as ensuring others charge similar rates for their services helps to maintain the price floor in their field. However, as Francesca noted, pricing recommendations can go both ways, and comembers often work in related but dissimilar fields or completely different occupations. For instance, Teresa also spoke to other members about what to charge, sometimes encouraging them to charge more for their work, yet these comembers often worked in different fields or were working on ideas for a new business. Teresa found a different kind of benefit in these conversations:

I notice, I think a lot of people are very anxious about what do I charge? And I'm so scared to put myself out there and am I doing anything good? I know I have this compulsive need to help people and support people, so I notice that, someone I might work with a lot, I'll push her to charge more and be more proud [sic] of what she does, because it's more of a big deal. Or, [Rob's⁴⁵] business idea is a great idea, and get that in return. And once you start talking to other people that way, it makes you kind of think, well I'm not that different, so why wouldn't that also apply to me?

Supporting her comembers in this way also served to give her more confidence in her own services and helped her realize her own unique skills and abilities.

Freelancers and entrepreneurs are not the only workers who benefit from open, business-related conversations with comembers. Emily, a member of ProShare, brought up the idea of trust when I asked her what she thought the values of coworking were: "I think that there's an inherent trust in coworking that your intellectual property, your physical property, are not up for grabs. So, there's some trust that is a value, I think, that has to be shared." As a remote worker who deals with confidential data, she appreciated that she could work around others and could engage her comembers in conversations without worrying that someone would steal her ideas or her files.

⁴⁵ Rob is a member of Workmine.

Ethan expressed a similar sentiment about his preference for consulting his comembers at Cosite about business questions rather than asking a boss or communicating remotely with someone from his company. Part of this preference relates to the fact that comembers at Cosite are more his peers and another part is that he prefers in-person communication. He recalled previously trying to get answers to questions by sending out a message on LinkedIn or Facebook and filtering people by their expertise. He found that “sometimes that works; sometimes it doesn’t.” It could be hard tracking people down, especially with so many different forms of communication, which can become a bit like “white noise.” Ethan found that, often, going directly to a trusted contact is more efficient than trying to find the answer himself. He explained:

In the smaller tight knit communities, you maintain a higher level of more human interaction where you can reach out to someone directly or you can see what projects they’re working on or what company they work at, products that they’ve made. It can be helpful. You can find those resources online, although a lot of times it’s like wading through a haystack to get to the needle. If you can go to someone who is an authority or someone you can trust directly, I prefer to do that before doing the diving into the haystack to find that needle. ... I guess it definitely, it helps filter trust or helps filter *untrustworthiness* out of the conversation in some instances.

The higher level of human interaction in coworking spaces cultivates a sense of trust difficult to build and maintain in online communities or forums. As Ethan mentioned, trusting one’s comembers saves time and, as Sean also noted above, promotes productivity.

In general, workers I spoke with contrasted the high levels of trust in their coworking spaces with their previous, more traditional workplaces, as well as online forums and professional organizations. Given the importance of trust in collaborative relationships, this suggests that coworking spaces may offer environments more conducive to collaboration. In addition to collaboration, my interviewees – founders, community managers, and members alike – offered many examples of business-related interactions, cooperation, and assistance. The section below examines the various types of work-related interactions I learned of or witnessed during my field work, and teases out the differences between them.

BUSINESS-RELATED INTERACTIONS IN COWORKING SPACES

KEY TYPES OF BUSINESS-RELATED INTERACTIONS

Business-related interactions between workers can take several forms. Both founders and members spoke of collaboration, learning or receiving instruction from other members, and approaching their comembers for advice, feedback, or assistance with issues. Robin, for instance, spoke about various types of collaboration that occur at ProShare, in contrast with other places she had worked:

Sandra: How does this space compare to places that you've worked in the past?

Robin: It's much different because my other places were schools but it's also kind of similar in that with teaching there's a lot of...you're doing a lot of collaboration with other teachers and it's for the same goal.

So, I feel like here it's maybe for different goals, but you're still working with other people. Like there's a lawyer down the hall that comes and talks to us. Or like the people that do websites across the hall. They're just like; hey, what do you think about this? Oh, I have a contractor website. And we're like; well, we need contractors. So that's a really, I think, unique opportunity here.

Sandra: How do you think that comes about, those sort of collaboration opportunities?

Robin: I think it depends on the personality of the individuals. I feel like I'm not super outgoing so I'm not going to go knock on a door and be like; hey, what do you do?

But my boss does that or other people stop in and they're like, "hey, I like your door thing whatever." So, they're like, "I see that you do property so I have a question on it." We actually sold a house to [Emily], because she knew that we did realty.

In both traditional, bureaucratic workplaces and coworking spaces, workers seek out coworkers or comembers for assistance with their work. They may ask for advice on how to handle a novel situation, collaborate with others on a project, solicit feedback on a work product, or receive instruction on a work process or system they experience difficulties with. Although assistance, mentorship, and other forms of collaboration occur in traditional, bureaucratic workplaces, as well, these interactions differ in each type of workplace. The discussion below focuses on five main types of business-related interaction that occurs

in coworking spaces: collaboration, feedback, guidance, instruction, and networking. In each section, I provide examples of that type of interaction in coworking spaces compared to traditional workplaces.

Collaboration

In traditional workplaces, workers typically collaborate with their coworkers because their job requires it. They may need to bring in stakeholders from other departments to get their buy-in, or they may be assigned to a project team by their boss. In contrast, coworking space members typically choose when and with whom they collaborate. This is mostly owing to many members' status as independent workers, who enjoy a high level of autonomy and control over their work. As explained above, the key distinction between independent workers who work in a coworking space and those who work from home or a coffee shop is that coworking members have regular, easy access to many potential collaborators. Working in a coworking space also allows more occasions to interact with, build trust in, and get to know the work of comembers before deciding to collaborate on a project.

Collaboration figures prominently in many founders' reasons for opening a coworking space, and members and founders alike cite it as a major benefit of coworking. For Sean, the potential for collaboration with comembers served as a central motivation behind his decision to open a coworking space. He wanted to bring together people he could work with on projects. He explained this when he discussed his goals for his coworking space:

The driving force was if I wanted to grow my business in this way that I had going, sort of this distributed network of freelancers, I needed to know that there were more people than I already knew who I could trust before I needed to work with them. I wanted this community so I would have these trusted allies, where we would be able to... whether I would win the work and you come work with me, or you win the work and I come work with you, I really don't care, but that network needs to grow.

Rather than having to scour the city each time he had a new project or look to other cities for talent, Sean wanted to build a network of people with whom he could collaborate. The coworking space he opened

offered a physical space for these interpersonal connections to thrive. These connections tend to occur, regardless of the initial intentions of founders.

When Gabriel first started ProShare, he envisioned the space as more of a business center than a coworking space. He bought a building and rented office spaces and cubicles out to small businesses and entrepreneurs who needed a place to work near the part of town he lived in, which he did not think of as coworking: “We never went into it trying to be a traditional coworking facility; we just tried to fulfill a market need.” Nevertheless, collaborations seem to grow naturally from the relationships among comembers there. Though coworking in a strict sense is still not the primary focus of ProShare and affiliated spaces Gabriel has expanded into, he began to embrace the term coworking more as he saw more and more examples of cooperation and learning occurring there. He offered this example of collaboration at ProShare:

When we bought this building, one of my tenants who had just started with us was a PR writer, a copywriter. She does press releases. I’m like, “I’ve never done a press release before, and we have this big new project that we’re calling [ProShare]. Can you help us?” And, she did. That’s just one example of hundreds, probably thousands at this point, of things that have happened here.

Collaborations interviewees discussed most often involved one member having a specific need, such as public relations or tax assistance, and choosing to work with a comember who they know has the necessary skills and experience.

As coworking puts members into contact with a range of people, it most often broadens their social network. Thus, another theme that emerged regarding collaboration was serendipitous encounters, that is, meeting and working with people they otherwise would not have. For instance, Victor (member, Alloy) referenced collaboration when I asked how his work had been affected by the other people in his coworking space. This was his reply:

Victor: Collaboration sometimes. We end up collaborating with people that we otherwise might not have. That affects the kind of work you do. You end up doing something with somebody else and combining

forces to get something done, which is always cool. That is part of life that is good, collaboration. If the right people come by I will, as far as the people that I'm surrounded by here, or at any place – not so much people that I invite, but rather people that are here on their own accord – based on their skill set you never know what could happen. You run into different people and you get different opportunities.

My work has been kind of... my mind opened, and my work expanded, and it just kind of helps to expand your horizons when you're surrounded by people who you otherwise would not have ran into or surrounded yourself with. You're just forced into that situation, which I love. It is kind of like high school. In high school, if you went to a public one, it is just a lot of people. You don't get to choose who they are and it really opens your eyes to all kinds of different things. It is a very cross-section of society, which it is not so much a cross section of society here. Obviously, these are people who are professional enough to pay money to own a desk in a building with a business. We are all kind of similar in a way, we just do different things.

Sandra: Can you say a little more about how your work has been expanded by these collaborations?

Victor: We ended up doing something with... I guess I have to use particulars to explain what I really mean, but I guess particularly working with [*Ilk* magazine]. If they throw an event or something or work with a musician that I otherwise would not have met, and then I end up meeting with these people and I talk to them through this event that I was doing for these people, [*Ilk*], and end up shooting some stuff and talking with them, and you might have another contact there. So now or maybe later down the road, that person calls me to do something, so I end up getting more work. A big part of it is getting different opportunities.

Then the new business that just moved in here had a party. We heard about it, went, filmed a video recap kind of thing, and gave it to them, and now they have a cool little commercial, and we did it. Otherwise, we wouldn't have done that and made that connection. And who knows what could happen from there? Maybe they will hire us to do something. Maybe we will collaborate with them somehow. It is just cool to be able to have people that you can curry favors with. It is all Game of Thrones, the work edition.

Sandra: In what way?

Victor: You do a favor for somebody, and they do a favor for you. We're not killing each other. This is all the friendly Game of Thrones. It is a Game of Thrones where we are all allies, hopefully.

Collaboration factored into Victor and his business partner's experience of coworking from the beginning of their time at Alloy. They worked out a deal with Ben and his co-founders – who manage and publish *Ilk*, the magazine operating out the space – to produce videos for the magazine in exchange for workspace at Alloy. As Victor described above, they also produced a video for Paul's company. He spoke more about it later in the interview, as well:

We did that video for [Paul's company]. There was no discussion about it. It is kind of like your friends when you work with these people automatically, so there is no need for expected things. We want to do favors for all these people really unless it gets extreme. I'm happy to shoot a little thing for them or whatever. You give it to them and there you go; no stress. They are friends. That is part of the collaborative

part of it that is really nice. Everybody is happy to help the other person, because you want them to help you if the time comes around.

It is a good feeling to be part of a community. I guess that is why we all seek it out. That is part of this. Nobody is waiting on a paycheck from the boss. Nobody is feeling sick of working at the place unless you're feeling sick of working for yourself and then, whatever, that is your thing, but you're not mad at the other people for it. Everybody is happy to collaborate with each other if they can.

For Victor and other members, collaboration seems integral to their coworking experience. Dana and Valerie also collaborated with Victor, as well as with some of the employees at *Ilk*. Valerie recalled:

Yeah, so [Victor's company]. They sit kind of kitty corner to us, and so I'll send them a video or I'll send them a song and just be like, "What do you guys think of this?" Or "Hey guys, if we're going to throw this event, do you guys want on? Do you want to sponsor it? Do you guys want to be a part of it?" Like we were going to go, we're going to South by Southwest in March, and we're bringing a couple of our bands down. And I offered [Victor] a spot in the car if he wanted to come down, and he could take videos of our bands and stuff. And so, it was nice to be able to collaborate. It's a lot more accessible when you're in a co-working space versus it being more of a... like it's more professional and a little bit more cold [sic] when you have to email someone instead of just being face-to-face.

Zack, a freelancer whose company rents an office suite at ProShare, also mentioned collaborations through serendipitous encounters. In addition to finding several potential clients from other tenants at ProShare, the president of Zack's company gleaned inspiration from one of the workers in their office suite. Zack explained, after I asked about how frequently he engages in business-related interactions with his coworkers or comembers at ProShare:

I mean, constantly. Well, I shouldn't say constantly, because it is amazing how much you start talking about just random stuff, or other people start talking about random stuff. But, yeah, I mean tons and tons of business-related conversation. We have a videographer that works out of our office that we work with a lot, but he is not an employee. So, he is one of the two or three people that rent a desk that are currently there. And he gets in on a lot of our business things, just because he will overhear something and be like, "oh, yeah," and just trying to say something. Sometimes, it will be because it is actually a project that he is going to be doing some work on. ... I am not sure how the connection was made, but I definitely think, I mean, we have an entire product kind of structured around video, which we didn't really do video before, and I have to say that if he wasn't coworking, if he wasn't in the same office, we probably wouldn't be working with him. I mean, it is just, oh, we were in the office with him, we see him editing and stuff and it is like, "oh, that looks really good." And then, [the company president] or whatever, gets an idea and is like, you know, let's focus more on videos... We've got [the videographer] right here. So, that would definitely be an interaction.

As Zack described, sharing an office suite with a videographer not only led to collaborations for his coworkers, but also seemed to motivate the company president to refocus his strategy.

Collaborations between workers with different skills sets, relying on an organic division of labor, also occur in traditional workplaces. The distinction between the type of collaboration that develops in coworking spaces and that in traditional workplaces is that in the former, collaborations are voluntary while in the latter, they tend to be part of the job. Independent workers and entrepreneurs also collaborate with other entrepreneurs or organizations, but most often these collaborations are formalized through a contractual relationship, often after going through a bidding or proposal process. Some may have more informal collaborations with people they have worked with before or have an existing business relationship with, that is, someone they already trust. Thus, collaborations in coworking spaces tend to be voluntary and more informal than those in traditional workplaces.

Feedback

As with guidance, soliciting feedback on one's work differs in traditional workplaces compared to coworking spaces. In traditional workplaces, workers may solicit feedback on project-related tasks or work products, for instance asking fellow project team members or project stakeholders for their opinion on a proposal or new software program. Requesting, providing, and accepting feedback in these situations typically happens as a routine and required part of workers' job responsibilities, among specified project staff or subject matter experts.

In contrast, workers in coworking spaces consult their comembers by choice. In fact, many workers I spoke with indicated that, "what do you think about this?" was a common question in their coworking spaces. Francesca found that Cosite members would often come to her to solicit her opinion on things they were working on. She valued the opportunity to give feedback, particularly because previous jobs offered her so little opportunity to do so. Christina expressed a similar sentiment about the interactions she has with her comembers at Workmine:

Being able to work with different people and see how they live their life and how they view things and based on their experiences, gives people a better perspective to do work in a way that's actually valuable. I could work all day by myself not even really realizing [whether] I'm even meeting the right needs, and just talking to someone who knows someone who knew someone, and this is what they need, is just so much more beneficial.

I can [also] help people here. People come up to me, and they think this is how they should market this, and I'm like, "well, that wouldn't do anything for me."

Working in the non-profit field, Christina puts a lot of focus on ensuring that her organization meets the needs of the people they serve. As she works remotely, she values the opportunity to get feedback from her comembers. Valerie, at Alloy, also reported soliciting feedback from Victor and his business partner, who run a video production company. Like Christina, Francesca, and Valerie, the other members who mentioned this as a type of business-related interaction indicated that they gladly offered and received feedback. As this exchange is voluntary, feedback in coworking communities may imply a greater level of trust than does feedback in traditional workplaces.

Feedback in coworking spaces can also include discussing ideas, rather than concrete products or designs. Kyle emphasized that the open layout of coworking spaces encourages interactions and the exchange of ideas. When I asked in what ways Workmine differed from the office environment he had worked in before, Kyle mentioned the openness and absence of cubicles. I inquired about the impact that makes, and he replied:

It encourages interactions. I could be sitting across from somebody I had met before, but if there was a cubical I wouldn't see him. I would just not look at him. Maybe I would be more productive, but we're not factory workers anymore. It's a creative culture. I think that really encourages interaction.

I told somebody that I like to call it an "Idea Farm". You come in and mention an idea to somebody, and they help you develop that idea and it could lead to ten more ideas that you didn't even expect. I think that is one thing about it being open.

Zara, another member of Workmine, has had similar encounters with her comembers. She described one example this way:

There were a couple of times when I've been in there sketching something out on a white board and, like, the iOS engineer from [an e-commerce website] came in and was like, "oh, what are you working on?" And, he was working on the same thing, and I got some ideas from him. So, it's just nice to get some thinking outside of the [company⁴⁶] vacuum, as they like to call it internally.

As the interactions Kyle and Zara describe indicate, the open-plan layouts of coworking spaces encourage the flow of feedback and ideas between members.

Guidance

Asking a coworker or comember for guidance on how to handle a novel or complex situation requires a fair amount of trust. Workers in both traditional offices and coworking spaces may request guidance from a trusted colleague or mentor. Yet seeking advice can be a riskier proposition in a traditional workplace, as those with the experience to offer advice may also be in a position to evaluate a worker's performance and make decisions about her career trajectory in the organization. Conversations with peers may also have higher stakes in traditional workplaces, as coworkers often compete for promotions, bonuses, or simply the good opinion of their bosses. In contrast, members of coworking spaces can typically avoid this quagmire with their comembers.

For freelancers, entrepreneurs, or remote workers, figuring out where to get advice on business-related questions presents another set of challenges. As mentioned above and in previous chapters, these workers are often isolated from a regular set of coworkers or other entrepreneurs. Even professional organizations may not offer sufficient opportunities to develop personal relationships with other entrepreneurs, as Justine found. Coworking spaces provide these workers with an environment that facilitates guidance interactions.

⁴⁶ The name of Zara's company was redacted to help maintain her confidentiality.

Guidance interactions in coworking spaces can take the form of informal mentorship, where someone with more experience or expertise in a particular field counsels a comember on specific skills or practices related to that field. When I asked Maggie about interactions she had with other people at Alloy, she explained that she tended to have more business-related discussions than social. Ben, the cofounder and manager of Alloy, also co-founded *Ilk* magazine, and he often shared his editorial experience with Maggie. She found this particularly helpful as she navigated a new position:

That was one thing that was really cool especially at [Alloy], because I started working there when I was kind of still feeling my way through this editorial director role. It was really cool, unexpectedly, because they ran a magazine out of there and so [Ben] particularly was like so open to stopping to chat with me all the time about communication ideas. I had worked mostly on the web, and I was starting to have to do print publications, and so it was actually really cool. He would come and talk with me about how they create their magazine and page layouts and all sorts of stuff. So, that was a very neat, unexpected thing to actually have other people to chat with about my field and the current projects that I was working on. That was really cool.

Assistance from a knowledgeable source provided Maggie a boost in her new role. Instead of working in isolation and having to muscle through any difficulties she encountered, Ben offered guidance through this unfamiliar area.

Summer, a member of ProShare, spoke about the value of mentor-like relationships for independent workers and entrepreneurs. When I asked what she hoped to gain from the work she does, she replied:

Summer: Personally, just satisfaction of doing things that I love every day. Skill-wise, I'm always trying to, I guess I'm always trying to just fine-tune, or I've called it polishing my diamond in the rough. Just kind of taking it and continuing to polish it so that it will shine more. Just through the years, I think that's it.

It's very analogy-like, but every experience, and I think even being here, being around people who are more professional around certain things. I feel like in a more corporate work environment, you're always looking up to the people who have next level promotion to find out what you're supposed to do. Okay, emulate that so I can move to that position. And when you work for yourself, you don't have that. You're always the top dog.

So, you have to find role models and other people out there and figure out how are they doing what they're doing. So, an environment like this just in little ways, I can go, "oh, they're marketing like that, that's cool. Or they're using this kind of technology, that's cool." So, you can kind of do that positive peer pressure, peer reflection kind of thing. And go, "oh, maybe I should try that."

Sandra: So, that gets you sort of mentors. Have you developed any sort of formal or quasi formal relationships with anyone?

Summer: Not people in the building, but through the years I've always tried to pick people who are doing what I want to do someday and say, "let me just watch how you do what you do." And then imitate it at whatever level I can.

Sandra: So do you approach them? Or is this sort of you just identify them?

Summer: Some of them are famous, and I can't contact them personally. Not that I want to be famous, but they're just doing projects, and they're well known and don't want to chat with me. I have in the past approached people. Interestingly enough, I have a lot of people approach me and say, "Can we have coffee? I want to talk about how you're doing what you're doing." Or especially with real estate, "I want to be in real estate too.

So, I always try to find... Someone told me this along the way: Find someone to look up to and find someone to help, because you learn from both. There's not really anybody else in the building exactly doing what we're doing that we have that opportunity with, but trying to just cross over a little bit maybe in how we share information in the building.

Sandra: How do you think you benefit from those relationships: the mentor relationship, working with someone that is doing what you want to do, and then yourself being a mentor?

Summer: The benefit I think of working with people, the benefit to me of working with people who are trying to do what I'm doing is it kind of gives me some of those pats on the back that no one else gives me, because I don't have a supervisor. There's no one to say, "you just did great this year." It's just me. Am I okay? Am all right? Am I getting where I need to go? So, when I work with somebody that's kind of like, "wow, I'm so amazed at how you did this." It's encouraging. It helps me see where I've come from, because they're where I was at one point. So, it's like, oh, you made some progress.

And then, same thing with the other direction. It's kind of like, okay, you're encouraging me that I can get to where you are. Thank you for that. Okay, this is what I need to do. I can make that happen.

As Summer points out, entrepreneurs and small business owners do not have supervisors who can evaluate their performance, nor coworkers higher up on the career ladder to look up to and emulate. They must seek and create those relationships for themselves. Although ProShare does not offer comembers in her industry whom she could form a mentor-like relationship with, she nevertheless attempts to "share information" with others in the space.

In general, members seem to find utility in guidance from both comembers working in their same field or doing similar work, as well as general guidance from other entrepreneurs or independent workers.

At Workmine, Zara appreciated having conversations with Tom, the founder of the space, as well as comembers in related fields. She commented:

[Tom] will always [say] like, “all right, what are you doing? What are you working on? Are you launching anything this week?” So, I’d talk with him about that. And then, like I said, there are two other engineers there, so I like to talk to them about what technologies they’re using, what they’re liking, things like that. Beyond that, relating specifically to my business, I think that’s it. I just like hearing what other people are working on, just to know.

Zara benefits from more social conversations with Tom, who has experience helping entrepreneurs as an entrepreneur himself, as well as interactions with other engineers, as she works on websites and apps. The latter serve as a sort of micro-occupational community, offering a chance to engage in industry-related discussions with people outside of her company.

Similarly, Ethan found business-related guidance interactions in coworking spaces to be particularly valuable, identifying assistance from other members among the resources he found most useful:

Probably the ability to go to other [Cosite] members for help or for advice [is the resource I find most useful]. Sometimes, it’s not a hard thing that I need help on. It’s more like a soft thing. It’s like, “how do I approach this topic with a client?” or “how do you handle this type of situation?” Sometimes it’s more like learning from [other members’] experiences or similar experiences than it is like, oh, using this type, this sequence of characters to make your problem go away. What you can do in live programming, you can’t necessarily do that [remotely]...Sometimes it’s as simple as an email to a client, but not always.

Without available mentors or trusted coworkers in more advanced positions, the “soft” skills Ethan refers to often must be developed over the course of years. Guidance in coworking spaces serves as a kind of informal mentorship for members, offering easier access to professional development opportunities for these workers. However, not all members succeed in locating sources of guidance at their coworking spaces and, like Summer, must seek those relationships outside of the space.

Instruction

Both types of workplaces – traditional and coworking spaces – offer formal and informal instruction, such as training courses or peer assistance in learning new tasks. The major difference is that freelance or independent workers typically do not have access to either type of instruction in traditional offices, where they may be hired to be an expert. Rather, they must seek out and pay for these benefits on their own. Those working independently or remotely also lack coworkers to learn from.

Coworking spaces, in contrast, offer these workers informal assistance from comembers and sometimes even training courses available at the space. Members benefit from these readily available resources, particularly the knowledge base of their comembers. For instance, Owen, founder of Cosite, related learning from comembers who work as programmers there. With their help on his Word Press website, Owen not only resolved an issue taking up his time, but developed his professional skills: “I now have a new skill that was easy obtain, didn’t cost me anything, and now is a part of my skill set. So, I think having people with different skills and different specializations helps me to learn quicker [sic].” Ethan, a member of Cosite and Owen’s business partner, also mentioned receiving instruction from members. When I asked about whom he interacts with at Cosite on a typical day, he had this to say:

Almost everyone who’s there on a typical day, whether it’s like in passing, saying hi, catching up about the weekend or the holiday, or if I know if their particular sports team did well or poorly we can commensurate or whatever about that. Or, I will go to specific people for specific questions if they have free time or if they want to break from the work that they’re doing. I ask them for help on what I’m working on, if I know that they are either an expert in what I’m working on or have greater knowledge than I do in a specific area. That can be something very specific to, like, a very specific question about how Adobe Illustrator works.

I was having a problem with the way things were aligning, or rather the way they weren’t aligning the way I would like them to. [Luke⁴⁷] showed me a great trick that I was unaware of and I hadn’t read about or seen it used anywhere else in the tutorial or anything like that. That helped speed up my work, not by 20% or 50% or anything like that, but it’s another little evolution in efficiency and design. That was incredibly helpful. That was like 30 to 40 seconds of his time, which hopefully will save me, it saves me probably five

⁴⁷ Luke is a member of Cosite who operates a small design and marketing firm.

to ten seconds every time I do that specific task. I've definitely done it at least a dozen or two times since. The investment has paid off for me taking a minute or two to ask him...if you think about it by the numbers.

It's more than that, because you develop a rapport with these people and connection. I think that's really important for, like, professional happiness, as well. It's like being around people that are engaging and helpful and interested, who not only are interested, but actually actively take interest in what you're doing.

Like Owen, Ethan noted that obtaining help from his comember in this way saved him time. He also linked the idea of instruction assistance with the idea of a coworking community that takes an active interest in what its members are doing.

Other members spoke about informal learning through discussions about industry-related trends or work ideas. For instance, Landon has benefitted from informal instruction in the form of non-work-related conversations with his comembers. When asked about conversations he has with people at Alloy, he commented:

Sometimes if [Ben] comes up, he'll be curious about what I'm working on or how stuff is going. We might both vent about what we're dealing with. But, I don't know, I feel like probably the casual, "hey, how's it going" conversations are more work-related, just because that's what's in front of us right now, but those are sort, but whenever I'm actually really talking to someone, generally it's about something else.

[Ben] and I have a lot of non-work-related stuff that's still design related stuff that we talk about. [Mark] and I are kind of the same way. He and I talk a lot about shared interests and then programming and stuff, because he's really good at that and I'm trying to learn that. So, a lot of it's like, tangentially related to work, but I think that's probably partially because that's the shared thing that's happening at [Alloy] and part of that's because I feel like people who are in design and tech and stuff tend to associate their identities more closely with their works, so that's just kind of naturally what comes out.

In addition to receiving instruction through such conversations, Landon also provided instruction to comembers at Alloy:

Sandra: How do you think that your work has been affected by the people that work at [Alloy]?

Landon: Not much at all, really, positively or negatively. It's been pretty neutral. But the thing is, which I think is good, I think there's been a couple times when someone had a question about Photoshop and I was able to help them and it's kind of cool to see when stuff like that happens.

And then there's too, that guy [Mark⁴⁸] that I know, he and I have hung out, outside of [Alloy]. And there's a project that he's working on that I'm helping him with, because I'm interested in it. So, there's been some kind of intersection like that. But in terms of my day-to-day work, it's really almost unaffected.

Although Landon's comembers at Alloy did not substantially impact his day-to-day work, he benefitted from work-related conversations with comembers in related fields who have expertise in skills he would like to learn. Additionally, Landon values the opportunity to contribute his expertise to others in the space.

Instruction between comembers may not relate directly to members' jobs, but rather to their work more broadly. That is, members may receive instruction in new skills or technologies valuable for their career goals, if not immediately connected to their current jobs. This type of assistance may offer particular value to post-bureaucratic workers since, as discussed further in the next chapter, career pathways in the new economy oblige these workers to continually expand their knowledge and abilities, even if their jobs do not offer learning or training opportunities. In any case, the availability of training and learning opportunities like these can save members time and money, particularly valuable resources for independent workers and entrepreneurs.

Networking

Like traditional networking that occurs at conferences, meetings, or business events, networking in coworking spaces often involves conversations about work opportunities and referrals to people who could fulfill a business need. Most workers develop and maintain relationships with a group or association of people with whom they share some connection. Over time, workers with well-established networks have access to people with a range of knowledge, skills, and abilities. To network, then, is to

⁴⁸ Mark is a pseudonym for another member of Alloy.

call upon the knowledge, skills, and abilities of associates to fulfill a business need, or to provide such a service to an associate, whether directly or through referral. Although interviewees sometimes used the terms networking and collaboration interchangeably, most workers I spoke with used the terms to describe distinct social interactions. While collaboration usually describes two or more members or businesses working together on a project, the term networking can denote a one-way transfer of resources, such as contacts, skills, or information.

For entrepreneurs and freelancers especially, networking can end up critical to their success, as it can provide avenues to new projects or clients. Kyle, an independent CPA who works at both Cosite and Workmine, finds access to his comembers valuable, as he explains: “Really my business model is kind of focused on entrepreneurs and small businesses. Since they start out of places like this, it's kind of beneficial for me to be a member of at least two [coworking spaces] where I get more exposure than other entrepreneurs.” For Kyle, the value of networking lies principally in access to new clients.

William, a remote worker at Workmine, finds he misses living and working around his professional network, now that he lives away from all the people he works with, as well as his clients. When I asked him about conversations he has with comembers at Workmine, he spoke about the value of those networks:

William: Like, [Wendy] and [Kyle] were here a couple nights ago, and they're like, “Yeah, we should go to happy hour at [the restaurant] across the street,” and [Kyle] got a box from, it was from Batch, they do local stuff, and he made us all mint julips at like, 6:30. And, so I mean, I feel like it gets kind of social, but most of the time it's kind of like, small talk, like, “Hey, how you doing? How's your day?” I don't feel like I have like, deep conversations. I would probably... [Tom] and I occasionally will talk about stuff that gets any, you know, any further past surface-level, but like with the people I work with, I would say it's kind of rare. Not in a bad way, it's just, you know, hasn't happened a ton.

Sandra: Do you talk about business-related topics with people, or what you're working on?

William: Sometimes. Not as much as you would think, maybe. Like, I've never been like, “Hey, will you look at this?” Which I thought I would have done more, when, if you asked me this like a year ago. But that hasn't really come up. Maybe that's my fault, I don't know. I don't... I feel like other people do that though. So, like, if you ask someone else, you might get a different answer. But yeah, it's not usually

business specific, it'd be more like, you know, "What are you working on?" And there's like a one sentence response, like, "I'm doing a flyer," whatever, you know. See, I don't know that it really gets specific. Part of that might be too, is that technically I'm not, I don't work in [Riverport] with [Riverport] clients, with [Riverporters⁴⁹]. Like, that's been kind of interesting for me, like, from a... It's just a different dynamic for me. Like, my circle is technically not in [Riverport].

So, like, the people that I work with, the people they know, are in [other cities]. So, like, my friends of friends, with the people I work with, aren't in [Riverport]. So, I feel like, "Hey, do you know...? I work with them," is something I've never said, and wouldn't be able to say. So, I feel like that's something that has been an interesting like, social dynamic for me, where it's like my social circle, and my work circle overlap zero. Like not even friends of friends of friends of friends. You know, like they overlap zero. Which has been kind of one of those things it's like, I kind of didn't realize I was going to miss that. Does that make sense?

Sandra: Yeah. What about it do you miss? I mean, what do you think that gives you?

William: It's just like the practical stuff, like... "I went to Creative Mornings, and I saw your coworker," is something I've never said to anybody. I mean, sorry, something no one has ever said to me. Be like, "Hey, I work with your senior designer," or, "I work with your whatever," or, "I saw so-and-so at a coffee shop, do you work...?" I just don't have that in my life at all, which is not a big deal, but I think it'd also be... I think I have been surprised at the amount of I think, work or social, or just like, social perks that come from your network, you know? It's like, my network is everywhere else, you know? My network is in San Francisco, my network is in New York City, my network is in [the city where most of my coworkers are located]. My social network is in [Riverport], but my professional network isn't. Except for the people I know at [Workmine], which is kind of small.

Sandra: So, how is it different, like when you think of your professional network, and the network you have here at [Workmine], how are they different for you qualitatively? Or do you see it as part of the same network?

William: I don't know. I don't see it as the same network, but if they are the same network, it's helpful. Like, you go to a happy hour that's for workers, like, professional businesspeople, and you know people there, and your friends and your social people are there, that might lead to business, or a connection, or whatever, and I have trouble with that. Partly because like I said, I'm an introvert, but partly because like, those connections don't exist, like they're harder to come by. Also, too, I don't have an excuse to go and create them, because like, "Hey, I'm going to this happy hour, are you going to come?" Like, that doesn't happen at my company, you know.

So, I don't know if that makes sense, but like, I see them, I see the social and professional as separate, but when they overlap, I think there's benefit. That is one of those things that I haven't experienced in years, you know, on a local level, in the town I live in. So yeah.

William sees a potential benefit when social and professional spheres "overlap," as he described. Yet working remotely from his coworkers and his clients, William feels he does not benefit from such

⁴⁹ Thanks to Jaime Nguyen for coming up with the term Riverporters, to mean people living in Riverport.

serendipitous encounters between members of his existing business network and his social network. Coworking at Workmine, though, may provide William with the opportunity to establish a more local network, one in which more connections between contacts become possible through serendipitous encounters in Riverport.

As noted above, Teresa, another member of Workmine, also found that coworking helped her network without “much effort,” a theme affirmed by other members, as well. Victor, at Alloy, highlighted networking when speaking about the differences in what coworking offers versus working from home or a coffee shop:

Also, all the different kinds of people you get to work with in a coworking space, there is more opportunity, which is different than working at home or working at the coffee shop, because everybody here is running a business and they are all here, being professionals and getting things done. . . . So, another difference from working from home and working in an office is just all the people that you're surrounded with are all professionals doing something. You never know who you're going to meet. Right next door is [a local radio station]. There are businesses all around us. It is a good way to get out and network at the same time, which otherwise, I'm kind of a homebody anyway so I don't do too much networking when I don't have to. This kind of forces me into it.

He elaborated on networking when asked about the distinction between community and network. He remarked:

Having the community at your fingertips and just built into a coworking space gives you nice opportunities to network. Being forced into close proximity with many people that you are going to sit around with all day lends itself to the opportunity to network with them. They want to make money. You want to make money. I guess that is the goal of owning a business or making art or whatever it is you do. We all want to make a living so we're all here and we're happy to network with the community and make it work. If it works for everybody, it works for everybody and everybody will work together. That is kind of how the two coincide – community and networking.

Before working at Alloy, Victor and his business partner worked out of a warehouse-type space, and the only other work setting he had experienced was a restaurant, a setting without “a corporate culture,” where “everybody is working for one beast instead of a hydra with six heads.” His image of a company office resembles a traditional, bureaucratic workplace. He explained that he had no experience with that:

I guess I haven't worked for a company where everybody was trying to move vertically, which is probably a big difference from...at a coworking space you don't move vertically so much. You're not getting promoted at a place where you are the boss, but there is also a bunch of other people.

Victor equated traditional offices with hierarchical authority structures and vertical career paths, while coworking spaces offered more opportunity to collaborate and network.

Keira had a different experience with networking at Alloy. Although she also talked to comembers about her work and possible collaborations with them, nothing concrete came of those discussions. When I asked about interactions at Alloy and her new coworking space, CO2, she communicated the differences between the two spaces in terms of interactions:

Keira: In [Alloy], there was a little [interaction]. I would say the majority of that was probably due to the job, and people wanted to ask questions [about my dog].

Sandra: He was really sweet.

Keira: Yeah, or there would be other dogs, and we'd all stop and watch them play. That sort of thing. But usually if I were focused and in the zone of my work, nobody would, you know, nobody would talk to me so, and now at [CO2], it's more of a "Good morning. See you tomorrow," kind of thing.

Sandra: Apart from social interactions, do you talk about your work ever with people in the space?

Interviewee: Not the new space [CO2]. The old space [Alloy], yeah, there was reasons to chat about what we did and some, you know, like there was that little healthcare company that was there and a designer, and we talked about what I did, and they would say, "Oh, we need help with this and that," and I never would wind up helping anybody, but there was kind of the potential. And I think that there's that same potential at [CO2]. We don't have another developer, so it's like, "Oh," well, you know, if I stay, like there's a potential of a job, so that's neat.

Keira found that, although she was able to network with comembers at Alloy, no work arose from it. She decided to leave Alloy, in part, because she felt it did not offer enough networking opportunities.

One of Keira's initial reasons for choosing Alloy in the first place was that she could bring her dog to work with her. When her dog became sick, she started spending more time at home with him, but "also I kind of found it wasn't benefiting me." She elaborated:

Keira: It became too comfortable, too much like home so I wasn't actually getting any work done and I was leaving when I wanted to leave and not really treating it like a professional space.

Sandra: Why do you think that is?

Keira: I think the environment was just like a little bit too laid back, and there wasn't enough push to have like networking, and it was very much like you were accountable for your own networking. And being in the building with another company made it kind of complicated and being even [in the same space] with other small companies made it a little bit harder because everybody kind of kept with their groups and it was hard to break into any of those groups and it seemed like everybody else that was there independently wasn't very interested in networking or going to lunch or going to happy hour or doing things that I kind of miss about being in an office.

Keira found that the laid-back environment of Alloy made her treat the space too much like home. The membership at Alloy also prevented her from getting what she wanted out of the space. Since about half of the occupants of the space were employees of *Ilk* magazine, and many of the members were small businesses with two or more workers who worked together at their own tables, Keira found it difficult to “break into” those groups and establish the kinds of connections with other members she desired.

Justine, who works at Cosite with her business co-founder, Gillian, also found making connections with comembers a slow process. However, Justine noted that “there’s a big sharing economy in here.” She has gone to Owen or Ethan to “inquire about things,” and she knows other members have “traded work.” I asked how those connections come about. She responded:

“They’re really slow, because of the lack of interaction here, I think. I think it starts with connecting with [Owen], and then [Owen] connects you with others. But, beyond that, like it’s really slow. And, one day, you just have to be weird and [say], “tell me all about this.” Or, like, “we have never really talked before, but I am super interested in this thing.” So, I don’t know, they come about from awkward conversations and rocky introductions, and eventually, you express a need, and someone’s like, hey so-and-so does that. Or, I can look at that, I can help you with that. Let me point you in the right direction.”

Though she herself has not collaborated with any comembers, she feels that if she needed something, she would know where to go.

Essentially, a strong network enables members to extend the scope of the resources available to them. Coworking staff or members offer these resources within easy reach when needs or opportunities arise. Rather than having to place a phone call, send an email, or even set up a business lunch to discuss needs, members can simply speak across the table or walk down the hall to their comember. However, as

Justine and others have made clear, coworking space founders often function as the central nodes of those networks. Members can have trouble making connections themselves, particularly those members less comfortable with having “awkward conversations” or making “rocky introductions,” as Justine put it. Consequently, the development of connections between comembers can progress slowly, a little too slowly for some members.

THE EFFECT OF LESS HIERARCHY ON INTERACTIONS

The traditional bureaucratic hierarchy presumes graduated levels of knowledge and experience: the higher one’s position in the hierarchy, the larger one’s scope of authority and the more specialized knowledge and experience one typically has. Francesca mentioned that in previous jobs she held, if she had a question, she would not ask her coworkers; she would ask her immediate supervisor. If he didn’t know, he would ask his supervisor, and so on until she got an answer to her question. There was a clear chain of command, a defining feature of bureaucratic workplaces. In contrast, at Cosite, Francesca felt on more of an “even playing field” with comembers, even though there is a wide variety in ages and experience levels. She contrasted her experience in the two places:

In my old job, the people who were older were the superiors, so it was very, that was a clear barrier, like you asked everyone else before you get to them because if you asked them, that means no one else knew the answer. Whereas here, it’s like you don’t feel that kind of divide at all, which is pretty cool.

As discussed above, advances in information and communications technologies have disrupted and reconfigured the relationship between positional status, authority, experience, and knowledge, pushing work away from bureaucratic organizations with high levels of hierarchy to more flat-structured organizations, as well as freelance and temporary labor.

On one hand, hierarchy is very efficient. When workers have questions, they know exactly whom to ask to get their questions answered. In a less hierarchical workplace, in contrast, the person with the

most knowledge or experience on a subject may not be the person in charge. Knowing who to consult on which topic depends on having relationships with one's coworkers, and building these relationships takes time. Without these relationships in place, worker productivity may be negatively affected. In coworking spaces, staff members like the founder or the community manager can often facilitate these introductions or interactions. Likewise, in small organizations, this may present less of an issue, as workers more likely know most of their coworkers.

In a traditional bureaucratic workplace, the efficiency of work processes affects profits. For instance, manufacturing typically becomes more profitable when a company increases production efficiency within acceptable margins of error. That is, companies can speed up and streamline production as long as their products meet desired levels of quality. In service industries, efficiency must be balanced with customer experience, as well as quality. For instance, a nail salon may be able to increase the number of clients each manicurist or pedicurist can assist in a given amount of time by employing an assembly-line strategy, but this approach would likely result in a decline in customers' satisfaction with their manicure or pedicure appointment, as this increase in efficiency dramatically changes the customers' experience. In contrast, a hair stylist can schedule a haircut appointment while the hair color is setting on another client without negatively impacting the experience of either customer. But how much does efficiency matter in the creative sector?

Robin, a member of ProShare, studied music in graduate school and had formerly worked as a teacher. When discussing her experience with coworking, she spoke about the opportunity that comes from breaking down hierarchies:

Sandra: Did you have any experience with coworking before you started working here?

Robin: I feel like, when I was getting my doctorate, I was only there for a year, so I did not finish. So, I did not do the dissertation all right. But that first year it was, I went to [a teaching college in another state⁵⁰], and there was this one class where our teacher broke us up into different groups, and he called them garage bands.

So, it was like me, I played the tuba, and there was a drummer and a guitar player and a singer and a piano player, and we were given assignments to do. So, we all had to pull from our own knowledge base and our own experiences and whatever to come together to write a new song or to do a parody of a song or whatever the assignment was. So, I feel like that was kind of coworking in a way. I don't really know what coworking is, but it seems to be, and it was, really energizing and really exciting and really creative. And that wouldn't have been possible in a traditional school setting I think.

Sandra: What about it did you find energizing? What was positive about that experience?

Robin: I think that we all had mutual respect for one another, so there's like a pedigree kind of thing. Two of us were getting our doctorate and three were getting their masters and I don't know I feel like it just kind of fell into this hierarchy, where the master students defaulted to the doctoral students when we started. But then we were like, this is not...I'm not a better musician than you because I have more degrees than you.

So, it was really helpful to have those kinds of conversations with the people in our group. One person was 47 and one person was 23, so there was a range of experience and all this stuff. But I feel like it was...I think the hierarchies happen, and then I think if you problematize them, break them, then it opens up lines of communication and creativity that wouldn't otherwise be there.

Robin's group had defaulted into a hierarchical structure based education level and years of experience, which prompted them to grant more authority to those at the top. After discussion, they collaborated without that hierarchy. Robin felt that this flatter, less hierarchical group structure enabled more communication and creativity in the group, which would not have been possible in a more traditional work environment.

Working outside of a traditional office hierarchy may enable workers to do more high-level work than they would have inside an organization. Teresa, for instance, found that as a freelance designer she enjoys more flexibility to pursue her ideas than she did working for a design firm, where "a lot of times, at least with in-house design, it was very, very rigid." She explained:

Teresa: I understand that to a certain a point with branding everything but it's too rigid and everyone sort of had a hand in everything. Whereas, as a consultant now, I feel that I'm respected more as an expert and

⁵⁰ I redacted the name of Robin's university to protect her confidentiality.

my ideas are more listened to. So, it kind of pushes you to feel like you can come up with more ideas, versus [at a design firm,] you're always thinking, well this person might say yes, but then the CEO is going to say no. So, why even bother? Just do something that they'll be happy with. They just want something simple.

Sandra: So, there's a difference being on the outside of the organization as a consultant versus the inside?

Teresa: Oh yeah, absolutely. And it was the same thing that I observed before I even was a consultant. I always thought like, "God, those people are so lucky. They get all the respect. I'm being treated terribly, I want to be a consultant, but I don't think I could ever do that." And then actually experiencing, yeah that observation was right.

Sandra: That's really interesting.

Teresa: And I've heard other people, I was talking today, I've heard other people echo that, too. So, I think it's not just my experience, but it might be a design thing. It might be other industries, I don't know. But it's nice to feel like a valued member of a team, even if you have to take yourself out of the environment to be valued.

Sandra: Why do you think that is?

Teresa: Honestly, I think it's a hierarchy thing. Because I even still do work for the place I worked last, when I was there for five years and then I left. So, I still do things for them from time to time, and they're still some difficult people. But they...they're my only difficult client, but I think definitely hierarchy is the big thing. It's... when you're in-house, there's a sense of, "oh, well I out rank her, so what does she know?" And not only that, but if I'm using...if my time is being used by someone in-house, they're not thinking of it as costing anything. I'm there already. What does it matter what they have me doing?

Versus if I'm outside, I'm suddenly removed from that rank system. I'm not a specialist or a manager or anything like that. I'm an outside expert that they brought in, and my time costs money. And I clearly know what I'm doing, because they've chosen to bring me in. So, people are more likely to just go with it. I mean some people...everybody wants to have a say in things and change things, even if it's something silly and small, which I understand, but it's nowhere near like it was. At all.

For Teresa, working outside of the firm garnered her more respect for her skills and greater flexibility to pursue her design ideas on projects.

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN COWORKING SPACES

For members who previously worked at home or a coffee shop, coworking gives them the experience of having coworkers. Most realize they enjoy not only working around others but also having the option of interacting with people in the space when they want to. Summer contrasted her experience

working from home or her other business space with her experience working at ProShare in terms of social interaction. She had this to say:

With my retreat stuff, I do a lot of collaborative art projects, where people come together and the finished product is because different people have their hands in it. ...So, I have an office over [my other business space⁵¹]. That's my business [...] ⁵², been doing that for years. So, when I really want to completely focus in and be all by myself, I go there.

But what I find is that most mornings, I want to come here. So, this morning I had my coffee, and my little ritual is having my coffee and kind of my quiet time, and I journal a little bit. And I was like, "okay, where do I want to work this morning?" And I felt compelled to come here.

So, I get in a little before most people, cause I'm an early riser, but when I come in the building there's a couple people that I know are always here. So, I got my cup of coffee, and I'm hanging out, and I go by their office, and we talk for 20 minutes. And now my brain is revved, and I'm feeling more connected, and then I've been in my office since then, and it's just like, it changes something. It totally changes something for me to come here and have people to interact with.

Or if I get a little, you know, you get that place where you're like, "I've hit the wall," with work? And you need to get up and take a little break? So, at home, when I do that or at [my other business] when I do that, it's like "okay, let me take a break and go outside." I'll go sit on the porch, I'll watch the neighbors go down the street, I'll do some dishes. I'll talk to the dogs and cats. But I'm not interacting with people. So, it's a more introspective experience when I take a break.

Here, when I take a break, it's like I'm going to go down to the break room. I'm going to go make my lunch and chit chat with people. I'm going to go up on the deck. It's like there's all these opportunities to interact.

So, I think it's interesting, because what we were talking about earlier, it's like how do you recharge your battery? Is it time alone or time with other people? And sometimes I need different things. Sometimes I've been with clients all day long, and I don't want to even come to the break room where I might run into somebody, right? Because I'm just like, "I don't want to talk to anybody anymore." Then, I'll stay at the home office. But if I'm in a mood where I'm like, all right, I've been doing paperwork, I want to run into somebody, then I love being here.

Summer appreciates having a variety of workspaces available to her, so that she can select the workspace appropriate for her needs in the moment. Coworking offered something that working at home, her business space, or a coffee shop did not: social interaction. For Summer, "it totally changes

⁵¹ I redacted the name of Summer's business space to protect her confidentiality.

⁵² I also redacted the details of Summer's business.

something...[to] have people to interact with.” She stopped working at coffee shops after she started at ProShare.

Maggie also noted the increased social interaction available in coworking spaces versus coffee shops, where she had worked before starting at Alloy. When asked what surprised her about the experience of coworking, she commented:

Good question. I guess two things. One it was so refreshing to have people to work around again. I just – I had gotten into this [routine of] just working by myself every day, and I hated it. And so, unlike going to work in a coffee shop or something, which I had started doing a lot, going to a coworking space, you actually have the same people that you see every day. So, you actually have, like, office buddies again. That’s really nice to have people that you see every day, that you chat with, that actually care if you’re gone for a couple of weeks. And that was really cool.

In addition to having a consistent group of people to talk with at work, many members expressed the same idea as Maggie, that comembers “actually care if you’re gone.” For members like Maggie who worked at a coffee shop before joining a coworking space, this marks a distinction between the social environment of coffee shops and that of coworking spaces: workers may see the same people day after day in a coffee shop, but those people likely care little whether they are gone, if they even notice.

When describing her ideal workspace, Natalie spoke of not feeling “beholden” to her Workmine comembers like one might with coworkers in a traditional office, and she did not have to fear getting “stuck” in a conversation with strangers in a coffee shop. She explained:

Sandra: How closely would you say that this resembles what you’d consider an ideal workspace?

Natalie: Hmm, I haven’t thought of that. I haven’t really thought of an ideal workspace. I would say it very closely resembles what I’d consider ideal for me. Generally, if I am writing for pleasure, I often like to do that in a coffee shop or something where it’s that feeling of alone in a crowd kind of thing. So, there’s movement, there’s life; I don’t feel like I’m diving into the deep well of myself so much. It sort of keeps me grounded to have other people around me, and this is a lot like that kind of environment. So, it’s like half coffee shop and half tiny village, because there are, like, zones, and there are people who gravitate towards those zones, and there are the people who interact and the people who don’t, and the little common hub of the kitchen. So, in that respect, it is ideal for me, because if I want to be alone, I shut myself away. It doesn’t have a door, but shut myself away in the office and face the wall. And, if I want to be somewhat not alone, I can come out and sit on the couch. And, if I want to actually talk to people, I can do that, too. So, yeah, very closely resembles the ideal, only because I don’t know what the ideal is. That’s it.

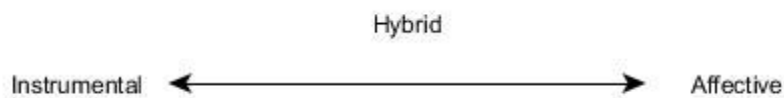
Sandra: So, you like the flexibility of being as social as you want to be?

Natalie: Yeah, but then also having that safety net of everyone has a job to do. So, it's not like a coffee shop, where if you get to talking to someone, they might never shut up. It *is* the South. So, you don't have that sort of problem, because everyone literally does have a job to do; they're working. Rarely do you see someone just completely farting around, you know, all the time. And, because a lot of these people are in business for themselves, or they have non-profits, or they're freelancing, and so their pay is dependent on how much they work. So, it's nice to be able to have social interaction, but not really be *bound* to anyone. So, yeah, it's nice to have that kind of flexibility to [say], "yes, I can talk to you, but I'm not going to get stuck and I'm not going to feel beholden to you, because we both have work to do."

As Natalie mentions, members of coworking spaces can typically have as much or as little social interaction as they desire, without feeling "bound" to anyone. Nevertheless, members tend to feel a sense of caring from their comembers. For some members, like Summer, having access to interactions with other people energizes her. Teresa, a member of Workmine, commented that chatting with her comembers about their hobbies encouraged her to pursue her own hobbies and maintain a better work-life balance. In general, the social interactions available to coworking members differ qualitatively from both coffee shops and traditional offices.

HOW QUALITY OF COMMUNITY VARIES ACROSS SPACES

FIGURE 4.1: THE RANGE OF QUALITY OF COMMUNITY



Quality of community varies from affective, solidaristic communities focused on mutual support and assistance to more instrumental communities where networking and work collaborations are more common interactions. Among the four coworking spaces where I conducted fieldwork, Alloy was the

most instrumental in its quality. Cosite and ProShare both had hybrid quality of community. The quality of community at Workmine was affective.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has contended that coworking represents a modern form of *Genossenschaft*. In this type of community, trust replaces hierarchy. Community members relate to each other in a collegial, cooperative manner, in contrast to the more competitive environments of traditional, bureaucratic workplaces. However, coworking spaces facilitate both business- and social-related interactions. The key types of business-related interactions that occur among coworking members include collaboration, feedback, guidance, instruction, and networking. Although they enjoy the social interactions that coworking spaces make available, members generally find these business-related interactions the most beneficial, both professionally as well as personally. However, casual, social conversations may serve to create and reinforce social bonds and encourage more supportive business-related interactions like feedback, guidance, and instruction.

Coworking members and staff depict these interactions, whether or not they find them desirable, as qualitatively distinct from traditional workplaces. They also prove integral to making a coworking space an open, collaborative environment. However, as shown in the examples above, this type of work environment can become challenging for members whose work needs or preferences oblige more privacy or quiet than the typical open-concept coworking space can afford, or do not align well with the physical layout or culture of their coworking space. For others, the benefits far outweigh any drawbacks. Many workers shared stories of the profound impact their comembers had had on their work and the meaning

they derive from it, as well as their goals for the future. The next chapter examines the challenges and the benefits of the coworking environment and expounds upon the concept of Strength of Community.

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CHAPTER 5

INTERACTIVITY: STRENGTH OF COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

Community has long been the focus of a great portion of sociological and anthropological studies. Chapter 1 reviewed work in the area of occupational communities, defining these workplace relations in terms of the type of work members engage in, the centrality of work to members' identities, and social relationships that permeate community members' non-work lives (Van Maanen and Barley 1984; Salaman 1974). Recent scholarship on occupational communities has also demonstrated the importance of space to these communities. For example, Cornfield's (2015) study of musicians in Nashville reveals how artistic entrepreneurs' creation of communal social spaces helps nurture collegiality and solidarity, promote professional development and peer learning, and create networking opportunities among occupational peers. Studies of new urbanist communities have similarly demonstrated the link between the built environment and a sense of community. One of the factors that engenders community identity, or identification with a community, is "cohesiveness – the strong character of community expressed by a sense of homogeneity, intimacy, and compactness" (Barrett-Lennard 1994; Kim and Kaplan 2004: 316; Robinson and Wilkinson 1995).

Building on this scholarship, my concept of strength of community involves the degree to which community membership helps members to identify positively with and derive a high level meaning from their work, and enables members' coworking relationships and activities to permeate their non-work lives. Variation in these factors influences the strength of coworking communities, encouraging the development of conflicting, cooperative, or cohesive communities. Derived from interviews with

coworking founders and members, the data below on the challenges and benefits of an open, collaborative environment illustrates the concept of strength of community. The data for the section on how strength of community varies comes from interviews with founders and members of the four coworking spaces where I conducted fieldwork, as well as observations from those sites. The data reveal how strength of community varies between conflicting, cooperative, and cohesive communities.

THE CHALLENGES OF AN OPEN, COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT

DISTRACTIONS AND “BAD ROOMMATES”

Rarely did members and founders I spoke with view advice or aid from comembers as a negative. However, a few members did see some drawbacks in having comembers to consult when they needed advice or feedback, as well as having comembers who seek their assistance. Some, like Valerie at Alloy and William at Workmine, found interruptions distracting, and preferred to remain focused on their own work while at their coworking spaces. In general, most members felt that minor distractions, like conversations between comembers, came with the territory of coworking. However, members tended to regard conversations they were not a part of, particularly loud conversations on the telephone, more disruptive to their work.

In addition, many coworking members complained of disrespectful comembers or messy spaces, where office supplies or personal items went missing, the trash overflowed, or dishes piled up in the kitchen sink. In fact, dishes piling up in the sink seemed to function as a bellwether of conflict over the social norms of the space. When speaking about members' role in making a space successful, Zara at Workmine commented: “There's the very logistical aspects of it, like wash your dishes when you're done

with them, clean up after yourself, if you move something, move it back. So, all those things. It's the tragedy of the commons if people don't all pitch in." She also noticed that "there was a sign added next to the sink that said, 'please wash your dishes,'" which she thought "implies that perhaps that was starting to be an issue." The kitchen also presented at source of conflict at ProShare. For instance, when asked what surprised her about the experience of coworking, Izzy commented:

So, the kitchen cupboards. If you put stuff in there, even if you put your name on it, people will use the shit out of it. So, there's, we don't keep things in there. But one time at Costco, we bought this big old thing of half and half, a big old thing. And said, use it, [but] please leave some for our clients, and it was gone. It was a huge box of it, too, a hundred something or 300. It's like a big Costco box of half and half.

So that surprised me. There wasn't any boundary there. And then a lot of our dishes and our bowls disappeared. They would use it, and they wouldn't bring it back. A lot of my mugs that we brought here, which I was okay. I knew that if they were here, I didn't have any sentimental value to them. If they went away, it'd be okay; they were just excess stuff. But that surprised me. People don't have boundaries and respect for other people's stuff. So, we don't really use the kitchen cupboards anymore.

Emily, another member of ProShare, shared a similar story. She had this to say about members' role in making the space successful:

I think that they need to be good neighbors. Some of the neighbors are great, and they have lunch downstairs, and maybe sometimes talk about TV or whatever, I mean talk about whatever. Because we don't have, I don't have a common [bond with comembers], we can't talk about, "oh my God our boss." We can kind of just talk about whatever.

But some people are not good neighbors. Some people think it's appropriate to pace the halls on the phone. And I don't think.. like, we have a shared space, and we each have a [private work]space. The hallways, though, need to be the hallways. That is not your phone booth. So, there's stuff like that, mostly the men. I don't know any women that think it's appropriate to pace the halls on the phone. Some people will be FaceTiming, so they're carrying their computer and pacing. Or will open the door and blare loud music downstairs, that's more downstairs.

So, some people I think feel that they have more ownership in the building than others, and they think they have the privilege to just take up a lot of space, noise space, and putting their beer in the fridge and kind of creating a space that, if I were to have a meeting here, I wouldn't want my visitors seeing a lot of beer in the fridge. ...

I think I've talked to some people that say that they've had, like when they were sitting in the kitchen, there was someone that went into their part of the cabinet – it was clearly labeled that it was property of their company – and poured out some salt in their hand and then just walked away. And kind of that, you know, you're just taking what you think is yours and kind of a sense of entitlement that just, this is yours to run rampant with.

I don't want to lump people together, but some of the young guys, I think, just behave that way. They just think, you know, I can do whatever I want because there's no one here to tell me not to. And that might be the culture of their company, but we don't want to be... Like there's a sign on the fridge that says, "label what's yours and then we'll throw away stuff every so often," because stuff was kind of getting left and getting moldy. And someone else said like there's post it notes inside the cabinets, like, "stop taking the plastic silverware; it's not yours."

So, some of those common workplace things, like "who stole my yogurt?" that [happen] because we don't all have the same boss that can send a mass email that says stop stealing the yogurt. It feels really petty to go to the staff of [ProShare] or [the other building owned by Gabriel] and say, "someone stole my brisket from the fridge. I'm annoyed." Because they're going to be like, we can't necessarily do anything about that.

But I think then they do have a role to play in creating a culture here.

Emily felt that some of her comembers at ProShare were not good neighbors. Although she considered some of the conflicts "common workplace things," they nevertheless presented a source of frustration.

Emily's story also exemplifies how gender factors into perceptions about "bad neighbor" members: women are more likely than men to mention conflicts or norm violating behavior in their coworking spaces, and those violating the social norms of the coworking space tend to be men.

Maggie, a former member of Alloy, also described how some of her former comembers acted like "bad roommates":

I think the other thing is just at [Alloy] particularly, there was kind of like a... they've described it like we were all kind of roommates in the same space, and not so much that they were running it and we were just clients, but that we all had a shared responsibility to take care of the space and to be respectful of each other. And I hadn't really thought about that until I worked at [Alloy] and there were some people who were really respectful and then some people that just, they were like having bad roommates that just left garbage everywhere, were really loud, or played videos next to you when you're trying to work and so it really mattered how much people took seriously their responsibility to care for their space and respect the people next to them.

Paul confessed that he might be one of those "bad roommates," as he worked in the space most of the day and often made phone calls at his desk. While Alloy's original space felt more open, and the desks there more spaced out, in the smaller space Alloy moved into, desks were closer together. This layout seemed to exacerbate the disruptive effect of conversations in the space. Maggie mentioned this, as well, when contrasting Alloy and her new space, CO2:

[CO2] felt a lot more professional and more focused. Like everybody chatted a lot, and they had a lot of cool after-hour things that you could do together, but you all knew that you were there to work. [Alloy] was kind of this... it was this vibe after a while where it was a lot of [young guys?] and not all of them felt like working that hard. And so, it was a very like goof-off and come in hung over sometimes and play videos out loud while people are trying to focus [kind of atmosphere]. So, after a while, that got really annoying especially then when we were crammed into one little space. [CO2 members], in contrast, were all... they were a bit more...still fun people but a bit more serious about their work that they were doing. They really, really cared about their careers and cared about doing good, innovative work. And actually, I think one of the... they have really fun rules posted on the walls at [CO2], and I think one of them was like, "Do cool stuff every day." And so, they had this attitude of like every member, you should be doing something you love. You should be making a difference and actually care about how you're spending your time. And I liked that a lot more for work space.

For Maggie, the smaller dimensions of the new space that Alloy moved into amplified the effects of distracting comembers. She preferred being in a space like CO2, where she felt her comembers maintained a more professional demeanor and focused on getting work done. Of course, distractions occur at every coworking space. Many members filter out distractions by putting on headphones or changing seats. Yet assigned seats, like Alloy has, can make that more difficult, as can smaller coworking spaces where members sit very closely together. With assigned seats or few options in workspaces, members have little recourse when faced with distracting comembers.

The issue of "bad roommate" members arises, in part, from inconsistent acculturation of members. That is, if members have different ideas about what constitutes appropriate behavior in the coworking space, clashes between comembers become more likely. For instance, when Dana and Valerie first started working at Alloy, they "didn't really know how quiet [they] needed to be or how loud [they] could be," Dana recalled. She continued:

Dana: I felt like I needed to whisper and walk out to take calls. And then since then, a couple of new people have moved in, and we've all just got to know one another, and it's been a lot more easy going. But there are definitely moments where like people will be on the phone, and they're being very obnoxious. Like, you know, just be courteous and respectful. If you need to take a call, and you're going to be on it for a couple of minutes, fine, but if you're going to be yelling at people, if you're going to be getting really excited, and your tone of voice is going to be distracting, you know, you should definitely walk out and take the call. Noise-cancelling machines, the white noise machines they have in there really don't do anything, so it can be a little nerve-wracking from time to time but all in all, just the energy amongst everyone has definitely got better.

Sandra: How do you handle those kinds of situations when people are talking too loudly on the phone?

Dana: I've put my earbuds in a lot of times, but it's kind of like the situation where you're like, you know, you're at a coffee shop and you're reading a book and it's too loud. You're like sitting there holding your ears, you know. I've tried all I can to not let it affect me negatively. So, I pop my earbuds in a lot of times, I'll turn music on but even the music can be distracting when trying to read through contracts and kind of structure production plans and stuff. So, then at a certain point, I just hold my ears, and if people don't realize that it's like bother other people, you know, then I just get up and I'll leave. Like I pack my stuff up, and I'll go, because you know, we are in a coworking space and one person's needs don't necessarily take a superior tone over somebody else's.

So, I try to be respectful of what I want, as well as what I know other people are trying to get out of the space. But it can be frustrating but when I get to that point, I just remove myself. I have found out, I have found that like when I get irritated, like if I'm in there late at night working on something and people get a little bit, I don't know, they get carried away, it's too loud, and it kind of pushing me over the edge, I end up leaving, and then I'll work from home the next day because I need to kind of get, you know, find my groove and just stay in it.

Dana tried to be “respectful” of her comembers and conscientious about the level of noise she made when in the space. Yet, as she recounted, other members sometimes seem to put their needs above others’.

Dana spoke more about the issue of getting distracted at Alloy when we discussed how her comembers had affected her work. She remarked:

I think that it has benefitted, and I think that there have been some downfalls. I think that the relationship with [*Ilk*] and the relationship with people in [Steelworks Mill], the radio station with other entertainment attorneys, agents, you know, other managers in the building, I think that our relationships will become much stronger and the level of respect, which I'm very grateful for.

I have a hard time focusing when people are being really loud and when I'm really overwhelmed with my workload. And every hour, I'll go through, and I'm responding to 20 e-mails that I have, and 15 more that have piled up that I have to respond to. And some of them are going to be 20 minute e-mails, some of them are going to be hour-long novels. It can be very frustrating when I'm overwhelmed with stuff, and people are just, like, when it's six o'clock and people are, like, “Oh, well, you know, like, half... like, most everyone's out of here, and, just [Dana] and [Valerie] are still in here, and we're going to be really loud and start drinking beer,” and whatever the case may be. It's just, I don't know, it makes me feel kind of anxious. It racks my nerves a little bit. So, then I end up... I try to deal with it for a little while, and then I just pack my things up and I go home and I work from there for a couple of hours to try to wrap up.

Dana values the access to network connections that Alloy enables, but can “have a hard time focusing when people are being really loud.” When that happens and her comembers at Alloy become too distracting, Dana leaves the space. Further, as mentioned in Chapter 2, three of my interviewees from Alloy – Hallie, Keira, and Maggie – ultimately decided to leave the space. Both Keira and Maggie left after the space moved from a large, open area where everyone worked together to a more isolated, closed-

off space, removed from the magazine employees who also worked at Alloy. The small space seemed to aggravate any issues they had with comembers.

DIFFICULTY CONNECTING

Some new members join coworking spaces specifically to find people to work with or hire, yet may have trouble building those relationships. They often do not know how to approach working with comembers. When asked about the challenges of coworking, Sean discussed the difficulty for new members of knowing how to go about integrating into the coworking community:

It's really hard to walk into a room full of strangers and know what you're supposed to do when there is not somebody telling you what to do. There is a point where you cross over from the anxiety to the creativity and sovereignty that it can provide, but it's intimidating. It can be really intimidating.

While most members have never previously worked in a coworking space, those transitioning to a coworking space straight from a traditional office rather than from home or a coffee shop must scale a steeper learning curve to adapt to working in the less structured, less directed work environment of coworking spaces. Additionally, as noted above, Sean believes that traditional, competitive workplaces often engender an atmosphere of mistrust. Workers transitioning from these environments may find the notion of building trust among comembers “abstract.” He argues that, at least in coworking spaces, “all you've got to do is slow down and get to know some people, build some trust.” From there, collaborative relationships can flourish.

However, even coworking space founders can struggle with adapting to this new way of working. When asked how the values of coworking have impacted his own value system, Harrison shared that the values of openness and collaboration have made him work in a different way, but they also present a challenge. He elaborated:

Harrison: I guess the entrepreneurial and autonomous [values] I have never really had any difficulty with. I've never been challenged by them. Open and collaborative is challenging. Both of those are things that over the last several years I've had to really challenge myself to work in a different way. Sometimes you think, "If I just do this my way, if I don't collaborate, I'll get it done."

Sandra: Can you think of an example where you've seen the value in this way of working?

Harrison: Collaboratively I guess, meaning I wouldn't know where to start as in we do it every day. We do it every day with [our coworking space]. Now we are doing something at [our coworking space] where every 100 days we do something where we essentially collaborate with the community to work out what we're going to focus on in the next 100 days. Being open to whatever the community says ultimately steers us towards a different outcome that you might not have gotten to. One of the things that I have learned along the way, as well, is that consensus is not collaboration. Every time I fell into that trap we've pretty much almost gone broke. We never said that this was *consensus* working. It was *collaborative* working. That requires leadership. That requires trust that this person is going to go and do what they do. But I trust them. I actually don't have to agree with them, and there doesn't have to be a consensus on that.

Collaboration, whether compulsory or consciously chosen, challenges workers to remain open to differing viewpoints and ways of approaching problems. The process of collaborating can be frustrating and slower than working alone. Landon, a member of Alloy, described it by citing the proverb, "when you want to go fast, go alone; when you want to go far, go together." For many, though, the temptation of working faster proves difficult to resist.

KEEPING FOCUSED

Some members opt to keep relationships with comembers friendly, yet a bit detached. For instance, Justine does not tend to ask for help or advice from her comembers at Cosite, but she will have these interactions with friends or coworkers that she works with. She explained her rationale for describing the latter type of interactions as coworking, but not the former:

I used to say coworking. I don't really use that anymore. I just say we have offices in [Cosite Riverport]. It's a shared office. I call it a shared office space. People understand that. I refer to coworking... I use that term when referring to, like, meeting a friend at a coffeehouse, like she's going to come, I'm going to come, we're going to work together in a space that's neither of ours. So, I refer to that as coworking, and I don't really, outside [of here], tell people this is coworking. ... I guess when I use coworking as a verb – like, "do you want to cowork? Are we coworking today?" – I use it with the people I cowork with. So, that's just our shared language around what we do. And, then, here, like whenever I cowork with my friend [Bridget], for example, she is sitting across from me, and the way that we work is... we work in completely different fields, but if I get stuck on something, or I want somebody to read something and I want someone

to bounce ideas off of someone, then I'll have her, like "look at this" or "what do you think about this?" or ask her a question. It helps me make a decision and move on, whereas if I was by myself, I might spend more time on that. Here, it's ... it really is more like a shared office space. Like, I don't say, "hey, [Luke⁵³]," or "hey, [Pete⁵⁴], come look at this stuff over here," because it's not... I think it's what I'm assuming that [Owen (the director of Cosite)] wants, but the reality is, they have their deadlines and their business, and that would feel super weird. Whereas, when I cowork with friends at a coffeehouse, we can have those conversations and ask those questions. That to me feels more like coworking, because you are acting like my coworker essentially, versus this, which is shared office space. I don't think it makes it any less special, you know? It's not that ideal, like [in a dreamy voice:] *everybody comes together and helps one another*. But a lot of times, when I'm here, or I'm here with [my partner, Gillian], we're cranking out work. Like, I can't hang out and chat or even look at something, because we have deadlines.

Justine feels more comfortable (doing her definition of) coworking with people she has an existing relationship with, either friends like Bridget, who she works at a coffee shop with occasionally, or her business partner, Gillian, who also works at Cosite. She does not want to interrupt members from their work, and she seems to prefer not to be interrupted by others when she is "cranking out work." For her, Cosite is a place to focus on productivity.

DECIDING HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH COLLABORATION

It also may be necessary to figure out how much collaboration is too much. Because her company does consulting work, Brooke finds that members come to her quite often with business questions:

People come to us with everything. "What do you think about this? What do you think about that?" [I reply,] "You have to pay me for that answer, but I'll answer that." It starts to get sometimes a little intrusive. There's a line there. Yeah, I have to watch that all the time. We are always advising and consulting with the members.

Her expertise and role as co-founder of her space makes her a go-to person for many members, but also obliges Brooke to maintain a boundary between information that she and her business partner are willing

⁵³ Luke is a member of Cosite, whom I did not interview.

⁵⁴ Pete is another member of Cosite.

to share for free and more specialized advice that would be more appropriate in a formal contractual relationship.

MISMATCH BETWEEN MEMBERS' WORK NEEDS AND THE WORKSPACE

Some founders and members noted that lack of a private office can present an issue when they have telephone conversations or video conferences, especially if they handle sensitive data, or if they just need a quieter space to focus on their work. Members often deal with minor noise or a need to focus by putting on headphones or switching workspaces, as noted above. Spaces also have their own methods for dealing with noise and the need for privacy. Alloy uses a white noise machine to help diffuse sound, while CO2 has a vent system that members claim helps filter noise. Most spaces offer the use of conference rooms or telephone booths for meetings or phone calls, but not typically for routine work. That is, members cannot work all day in these spaces.

Although a few coworking spaces, like ProShare, do offer private offices, most do not. However, the demand for private offices may be increasing. Tom, the cofounder of Workmine, decided to close his coworking space, in part because of the increasing request from prospective members for private offices.

GETTING “SOFT”

On the other hand, some felt that the less competitive environment of their coworking space and virtually on-demand support of comembers diminished their ability to wrestle with problems on their own. For instance, although Francesca loved coworking at Cosite and “noticed that [she’s] happier, and when [she’s] in the zone here, it’s great,” she nevertheless felt that she had “lost a little bit of [her] discipline.” In her view, in the more “individualistic environment” of her previous competitive and

quota-driven job, where employees had only their supervisors to get help from, “you had to be tougher on yourself.” In contrast, at Cosite, if she encountered a problem she could not figure out, she had many comembers to turn to for help. When I spoke with Francesca, she was preparing to move to a new city with her fiancé, so she worried about her perceived loss of discipline as she sought a new job. She also felt more confused about what she wanted to do, after having gained skills in graphic design and web developing, and having been exposed to “so many different people and different industries.”

THE BENEFITS OF AN OPEN, COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT

SERENDIPITY AND ENCOUNTERING PEOPLE YOU OTHERWISE WOULD NOT

Coworking connects people. As discussed in the previous chapter, because it puts into contact people who may otherwise not have met, coworking can foster serendipitous encounters. Although comembers can present a distraction from work, they can also offer new network connections. For instance, Paige spoke about this when asked how closely Cosite resembles her ideal workspace. She observed:

I feel like I’m very productive when I’m working at home, because there’s not as many distractions. But at the same time, I like coming here because it’s an open, airy environment. It’s kind of interesting. The distractions I think are good and bad, because I feel like when you really need to get something done, they can be an inhibitor. But, at the same time, one day we talked to this one guy who was a writer, and we found out he was like interested in this, and we kind of had mutual education interests. [Owen] himself, there was one day I was trying to find a contact, and he was like, “oh, by the way, I know someone at [a local school], and they, you know. So, it is kind of, when there are even tangentially overlapping fields, I feel like it can be beneficial in getting you connected to others in the community that might be useful.

In this way, the collaborative environment of coworking enables members to make connections they may otherwise not have made, or at least would not have made as easily.

In addition to establishing new connections, comembers may also influence each other's thinking or expose members to new ideas beyond the limits of their existing social and professional networks. Zara appreciated that her comembers at Workmine provided a source of ideas and feedback beyond the "vacuum" of her company. Natalie also spoke about how the people at Workmine impacted her perspective. When her boss decided to move from a small, shared office at Steelworks Mill to Workmine, she had initially feared that she might not feel a connection with the people in the space. She explained:

Sandra: So, you said the other people that you shared an office with at [Steelworks Mill], that they're not your people. How do you feel about the other people that work at [Workmine]?

Natalie: It was actually one of my biggest fears is that these are all...oh, there's no good term. Everything's going to come out bad. Like... happy people?

Sandra: Like, really excited to be here?

Natalie: Yeah, like, "I work for a non-profit that saves *puppies!*" And, just super, like, "let's change the world together! Give me a hug!" I'd be, like, ughhh. I'm just not effusive like that. I'm not a fizzy fountain of a person. I don't think I'm overly negative, but I thought that it was going to be a lot of those kind of people, like the hip people, the trendy people, the people who know music from now, which I don't, just those kind of people, the super connected, and frenetic, and that kind of stuff. That's not how I am, and I usually can't connect with those people.

But, actually, some of those people are like that. I can point you to a few in particular. But, they are extremely open – way more open than I thought – to my little black raincloud. They're fine. They're all pretty much doing what I would consider, like, real work. It's not, you know, fake charities and movements that never happen, and those kinds of things, like community things that don't actually do anything except little housewife people. Like, these are people who actually, like even one of the girls who's working in non-profit, she's like helping sick children of restaurant workers and, like, actually getting work done. She's not just saying she's giving them a teddy bear. She's actually improving these people's lives and actually helping *save* some of their lives and save their livelihoods and that kind of thing. So, those kind of people, I can respect them as well as converse with them on a certain level, if that makes sense.

So, yeah, I thought they were going to be incredibly fluffy, but actually they're just people who like people, people who want to connect with people, but not in that "I'm gonna hug ya" kind of way. So, it's strange, because in a very real sense, these are not my people. If I would see them in other social situations, we probably wouldn't talk. But, now that I am in this artificial social situation, I do talk to them, and I find out that I would have been wrong to not speak to them in other situations. Yeah. So, I hate to admit it, but it has actually broadened my mind a little bit, being here.

Sandra: How would that change your approach to people outside this space?

Natalie: I think I'm going to give more people a shot at conversation. Even if they dress head to toe in American Apparel, I will still try to talk to them. Yeah, I think I'll give it more of a shot, and I think,

personally, I've been dealing with a lot. There's a way to be positive and not be fluffy. And, I'm seeing a lot of people doing it successfully here.

So, yeah, seeing other people whom I can respect being positive without being fluffy, I know that it's possible to still remain someone that I can respect and also remain positive. So, I'm going to give that a shot for a minute and see if that improves things.

Encountering people she likely would not have come into contact with otherwise expanded Natalie's views about positivity and whom she might want to engage in conversation outside of Workmine.

MORE ACCOUNTABILITY, LESS OBLIGATION

A distinguishing feature of post-bureaucracy is the shift of risk and responsibility from organizations to individuals. This also includes the responsibility for deciding the boundary between professional and private concerns (Maravelias 2003). Individuals now bring a great deal of their personal lives into work and a great deal of work into their personal lives. Yet, absent established norms for an appropriate balance between them, workers must decide for themselves how much to separate work life and home life.

Christina cited separation between work and home as one of the reasons she chose to work at a coworking space. When asked what the separation gave her, that is, what it contributed to her work and home life, she replied that "it turns my mind off." Working at home had become "depressing," and she "needed a routine of some sort." Getting out of the house and going to Workmine provided her with structure and a sense of accountability that she had been lacking. Yet, while Workmine offered a sense of accountability, it also allowed Christina to avoid a sense of obligation, as she explained by contrasting previous workplaces with Workmine:

I think we're trained that you go to work. And, [at my former office] I had someone always expecting me to be there on time. Like, if you go to an office, you need to go there and you need to be there at that time. So, having that "I need to get up and go somewhere" [feeling], so that [Quinn, the Community Manager,] knows that I'm going to walk in the door. And I feel like I have coworkers, but also that I don't owe them anything. I mean, it's nice.

The accountability Christina felt toward her comembers encouraged her to maintain a regular presence at her coworking space. Choosing a level of membership also helped her set an expectation for how frequently she would work in the space. Because Quinn, Workmine's Community Manager, knows Christina and how often and at what time she generally comes to Workmine, Christina feels accountable for showing up and making full use of her membership level.

On the other hand, working at a coworking space without coworkers from her company releases Christina from a second type of accountability: a sense of obligation to remain available to her coworkers. Christina expressed that, when she worked at an office around coworkers, she was expected to help coworkers with issues they were having or answer questions they had, whenever needed. At Workmine, although she remains open to helping her comembers, she felt that she could indicate to comembers when she needed to focus and not be interrupted, for instance by putting on her headphones. At a traditional office, she felt more pressure to be constantly available and interruptible.

Owen, the founder of Cosite, also spoke about the sense of obligation he felt in conversations with coworkers in traditional offices. When asked how Cosite compared to places he had worked in the past, he mentioned distractions and the differences in conversations between coworkers and comembers:

[I]n my old offices, I would feel cornered. Somebody would come talk to me, or I would even come talk to them, and then you'd feel kind of like you're trapped in these conversations. And that doesn't really happen at [Cosite]. I feel like I talk to people a lot, but it's always on our own terms, and it's not very long and people know that they're doing their own thing.

Whereas he often felt "cornered" in conversations with coworkers in traditional offices, at conversations with members at Cosite were on their own terms.

“DRAMA-FREE ZONE”: ESCAPING OFFICE POLITICS

William, a remote worker in a company with many remote workers, appreciates the contrast between his comembers at Workmine and traditional coworkers. Although he sometimes misses those informal conversations at the water cooler, he also realizes that they can prove “distracting.” Working remotely, he can sign on to his company’s chat room whenever he craves informal conversation without the distractions of the traditional office. Creating chat rooms, or “virtual water coolers,” for remote workers may encourage more collaboration and open communication among geographically dispersed coworkers (Fried and Hansson 2013). At Workmine, William finds that he can similarly engage his comembers in informal conversations without worry of becoming ensnared in office drama. He explained:

So here, I think people understand that like, I don’t know, there’s like a drama-free zone with the people you work with. So, like, I’ll talk to [Wendy], or I’ll talk to [Kyle], or I’ll talk to [Tom], or whoever else, and it’s nice and cordial, and there’s no drama, because we don’t share a boss, and we’re not frustrated about our, blah, blah, blah. So, it’s kind of like a neutral zone for me, which is nice.

Coworking spaces offer members a “neutral zone,” as William described, free of the office politics and interpersonal drama created by coworkers who may feel in competition with one another. Although some members do work alongside their bosses or coworkers in their coworking spaces, most members do not, and even those who do report less of a sense of competition or drama. The lack of competition and drama among coworkers within coworking spaces may owe to the fact that companies with multiple employees at the same coworking space tend to be small businesses, which tend to have limited redundancy in roles or job functions. Having responsibility for different tasks and working in close proximity likely encourages transparency and cooperation more than competition.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Another benefit members provide their comembers is encouragement on their work. Gwen described speaking regularly to members in her coworking space about work-related topics, although she said, “I don’t get into all their business, but I definitely know what they all do and cheer them on.” She expressed that part of her role as an owner included this type of involvement with their work: “Just cheering them on and try to figure out what we can do to help them grow their business.” Like many owners, Gwen celebrated the successes of her members.

Members also spoke of cheering on their comembers. As discussed in Chapter 2, Teresa often provided support to her comembers at Workmine, encouraging them to take pride in their work and receive adequate remuneration for it. In the process, she felt that she had been helped, as well. When prompted to say a bit more about that, she continued:

I think, I don’t know how it came up, but just talking to a few people, they kept saying, “you’re really helpful with coming up with ideas for things, you’re really helpful with helping people know what the possibilities are, especially for, say, info-graphics for visual storytelling of any kind.” To help people figure out what they can even do, what they have that’s useful, how they can even begin to think about that kind of thing, because it’s not a thing that most people tend to think about. They mostly think brochure, website, stuff like that. So, just kind of skills that I wouldn’t have thought that I have per se. Or being really good at organizing things, which I generally would not have considered true of myself.

But it’s helpful to get that perspective from people when you’re not in a tense supervisor/employee, review kind of a situation, where you have to do compliment sandwiches and all that kind of nonsense. And fill things out on a scale of one to ten, and “how do you fit the different mission points of our organization?” And it doesn’t really matter for your personal growth, which is people saying, “you’re really good at this” or “you should look into doing more of this.”

In contrast to her experience in a traditional work setting, Teresa’s interactions with her comembers have felt less “tense” and more geared toward her own professional development. She found it helpful to get information from other people about what they think she is good at, rather than from a supervisor who evaluates her work. This information includes potentially marketable skills that could help a worker get another job, whereas supervisors typically evaluate only job-relevant skills or specific project outcomes.

While risk typifies the work contexts of most post-bureaucratic workers, new freelancers and entrepreneurs developing a new business tend to find themselves in a moment of elevated risk. Many have quit their jobs, moved to a new city, and invested or risked their savings to do the work they now do. For these workers, encouragement or support from comembers seems particularly valued. Whether a friendly word of praise or commiseration about the difficulties of starting a new business, this type of interaction can offer a needed push when workers encounter challenges. It can also provide them with a sense of validation that they are on the right track, that what they are experiencing is normal, or even just that they are not crazy for doing what they are doing.

Justine, a member of Cosite, spoke about the significance to her of the support she receives from her comembers. Before she started her company, Justine left her last job – her first real “big girl job” – in another city in the South, because the job, the company, and the lifestyle it afforded her felt too “comfortable,” too “cookie cutter,” and too lacking in challenges. She realized that she did not regard the “adults” of the company, the people she “would essentially become” if she had stayed there, as people she wanted to emulate. She articulated: “The stuff that they cared about, I didn’t care about. Their behavior, I didn’t want to have. I didn’t want to be them. I didn’t want to be that.” When I asked her how working in the coworking environment of Cosite facilitates her getting what she wants out of work, she said this:

I think that it totally facilitates it. I don’t think I could do what I do and do it [my former city]. And, I don’t know, I haven’t lived there in five years, and hopefully it’s grown and changed. But, in other cities, in other areas, it’s really confusing what I do. And, then, [people would say,] “why would you leave something more stable?” Everything [there] is, like, banking and business, more by the book. And, here, you can say that you’re selling artisan unicorns that you’re making out of paper mâché, and people are like, “Great! Where can I find it?”

I think [Cosite] is great, because you look around, and you see that other people are doing what you’re doing. And, for the most part, I think my business is hard to understand what we do. It’s like, we don’t have a great elevator pitch or whatever, but no one in here has ever, like, made you feel weird about it. Like, everyone is just genuinely interested. So, I think it’s not being alone and feeling like you’re connected to a community that is probably experiencing similar things to you. And that’s really helpful, because you can have a big heart and drive, but you can only feel alone for so long, feel like nobody understands what you’re doing, feel like nobody gets it, nobody supports it, what’s wrong with me, what I am doing?

Justine felt that not only Riverport as a city, but also Cosite helped her achieve her goals for her company. Even without a “great elevator pitch” for her company’s mission, she felt supported in what she does by the people around her. Further, working among other entrepreneurs in Cosite and feeling “connected to a community that is probably experiencing similar things” gave her and her co-founder a sense of validation. As comembers shared their experiences, especially the challenges and set-backs, they realized they were doing okay. These interactions occur most commonly within a context of trust, as noted above.

When I interviewed Hallie, she and her cofounder, Harper, had expanded their women’s ministry from eight schools the semester before to locations in “almost 20 universities across the country,” with the goal of expanding nationwide to “almost every college campus.” When asked how coworking constrained or facilitated their achieving those goals, Hallie stated:

It definitely helped. I think everybody... having your own space and being in an entrepreneurial setting helps launch you. It kind of gets you going. It’s like a fun, little, prideful thing where you get your own space, and you can do your own thing and work really hard. And so that was really helpful. I think we needed that space instead of getting blended in with everybody else.

Yeah, I think it was really important for us to have a space to go to in the beginning because we didn’t... before going in there, we didn’t even really have much of a vision. We wanted to do this as a career, but we didn’t really know where it was headed or if it was even possible. So, going into [Alloy] was super helpful. It kind of gave us a mission and inspired us, and it was definitely what we needed at the time to kind of just get us going and launch us further.

Hallie and Harper appreciated having their “own space” and found that coworking in “an entrepreneurial setting helps launch you.” It provided the encouragement they felt they needed to get their organization to the next level, where they could pursue this work as a career.

When asked about how working at Alloy had influenced what she considers to be the meaning of work, Valerie responded with the following:

Valerie: I think it’s a lot of staying in touch with your community and encouraging the other people to work hard and to go for their dream and to do what they’re passionate about. I think the coworking space definitely provides that air, that energy. So yeah, I think that is the meaning of it, of work, for me. It’s not

just doing it on your own, but it's being a part of an environment that is so open to it and that wants you to create. I think [Riverport's] pretty good at that.

Sandra: How is it different from when you working at an organization?

Valerie: We never really talked to anybody outside of the eight people that worked there and it was scary. Like if I didn't respond to an email the right way I was like you know yelled at or if I didn't answer the phone in time, like I was yelled at. Or I was just... I just didn't see any room for growth. So, I was just bored and resentful and sad, stressed.

Sandra: It sounds so different from the work that you're doing now.

Valerie: Yeah. Now those people are asking me for help.

For Valerie, the meaning of work closely connects to community. Her former work environment lacked such community, but she found encouragement from her comembers at Alloy. In turn, she can extend the benefits of that community through her network, by encouraging and helping her former coworkers.

Whereas workers in traditional offices may receive encouragement from coworkers or managers, entrepreneurs, freelancers, and independent workers must often struggle and face challenges on their own. For those in cities or communities inhospitable to entrepreneurship or to their particular businesses, the experience may feel particularly isolating. As Justine declared, people "can only feel alone for so long" before they burn out. Encouragement or support from comembers gives these workers the fuel they need to keep going.

CREATIVITY AND INSPIRATION

Coworking members and owners often talk about the creativity that exists in coworking spaces as one of the benefits of coworking. Being around others doing creative, exciting work encourages members to do work they find stimulating and valuable for their own career and work goals. This creative energy produces a more vibrant, "open" and "active" atmosphere, as Valerie (member, Alloy) described. For Valerie, like many members, membership in a coworking community contributed significant meaning to

their work. Members often spoke of a certain “creative energy” or “vibe” in their coworking spaces.

Maggie, a former member of Alloy, also spoke about creativity when speaking about the impact that coworking had on her experience of work:

I worked at a really kind of sleepy, non-creative work environment before and so it was kind of drudgery going to the standard office, and we weren't doing coworking, and then working at home was... it was really fun at first, but then it got to be drudgery because I felt like I was just totally stuck in the house doing work all the time and not even interacting with society. So, going from those to then going to a place where it was actually really fun, people enjoyed being at work, they liked what they were doing, they were trying to be creative, and being around other people was inspiring. It makes you want to be creative in your job, and it's hard to hate your job or to stay in a job that you hate when you're around a lot of people that are trying to have really fulfilling careers. So, I think that's really neat to be around and fun and inspiring.

Teresa experienced a similar phenomenon at Workmine, commenting that “it definitely is inspiring to see other people do cool things and you're like, ‘I want to do cool things, too. I guess I should work.’ And then you start getting into it, and then it's no longer quite such a chore.”

In explaining the benefits of coworking at ProShare, Gabriel also spoke about being inspired by seeing others in the space working hard. Although he had previously discussed the accessibility of the space in terms of access to downtown and residential areas, parking, and proximity to restaurants and services, he invoked the term accessibility once again to describe access to community members as a benefit of coworking. He described it like this:

Again, I think it falls back to that word accessibility. You have access to, maybe not experts, but people who are hustling, and you can feel that. I tell people back in [my previous city] or friends in other cities why I love my job. I'm next to people who are trying hard or doing well all day every day. Whatever you believe in, there's something you can feel in the air with that on a daily basis, so it's pretty exciting.

This exposure to workers who enjoy their work motivates members to work hard and find fulfillment in their careers. For instance, seeing others working and building their businesses inspired Valerie to be productive and work toward her goals. She remarked:

Sandra: How do you think that affects you being around other people that are also starting businesses?

Valerie: I think we build each other up. I think it's a little bit of like a healthy competition type of scenario. Like when you're on the treadmill and you're running and you're by yourself at the gym, you're not going to run as hard, you know? So, it's really nice to be able to like build our own foundations and our own homes, like our business homes. But that everybody is building their own and not just – everyone's their own boss and a lot of them show up. Dana and I are there normally first and then we leave last but it's really cool to see people that are their own bosses show up and they work all day and then they show up again the next day and like everybody's really determined, it seems.

Brooke also spoke about being inspired and empowered by the successes of others in her coworking space:

Sandra: Going back to how you think coworking has affected you, how do you think the people in your coworking community have impacted the way you see work?

Brooke: They inspire me almost every day and they empower me almost every week. [My company's] mission is to inspire and empower creatively. That's something that's really important to me. We need the same kind of fuel as everybody else does. We need people to contribute to that. Almost everything the members celebrate, I celebrate it with them, which means we get to celebrate a lot, not just our own successes we celebrate each other's.

Ethan similarly found it “helpful” and “inspiring” to see other members’ struggles and successes.

Although members may work toward different goals, members can see the result of the hard work they do by seeing others succeed, as Ethan commented:

Yeah, I think it's the unofficial collaborations that are really helpful. To see other people struggling with the things I struggle with and overcoming them and finding success in different things and being able to empathize with that, like celebrating. I went out and bought a 12 pack of Corona when [a company at Alloy] closed their first public school. Now they're in, like, a thousand different public schools in the [area]. At the time, they were a member. They're not anymore, but it's nice to be able to celebrate the victories with the people who are in the trenches with you, doing their own thing in the trenches, but, nonetheless, nose to the grindstone in the same way you are. That's inspiring to see other people's success. And to help people problem solve things that they need problem solving help with is also a rewarding thing.

As Ethan's story demonstrates, celebrating the success of other members is not about the success of a common organization. There is little to no direct material or professional benefit from another member's experiencing success. Nevertheless, members find the hard work and successes of their comembers inspiring and motivating.

CAREER PATHWAYS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE NEW ECONOMY

Traditional workplaces oblige employees to think of their knowledge, skills, and abilities in terms of how they fit into the company's mission and the confines of each employee's job description. In a bureaucratic career ladder position, in which experience gained in one position enables employees to move to the next level in the job hierarchy, this arrangement benefitted both employer and employee. However, post-bureaucratic career trajectories often resemble more a web or lattice than a ladder (Benko and Anderson 2010). To progress in their career paths, full-time workers often must look beyond their current organizations to external labor markets, and independent workers in casual employment relationships must advance through a series of strategic moves – even lateral moves – in different firms (Cornfield, Campbell, and McCammon 2001). This approach to career planning requires that workers recognize the breadth of their skills and how to apply them to a range of positions, a strategy O'Mahony and Bechky (2006) identify as *stretchwork*, or “work that largely fits with an individual's previous work experience but introduces a small novel element that extends his or her skills in a new direction” (p. 919). Workers must also find ways to develop marketable skills, which may or may not factor into their current positions, particularly if their employers do not offer training opportunities. For such workers, access to people who can provide feedback, guidance, and instruction on relevant skills presents an invaluable opportunity for professional development. Freelancers and those working remotely may especially benefit.

Most Americans feel they need continuous training to succeed in today's economy and regard workers themselves as bearing the most responsibility for making sure workers have the right skills and education to be successful (Pew Research Center 2016). As noted above, independent workers in the new economy most often assume the primary responsibility for their professional development and continued learning. Many of the workers I spoke with mentioned learning new skills and gaining experience as the

main benefits they hoped to gain from the work they are currently doing, often noting how this would provide them with greater job security or make them more marketable when they look for their next job. For instance, Zack appreciates the skills he has gained working for an e-commerce marketing start-up company at ProShare, a position which has afforded him the opportunity to grow “from the ground up.” He loves the company and hopes that “I can stay invested in it, and they can stay invested in me.” At the same time, with his prior experience with start-ups that have gone under, he recognizes that he needs to be prepared for that possibility. He disclosed that, “I want to have enough experience with the specific stuff that I'm doing [here] to where I can market myself somewhere else.” This guides his goals for the position.

Landon, a remote Web designer who works at Alloy, also spoke about the career benefit of developing his skills beyond the specific needs of his job and his company. When asked how coworking facilitates his work needs, or allows him to get what he wants out of work, Landon spoke about productivity and learning. He finds that he is generally able to get a lot more done working remotely. It allows him to focus on “what my job is and what I care about,” rather than “peripheral things.” He also appreciates that “there’s times when I get to fill in the gaps with learning and other things that I care about.” Although working remotely from the rest of his company presented challenges in terms of communicating and collaborating with his coworkers, it also afforded him opportunities to focus on learning new skills and refining his design expertise. When I asked him about the impact of coworking on his own values, he had this to say:

Landon: I think it’s encouraged me to be, at least made me a little more aware that I can be more outgoing and stuff. ... There’s this kind of this whole category of peripheral things to my work, like communicating and emailing and all these different things, that I’ve kind of felt differently about throughout the year.

In one sense, it’s part of my job, and it’s part of what it takes to actually ship good work, which is what I care about. Coworking has for better or worse, kind of empowered me to neglect that, not neglect it, but neglect it like, be less attentive to it, you know? And so, I think co-working has made me probably more focused on my growth and development as a designer and less focused on our growth as a company. And

that's not entirely due to coworking but partially. I think I'm probably generally less in tune with company level stocks, which does let me be more in tune with this project level thing that I'm focusing on, for better or worse. So, I don't know, it's kind of a, I'm not sure if I have a super clear answer for that.

Sandra: Do you see your development as a designer as separate from things that are specifically benefiting the company and your job?

Landon: Not entirely, but partially. I feel like there's a whole category of things that my employers would like me to do and instead of those things, I work harder on this one project or I spend time learning things or...and I think because I'm remote, along with some other aspects, I feel less invested in the company. So, I don't even remember what the question was.

Sandra: How coworking impacted you in terms of your own values.

Landon: Oh yeah ... I think there are, there's probably like one path alone, which I could develop, which is being better at selling my work, being better at communicating to coworkers, being better at collaborating and stuff. And I think if I was not remote, I would develop more in those ways, and those are important aspects of what I do. Being remote has allowed me to develop less in those ways or has inclined me to develop less in those ways and more in the ways of honing my craft and learning new skills, and maybe learning to manage my time better. So, I don't think it's like my development is entirely divorced from my company's development as much as it is just being remote has inclined me to develop in a certain way that probably would be different if I wasn't. Does that make sense?

Sandra: Yeah. How much do you think your beginning to develop your skills as a designer ... gives you a sense of security in terms of your job search?

Interviewee: Yeah. I think, it's like the skills or the development that being remote encourages or allows more for, these are like harder skills that I can name. I know this programming language now or even my work looks better now, and you can see and hear it. So, there's definitely, there's kind of a security to that.

And then these other things are like, if I was in the office, I think that I would be more invested in helping grow the company. In doing that would, I would still be developing skills and learning new things in doing that, but those would all be kind of like softer things that I don't really get to put on a resume. Like how well I sell ideas or how well I collaborate on certain things. So, I am looking for an opportunity to learn those, to grow more in that way. I think that's part of why I'm looking for a non-remote job. But it's just that, I want to do that in a context where I feel like I'm going to be around for a couple of years.

Knowing that he will soon go back on the job market, Landon values the opportunity he had to acquire “harder” skills that he can list on his résumé, such as a new programming language, and to develop his design portfolio (“my work looks better now, and you can see and hear it”). Ultimately, though, he would like a job that does not require him to work remotely, where he can also focus on “softer” skills he values, like learning how best to sell ideas or collaborating with coworkers on projects.

Generally, coworking around other workers in similar work situations provided members a greater sense of comfort with the risk of their work, greater awareness of opportunities and uses for their expertise, and greater confidence about pursuing their goals. Teresa, a member of Workmine, lauded the benefits she received from coworking and freelancing, and even began proselytizing among her friends in more traditional positions similar to her prior work situation. After we had discussed how coworking had influenced her in terms of her own values, I asked if there was anything I had not asked her that she believed important for me to know or that she just wanted to share. She had this to add:

Teresa: I guess in general, I just think back to the introverted thing. I'm trying to get so many other people I know who are a lot like me, to...but they're not in positions to really do coworking, but I'm just like, "you have to just leave what you're doing and just go do something else, because you don't understand, it's so much better."

And I think that it makes me really happy to see, when... every time you see people come into this [coworking space] or any of those other spaces, because... the way things work now in the work world is not, like, it doesn't need to be like that. We're in a position as an economy in general where we're not focused on manufacturing and stuff like that. We can be a culture of people who, for the most part, have this weird flexibility and look at things in a little bit different ways, the way some companies and some countries may already be doing, that it makes such a difference.

And I just know that there's so many people who'd benefit from it if they had the opportunity of if they were in a position where [they could do it], because even if they were working for the places they work, if they could work in a place like this, instead of where they're working now, I just feel like, oh, so many fewer people would be just be miserable, I think. I don't know.

Sandra: What do you tell them when you try to convince them to not do what they're doing, basically?

Teresa: Mostly the misery angle. I know they're getting kind of annoyed with me, because people just want to sometimes complain about things and not, you know...

Sandra: Not have a solution kind of thing, just vent?

Teresa: Not have a solution. And I'm really bad about that. I'm always like, "well here's what you could do. You have this great idea. What if you looked into that? What if you tried doing something completely different?" I'm all radical about, "well, why don't you just stop doing it, just move here, and work freelance for something, come up with something?" And mostly though the misery angle, because I think, especially, I mean, most of my friends are pretty big introverts, too, and it's all the same stuff stresses them out. I mean, they may not quite have the weird squirrel reaction to things that I have, but it's all the same frustrations. And I just wish that I could just magically make them go, "yeah, that's a good idea! I'll do that." And maybe it would work for them. But I probably shouldn't be deciding their future, but it would be...I just feel like, I want to say like, "you don't have to be miserable all the time. It is actually possible to not be miserable."

I wouldn't have even thought of that [before], because I've always been a pretty miserable person. I know that sounds terrible, but I've always been a very introverted, shy, pessimistic, skeptical, nothing's-going-to-work-out kind of person. So, I mean, if I can benefit from, or maybe especially, I don't know which would be a better word, but if I can benefit from that and be in such a better place, it's hard to imagine that most people wouldn't be in a better place. I guess realistically everybody can't be coworking. I just, in talking to people, I just want to go, "why are you still doing this? There's this other option, and it's so much better."

Sandra: Do you see them having the same sort of experiences you had with work before?

Teresa: Oh God, yeah. Yeah. Oh, so much. And I just, especially hearing the political stuff. It's so frustrating to hear. Or people are stuck in jobs where they're not doing something that they really like doing, or they're being underutilized. I feel this huge need to fix it, even though I don't really have a way to fix it. But I just want to be like, "I'm doing it. You can do it." ...Because if I would've, I mean from this time last year, that's when I was already living here...let alone the year before, I would not have thought I'd be in the place I am now, and I definitely think it's because of coworking.

Sandra: Can you say a little bit more about what you mean by the place where you're in now?

Teresa: Oh sure, yeah. I wouldn't be in a place where I felt comfortable with risk, where I felt like I had a community of people I could rely on and also be reliable to. That I wouldn't have this sort of sense of achievement and comfort, I guess. Like being comfortable with the way my career is going and to not feel like regret or anxiety about not being where other people are. I mean, even just hearing someone else's success, I don't go, "oh, God, why am I not having that?," which I might've done a few years ago. ...

It's like that whole ladder is gone, and I don't have to constantly think of it as: "where am I on that ladder? Why am I no further? What do I need to get there? Oh crap. What if I never get up there?" If you just take that away, then it's not something that really colors all your decisions. Then, suddenly, your decisions can be colored with "well, what do I want to do? What am I good at doing? Are those the same things? How do...well, what do I feel like doing today?"

I think people want to work with people who are positive and enjoy what they do. I mean, I know I do, so I can't see that at all being a bad thing. And I definitely was not there a year ago. Back then, well, even before then, I was just still kind of in that ladder mindset, where I felt like I couldn't accomplish...I wasn't accomplishing anything, and [feeling like], "oh God, I'm so behind. Why am I so behind other people?" *Behind* was a really big [phrase]. I used that all the time.

Sandra: Like behind people in your job? People your age?

Teresa: Yeah, my age. My age definitely. And [thinking] like, "I'm 31" – not that 31 is old but – "oh great, another story about some 12-year-old who's the CEO now. Screw that kid." But now, I can talk to someone who's 24 and really successful and be like, "that's awesome," instead of being, "oh my God, what does that mean about me?"

And then again, back to the focus thing, I feel like I cannot just think, "oh, it'd be nice if I accomplish that." I can *actually* accomplish it, because I can focus. And having that draining [environment] and all of that anxiety and stuff *not* in my life, means I can, not just accomplish stuff, but think further into other stuff. An awkward way of putting it, but I guess that would be the main thing.

Working as a freelancer enabled Teresa to step away from a traditional career path – or "ladder mindset," as Teresa called it – and the associated anxieties about how far up the career ladder she had managed to

climb. This also freed her from comparing herself and her achievements to other workers her age, which meant Teresa could focus on figuring out her own goals. Without a predefined path and with a community of people to rely on, Teresa could focus on accomplishing those goals and felt comfortable determining her own path.

For some workers, like Teresa, the career ladder mode of career development can exacerbate feelings of competition among coworkers, as workers may tend to compare themselves to other workers their age in terms of their position on the ladder. Working outside of a career ladder structure, then, may help these workers refocus their career goals in terms of their interests and abilities. That is, instead of progressing along a career path defined primarily by their firm's organizational structure, they may feel freer to pursue a course charted more by their own interests. Since the onus for continued training falls largely on workers themselves, workers can supplement their experience with new projects or skills that will lead them in the direction they wish to go. Coworking spaces may help workers gain access to such opportunities through networking with or instruction from their comembers. Further, comembers' guidance may also prove useful for freelancers and independent workers especially, as these workers must also figure out how to market their skills across a gamut of available positions or projects, as noted above.

“LEVELING UP”: GROWING BIGGER AND BETTER

Xavier has a key role in one of the major international coworking conferences. At his coworking space in Europe, he noticed a shift in members who had initially felt satisfied with the scope of their work or the number of projects and clients they had when joining their coworking space. Contented with working for themselves or working remotely, these workers did not aspire to expand their businesses or work. However, Xavier witnessed a transformation in their work goals after they had worked and

interacted with others in the coworking space. He spoke about this change in work goals, when asked how he thought coworking had impacted the way that he viewed work:

It's impacted my life because now, of course, I'm fully involved in coworking, and I did not expect that five years ago. It was not the first idea, but yeah, that's...an iterative process. And for instance, in our space, it's really interesting to notice most of our older members, I would say, all have a story to tell about how they improved their business thanks to someone using their work in the coworking space. All of them. And to the extent that actually I spoke about a translator, a web developer, and someone who runs business for ERP, a management system, and they were working from the home, and when we spoke with them one year ago, they were at home. "That's okay, I'm an independent, and I work like this, I don't have problem, I don't want to grow. I don't care. I just want to, after 6:00, be back [home], and earn enough money to... Okay, I work for myself, and that's enough." And the level of ambition was pretty low. And now, the translator is outsourcing part of his work to be able to accept more contracts. So, she said, "Yeah, through speaking with all those people, I said, yeah, I could take more days off if I chose it," and so she's now supervising a team of, it would be five or six translators as well, but she's giving work to other people. The guy was very persistent. He wants to hire people, and we could put him in touch with someone who's an inventor and a coach, business coach, so, and those were ideas they weren't even considering before being in the space. And they are working. So, another guy's a graphic designer, and same story. He's going to the idea that he wants to develop his business, and work on more projects, and they all said... This is, the proximity was, those people who are building up something which influenced my opinion about it. That's a very impactful thing.

Even members who had been satisfied with the current scope of their business were inspired to do more.

Sean alluded to this phenomenon, as well. He put it this way:

People talk about a coworking space being a gym for entrepreneurs. I think a coworking space is more specifically a gym for learning how to communicate like a human being. It's a gym for learning how to recognize patterns, which can lead from everything to opportunities to dodging bullets, right? It's a gym for empathy. Those are all things that no one's going to sign up for, by the way. I don't know anyone who wakes up and goes, you know I need to learn to be more empathetic. If they do think that, it's because they have a problem. The core problem that I know coworking solves consistently is loneliness for so many audiences. The things that people actually walk away with, the discreet new skills that they learn, the new muscles that they're toning with [our coworking space] as the gym and myself, [Mason], [Nicole⁵⁵], and other members as their personal trainers, to extend the metaphor, we are each other's trainers, pushing each other to get a little better at it. It's rad to watch people level up whether they realize it or not. It's mind-blowingly cool when people do have that [realization that] 'holy shit, I'm so much...like this has changed me so much.' Whether we get that discreet feedback or a thank you or just like the "aha moment" that leads to some more confidence. They try something a little bit bigger, a little bit bolder or maybe not bigger and bolder they just try what they needed to try all along. Bigger isn't better, better is better. It's not only making people do bigger things. It's about them being a better version of themselves.

⁵⁵ Nicole (pseudonym) is one of the other staff members at Sean and Mason's coworking space.

As Sean and Xavier suggested, coworking can push members to do more and go further in their work than they may have previously aspired to or even imagined was possible.

NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR WORK, NEW WAYS OF WORKING, AND NEW MEANINGS OF WORK

Christina used the term “open-minded” when asked about the values of coworking, and spoke about the advantage of hearing different perspectives. Following up, I asked how working at her coworking space had influenced her in terms of her own values, and she elaborated on what she meant by open-minded:

I’m very open-minded, but it makes me more open-minded, because not everyone’s like you, and I think we kind of forget that. Even if we say that we’re not like that, we tend to forget it. So, judging people is terrible, but we all do it the moment you stare at someone. But, getting to know people that I normally wouldn’t on a daily basis, because they’re not really in my circle, is nice. So, it’s changed the idea of what people do and what jobs do exist and what someone’s like and what they value. It’s nice to hear, because then it’s like, ‘Huh. I value that, too. Why am I not doing that?’

Christina connected the idea of open-mindedness to exposure to people beyond one’s social circle. Workmine offered her the ability to interact with people working in jobs she may not have known about before. Seeing the work that others who share her values do enabled her not only to broaden her network, but to broaden her conception of what work is possible for her. Teresa, also a member at Workmine, felt similarly, commenting that, “collaborating with people is really helpful for just getting ideas and thinking about possibilities that I wouldn’t have thought of before and possible work and everything.”

For Maggie, having comembers changed her perception about how social and “intense” she should be at work. Asked how she thought her experience at Alloy and CO2 had influenced her perspective about work, she commented:

I think it was interesting working around other people and seeing how I compared to them. I think that it made me realize – I didn't realize how much of a focused intense worker I am and how much of an introvert I am until I was around other people. I think that was definitely an eye opener for me. Also, it gave me a taste of something that I realized that I was missing entirely because I just... I tend to be shy. I tend to work really hard and then to go to work and see people who were having a lot of fun and goofing off, it made me realize that maybe I should change my perspective on how intense I should be when I'm at work and my husband is the life of the party fun. And so, he would go – he would come in sometimes and see people, I mean like going around on razor scooters goofing off on a coffee break or something and he's like this is perfect for you to be around people who don't take things so seriously. And I do. I think that was really good for me.

Being around comembers who “goofed off” at work from time to time made Maggie realize what she had been missing. She credits coworking, in part, to her later decision to take time off from working to focus on something she feels passionate about. After working at Alloy and CO2, Maggie quit her job, spent a month traveling abroad with her husband, and then intended to work with her husband on their passion project: tiny houses.

Ethan, a member of Cosite, likewise felt that seeing comembers enjoying their work encouraged him to focus on doing the same. Like many members and founders, he spoke about “doing work that doesn't feel like work”:

Sandra: How do you think coworking has impacted how you think about work?

Ethan: That's an interesting question. I guess it has made me focus more on doing work that doesn't feel like work. I've seen people really enjoy what they do and the product of their labor. It's made me focus on enjoying the process as much as the product, actually enjoying the minutia and the details of getting the work done. That could be just camaraderie or observation of other people that have already found that enthusiasm. I'm not sure, maybe a combination. Yeah, I think that's how it's affected me positively.

Working in an open environment like a coworking space likely facilitates the free exchange of information and ideas. Rather than being confined to cubicles, members can see each other and benefit from seeing how others around them go about their work.

Some members commented that coworking had exposed them to different ways of working and different professions they previously knew little or nothing about. For instance, when I asked how she thought working at Workmine had impacted her experience of working, Natalie first commented that she

appreciated being able to get fresh air in the outdoor space, and then spoke about how Workmine had changed how she thought about networking. She then added:

Being in the regular office [at Steelworks Mill], that felt like it was what a “big girl” job was supposed to be. But then being here, I see that there are a lot of different types of big-girl jobs and that you can take a different tack on all of it. And, that is really nice.

Coworking at Workmine introduced Natalie to a range of occupations. She got to see first-hand the kind of work that people in those occupations do and even have conversations with them about their work.

Even for those who did not previously work in traditional office environments, coworking offers exposure to many different professions. Formerly a teacher working around other teachers, Robin now works in a completely different career around others working in various professions. This variation exposed her to different ways of working that she feels would not have been available to her in a school environment or a traditional work environment. When asked how working in this kind of space (i.e., ProShare) has affected how she views work, Robin expressed:

Robin: There’s been a huge shift just in [my] career itself, but having models of other people doing it and seeing lots of people have white boards or everyone has a computer and a lot of people are sitting in their chair all the time or other people are walking. I’ve been able to visibly see lots of different work styles, and if I wanted to adapt or draw from them I have models to do it now, whereas if I was in an isolated cubicle or whatever, everyone is typing. I’m able to see a lot here that I would’ve not...it’s a total career shift, so it’s really interesting to see all of this.

Sandra: How does that help you define what you want out of your work life? What have you learned from seeing these different work styles?

Robin: I feel like I’ve seen that there’s got to be work-life balance, which there wasn’t with teaching. Then the people who are here working all the time and are hunched over their computers, they seem less happy, they’re not smiling. Then there are people that are interacting or in and out of the building and everything’s transparent, there’s glass everywhere, so you can see all the people. I feel like I can tell who’s happy and who’s not, whether it’s through the...I don’t know why they’re happy or why they’re not, but it seems like there’s some people that are just going through the motions and the other people are living. I’m trying to be like the people that are living, which I wouldn’t have seen at a school. Even during school, you have your class, everyone else has their classes and you don’t interact with them except for the five minutes in between classes.

In addition to seeing new possibilities for work, Robin’s boss, Izzy, also connected her to other business owners at ProShare that needed part-time assistance. Robin planned to speak with other business owners

she would like to work for, as well. She felt that “you don’t have that opportunity in a space that’s not like this.”

When I interviewed Francesca, she was in the process of looking for a new job. Like Robin, Francesca felt that working at Cosite had revealed new possibilities for her career. She explained the impact coworking had on her vision for her future work:

I feel much more capable than I did before. Especially since, you know, a lot of people are younger in this space, and they’re doing their own thing. I never thought that was really possible at my age. I thought it’d be something I would do down the line. So, coworking especially at [Cosite] has helped me feel like I can really do anything. It’s a cool feeling but at the same time it’s a little confusing, because now I feel like my scope has definitely increased.

She had gained experience with web developing and design through working with Owen. Ethan had also helped her gain skills in web design by letting her take a stab at the website for Cosite and then mentoring her. Seeing how Ethan approached his work for clients, such as letting them into his design process and soliciting feedback along the way, helped her understand how she might work differently. She stated that this experience and mentorship would guide her job search.

Thus, in addition to productivity and inspiration to work hard in their current jobs, the “creative energy” of coworking can also encourage members to work toward career goals in other companies or fields, and sometimes cultivates entirely new visions for their work. Maggie enjoyed the opportunity to work “around a lot of people that are trying to have really fulfilling careers” and found that her comembers at Alloy and CO2 gave her insight into different ways of working that she otherwise would not have been exposed to. I asked her the impact she thought this might have on her future work, in terms of how it affected the types of work environments she would look for in the future:

That’s a good question. I think, for me, I’m kind of at this weird transition of my life where I have worked for like seven years in front of a computer in a very...it’s a desk job, and I loved it for a long time. And, then this past year, it has just felt like I can’t stand it anymore. So, whatever I do in my future, it’s going to be something that is more varied. And, it may involve computer work, too, but I need something that is going to, like, actually get me out moving and doing things and actually being around other people. At

CO2 particularly, I got to see kind of tastes of other careers, and I got to see people coming in, doing some work, and leaving to go to a [photo] shoot or something like that. That kind of helped me realize that work doesn't have to be that you just go and stare at your computer for eight hours and then go home, that you can have kind of the more creative, get-up-and-move-around kind of career. So, yeah, I don't know what my future is going to look like, but I do think it has been impacted by seeing the way other people work.

For Maggie, seeing different ways of working made her reconsider what she wanted in her own career.

As discussed above, that led to big changes in her life and her career path.

Coworking also influenced what members considered the meaning or purpose of work. Teresa, a member of Workmine, had this to say:

Sandra: How do you think that working here has influenced what you consider to be the purpose of work?

Teresa: Oh, like, so much. Because I mean, moving here I definitely realized...well I don't, I'm not so hung up on the whole... like, I always thought, "how would I move someplace and take a cut in salary, moving somewhere else?" And then, now I'm not... I don't even really think about that. And it, with more time, you just get more of a sense of, well, you should be enjoying this, and you should be doing stuff that you think is interesting, and you should try things you want to do. And worse case, it doesn't work out, no big deal. Getting... just I mean, feeling like there's still adventure left in work, which I don't know that I've ever necessarily experienced before, but I definitely think that comes from being in this environment.

She continued along that theme, when discussing the values of coworking: "it's all just sort of a spirit of adventure and risk taking to do something that, again, goes back to having a life that makes you happy and is flexible and works for you." Coworking helped Teresa become more comfortable with the risks of freelance work, as she saw her freelancing comembers achieving success. Consequently, she felt that she could still find "adventure" in work.

HOW STRENGTH OF COMMUNITY VARIES ACROSS COWORKING SPACES

A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP

When asked about her reasons for choosing ProShare, Emily contrasted her experience at ProShare with her prior experience working at an executive center in Riverport and with the space her

colleagues on the West Coast work out of. She described the environment in the executive center as “stiff,” with “not a lot of young people,” and she felt that the staff judged her nonstandard working hours. There and at her colleagues’ workspace out west, they charged for “workplace add-ons” like sending a fax. She disliked how her former workplace “pushed” these services, as “that’s just not something I need, and ... I think it’s just kind of a holdover from a different way of working.” At her colleagues’ space – one location of an international chain of rentable office space, coworking, meeting rooms, and other business services – her colleagues had to pay for each service they used, as Emily illustrated:

It's kind of like [ProShare], except you have to pay for everything, like you pay for your phone line, you pay for according to your internet access, and you pay for all these things that it just feels way more corporate. And so, I mean, I don't know what the cost breakdown is and how much money they're making here versus how much there, because it is a business either way. But here at least it feels like you just, you're paying your rent. And if you don't want to have someone come and empty your trash for you every week or every day, then you don't have to pay for it. You know, you can just do it on your own.

That kind of stuff is, I think especially to someone like me, who I'm not going to take advantage of secretarial services that you can buy extra. ... [My colleagues] complain about it, just because they don't feel like they're getting, like they have to pay for hours with the conference room and stuff like that, that you don't have to do here. And I think you're kind of communicating something to the people that you're working alongside as a company when you try and charge piece by piece for different [services]. You know, because [at ProShare] they're trying to kind of create a working space that feels like you have access to and have ownership of all these different areas. And so that's something that I really like about this, this workspace, and makes coming to work [better].

In contrast to her colleagues’ workspace and the executive center where she worked previously, ProShare creates an environment that gives Emily a sense of “access” and “ownership.” This meaning of ownership is distinct from Emily’s discussion of “bad neighbors” who feel more ownership over communal space, as quoted above. To Emily, paying a single fee that covers her office space, internet, and free access to meeting rooms, without having to pay extra for resources or services she does not need, make ProShare feel less corporate.

Valerie spoke of taking ownership of Alloy when discussing how she describes coworking to people. She explained that she generally speaks about Alloy as if it is their own office:

I just kind of make it sound like it's our own office. I don't really – unless I say, “Yeah, I'm over at [Steelworks Mill]. You should come check out our office.” And if someone comes over, and they're like, “Oh, who else is here?” I'll be like, “That's [*Ilk*] and this is [Victor's company].” So, I'll kind of share that information with them when they get there. Or if they're like, “Oh, where about in [Steelworks] are you guys?” I'd say, “Well, we're in [Alloy].” And if they know what that means, then they'll know it's a coworking space. But mainly I just, I like to have it come off as if it's its own office. Take ownership of it. Because you know what? I'll get in there, and I'll clean the entire office sometimes. I'll take the trash out if I have to, or like make sure there is spoons or forks sometimes, which there are never, you know, and make sure the fridge is clean. Like, that's just kind of who I am as a person. So, I take ownership of the space that I'm in. And so, when someone says, “Where's your office?,” I don't really say it's a coworking space. But I don't hide it either. I'm not ashamed of it. I'm just not... I think as a young, like as a small business that's fairly new, you know, having a space first of all is amazing, and we're very lucky. But also, to say, “But we have an office,” and not to say that it's a coworking space quite yet until they come over and see for themselves, I think it's nice. I think people just, you know, I think there's better stature for our money that way.

Valerie takes ownership of her coworking space by taking responsibility for taking out the trash and restocking the kitchen.

Many founders acknowledged a desire to instill a sense of ownership in members, as discussed in Chapter 3. This involves not only cleaning up and taking care of common areas, but also feeling comfortable making suggestions to the space founder or staff. For instance, when discussing the culture of coworking, Owen stated:

I always tell people when they become members of [Cosite], please tell me, preferably in a constructive way, ideas that you have to make this space better. So, part of that ownership is taking ownership over, if it's not great yet, what do we have to do to get there?

He provided an example of one type of input he received from members:

One time, last week, I was like, “All right, I'm out of music. Anybody have any ideas? And one guy was like, “What if we started a Spotify collaborative playlist?” I was like, “Perfect.” And so, I stopped, and I went around to everybody, and I was like, “I'm inviting you. Can you add some songs?” And then it was amazing. Everybody's working, but then the playlist goes on the song list, and people are like, “Aw, who's song is that?” They're like, everybody's messing with each other, and it's just a fun environment. I think that's part of that ownership I was talking to you about. So, in the corporate environment, you're not going to go to your coworkers or your boss and be like, “I really think we should tear this wall down, or I really think we need this type of machine or this idea that.” Usually ideas are not appreciated in a space like that.

For Owen, members' taking ownership over the space distinguishes coworking from traditional office environments, where such input might be less welcome or appreciated.

BRINGING (CO)WORK HOME: A PERMEABLE BOUNDARY BETWEEN WORK AND HOME LIFE

When workers talk about wanting separation between their work and home, they typically mean that they want to stop working from home, at least primarily. Some still do choose to work at home, but the work they do at home often changes, as discussed above. They may also use their coworking space as a way to get out of the house, so they do not feel “holed up” inside their houses. However, a desire for a workspace away from home does not necessarily equate to a complete separation between work and home. Rather, many members, even those expressing the desire for separation between work and home, maintain a more permeable boundary between the two. Cohesive (higher strength) communities are those that enable members to incorporate their coworking communities into their personal or home lives, at least to a degree that helps them strike the desired balance between work and home.

For Valerie, at Alloy, the purpose of work “is to contribute to society,” and “to create a legacy for yourself and for your family.” As she elaborated on what she hoped to get out of the work she does now, she spoke about wanting “to build something” for her kids and how fun it would have been if her father had been in the music industry. Although they are very close, she felt that working in the same industry and “build[ing] up what he’s done” would have enhanced their relationship. Since Valerie had stated earlier that she wanted “to separate things,” I followed up by asking her about the degree of separation she wanted between work and home:

Sandra: So, that’s interesting. You want a boundary between work and home, but there’s sort of this...you sort of want to have a familial relationship with the people you work with?

Valerie: Yeah, because my work is very much my lifestyle at this point. Like a lot of the work that we do goes from the moment that you wake up and go to the office at nine to you kind of end your day around six but then you might have a dinner meeting or you kind of go home for a few hours and you have to go up to a show that night. And when everybody’s out – when everyone’s going out to the show to have fun and get drunk, you’re going out to work and to support your artists and network if you need to and see what’s going on and collect all your information you can, and then figure out how to do it better the next time. So, I still really enjoy... like, what I enjoy about doing what I do is I get to go and have fun, but it’s a productive fun to me. Like I don’t like just to bars. I’d rather go to a show that has a bar in it.

And I'd rather go to a show where I've earned the right to be there in the sense. Either I've helped put it on or I'm managing the band that's playing or I'm really good friends with somebody that's putting it on. I can go back stage and talk to the artist and see more about who they are and what they felt about the show. And just kind of that stuff. I just don't like not having a place in it. I like to go there with a purpose.

So anyway, back to what you were saying, because it's an almost around the clock job, my family will have to understand like if – I'm single currently so if I am dating, like the next person that wants to date me, they're going to have to understand that like this is going to be first for a while. It's going to be first and I want that person to support that and understand that and spend – continue to enhance – I hope that we can continue to enhance each other's lives but not take each other away from what we are really passionate about. Because I think when the moment that you're with somebody that takes your attention away from what you truly are passionate about, that's when the relationship starts to crumble in my opinion. So, I think – yeah and I can't even think about having kids really like at this point. I would love to share my legacy with my hypothetical children and I'm sure like my views will change like when I'm done with work at the end of the day, I have a very good feeling I'm not going to want to go to a show. I'm going to want to go home and spend time with my kids. But they'll understand why Mom needs to be at the office all day or why Mom needs to be gone for a weekend. It's because she's working, and she's got to do her thing.

Sandra: I think that's interesting what you're saying about sort of earning the right to be at a show. How do you think that changes your experience of being there?

Valerie: Yeah. It definitely changes my experience. When I put on a show, it is the most stressful thing. But when people are having so much fun, and it's a sold-out event, it gives me so much joy, because I'm like, when somebody's like "Who put this on?", or whatever, and someone's like "Oh, [Valerie] did it," it's like, that is awesome. I love that. And even if that person doesn't know who I am, maybe they're going to look me up or something, and then they're going to see it's this really short, Italian-looking girl, and be like, "Oh." You know, I feel like I'm not like the average white male that's doing this.

So, it's really fun that I can kind of turn people upside down when they meet me or when they see me or by the types of shows that I'm putting on. I'm not just sitting at the receptionist desk at a country artist management company answering phones. Like I'm doing something that is providing an experience for people that have a good time and they talk about it, and the recognition that I like to get is not by performing on stage like my artists do. It's being behind the scenes and for the people that are interested in knowing more about the event, those are the people that find me and those are the people that I want to meet and talk to because they probably will interest me a little bit more than just the regular folks that show up. I love having those people there. We need them. But I don't know, maybe I need that person that's interested in knowing more about who promoted the event. That's such a nerdy thing to go to the event and go, "I wonder who promoted this." But I like those people. I think those people are interesting. And maybe I can help them or maybe they can help me or something.

Valerie's identity is closely tied to her work, and her work permeates her personal life. She takes pride in producing shows and defying people's expectations for her as a woman in her 20s. Valerie likes "being a little in the minority a bit, because I feel like we're doing women a service by representing them well in the business and work space, and I feel like it's kind of fun to turn people upside down." Working at a

coworking space gives Valerie the professional space she desired, one not located in a home office, yet her work and personal life still intermix.

For many members, having a workspace where they feel more productive frees up more space in their personal lives for other pursuits. For some, it is a matter of flexibility, while for others, a matter of time. As an example of the former, Keira enjoyed the flexibility of coworking at Alloy and CO2, because it allowed her to pursue her hobbies like rock climbing. Teresa found that getting more work done at Workmine than she had been able to at home freed up time for her to think about new project ideas and other activities she might enjoy. She shared this insight when asked how coworking facilitated or constrained her achieving her work goals:

I don't see any constraints. I think I definitely need to push myself to get out of my comfort zone more in meeting other people, and I'll get there. But mostly I think it's definitely helpful. I mean, obviously with the making connections and getting new work and stuff like that, obviously it helps that way. But just in the fact that I can get my work done and still have the energy to think of other things or think of new ways of doing things for whatever project I have coming up, where it's not so much playing catch-up, it's actually accomplishing things in a fairly reasonable amount of time. And if you don't have that, it's really hard to have the energy to come up with anything else you want to do or, I mean, even get a stupid portfolio done.

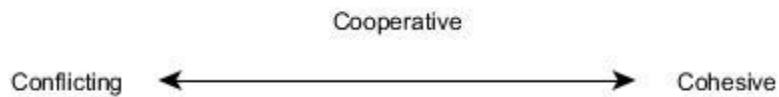
I mean, I only just started it really in January, and I'm not doing anything complicated. I just... stuff comes up. But it took me all the way to that point to get inspired enough to go, "yeah, I should do that right now." I think I'm in a place where I get who I am, and I'll start working on that. Which I'm sure I would've still been theorizing about it, meaning have a domain name and nothing attached to it, for ages if I hadn't done that. Hopefully, one thing that I'm hoping is that this 24/7 thing with my downtime between projects, hopefully I will get myself to a point to where I'm using it more to do my own projects.

Either just stuff that I want to do for myself, or if I want to, if there's a group I'm really interested in and I want to just kind of offer myself to them as, sort of, I think what you do is really cool, maybe we can do something. Where I have more room to do that stuff, that's probably the biggest thing and that's still a question mark right now. I'm still working on that but I can feel myself getting to that point, just the fact that I'm ever here at eight and I'm ever here at eight p.m., is a good start. In my old job, I mean I was definitely like I say, I'd get in at 9:30 and I would leave at five. If I had to stay later, I would get out as fast as I could. Whereas now I just kind of want to keep working on stuff, so that hopefully will lead to a path where like I said, I'm doing stuff for myself and then it.

Workmine allowed Teresa to focus on getting work projects done more efficiently, which freed up time for her to think about her "own projects." She hoped to use the 24-hour access to the space to pursue some of those personal projects in her downtime.

For other members, coworking had more direct influence on their personal lives. Christina, another member of Workmine, commented that working there had made her think about the things she values and the activities she hopes to incorporate more in her life. Natalie, another Workmine member, talked about how interactions with comembers there had broadened her mind and would impact how she talked with people outside the space. These types of impacts on members' values and perspectives, impacts which carry over into their personal lives, signal a cohesive coworking community.

FIGURE 5.1: THE RANGE OF STRENGTH OF COMMUNITY



CONCLUSION

Despite challenges such as distracting or disrespectful comembers, difficulties connecting with other members, and a lack of privacy, members realize significant benefits from working in an open, collaborative environment. These benefits consist of serendipitous encounters, a greater sense of accountability compared to working remotely from home or coffee shops, a lower sense of obligation to comembers compared to traditional coworkers, the ability to work around others without the drama and politics endemic to many traditional workplaces, encouragement and support from comembers, creativity and inspiration, access to means of professional development often unavailable in post-bureaucratic workplaces, exposure to new ways of working and an expanded notion of what career possibilities exist, and the motivation and support necessary to push members' work further.

As explained in this chapter, the strength of coworking communities varies according to the net balance of positive compared to negative interactions in the coworking space to produce conflicting, cooperative, or cohesive communities (from low to high strength). Positive interactions include social conversations and all manner of business-related interactions, including collaboration, feedback, guidance, instruction, and networking. Members in high-strength, cohesive communities tend to engage in social conversations regularly with their comembers. Cohesive communities also have a greater impact on their members in terms of their personal values and the meaning they derive from their work, as members in these communities attest that coworking broadens their perspectives or introduces them to new ideas and possibilities, which they carry with them into their non-work lives.

Cooperative coworking communities also provide members with positive social and business-related interactions. As in cohesive communities, members of cooperative communities also feel a sense of support and inspiration from their communities. However, these communities are apt to experience either higher levels of conflict over social norms in the space or a concentration of interactions among a smaller group within the community. That is, despite medium or high levels of positive interactions among some core members, a significant portion of members have low levels of interactions with their comembers. As a result, members are unlikely to feel influenced by their coworking communities in terms of their personal values, and their coworking relationships and activities are not liable to permeate their non-work lives.

Although my observational data do not include an empirical example of a conflicting community, my typologies allow a theoretical outline of this level of strength of community. A conflicting community would likely involve higher levels of conflict, such as unwelcome distractions, disagreements over the appropriate use and social norms of the space, and incongruent values among comembers.

Members in conflicting communities would likely have low levels of interactions overall, and fewer positive social and business-related interactions to offset conflicts.

This chapter has characterized strength of community in coworking spaces and demonstrated how it varies. The next chapter, which concludes this dissertation, examines all the factors that influence strength of community. The discussion combines the intentionality and interactivity of coworking founders and members with nature, quality, and strength of community to demonstrate how all the elements of coworking communities relate.

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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: THEORIZING COWORKING COMMUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapters of this dissertation have examined the intentionality of members and founders of coworking spaces and the interactivity between comembers at four different coworking spaces, with the aim of building toward a theory of coworking communities. Chapter 2 proposed a four-fold typology of members' intentionality, the reasons members cited for choosing to start coworking. These included: (1) *productivity*: to increase productivity and promote professional development, (2) *sociability*: to combat loneliness and isolation, (3) *separation*: to reinforce the boundary between work and home, and (4) *variety*: to pursue a different way of working, characterized by variety and flexibility. It also demonstrated how these reasons covaried. For instance, for members who cited only one reason for coworking, that reason was always productivity.

Chapter 3 examined the intentionality of coworking space founders, the reasons that they chose to open coworking spaces and their visions for what they wanted to achieve there. Using data from in-depth interviews with fourteen founders and surveys from participants of the 2014 Global Coworking Unconference Conference (GCUC), I derived a typology of founders' intentionality: entrepreneurial, collaborative, and communital. Founders with an entrepreneurial focus regard coworking primarily as a business venture or strategy for making use of existing real property. Collaborative intentionality refers to founders who operate their spaces for profit, but with a focus on generating resources of value to their community members or tenants. They also seek input from members or tenants on business decisions, such as plans for expansion; the use of new private rooms or existing communal space; or the creation of

new events or courses for or by members. For founders with a communal focus, the needs of the community drive the creation of the coworking space and shape its configuration.

Chapter 4 argued that coworking communities represent a contemporary form of *Genossenschaft*, in which the nature of relationships falls somewhere in between those that form in *Gemeinschaft*-like communities and those in *Gesellschaft*-like civil society or associations. In *Genossenschaft* organizations, an ethic of openness and mutual engagement shape members' interactions, and a common purpose and shared identity structure social bonds. The quality of coworking communities can vary from instrumental to affective, according to the types of interactions that preponderate. When collaboration and networking constitute the most common types of business-related interactions in the space, instrumental communities emerge. When more social support-based interactions like guidance, feedback, and instruction occur more frequently, the quality of community is affective. Hybrid communities result from a balance of the two sets of interactions, or from lower rates of interaction overall.

Chapter 5 considered the benefits and challenges of the open, collaborative environment of coworking spaces. Among the challenges coworking members face are distractions, conflicts over the social norms of the space, difficulties connecting with comembers, having to limit collaborations to protect work time, dealing with mismatches between work needs and workspace, and becoming too reliant on assistance from members. Benefits include serendipity, more accountability, less obligation, less workplace drama, encouragement, inspiration, professional development opportunities, exposure to new possibilities for work and new ways of working, and the creation and reinforcement of new meanings of work. The discussion in this chapter also demonstrated how strength of community varies across coworking spaces.

The findings from the previous chapters are summarized in Table 6.1 below, which shows how my four primary research sites – Alloy, Cosite, ProShare, and Workmine – vary in terms of members'

intentionality (Chapter 2), founders' intentionality (Chapter 3), quality of community (Chapter 4), and strength of community (Chapter 5).

TABLE 6.1: VARIATION ACROSS SPACES

Coworking Space	Members' Intentionality	Founders' Intentionality	Quality of Community	Strength of Community
Alloy	High Productivity, High Separation, Medium Sociability	Communital	Instrumental	Cooperative- Cohesive
Cosite	High Productivity, Low Separation, Low Sociability	Collaborative	Hybrid	Cooperative
ProShare	High Productivity, Low Separation, Medium Sociability	Collaborative	Hybrid	Cooperative
Workmine	Medium Productivity, Low Separation, Medium Sociability	Communital	Affective	Cohesive

In this concluding chapter, the discussion focuses on elaborating a full theoretical model of coworking communities. As a reference, the first section below briefly defines each concept used in the model (Figure 6.1). The middle of the chapter concentrates on elucidating the relationships between those concepts, such as the effect of members' intentionality on the strength of coworking communities. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the significance of the findings, the limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

COMPONENTS OF THE THEORETICAL MODEL

MEMBERS' INTENTIONALITY

Members' Intentionality comprises the reasons members identify for joining a coworking space, including productivity, professionalism, sociability, separation between work and home, and variety of workspaces. Although Chapter 2 considers members' reasons for choosing the particular coworking spaces they did, this factors into the theoretical model expounded below only to the extent that it relates to how they intend to use their coworking spaces. For instance, some members select spaces because they feel like light and airy spaces or due to their proximity to members' homes. In the interest of clarity, the model does not reflect these aspects of member intentionality.

FOUNDERS' INTENTIONALITY

Founder's Intentionality designates founders' and owners' reasons for opening a coworking space, their vision for what they hope to create there, and the decisions they make toward achieving that vision, such as choosing the layout and location of their space and deciding what kinds of events and activities to host in the space, if any. A three-fold typology characterizes the intentionality of coworking space founders as entrepreneurial, collaborative, or communitarian.

QUALITY OF COMMUNITY

Quality of Community reflects the types of business-related interactions most common between comembers in the space, producing an affective, hybrid, or instrumental community. Affective communities occur when guidance, feedback, and instruction outweigh collaboration and networking.

Instrumental communities favor collaboration and networking interactions. A hybrid community results from an equal or near-equal ratio of the two categories of interactions.

NATURE OF COMMUNITY

Nature of Community depicts the actual occupational diversity of a space, as well as members' perceptions about the degree of member homogeneity in terms of industry, employment situation (i.e., remote worker, entrepreneur, freelancer, etc.), client base, neighborhood of residence, or other salient characteristics.

LAYOUT

Layout includes the physical and organizational layout of a coworking space. The physical layout can encompass both the structure of the building and design of the space, such as whether it has interior walls and doors or features a more open-plan design. A coworking space's organizational layout refers to staffing, such as whether the space employs a community manager, and to the level of involvement of the founder and any staff members in the day-to-day operations of the space, such as refilling paper in the printer or taking out the trash.

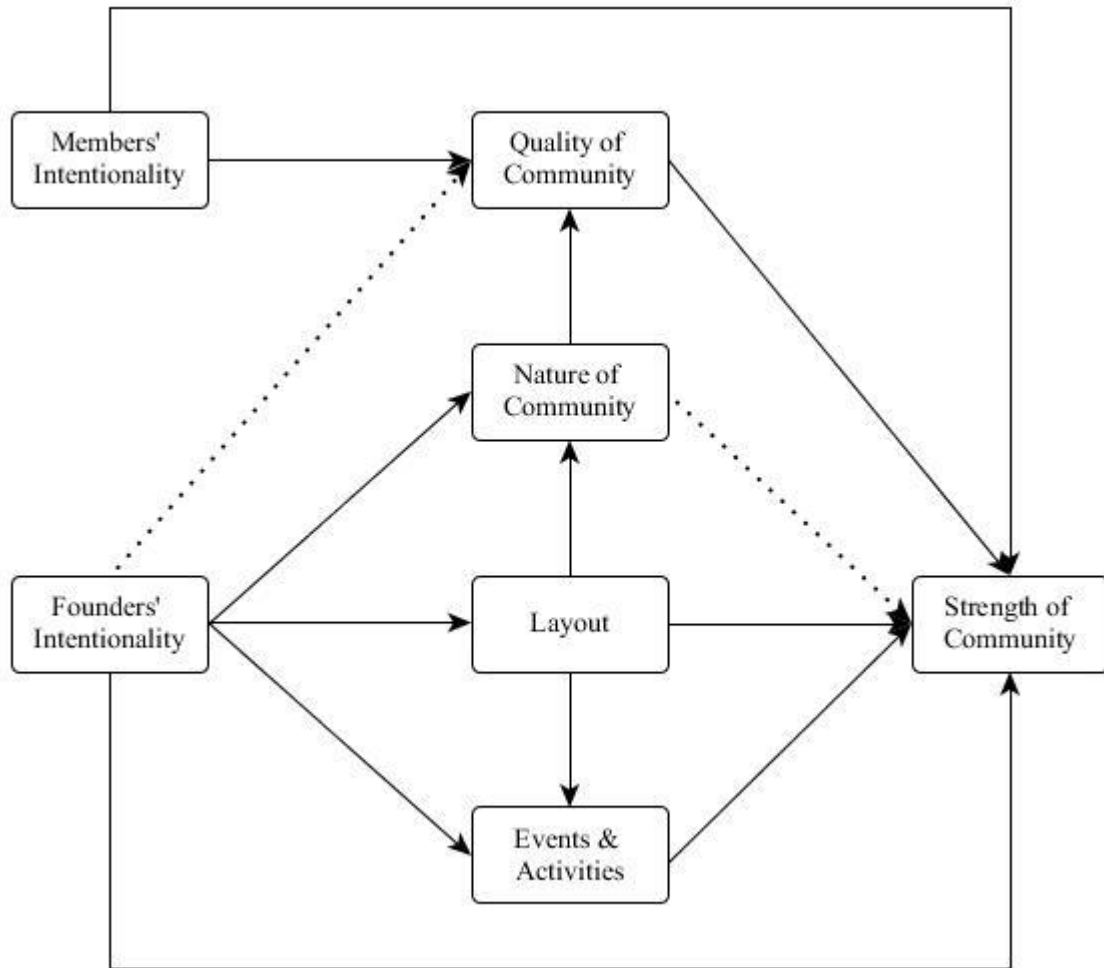
EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Events and Activities describe any coordinated activities, social events, or courses open to members that take place in the coworking space or associated spaces, such as coffee socials, happy hours, open houses, ping pong tournaments, or wellness exercises.

STRENGTH OF COMMUNITY

Strength of Community denotes the net balance of positive interactions as opposed to negative interactions in the space. Positive interactions can include encouragement, support, social conversations, and an inspiring atmosphere. In contrast, negative interactions may consist of unwelcome distractions from comembers and conflicts arising from disparate views about the roles of members or about the appropriate use and condition of the space.

FIGURE 6.1: FULL THEORETICAL MODEL OF COWORKING COMMUNITIES



EXPLANATION OF RELATIONSHIPS IN THE THEORETICAL MODEL

THE EFFECT OF MEMBERS' INTENTIONALITY

On Quality of Community

The reasons members choose to start coworking – members' intentionality – may affect the types of interactions they choose to have with their comembers in the space. For instance, members who sought a coworking space because they felt isolated working at home and craved interaction were no more likely to engage in affective business-related interactions than those who did not cite sociability as a reason for coworking. However, those who joined a coworking space to become more productive or to have a more professional space to meet clients in, were over twice as likely to report participating in instrumental interactions like networking and collaboration with their comembers than were members who cited other reasons for coworking, such as sociability or separation of work and home.

On Strength of Community

Members' willingness to engage with other members has a clear impact on the strength of coworking communities. Members who joined coworking spaces for sociability reasons tended to engage more frequently in social conversations with their comembers. This may be particularly important when other elements of the space, such as the founders' intentionality or the layout of the space, are not conducive to strong, cohesive communities. A sufficient number of members willing to have "awkward conversations" or "rocky introductions" with comembers may help tilt the scales toward a stronger community. For instance, even if the layout of the space does not encourage interaction, there are no areas for members to congregate, and no activities or opportunities for members to experience

serendipitous encounters with comembers, enterprising members might knock on office doors or cross discouraging distances to initiate conversations, talk to the space owner about creating new spaces, or organize their own activities or events. However, members who joined a coworking space solely to have a workplace more conducive to productivity may not be inclined to make such efforts. In this way, members' intentionality can affect strength of community.

THE EFFECT OF FOUNDERS' INTENTIONALITY

On Quality of Community

Founders' intentionality can influence the types of interactions that preponderate in a coworking space. Some founders chose to start coworking spaces because they wanted to create their ideal workspace and surround themselves with members whom they could collaborate or share ideas with. Sean, for instance, stated: "I needed to know that there were more people than I already knew who I could trust before I needed to work with them. I wanted this community so I would have these trusted allies." He discovered that having a very disperse network of freelancers across his city made it hard to find each other when they wanted to collaborate. He started a coworking space, because "[t]he more we gather, the easier we were to find." As founders assume a central role in fostering connections among members, the types of interactions – collaboration, guidance, feedback, instruction, or networking – may vary according to what founders want to get out of their coworking spaces, particularly in smaller coworking spaces. This relationship is depicted with a dotted line in the diagram of the theoretical model, since the empirical evidence is inconclusive, but suggestive of an influence of founders' intentionality on quality of community.

On Nature of Community

Founders' intentionality also directly affects the nature of community in their coworking spaces to the extent that founders curate their membership. Some founders seek to create niche spaces for workers in one industry or cluster of related fields. In addition, because the preliminary coworking community sometimes precedes the physical coworking space, the membership of a space may originate as a group of friends or contacts who have worked together before or have common network connections. The vision that founders have for their space also indirectly impact the nature of community through decisions they make, such as the physical and organizational layout of their space, as discussed below.

On Layout

Founders' decisions regarding the physical design of their coworking space include how they furnish the space, including the variety of workspaces and communal spaces available, such as long work tables, individual desks, standing desks, outdoor areas, tables in the kitchen, or lounge areas; how the space is laid out in terms of open areas, walled-in spaces, or private offices; and the arrangement of workspaces in relation to one other, such as the distance between workspaces and partitions or dividers between desks. These decisions can impact interactions between comembers in the space in several ways. First, open sightlines may encourage simple social interactions such as greeting comembers upon entering the space. For instance, Paige noted that, because she can see her comembers when she arrives at Cosite, she feels obliged to say, "hello." In contrast, closed office doors, partitions, or greater distances between workspaces seems to discourage members from engaging their comembers, often out of fear of disturbing them or disrupting their work. In those cases, members must either encounter each other in common spaces, such as when they get coffee or grab their lunch from the kitchen, or brave the awkwardness of

knocking on office doors or walking across a large room to introduce themselves to someone sitting at another table.

On Events and Activities

Coworking space founders decide whether to host activities and events in the space and what kind of events and activities they offer. Although members may initiate new activities, founders' vision for their coworking spaces affects the events and activities they agree to host there. For instance, Tom, the co-founder of Workmine, was often approached about renting out the space for private events. He explained how he did not “want to be in the event business, personally” when we spoke about his reasons for deciding to open a coworking space and the needs of the community that drove that decision. I asked him why he did not have an interest in renting out the space, and he explained:

It is just like a whole other world with catering, and people have expectations about rentals and bringing stuff in. I have no interest in that. I really don't have an interest in – how do I say this? Even as someone who is running a coworking space, I don't have much interest in thinking about the space as the thing I'm monetizing. I think if I wanted to do that I would have split it up into private offices and just tried to rent them out and then I'd be essentially a landlord for people and that's just not the business I want to run.

The business I want to run is about the people who are here and what they are doing and what the work is that drives them and how I can support what they are doing and ultimately monetize that. Part of that is about utilizing space, but I don't think about that first and foremost. There is a practical reality that I have a shit ton of space and need to pay the rent. If I have empty rooms that aren't being used, then I have to think about what to put in there.

It is just a slippery slope if you start renting it out. You get all kinds of requests for weddings, film shoots, photo shoots, and all kinds of stuff. We've done a few, and they are honestly a pain in the butt. They take a toll on the space. People spill stuff and break stuff. It's just not worth it.

Even though people expressed interest in certain types of events, Tom's intentions for the space guided what kinds of events and activities he agreed to host.

On Strength of Community

Founders' intentionality affects the strength of coworking communities not only indirectly, through the decisions founders make about the physical and organizational layout of their spaces or the events and activities they choose to include, if any, but also directly. Founders tend to be individuals with a good deal of social capital and network connections. As most members report interacting regularly and in a positive way with the founders of their spaces, the interactions founders have with members in their coworking spaces can go a long way toward building a stronger coworking community. They not only interact with members themselves, but also connect members with other members, producing even more potential interactions.

The relationship between founders' intentionality and the strength of a coworking community manifests in founders' descriptions of their visions for their space and what they hope to create there. Quinn spoke about a sense of connection with and attachment to the community in reference to her vision for Workmine, which she shared with Tom and Asher, the co-founders of the space. She articulated it this way:

One thing that is important to me, and I know it is important to [Tom] and to [Asher], my bosses, is that we want to create such a great community that when people decide to stop coming here, they feel the loss of that community in some way, shape, or form. But also, my goal long term, I don't know how long it will be, is that we have hit capacity, and we have a wait list, because people have heard how great of a community it is, or we have to expand. I want us to get to that goal.

The desire to create a community that members would feel the loss of or miss if they left the coworking space suggests the intention to build a strong, cohesive community. As displayed in Table 6.1 above, Workmine presents as a cohesive community.

THE EFFECT OF NATURE OF COMMUNITY

On Quality of Community

Coworking members often find it helpful to work around coworkers from their company or comembers who work in the same industry, as this provides people to consult with on issues. Many members reported benefitting from the ability to confer with comembers on a creative problem or technical issue they struggled with. For instance, as the only employee in her company working in her role, Christina found it extremely helpful to have a couple comembers at Workmine doing non-profit work. This offered a unique resource she would not have had available at home or working from her company's office. Similarly, Maggie would "chat" with a comember who worked for a non-profit. She described how she profited from the assistance of comembers in similar fields when explaining why she found it beneficial to have people in the same industry, or with at least some "overlap" with her field:

I think it is really nice to work alongside people who have some sort of overlap. They don't have to do the same thing as you but like it is really nice like if you're in a creative industry, to be able to talk with other creative to kind of think alike. I think, yeah, I have more to talk about with people who have somewhat of a similar career path and also, I think it's definitely really beneficial to just like if you're thinking about a problem or you know you're working on some project, to have other people around to kind of just like over coffee say, "Hey what do you think about this?" That is like really, really good. ...

I think it makes a really big difference socially and then also career-wise, too. It helps you kind of get outside of your own mind and think creatively and find solutions to problems when you're stuck. That happened to me a lot where I just kind of hit a wall and then somebody [at my coworking space] might say something that would help me find a new solution.

Valerie had a similar experience. She explained how she found it helpful sometimes to have conversations with comembers, who do not necessarily do the same kind of work that she and her partner

Dana do:

What I like about the coworking space is that it feels like there's a lot more creativity going around. It's not as stagnant, and we're not only in our business and our management frame of mind. We do kind of get pulled out of it. Sometimes unwillingly, but sometimes we like the break. So, having other people that are doing different things is really nice. If we had our own [office], I think it would be kind of lonely and not

as vibrant because we don't always have people for meetings or conferences or anything. So, I think I really like just all the different things that are going on. Even though they're not in our field or anything, it's nice. Because at the end of the day, we're all young, and we're all starting our own businesses, which I really think is cool. And so, there's something about being at the level that we are right now. I think eventually, yes, we'll be looking for a more permanent spot but financially this makes the most sense right now.

Despite differences in job tasks, Valerie nevertheless perceived a kinship her comembers, who included other young entrepreneurs. Working amongst these other entrepreneurs created a less "stagnant," more "vibrant" work environment, with conversations that pull her and her business partner out of the routine of their own workflow and spark creativity.

However, when asked whether they would like more people from their company or in their profession to work at their coworking space, members most often said that they would like only a few people. They prefer not to be surrounded by workers doing exactly the same thing or exclusively those working in their field. Teresa, from Workmine, also felt that having comembers with different skills sets was helpful, as well as having another web designer, whom she could "bounce ideas off of." When Teresa spoke about learning from other members, I asked whether she found herself learning from members at similar career levels or more advanced in their careers. She stated:

Teresa: I think [I learn] from literally everybody. I mean I learn a lot from [Wendy]: she's the main other designer that I talk with. I mean, I'm sure there are other designers, but she's the main one that I know and work with a lot. And she has different ways of doing things that I don't know, and I have ways of doing things that she doesn't know. So, we just bounce ideas off of each other, come up with ideas, might get inspired by. She has a business on the side; that was really interesting. So, that might kind of make me think about, well what could I do? And then someday something will click and I'll think, ah, that's it. Or, talking to [Kyle] who is a CPA and a wood worker and just getting just really interested in, "well, you know maybe I could just do something else totally different on the side." Or maybe like, "what could I do that's sort of out there?" Or just learning tax and business stuff that I just never got, or from the guys from [the company here], just how they interact with people. And how they were talking about how they introduced themselves to people, and they're friendly and loud, and it's not really, "hi," it's "nice to meet you."

Or and just stuff like that and even things you that you don't necessarily even think of as necessarily job stuff. You just kind of start absorbing the interesting way people do things and the different experiences you hear about through talking to them. Like [Tom's] been at different things, and he knows a ton of stuff, so talking to him you always get good advice on anything, just stuff like that, a whole range of stuff.

But definitely not just people at my level or even doing what I do, 'cause I don't even think there are that many designers who work here. Just sort of the whole range of, I think everybody. You never really know what you're going to get out of talking to someone, not that that's *why* you talk to them, but you never know what you're going to take away. And so, they make you start thinking about something else that you wouldn't have thought about before.

Other members felt similarly divided about the benefit of having coworkers who do similar work. Ethan explained why having comembers who were more like peers than superiors was preferable to him:

Sandra: Comparing your experience in your first job, where you were the only person doing what you were doing, how important is it that you have other coworkers that do the same kind of work that you do? How does that affect your experience working with other people [at Cosite]?

Ethan: I think it definitely affects my work and the difference that I see and I've only really thought about this just now as you're asking the question, so it might not be...I don't know if it's a difference I'm observing right now. When I was doing sales for [my former] company, I was the only one in my position on my level. My boss, who was my direct superior was doing the same thing that I was doing and other things for the company as well, but primarily selling the service. It was different going to ask him questions or for help because he was on a different level than I was. Part of it was that he was very condescending, which was really annoying. That made it difficult to go ask him for help when I knew he was going to be a condescending jerk when he was going to give me the answer.

Having people that are doing what I do or similar things to what I do that are on the same level with me, they are business owners or they're freelancers or they have the same frustrations that I do. They've maybe already found a solution to it because they had to work it out on their own going to them and asking them for help is I think more rewarding for both of us.

If I find a unique solution for something and someone comes to me for help, I'm flattered that they think that I'm an authority on that when I had to struggle to get through it and figure it out myself. If someone is going to come to me for help and guidance, I will gladly spend the time to save them time when I know that they will gladly return the favor in the future. There's like a psychological difference there when you're going to someone who is a peer versus you're going to someone who is a superior.

Sandra: Yeah, your boss is evaluating you also.

Ethan: Yeah, is evaluating me also, and it shows weakness. It shows ineptitude. It shows a lot of different things if you're looking at it from his perspective of a condescending, jerk boss. If you're looking at it from someone who is understanding and sees that this person is actually trying hard to learn something and trying to seek direction and guidance because they want to learn how to do it the right way, that's a different reading of the same interaction. You just happen to choose the one jerky boss that no one wants to get.

Ethan saw value in having peers rather than managers available to answer questions. He also argued that, regardless of what kind of work one's comembers do, there is still something members can learn from their comembers. He had this to say about learning from comembers:

That goes back to the coworking thing, too. Even though there are people working in similar industries, like similar but different companies, or totally different industries, there's always something to be learned from learning about what other people are doing, especially if they are good at what they do.

Thus, occupational diversity, or the type of work members do, may have less effect on interactions in coworking spaces than the quality of work members do. As Ethan put it, if members are good at the work they do, other members can learn from them. Zack also felt that he learned new things from just being around other people in his coworking space. He explained:

But the, just being around all these different areas, I mean you can't help but learn, you know, little tidbits, even on conversations that you're not involved in, and sometimes those end up directing you down new paths. I mean, with some certain kinds of website installations...when the girl in our office who typically does that, when she talks about it, then I learn more and so, that's led me to... That's another avenue that I would like to pursue, you know, aside from the page search thing. So that definitely, it gives me other places that I want to develop myself in.

Being around coworkers in his own office and his comembers at ProShare not only gives Zack “little tidbits” of new information, but also exposes him to new skills and jobs that can lead him down new career paths.

What many workers find most helpful is having comembers who are in related or complementary fields. This complementarity appears to lead to more collaboration. Members with unique skills that many small businesses or entrepreneurs need also tend to benefit from being around comembers in complementary fields. For instance, Victor, the videographer at Alloy, and Kyle, the accountant who works from Cosite and Workmine, collaborated or contracted with many comembers at their respective spaces. In contrast, when little complementarity exists among comembers – that is, the nature of the community veers strongly toward heterogeneous – collaboration may prove harder to come by. For instance, Ian, a real estate professional and member of Cosite, remarked:

In my job, I get a ton of help from people, tons of help. Like all versions of contact help or service help, and it's like that only happens when I stir those things up. I mean, I only interact with the house designer when I need house plans. Or I only interact with a lawyer when I need a closing. Or I only interact with a banker when I need a loan. And that's because in this place there are no house designers or bankers or lawyers or interior decorators or contractors or investors or developers or builders in this place. If there was

any of the related fields were here, then there would be opportunities for collaboration. Yeah, I guess that is what I mean. There is no, I feel like there is no currently related fields here. I mean, my website is half of 1% of my business, you know. It is not important part, and I can talk about that with some people here if I needed to. But it is kind of all fine. That's kind of it, that they're all working in a different world than I am.

Ian tended to look outside his coworking space for help or services, as he did not know of any comembers at Cosite who worked in related fields.

On Strength of Community

The nature of community in a coworking space describes to the extent to which members regard themselves as doing work similar to that of their comembers. These perceptions, in turn, can impact members' willingness to engage with comembers. For those members who perceive that others in the space work in occupations complementary to their own, collaborations and networking may flourish. Alternatively, those in the same profession could also collaborate and network, or offer each other advice, feedback, and guidance. When members view their comembers' work as dissimilar, but value their skills, feedback and guidance are also possible, and instruction is more likely. For instance, although a Web designer and a real estate agent might not be interested in collaborating on projects, or even able to, the Web designer might help the real estate agent edit photos in Photoshop before uploading them to her website.

Nature of community can also refer to the types of workers in the space, such as entrepreneurs, freelancers, remote workers, or small businesses. As discussed above, independent workers may feel alienated if too many of their comembers have coworkers in the space and fail to engage outside of their own groups. For instance, Keira, a former member of Alloy, found it hard to make connections with members in the space who worked with at least one other coworker. The diagram of the theoretical model displays this relationship as a dotted line from nature of community to strength of community,

because the data do not allow a precise determination of how nature of community varies in the four observation sites.

THE EFFECT OF LAYOUT

On Nature of Community

Coworking spaces differ in terms of layout and design. Some offer private offices, cubicles or assigned desks; some have shared tables in an open-plan layout; some have partitions between assigned desks or a mixture of workspaces; some offer studio space or classrooms. When Ethan described what an ideal coworking space would look like, he emphasized amenities and having enough personal space:

For me an ideal coworking space has a lot of different things. Obviously low cost. It's like community driven and it's not like a private office. It's like anything else: if you have a gym membership you're working out with other people versus private training sessions. Costs and then amenities. I would consider like the things we need for productivity to be amenities, so maybe that's a sound system or white noise that helps kind of provide a baseline for sound absorption. Enough private spaces to not be crowded on top [of each other], enough personal space. I think you don't need a 300-square foot private office to be productive. You need really just a desk, where you have your own personal space and enough room to maneuver.

Obviously, every business has its own different requirements. Like, if you are doing something like retail, you need like a loading dock and storage. If you're a web developer, you need high-speed internet. I think [Cosite] probably has the best combination...of the different amenities that would be required for my personal productivity.

As Ethan pointed out, different professions have different requirements for workspace. In this way, the layout of a coworking space and the types of workspaces available there affect the nature of community, the range of work and workers who occupy a coworking space.

On Events and Activities

The layout of the space can also affect what types of events and activities can occur there. For instance, Workmine had a large classroom space, which accommodated guest speakers and classes. Cosite also later constructed a large classroom space to enable them to host courses concerning entrepreneurship and other topics helpful to their members. The physical layout can also impact the times of day when activities occur. Founders of open-plan spaces without separate areas may feel less inclined to allow activities or events during the day, when most members use the space to concentrate on work, to avoid disturbing members. In contrast, separate workspaces, large kitchens or breakrooms, meeting rooms, or outdoor areas offer spaces conducive to daytime events or informal gatherings.

On Strength of Community

Open-plan offices can facilitate communication and interaction among coworkers, and desk-sharing improves communication (deCroon, Sluiter, Kuijer, Frings-Dresen 2010; Stryker and Farris 2004). Yet reductions in worker satisfaction and privacy far exceed the gains realized in communication and team-work (Brennan, Chugh, and Kline 2002; deCroon, Sluiter, Kuijer, Frings-Dresen 2010; Kim and de Dear 2013; Morrison and Macky 2017). Individual differences in satisfaction with open-plan spaces have been shown to relate to job task complexity, office density, and individuals' ability to tune out distracting stimuli: individuals with high stimulus-screening skills have higher satisfaction with open-plan office designs than those with weak stimulus-screening skills (Maher and von Hippel 2005; Oldham, Kulik, and Stepina 1991). Proximity also proves important to community, as the frequency of communication tends to decrease with distance, especially after 30 meters (Allen and Henn 2007). Empirical studies have also found that workstation visibility promotes both team communication and

inter-team interaction (Stryker and Farris 2004⁵⁶, cited in Haner 2005). For instance, members of Cosite noted how the open space and visibility from the front door to most of the desks and tables in the space encourages members to greet their comembers when they arrive.

In this way, the physical layout of a coworking space impacts the frequency and types of interactions in the space. Open spaces tend to encourage interactions among comembers, but they can also present distractions if there is too little room between workspaces. In Alloy, for instance, the coworking area in the second location they occupied left little space between desks. As a result, many members and former members complained of becoming distracted by other members' conversations. Having three or more coworkers working together in an open space seemed to exacerbate distractions of this kind. For instance, Maggie, a former member of Alloy, mentioned the noise generated from a small healthcare-related company that had several coworkers at a table in the middle of the space. Zara also sometimes wished that Workmine's space included a door between the coworking area and the space where a relatively large company worked in the back, as their meetings and conversations could become a bit loud at times.

On the other hand, too much space between work areas may discourage sustained interactions, that is, conversations other than simple greetings. In the early months after Cosite opened and began building up membership, as well as during the slower weeks around the winter holidays, members tended to work scattered around the room, apart from those who had coworkers in the space. As Justine, a member there, mentioned, members can feel intimidated by having to get up and cross the room to talk to someone, rather than simply having comembers working at the same or adjoining workspaces. Several

⁵⁶ Cited as Stryker, J. and Farris, G. (2004) 'Designing the Workplace to Promote Face-to-Face Communication in R&D Project Teams: A Field Study'. Working paper based on Stryker's unpublished dissertation, Rutgers University.

members of ProShare commented that they felt similarly awkward knocking on office doors, preferring to encounter other members in the kitchen area or at events like coffee socials or happy hours.

The location of the kitchen or break area within a coworking space may also have an influence over strength of community, since it can become a site of conflict, as noted above. Locating the kitchen in an area open to workspaces may encourage members to help keep the space clean and discourage pilfering of food, coffee mugs, or utensils, as several ProShare members reported. ProShare's kitchen area was on a separate floor from the coworking table and tucked away from any of the offices. In contrast, no members I spoke with at Cosite complained of this, and their kitchen area was completely open to the rest of the coworking space.

What seems to create stronger communities is open spaces where people can interact, with some private meeting areas or spaces for private conversations, and a balance between too much and too little space between tables or desks. People tend to spread out if space allows, so a large, open area with many different work tables, like the space in Cosite, does not encourage interaction. On the other hand, too little space between work areas, like Alloy's second space, lends itself to less privacy, less of a sound buffer, and more distractions, leading to more negative interactions.

The organizational arrangement of a coworking space – the respective roles assigned to founders, members, and community managers or other staff members – also affects the strength of coworking communities by cultivating connections between members, enculturating members into the norms and values of the community, and minimizing conflict between members. Community managers, in particular, seemed to adopt a prominent role in minimizing common elements of conflict in a space, such as overflowing trash or dishes in the sink, by keeping the space tidy and well-stocked, and by reinforcing social norms, such as washing one's dishes or throwing away leftover food.

THE EFFECT OF EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES ON STRENGTH OF COMMUNITY

Social activities or events hosted in a coworking space can generate introductions and conversations between members and facilitate subsequent interactions in the space. Short activities during the workday, like a coffee social or wellness exercise, or social events after hours, like a happy hour or ping pong tournament, offer prime opportunities for members to mingle and meet each other. Even courses or lectures may present an icebreaker or conversation starter to aid introductions and connections between members. For instance, Workmine hosted weekly wellness-related activities. I attended one of these events along with Christina, Natalie, Quinn, and a couple other members, and found that this spurred social conversations during and afterward, such as casual chatting and references to the shared experience of the activity (e.g., “I see you’re drinking your water today!” or “I need to do one of those stretches.”) Although from the different places where I tended to sit in Workmine, I tended to see at various times Christina, Kyle, Teresa, Quinn, William, and Zara, I seldom ran into Natalie, who worked in an office at the back of the space, apart from seeing her occasionally in the kitchen or perhaps in the outdoor space. In this way, activities in the space help break the ice, so to speak, and increase opportunities for interaction and “accelerate serendipity” (Kwiatkowski 2013; Olma 2012).

Events can also provide a means of connecting to the broader community in which spaces are located. Cosite, for instance, held a ping pong tournament open to members’ partners and other community members. Although, even after Ethan taught me how to serve properly, I was eliminated from the competition rather quickly, the tournament nevertheless offered me and others in the space a chance to chat with people we otherwise may not have. Similarly, when the owner of ProShare launched another flexible work space, the guest list for the grand opening event included members of his staff, tenants of ProShare and other buildings, other coworking space founders, their significant others and guests, and other community members. Again, the event presented me and other members or tenants a

chance to socialize with comembers and community members. Open events like these can also help introduce coworking to the community and attract new members to the space.

DISCUSSION

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The research presented here has served to construct a sociological theory of coworking communities. Chapter 1 introduced three conceptualizations central to the elaboration of a theoretical model: nature of community, quality of community, and strength of community. Chapter 2 presented a typology of members' intentionality: productivity, sociability, separation, and variety. Chapter 3 presented a typology of founders' intentionality: entrepreneurial, collaborative, and communal. Chapter 4 examined the concept of quality of community and how it varies from instrumental to hybrid to affective. I also argued that coworking communities represent a contemporary form of *Genossenschaft*. Chapter 5 investigated the strength of coworking communities and how it varies from conflicting to cooperative to cohesive. Chapter 6 integrated these elements into a theoretical model, summarized by Figure 6.1.

As Figure 6.1 illustrates, the intentionality of coworking members and founders exerts a strong influence on the nature, quality, and strength of coworking communities. Founders' intentionality influences nature of community through membership curation. It also directly impacts strength of community in terms of the interactions they have with members and the connections they make between comembers, as well as indirectly through physical and organizational layout and events and activities they host in the space. Members' intentionality affects both quality of community through the types of

interactions members choose to have in the space and strength of community through members' willingness to engage with their comembers and conform to the social norms of the coworking space.

SIGNIFICANCE AND BROADER IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

The theoretical model of coworking communities articulated here and the ethnographic data supporting it, contribute in several ways to the literature on post-bureaucratic employment relations and the new sociology of work, meanings of work, and occupational communities. First, coworking offers a novel type of post-bureaucratic work arrangement in which to examine workers' experiences, as much of the literature on post-bureaucratic employment relations focuses on contingent labor in the technological and creative industries, especially during the dot.com boom era. In contrast, while coworking embodies features of post-bureaucratic employment and restructured workplaces, such as independent workers, flexibility, and reduced hierarchy, it includes a mix of contingent labor and permanent employment and is associated with Web 2.0 and the sharing economy in the post-dot.com boom era, thus extending available empirical data in this field across a broader historical, economic period.

Second, with a research setting of coworking spaces, the ethnographic data, particularly from interviews, offers a view into the lived experiences of workers in a unique post-bureaucratic workplace. More specifically, the findings reveal how membership in coworking communities provides valuable interpersonal resources, like encouragement, support, and guidance, as well as physical resources necessary for business, offered at a reduced cost. These resources help independent workers and freelancers manage risk more comfortably and effectively. Additionally, the discussion addresses the issue of rational action in post-bureaucratic workplaces, suggesting that, as loyalty to an organization no longer appears rational in the contemporary era, building relations of trust with a community of peers may

function as a rational means of pursuing work goals. As noted, these communities aid workers in minimizing risk and pooling the costs associated with operating a business.

Third, the results of the research expand existing knowledge about the meanings of work, particularly for independent and remote workers, and the role of workplace communities in the process of meaning making. This research study introduced a theoretical framework for analyzing workplace communities along the dimensions of nature, quality, and strength, the latter having particular relevance for the literature on meanings of work. The strength of coworking communities is a function of the kinds of interactions members have. It measures the extent to which community membership helps members to identify positively with and derive a high level meaning from their work, and enables members' coworking relationships and activities to permeate their non-work lives. Further, these communities may help workers ascribe extra-organizational meaning to their intra-organizational work. As career paths within organizations continue to disappear, a community of peers like those in coworking spaces can help lend meaning and structure to workers' experiences and expertise as they work toward a desired career path. Thus, the findings of this study reveal the importance of social interaction and support in the meaning individuals derive from their work. Additionally, scholars investigating meanings of work in post-bureaucratic workplaces or the gig economy may find the theoretical concept of strength of community useful for their research.

Lastly, this dissertation offers a new concept, or rather a new use for an existing concept, of community. I have argued here that coworking communities constitute a contemporary form of *Genossenschaft* and have demonstrated how these communities vary from instrumental to affective, based on interactions within them. As existing definitions of occupational community may not adequately describe relationships between workers in the context of shifting employment relations and new work

situations, the concept of *Genossenschaft* may be helpful for scholars of workplace communities, as well as scholars interested in the broader theme of community in the contemporary era.

CONCLUSION

LIMITATIONS, UNANSWERED QUESTIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

By focusing on specific aspects of the social world, sociological research necessarily excludes or overlooks others. The typologies and theoretical model expounded here have derived from a focus primarily on the interpersonal and professional resources available to members of coworking communities. An economic analysis it was not. Although the discussion does address how membership in these communities facilitates networking and collaboration, as well as providing a source of clients for some members, the research design did not aim to measure direct financial gains attained from membership in coworking spaces.

In addition, as coworking represents a relatively new social phenomenon with little empirical data available, particularly sociological studies, the purpose of this study was theory generation, rather than theory testing. Apart from some meta-analyses, theory-generating research often has limited generalizability, in that the findings derive from a small number of cases. In terms of generalizability of the findings, it will be the task of future studies to test the generalizability of the theoretical model proposed here with larger scale survey research or datasets.

Nature of Community

As noted above, the data collected in this research do not permit a detailed account of variation in nature of community. Scholars wishing to examine more closely the effect of this element of coworking communities would likely need the approval and participation of all members of a coworking space. Surveys for this purpose might include questions aimed at documenting both self-identifications of member occupations and perceptions of comembers' occupations. As identified in this dissertation, members make other distinctions among comembers of potential interest to scholars, such as neighborhood of residence, or entrepreneurs versus remote workers employed by a company.

The Relationship between Quality of Community and Strength of Community

In my data, the relationship between quality of community and strength of community appeared somewhat curvilinear. Coworking spaces where quality of community tended toward the ends of the scale – either affective or instrumental – also experienced higher strength of community (cohesive or cooperative-cohesive), whereas hybrid communities had medium-strength community (cooperative). Future research could test whether that relationship holds for other coworking spaces. Since the coworking space with the most instrumental quality of community had lower strength of community than the space that measured the most affective in terms of quality, it may be that the relationship between quality and strength is more linear than curvilinear. That is, higher strength may be associated with affective quality of community and lower strength with instrumental quality of community. Additional cases would be needed to make that assessment.

Power and Social Control

The discussion here has largely neglected issues of power and social control. To contextualize the importance of trust in coworking communities, for example, I relied upon commonly referenced definitions of social capital (e.g., Cohen and Prusak 2001; Putnam 2000), which some scholars have critiqued for failing to analyze how power functions in the production of communities (see, for example, DeFilippis 2001). Scholarship on social capital has also revealed “three basic functions of social capital, applicable in a variety of contexts: (a) as a source of social control; (b) as a source of family support; (c) as a source of benefits through extrafamilial networks” (Portes 1998: 9). However, the research presented here concerns only the latter function, and focused primarily on contributing to scholarship in the areas of occupational communities, meanings of work, and the new sociology of work, rather than the literature on social capital. Future research could explore more thoroughly issues of power at work in coworking communities, as well as the idea of precarity as a means of social control and the role of peer communities in that context. For instance, in what ways do peer communities like coworking spaces reinforce or resist organizations’ social control in the post-bureaucratic era of increased precarity and risk individualization?

Post-Bureaucracy and Diversity

Weber ([1922] 1978) asserted that the necessary preconditions for the emergence of bureaucracy were population growth, the increasing complexity of administrative tasks, and the existence of a monetary economy that required a more efficient system. Concomitant with the shift from communal management to bureaucratic, and from traditional authority to rational-legal authority, Weber saw the rationalization of all areas of society and increasing democratization. Since Weber’s time, a growing commitment to social equality and equal treatment under the law has been accommodated reasonably well

within the bureaucratic system, which purports to remain neutral in its implementation of rules and advancement based on individual qualifications, rather than kinship and personal relationships. Yet, as mentioned in Chapter 4, informal, peer relations occur within, but are not effectively managed by, bureaucracies, which are structured around hierarchical, top-down flows of information and authority. These informal systems and relationships tend to function well in homogeneous groups in which similarity facilitates trust (Heckscher 1994); however, they do not easily accommodate diversity. It remains to be seen whether the post-bureaucratic, interactive type of *Genossenschaft* will fare better in this regard.

Member Diversity

White, middle-class men remain overrepresented among independent workers and entrepreneurs. My data suggest that white, middle-class, professional women integrate well into communities of post-bureaucratic workers and attain considerable benefits from them. Yet people of color were notably absent from, or at least scarce in, the coworking spaces I visited or observed. This suggests that these spaces, for the time being, remain privileged spaces. Future studies incorporating more ethnically and racially diverse coworking communities could provide insight into how this kind of member diversity affects members' perception about the nature of community and what impact that has on the quality and strength of coworking communities.

The Impact of Location

My data suggest that location may have an influence on the nature and strength of coworking communities. A coworking space's location within the city may influence the nature of the community, in that some members choose coworking spaces for proximity to their homes. If the space is not located

in a residential area, that could dissuade potential members who want a space close to home. Access to neighborhood services and amenities may also affect the strength of coworking communities. When members have the ability to go home and come back, or go to lunch, run an errand, grab a coffee, and come back to the space, it could encourage members to use the space. It may also promote a more permeable boundary between work and home life.

Durability of Coworking Spaces

As more and more prospective members seek private offices, founders must weigh the demand for privacy and individual workspaces with their vision for their coworking space. The needs of the existing community also factor into their decisions about how, whether, and when to expand or alter their spaces. Some founders may decide that the demand for private offices does not align with their vision for an open-plan space. Tom and his co-founder, for instance, ultimately decided to close Workmine rather than change the space into what they felt other spaces in Riverport already offered. As other less cohesive spaces in Riverport continue to operate, and new, potentially entrepreneurial spaces open, future studies may find a connection between the durability of coworking spaces and the quality and strength of coworking communities. It may be that affective, cohesive coworking communities are more difficult to sustain.

FINAL THOUGHTS

From the initiation of this study, what I anticipated would result from the research is a contribution to an ongoing dialogue, both academic and public, about the types of work arrangements that enable individuals to derive high levels of meaning from their work and form satisfying relationships with members of a community. I endeavored to produce scholarship valuable to both sociologists and

independent workers, that could aid the latter in their future decisions about work and advocating for the types of employment relations and work environments they want and need to be successful in the new economy. I hope that my participants enjoyed the opportunity to reflect on their work goals and the meaning they derive from their work. At the very least, I trust that readers came away with a deeper understanding of the benefits and challenges of coworking, and the role of coworking communities in helping workers manage risk and create new meanings of work.

The sociological theory of coworking spaces elaborated in this dissertation addresses the impact of coworking founders' and members' intentionality on the nature, quality, and strength of coworking communities. The results of this research propose that founders' visions for what they hope to create in their coworking spaces, as well as the decisions they make about how and when to include coworking members in decisions about the growth and development of the space, can have significant effects on the communities that form in their coworking spaces and the benefits of membership. Members also appear to have a great deal of impact over the strength of their coworking communities, as their reasons for joining a coworking space and what they hope to gain from membership affect the types of interactions that tend to occur there. Their willingness to engage with other members and to comply with the social norms of a space affects the net balance of positive interactions and degree of conflict between comembers, which reflects the strength of the community. Ultimately, this suggests that each of us may play a significant role in building the kind of communities we want to be part of.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR COWORKING MEMBERS

Thank you again for agreeing to be interviewed. In a moment, I am going to turn on the tape recorder and ask you some questions about your work and what made you decide to start working here in this space, and then we'll talk about your experiences with coworking. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Okay, let's get started. [*If interviewee agreed to be recorded, begin taping.*]

CURRENT PROFESSION

I'd like to begin by asking you about the type of work you do currently.

1. What is your job title?
2. What is your profession?
3. Nature and size of organization:
 - a. What organization do you work for? [*If interviewee is self-employed, skip to question 4.*]
 - b. Is your organization public or private?
 - c. How many employees work at your organization?
 - d. How many people here at [name of coworking space] also work at your organization?
4. How long have you been in your current job?

NATURE OF WORK AND WORK ENVIRONMENT

My next questions concern the nature of your work and your work environment.

5. How often do you work here at [name of coworking space]?
 - a. [If applicable] where else do you work?
6. Tell me about what you do during a typical work day.
7. How would you compare the work you do to the work that others in this space do?
8. With the type of work you currently do in mind, describe your ideal work environment.
9. If you were in your dream job right now, how would the work environment you just described be different?

SELECTION OF COWORKING SPACE AND PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH COWORKING

Now, I would like to talk to you about how you began coworking generally and why you chose this particular space.

10. First, tell me where you worked before you started coworking.
11. What made you decide to start coworking?
12. What experience did you have with coworking before you started working here?
 - a. [If interviewee has worked at other coworking spaces,] how does this space compare to other coworking spaces you have worked at?
13. How does this space compare to places where you worked before you began coworking?
14. How long have you been working here at [name of coworking space]?
15. Why did you choose this space in particular?
16. When you first began working here, what surprised you about your experience?

RESOURCES

We've talked a bit about your job and your decision to join this space. Now, I'd like to delve a bit deeper into the benefits you derive from coworking generally and from working here specifically. So, I'm going to ask you about the types of resources you use here. They could be materials or equipment you have access to, events or workshops here, or perhaps collaboration or support you receive from other members here.

17. Tell me about some of the resources available here.
 - a. What resources do you use regularly?
 - b. What resources do you appreciate most?
18. What resources *not* available here would you like to have in a coworking space?
19. In what ways has coworking impacted your experience of work?
 - a. [Potential follow-on question if interviewee does not contrast current with previous experience:] How does your experience with coworking differ from your previous experience of work?
20. In what ways has your work been affected by the other people who work at [name of coworking space]?

INTERACTIVITY

I'd like to talk briefly about your social life and interactions with other people who work in your organization in this space.

21. Outside of working hours, how often do you participate in group activities organized by the organization you currently work for?
 - a. [If applicable] what types of activities do you participate in?
22. Outside of working hours, how often do you participate in group activities organized by [name of the coworking space] or by other members here?
 - a. [If applicable] what types of activities do you participate in?
23. On the days you work here, how often do you talk to other members about non-business topics?
24. On the days you work here, how often do you talk to other members about business-related topics?

MEANING OF WORK

Shifting from our discussion about resources and social interaction, I would like to turn now to your personal experience here and with the practice of coworking, as well as your experiences in your working life as a whole. The questions I am going to ask you focus on your views about the meaning and purpose of work.

25. If someone were to ask you why you work, what would you tell them?
26. If you had enough money to live comfortably for the rest of your life without working, would you continue working?
 - a. Why or why not?
 - b. [If yes] would you continue working in the same job? Why or why not?
27. What is the most important thing to you about working?
28. How has coworking influenced what you consider to be the purpose of work?
29. What do you hope to get out of the work that you're doing now in your current job? [If interviewee needs prompts: new skills, experience, contacts?]
 - a. In what ways does coworking facilitate or constrain those goals?
30. Describe what makes work meaningful for you.
 - a. What role, if any, does coworking play in making work meaningful for you?
31. Values:
 - a. Thinking about coworking generally, beyond just Nashville, what do you think the values of coworking are?
 - b. What are the values of this coworking space in particular?
 - c. How does this space reflect your personal values?
 - d. How has working here influenced you in terms of your values?

WRAPPING UP

32. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you would like to share?
33. Who else do you think I should talk to?

[Give interviewee questionnaire to complete.]

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FOUNDERS, AND MANAGERS

Thank you again for agreeing to be interviewed. In a moment, I am going to turn on the tape recorder and ask you some questions about your work and what made you decide to become involved with this space, and then we'll talk more about your experiences with coworking. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Okay, let's get started. [*If interviewee agreed to be recorded, begin taping.*]

CURRENT PROFESSION AND NATURE OF WORK

I'd like to begin by asking you about the type of work you do currently and your role here.

1. What is your job title?
2. What is your profession?
3. Nature and size of organization:
 - a. What organization do you work for? [*If interviewee is self-employed or works only for the coworking space, skip to question 4.*]
 - b. Is your organization public or private?
 - c. How many employees work at your organization?
 - d. How many people here at [name of coworking space] also work at your organization?
4. How long have you been in your current job?
5. What is your role here at [name of coworking space]?
6. Tell me about you do during a typical work day.
7. How would you compare the work you do to the work that others in this space do?

INVOLVEMENT WITH COWORKING SPACE AND PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH COWORKING

Now, I would like to talk to you about how you became involved with coworking generally and why you chose to open or participate in this particular space.

8. What experience did you have with coworking before your involvement with [name of coworking space]?
 - a. [*If interviewee has worked at other coworking spaces*] how does this space compare to other coworking spaces you have worked at?
9. Where did you work before you started coworking?
 - a. How does this space compare to places where you worked before you began coworking?
10. Involvement with coworking space:
 - a. *For founders:* What made you decide to open a coworking space?
 - b. *For directors or managers:* How did you become involved with [name of coworking space]?
11. Length of involvement [if not answered by the questions above]:

- a. *For founders:* When did you open this space?
- b. *For directors or managers:* How long have you worked here?

RESOURCES

Now, I would like to learn more about what you see as the benefits of coworking generally and the resources of this space specifically. When I ask you about the types of resources available here, they could be materials or equipment you provide, events or workshops held here, or perhaps cooperation fostered among the members here.

12. In a general sense, what do you think the benefits of coworking are?
13. Tell me about some of the resources available here at [name of coworking space].
 - a. What resources do your members use most regularly?
 - b. What resources do you think set your space apart from others in Nashville?
14. What resources *not* available here do you think your members might like to have in a coworking space?
15. In what ways has your involvement with coworking impacted your experience of work?
 - a. [Potential follow-on question if interviewee does not contrast current with previous experience:] How does your experience with coworking differ from your previous experience of work?
16. In what ways has your work been affected by the other people who work at [name of coworking space]?

INTENTIONALITY

We've talked a bit about your work and the resources available here. Now, I'd like to delve a bit deeper into your views about coworking and your goals for this space.

17. *For founders:* What made you choose this space in particular to start a coworking space?
18. Tell me about your vision for [name of coworking space]. What do you hope to achieve here?
19. What do you view as the essential elements of a successful coworking space?
20. What do you feel is your role in making this space successful?
21. When you first [began working here/opened this space], what were some of the challenges you encountered? How did you overcome these challenges?

INTERACTIVITY

Next, let's talk briefly about social interactions among the people who work in this space.

22. What types of group activities are available to your members?
23. Outside of working hours, how often do you participate in group activities organized for members or organized *by* other members here?

- a. [If applicable] what types of activities do you participate in?
- 24. On the days you work here, how often do you talk to other members about non-business topics?
- 25. On the days you work here, how often do you talk to other members about business-related topics?

MEANING OF WORK

Shifting from our discussion about resources and social interaction, I would like to turn now to your personal experience here and with the practice of coworking, as well as your experiences in your working life as a whole. The questions I am going to ask you focus on your views about the meaning and purpose of work.

- 26. If someone were to ask you why you work, what would you tell them?
- 27. If you had enough money to live comfortably for the rest of your life without working, would you continue working?
 - a. Why or why not?
 - b. [If yes] would you continue working in the same job? Why or why not?
- 28. What is the most important thing to you about working?
- 29. How has coworking influenced what you consider to be the purpose of work?
- 30. What do you hope to get out of the work that you're doing now in your current job? [If interviewee needs prompts: new skills, experience, contacts?]
 - a. In what ways does coworking facilitate or constrain those goals?
- 31. Describe what makes work meaningful for you.
 - a. What role, if any, does coworking play in making work meaningful for you?
- 32. Values:
 - a. Thinking about the coworking generally, beyond just Nashville, what do you think the values of coworking are?
 - b. What are the values of this coworking space in particular?
 - c. How does this space reflect your personal values?
 - d. How has working here influenced you in terms of your values?

WRAPPING UP

- 33. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you would like to share?
- 34. Who else do you think I should talk to?

[Give interviewee questionnaire to complete.]

APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE⁵⁷

Please circle the letter next to the response of your choice and fill in the blanks, where appropriate.

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CURRENT WORK SITUATION

1. Your current position is primarily:
 - a. Non-supervisory
 - b. Supervisory
 - c. Managerial

2. On average, how many hours a week do you work (including overtime or at home)?
 - a. _____ hours

3. On average, how much time do you spend traveling to and from work (total) each day?
 - a. _____ minutes

4. On average, how much time do you spend working from the coworking space you are a member of? (Fill in each blank.)
 - a. _____ days per week
 - b. _____ days per month
 - c. _____ hours per week
 - d. _____ hours per month

5. On average, how much time do you spend working from home? (Fill in each blank.)
 - a. _____ days per week
 - b. _____ days per month
 - c. _____ hours per week
 - d. _____ hours per month

6. Besides home or the coworking space you are a member of, where else do you work?
 - a. I don't usually work anywhere else besides those two places.
 - b. I sometimes work _____

7. On average, how much time do you spend working from this/these other location(s)? (Fill in each blank.)
 - a. _____ days per week

⁵⁷ Many of the questions in this questionnaire are adapted or directly quoted from *The Meaning of Working* by MOW International Research Team, published by Academic Press, Inc. (1987).

- b. _____ days per month
 - c. _____ hours per week
 - d. _____ hours per month
8. Your work hours are primarily:
- a. Regular
 - b. Varied
9. Have you been unemployed in the last 5 years?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
10. If yes, for how many months in the past 5 years?
- a. _____ month(s)
 - b. Not applicable
11. If yes, for how many months in the past 12 months?
- a. _____ month(s)
 - b. Not applicable

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CURRENT JOB

12. Which statement best describes your current job? (Please circle one letter only.)
- a. I often do the same things over and over or use the same piece of equipment or procedure almost all the time.
 - b. There is some variety in my job. I use different pieces of equipment or procedures.
 - c. I do many different things and use a wide variety of equipment or procedures.
13. Which statement best describes your current job? (Please circle one letter only.)
- a. My employer supplies or pays for all of the equipment and technology required to do my job.
 - b. My employer supplies or pays for some of the equipment and technology required to do my job.
 - c. I supply all of the equipment and technology required to do my job.
14. Which statement best describes your current job? (Please circle one letter only.)
- a. There is little room for me to make decisions about my work and its procedures.
 - b. I make some of the decisions about my work about my work and its procedures.
 - c. I make all or nearly all of the decisions about my work and its procedures.
15. Which statement best describes your current job? (Please circle one letter only.)
- a. Mistakes in my work do not have serious consequences for the organization or for other people.
 - b. Mistakes in my work may have somewhat serious consequences for the organization or for other people.

- c. Mistakes in my work may have serious consequences for the organization or for other people.
16. Which statement best describes your current job? (Please circle one letter only.)
- a. Doing my job does not really allow me to learn new things.
 - b. Sometimes I can learn something new doing my job.
 - c. My work allows me to learn many new things.
17. Which statement best describes your current job? (Please circle one letter only.)
- a. My employer provides or pays for training courses related to my job.
 - b. I pay for any training courses I take.
 - c. I have not completed any training courses while in my current job.
18. Which statement best describes your current job? (Please circle one letter only.)
- a. I do my work alone.
 - b. I work with some other people, but this is not a big part of my job.
 - c. Working with other people is a very big part of my job.
19. Which statement best describes your current job? (Please circle one letter only.)
- a. There is rarely a chance during the work day to talk to other people about non-business topics.
 - b. I sometimes have the opportunity during the work day to talk to other people about non-business topics.
 - c. There is very often or almost always an opportunity during the work day to talk to other people about non-business topics.
20. How much of your past experience, skills, and abilities can you make use of in your present job?
- a. Very little
 - b. A little
 - c. A lot
 - d. Almost all
21. Which of the following statements best describes your relationship with your supervisor?
- a. I do not have a supervisor.
 - b. He/she does not inform me at all about his/her decisions.
 - c. He/she informs me after he/she has made his/her decisions.
 - d. He/she usually asks for my advice or input before making decisions.
 - e. We usually make decisions jointly.
 - f. He/she allows me to make most decisions on my own.

**QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR FUTURE WORK PLANS AND WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN IN
THE FUTURE**

22. Do you intend to change jobs within the next twelve months?
- a. No

b. Yes

23. If no, write "N/A" in the space below. If yes, what are you looking for in another job?

(Continue on the back of page, if needed.)

24. What other significant plans do you have regarding working during the next five years?

(Continue on the back of page, if needed.)

25. In the next five to ten years, what societal developments do you think could endanger your employment?

(Continue on the back of page, if needed.)

26. In the next five to ten years, what societal developments do you think could improve your employment situation or make it more secure?

(Continue on the back of page, if needed.)

27. Compared to the present time, how important will work be to you in the next five to ten years?
- a. Less important
 - b. Equal in importance
 - c. More important

28. What are the reasons for your answer to the question above?

(Continue on the back of page, if needed.)

29. Imagine if in the future people were able to work fewer hours for the same pay; which alternative would be most preferable to you? (Pick only one.)
- a. More paid holidays
 - b. More paid vacation days
 - c. A free afternoon each week
 - d. One less hour of work per day
 - e. Longer periods of education before beginning to work
 - f. A year off for further study about every ten years
 - g. A year off for travel or personal pursuits about every ten years
 - h. Less working hours for older workers
 - i. Earlier retirement

30. If the general economic situation in the future led to proposals to work fewer hours and earn proportionately less money, how would you feel about such proposals?
- a. I would be against them.
 - b. I don't really care one way or the other.
 - c. I would be moderately in favor of them.
 - d. I would be in favor of them.

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU, YOUR BACKGROUND, AND YOUR FAMILY

31. What is your age? _____
32. What is your gender? _____
33. What is your race? _____
34. What is your ethnicity? _____
35. What was the highest level of formal education you completed? (Circle only one.)
- a. Primary/elementary school
 - b. Secondary/high school diploma or equivalent
 - c. Some college or vocational training
 - d. Associate's degree or professional certification below university level
 - e. Bachelor's degree
 - f. Master's degree
 - g. Doctoral degree
36. What was the highest level of formal education completed by your parents or other primary guardians?
- Father or other primary guardian (indicate if other: _____)
- a. Primary/elementary school
 - b. Secondary/high school diploma or equivalent
 - c. Some college or vocational training
 - d. Associate's degree or professional certification below university level
 - e. Bachelor's degree
 - f. Master's degree
 - g. Doctoral degree
- Mother or other primary guardian (indicate if other: _____)
- a. Primary/elementary school
 - b. Secondary/high school diploma or equivalent
 - c. Some college or vocational training
 - d. Associate's degree or professional certification below university level
 - e. Bachelor's degree
 - f. Master's degree
 - g. Doctoral degree
37. Are you married and/or living with a partner in a joint household?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
38. How many persons do you support financially (including yourself)?
- a. _____

39. What other information about you do you feel is important for me to know?

– End of questionnaire. Thank you very much! –

APPENDIX D: INVITATION EMAIL TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Dear Mr./Ms. _____,

[Referring Participant Name] provided me with your contact information. I am a graduate student in Sociology at Vanderbilt, and I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting for my dissertation. My research examines how different types of coworking spaces emerge and how coworking groups form a community.

I am interested in speaking with you about your experiences with coworking. Your participation is completely voluntary and would entail completing an approximately hour-long interview and a brief questionnaire. Your responses will be confidential.

You can reach me at sandra.c.arch@vanderbilt.edu if you have any questions or would like to schedule a time to meet.

Thank you for considering my request to participate. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Sandra Arch

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEWEES' DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

#	Pseudonym	Site	Role	Occupational Category	Age at Interview*	Race/Ethnicity**	Marital Status at Interview
1	Abby	GCUC	Founder	Information Technology	45	Not given	Not given
2	Ben	Alloy	Founder	Coworking, Media/Publishing, Graphic Design	27	White/Caucasian/European American	Cohabiting
3	Brooke	GCUC	Founder	Art, Design	32	Not given	Not given
4	Christina	Workmine	Member	Non-profit	32	Caucasian/Italian, Croatian, and Irish	Single
5	Connor	ProShare	Member	Software Development	33	Not given	Single
6	Dana	Alloy	Member	Music Management	29	Caucasian	Married
7	Dean	ProShare	Staff	Property Development and Management	26	White/American	Single
8	Emily	ProShare	Member	Research	24	Not given	Married
9	Ethan	Cosite	Member	Design; Consulting & Marketing	24	White/Jewish	Single
10	Francesca	Cosite	Staff	Coworking, Marketing	25	Not given	Engaged
11	Frederick	GCUC	Founder	Hospitality, Entrepreneurship	60	Not given	Not given
12	Gabriel	ProShare	Founder	Real Estate	36	White/Western European	Married
13	Gwen	GCUC	Founder	Coworking, Marketing	44	Not given	Married
14	Hallie	Alloy, Crossings	Member	Non-profit, Ministry	22	Not given	Single
15	Harrison	GCUC	Founder	Information Technology	36	White/Australian, Chilean	Married
16	Ian	Cosite	Member	Real Estate	38	Caucasian/Caucasian	Single
17	Isabel ("Izzy")	ProShare	Member	Real Estate	28	Not given	Single
18	Jake	GCUC	Founder	Coworking	40	White/White	Married
19	Justine	Cosite	Member	Health and Fitness	30	White/Caucasian	Married

#	Pseudonym	Site	Role	Occupational Category	Age at Interview*	Race/Ethnicity**	Marital Status at Interview
20	Keira	Alloy, CO2	Member	Media, Web Development	30	Caucasian/ German, mixed	Single
21	Kyle	Cosite, Workmine	Member	Accounting	24	Not given	Not given
22	Landon	Alloy	Member	Web Design	24	Not given	Married
23	Lori	GCUC	Founder	Information Technology	33	Not given	Not given
24	Maggie	Alloy, CO2	Member	Non-profit, Communications	28	Caucasian/ Caucasian	Married
25	Mason	GCUC	Staff	Coworking	27	Not given	Not given
26	Natalie	Workmine	Member	Project Management, Animation/Creative Agency	26	Race is a social construct/ European	Engaged
27	Nate	GCUC	Founder	Coworking	38	White/ White	Engaged
28	Olivia	ProShare	Staff	Commercial Development, Management	26	White	Single
29	Owen	Cosite	Founder	Coworking, Business Services	26	Mexican/ Hispanic	Single
30	Paige	Cosite	Member	Public Policy/ Non-profit	27	White/ Polish American	Single
31	Paul	Alloy	Member	Delivery Services	33	Not given	Not given
32	Quinn	Workmine	Staff	Coworking	30	White/ American	Single
33	Robin	ProShare	Member	Real Estate	29	Not given	Not given
34	Sean	GCUC	Founder	Consulting, Various Industries	30	Not given	Not given
35	Summer	ProShare	Member	Real Estate	37	Not given	Not given
36	Tom	Workmine	Founder	Coworking, Education	37	Caucasian/ American	Married
37	Teresa	Workmine	Member	Graphic Design	32	White/ Non-Hispanic	Single
38	Valerie	Alloy	Member	Music Management	25	White/ Italian	Single
39	Victor	Alloy	Member	Video Production	23	Not given	Not given
40	William	Workmine	Member	Non-Profit Design	31	White/ White	Married

#	Pseudonym	Site	Role	Occupational Category	Age at Interview*	Race/ Ethnicity**	Marital Status at Interview
41	Xavier	GCUC	Founder	Coworking, Consulting	36	Not given	Married
42	Zack	ProShare	Member	Online Marketing	36	Caucasian/ American	Married
43	Zara	Workmine	Member	Tech/ Entertainment/ Music	29	White/ Jewish, Russian, Polish	Married

* Interviews were conducted from May 2, 2014 to July 9, 2015. GCUC participants' interviews took place between May 2, 2014 and July 14, 2014. Interviewees from the remaining sites (Alloy, Cosite, ProShare, and Workmine) took place between October 15, 2014 and July 9, 2015.

**Race and Ethnicity were self-reported in response to an open-ended survey question.