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Coworking as a New Innovation Scenario from the Perspective of Mature Organisations

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Abstract

This article discusses the relatively young phenomenon of coworking and its value propositions from a company's perspective. It aims at giving an overview of the current research on coworking with a special focus on coworking as "third places" for mature organisations. In contrast to startups, freelancers and micro businesses, which use coworking spaces as their primary work location, traditional organisations dispose of a corporate office and use coworking only as an alternative work scenario for a variety of purposes. Based on a cross-disciplinary literature review, an evaluation of the current state of research on coworking from a company's perspective is given. Due to the absence of extensive research on companies as beneficiaries of coworking spaces, no existing classification or analyses of value propositions could be identified. However, the authors propose a research landscape of coworking from a company's perspective with a focus on the question, of how coworking correlates with drivers of an innovation culture. The article concludes with looking at current developments, both in the coworking offering as well as the demand side.

Keywords: *Alternative Work Scenarios, Corporate Culture, Coworking, Innovation Culture, Transformation*

Track: *Entrepreneurship*

Word count: 6.020

1. Introduction

It was in 2005 when Brad Neuberg first coined the term "coworking" – a terminology he used to describe what he was aiming at by founding the first official coworking space in San Francisco at "Spiral Muse" (Spinuzzi, 2012). The idea was simple: he was looking for a compromise on two conflicting interests. Working as an independent professional while at the same time being part of a community (Neuberg, 2005). Little did he know that by solving his personal need he started – or at least gave name to – a bigger movement which should later become one of the most prominent examples of the sharing economy (Lessing, 2008) with regard to the transformation of work (Botsman & Rogers, 2011; Gandini, 2015).

After Brad Neuberg ignited the spark for something that should not be limited to a new spatial work concept, but rather be understood as a global movement and symbol for a fundamental transformation in economy and society, the phenomenon started to grow exponentially worldwide, reaching 13'800 spaces and 1'180'000 members (the latter figure is less reliable as a clear definition of "members" is missing) by October 31, 2016 (Deskmag,

2017). This impressive growth rate - although the turning point regarding the net growth of the number of coworking spaces was reached in 2015 – is even more remarkable, considering that the phenomenon spread without any coordinating forces. Rather the opposite: coworking associations only formed retrospectively, e.g. Coworking Switzerland and Germany in 2015 (Deskmag, 2015), when the driving forces started to realise that they have to join forces to fight for their cause with the goal to attract the interest of a broader audience. According to the 2017 Global Coworking Survey from Deskmag, the majority of coworking spaces is still not profitable, although the share of self-sustaining spaces grew from 32% in 2013 to 40% in 2016 (Deskmag, 2017).

More than a decade after the emergence of coworking, the topic gained interest far beyond the independent workers and the associated research community. While the original idea of “working alone, together” (Spinuzzi, 2012) still dominates the discussion, new scenarios of usage and audiences join as the phenomenon matures, leading to a more profound and relevant debate. Besides thematical variations of the topic, such as libraries as coworking spaces, where social and collaborative learning scenarios are explored (Bilandzic & Foth, 2013; Schopf, Roche & Hubert, 2015) or coworking spaces as part of the public service infrastructure (Capdevila, 2014; Brown, 2017) one development clearly marks a turning point: the increasing interest of corporates. Escaping isolation is clearly not a motive for them, considering that they dispose of a fully functional corporate office. Not only do they already have a center of gravity; most companies which still operate traditional workplace concepts (single/small offices, assigned desks) fight the problem of poorly utilised space, given the increasing mobility and flexibility of their workforce (Spreitzer, Garrett & Bacevice, 2015). So why should they pay for something they have in abundance? Moreover, given that a considerable fraction of managers still monitors physical presence as an indicator for productivity, why should companies pay their employees for being out of control and out of synch (Hinds & Bailey, 2003)?

2. Definitions and value propositions

Before looking deeper at the motives of organisations, which are the main focus of this article, a definition encompassing also target groups that only joined the coworking movement at a later stage, shall first be given. As coworking is from an academic point of view still a relatively young discipline, there is, despite the growing interest and attention from scholars and practitioners, no uniform understanding of what coworking is and how it is defined - besides the first definition of Brad Neuberg in 2005 which was strongly focusing on the aspect of community with the goal to fight against the risk of isolation (Jones, Sundsted & Bacigalupo, 2009). These initial thoughts are also well reflected in the definition captured in the often cited Coworking Wiki¹ based on the five values of the Coworking Manifesto²: *“The idea is simple: independent professionals and those with workplace flexibility work better together than they do alone. Coworking spaces are about community-building and sustainability. Participants agree to uphold the values set forth by the movement’s founders,*

¹ <http://wiki.coworking.org/w/page/16583831/FrontPage#whatiscoworking> [6 January 2018].

² <https://www.coworkingmanifesto.com/> [6 January 2018].

as well as interact and share with one another. We are about creating better places to work and as a result, a better way to work.” Even though this definition includes also corporate coworkers by adding “and those with workplace flexibility” the justification “work better together than they do alone” does not consider the situation of company representatives, who have other and more obvious options to avoid loneliness with a corporate office available. Although the strong emphasis on ideological goals might in principle also be appealing to members of large organisations, it is in most cases not strong enough as an argument when it comes to the organisations’ willingness to pay for this benefit. A broader but also very vague understanding is provided by Spinuzzi (2012) who introduces the notion of “co-presence” and suggests focusing on “knowledge and services in inter-organisational and cross-disciplinary collaborations”, similar as Parrino (2015) who focuses on knowledge exchange depending on physical proximity.

Based on a recent and very extensive literature review provided by Bouncken & Reuschl (2016) and including the perspective of companies, which use coworking not as primary but as an additional work scenario, we propose the following definition of coworking: *“Coworking spaces are neutral places, owned and operated by a private or legal entity, where affiliated and unaffiliated professionals work side by side or in collaboration. The spaces are used by individuals, teams or other cross-organisational groups, during a specific project phase or for an unlimited period, in addition to other work scenarios or exclusively”* (see also Josef, 2017).” The focus is on purpose on the phenomenon of coworking spaces and not on the activity coworking, as the latter would include almost all work scenarios where two or more people work side by side. The previous lack of a clear and shared understanding of coworking spaces as well as the missing inclusion of corporates as beneficiaries shows firstly that the associated research is in its early stages and, secondly, that rather than asking the question “what is it” we need to look at it more precisely and ask, “what is it for whom”.

Table 1 gives an overview of the manifestations of coworking from a company’s perspective by delineating the different usage scenarios (see also Josef, 2017).

Table 1: Overview of coworking manifestations from a company’s perspective			
1. Coworking as an alternative work scenario	2. Coworking as a substitute for the corporate office	3. Coworking as a means to foster co-creation with external stakeholders	4. Coworking as a new business offering
External coworking spaces are used as an alternative work scenario in addition to the corporate office, home office and mobile working. This might be occasional, for certain people or	Coworking Spaces are used instead of a corporate office e.g. for a small subsidiary, a remote location, during a period of strong growth, as a temporary solution or as a means to get access to specific	Coworking spaces, inside or outside of the corporate office, are operated and offered to externals as new ways of interacting with customers and/or partners, for free or against a fee.	Coworking including or excluding further services (e.g. printing services, consultancy, mail and package handling etc.), inside or outside of the corporate office, is offered against a fee for externals. The

teams only, during a limited time period or for a specific project.	target groups (e.g. students). Companies either dispose of exclusive office space and/or use shared zones.	Depending on whether the main motive is reputation and/or co-creation, externals do or do not mingle with employees.	motive is either space efficiency optimisation or addressing new markets and/or target groups.
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The primary focus of this article and the subsequent literature research is on the first scenario and on the question of how coworking as an alternative work scenario differs from coworking spaces as primary anchor point of work, as it is for startups, freelancers and micro businesses. That the value companies see in coworking is fundamentally different from what it is for independent professionals, can best be illustrated by taking the example of structure. Whereas freelancers and startups consciously chose coworking in search of more structure regarding their work routine, members of mature organisations often prefer coworking spaces over the corporate office for certain activities, because it allows them to escape from the tight corset of the corporate office, where too much structure leads to an atmosphere of rigidity and paralysis (see also Reuschl & Bounken, 2017). This particularly true for individuals and teams which are involved in innovation and transformation projects, for whom a stimulating or at least neutral work environment with only a minimal level of conventions better supports their specific needs (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2015; Waters-Lynch *et al.*, 2016).

3. Research methodology

A broad literature review covering intentionally not only the discipline Information Systems was conducted amongst academic and practical outlets in German and English. The search term “coworking” was used, as it includes “coworking spaces” as well the activity “coworking”, but not the term “coworker” which is often used as synonym for a work colleague. The search was limited to the last three years; this time frame was chosen as mature organisations have only recently started to develop interest in coworking and given the publication time lag, this restriction proofed to be reasonable. Backward search on relevant articles included also publications before 2015; however, this generated only one additional relevant article.

Table 2: Literature research “coworking” (January 2015 – December 2017)				
Database	Hits	Relevant	Individual	Organisation
SpringerLink	133	5	5	0
ScienceDirect	259	2	2	0
EBSCOhost*	27	3	2	2
ProQuest*	5	0	0	0
Emerald	17	0	0	0
Web of Science	35	1	1	0
IEEE Xplore	2	0	0	0
AISel	110	0	0	0
Wiley Online Library	100	0	0	0
Total	688	11	10	2

*Restrictions: EBSCOhost only academic journals were searched, in ProQuest only articles, conference papers, dissertations, and theses.

Out of the total 688 hits (including duplications) only 11 articles were considered as relevant (excluding duplications, including backward search), as they met the criteria to include an overview of different value propositions or at least a listing of benefits offered by the work scenario coworking. The relevant articles were further evaluated and categorised into “individual”, if they analysed coworking from the perspective of freelancers, startups or micro businesses, or “organisation”, if they focused on members of organisations as primary audience (see Table 3); one article (Ross & Ressia, 2015) counted in both categories. The article of Capdevila (2014) looked at two audiences, individuals and organisations, whereas organisations stood for cities, which are outside of the scope of this article. Two articles were found that counted for “organisation” – evaluating them closer it turned out that they studied the audience companies in a rather superficial way, that did not allow to derive any thorough insights for a classification out of it. The article of Ross & Ressia (2015) took public and private organisations as one of four potential audiences into consideration but did not go beyond the value proposition coworking “as an alternative to home-based telework” (Ross & Ressia, 2015), pointing to the missing trust of managers towards employees working from home as one of the major arguments to prefer the work scenario coworking over working from home. Although the title of the second article - “Should your company embrace coworking” by Spreitzer *et al.* (2015) – hints at the focus on corporate coworkers, a systematic analysis of value propositions is missing. In their article the authors identify the following three advantages of coworking over a traditional office concept: *serendipitous encounters, flexibility and autonomy* as well as the *potential to optimise real estate costs while at the same time increasing spatial variety* (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2015).

Table 3: Relevant articles found in literature research		
Authors	Individual	Organisation
Reuschl & Bouncken (2017)	X	
Bouncken & Reuschl (2016)	X	
Balakrishnan, Muthaly, & Leenders (2016)	X	
Parrino (2015)	X	
Capdevila (2014), based on Westerlund & Leminen (2011)	X	
Jakonen et al. (2017)	X	
Brown (2017), based on Rus & Orel (2015)	X	
Seo et al. (2017)	X	
Ross & Ressia (2015)	X	X
Spreitzer et al. (2015)		X

4. Findings and Research Landscape

As indicated in the previous chapters, research on the relatively young phenomenon of coworking is still at a very early stage. Narrowing the topic further down to the perspective and specific needs of companies, which use coworking only as an additional and not as their primary work location, only a few publications were found, none of them providing a systematic overview, classification or taxonomy of potential value propositions. This obvious

research gap can be explained by the fact that companies only joined the coworking party very recently. The authors propose the following three interpretations for the identified ignorance, hesitation or reluctance towards this new work scenario.

1. *Overcapacity*: Many organisations which still have traditional office layouts with single offices, a cell structure and assigned desks in operation fight the problem of overcapacity in office space, caused by the increasing mobility and flexibility of their knowledge workers (see also chapter 1).
2. *Cultural Readiness*: Another reason for the belated interest of companies in coworking lies in the authors' view not in the slower pace of evolution regarding the individual digital maturity of workstyle, but rather in the fact that coworking requires a certain cultural readiness level, in particular regarding the leadership and collaboration culture. This cultural readiness is often the result of a time-consuming evolutionary transformation process. Observations in the field show that most coworking pioneers started to experiment with home office and remote work first, before they set forth to exploring coworking. There seems to be a bigger gap than assumed between just passively tolerating a more flexible and autonomous (regarding time and space) work style and actively fostering and paying for working at these "third places", like many authors call places that are neither home nor the official workplace (Oldenburg, 1989; Gandini, 2015; Moriset, 2013).
3. *Lack of understanding*: Given that even the research community has only just begun to look at coworking from a company's perspective, most decision makers in larger organisations either are not aware of coworking or, if they are, they do have a rather fuzzy understanding of how coworking could complement their existing work scenarios and how they could benefit from it. The few case studies in literature which look at coworking in a corporate context often describe experiments of technological forerunners (see also Josef & Back, 2016), that have little in common with their own reality and challenges they face.

Despite the realisation that we cannot look at coworking from a company's perspective in an isolated manner and that the openness for this new work scenario is often the result of having walked through certain development stages, this does not necessarily mean that an extensive experience with mobile and remote work is an indispensable prerequisite for the successful implementation of coworking. Instead of thinking of coworking as the ultimate phase in an organisational maturity model (see e.g. Weichbrodt *et al.*, 2015, which looks at the degree of flexibility and mobility in the dimensions work-culture, space and technology), it could also be seen as a catalyst, which helps companies to initialise a change process towards a more agile work-culture while they are still at the beginning. Seeing coworking as an instrument of work-culture transformation is a novel and promising approach. It takes into account that coworking allows for and fosters flexibility, but that it offers at the same time a certain structure. And what is even more important: it does not force individuals to blend work and private life - as the work scenario home office does - often leading to discontent or rejection amongst those individuals, who prefer work separation (or segmentation; both terms are used) over integration (Nippert-Eng, 2008; Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006; Bulger, Matthews & Hoffman, 2007; Gisin *et al.*, 2016). Coworking can thus also make an important

contribution to employee wellbeing with respect to individual boundary management preferences (see also chapter 5).

The literature review did not generate enough findings to gain a solid understanding of the different aspects associated with coworking from a company's perspective and, based on this, to derive a systematic classification on different value propositions. Closing this obvious research gap is even more important considering the significant global growth rate of the coworking industry as well as the increasing interest of companies – in the short-term as an alternative scenario, in the medium and long-term also as a replacement for the traditional corporate office (Chapter 1 and Table 1).

Instead of analysing and clustering existing contributions in a retrospective view, the authors engaged in establishing a research landscape, with the goal to describe “lenses” through which we can look at the phenomenon of coworking from a company's perspective. In search of a framework to categorise the offered value propositions, the model “six building blocks of an innovative culture” by Rao & Weintraub (2013) was chosen, as it does not focus on the overall strategy and performance, like models based on the balanced scorecard approach (Kaplan & Norton, 1995), but mainly on the correlation between the corporate culture and the organisation's innovation capacity, which is the main focus of this article in connection with coworking. Rao's & Weintraub's model, which was derived from an extensive empirical research process, serves two purposes: explaining what constitutes an innovation culture and serving as a tool which assists in assessing and transforming corporate cultures (Rao & Weintraub, 2013). The model consists of six key blocks – resources, processes, success, values, behaviours and climate – which are split in three factors with three elements each. For the present evaluation only the factors but not the elements were used. As the authors of the model point out, most companies paid more attention to the first three blocks in the past, as they are more tangible and thus easier to influence and quantify (Rao & Weintraub, 2013).

Table 4: Assessing the contribution of coworking to an innovation culture			
Building blocks	Factors	Factor in correlation to coworking	Research aspect
Resources	People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to external experts in coworking ecosystem - Access to talent market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employer branding - Adoption of enterprise Social networking (ESN) - Adoption of unified communications and collaboration tools (UCC) - Interplay between space & creativity
	Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fostering of successful use of enterprise social networking and unified communications and collaboration tools - Building up and strengthening relationship to ecosystem 	
	Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to different types of spaces/communities helps to break out of daily business and initiate new projects 	
Processes	Ideate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diverse work environment and people with different backgrounds, affiliation and networks help to get new insights and inspiration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Serendipitous encounters - Third spaces as neutral zones (free of hierarchy, bureaucracy and internal politics)
	Shape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possibility to quickly form teams consisting of internal and external stakeholders for ideation, prototyping and feedback process - Neutral environment encourages to think bolder and to critically question activities and projects 	
	Capture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Third places help to break out of bureaucracy and to avoid rigid control mechanisms - Culture spillover from freelancers and startups leads to a faster go-to-market 	
Success	External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthen reputation as innovative company by demonstrating innovative leadership and work culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reputation as innovative company - Employer Branding - Internal signal for innovation capacity - Internal signal for
	Enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commitment to innovation by actively fostering entrepreneurial work and collaboration culture - Development of new capabilities through co-creation between internals and externals 	

	Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Participation in innovation culture even for roles which are not directly involved in innovation management- Development of new competencies by collaborating closer with others in coworking ecosystem and by participating in new initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">transformation- Internal signal for participation
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Building blocks	Factors	Factor in correlation to coworking	Research aspect
Values	Entrepreneurial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environment of entrepreneurs and freelancers positively influences curiosity, openness towards new ideas and ability to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity - Neutral and hierarchy-free environment encourages action and exploring new opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Culture spillover within ecosystem - Intrapreneur mindset - Individual autonomy - Job crafting - Critical thinking - Organisational learning within and beyond company boundaries - Failure tolerance
	Creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encouragement of new ways of thinking by providing access to people with diverse thinking - Access to flexible work scenarios that offer freedom to pursue new opportunities - Fostering of spontaneity due to open room structure and community management activities 	
	Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fostering of curiosity and joint learning processes by providing access to different people, organisations and projects 	
Behaviours	Energise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fostering of entrepreneurial spirit by providing access to entrepreneurial community - Clear signal for an output-oriented culture instead of a presence culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transformational vs. transactional leadership style - Signal for trust and output orientation - Community management
	Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encouragement of all team members to take initiative to innovate 	
	Enable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to neutral experts outside of company boundaries which help to overcome organisational obstacles and mental barriers 	
Climate	Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gaining access to a community of innovators, inside and outside of the company - Allowing for diversity and diverse workstyles by providing different work scenarios depending on the employee's preferences and needs - Fostering of team work by reducing manager centricity to a minimum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open innovation process - Employee engagement - Diversity of workstyles - Cooperativeness &

	Safety	- Fostering of trust by providing autonomy in the planning of work but also decision taking	- cohesion in team Boundary management
	Simplicity	- Encouragement of self-responsibility by providing autonomy and refraining from imposing rigid rules and control mechanisms	

A general critique to the “six building blocks of an innovative culture” model (Rao & Weintraub, 2013) or more precise to its suitability as a framework for looking at coworking from a company’s perspective is its strong focus on the leaders’ qualities, in particular in the dimension “behaviour”, which looks almost exclusively to which extent the leaders live up to certain values or empower their teams to be creative and innovative. This contrasts with the understanding of coworking, which stands for self-initiative, weakly pronounced power structures and the informal nature of encounters.

One of the most interesting but probably not self-explaining aspects of coworking as a new work scenario for traditional organisations (mentioned in Table 4 in the block “climate”) is, its potential role as a signal for trust and for transformation towards current employees. In a previous study that the authors conducted (Josef & Back, 2016) it turned out that the coworking experiment positively influenced the employees’ perception of their employer’s innovativeness, although their overall consumption of coworking hours was on a very low level. It can be assumed that offering new work scenarios to the employees already has a positive impact on their attitude towards the employer – irrespective of the actual utilisation. This effect can best be explained with the interpretation that coworking stands for more than shared office space in the eyes of corporate coworkers; for them it expresses the belief of their leaders in the employees’ commitment and reliability. A similar effect can be credited to the work scenario home office; however, since a lot of employees suspect that their employers’ primary motivation for fostering home office lies in infrastructure savings, coworking is a much stronger signal than just allowing working from office, as it stands for an investment in the employees’ wellbeing and productivity rather than potential savings.

Another topic for further research is the interplay between coworking and boundary management strategies, which Kossek *et al.* (2006) define as “*the degree to which one strives to separate boundaries between work and home roles*”. Coworking as a boundary management tactic is an important motive – for corporate coworkers as well as for startups and freelancers. However, it is a particularly interesting work scenario for corporate coworkers who belong to the group of “separators” – individuals who prefer to draw a clear line between their work and their private life (Nippert-Eng, 2008). They benefit most from coworking as an additional scenario to the corporate and home office, as for them, working at home is something they do very reluctantly. The option to work from a coworking space therefore gives them the freedom to work flexible; to escape from the corset of the corporate office or to avoid unnecessary commuting without having to mingle work life and private life. For companies that wish to specifically invest in the compatibility of family and work, while at the same time fostering different boundary tactics, coworking is a very powerful solution. This aspect also emphasises, why it does make a difference whether companies only allow working from home or, additionally, offer coworking as an alternative scenario to the corporate office. As indicated in the previous chapters, coworking from a company’s perspective is not primarily about escaping isolation and gaining access to a vibrant community, which are the main motives for startups and freelancers, but also about respecting the diversity of workstyles and preferences. Although this is a very noble motive for fostering coworking as an alternative work scenario, it is for most profit-oriented companies too weak as a stand-alone argument; it needs to be complemented by other convincing prospects like access to new ideas, potential customers, and suppliers.

Outside of the focus of this article but an important aspect that could not be addressed with the used culture-focused model is the financial dimension of coworking from a company's perspective. Two different effects influence the monetary considerations: On the one hand potential savings in infrastructure and maintenance costs, given that companies could operate smaller corporate offices with less variety in space when they include coworking in their infrastructure planning (see also Spreitzer *et al.*, 2015). On the other hand, companies could potentially realise gains in employee efficiency and productivity, because of reduced commuting times, reduced distraction and stress levels associated with working mobile outside of the corporate or home office. These effects are important decision criteria when it comes to evaluating the overall benefits of coworking from a company's perspective in a medium and long-term view. They are even more relevant for companies which are in a significant growth phase or which have a strongly fluctuating headcount (including cooperation phases with externals).

A last point to consider when speaking of the potential of coworking from a company's perspective is the aspect of marketing and communications endeavours of coworking entrepreneurs. As pointed out in chapter 1, the original motives of coworking – escaping isolation and the feeling of belongingness to a community – are not convincing for companies, as their corporate offices cover these needs. That's why the coworking industry should stop the underselling of coworking towards companies and to systematically address their needs, such as spatial efficiency and flexibility, geographic distribution, co-creation with the startup and freelance community, contacts with potential target groups, as well as access to inspiring, policy-free, and neutral grounds. This will be even more effective, if the coworking entrepreneurs join forces and implement standards which allow companies an easier orientation regarding their offering (e.g. a standardised classification of spaces and services) and a simplified organisational handling (e.g. community management services, uniform space access and well-coordinated invoicing services).

5. Outlook

It is generally assumed that the interest of companies in coworking will continue to grow and that coworking will gain in acceptance as an additional work scenario or in certain cases even as a replacement of the traditional office. At the same time, given that the coworking industry has grown out of its children's shoes and is in the middle of a transformation process, changes in the offering side can be expected, too. As a consequence of the coworking entrepreneurs' current search for their place in the landscape of new working and innovation scenarios, their offerings will gain in variety and distinction. We can today already see manifestations of these different poles, such as stylish urban business centers and organically grown local community hubs. However, they are in most cases rather a consequence of their origin than of a conscious positioning regarding their value proposition.

Besides the spatial differentiation, the specialisation in different clusters of thematic focus (Capdevila, 2013) seems of particular interest. When the aggregation of coworkers does not take place coincidentally based on the geographic catchment area or individual space design preferences, but on a common interest and specialisation (for example in education, artificial

intelligence, graphic design etc.) the social learning process – planned and unplanned – can be maximised. This is even more the case if physical and virtual community management activities systematically foster the exchange amongst the associated members. As a result, this “accelerated serendipity”, as Chris Messina, Co-Founder of the Citizen-Space called it (quoted in Moriset, 2013), will sustain the companies’ innovation endeavours. That’s why according to Kremkau (2017) one potential future of coworking might be that companies start looking at coworking as thematically focused innovation hubs, where different entities collide, mingle, pursue novel projects, and drive innovation together. It might therefore be a conceivable option that various, even competing, companies join forces and act as investors of such platforms, with the goal to build a community of startups, freelancers, and mature organisations which, together, but loosely associated, drive innovation in a certain domain (Kremkau, 2017). This idea of “platform sponsoring” would change the game and the role of companies in the further development of coworking substantially.

Whereas it is difficult to anticipate future developments of both, corporate work environments and coworking spaces, it is obvious, that the two major drivers of the changes in the world of work – from fixed to mobile collaboration and from individual to social productivity (Eagle, 2004) – will continue to further evolve and that the disentanglement of time and space for knowledge work will further progress.

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