



**BRITISH ACADEMY
OF MANAGEMENT**

BAM
CONFERENCE

3RD-5TH SEPTEMBER

ASTON UNIVERSITY BIRMINGHAM UNITED KINGDOM

This paper is from the BAM2019 Conference Proceedings

About BAM

The British Academy of Management (BAM) is the leading authority on the academic field of management in the UK, supporting and representing the community of scholars and engaging with international peers.

<http://www.bam.ac.uk/>

Organisationality in Collaborative Workspaces

In this paper, we look at a new forms of organizing. We classify collaborative workspaces as a new form of organising following an adapted criteria catalogue of Puranam et al. (2014) and argue that collaborative workspaces do not fit the traditional binary classification of organisation and non-organisation, but constitute a form of organising in a continuum between non-organisation and organisation. We contribute to the discussion on theorizing new organisational forms by identifying a new organisational form and critically evaluating the existing criteria for this kind on the example of collaborative workspaces. In addition, we contribute to the literature on organisationality by providing arguments how partial organisational elements can exist without constituting a full-blown organisation with clear boundaries.

For the purpose of this developmental paper, we use two tables to present our argument. Table 1 list the criteria established by Puranam et al. (2014) for the need of new theory when looking at new forms of organising. Table 2 looks at organisational elements that open up the notion of a partial organisation. The remainder of the paper offers a short review of what constitutes a collaborative workspace, followed by a section on new forms of organising and a discussion on the implications for the concept of organisationality. We close we a brief outline of the implications of our findings.

Collaborative Workspaces (CW)

Collaborative Workspaces are a new kind of shared, often open, workspaces that offer temporary and permanent desk spaces as well as the infrastructure of an office. They exist in different forms from open to more specialized spaces that may be more or less specific regarding the background of their members. CW provide a response to increasingly fragmented work patterns and the move to project-based work, but also offer flexible workspace to increasingly specialized corporations.

Method

This developmental paper highlights partial results from a qualitative and quantitative study in several locations of coworking spaces in China, Germany, and the UK.

CW as a new form of organizing

To be a new form of organising, CW need to offer “a specific set of solutions to the four universal problems that any organization must address in order to exist.” (Puranam et al., 2014, p. 11) and novelty “can be assessed (...) in its solutions to the universal problems of organizing – in comparison with existing forms of organizing with comparable goals” (p. 13). Table 1 lists the four universal problem and indicates how CW solves them in comparison to traditional organisations.

CW often feature emerging communities that – while depending on the service level of the CW may experience support by the CW management – that are based on voluntary engagement and self-selection processes into the community or for the establishment of the community. This stands in stark contrast to traditional forms of organising that emphasize hierarchal and specialized ways of dividing and allocating tasks.

Similarly, rewards in traditional organisations are often based on financial incentives or the work is closely monitored. Coordination takes place through colocation or virtual infrastructure. In CW, communities are based on self-selection possibly affected by social needs and networking opportunities. Information primarily flows through existing or emerging mostly informal networks that regularly create business opportunities.

Table 1: Universal problems of organizing in Collaborative Workspaces

<i>Goal / Organisation</i>	Traditional Organisations	Collaborative Workspaces
Task division	Hierarchical distribution of tasks	No clear division
Task allocation	Based on specialization	Emerging community with self-selection into tasks
Reward distribution	Generally based on extrinsic incentive schemes and monitoring	Intrinsic motivation based on self-selection, social needs, and often unspecific networking / business opportunities
Information flows	Physical colocation or/and virtual communication infrastructure	Mostly informal networks

The community aspect in CW offers a new dimension of organizing that alters much of the established way of doing business. With this insight, we take a closer look at the organisationality of this way of working in the next section.

CW and organisationality

During the last couple of decades, the way we think about organisations has fundamentally changed. Ahrne and Brunsson (2011: p. 84) suggest five elements that need to be in existence to speak of a formal organisation, otherwise they propose the term partial organisation. These five elements are: membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring and sanctions. We list the elements in Table 2 together with a short discussion how collaborative workspaces address these elements.

While in most formal organisations membership is governed by employment, in CW membership is more fluent. On the one hand, CW generally offer membership for desk fees. Interestingly, the duration of the membership varies according to plan from a day to a week to a month to a year or any other period. In addition, prior membership can affect the network status of individuals that may include them beyond their membership for service activities. Membership in coworking spaces is often more complex than in formal organisations.

Formal organisations generally have an organisational structure that clarifies that establishes power relationships between members. In turn, CW often coexist without clear relationship and interactions remain largely voluntary.

Most formal organisations are governed by policies that establish written rules and procedures for frequent and important processes. Often these rules affect the informal organisation such as cultural elements as well. CW generally have very few rules. However, we find that they have an emerging and dynamic system of norms that often changes as membership changes; sometimes on a daily basis.

Table 2: Coworking spaces as partial organisations

<i>Organisational element</i>	Formal organisation	Coworking space
Membership	Regularly employment	Paid desk / membership
Hierarchy	Clear distribution of power	No power relationship
Rules	Often driven through written policies	Emerging system of norms
Monitoring	Through monitoring systems	Informal networks
Sanctions	Resource allocation	Informal networks

Monitoring is one of the hottest topic in formal organisations with functional literature and governance theories covering this topic. In CW, monitoring is peripheral due to the low amount of rules and policies and the emergent character of the organisational elements in CW. Cultural norms are affected by the informal networks in the CW.

Sanctions in formal organisations are often performed by changes in resource allocations. In CW, sanctions play a minor role as the informal networks underlie different mechanisms.

CW feature some elements of formal organisations, but this varies across different CW. The less corporate and the lower the service level, CW take on more partial characteristics of formal organisations while none of our studied CW is a formal organisations neither did they feature the absence of an organisation.

Implications

We establish CW as a new form of organising and find that according to prior work, existing theories may be limited in their applicability. In developing this study further, we consider the concept of partial organisations as a useful starting point to describe and discuss CW further. Much work can be done to analyse the community and network aspect of CW further and extent existing literature on theorizing new forms of organizing and organizationality.

References

- Ahrne, G., & Brunsson, N. (2011). Organization outside organizations: The significance of partial organization. *Organization*, 18(1), 83-104.
- Puranam, P., Alexy, O., & Reitzig, M. (2014). What's "new" about new forms of organizing?. *Academy of Management Review*, 39(2), 162-180.