

The importance of social interaction in the co-working spaces of Boston USA and London UK.

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Introduction

This paper explores why community is a significant commodity in the co-working spaces of high technology clusters in North America and Europe. Coworking spaces offer flexible space, but also cafes, events, and other incubation and acceleration initiatives for members. Community is defined as the social relationships, trust relationships and networking opportunities resulting from managed mediation occurring both face-to-face and online. The paper presents part of a three-year production and industry study funded by the Polish Science Foundation. Dr Michal Glowacki, University of Warsaw, and Professor Lizzie Jackson, London South Bank University. The research team have been looking at ten high technology city clusters in North America and Europe. High technology industries “are defined as those with a large proportion of technology oriented workers” (Echeverri-Carroll, E & Oden, M, 2016:18). High technology industries are of significant importance to media outlets as media is increasingly distributed via internet protocols and this we argue requires an awareness and adoption of new digital skills and practices. The study ultimately aims to benefit public service media through the identification of strategies they might use for adaptation, innovation, and cultural change.

Coworking spaces are sites of entrepreneurship, digital innovation and knowledge exchange. In London they are a relatively new phenomenon (since 2011), and for Boston, they are also a critical element of their high technology cluster. Our hypothesis is that a sense of community and shared culture is of critical importance to the growth of successful innovation clusters. Furthermore, that the cultural and social mediation that takes place within co-working spaces generates rituals and practices that are understood globally. We are looking at ‘real world’ community, but also take into account online community and global online networks that might be affiliated. We believe an appropriate blend of online/offline community, networking and interaction is an important indicator of successful creative clusters.

This cultural study draws together the fields of media and management studies. For the analysis of the community elements we draw on Network Theory. The coworking spaces of Boston and London are compared through analysis of websites, fieldwork, and interviews. Initial findings indicate that both face-to-face synchronous and discreet online asynchronous interactions between coworkers support the building of trust relationships. However, of highest importance are the face to face interactions. The coworking spaces are themselves actors in the amplification of a shared culture through knowledge-building events and communal eating and

drinking. Coworking spaces are able to cater for small to medium-sized businesses and the easy brokering of interdisciplinary working and cross-cultural understanding. The value of adopting practices found in co-working spaces is the increased likelihood of ideation, trans-media project working and the ability to respond in a more agile fashion to external market conditions through the development of entrepreneurial partnerships.

The paper begins with a review of 'swarming', arguing that working collaboratively is not exclusive to human beings, but something inherent in many species. An overview of the growth of (post) industrial clusters and of digital networks follows. A swift review of the growth of coworking spaces and high technology clusters in London and Boston then provides context. The paper closes with an analysis of the findings and suggestions for further research in this area.

Reviewing swarming and clustering in natural, industrial, and digital networks

Much literature has been produced considering the benefits when 'swarms' of like-minded or mutually-intended individuals get together to work on projects for joint gain. One classic example is the collaboration between the scientists and mathematicians who manage to solve the problem of getting the crew of Apollo 13 back to earth. Miller argues that this is natural behavior seen in humans as well as in colonies of ants or swarms of bees and shoals of fish who work closely together for protection and survival, but also to enable evolution, adaptation, expansion and growth (Miller, 2010). De Geus' survey of the 100 businesses that remain trading placed the quality of being a 'living company' as being of foremost importance. He found that a living company is one that accepts change, and which embraces agile working and evolution. Ideas from anyone are considered and some tested. Overall, these are organisations that have adaptivity embedded within their structures, processes, and problem-solving (De Geus, 1999).

With the advent of the internet it has obviously become easier - given constraints such as bandwidth, gate-keeping, and digital literacy - to act as a crowd with ease. Surowiecki (2006) argues the value of the 'wisdom of crowds', how crowd-thinking can enhance business intelligence. Tapscott and Williams argue that smart businesses are re-framing their customers and clients as co-workers within the enterprise; "ordinary people and firms are linking up in imaginative new ways to drive innovation and success" (Tapscott & Williams, 2006: 2). In the twenty-first century online networks augment face to face interaction, and this is significant. Network theorists argue that this ushers in the need to fundamentally rethink the workplace, economic exchanges, and also production and distribution chains. We are now in a global, relatively borderless, world.

Kuah provides a useful definition of twentieth century industry clusters describing locations where there is "...a geographical agglomeration of competing and related industries; and where there is evidence of improved performance such as a growth and profitability arising from the agglomeration of firms in a region" (Kuah, 2002:220-221). Clusters may have different purposes and characteristics, "...Media

clusters involve a complex interplay among cultural, economic and political objectives” (Karlsson and Picard, 2011:5). They exist to produce mediated content such as “motion pictures, television programmes/videos, broadcasts, audio recordings, books, newspapers, magazines, games, photography and designs, websites and mobile content for customers that often are based elsewhere” (Karlsson and Picard: 2011: 4-5). We are interested in media hubs but informed by high technology clusters, and particularly by the coworking spaces that have emerged internationally over the last five years.

Vitale (Vitale, 2014: 115-219) argues that computer networks have ushered in the need to think in a completely different way about sociability, creativity, interaction, business, economics, and culture. He sets out in a manifesto a new philosophical framework for cultural connectivity in the age of networks. Networks are, he argues: about access, they are also a science, a new ‘image of thought’, a philosophy of process and of complexity, a philosophy of emergence and of relation. Networks are fractal, holographic, and concerned with ‘spacetime’; they remake ideas of space and time. Networks are immanent (they can be present all around us) and they follow a set of principles that enable us to feel a sense of being ‘online’ and experiencing an element of a slice of the world as presented to us. Networks are ‘a theory of realities’, but they have no limits. They are semiotic; “In addition to theorizing experience, networks are also a theory of meaning”. Networks are a ‘mediology’ as well as being a general ‘machinology’, and they generate values and surpluses. They are a practice, they evolve and hyper-evolve, they think and can construct and deconstruct. Networks automatically archive and track and trace, they have economic and power-based structures. In summary, networks demand distinctly different philosophical frameworks. Manovitch believes the pliability of code within networks enables new forms of media to evolve such as virtual spaces and virtual realities (Manovitch, 2013).

Vitale also argues that networks provide an amplification resulting in increased potential that can be expressed in the form of currency or capital, whether that may be cultural, social, or intellectual capital (Vitale, 2014:55). This is also supported by Brynjolfsson and Saunders (2010) who argue that economists would be wise to find ways to measure increased potential as part of the Gross National Product of a country. Accordingly, they put forward *Cognitive Surplus* and *Consumer Surplus* as being indicators of increased value, something echoed by Shirky who offers a useful - if slightly utopian - overview of the value of collective action (Shirky, 2008). For Van Dijck, in his more critical history of digital connectivity and social media, the early societal promise of the internet has declined into an engine of commerce.

“A quick look at today’s palette of the 100 biggest social media platforms reveals that the overwhelming majority (almost 98%) are run by corporations who think of the Internet as a marketplace first and a public forum second – Wikipedia being the most notable exception (Van Dijck, 2013: 16).

We found a high level of interest in using technology for social innovation, real world impact and societal value in the coworking spaces we visited. These spaces are

largely occupied by small to medium-sized businesses (under 250 employees) with small businesses being dominant. As noted previously, we have looked at ten cities, but for this paper I concentrate on Boston and London. To provide background the development of coworking spaces is reviewed in London and Boston, beginning with London, UK.

Creative Clusters in London and Boston

Coworking, and any accompanying incubation and accelerator programmes is a recent phenomenon in London, largely since 2011¹. They have grown rapidly recently as they “...provide flexible and low-cost office space while giving people the opportunity to interact with a community of like-minded freelancers, entrepreneurs and startups” (Friel, 23 April, 2017). TechCity UK, the brand that has marketed high technology and digital clusters in London since 2010 has partly assisted this growth as it is, in itself, also an accelerator programme that was designed to support the growth of the East London technology cluster. London has one of the world’s largest financial centres and the UK’s media companies are highly concentrated within central London. High technology companies are based in East London, otherwise known as Silicon Roundabout. The average number of startup births (2011-2015) was 7,682 (TechCity, 2017), generating £56 billion in digital technology turnover (ibid).

In 2010 NESTA, a research body in the UK, commissioned a report on the creative clusters of the UK. They found

“...the mere existence of a creative agglomeration is not enough for the benefits from clustering to emerge. The other crucial ingredient is connectivity between firms within a cluster, with collaborators, business partners and sources of innovation elsewhere (both in the UK and overseas), and finally, with firms in other sectors that can act as clients, and as a source of new and unexpected ideas and knowledge. These three layers of connectivity are underpinned by a dense web of informal interactions and networking” (Chapain et al, 2010:5).

Merely being collocated is not sufficient to form communities of purpose there has to be a formal organisational structure (or structures) that amplify and continually refresh the social networks as they emerge, flourish, and are then perhaps reconfigured to suit contemporary needs. There needs to be mediation of some kind to organise the exchanges within conducive spaces, events, or forums.

Creativeworks (2016), a three-year project based at Queen Mary University, London, UK looks at the digital economy in London from a range of cultural perspectives; practice-based work in the field of digital art, the conducting of ethnographic research into clusters, and knowledge exchange. The project found the term ‘hubs’ was more appropriate than ‘cluster’ when looking at creative aggregations of firms

¹ <http://www.coworkinglondon.com/>

in London due to the activity of specific dynamic individuals who proactively initiated activities that resulted in the development of aspects of the digital economy. It could be argued that the exercise both created – and then examined – the site of the fieldwork that was therefore not a ‘naturally-occurring’ phenomenon. The significance of the social networks was also not reviewed in detail.

Boston, USA, has a more mature high technology cluster dating from the 1980’s that is mostly located in the adjacent (and joined) city of Cambridge, the other side of the Charles River. The city is considered a leading world centre for innovation and entrepreneurship. This is due, in part, to the proximity of universities such as Harvard. According to Bathelt the reason for the growth of Boston’s high technology sector from the 1980’s onwards was “cooperative behaviour and collective learning in supplier-producer-user relations [which] have become important factors in securing reproductivity in the regional structure” (Bathelt, 2001:289). High technology firms are able to adjust their product and processes and, furthermore, the way that they do this stimulates further innovation and growth. Bethel refers to a “growing body of literature that suggests that some regional economies can develop into learning economies, which are based on intra-regional linkages, interactive technological learning processes, flexibility and proximity (Storper 1992, Lundvall and Johnson 1994, Gregersen and Johnson 1997).” (Bathelt: *ibid*). These learning economies take the form of a high level of knowledge exchange between suppliers, producers, and users resulting in a particular ‘industrial atmosphere’ that is concerned with social relations and collective learning. This echoes De Geus’ argument that continual learning is critical to an adaptive or ‘living’ company.

In the first quarter of 2017 Massachusetts had the third highest number of venture capital deals completed in the USA (129), with New York having 218 and California having 560 (National Venture Capital Association, 2017:26). Like London, UK, Boston’s coworking spaces have grown rapidly in recent years². In almost all cases access to the ‘community’ is a saleable commodity, “C3 is for startups, freelancers, small businesses, and entrepreneurs who want the "power of community" to work for them” (Cambridge Co-working Centre, 2017). Impact Hub³ foregrounds community – the opportunity to work alongside other entrepreneurs involved in social entrepreneurship - as their main focus.

Boston’s ability to adapt is noted by Echeverri-Carroll and Oden (2016); after the dot-com bust in 2000, high technology firms in Austin restructured and technicians who had worked in the semiconductor and computer manufacturing industry moved across to work in software and computer design. The researchers have been observing the churn of experts from large corporations to small to medium-sized businesses, noticing this creates an outward spreading of knowledge to startups and scaleups. They found that Senior technicians in larger companies may leave to work on their own startups, this creates a spiral of increasing entrepreneurship. Usefully, Echeverri-Carroll and Oden make the following differentiation of types of

² <https://bostonstartupsguide.com/guide/boston-coworking-spaces-roundup/>

³ <http://impacthubboston.net/>

collaboration that can take place within clustering, “Colocation refers to the linked location of firms within an industry, often because they accomplish different tasks in the value-added chain such as invention and industry production. In contrast, co-agglomeration emerges from the location of firms from different, but related industries in the same place” (Echeverri-Carroll & Oden, 2016: 6).

It’s clear the digital and high technology industries of both London and Boston gain benefit from a high level of interaction, and that there is cross-fertilisation between small, medium, and larger businesses (see Echeverri-Carroll & Oden, 2016). In London the explosion of coworking spaces has not happened by chance, and they are expanding rapidly (Haley, C et al, 2017). The possible reasons for this rapid expansion is the topic under review here, and the methodology for the study now follows.

Exploring the nature of coworking spaces

Overall we are looking at co-working spaces in ten cities in North America and Europe (Glowacki & Jackson, 2017), however, for the purposes of this paper London, UK and Boston/Cambridge, USA are the case studies. In both cases the observations, interviews, and fieldwork took place in locations where either co-working, incubation, or acceleration was taking place. At this point, therefore, it is useful to define the variety of co-working spaces as they are slightly different. Dee et al (2015) looked at the support programmes available such as accelerators, coworking spaces, incubators, active seed investors, courses, competitions in the UK. They did not look at research institutes and science parks which can also offer some space and services to startups.

“...programmes make money from startups through three main mechanisms, being: (1) growth driven – dependent on creating startups with rapidly growing valuations; or (2) fee driven – dependent on startup revenue so that regular charges can be made to the startup; or (3) income independent of the startup – funded by charges to individuals, or income from other stakeholders (investors, companies, public bodies etc.)” (Dee et al, 2015: 5).

According to the Boston Startups guide⁴ there are 36 coworking spaces in Boston, with We Work being the largest as it has three separate locations. We Work is an international franchise having WeWork offices worldwide⁵. There are 43 further coworking locations listed in ‘Yelp’ in Cambridge, the other side of the river. One of these is the Cambridge Innovation Centre that is linked to and supported by MIT, which – in turn – is part of Harvard University. The Cambridge Innovation Centre, is however, a separate legal entity from either MIT or Harvard. CIC claim to have the “more startups than anywhere else on the planet” (CIC, 2017). They measure their level of success by the *density* of firms that are currently coworking from their offices in Cambridge. Picard & Barkho define density as “...the number of

⁴ <https://bostonstartupsguide.com/guide/boston-coworking-spaces-roundup/>

⁵ <https://www.wework.com/>

participants and the extent and range of their activities” (Picard & Barkho, 2011:285). In London, UK, Haley et al (2017) report in a new study commissioned by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in the UK that there are 205 incubators and 163 accelerators in Britain currently. The number of these is projected to grow, and they are directly related to the number of startups and scaleups that result. This in turn relates to an increase in the number of new businesses and services that are launched in the UK.

Coworking spaces can be just places to work, or act as accelerators, or incubators. Haley et al found “... the previous view of accelerators as 'feeder programmes' for incubators no longer hold true: in our study, accelerators reported catering to a similar profile of business stages as incubators, suggesting that accelerators are best seen as alternatives to incubators rather than precursors” (Haley et al, 2017). The majority of accelerator and incubator programmes in the UK date from 2011, making this a relatively recent British phenomenon. Differentiating between accelerator, incubator and coworking programmes can be confusing, however Haley et al provide this clarification “While all incubators provide businesses with office / work space, accelerator programmes place more emphasis on direct funding, with the majority offering some form of financial support to startups” (Haley et al, 2017:7).

We propose therefore that Coworking spaces offer shared work space that supports cultural and social exchange, however this may be additionally augmented by additional activities including training, mentoring or financial support (such as incubation and acceleration initiatives). *Accelerator* programmes often have short courses or longer – for example twelve week - training programmes to assist entrepreneurs or young companies to mature in a concentrated period of time. *Incubators* provide seed funding and other tools (such as mentoring and access to venture capital). The picture is often confusing as some coworking spaces offer space, accelerator programmes and incubation activities.

As has been said, this paper is looking at an element of a three-year study of the work culture of the high technology clusters of ten cities in North America and Europe: Toronto, Boston/Cambridge, Detroit, Austin in the US and Canada, and Tallinn (Estonia), Vienna, London, Warsaw, Copenhagen, and Brussels. The focus here is to examine the significance of community fostered in the coworking spaces of Boston USA and London UK. Our hypothesis is that the face-to-face and online exchanges mediated by coworking spaces results in an extremely high capital value. A selection of co-working spaces were identified in each city, and semi-structured interviews were conducted alongside observations.

The coworking offices of London and Boston

The form and history of many of the coworking spaces varied. Several of the coworking spaces visited are international franchises for example Google Campus, We Work and TechStars. Members of We Work and TechStars can walk into any of their buildings worldwide and find a work space they will recognise. It's also possible to access an online network of contacts and job boards that offer the ability to work

internationally or to work with digital specialists in a range of different countries in the US and Europe. As the work culture is the same in each location therefore there is a familiarity that increases the speed of settling in, the level of knowledge exchange, and efficiency of working. As it is possible to buy desk space by the day, week, month or year, companies can grow or contract as necessary.

Several coworking spaces have grown out of other enterprises, for example, the well-known music club the Ministry of Sound in London has just opening a coworking space which offers proximity to its music and events venue. The BBC's commercial arm, BBC Worldwide is offering annual coworking space and acceleration to startups at its West London offices. The Cambridge Innovation Centre in Boston has grown out of an incubator programme started by MIT to having a large, purpose-built, office in Cambridge that is one of the largest coworking spaces in North America. CIC has therefore grown out of Harvard University. They also have coworking spaces in St. Louis and Miami in the US and in Rotterdam in Holland.

Coworking spaces largely fall into two types, firstly those that have been created within industrial age warehouses, and those that are within new high rise office buildings. In each case the spatial organisation is of high importance and considerable effort has gone into the 'look and feel' of the design. The aim is to create a space which is playful, personal, creative, and energetic. Often different floors take an individual theme that blends items of a pre-industrial age with symbols of digital modernity. Areas are segregated into work and play for example, leather chairs and sofas might be ringed under a chandelier and set around a rich rug. The look of the coworking spaces is critical to their success and significant amounts of money are spent in designing the spaces, often hiring external companies to do this work.

It is common to find a range of different sized spaces: a large lecture room, small meeting spaces, and a large room with lines of desks for co-working. Table/desk space can be rented by the day, week, month, or permanently. It's also possible to rent part of a table/desk. Meeting rooms often have iPad booking systems to enable these to be booked by the hour. The meeting rooms are often glass-sided to show activity and increase the flow of light from one space to the other. All the coworking spaces had a larger room where training courses could take place. Coworking spaces also had external locations where larger activities could take place on occasion such as hackathons and 'makes' (rapid prototyping sessions).

Coworking spaces are designed to foster networking and communication. There are often telephone booths at the edges of the larger communal desk spaces for skyping or phoning. Noticeboards are of high importance, whether they are blackboards, corkboards showing fliers for events, or business card boards. Every coworking space has a high-speed internet connection and often the furniture offers charging spaces for mobile phones and iPads. Online project management software is offered, for example 'Slack' was used in the Cambridge Innovation Centre, alongside other social media tools.

All the coworking spaces have a café, often on each floor of the building. A chill-out room is often offered or there are tables in the café for short meetings. Roof spaces are often used as an additional meeting or chill-out space. The cafes are of high importance as they increase the sociability and sense of community. Bagel breakfasts and Friday beers are hosted here and these rituals are considered central to the cultural life of the coworking community. In several of the coworking spaces there were rooms for yoga and meditation.

At the Cambridge Innovation Centre the café/bar hosts Venture Café, a weekly gathering is hosted by the Venture Café Foundation, the not-for-profit, public-purpose sister organization of CIC. The event aims to provide a space for conversations, presentations and mentoring for the Boston entrepreneurial and innovation communities. TechStars and Google Campus also host longer programmes that support the incubation of businesses, these can be up to twelve weeks of intensive mentoring, teaching, and introductions to venture capitalists.

The sense of community is fostered through the appointment of a community manager who is responsible for overseeing the face-to-face events and the online social media software. Each coworking space is highly customer focused. At We Work the online community is accessed via subscription only, it's global and access to these international contacts is seen as being of high value. Google Campus tracks visitors to each of its global centres by issuing visitors with a pass on a lanyard that they can keep and scan each time they enter a Google Campus building. This builds up the understanding of the community members over time. Each coworking community is a blend of CEOs, digital specialists, mentors, venture capitalists, marketing managers, community managers, Intellectual Property lawyers, students, and academics.

A table of the facilities provided by selected coworking spaces in Boston and London is provided below. The facilities are almost universally comparable, however there can be differences in the location and each space tries to offer something different in order to attract customers. There are one or two very large, worldwide, franchises such as WeWork, Impact Hub, and TechStars. CIC in Boston has partnerships with other Boston and Cambridge centres such as Impact Hub Boston and the Cambridge Coworking Centre. CIC is also beginning to open centres in Europe. Impact Hub, a coworking space specialising in supporting social innovation entrepreneurs has 86 coworking spaces currently open and 21 being developed, across five continents. They also have over 15,000 members in their online community (Impact Hub, 2017). In London Headspace specialises in coworking spaces for the creative, media, and technology sectors. Innovation warehouse was launched with the support of the City of London Corporation in 2010, making it one of the earliest coworking spaces in London. The Trampery is the oldest coworking space in London having opened in 2009, they also have co-living apartments next to the coworking spaces, something that's beginning to be developed more widely internationally. The Trampery offer a consultation service for cities and organisations who are starting innovation clusters.

Community-fostering at Selected Coworking spaces in Boston & London, UK: April 2017								
City	Name	Community Manager	Café/Event space	Health Insurance	Accelerator	Incubator	Franchise	\$ / £
B	WeWork	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	\$400
B	CIC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	\$425
B	Cambridge co-working Centre (C3)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	\$425
B	Workbar	✓	✓		✓			\$350
B	Impact Hub	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	\$350 or \$30 per person
L	Campus London	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	Price on demand
L	Central Working	✓	✓		✓		✓	
L	Headspace	✓	✓	Fitness classes	✓		UK Franchise only	£400-600
L	Innovation Warehouse	✓	✓		✓	✓		£150
L	The Tramper Y	✓	✓		✓		✓	Price on demand

Fig 1: Analysis of coworking spaces in Boston and London

Several coworking spaces offer incubation (financial support from, for example, venture capitalists) and all offer some level of business acceleration (training, mentoring). There is a high level of fun and playfulness in all the workspaces we visited and an emphasis on health and wellbeing in many. CIC and WeWork both offer Health Insurance schemes for their members. The level of socialising outside of work was far higher in London than in Boston, which is due to the greater range –

and concentration - of cafes, restaurants and entertainment venues in London. There was a higher number of wellbeing centres in Boston in proximity to the coworking spaces, such as gyms, wholefood cafes, and sports equipment outlets. There is a common level of digital literacy across all the participants who took part in the study, this extended to an understanding of computer code, but also of agile working practices and the business practices connected with startups. This creates a very strong sense of community and shared purpose in all of the coworking spaces and is common across all coworking spaces in the ten cities considered in the larger study. The prices for membership, shared desking and permanent desking are twice as expensive in London as in Boston.

The aim was to find out whether the community aspects are of significant importance in coworking spaces. Community is defined as the social relationships, trust relationships and networking opportunities created via mediated and managed face-to-face and online opportunities; this proved to be true.

Findings:

1. The success and value of a coworking space is measured on the quality of the community as well as the density of startups.
2. The community manager is considered to be of high importance to the enterprise.
3. The face-to-face interactions foster trust and knowledge exchange.
4. The global reach of the community via social media was also found to be of high value.
5. The reputation of digital workers provides short cuts to skilled workers, and this is built through community awareness of past projects and collaborations.
6. The coworking spaces are designed to foster community, through the cafes, communal eating and drinking, events, and the noticeboards and event boards.

It's clear community is a highly marketable commodity and that there is a rich economic seam that is currently being exploited through the rapid launch of coworking spaces in London. Universities such as Harvard have been fostering the development of commercial coworking spaces, such as CIC in Boston, since 1999. Coworking spaces are being swiftly franchised, as in the case of WeWork and TechStars who have started up similar spaces internationally; all linked via social media, cloud-working facilities, and shared project management software. The complex interweaving of the online and face-to-face elements is likely to be worthy of future analysis. Some attention to this dimension will be possible within the three-year study mentioned here.

Conclusion

Highly valuable social and intellectual capital is being generated in the coworking spaces of Boston and London and their spatial, organisational and cultural practices

are designed to grow relationships and to create networks for national and international knowledge exchange. Success continues to be defined by the density of startups that base themselves in the shared space and their range of activities (as identified by Picard & Barkho, 2011), but also by the number of startups that progress through any affiliated acceleration and incubation programmes. A growing measure is the growth of global networks supported by the franchising of coworking spaces internationally.

The central finding from the study of coworking spaces and their culture and practice is the value placed on face to face human connection, almost towards a level of rejection of digital communication tools. Each space is organised specifically to foster community and networking. James Layfield, the CEO of the Central Working coworking space in London states what many interviewees also described; the essential element of creative endeavor is “...valuing human connection. People walk around these days looking at their phones, on instant messenger, using things like Facebook, and whilst they are important tools, we don’t believe that’s where the magic happens. The magic happens in a room with two people face to face...” (Layfield, 2017). In the case of high technology entrepreneurs digital communication tools are becoming ‘background’ tools. What are becoming of rising importance are shared work hubs, which are rapidly growing in number internationally. Those that are successful know how to create highly sociable groups that learn together.

From the perspective of our study’s ultimate aim, to assist Public Service Media to evolve there is evidence that PSM is beginning to look towards co-working. The BBC in the UK has been engaging in a range of partnership initiatives that include undertaking joint research with universities and launching a coworking space under their commercial arm, BBC Worldwide. The Flemish PSM, VRT also partners with a range of small to medium-sized creative businesses, including gaming and VR companies. They have just launched Sandbox (<https://sandbox.vrt.be/liveip/pressreleaseboilerplates/>), a research and development platform with the European Broadcasting Union and iMinds.

These initiatives by Public Service Media support smart ideation between the public and private partners which could support Van Dijck’s argument for an “endorsed fusion of non-market and for-profit principles” to invigorate a “spirit of public collectivism” (Van Dijck, 2013:16). Coworking and its culture of supporting both partnership working and social innovation is providing an interesting set of frameworks that may begin to assist public service media to survive. Such duality might also address the current dominance of large private global companies within the digital media and communications sphere.

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