When technology is taken for granted: the paradox of co-working

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Co-working: a response to conventional understandings of work

- **Productivity** is decoupled from physical location and set hours (Gregg and Kneese, 2020).

- **Commitment** to work is a personal endeavor not associated to being physically at one's desk (Taylor & S. Luckman, 2018)

- **Self-regulation** has supplanted traditional forms of control, regulation and rewards (Fleming, 2009)

- **ICT** applications and platforms as the bricks that make possible the functioning of co-working spaces (Richardson, 2017)

ICT and the role of technology in co-working studies

- Co-working offices are workspaces enabled by **digital technologies** and sometimes producing 'born digital' businesses"

- "This work is thus 'digital' in that it occurs through software, hardware and connectivity **affording the possibilities** of smaller, self-organised producer units" (Richardson, 2017).

  – ICTs are deemed critical variables (or enabling resources) for the diffusion of more flexible forms of work, outside of traditional workspaces

A vague use of the notion of ICT

Lack of explanations on how technology:

– Enables the functioning of co-working spaces

– Informs organizational design and practices within co-working spaces

- **What are the main debates around co-working?**
- **How is technology placed within those debates**?

Research strategy and method

- A **scoping review** (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) → to "map" the broad phenomenon of coworking and its key characteristics.

- An exploratory review of academic articles on the topic (2005-2020).

- About 60 papers reviewed from different disciplines

  > e.g. economic geography, urban studies, communication studies, sociology, organization studies and management.

The collaborative dimension

Source: photos taken by authors

The aesthetic dimension

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What is the *place* of technology within the debate on co-working?

– ICT is described mainly in a cursory 'nominal' way.

– ICT is infrastructural, it so taken for granted to have become invisible.

– ICT is celebrated as enabling radical transformations, interlinked with future-oriented grand aspirations

Common views of Technology 1/2

1. Nominal view

- Generic terms – including: digital technology, technological change, 'digital platforms - are used as mere background information.

2. Tool view

- ICTs are seen as tools. (ex.co-workers manage to reconcile their jobs and social relationships through technology)

Orlikowski and Iacono, 2001

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Common views of Technology 2/2

4. Proxy view

- Key aspects of technology may be cap-tured through surrogate measures

5. Computational view

- The focus is on technical features of artefacts

6. Ensemble view

- ICT is analysed in association with organi-zational context of use

Orlikowski and Iacono, 2001

What is the *place* of technology within the debate on co-working?

View of technology	Conceptualization of technology	Examples from the content analysis
Nominal view	References to technology are either incidental or used as background information	Richardson, L., Sharing as a postwork style: digital work and the co-working office. Cambridge Journal of regions, economy and society, 2017. 10(2): p. 297-310
Tool view	Artefacts are expected to do what its designers intend them to do	De Paoli et al-2019. *The spatial context of organizations: A critique of 'creative workspaces'.* Journal of Management & Organization
Ensemble view	ICT is analysed in association with organizational context of use	Toivonen, T. and C. Sorensen The Creative Process in Coworking & Collaborative Work: Insights for Executives, Managers & Designers. 2018.
Proxy view	Key aspects of technology may be captured through surrogate measures	Clifton, N., A. Füzi, and G. Loudon, Coworking in the digital economy: Context, motivations, and outcomes. Futures, 2019. (in press): p. 1-16.
Computational view	The focus is on technical features (e.g. modeling capabilities) of artefacts	Kopplin, C.S., Two heads are better than one: matchmaking tools in coworking spaces. Review of Managerial Science, 2020. in press: p. 1-25

Orlikowski and Iacono, 2001

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Limitations and next steps

- The review of co-working scholarship is not meant to be exhaustive or even necessarily representative
  - → Our review of papers need to be broadened to include up-to-date studies (after the health-emergence)

Further investigation

- the role of ITC artefacts as 'mediators' that organize and are organized (Holt, 2019)
- the impact of ICT on the daily activities of workers and experiences
- the way in which technology is configured raise issues of power and control.

Thank you!

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EXTREME CO-WORKING SPACE

"Give me a shout when you're done with the space bar!"