Not *from*, but *in*, the Same Organization: Cooperation, Collaboration and Competition in Creative Coworking Spaces

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Abstract

Increasingly more individuals are subject to project-based work arrangements that imply flexible and team work and a shift of any risk from the employer to the employee. Little is known about the social relationships of these workers, let alone about if and how socio-dynamic processes outside the traditional organization foster creativity and innovation. The present study investigates these processes in relation to cooperation, collaboration and competition in creative coworking spaces, which bring together autonomous workers within the boundaries of a shared environment. Based on traditional clustering theories, we develop the argument that coworking spaces, as microclusters of innovation, have the potential to leverage the cognitive proximity and absorptive capacity of coworkers, resulting in creative and novel ideas, while competition between creative coworkers can also be expected. The findings of our qualitative case study, which was conducted in the Netherlands, highlight that different socio-dynamic processes co-occur in coworking spaces and involve: (1) cooperative attitudes and behaviors, leading to a sense of community; (2) collaborations by way of preferred partnerships and, occasionally, start-ups; and (3) soft internal competition in the form of peer pressure and intra-industry microclusters that compete externally. The motivations and goals of workers are aligned through selection procedures, while trust and information exchanges reside in the community aspect of the coworking space. Even if workers are autonomous, the management of and the physical space in coworking have a significant impact on the aforementioned processes.

Keywords: cooperation, collaboration, competition, coworking spaces, creativity, innovation

Introduction

Meeting likeminded people produces positive emotions, while working alongside others generates great ideas. Both of these circumstances are sources of creativity at work (DeGuzman & Tang, 2011). With imaginative labels like creative incubators, innovation hubs, fab-labs, creative business centers, breeding spaces and "UnOffices" (DeGuzman & Tang, 2011), the majority of contemporary coworking spaces are physical locations that aim to coordinate and facilitate an alternative organization of work based on socially meaningful encounters and the sharing of resources and knowledge (Capdevila, 2015; Merkel, 2019). Real-life connections still have much more to offer in terms of knowledge-sharing and collaboration than virtual connections (Bathelt et al., 2004; Storper & Venables, 2004). As a result, coworking addresses the needs of the numerous entrepreneurs, freelancers and digital nomads who work autonomously yet run the risk of becoming "isolated and socially adrift" (Garrett et al., 2017: 821).

The present study seeks to develop a deeper understanding of the antecedents of cooperation, collaboration and competition in creative coworking spaces. It does this by investigating the behavioral dynamics that can foster or hinder creativity and innovation through diverse inter-individual exchanges. In this way, we address the issue of how creativity and innovation are encouraged and/or hampered in communities of practice composed of specialist and creative professionals who do not belong to the same organization, but do work in proximity to one another (Capdevila, 2017). Specifically, we seek to answer the following research question: *What leads to the behavioral processes of competition, cooperation and collaboration in relation to creativity and innovation between individuals who do not work for, but do work in, the same organization?*

We are inspired by clustering theories within the disciplines of economic geography and strategic management (e.g., Scott, 2000; Porter, 1998; Lavanga, 2020), which have explained why firms group together and the benefits of spatial concentration. We argue that coworking spaces, as microclusters for innovation (Capdevila, 2017) and coping mechanisms against the scarcity of resources (Merkel, 2015; Garrett, et al. 2017), are subject to similar dynamics. Furthermore, following Snow (2015), we are of the view that an individual's motivations, beliefs and actions (including trust and communication) are important factors that energize competition, cooperation and collaboration processes. After all, every worker wants to achieve their goals, and will manage their resources (including human and social capital) in such a way that enables them to survive or prosper. Yet what are the behavioral dynamics between workers who have to cope with the simultaneous absence (authority, hierarchy, control) and presence (people, space) of features commonly associated with an employer organization?

Little is still known concerning how the social relationships formed in coworking spaces affect the individuals involved (Merkel, 2019), let alone about if and how socio-dynamic processes foster creativity and innovation (Amabile, 1988; Capdevila, 2017). The social course of the interactions of individuals or firms, and the ideas and inspiration they generate, are increasingly seen as the basis of creativity (Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003), which is a prerequisite for innovation (Amabile, 1988). Further scrutiny is, however, required of the nature and outcomes of the interactions of innovation communities that are localized *in*, but do not *belong to*, an organization (Capdevila, 2017). As they arrange the physical proximity of particularly creative individuals, coworking spaces could be expected to foster creative cooperation and collaboration that may result in innovations (Capdevila, 2015). The socio-dynamic processes that occur in coworking spaces have the capacity to contribute to creativity and innovation in at least two ways: 1) by fostering the productivity of creative workers who, outside the coworking space, might be less productive and may experience a sense of alienation or of operating in "a void" (Baker & Hesmondhalgh, 2013); and 2) by facilitating the emergence of strategic alliances and new partnerships that could result in innovative solutions

(Gundolf, et al., 2018). At the same time, because coworking spaces bring workers operating in the same or related industries together, the emergence of competition between them is also imaginable, which could in turn limit creativity and innovation (Loots, et al., 2018). Titles such as "They're working on their own, just side by side" (Fost, 2008) and "Working alone, together" (Spinuzzi, 2012) suggest that the productive processes of knowledge-exchange and collaboration do not occur naturally in such spaces.

In times where considerable numbers of coworking spaces are becoming more commercialized and politicized (Merkel, 2019), and where the "ambivalence of co-working" is growing (De Peuter, et al., 2017), it is important to understand the micro-foundations of the socio-dynamic interactions between creative individuals, because these touch on both the essence of creativity at work and collaborative innovation.

This article is organized as follows. First, we review the expanding literature on coworking spaces. We then develop a theoretical framework based on Snow (2015) and clustering theories. A qualitative research method using case studies in the Netherlands is employed to advance our findings, which are discussed in a final section that also highlights practical implications and makes proposals for future research.

Literature review and theoretical framework
The phenomenon of coworking spaces
Even though the phenomenon of coworking is not new *per se*, it has intensified since the start of the 21st century. This is especially the case in cities in the global north (Merkel, 2019), which witnessed the rise of the creative economy (Florida, 2002) and the growing instability of full-time employment after the financial crash (Merkel, 2015). In shared, temporary office environments, coworking spaces provide a remedy for the needs of the about 1.2 million people worldwide who use such "everyday meeting places" (Statista, 2017; Merkel, 2019: 9). Starting as a bottom-up organizational practice in the hacking sphere (Merkel, 2015), coworking spaces can be regarded as one of the fastest growing organizational forms, with Statista (2017) reporting that there were 75 coworking spaces in 2007 and almost 14,000 ten years later. Coworking spaces are places where people can work, are generally open to the public, and are intended to foster collective creativity. Their members share tools and information, encourage knowledge sharing, and often have a mission that is agreed by them collectively (Capdevila, 2017). These spaces are more than just shared offices because, based on the values of community, sustainability, openness and collaboration, they promote both the communication of what members have learnt and collaborations between them (Capdevila, 2017).

Different types of coworking space coexist and may be conceived as being on a continuum from informal to formal. Initially bottom-up initiatives, informal/grassroots' coworking spaces were established when those who needed a

work space gained access to a building with the physical properties suitable for all kinds of occupation, including artistic work in atelier-like spaces. Local governments often support the re-use of abandoned industrial heritage sites for gentrification purposes (Lavanga, 2013). At the other end of the continuum, there are amenities that function as accelerators and incubators for promising start-ups, for example in the digital sectors, and are commonly part of open innovation strategies (Merkel, 2019). A number of global chains today recognize a profitable business model in coworking, particularly given its potential to rehabilitate real estate. As a consequence, they have started to "commercialise and formalise co-working into a professional, high-end and exclusive service and glamorise the individual culture of entrepreneurship with their invocations of the 'do what you love' ethic" (Merkel, 2019: 22). Coworking spaces can be not for-profit or for-profit initiatives started by individuals or institutions (Capdevila, 2017). They have also been described as "middleground" intermediaries between creative individuals and innovative firms, and play a crucial role in localized innovation processes (Capdevila, 2015).

As coworking continues to expand and affect more workers, the motives for engaging in it are also diversifying. Typically, coworking spaces are appreciated for intangible features such as the ambiance and atmosphere, which tend to have a positive impact on workers by providing benefits as wide-ranging as social support and inspiration (Gerdenitsch, et al., 2016). They also facilitate meaningful social encounters and create a sense of belonging and identity (Merkel, 2019). Some workers are motivated by economic drivers, including economies of scale achieved as a result of reducing operating costs by sharing amenities and services (Capdevila, 2017). Many of the benefits arise from the proximity of workers, which cultivates access to and the exchange of (industry-specific) knowledge (Spinuzzi, 2012; Capdevila, 2015; Parrino, 2015; Merkel, 2019). It also tends to foster the swapping of key information with professional contacts, and the network that emerges from being close to peers also helps to create and diffuse a member's reputation (Blein, 2016).

Regardless of workers' motives and the available types of cowork environments, these spaces have one vital aim: to facilitate coworking among their members, clients or users (the terminology depends on the space). Fost (2008) makes a distinction between coworking (without a hyphen), as the practice of individuals working in shared facilities, and co-working as the process in which two or more people work together on a common project. While many coworking spaces engender the first of these by providing space, actual collaborations (co-working) are not evident or common (Fost, 2008).

An important precursor to coworking, and a well-appreciated component of it, is the sense of "community" it generates. This is a multi-step process built through day-to-day interactions and careful management (Merkel, 2015; Rus & Orel, 2015; Garrett, et al., 2017). The activities that coworking spaces contribute to building a

community, and the co-working and coworking arrangements that are the result, are as diverse as the spaces themselves. However, what most coworking environments do have in common is a set of "values" that often includes community, collaboration, sustainability, openness and accessibility (DeGuzman & Tang, 2011).

The potential role of the manager of a coworking space as a facilitator of productive encounters and collaborations has received little attention. Research that has considered this issue found that managers describe their roles using terms such as "mothering" and "social gardening" (Merkel, 2019: 18). Merkel (2015) identified two management styles in coworking spaces: 1) as a service provider who seeks to create the optimal working conditions and an environment conducive to productivity; and 2) as a visionary with concerns about the intangible elements of a coworking space, including communication and collaboration between the different users. Similarly, Surman (2013) made a distinction between intentional and organic ways of community-building in coworking environments. Generally, establishing a community appears to be a crucial responsibility for managers of such settings (Merkel, 2019; Brown, 2017), and a "participatory design" of the physical space is believed to play a considerable part in fostering collaborative behavior (Schultz, 2013).

Coworking spaces as microclusters of innovation
The literature in the fields of economic geography and strategic management provides a rich repertory of theory that explains why firms cluster and the benefits they receive from spatial proximity (e.g., Scott, 2000; Porter, 1998; Lavanga, 2020). Around the turn of the millennium, many policymakers seized on such theories' arguments in favor of urban renewal processes in Western cities (Florida, 2002; Landry, 2000; Lavanga, 2013). Simply put, the density of firms located in the same place generates economies of scale and less tangible benefits such as knowledge-spillovers, leading to economic development (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). Porter defines clusters as "geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries, and associated institutions (e.g., universities, standards agencies, trade associations) in a particular field that compete but also cooperate" (Porter, 1998: 1). In this way, he suggests that clusters can result in both competitive and cooperative behaviors: competition arises from the geographical proximity between different economic actors developing similar products and services, while the complementary of companies can lead to cooperation and collaboration. Jointly, competitive and collaborative processes contribute to the evolving dynamics and reputation of a cluster.

Belonging to a cluster enables firms to benefit from ideas and become more innovative by: 1) having access to a specialized, skilled labor pool; 2) incurring low transaction costs; 3) offering short delivery times; and 4) communicating effectively (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). As such, clusters function as a basis for learning,

knowledge-creation and innovation (Bathelt et al., 2004). Through a very subtle information ecology, being in a cluster can also add to the reputation of a firm through the "buzz" or "noise" (Grabher, 2002; Storper & Venables, 2004) that exists as a result of "face-to-face contacts, co-presence, and co-location of people and firms within the same industry and place or region" (Bathelt et al., 2004: 38). Such a buzz consists of "specific information and continuous updates of this information, intended and unanticipated learning processes in organized and accidental meetings" (ibid.). Just "being there" means that firms can contribute to and benefit from the diffusion of information, news and gossip (Bathelt et al., 2004: 38). In this way, clusters involve reputation spillovers, both from firms to the cluster and vice versa, with positive repercussions for geographical entities (neighborhoods, cities, regions), and speedy human agency and feedback processes (Porter, 1998). Most of these benefits rely on physical interactions and cannot be bought, built, or developed by any advanced technology. They are also extremely important for many firms in today's knowledge economy (Florida, 2002).

Clustering theory has been applied to coworking spaces to explain the knowledge dynamics leading to creative value creation (Capdevila, 2017). As 'microclusters', coworking spaces have the capacity to act as a focal point for the coordination of actors and ideas (Potts & Waters-Lynch, 2016; Capdevila, 2017). This is because this is where a network exists. Such innovation microclusters are equally characterized by cognitive proximity and the absorptive capacity that leads to the creation and exploitation of new knowledge (Capdevila, 2015; Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). In particular, firms and workers active in the creative industries – depicted as social network markets that are ruled by complex incentives and interactions between demand and supply (Potts et al., 2008) – seem to be especially susceptible to clustering, as they have a need to share ideas, develop networks and exchange industry-related information (Oakley & O'Connor, 2015; Scott, 2000; Martins, 2015). Equally important in these industries is reputation, and being part of a larger community can enhance an individual's symbolic capital in such a manner that it further feeds into her/his creative production (Lloyd, 2004; Scott, 2012). In this way, coworking spaces that host workers and firms in the creative industries have the potential to act as microclusters of knowledge development and innovation.

The behavioral dynamics of competition, cooperation and collaboration in coworking spaces theorized
According to Porter (1998), geographical proximity improves the communication between, the reputation of, and the trust among firms, with these elements being fundamental to understanding the behavioral dynamics of cooperation, collaboration and competition. Equally, Snow (2015) states that the level of trust and commitment among the parties to a relationship, and the motivation that energizes a particular behavior, all underlie these dynamics. Over the course of history, these forces have successively shaped the organizational landscape, which has evolved from a Schumpeterian arena, with competition at the heart of

innovation, to the current collaborative economy as the more efficient way of using limited resources (Schumpeter & Elliott, 1983; Snow, 2015). Understanding these behaviors is essential for identifying how they are interrelated, as this tends to define the dynamics of both organizations and places. As a result, it can be inferred that the proximity experienced in a coworking space may produce the communication, trust, drive and goals that energize the cooperative, collaborative and competitive attitudes and behaviors that could foster, or hinder, creativity and innovation. Figure 1 illustrates how individuals or firms relate within the three behavioral dynamic types.
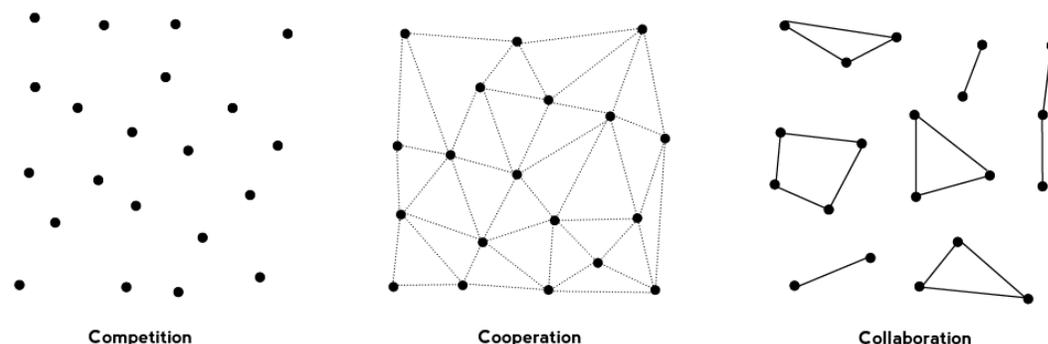

Figure 1: The behavioral dynamics of competition, cooperation and collaboration visualized (own elaboration based on Snow, 2015).

Competition
Competition is associated with rivalry, and arises naturally when individuals or firms experience limited resources and when people or companies with similar needs share the same environment (Porter, 1998; Keddy, 2001). The motivational assumption underlying economic theory is that individuals and firms, sparked by an extrinsic incentive, act in their own self-interest in order to maximize returns (Snow, 2015). The level of trust between the different parties involved in a competitive situation tends to be extremely low. Indeed, as the main goal of firms in such an environment is to outperform their rivals, information and knowledge are generally very tightly held (Snow, 2015).

Competition can be expected in the context of creative working spaces, especially between tenants who operate in the same industry or tender for the same contracts. Competitive behavior might also take the form of friendly competition. As Porter (1998: 83) suggests:

> Local rivalry is highly motivating. Peer pressure amplifies competitive pressure within a cluster, even among noncompeting or indirectly competing companies. Pride and the desire to look good in the local community spur executives to attempt to outdo one another.

In particular, the managers of coworking spaces that host workers and firms in the creative industries can be expected to understand competition, because these sectors have all the features required to be deemed competitive: the entry barriers are low and the work is appealing, leading to an oversupply of candidates (Abbing, 2002; Towse, 2010; Porter, 1998).

Cooperation
Cooperative relationships emerge when two or more actors use formal or informal arrangements to share information and leverage resources, motivated by the benefits that each party expects to receive as a consequence (Polenske, 2004). Cooperation in game theory implies that a mutual agreement can produce better outcomes for the parties involved, who still act in their own self-interest, but seek to accomplish mutual objectives (Snow, 2015). Cooperation produces a weaker and more superficial relationship than collaboration. At the same time, the interdependence of partners requires a certain level of trust and different ways of dealing with information when compared with a competitive scenario.

In a coworking setting, coworkers who mainly seek to reduce their costs are inclined to cooperate (Capdevila, 2015), which may take the form of sharing information, knowledge and resources. Such cooperation includes receiving feedback and advice from other coworkers (Spinuzzi, 2012; Blein, 2016), which is most likely to occur when trust levels are high enough and the parties have common goals. In the creative industries, cooperation is more probable between individuals who care about the development of their creative qualities and possess the self-confidence required to engage with others; when someone believes that they will outperform others, they are more likely to compete for additional resources (Loots et al., 2018).

Collaboration
Collaborative relationships involve the direct participation of two or more actors in designing, producing and marketing a product (Polenske, 2004). Collaboration tends to involve greater engagement between different parties than cooperation. It is typified by volition, deep care and mutual commitment (Snow, 2015). Such relationships depend on there being huge trust between the parties involved and a great deal of intrinsic motivation with respect to their goals (Snow, 2015).

Capdevila (2015) has studied the innovative capacity of coworking spaces in Barcelona and the role that collaboration plays in them. He noted that some spaces are characterized by the emergence of collective pioneering projects and highly-innovative communities. Their members are intrinsically inspired to engage in knowledge sharing and collaboration, with their goals being to learn and have access to complementary resources (Capdevila, 2015). Moreover, their "cognitive proximity and affinity to profit from collective activities" lead to collaborative innovations (Capdevila, 2015: 9), which require coworkers to care about a product

or project as if it were their own (Snow, 2015). Gundolf et al.'s study (2018) of strategic alliances in the creative industries demonstrates that decisions to collaborate are not only based on rational economics, but also on emotional and "quality-of-life considerations" (9); there must be trust and a congruence of goals. By pooling complementary resources, strategic alliances enable creative entrepreneurs to reduce overspecialization and cope with the challenges of competition, resource shortages and unpredictability (Gundolf et al., 2018). Table 1 is an adaptation of Snow (2015) to the setting of creative coworking spaces. It includes the main differentiating parameters of cooperation, collaboration and competition, namely goals, motivation, communication and trust.

Table 1: Expected characteristics of competition, cooperation and collaboration in creative coworking spaces (based on Snow, 2015).

	Competition	**Cooperation**	**Collaboration**
Trust	Low	Moderate	High
Motivation	Extrinsic	Extrinsic and intrinsic	Intrinsic
Information / communication	Tightly held	Selective	Open and shared
Goals	Succeed over competitors	Work together to achieve a common ideal	Work together to achieve / develop new projects or solutions

Methods

Research design

The work explained in this paper can be described as inductive qualitative research, with a case study used as a strategy that enables the focus to be on the social dynamics within coworking spaces. The setting is the Netherlands, where coworking is quite common in the creative industries (Bhansing et al., 2018). Three coworking spaces were selected from approximately 103 possibilities (coworker.com, 2018) after a filtering process based on the following criteria: 1) the coworking space mainly hosts creative-knowledge workers; 2) it is at least one year old; and 3) it has at least 25 members to ensure that cooperation, collaboration and competition are conceivable. Size was the main distinguishing characteristic (small: 30–50 members; medium: 200–300 members; large: 400 members or more), because this can affect the degree of proximity between coworkers and may, potentially, produce variation among the cases. The coworking spaces selected were: Kleinhandel, Rotterdam; Rotterdam Collective (RoCo); and A Lab, Amsterdam.

Kleinhandel is a creative coworking space located on the first floor of Het Groot Handelsgebouw in the center of Rotterdam. It opened in 2014 and offers flexi and fixed desks and office space for start-up and scale-up companies. The design of the space reflects the innovative and creative nature of its coworkers, with examples being indoor swings and a greenhouse as a meeting room.

RoCo, which is located in the city center, was established in 2010. The space is primarily occupied by a group of creative and viable members, ranging from graphic designers and event managers to businesses involved in sustainable development. RoCo's values include sustainability, social responsibility, knowledge sharing, the use of open-source technologies, and the recognition of ideals beyond profit-making. As a collective, its members play an active role in how the space is organized.

Located in Amsterdam Noord, A Lab has transformed the old Shell laboratory into a 5,000-square meter creative coworking environment. The focus of this space is on the following industries: art and culture; block chain; journalism; music; robotics; visuals; and sustainability. Although most of its members work with digital media, A Lab also provides workshops and studios for photographers and artists. Its values are curiosity, connectivity, sharing and being real, which are realized through its numerous partnerships with other institutions and schools and the city of Amsterdam.

Data collection and analysis
The main data collection method was interviews, which took place in two rounds. These enable the collection of rich data through conversation, but also give the interviewer leeway to make further observations based on attitudes and behaviors (Bryman, 2012). In the first round, the first author conducted semi-structured, face-to-face interviews in spring 2018 with the following subjects: the three managers/founders of the selected creative coworking spaces; one key informant; and 13 creative-knowledge workers who had used the space on a regular basis for at least six months. Interviewing a minimum of four users per space enabled us to relate the testimonies of the two types of stakeholder (managers and users) to each other. To some extent, the sample of coworkers reflects their heterogeneity in the spaces at stake in terms of sex, age, profession and nationality. In the second round in February 2019, 17 structured interviews were conducted by small groups of students undertaking the master's program Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship at Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands, for which two of the authors teach the subject of coworking. The main aim of this second interview series was to validate the findings, in particular the model that emerged from the first round. The interviewees in this second group were professionals in the creative industries who worked in a coworking space other than the three selected for the case studies.

A number of data triangulation techniques were used to further increase the validity of the findings. Most of the interviews took place in the coworking spaces, which gave us the opportunity to assess the ambiance and broader context for the cooperation, collaboration and competition that took place in these settings. Along with on-site interviews, the first author spent considerable time in the coworking

spaces, attending events or simply working on interview transcriptions, usually in the flexi desk area. As a complementary research method and additional source of data, such participant observations add to the understanding of people's ideas or behaviors, not necessarily because they do not want to share them, but because they might be unaware of particular manners, habits or potentially relevant details (Babbie, 2014). Additional sources of data triangulation were also used, including secondary data in the form of online materials and reports and 13 interview transcripts from a previous study conducted by one of the authors (unpublished).

A thematic analysis using the ATLAS.ti software was employed to make sense of the interview transcripts and fieldnotes. This method is particularly suitable when a researcher has to understand and identify the relational structure of a significant amount of data, as was the case in the current study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Table 2: interviewees of the study (first round)

Name*	Sexe	Age	Education	Profession	Nationality	coworking si	CWS
Irina	F	25	BA	community manager	NL	na	*A Lab*
Mary	F	41	BA	illustrator	NL	2014	A Lab
Tom	M	34	BA	software, app developer/graphic designer	BE	2017	former A Lab
Ian	M	44	high scho	graphic designer/illustrator	NL	2016	A Lab
Annet	F	47	na	graphic designer/founder	NL	2017	A Lab
Walter	M	27	MA	motion designer/founder	NL	2014	A Lab
Stuart	M	32	MA	Co-Founder of Kleinhandel	NL	na	*Kleinhandel*
Mark	M	37	MA	musician/foudner	NL	2016	Kleinhandel
Mike	M	25	BA	graphic designer	NL	2016	former Kleinhandel
Rudy	M	32	na	web designer	NL	2015	Kleinhandel
Wim	M	25	BA	founder	NL	2016	Kleinhandel
Ned	M	38	MA	chair of board RoCo/entrepreneur	US/CH	2015	*Kleinhandel*
Chelsea	F	31	MA	communication	NL	2016	Rotterdam Collective
Bruce	M	37	PhD	filmmaker/secretary RoCo	US	2016	Rotterdam Collective
Jeanne	F	31	MA	urbanism and architecture	FR	2017	former Rotterdam Collective
Martin	M	36	MA	entrepreneur/key figure of RoCo	NL	na	Rotterdam Collective
Luc	***M***	***na***	***BA***	***chairman of Startup Foundation***	***NL***	***na***	***na***
Name*: for privacy reasons pseudonyms are used							
Italic: managers of the coworking space							
Bold italic: expert							

Findings

Cooperative attitudes and behaviors resulting from a sense of community

The cooperative aspects that emerged from the community appeared to be much more appreciated by the coworkers than actual collaborations. The origins of the cooperation lay in attitudes that led to cooperative behavior, which was strongly fostered by the sense of community that the coworkers experienced. The community provided a professional structure and social context. This gave workers who would otherwise have to rely on self-management, self-organization and self-control (Mládková, 2015) "a reason to go to work", as well as the experience of "having colleagues" and "peer pressure" (Luc). Interestingly, certain aspects of the settings (including the collegiality among workers) were highly valued by

freelancers, who initially seemed to have wanted to escape from the typical office life. Such findings are in line with DeGuzman and Tang (2011), who present spaces that allow coworking as "Unoffices." A very specific way in which coworking spaces appear to 'replace' regular offices is their capacity to offer mentorship. The starters had increasingly experienced problems in identifying people who would coach them or serve as mentors, which would be less of a concern in typical employment situations. With their informal community of peers, coworking spaces apparently encouraged younger people to evolve professionally by having others around to look up to and ask for advice.

Cooperation and the fact that people within the community help each other were among the most common features across the three cases, as also identified in the literature (Gerdenitsch, et al., 2016). Such social support can take different forms, ranging from practical advice on paperwork or work permits, to more engaged help in relation to work, for example in the form of feedback on colleagues' creative ideas and artistic designs. In this way, working in a coworking setting can stimulate the everyday creativity of its members (Runco & Richards, 1997). Furthermore, being part of such a "madly supportive community" (Bruce) can foster a sense of belonging and identity in those who would otherwise identify with more vulnerable groups in the labor market (Merkel, 2019). However, the ties among coworkers in this scenario can become so strong that their relationships change from just being professional colleagues to being genuine friends. Yet this could also be detrimental, because it reduces productivity and any inclination to identify solutions outside the 'club' (Garrett et al., 2017).

Governance in the form of encountering, engaging and endorsing can play a role in fostering cooperation between coworkers (Garrett et al., 2017). In all three coworking spaces examined in this study, the manager clearly encouraged *encounters* by way of events. However, such events were not seen as the best strategy for building a community, for the simple reason that many of the coworkers lacked the time and motivation to attend. Along with cooking and eating together, the football and ping-pong tables and other regular distractions from work, earlier pronounced as a "manifestation of the overlapping contexts of work and play in a 'culturalized economy'" (Stahl, 2008), were mentioned as occasions where the sense of community was mostly built. Alternatively, external events that allow coworkers to present their projects to the outside world and form bonds with their neighborhood could be encounters during which community and cooperation are reinforced (cf. Capdevila, 2015). However, such events were not mentioned by the interviewees, even though they are conducive to the common goals needed for the purpose of cooperation (cf. Snow, 2015). Likewise, occasions in which managers *engage* toward cooperation (Garrett et al., 2017) were not referred to , apart from in the example of RoCo, where coworkers had been actively involved in the design of the space. The space itself and the selection of coworkers are two elements by which management can actually *endorse* (Garrett et al., 2017) the sense of

community. Having the right number of the right people in the right place can be beneficial to both the community and the cooperation that members of creative coworking spaces tend to seek. As Luc, an industry observant, suggested:

> I think [you hit] a sweet spot when you have between 30 and 50 members. This number indicates the point where you [have the opportunity to] know and meet everyone…. With 25, 30, or 50 people, there is variety, but everyone is still able to get know everyone else.

A number larger than 50 is likely to reduce the levels of trust and information flows needed for individuals to cooperate (cf. Snow, 2015). The turnover of members and individuals who do not fit into the community well enough also becomes a factor. A space may similarly foster or hinder the sense of community and cooperation, and has the potential to contribute to the endurance of organizational practices (Cnossen and Bencherki, 2019). Indeed, we saw that the larger coworking environments divided the space into what they referred to as "labs" or "squares" in order to maintain a "participatory design" (Schultz, 2013), because "walls create boundaries".

Collaboration: many preferred partnerships, few new businesses
Even though collaboration was valued highly by the managers of our coworking spaces and regarded as the main indicator of success, it did not occur as often as they wanted. Most of the coworkers did not turn to coworking spaces with the explicit aim of finding partners for collaboration purposes. Indeed, it was clear from the interviews that most of the members had built the professional networks they usually rely on prior to moving to the space (the average age of these users in our study was 34). Even though the costs of being part of a coworking setting are relatively low, starters may nevertheless be unable to afford it. At the same time, workers who have high expectations of collaborations or joined coworking spaces to find jobs may be disappointed, as in the case of Ian, a graphic designer:

> I was mainly a graphic designer in the past and created a lot of designs as a freelancer for companies. These companies basically rent you to do work for them… But this model seems to have disappeared. Not enough work's available. [This aspect pushed me to] join A Lab in the hope of maybe finding new people to collaborate with, which hasn't really happened yet.

Nevertheless, the majority of our interviewees had undertaken some form of collaborative activity, and, even if they had not, they expected to do so in the future. Project-based collaborations with preferred partners were highlighted, which came into being as a result of spatial proximity, as in the following case:

> The company we collaborate with is a media and design company. It creates the design for our festivals and the website of a particular event, a jazz festival.

It also develops all the designs for the series of tours we promote. They are our preferred partners for graphic design (Mark, musician and founder).

Technological developments and the increasing use and accessibility of online information formed the basis of several such repeat collaborations. As another user stated: "I've got an illustrator in my lab who I collaborate with a lot. If a project needs an illustration, I usually approach [and work with] her" (Walter, motion designer). Such repeated, temporary collaborations, coined as 'preferred partnerships', only occur between individuals with complementary skills.

Alliances sometimes follow on from tentative collaborations. Typically, small firms have the flexibility and capacity to collaborate through projects and build relationships that could lead to innovative solutions (Acs & Audretsch, 1990). This could be recognized in the repeated interactions between two pairs of coworkers at RoCo and Kleinhandel, which resulted in longer-term collaborations in the form of start-ups. As stated by Rudy (web designer): "My company and that of a coworker have resulted in a new business. [This collaboration engenders] two companies working together in a new business that lets interior designers be found by consumers on the internet."

Collaboration and cooperation as social dynamics may be rooted in the exchange of information and ideas, as well as in shared values and goals. However, which of the two is facilitated by the coworking environment or governance is unpredictable. Mike, a web designer at Kleinhandel, shared his story:

> We (with another coworker) always play baby football. At some point, I suggested, 'You should do lunch here.' So, he started to have lunch here and then he said, 'Maybe you can do the website for me.' And now he's already doing the restaurant and everything. Yes, everything is growing quickly. And yes, we're basically sharing ideas—while playing.

Many collaborations originated not just from an individual's need for complementary skills, but also depended greatly on people finding each other, to which the space contributes. Nevertheless, several users, including Rudy, indicated that the personality and attitudes of coworkers play a significant role in the materialization of collaborations: "I think the most important factor at Kleinhandel is the personality of people, because they're quite open, open to have a chat, that's also why it's good." Related to personality are people's values. Annet, a designer at A Lab, highlighted the importance of the selection filter, which means that he is surrounded by people who share his standards and are open to collaboration. Indeed, the recruitment by managers of members with shared needs and values and similar goals and intrinsic motivations may well cultivate collaborations between them, given that the relationships are characterized by open information-sharing and trust (cf. Snow, 2015).

Low internal and external competition by industry-specific microclusters

The frequency and the level of competition in the coworking spaces were surprisingly low. As explained earlier, coworking communities tend to foresee professional and social support for members, and 'soft peer pressure' seems to occur more frequently than harsh rivalry. According to Walter, a motion designer, having a high density of people in the same industry "leads to more collaboration than competition." Coworkers in similar professions described how they help one another, even going as far as "forwarding" jobs and recommending each other for them. Walter highlighted some of the circumstances where collaboration was preferred over competition:

> It's not effective to think in terms of competition, especially among motion designers. Motion design is a relatively difficult discipline. So, we usually help one another and get more work for everyone. Maybe at some point someone is going to get a job [from this]. If you help him, he'll help you. I think everybody here has the mindset of helping one another instead of beating each other out of the profession.

Walter is referring here to the expected reciprocity among coworkers with similar mindsets and in a profession that requires a high level of human-capital investment. What also takes place in a coworking setting is that coworkers recruit new members from within their professional fields (motion design, web development, etc.) to ensure that there is a critical number of colleagues within the space with whom they can share work. In this way, a microlevel localization economy is installed in the coworking space, leading to benefits such as economies of scale, low transaction costs and knowledge spillovers (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008), all of which could invigorate industry-specific microclusters. Particularly when the demand for products or services is high, as in the case of motion design, the physical proximity between similar workers leads to cooperation and not competition (cf. Porter, 1998). At the same time, such within-industry microclusters could lead to collaborative innovation practices (Ollila & Yström, 2016), as well as having a positive effect on a local industry due to reputation spillovers (Porter, 1998). In this way, the cooperative attitudes and collaborative practices that can occur in coworking spaces may create a competitive advantage for the microcluster vis-à-vis other firms in the industry, particularly when the sector is global (e.g., digital).

Management plays a role here, too, by attenuating the parameters that lead to competition, namely low trust, tightly held information, extrinsic motivations and competitive goals (cf. Snow, 2015). As one manager explained about her selection and curation process: "If we only have the feeling that someone is really commercial, and really looking for money and not for other things that we find important… That's actually our only criteria and the only time we might say 'no'"

(Irina). This statement underlines the fact that mindsets and values are important, and means that "toxic people" are not invited to join the space. Another manager tries to keep competition out of the environment by deliberately recruiting professionals who do not operate excessively in the businesses of other members:

> I don't see a lot of negative competition, because we try to curate the company effectively. Perhaps two individuals are both web-developers, but are somehow in different fields. To paraphrase a Dutch expression, 'Not everyone is the same type of farmer.' (Stuart)

In the coworking space that had the most properties of a collective, new members could be blocked by incumbents, which could effectively lead to a competition-less environment. Figure 2 visualizes the behavioral dynamics in the coworking spaces, how they relate and come into being, and how they could foster creativity and innovation among individuals who work in, but not for, the same organization.
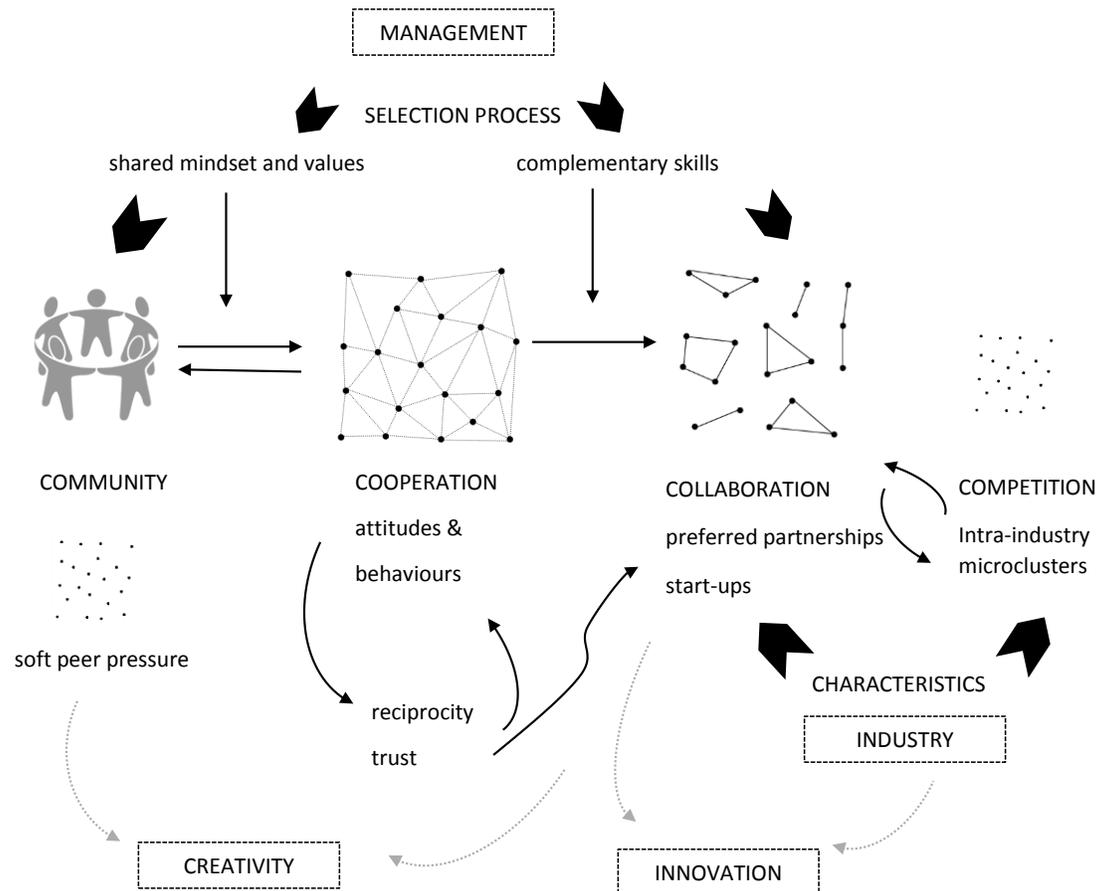

Figure 2: The behavioral dynamics of cooperation, collaboration and competition in coworking spaces (own elaboration).

Conclusions

The present study sought to examine how the behavioral dynamics of competition, cooperation and collaboration in relation to creativity and innovation occur between individuals who do not belong to an organization, but do work within the same place. In other words, we examined how creative and innovative cooperation and collaboration emerge when the coordinating mechanisms common to the organization (leadership, hierarchy, control, etc.) are absent.

An important precursor to any of the behavioral dynamics found in coworking spaces is the community element. Without exception, our interviews with coworkers and managers emphasized that the beneficial aspects of a community at work are both "an informal urban practice with its roots in collective forms of self-help and self-organisation" (Merkel, 2019: 6), and a remedy against the social isolation and remoteness of much creative work (Capdevila, 2015; Garrett et al., 2017). As an example, the community aspect and sociable atmosphere in coworking spaces have been foregrounded as the main reasons why people want to work in such environments (Garrett et al., 2017; Merkel, 2019). The self-selection of coworkers occurs in relation to these spaces (Garrett et al., 2017). Moreover, as our findings underline, there is also a considerable degree of filtering by managers, who put complementary or shared mindsets and value systems to the fore when constructing a coworking community. Managers' clear preference for unique, creative personalities and non-commercial, non-toxic individuals form the baseline for a community at work, within which cooperative attitudes and behaviors seem to naturally emerge. As such, and in line with previous studies, the coworking spaces in our research are socially and emotionally supportive physical communities that nurture the quality of working conditions for those who are motivated to self-organize in creative work. As well as being socially and psychologically beneficial working environments, coworking spaces, as microclusters where creative workers concentrate, have economic properties as well. Many of the benefits of coworking arise from the proximity of workers, which tends to stimulate access to and the exchange of (industry-specific) knowledge (Spinuzzi, 2012; Capdevila, 2015; Parrino, 2015; Merkel, 2019). Our study found that the community aspect accommodates cooperative attitudes and behaviors, as well as the reciprocity and trust needed for collaborations that mainly emerge in the form of preferred partnerships, supplemented with some instances of actual start-ups (cf. Snow, 2015). As such, coworking spaces are a clear manifestation of breeding grounds for collaborations between individuals, which in the creative industries have been shown to be more likely to occur when trust and personal fit between business partners are present (Snow, 2015; Gundolf et al., 2018). At the micro level, these elements increase the viability of the creative practices of the workers. Meanwhile, at the industry level, the within-industry microclusters residing in coworking spaces are capable of creating a comparative advantage vis-à-vis outside competitors by leveraging the community at work, developing collaborative innovation practices, and benefiting from reputation spillovers (Porter, 1998; Ollila & Yström, 2016).

Coworking spaces have features that enable them to replace regular organizations. In fact, they could even outperform them, especially for the workers who have a high need for autonomous work. As an example, the collegiality that emanates in coworking communities makes them peculiar learning environments, which are particularly suitable for easing the transition of starters from school to having a professional life. As creative industries are typified by high levels of informality in terms of work habits, being capable of learning from peers and being respectful to their practices are important assets (Merkel, 2019). The quality of creative coworking spaces as environments "where network sociality can be learned as it presupposes certain sociable attitudes, behaviors and norms (e.g., trust, forms of reciprocity)" (Merkel, 2019: 16) also came to the fore in our study, particularly in the presence of mentorship, from which early-stage workers can benefit in terms of strengthening their employability and career self-management skills (Bridgstock, 2013).

Furthermore, the coworking environment provides the boundaries of a space, which is often attractive in terms of its appearance and participatory design (Schultz, 2013). The managers of such settings, who have an interest in how well they function rather than the performance of individual members, may also add to their appeal as places to work, particularly if they take pride in how they curate them. In this way, space and management are elements that mock the traditional organization, but are more tailored to an independent, creative workforce and foster the 'accelerated serendipity' found in such environments (DeGuzman & Tang, 2011).

Along with explicating the factors that foster cooperation and collaboration between coworkers, our study also sought to both address the elements that hinder such productive interactions and, if possible, tap into live, competitive relationships as well. There is a downside of a community at work, which is referred to as a "dark side" by Bouncken et al. (2018), who theorize that this negativity resides in the personality of the entrepreneur. In our study, this was found in the sociality of a community as a network of ties between individuals. Consequently, collaborations are unlikely to occur when a microcluster becomes a self-sustaining bubble, and when the community is characterized by too much homogeneity. Bouncken et al.'s theory supports our findings, even if such claims could only be substantiated in our study by the limited evidence of actual, strong, long-term collaborations in relation to the emergence of new business with innovation outcomes.

First, and in line with network theory, each single connection between two economic agents can be regarded as a tie, whose strength relates to "the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie" (Granovetter, 1973: 1361). Weaker ties can be

expected to prevail in creative microclusters, where they are regularly and accidentally encountered. These ties are very important in professional contexts, as they open up opportunities and new avenues beyond the closer social circle. Such weaker ties reflect the informal links between people in coworking spaces (Merkel, 2019). However, from the point when the sense of belonging to a community becomes too compelling, it can result in strong ties or genuine friendships that may be detrimental to professional collaborations. One of our interviewees (Tom) put it clearly:

> When you're a freelancer, you have to socialize; it's like when you go on your own to a party, you always meet people, but when you go with a group you just stick to it and you don't meet anyone.

Coworking spaces could be susceptible to becoming a self-sustaining bubble, which can be problematic in cases where initially weak ties become too strong and prevent the forging of connections beyond the cluster (Granovetter, 1973). Too much homogeneity within a coworking space can also hinder collaborative innovations. Recent research has attested that addressing complementary resources by means of strategic alliances enables microbusinesses in the creative industries to diversify, reduce their uniqueness and reach bigger targets, all of which make surviving more possible (Gundolf et al., 2018).

Implications and directions for future research
Some avenues for future research are clear. Scholars could examine how coworking spaces can actually lead to innovation by studying the processes and antecedents of real, innovative collaborations that originated in a coworking setting. The design principles outlined by Ollila and Yström (2016) could be further tested to enable scholars to better comprehend the organizing required for collaborative innovation. Accordingly, by nurturing collegiality and the building of microbusinesses, coworking spaces act as sites where relational qualities and ongoing interactions take center stage because of the physical presence and proximity of a diverse range of partners with prior networks of relationships. Definitively, studies could: 1) consider the behavioral dynamics within other communities, such as maker-spaces and fab-labs where the fabrication of digital and craft objects takes center stage; and 2) scrutinize the potential of other set-ups that successfully include community and diversity, and exclude bureaucracy (all of which support creativity - Amabile & Khaire, 2008), to bring about actual innovation.

Guidelines for applying research to practice
Our study has some implications for creative- and innovation-management in general, and for the management of coworking spaces in particular. The three types of collaboration that occur in coworking spaces require different management practices. First, preferred partnerships emanate from regular cooperation between a creative entrepreneur and, often, a creative-service provider, as in the case of

advertising, web development or IT support. As these partners work together to achieve a common goal that requires moderate trust levels and specific information exchanges (Snow, 2015), the community aspect is less important than the actual presence of useful, complementary skills. Second, actual start-ups can be the result of repeated interactions among creative coworkers who set the shared goal of developing a new solution, and who are intrinsically motivated and supported by high levels of trust and the alignment of goals and values (Snow, 2015). In this way, a sense of community can be the basis of start-ups, because it facilitates exchanges and trust, but also requires matching skills and mindsets. Third, intra-industry microclusters with a comparative advantage vis-à-vis other (outsider) industry incumbents can emerge from the proximity of individuals within coworking spaces who, by repeated interactions, actually succeed in leveraging knowledge spillovers. While a supportive management style and participatory management practices are beneficial to the community aspect of coworking spaces, those who manage them could take on the additional role of fostering such productive socio-dynamics. In order to become supportive of open innovation practices in a collaborative setting, and endorsed by the coworking-space environment, managers can expand their activities beyond just selection and accommodation by taking on "an active role in the process of joint exploration and [the] creation of knowledge" (Agogué, et al., 2013). Participatory management may not suffice for the creation of an agentic and performative community for which "openness to continual reconfiguration and adaptation by the members" (Garrett, et al., 2017: 838) is required. Instead, seeking and supporting real collaborative innovation requires a particular form of relational leadership, because participants "must be moved into a stake where they can embrace the messiness and focus on the values that can be created in collaboration with others" (Ollila & Yström, 2016: 373). Indeed, instead of "social gardening" (Merkel, 2019), if the seeds for intra-industry microclusters of innovation are present, the managers of coworking spaces may need to develop ways to become the actual 'architect' of a landscape in which innovation thrives.

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