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Organizations in the Shadow of Communities

by Siobhan O'Mahony and Karim R. Lakhani

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Abstract

The concept of a community form is drawn upon in many subfields of organizational theory. Although there is not much convergence on a level of analysis, there is convergence on a mode of action that is increasingly relevant to a knowledge-based economy marked by porous and shifting organizational boundaries. We argue that communities play an underappreciated role in organizational theory-critical not only to occupational identity, knowledge transfer, sense-making, social support, innovation, problem-solving, and collective action but, enabled by information technology, increasingly providing socio-economic value-in areas once inhabited by organizations alone. Hence we posit that organizations may be in the shadow of communities. Rather than push for a common definition, we link communities to an organization's evolution: its birth, growth, and death. We show that communities represent both opportunities and threats to organizations and conclude with a research agenda that more fully accounts for the potential of community forms to be a creator (and a possible destroyer) of value for organizations.

Keywords: [Knowledge Sharing](#); [Organizational Culture](#); [Civil Society or Community](#); [Boundaries](#); [Information Technology](#); [Theory](#); [Value Creation](#);

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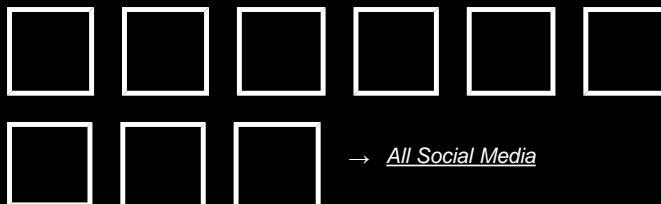
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