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Rethinking Community in Organizations: Dynamics and Identity



ABSTRACT

Objective: The study examines the transformative role of communities in driving organizational innovation and responsibility. It explores how community dynamics influence corporate social responsibility (CSR), innovation, and employee engagement while fostering a shared sense of purpose and belonging. The research specifically focuses on how organizations can harness the power of communities to enhance collective outcomes and sustain long-term growth.

Methodology: This research employs qualitative analysis, combining theoretical perspectives with illustrative case studies. Examples from Linux and the Copiapó Mining Disaster are analyzed to demonstrate the practical implications of community-driven approaches in fostering innovation, collaboration, and engagement within organizations.

Findings: The findings reveal that communities are pivotal in creating cohesive, purpose-driven organizational environments. Beyond operational efficiency, they enhance employee engagement, drive CSR initiatives, and foster innovation. Cases like Linux show that community-based approaches democratize organizational processes, while the Copiapó Mining Disaster illustrates how collective action can achieve extraordinary outcomes.

Value: This study underscores the critical role of communities in modern organizational frameworks. By highlighting the link between community dynamics and sustainable organizational practices, it provides insights into building more resilient, innovative, and socially responsible organizations.

Recommendations: Organizations should prioritize cultivating community-driven cultures by aligning their values with those of their employees. Strategies include fostering open collaboration, supporting shared purpose through CSR initiatives, and leveraging technology to build dynamic and inclusive networks. These efforts can lead to stronger engagement, more significant innovation, and enhanced organizational performance.

Key words: community engagement, organizational innovation, corporate social responsibility (CSR), employee engagement, innovation communities, transformative leadership

JEL codes: M14, O31, D23, L31

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving organizational landscape, the notion of community has emerged as a pivotal element in fostering innovation, engagement, and social responsibility. As organizations navigate the complexities of the modern world, the concept of community extends beyond traditional boundaries, encompassing various interpretations and applications integral to organizational success.

A community can be seen as a collective of individuals united by shared values and goals, creating a sense of belonging and mutual support. This sense of community is crucial for fostering a cohesive environment where members feel connected and committed to individual and collective well-being. Technological advancements have significantly influenced how communities form and function, enabling more dynamic and expansive communication and collaboration networks.

Technological developments have paved the way for new organizational structures prioritizing democratization and member engagement over traditional hierarchical models. Organizations like Linux exemplify this shift, demonstrating how community-driven research and development (R&D) approaches can enhance innovation and members' more potent sense of commitment. By embracing these community-centric models, organizations can tap into their members' collective creativity and expertise, driving groundbreaking solutions and ideas forward.

Beyond technological innovation, communities are vital in advancing corporate social responsibility (CSR). By aligning organizational missions with employees' values and beliefs, CSR initiatives can foster a more profound sense of

purpose and engagement. Campaigns centered around environmental sustainability and social justice resonate with employees, reinforcing their identification with the organization's goals and values.

The concept of community also addresses the fundamental human need for connection and interdependence. In organizational contexts, this translates to enhanced employee well-being, increased civic behavior, and the cultivation of a collaborative environment. The collective identity formed within such communities can drive knowledge creation, innovative thinking, and the development of new solutions to complex challenges.

This article delves into the multifaceted role of communities in organizational development, exploring their impact on innovation, CSR, and employee engagement. Through theoretical insights and practical case studies, the study aims to elucidate how building and nurturing communities within organizations can lead to sustainable growth and success. By understanding the dynamics of community-driven approaches, organizations can better harness their members' potential, fostering innovative and socially responsible environments.

Organizing Through Community

A community can be understood in several ways. For example, 1) it is a group of people who are loyal to the directions they have chosen to be necessary, 2) it is a social class that exhibits similar interests, 3) it refers to ecology, 4) it constitutes the public sphere, 5) it is a common possession and participation (Ross, 2011, p. 61). A sense of community refers to belonging, connecting with a group, and believing together that their needs for integration will be met (Boyd & Nowell, 2020, p. 1029 after McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Sense of Community Responsibility – refers to a sense of duty to support a community's individual and collective well-being not directly rooted in the expectation of personal gain (Boyd & Nowell, 2020, p. 1029, after Nowell & Boyd, 2014).

Technological developments have enabled faster, richer, and more expansive communication networks, and organizations are witnessing the emergence of

new, dynamic cooperation structures (Cordery et al., 2015, p. 645). The community contributes to development (Faber, 2002, p. 180). The word “development” is used as an attribute referring to technological possibilities, and the phrase “development community” is used for new media, the internet, or digital communities. Organizations rely on creative communities to flourish because of the speed and quality of their relationship with the business area. An example of such an approach is Linux. This company has moved away from the hierarchical order of R&D departments, based on control structures, in favor of their democratization and building a sense of commitment of the organization members who form communities (Bansemir, 2013, p. 2). The potential of the innovation community allows for the creation of innovation. Effective anchoring and support allow for creating challenges and unusual approaches to new solutions (Bansemir, 2013, p. 2).

The concept of the organizational community reflects the fundamental need to look at the organization from the perspective of higher needs that can be attributed to the general interdependence of people (Ross, 2011, p. 60). The thought of an organization as a community, philosophically and psychologically, refers to the basic needs of the man of his desires and affirmations (Ross, 2011, p. 60). Attachment to organizations and communities contributes to employees’ well-being and civic behavior (Singh et al. 2021, p. 883). Community as an interactive event of its participants can contribute to knowledge creation (Suorsa, 2017, p. 1187).

A community of employees can go beyond the specificity of the product and be concerned deeper, rooted in the beliefs of employees’ vision of their organization. In critical discourse, it can refer to corporate ideas, rooted in the consciousness of employees and included in slogans that circulate in the life of the organization and the marketing environment or the employer’s brand, such as “success with passion”, “we are number one in the IT industry”, “we create the future”. Communities can also address issues related to Corporate Social Responsibility and refer to matters of public service, e.g., “we are building a better world”, “we are Vegan”, “we believe in health”, “we save the oceans”. Employees can refer to them, believe in them, and participate in organizations whose identity coincides with theirs. Identification of the employee with the leading ideas of

the organization affects the possibility of developing a community of beliefs, as it is easier to create a friendship or relationship with someone with a similar worldview.

A community of thoughts, a community of views, a community of ideas, a community of beliefs – there can be a lot of these communities. Perhaps the future organizations will be communities that revolve around meanings that are important to them. The organization will then be about thoughts and beliefs, and the division of labor will be their exemplification. Great crises, shocking events, and catastrophes made societies face challenges by building emotional engagement and natural communities. People are willing to entrust their resources to what they think is right. Perhaps they feel even better when they can entrust something more than money to a significant and noble cause but offer talent, knowledge, skills, practical solutions, or intellectual expenditures.

As the world followed the fate of the thirty-three Chileans imprisoned during the Copiapó Mining Disaster, the rescue staff created a plan to rescue them. The project gathered around professionals of various fields involved in the case, with an above-average commitment to the work performed. By activating all the outlays of talent, a community of a struggle to extract miners trapped underground was built around the case. As a result of their complex and committed work, a remarkable rescue capsule, Phoenix 2, was created (Dziadul, 2010).

Photo 1: The Phoenix 2 capsule ascends with a trapped miner



Source: The Telegraph (2010). *Chile miners: rescue capsule brings trapped miners to the surface* [Photograph]. The Telegraph. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/>.

Creating the Phoenix 2 rescue capsule is an extreme example of building a community of employees outside everyday organizational life and gathering around some noble cause. A more common manifestation of the existence of communities of corporate relations is a series of third-sector activities. Non-profit representatives demonstrate the characteristics of altruism, cooperation, and above-average engagement in socially, culturally, or ecologically significant issues. This indicates that organizational walls can be replaced by ties of values, ideas, and beliefs of members of given organizations. Virtual reality and user colonies accumulate around issues and merge into organizations of beliefs that extend beyond the physical context.

Collaborative communities have become a strategic imperative for modern organizations aiming to enhance innovation, adaptability, and long-term resilience. These communities not only facilitate knowledge exchange but also create

inclusive environments where shared purpose and collective problem-solving thrive (Agile Business Consortium, 2023). Evidence suggests that community-based collaboration leads to improved operational outcomes, stronger engagement, and greater capacity to manage complexity and risk (University of Kansas Public Management Center, 2023). Communities of practice, in particular help organizations, retain knowledge, promote learning cultures, and foster interdisciplinary dialogue (LinkedIn Pulse, 2023). However, successful implementation requires careful design, sustainability planning, and clarity of roles to avoid fragmentation and ensure continued relevance (ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center, 2023). As London (2023) notes, true collaboration arises not from top-down control but from mutual trust, shared responsibility, and openness to differences – a mindset increasingly critical for navigating organizational challenges in the post-pandemic era.

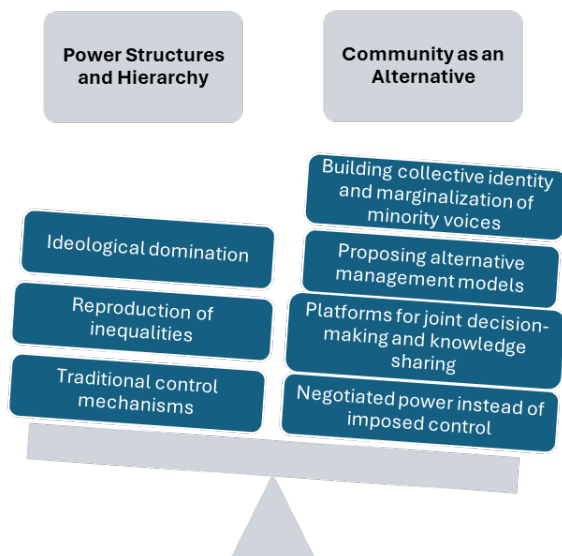
Key Dimensions of Community-Driven Organizational and Critical Approaches

Combining a critical approach to management with the idea of community opens new opportunities for reflection on power structures, relationships between individuals, and the importance of cooperation in organizations. The critical approach, developed within the framework of the theories of authors such as Alvesson and Willmott (1992), emphasizes the importance of challenging the dominant structures and ideologies of management, which allows communities to be understood in this context as spaces of both emancipation and potential instrumentalization. From a critical perspective, traditional organizational structures, based on hierarchy and control, can be seen as mechanisms for the reproduction of power and inequality (Foucault, 1977). Community can provide an alternative to these structures by promoting more democratic forms of cooperation, where power is negotiated rather than imposed from above (Hardt & Negri, 2004). Organizational communities can function as platforms for equal knowledge exchange and joint decision making, undermining classic power divisions in companies.

However, critical management theory draws attention to the possibility of instrumentalizing the idea of communities by managers to increase organizational efficiency and employee loyalty. Alvesson and Willmott (1996) warn against using communities as governance tools that can reinforce ideological dominance and limit the autonomy of individuals. In this context, communities can function as “soft power” that only ostensibly offers equality, while in fact, it sustains existing asymmetries.

However, communities can also be understood as spaces of resistance and emancipation, as employees, through their involvement in ordinary activities, can express their dissatisfaction with dominant organizational practices and propose alternative management models (Fraser, 1997). Such communities make it possible to build a collective identity that fosters joint action and strengthens the voice of individuals in the organization. Butler (2004) points out that any form of community risks excluding individuals who do not fit into its dominant norms. In organizations, this can lead to the marginalization of minority voices, which requires the creation of more inclusive community structures.

Figure 1. Critical Management Approach and Community



Source: own elaboration.

The diagram (Figure 1) illustrates the tension between traditional power structures and community-driven alternatives in organizational contexts. Drawing on Michel Foucault's (1977) analysis of power as pervasive and embedded in hierarchical systems, the left side highlights how control mechanisms perpetuate inequality and ideological domination. In contrast, inspired by Hardt and Negri (2004), the right side proposes community as a democratic alternative, where power is negotiated rather than imposed. However, as Alvesson and Willmott (1996) caution, communities risk becoming tools of "soft power", reinforcing dominance under the guise of collaboration. This balance reflects the potential for emancipation and marginalization, requiring inclusive frameworks, as Butler (2004) emphasizes.

Communities in organizations reflect the evolving dynamics of collaboration, innovation, and shared purpose (Table 1). Each type of community serves a unique function, contributing to the overall development and sustainability of modern organizations. The table below outlines various types of organizational communities and their defining characteristics, highlighting their role in shaping contemporary management practices.

Table 1. Characteristic and types of communities in organizations

Type of Community	Definition	Modern Characteristics
<i>Professional Communities</i>	Groups of employees sharing expertise and common professional goals within an organization.	Knowledge sharing, cross-functional collaboration, and continuous professional development.
<i>Innovation Communities</i>	Groups focused on co-creation, developing new ideas, and fostering innovation within organizational contexts.	Flat hierarchies, openness to experimentation, and emphasis on creativity and problem-solving.
<i>Digital Communities</i>	Virtual groups connected through online platforms to discuss, collaborate, or share resources.	Use of collaborative tools, accessibility across geographic locations, and 24/7 connectivity.
<i>Purpose-Driven Communities</i>	Groups united by shared social, environmental, or ethical goals.	Aligned values, strong collective identity, and active participation in CSR initiatives.
<i>Employee Resource Groups</i>	Internal communities that support specific demographics or interests, such as diversity or mental health.	Inclusive culture, peer-to-peer support, and advocacy for equity within the organization.

<i>Knowledge Communities</i>	Teams focused on accumulating, organizing, and sharing knowledge within and across organizational boundaries.	Structured processes, focus on intellectual capital, and fostering a learning culture.
<i>Leadership Communities</i>	Networks of leaders collaborating to drive strategic decisions and organizational transformation.	Shared accountability, mentorship, and dynamic leadership approaches.
<i>Agile Project Communities</i>	Temporary groups formed to deliver specific projects or achieve predefined objectives.	Flexibility, rapid adaptation, and goal-oriented collaboration.

Source: own elaboration.

Table 1 illustrates the diverse types of communities within organizations, highlighting their unique characteristics and contributions to organizational goals. These communities, ranging from professional and innovation groups to purpose-driven and digital networks, reflect the dynamic and interconnected nature of modern organizational structures. By fostering collaboration, knowledge exchange, and shared values, such communities enhance operational effectiveness and contribute to building inclusive, innovative, and resilient workplaces. Understanding these community types enables organizations to leverage their strategic and cultural transformation potential.

Example of the transformative role of communities in organizations: Linux Case study

Linux is an example of how communities can break down traditional organizational models and create new dynamics for innovation management. Unlike hierarchical R&D structures, the Linux community is based on openness, transparency, and democratization of creative processes. This global distributed collaborative developer network has created one of the most versatile and reliable

operating systems, dominating key sectors such as servers, supercomputers, and mobile devices (Bansemir, 2013).

Linux's democratic cooperation model is based on the idea that any community member can contribute, regardless of formal hierarchy or place of residence. The sense of belonging to a larger goal and the participants' internal motivation play a key role here. Members of this community are motivated not only by potential financial benefits but also by values such as innovation, the common good, and a passion for programming (Faber, 2002).

The Linux development process illustrates how creativity and knowledge dispersed among community members can effectively generate breakthrough solutions. The lack of a traditional hierarchy fosters the free exchange of ideas and allows for a quick response to user needs and technological changes. As a result, the Linux community has created a model in which member engagement leads to increased product quality and innovation of the entire software ecosystem (Cordery et al., 2015).

Linux is also an example of an inclusive approach to management. Thanks to the open source principle, each user can use the system and contribute to its development, which increases engagement and makes the organization more flexible and resilient to market changes. The Community approach used in Linux shows that the open cooperation model can be effective and more sustainable in the long term (Bansemir, 2013; Ross, 2011).

The Linux example shows that community organizational models can be an effective tool in innovation management. They allow individuals' competences, resources, and values to be combined in a way that would not be possible in traditional organizational structures. The democratization of the innovation process and joint project management are becoming increasingly desirable models, especially in organizations operating in a dynamically changing technological environment.

Discussion

The community is a collective therapy of purification and perhaps even liberation. The typical story is outside our accustomed contexts in the analogue environment. The world of instant communication provides, on the one hand, an enormity of possibilities for creating communities that exist outside the geographical context, and on the other hand, many anxieties about the mental condition of modern generations. Organizations, therefore, face new questions about their possibilities of development following these conditions and about the form of these relations. The shift from hierarchical to community-driven organizational models highlights the importance of adaptability and shared purpose, with collaboration as a catalyst for innovation and resilience in global markets (Cordery et al., 2015; Suorsa, 2017).

By aligning organizational identity with community values, organizations can build sustainable, resilient structures that drive innovation and enhance employee well-being and civic participation (Boyd & Nowell, 2020; Cordery et al., 2015). Mainly responsible organizations that genuinely adopt CSR strategies – rather than doing so for marketing purposes only – take on responsibilities related to the challenges of emerging technologies. Will those organizations that operate solely within the product and service survive, or does the future show that those that understand that they must operate within communities, cultures of partnership, modern participation, and understand Internet tribes will survive? Some scientists would say that it depends on the specifics of their business, others that it is only a matter of time.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the community can be a kind of hope for profiling the organizations of the future, which strive for self-liberation through entrustment to worthy values and manifest with appreciation attitudes worthy of a mature civilization. Zygmunt Bauman writes about the possibilities inherent in employees' solidarity as "the only trustworthy possibility to choose what is good for me – but it would require the liquidation of permanent workplaces: office rooms or factory halls" (Bauman, 2011 p. 232). Perhaps Bauman's forecasts organizations based on potentials and talents that cannot fit into the usual patterns of activities and exist outside the systemic trap.

The future of organizations could be community relations because of doing things together. Integrating technology and virtual communication tools enables organizations to create decentralized, inclusive communities that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries, fostering engagement and collective intelligence (Bansemir, 2013; Ross, 2011).

Referring to the original understanding of organizations as an organized group of people focused on goals and performing tasks, it can be assumed that some organized communities of innovation, profession, and communication are organizations. They may not have a normative or formal sanction, but they fall into the categories of organization around a task or specialization. Of particular interest seems to be the work of people who jointly use their talents to achieve the so-called “higher purpose”. Different generations had their manifestos. Perhaps today, community organizations can be designated, associating employees with their abilities, predispositions, and skills to create, not just produce.

Conclusion

Exploring community within organizational settings reveals its profound impact on fostering innovation, enhancing employee engagement, and driving corporate social responsibility (CSR). Communities are critical in the modern organizational framework, defined by shared values and mutual support. By leveraging technological advancements, organizations can create dynamic, interconnected communities that transcend traditional hierarchical structures, exemplified by models like Linux’s community-driven R&D approach. This democratization not only enhances innovation but also strengthens the commitment and engagement of organizational members.

Moreover, aligning organizational missions with employees’ values through CSR initiatives creates a more profound sense of purpose and identity. Slogans and campaigns that resonate with employees’ beliefs foster a cohesive organizational culture and drive collective action toward social and environmental causes. The concept of community, therefore, extends beyond mere organizational

function to fulfill fundamental human needs for connection, interdependence, and collective achievement.

As organizations continue to evolve, the role of community becomes increasingly vital. The future of successful organizations may well be rooted in their ability to cultivate and sustain communities centered around shared meanings and values. By embracing community-driven approaches, organizations can achieve sustainable growth and contribute to broader societal well-being.

While this study highlights the significant role of communities in organizational success, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. Firstly, the research relies on theoretical perspectives and selected case studies, which may not capture the full diversity of community dynamics across different organizational contexts. Further empirical research is needed to validate these findings and explore the nuances of community building in various industries and cultural settings.

Secondly, focusing on successful examples like Linux may present an idealized view of community-driven approaches. Not all organizations may experience the same level of success, and challenges such as internal conflicts, resource constraints, and resistance to change can hinder the effective implementation of community models. Future studies should address these challenges and provide strategies for overcoming them.

Additionally, the rapidly changing technological landscape poses a challenge in maintaining up-to-date insights into the role of technology in community building. Continuous advancements in digital communication and collaboration tools necessitate ongoing research to understand their evolving impact on organizational communities.

Lastly, the study's emphasis on CSR initiatives and employee engagement might overlook other critical factors influencing organizational success. Economic, political, and regulatory environments and individual organizational cultures are significant in shaping community dynamics. A more holistic approach that considers these factors would provide a comprehensive understanding of community in organizational contexts.

In conclusion, while the study underscores the transformative potential of communities within organizations, it also calls for further research and a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved. By addressing these limitations,

future studies can build on the insights provided and contribute to more effective and inclusive community-driven organizational practices.

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