Communities within and without of the corporation: control, power, and interests

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Please cite as:

Faulconbridge, JR (2017) Communities inside and outside the corporation: control, power and interests. In Baars, G. and Spicer, A (Eds) The corporation. A critical, multi-disciplinary handbook. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 457-469. ISBN: 978-1-107-07311-1

Introduction

This chapter examines how critical analysis of communities within and without of the corporation can provide valuable insights into the way communities emerge, are leveraged, are imbued with power and politics, and are used to serve the interests of different parties. The starting point for discussions is geographical and organization studies literatures on corporate communities. In this work, one preoccupation is identifying how managers in corporations seek to construct communities (see for example, Amin and Cohendet, 2004; Faulconbridge, 2010). This work has been informed, in particular, by the communities of practice literature (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). A second preoccupation is analysing the various extra-firm communities that corporations participate in (see for example, Bathelt et al., 2004; Maskell, 2014; Morgan, 2001). The purpose here is to reveal the ways corporations define, exploit and contribute to communities outside of the organisation's boundaries. The effects on institutions are afforded particular attention in this literature as part of efforts to understand how, through communities, corporations influence local and global governance regimes (see also Morgan, this volume; Sanchez, this volume).

In these literatures, the concept of the community is used in a variety of ways, from co-located workplace communities, to local host communities in a city or region, to transnational virtual communities. Whilst recognising the limitations of such diverse conceptions, these literatures are useful because they reveal not only the centrality of, but also the sometimes insidious nature of, the communities created and leveraged by corporations. In particular, the chapter seeks to reveal the ways that: communities are used by corporations as a means of control; power over communities without is used by corporations to allow goals to be achieved; and communities are used as means of protecting and promoting the interests of particular groups. The discussion thus reveals that critical analyses are crucial for bringing into view the multiple ways that communities can be used as a means of pursuing the interests of the capitalists driving corporations, this having potentially detrimental effects for workers and society. It is also noted, however, that communities might also be a means of resisting the control, power, and interests of the corporation.

The rest of the chapter proceeds over four further sections. The next section considers how communities within the corporation have been studied, and the way these communities contribute to the innovative capacity and governance of corporations. The following section then considers the parallel role of communities without of the corporation, focussing in particular on how corporations leverage such communities and in turn affect the governance and development of local and transnational economies. The penultimate section then exemplifies the nature and effects of communities within and without of the corporation through the case of legal professional services. The concluding section reflects on the critical future research agenda.

Communities within the corporation

The starting point for discussions of communities within is reflections on fundamental conceptualisation of the corporation. There are, of course, multiple competing perspectives on the corporation. For example, work in economics has inspired a transaction cost perspective, (Williamson, 1979), as well as the resource based view (Barney, 1991), and evolutionary perspectives on how competency is created, maintained and developed over time (Nelson and Winter, 1982). A communitarian perspective does not necessarily question the fundamental tenets of such perspectives. Rather, it conceives of the firm as a ‘community of communities’ (Brown and Duguid, 1991) that generates economic and competency related advantages through communitarian activities.

Specifically, when corporations are viewed from a communitarian perspective, two related sets of issues emerge as important. First, the form of communities within the corporation. Communities may vary in form from functional groups with a particular mission, such as providing marketing services for the firm (Cohendet and Llerena, 2003), to more or less permanent project teams (see Engwall, 2003), to a community of practice centred on a shared form of work or interest (Wenger, 1998). As a result, whist sharing a general conception of communities as groups of interacting individuals, with the collective being the means of generating economic or competency related advantages, the organization studies literature deploying the term community refers to a diversity of forms. In particular, communities are viewed as both organic and organized forms. On the one hand, as Brown and Duguid (1991: 49) argue, communities are ‘fluid’ and ‘emergent’, not being deliberately created but being organic and spurred by shared interests, experiences or concerns. On the other hand, as Wenger et al. (2002) argue, ‘cultivating’ communities is increasingly important and common in corporations. This involves the deliberate creation of communities that can enhance competitive advantage, for instance through the use of combinations of virtual forums, face-to-face meetings, and collaborative project working (see, for example, Faulconbridge, 2006, 2010).

A second concern in existing literature is how communities contribute to the functioning of the corporation. Here emphasis is placed on communities not just as a structure for the management of people, but also as a means through which the corporation is transformed into a learning organization that develops its economic advantage and competencies through collective efforts (Cohendet and Llerena, 2003). The learning perspective has been most thoroughly developed through work on communities of practice (see for instance Amin and Cohendet, 2004), and emphasizes the value of learning in practice that occurs when individuals with shared interests and experiences interact and work towards a common agenda. Particularly significant about this view is the way it promotes community participation over active management as a means of enhancing the competitive advantage of the firm. Cohen and Prusak (2001) argue that communities should be nurtured rather than controlled, implying that, once formed, communities should become self-governing entities that serve the interests of the corporation through self-motivated activities.

There is much more that could be said about the form and functioning of communities within the corporation. However, I want to focus on two critical questions that emerge in relation to the form and functioning of communities. These relate to the location and the internal power dynamics of communities, both of these questions highlighting how the baggage that the term community brings with it needs to be shed in order to critically conceptualise corporate communities.

Locating the corporate community

Two particularly important and interrelated changes in the economy over the past 40 years or so have raised a series of questions about the location of communities within corporations. These questions relate, in particular, to whether or not communities are localised phenomenon, attached to a single site within the corporation and predominantly involving face-to-face encounters between community members (see Amin and Cohendet, 2004; Faulconbridge, 2006).

First, processes of globalization have led to corporations stretching their activities across space, implying that processes of production and the communities that enabled them have also become stretched. In particular, whilst early conceptions of the multinational enterprise focussed on divisions of labour between different global subsidiaries (Massey, 1995), recognition has increasingly grown of the way the transnationally integrated corporation benefits from collaboration between subsidiaries (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1998). This has been variously developed through work on global production networks (Dicken et al., 2001) and the integrated 'one firm' service corporation (Faulconbridge, 2010; Segal-Horn and Dean, 2009). Questions about how communities might, therefore, emerge in-between different corporate subsidiaries have become of significance.

Meanwhile, second, as a result of the aforementioned processes of globalization and also technological changes that have transformed the practice of work, the increased mobility of workers has been documented. This mobility can range from that associated with the intranationally travelling photocopier technicians (Orr, 1996) or salespersons (Laurier, 2004), to that associated with international business travel (Faulconbridge et al., 2009) and secondments (Millar and Salt, 2008). The growing importance of these different forms of mobility means that community members may work away from a single site and whilst on the move, and may travel between different subsidiaries at regular (daily/weekly/monthly) intervals (Jones, 2008). For corporate communities this means that choreographing interactions between mobile and dispersed members, and managing the effects of travel in terms of stress, time away from the family, and impacts on physical health becomes important.

Such developments are worth noting because the concept of community brings with it a risk of a parochial perspective. Nostalgic views which associate community with local collectives must be transcended (Amin and Roberts, 2008) and communities recognised as being at the heart of a global capitalist economy. Morgan (2001: 121) thus notes the rise of transnational communities in business systems which act as a means of economic coordination and which involve a ‘thick web of communicational possibilities’. These communities are certainly not begin and local phenomena.

The rise of transnational communities raises a number of important questions. First, what role do transnational communities play alongside their local counterparts? In this regard, questions about the significance of face-to-face contact are of relevance. At one level this relates to the possibilities for face-to-face encounter when communities are local, being located for example in a single office of a corporation. In such scenarios, the interactions that matter can benefit from the richness of the visual cues gained through embodied encounter (Boden and Molotch, 1994). Moreover, the opportunities that chance encounters, at the water cooler or otherwise, bring for interaction also matter (Cohen and Prusak, 2001). The materiality of the workplace thus becomes a crucial consideration in how local communities operate and are governed (Kornberger and Clegg, 2004).

Transnational communities potentially limit the possibilities for face-to-face encounter. The very mobility of people and capital that helps create transnational communities can, of course, be a solution; business travel for instance allowing community members to spend periods in the same place and benefit from embodied face-to-face interactions (Faulconbridge et al., 2009; Strengers, 2014). But, as Amin and Cohendet (2004: 110) note, the operation of transnational communities "includes, yes, face-to-face meetings, sociality, and casual contact…but it also draws on distant objects such as drawings faxed between offices around the world, global travel to form temporary project teams, and daily internet/telephone/video conversations" (Amin and Cohendet, 2004: 110). As such, the rise of transnational teams has involved the creation of a new architecture designed to ensure that regardless of whether team members are co-located or spatially distributed, productive interactions are possible.

A second key question relates to how local and transnational communities are formed and nurtured. As already noted, the literature is split on whether communities can only emerge organically without deliberate creation by the corporation, or whether they can be organized and cultivated as part of corporate strategy. Whilst such questions are equally applicable to local or transnational communities, studies of the latter have been particularly useful for revealing how deliberate organizing and cultivating increasingly occurs in corporations. For instance, Faulconbridge (2010) documents how transnational communities of practice are constructed in global architecture firms through not only the provision of the material infrastructure that can support communities, things such as circulating documents and the provision of videoconferencing, but also the deliberate management of the social conditions that underlie community formation. This included shaping two of the fundamental social components of communities of practice that Wenger (1998) identified in his seminal work; a sense of joint enterprise, involving efforts to produce a common way of understanding and completing activities, and shared repertoires, this involving the generation of common languages, tools or procedures that community members share.

Such insights into how communities are created by firms as part of efforts to leverage their benefits reveal that communities both local and transnational have increasingly become mechanisms of management. The cultivation of communities by managers to serve particular purposes involves a significant shift away from the ‘fluid’ and ‘emergent’ forms that Brown and Duguid (1991) discussed. The third key question about communities within the corporation relates, therefore, to how local and transnational communities in similar but also distinct ways effect workers.

As Duguid (2008) argues, if communities are to be effective means of organizing work and spurring innovation, they should have autonomy and agency to improvise, and should be antagonistic and capable of challenging the status quo within organizations. However, once they become mechanisms of management and ‘tools’ promoted by consultants and knowledge managers, the potential for such conditions to exist is eroded. In particular, there is increasingly a need to challenge the intuitive assumption that communities are an open, hospitable and agreeable means of organizing work. As Fox (2000: 858) argues, there is a need to study “power relations from within situated activity” in order to reveal the way communities can act as means to control workers and enrol them in corporate projects, or exclude them as non-compliant. One of the key concepts from Lave and Wenger’s (1998) work, ‘legitimate participation’ in a community, when viewed through the Focault inspired lens that Fox (2000) proposes, thus becomes indicative of the governmental possibilities of communities. To become a legitimate member means subscribing to the community’s definition of legitimate practice. Even in the organic and fluid communities Brown and

Duguid (1991) envisage, and certainly in the more organized communities developed as management tools, questions thus arise about who is defining legitimacy, the extent to which this definition is open to contestation, and the implications for workers in corporations who are expected to participate in communities.

Contu (2014) demonstrates the importance of such sensitivity to power relations through analysis of the ‘creative abrasions’ in communities of practice within one digital production company. These ‘abrasions, Contu argues, are fundamental to how communities exercise power over workers; in the creative industry these ‘abrasions’ being at the heart of how the inherent tension between creativity and management are handled. For instance, in one case studied by Contu, the work of a junior member of staff is criticised and ridiculed, this not only highlighting her failure to participate legitimately in the community, but also acting as a means of encouraging compliance and learning of the values that others subscribe to. As such, Contu reveals that even in corporations that are assumed to rely on limited managerial intervention in day to day work, communities become a means of regulation. This exposes the superficiality of the façade of autonomy that corporations in creative sectors use to entice workers and garner commitment.

Other examples of how communities can be used to control workers include Robert’s (2006) observation that corporations can exclude certain communities that are not supportive of strategic priorities, and Boussebaa’s (2009) study of how in global professional service firms power and politics define relations between communities located in different subsidiaries, this inhibiting collaboration and creating a core and periphery within the corporation. These studies remind us, then, that whilst communities might be productive social spaces for workers, there is always the potential for exclusionary and governmental forces. Research needs to be alert to these forces and reflect on how communities, like any other organizational form, have the insidious potential to inflict on workers what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 167) called ‘symbolic violence, “[a] violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity...”. The complicity of this violence is most significant, being as it is something that is often subsumed under the hospitable façade of the community, its apparently collaborative nature, and the innate desire of workers to be ‘insiders’.

Blurring the boundaries of the corporation – communities without

Communities and critical questions about their form and effects are not just of significance within. In line with recognition that the boundaries of the corporation have become increasingly blurred (Colombo, 1998), there has been growing acknowledgement that participation in various forms of extra-firm community are crucial to innovation and competitiveness. Driving this boundary blurring has been processes of externalization which have created increasingly interdependence between firms and their suppliers (Dicken, 2011), as well as a growing reliance on advice from professional service firms (Miles, 2001) and recognition that ‘knowledge networking’ (Skymre, 1999) through participation in multiple communities can drive innovation. As part of this trend, engagement with various stakeholders outside of the firm, including consumers through forms of user led innovation (von Hippel, 2005) and critics of the corporation and its impacts, for instance on the environment (Zietsma and Lawrence, 2010), has been shown to be an important part of challenging thinking and developing new products and practices.

Communities without of the corporation thus take multiple forms, from the industry professional association (Benner, 2003; Faulconbridge, 2007a), to the local industrial cluster (Porter, 1998), and transnational interest group (Morgan, 2006). At one level, such communities are similar to those within the corporation, being collectives that generate economic and competency related advantages through collaboration between individuals.

However, there are also important differences. Communities without of the corporation are often populated by members drawn from competing firms, and as such membership by individuals is driven both by an interest in developing collective interests, but also by a desire to extract advantages for their employing organization. As a result, a range of additional questions emerge about communities without of the corporation that this section of the chapter addresses.

Give and take

The first important question relates to the way membership of extra-firm communities creates responsibilities of contribution. To what extent does membership imply responsibility to give to as well as take from the community? A useful way to explore this question is by considering the nature of local communities that corporations, through their employees, participate in.

It is now well recognised that significant advantages can be accrued by firms from the localities they operate in. Porter (1998) most famously drew attention to this through his (now widely critiqued) work on clusters, whilst a parallel literature on industrial districts inspired by Marshall's early work (1950 [1890]) makes similar arguments (for a summary see Asheim, 1996). Much of this work is focussed on explaining how participation in local industrial communities, both through formal means such as membership of associations but also through informal means such as attending social events and frequenting local bars, leads to learning and enhanced capacity for innovation. Thus, for instance, Henry and Pinch (2001) document how Formula 1 motorsport companies benefit from locating in 'Motorsport Valley' in Oxfordshire in the UK because of the knowledge spill-overs that occur between firms thanks to the kinds of community participation mentioned above.

In one sense, these literatures assume that give and take is an inherent part of participating in local communities; all individuals both helping sustain the community via their participation but also taking away insights that they use to the advantage of their employer. Faulconbridge (2007a) argues that commitment to such a logic is a crucial part of the ‘institutional thickness’ of local communities; thickness being a variety of “local social and cultural and institutional arrangements" (Amin, 1999: 369) that define acceptable behaviour. ‘Thickness’ provides a means of reconciling the apparently contradictory situation whereby individuals from competing firms share ideas and experiences. However, such give and take should not be taken for granted.

A number of literatures have drawn attention to the way corporations, more or less intentionally, might give less than they take from participation in local communities (Dicken, 2011; Lee, 1999). Again, work on transnational corporations (TNCs) provides a useful lens because of the way concerns about their footloose nature and ability to re-locate activities have spurred research on their impacts on host communities (Yeung, 2009). Again, the idea of community is used in a diversity of ways in the literature, and certainly extends beyond the kinds of communities documented in studies of industrial districts. For instance, work on corporate social responsibility extends analysis to the communities of citizens impacted upon by the work of the corporation (see for example Campbell, 2007).

One core theme in work on TNCs relates to their degree of commitment to host communities. TNCs have been accused of exploiting their apparently footloose nature (even if sunk costs in reality may limit this) through forms of place arbitrage which allow communities to be exploited. This exploitation revolves around threats to relocate, and can lead to low wages, poor work conditions, environmental degradation, and economic fragility due to an over-reliance on a lead TNC for employment (Dicken, 2011). In such scenarios, TNCs do more taking than giving.For instance, TNCs can come to define the agenda of local communities (Levy, 2008), whether that be a community of practice associated with the development of new kinds of product, or a professional association operating at the industrial district level and which influences institutional investments. The tangible effect of TNC dominance of local communities can be lock-in to economic development trajectories that serve the interests of the TNC but do not in the long term benefit the workers and sustainability of the economy of a locality.

In relation to both of the examples above, the power of TNCs in terms of their ability to act to protect their own interest and control the actions and opportunities available to workers, governments and other stakeholders, is a central concern. Individuals representing TNCs, whether they intend it or not, often find themselves in positions of power in communities, most fundamentally because TNCs often anchor local industrial communities, being the lead firm that generates most employment and demand for component and service suppliers (Yeung, 2009). As such, TNCs can use their power and influence to direct communities in ways that are beneficial for their activities but that are unsustainable in the long-term for a local economy. Again, then, it appears that communities need to be viewed through a critical lens that brings into view the potential for insidious effects. One example of work that does this is the growing body of writing on forced labour in global production networks (see, for example, Barrientos and Smith, 2007; McGrath, 2013). This reveals that the structural arrangements of production networks, which often devolve responsibility for workers away from lead TNCs, create the potential for hidden forms of exploitation that harm both individual workers and the development of local economies more widely. Such issues need careful management, in particular through public policy. However, as Dicken (2011) highlights, such management can be difficult given the ability of TNCs to bargain as part of arbitrage processes in which states are played off against one another, competition for investment or threats of disinvestment driving such bargaining processes. Export processing zones and the suspension or lax policing of labour and other regulations designed to tame TNCs and the negative effects on workers, the environment, and local economic development are good examples of how management of the insidious effects of corporations through public policy can be stymied by the power of firms (see Lee, 1999).

Perpetuating neoliberal interests

As already noted, communities have always and continue to be at the centre of capitalist systems of accumulation. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the transnational communities that form around a common interest and seek to shape economic governance regimes, such as those relating to bankruptcy and antitrust (competition). As one sub-set of the transnational communities that Morgan (2001) identifies, these communities have been associated with the emergence of transnational governance regimes that operate either through the auspices of organisations such as the World Trade Organisation, or as forms of 'soft governance' that define best practice (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson, 2006; Djelic and Quack, 2003).

Participation in transnational governance communities is driven first and foremost by a desire to protect and enhance the interests of the individuals and corporations involved in global capitalist activities. The effects of this self-interest serving are worth reflecting upon as the governance regimes produced have significant implications not only for global economies but also for a range of stakeholders in wider society. Two examples illustrate the significance of such effects of transnational communities.

Greenwood and Suddaby (2007: 334) document how the 'big five' accountancy firms, as they were at the time of their analysis, were part of the development of a "compact between conglomerate professional firms and transnational trade organizations”. This was designed to promote a transnational regulatory field in which the firms in question could operate freely and leverage their emerging multidisciplinary practices. The compact emerged as the interests of the firms in question aligned with those of, in particular, the World Trade Organization (WTO). The compact led to neoliberal logics of free markets being exerted on professional domains as restrictions on both the services accountancy firms were entitled to deliver and the access they had to different national markets were relaxed. The resultant transnational professional service field opened the way for the ‘big five’ to “influence governments not only by providing consulting services about accounting, tax and management advice, but by developing mechanisms enabling privatizations and giving more general advice about using markets to coordinate economic activity” (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2007: 345). As a result, and as is discussed in more detail in the next example, the transnational service field that formed and united the interests of senior professionals from the ‘big five’ as well as the WTO played a role in transforming the economies and societies of countries around the world. Questions about whether this ultimately brings long-term benefits are well-documented (see for instance Klein, 2007); transformations occurring in ways designed to enable the activities of global capitalists, including in this case the ‘big five’ accountancy firms, with the concerns of and detrimental effects on other stakeholders being subordinated to the interests of the powerful capitalists. Arnold (2005) illustrates such effects when she describes how Greek domestic sovereignty over accounting standards was undermined by the transnational field formed through a compact between the ‘big five’ and the WTO, this leading to the forced adoption of transnational standards that removed some of the systems devised domestically to protect consumer interest.

Halliday and Carruthers (2009) provide a different example through their work on bankruptcy regimes. The emergence of a global bankruptcy regime is shown by Halliday and

Carruthers to have been the result of sustained efforts by the International Monetary Fund, supported by global accountancy, law and consultancy professional service firms, to convince, compel and negotiate with countries affected by the Asian financial crisis. Countries including China, Indonesia, and South Korea were in different ways enrolled into a set of global bankruptcy standards, this being seen as crucial for protecting global investors, i.e., the clients of the global professional service firms involved in the project. As far as our interest here in transnational communities is concerned, this example is significant because it reveals the potential for communities to form and reconfigure national economies. In the case of bankruptcy law the community was formed of multiple interested professional service firms as well as the IMF, and worked tirelessly over many years to produce, disseminate and legitimize the knowledge that underlay international standards for bankruptcy. The work of such communities has, according to Boyer (2007), led to a situation in which international bankruptcy regimes protect international investors but leave citizens of countries to deal with the volatility of financialized economies. The fallout of the global financial crisis clearly reveals the negative effects of this: the excesses and mistakes of financial elites being paid for, literally through taxes and austerity, by citizens who never reaped the benefits of the financialized products that brought down the global banking system.

There is, then, very good reason to ask critical questions of the way corporations leverage communities without. As shown by the examples above of the transnational field transforming domestic accounting practices and the effects of bankruptcy regimes on the fallout of the financial crisis, power relations and their effects on those participating in or affected by the actions of communities have the potential to yield questionable outcomes, whether at the individual or societal level. The chapter now turns to a short case study of a single type of corporation, the corporate law firm, as an example of how the different dimensions of corporate community discussed above play out in overlapping ways.

The firm as collaborative community – the case of corporate law firms

In this section I draw on my own empirical studies of English corporate law firms, as well as other published research, to examine the different ways communities operate within and without of corporations. I take as a starting point the idea that corporate law firms might usefully be viewed as a form of what Adler et al. (2008) call 'collaborative community'. This conceptualisation draws attention to how, in the case of Anglo-Saxon professional service firms such as law firms, long-recognised logics of autonomy and in turn the organisation of firms through what Mintzberg (1979) called 'adhocracy' whereby managerial control is replaced by professional discretion, have relied on forms of community control. For instance, peer sanction for misbehaviour, and decision-making through consultation and consensus formation, have been highlighted as key features of professional partnerships (Greenwood and Empson, 2003; Lazega, 2001). The nature of this 'traditional' and organic form of community control has, however, been evolving in light of pressures in the English context imposed by neoliberal reforms of the professions (Muzio and Ackroyd, 2005) and associated processes of globalization and technological change (Brock et al., 1999). Reforms, which were instigated in the English context in the 1980s as part of a broader liberalization of the professions, have led to change in both the ownership structure of firms, and the logics guiding everyday business practice. In relation to the former, there has been a shift away from the traditional partnership model of ownership as corporate entities emerge, the Limited Liability Partnership model and opportunities for the public (stock market) listing of law firms allowing this. In relation to the later, the imperatives of managerialism (Cooper et al., 1996) and financial performance (Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2008) have led to greater emphasis on profit generation than in previous eras as firms compete in both national and global deregulated markets.

Collaborative community thus refers to the idea that in the context of pressures which threaten to undermine 'traditional' forms of control, a new form of community governance emerges in which "participants coordinate their activity through a shared commitment to a set of ultimate goals" (Adler et al., 2008: 366). This reflects in many ways the underlying premise of a community of practice, and Adler et al. (2008) note that collaborative community is defined by a reliance on interactions between different groups within (and I will argue also without) in order to navigate the increased complexities of capitalist economies. Indeed, Seabrooke (2014) shows that the claims to expertise that underlie professional control are increasingly constructed through forms of 'epistemic arbitrage' which connect together different professional communities in complex ways. For example, lawyers must compete with accountants as part of tussles over claims to the expertise needed to provide legal advice about corporate activities such as mergers and acquisitions.

Collaborative community can be seen in the case of corporate law firms along multiple dimensions. Within firms, communities of practice have become a central means of governing the activities of professionals. As Faulconbridge (2007b) shows, these communities are both local and global, being as they are focussed around areas of practice rather than offices or legal jurisdictions. Through these communities learning and innovation occurs that helps the firms in question enhance their economic competitiveness and competencies. For instance, approaches to common forms of legal transaction are shared between community members and insights into ways to enhance efficiency and effectiveness developed. However, these communities are not inert structures. Faulconbridge (2007b) shows that they are used to govern the way professionals produce and deliver legal advice as part of efforts to maintain control of processes and practices within the firms. In global firms this takes the form of control which seeks to reshape the practices of lawyers outside of the home-countries of the firms. For instance, in English global law firms communities act as a means of shaping the practices of lawyers in civil law jurisdictions so that they correspond with the common law approaches favoured by the firms in question (see also Faulconbridge, 2008). Communities within are, then, increasingly means of management organization and have important governmental effects.

In addition, collaborative communities within corporate law firms are also a means of managing interactions between an increasingly diverse group of actors. For example, as Empson et al. (2013) show, a growing cadre of non-lawyers (including finance officers, human resource personnel, business development executives etc) influence the organization of corporate law firms. But, this cadre need to collaborate with professionals (lawyers) to exercise control, whilst professionals need to collaborate with these non-lawyers to handle the complexities of ever growing firms. Moving forward, as accountancy firms begin to rekindle their ambitions to form truly multidisciplinary partnerships through the creation of legal divisions, such heterogeneity within collaborative communities is likely to intensify. The communities within professional service firms such as law are, therefore, both becoming more diverse and, in line with the discussions earlier in this chapter, are increasingly vectors of power and control in ways not witnessed in earlier forms of the professional adhocracy as different groups struggle for influence.

Without of the corporate law firm, communities matter in a variety of ways. At one level, the clients of corporate law firms are increasingly part of the process of producing legal advice. Reflecting suggestions that advice is co-produced by professional service firms and their clients (Miles, 2001), clients are increasingly drawn into communities of practice in order to tap into their industry specific expertise, this allowing advice to be tailored and sensitive to sectoral variations. More broadly, corporate law firms become part of communities in the cities they operate in. This usually relates to city-based communities of fellow legal professionals but also regulators. As Faulconbridge (2007a) shows, this can involve active participation in communities centred around professional associations and the associated social networking activities they provide, the ambition being to both gain insights that advance the competitiveness of the firm, but also to shape the regulatory and competitive landscape in ways that serve self-interests. For instance, in the case of English law firms, active participation in City of London based communities is important for shaping the economic environment of the London market.

At the same time, however, participation in global communities seeking to influence other host- jurisdictions is important. One example of this is the way English law firms, in collaboration with the Law Society of England and Wales, have sought to engage with the legal community in India as part of efforts to encourage liberalization of the market (see The Lawyer, 2007). Engaging with these communities forms a key part of strategies designed to ensure that the transnational professional field for legal advice is unhindered by regulatory barriers in different jurisdictions, this not necessarily serving the interests of Indian lawyers but being encouraged by a powerful compact of law firms and associated bodies. Ultimately, these efforts failed, revealing that the nation-state does still have the power to resist TNCs and the communities they help create. This suggests that revealing the way corporations utilize communities to further their interests can provide a useful first step to developing understanding of resistance strategies, a point I return to below.

Not all of the communities that corporate law firms are part of have, however, been thwarted by the state. Morgan (2006) outlines through his work on the rise of the International Competition Network the way law firms collaborated with trade bodies, professional service firms, and other groups set to benefit from harmonised competition regulation, to develop standards and best practices that have come to govern the way international competition issues are handled. As a form of collaborative community, the international competition network is, then, representative of not only the growing heterogeneity within the communities that law firms operate within, but also the way communities can be an effective means of gaining control of issues of importance and governing economic practice in ways that benefits the firms in question. Again, we might ask whose interests are being served by this compact and the transnational governance regime that emerges, with other TNCs seemingly most likely to benefit. As with the case of accounting standards documented by Arnold (2005), the international competition network as a community has managed to effectively intervene in how competition matters are dealt with in hundreds of jurisdictions, and therefore potentially undermines the ability of the state to prioritise the interests of citizens. Further research is needed, however, to ascertain the precise nature of such effects; existing work tending not to ask such critical questions but focusing on the way the transnational communities operate and implement standards. This highlights again the importance of probing the critical questions associated with the way corporations leverage communities, both to identify the kinds of resistance strategies possible as well as the risks for a range of different stakeholders.

Conclusions

The concept of community is now firmly embedded in theoretical conceptualisations of the corporation. This chapter has explored the different ways that community has been used as a means of understanding the organization, control and impacts of corporations, highlighting the way communities can be used within as a management tool to both drive innovation and control workers, and the way corporations create, engage in, and impact on communities without. Especially important in the chapter’s narrative are critical reflections on the effects of community. The chapter has sought to move beyond the often intuitive position that communities are collegial and benign social units, to draw attention to the various ways that communities can be used to control and exploit workers, to the way that corporations are prone to leveraging positions of power to take more than they give to host communities, and to how corporations seek to use communities as a means of shaping systems of capitalism in ways that benefit their activities and economic interests. Many communities might, therefore, be said to be associated with corporate self-interest serving in the contemporary financialized era. There is, however, an important caveat to add to this interpretation.

Communities within and without of the corporation can also be a positive force. Just as they have been leveraged to further the interests of capitalists and the corporations they represent, communities might be leveraged as a mode of resistance designed to limit negative effects on workers and host communities. Less attention has been given to such a role here; the chapter aiming to highlight the need to develop critical reflections on the nature of communities in corporate life. But a fruitful way forward would be to seek to connect work on resistance within (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Fleming and Spicer, 2003) and without (Contu et al., 2013; Dicken, 2011) of corporations to ideas of community and to examine how some of the insidious effects pointed at in this chapter could be counterbalanced. For instance, analysing resistance of attempts at control by management through community formation might reveal be productive. Likewise, analysis of the strategic bargaining of host-country actors as a means of creating conditions in which TNCs have to give as much as they take from local communities might yield lessons about whether and how the TNC can be tamed, as the example of the failure of English law firms to gain access to India suggests is possible. There is much more than could be said in this regard. The key thing to note, therefore, is that developing critical perspectives on communities within and without of the corporation opens-up opportunities to reveal insidious effects, but then also begins to lay the path for discussions of how such effects might be curtailed. This chapter takes one small step along this path.

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