



The Firm as a Collaborative Community: The Reconstruction of Trust in the Knowledge Economy

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This volume explores the changing nature of community in modern corporations. Community within and between firms--the fabric of trust so essential to contemporary business--has long been based on loyalty. This loyalty has been largely destroyed by three decades of economic turbulence, downsizing and restructuring. Yet community is more important than ever in an increasingly complex, knowledge-intensive economy. The thesis of this volume is that a new form of community is slowly emerging--one that is more flexible and wider in scope than the community of loyalty, and that transcends the limitations of both traditional *Gemeinschaft* and modern *Gesellschaft*. We call this form 'collaborative community'.

The trend towards collaborative community is difficult to detect amidst the ferocious forces of market and bureaucratic rationalization. But close analysis of some of America's most successful corporations reveals three dimensions of the emerging form:

- A shared ethic of interdependent contribution: distinct from the uneasy mix of loyalty and individualism that prevailed for so long;
- A formalized set of norms of interdependent process management that include iterative co-design, metaphoric search, and systematic mutual understanding: distinct from both rigid authority hierarchies and informal log-rolling;
- An interdependent social identity that supports these organizational features: distinct from both dependent, traditionalistic identities and the independence of the autonomous self that is often associated with Western culture.

This volume is a collaborative effort of leading scholars in organization studies to delineate the new form of community and the forces encouraging and constraining its growth. The contributors combine sociology and psychology theory with detailed analysis of business cases at the firm and inter-firm level.

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