Beyond Teams:
The Transformative Power of Building a Workplace Community

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In recent years, the workplace has undergone a seismic shift causing the traditional team structure to be supplanted by something more expansive and agile: a *community* with thoughtfully designed *neighborhoods*.

From Teams to Community: A Paradigm Shift

For decades, the conventional business wisdom to achieve goals has relied on a team mix of skills and talents. Prioritization was placed on specifying roles and integrating diversity to enable better collaboration – not bad, but not enough to keep pace with the complexities facing today's workplace.

Whether impacted by the lingering effects of COVID-19 (which has entrenched remote work and heightened feelings of isolation), the ever-accelerating pace of global change, or the encroachment of artificial intelligence (which seemingly

both delights and terrifies users), the fact remains that the divide between worker and company is reported as a crisis (see the State of the Global Workplace: 2023 Report by Gallup).

Today, a reimagined work structure is required – one that is inspired by the evolving neighborhoods where we live into the types of communities we want to work in. In other words, aiming for a rooted sense of belonging on the job to be somewhat reflective of the experience associated with having a place to call *home*.

The Community Framework Includes Neighborhoods

"Each 'neighborhood' within this organizational community has a specific role and subculture, akin to how residential areas might be known for arts, commerce, or education. "

In this analogy, the organization is likened to a vibrant, bustling community, where each functional area represents a unique neighborhood. Just as a community is composed of various neighborhoods, each with its own character and specialty, the organization consists of different departments that contribute their distinct expertise to the whole.

Neighborhoods as Functional Areas

Each 'neighborhood' within this organizational community has a specific role and subculture, akin to how residential areas might be known for arts, commerce, or education.

For example, the marketing department might be viewed by some as the 'downtown' area, where creative ideas are showcased and exchanged. The R&D 'neighborhood' could resemble an innovation district, teeming with new projects and cutting-edge research. The HR 'neighborhood' might be likened to a community center, where the wellbeing of the organization's members is nurtured and where culture is fostered.

Integration and Interaction

While each neighborhood has its own function, one is not isolated from the other. Pathways and thoroughfares connect these neighborhoods, symbolizing the communication channels and collaborative workflows that bind the organization. Cross-functional teams and project-based alliances are like community events, bringing together residents from different neighborhoods to achieve common goals.

Governance

Leadership within this community structure functions similarly to city governance, providing guidance, resources, and support to each neighborhood. They also act as master architects when cultivating plans for development and growth. Leaders ensure that the infrastructure is in place for each area to thrive and that the community as a whole is cohesive, prosperous, and sustainable.

> *"The community-oriented infrastructure allows for better planning when changes are made..."*

Adaptability and Growth

What makes this organizational structure preferable to a traditional team model is that it is inherently more adaptable. Neighborhoods can evolve, new ones be developed, and others merge or recede as the needs and goals of the organization change. Conversely, the traditional model requires a resetting each time a member leaves or onboards their small working group.

The community-oriented infrastructure allows for better planning when changes are made (vs demolishing entire structures associated with the old). The organization as a community reflects the dynamic nature of the business environment and corresponding need to remain flexible and responsive to external conditions.

Culture and Shared Values

Central to the community model is a shared sense of purpose and values. These are the norms and beliefs that permeate through each neighborhood, providing members with a sense of identity and belonging.

These values guide decision-making and behavior, ensuring that (despite the diversity of functions and specializations), there is unified direction and sense of community spirit.

The Subculture of Neighborhoods

In a community-oriented structure where neighborhoods exist, the emphasis is on goal clarification and alignment, rapid transfer of knowledge, continuous learning (making individuals future-ready), refinement and communication of best practices, access to collaboration channels, and the coalescence of members.

The community's overarching culture of collaboration and innovation funnels down to each neighborhood which, in turn, creates their subculture to best attract, engage, reward, and retain the individual.

The Six Elements of the Community Neighborhood

INTEGRITY

COLLABORATION

INNOVATION

PASSION

PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

RAPIDLY SHARE KNOWLEDGE

CLARIFY & ALIGN GOALS

BUILD FUTURE-READY SKILLS

THE COMMUNITY NEIGHBORHOOD

COALESCE TO COLLABORATE

LEVERAGE DYNAMIC DATA & COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

IDENTIFY & SOCIALIZE BEST PRACTICES

The above diagram is an example of an organization's values (the outside circle) influencing the 'neighborhoods' under its umbrella of community.

1

The Rapid Sharing of Collective Wisdom

Knowledge-sharing is amplified because each neighborhood facilitates an environment where continuous learning is not just encouraged, but ingrained in the operational fabric. This framework allows for the rapid conveyance of knowledge with each member becoming both a contributor and a beneficiary to the collective intelligence.

It's a structure that thrives on the diversity of thought and experience, and when leveraged, achieves common goals as well as fostering a shared sense of purpose.

Leaders weave the concepts of continuous learning and knowledge-sharing into an individual's targeted goals which include regular conversations around accountability. Further, managers are equipped to provide constructive feedback, coaching, recognition, and – of equal importance – immediate course correction when required.

2

Clarification and Alignment of Goals

Each neighborhood translates organizational values and overarching objectives into tangible actions for its members.

A seasonal approach to planning (which coincides with business quarters) is used to set, manage, and monitor goals guided by project-management principles. Course correction occurs in real-time. Members can quickly articulate how what they do supports the neighborhood, and community at large, and embrace citizen-like accountability in how things get done.

3

Coalesce to Collaborate

What if companies embraced the idea that the experience of feeling a sense of welcome, safety and comfort when returning home to the neighborhood their employees live in should not just be something reserved for weekends and weekdays after 5pm?

Instead, what if they actively sought out ways to reduce barriers and rewarded the types of 'neighborly behaviors' that resulted in rapid knowledge-sharing and continuous improvement?

This doesn't suggest a 'work block party' must be held every Friday, but it does strengthen the thinking that, as humans, we are social creatures and do better when we have a tribe to thrive in.

4

Amplifying Engagement Through a Sense of Belonging

To be intentionally redundant, the organization as a community (with its architected neighborhoods) addresses the engagement crisis by creating a sense of belonging.

In a world where remote work can lead to feelings of isolation, the community approach fosters connection extending beyond physical boundaries as 'good neighbor' practices include regularly checking-in on one another. And, by nurturing a culture where knowledge-sharing is the norm, members are more likely to feel valued and understood, leading to greater satisfaction and sticking power.

5

The Role of Technology & Dynamic Communication

In the community, technology plays a crucial role, serving as the conduit for knowledge exchange and the platform for collaboration. Today's work neighborhood requires real-time data and communication channels configured for immediate access.

Libraries of best practices (made up in large part of video microlearning-lessons supplied by members), just-in-time resources (like smart directories profiling skills and knowledge areas to accelerate 'flash mentoring'), along with course correction notifications are an easy click away. When the organization (as a community) has their portal to communicate overarching news and events, each neighborhood also has a go-to technology channel (think of the local coffee shop) where members can immediately access pertinent information.

6

Building Future-Ready Skills

Each neighborhood places a premium on the development of future-ready skills. This focus ensures that the neighborhood (and community at large) is not just functioning effectively in the present but is also prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the future. It emphasizes adaptability, lifelong learning, and the cultivation of a skill set that will be relevant in the evolving landscape.

Gone are the days of training where individual work groups pursue their own agendas in skill building. Rather, a community blueprint lists out those skills believed to be relevant at this juncture of organizational growth in addition to those competencies anticipated for future readiness.

Conclusion

The concept of a community, with its expertly designed neighborhoods, does more than mirror the changes in the work world; it actively shapes them. Incorporating the language of *community* and *neighborhood* can inspire a company's philosophy without coming across as patronizing.

This community-oriented approach (emphasizing clarity of goals, the rapid exchange of knowledge, and continuous learning), is not just a response to the engagement crisis—it is a strategic solution.

Approaching organizational design as though leaders were in fact the master architects behind a great build, the blueprints established can positively influence a more resilient, and adaptive workforce that thrives on shared values, collective wisdom, and a palpable sense of belonging.

This community-oriented approach (emphasizing clarity of goals, the rapid exchange of knowledge, and continuous learning), is not just a response to the engagement crisis—it is a strategic solution.

It is about cultivating a space where collaboration is as natural as it is in the neighborhoods we call home. In it, every member is empowered to contribute to the community's vibrancy.

By prioritizing clarity and alignment, future-ready skills, and dynamic communication, the immediate needs of today's workforce are addressed, and a future path clearly laid out where every individual can find their place, their purpose, and their tribe under the broader umbrella of the organization as a *community*.

About the Author

Victoria Tucker is a master builder of organizational communities where collaboration is amplified, knowledge is shared, and leaders are shaped by reimainging how work gets done in an age of global change.

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