Let’s Think About Coworking Spaces and Coworking

(Everyone put on your ‘anthropologist’ hat…)

...and there is a book
Coworking spaces are one place where the gig economy happens.

There are many coworking spaces, everywhere, including here.
Around the world, there are many different workspaces that call themselves ‘coworking spaces’

They are quite different from each other:

- There are big, corporate spaces,
- Small eclectic spaces,
- Kitchen tables,
- Even a sailboat
With so many examples, enquiring minds want to know:

What *is* coworking?

What do we know about it?
How should we think about it?
Etc.

Hence, the Book
Note: I’m not going to tell you the “right way” to cowork,

There are many ways to do it...

*What is the right way to cowork?*
The key feature of contemporary coworking (according to Bob):

Coworking is about more than cheap workspace, it is about community

A coworking space is a place where freelance/independent workers find a face-to-face community of ‘like-minded’ workers

You could say:

*a coworking space is a physical realization of a digital social network.*
For independent workers who might work at home or a café, a coworking space fills a need for colleagues.

Coworking is a “respite from our isolation” (ZR Klaas (2014))
The benefits may include:

#1 coworking makes coworkers happy (at least some workers some of the time)

#2 coworking improves coworkers work and career (ditto)

(There is a lot more to day about this topic, but not today....)
Coworking communities are generally non-hierarchical, but most are created and sustained by **community leaders**

This a cadre of professional community leaders has emerged who combine aspect of office manager, HR person, event organizer, therapist, etc.

(Community leadership is a topic for another day....)
My own goal is to try to understand coworking spaces, coworkers, and the future of work.

There are many ways to look at coworking and coworkers, each may give some insight

(See the book.)
Today I’m going to consider one perspective:

Let’s view coworking as

_a form of participatory theater._

* similar ideas have a long history in social theory
The essence of this idea

1. A coworking space as **the stage** for an improvised, participatory play.
2. Workers are invited to enact the **role of coworker** in a **story** about the new way of work.
3. Like an improv theater exercise, the players (workers) make up the **dialog and action** for themselves within an overall storyline.
1. A coworking space is the stage.

A stage is necessary and important, but it isn’t the whole play
The same set can host many different plays
The same play can be staged in different settings.
2. Workers are invited to enact the **role of coworker** in a **story** about the new way of work.

As in improv, the players co-create the story through their actions and interactions.
Each worker must *learn* his or her role, and must *enact* the role.
The story that unfolds will be unique to particular players (workers).
3. The *community leader* is like a ‘director’ in improv theater, who sets the scenario, elicits and guides the action
teach by example new workers the community ”narrative” and their role in it

intentionally guide and call forth performances through techniques such as:
making introductions
initiating conversations
convening events
If the workspace is a stage, then what is the play?

A starting place is the *Coworking Manifesto* (circa 2007??), which offers a classic version of the narrative

“Coworking is redefining the way we do work. “We are a group of connected individuals and small businesses creating an economy of innovation and creativity in our communities and worldwide.”
There are lots of variations on this theme

A group of scrappy (young) **freelancers**, banding together to **help each other** and have fun along the way.

A group of scrappy (young) **business entrepreneurs** band together to help each other **disrupt the universe** and have fun along the way.

A group of scrappy (young) **social entrepreneurs** band together to help **make the world better** and have some fun along the way.
This is an **epic narrative** about the future of work, and each worker has an important and, perhaps, a **heroic** role to play.

But the thing is, the workers are free to make up their own narrative.
The bottom line is:

*We, the workers, get to co-create our own epic story.*

This is one of the neat things about contemporary coworking,

And this is probably one of the things that *makes coworkers happy*
So,

“What is Coworking?”

One answer is:

*It’s an opportunity to co-create and act out your own, heroic, version of the future of work.*

No wonder it’s catching on!