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A Novel Mechanism for Art-Sale and its Impact on Organization Structure

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Abstract

Online social networks (OSNs) enable sharing of ideas and content and thus provide a basis for systematic harnessing of knowledge and knowledge management. OSNs also create weak ties (acquaintances) among its users, and as per theory weak ties are known to enhance creativity. OSNs increase autonomy and autonomy enhances creativity. Creative industries such as art galleries and cultural enterprises thrive on autonomy and creativity. OSN usage can help emulate learnings from such industries in other knowledge-intensive organizations. We propose a novel mechanism for art sale. The 'command and control' nature of these organizations needs to be eliminated in order to become more innovative. Starting from existing organization structures involving hierarchical command and control, the paper identifies a resultant futuristic organization structure. Advantages of our proposition include the transformation of creativity into organized innovation.

Key words: Art industry, Art sale, Online Social Network Usage, Creative organizations

Introduction

Art galleries and physical art auction houses (auctions) have been the two most prominent modes of organized selling of art, apart from private sales. *Saffronart* as described in Khaire (2007) is an online store for lovers of art was established a decade earlier. Since then online art websites have caught on, as they provide the benefit of increased reach to a large number of art-buyers. Art fairs such as *India Art Summit*, first held in 2008 (now an annual event) are another recent mode of art sales.

Online Sale of Art

Online sales comprise art prints and artwork displayed on websites. Fixed-price sale (standard e-commerce model using a transaction gateway) and online auctions is the modus operandi. Mobile auctions augment these website-based online auctions. Art-fairs conducted entirely online based on rich graphical website technologies with a 3-dimensional look and feel (e.g., VIP Art Fair – held for the first time in January 2011) are of recent origin. Such fairs are for the net-savvy, and are international in nature due to the prevalence of high-speed internet connectivity. High-resolution images are electronically mailed to potential buyers/patrons. Gallery repute and the artist's stature are important when buying online as stated by art gallery curators and owners as stated in Jaipuria (2010).

Many world famous auction houses have online presence. Sotheby's, Christie's, and deviantArt (that incidentally uses an online social network/forum format) are a few prominent ones. Although highly fragmented with hundreds of art galleries the Indian art industry has a few noteworthy online galleries including Saffronart. Many upcoming websites such as Artjini, Artflute, and Indian Art Collectors are also making a mark in the online art scenario.

Online-Social-Networks Usage

Several 21st century organizations are becoming more and more knowledge intensive, less hierarchical and less structurally rigid and predominantly network oriented. Within such organizations, it becomes imperative to adopt new ways of managing the employees, building effective teams or even virtual teams that operate over the internet.

The way we connect with one another and with the institutions in our lives is also seeing a sea change due to technology advances. There is no longer trust in authority, and this has led to decentralization of power and at the same time a greater faith in one another through social networks. One interesting observations is that art galleries have operated in with autonomy except that there is a central authority for co-ordinated namely the gallery owner.

The art industry runs on mutual respect and trust. All constituents especially artists are free agents. They come together, enjoy work, openness and trust as these are mutually beneficial. The present research makes some valuable contributions to the existing literature. It theoretically and empirically establishes a synchrony between individuality, independence and cooperation. In doing so, this study brings greater conceptual clarity to the reasons behind increasing usage of online social networks and provides a more appropriate and comprehensive analysis of why this might have far reaching consequences in organization theory. In addition, the present study extends this perspective by identifying this behaviour among art gallery operations to show instances of its success.

From this perspective, an art gallery provides some unique answers. An art gallery usually runs as a proprietary firm with a few employees. The proprietor involves in the primary activity of selling art to art-patrons and art collectors. This activity involves marketing and display of art along with knowledge dispersal through curators. Independent artists (affiliated to the gallery) sell their work at auction houses and exhibitions, and inside the art gallery premises. The nature of this type of an organization is different from other organizations, as there is no joint effort to create a deliverable end-product. However the gallery itself runs on cooperation; based on the artworks of the various artists. This leads us to key findings in the evolving organization structures, for the future.

Weak and Strong ties indicate the strength of a relationship in a network as per Granovetter (1973). It has been established that weak ties do not lend themselves to success in a formal organization setup Granovetter (1973), where stronger ties are needed within teams and groups for work to happen. However the nature of an art gallery seems to suggest otherwise. Artists being highly independent, do not want to get restrained by any organization setup. They would like to work at their own pace and without any hindrance or interference. They like to achieve their goals in terms of high creative output of artistic expressions in the form of artwork.

However, creativity is seen to increase with weak ties. Networks of optimal size and weak strength were more likely to boost creativity when they afforded actors access to a wide range of different social circles as per Baer (2010).

Often galleries also thrive on partnerships with bigger galleries or museums, wherein exhibitions, events and shows are conducted by multiple galleries. This leads to a more collaborative scenario rather than being purely competitive. When they rely upon such weak or arm's-length ties, they enjoy flexibility and access to diverse information in their networks as evidenced in literature. Smaller cliques also get formed.

Online social networks are also based on the same patterns of independence and interaction without any hierarchy or coercive practices; an exploratory approach leads to learning and dissemination of information and sometimes intense discussions. Social networks haven't yet been used to sell products per se.

What online social networks such as Facebook do is to try to map out what exists in the real world. In the world, there's trust. As humans fundamentally parse the world through the people and relationships they have around them. So at its core, what a social network does is map out all of those trust relationships. So this map can be called the social graph, and it's a network of an entirely new kind and has real world implications as per Grossman (2010). Social networks such as Facebook make cyberspace more like the real world. Where earlier on the internet people led double lives, real and virtual, now they lead single ones again. The online social networks are no longer just a network of computers but can be viewed as a network of people, the same way as there are a group of people in reality/society.

So online social networks are more and more mimicking the real world and yet are able to plug in some of the deficiencies or existential problems of the real world.

We shape our buildings, Winston Churchill argued, and then they shape us. Online social networks are seeing an unprecedented rise is adoption rates. In online social networks people join and independently contribute or use it for their benefit. They also do the curatorial function well.

We feel the stakeholders of an art gallery can benefit significantly from OSN usage. Stakeholders in an art system comprise of the following:

- Art Gallery owners and entrepreneurs, curators
- Art buyer, art collectors who collect artworks more often
- Artists who create the artworks

Online Social Network Benefits

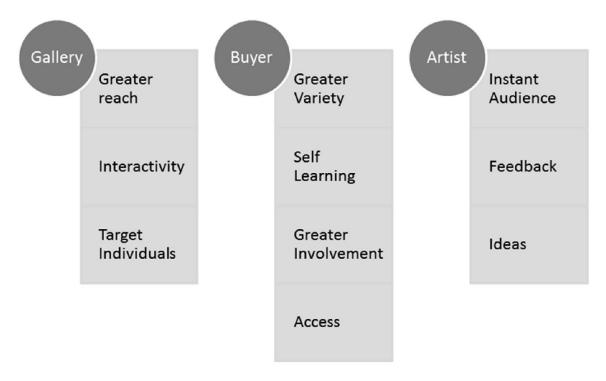


Figure 1: Online Social Network benefits for Stakeholders of an Art Gallery

Figure 1 summarizes the benefits for the stakeholders of an art gallery:

Art gallery: Physical space constraints don't exist online and as a result, greater numbers of art works can be displayed. Within an online social network, friends' recommendation is of greater value than those provided by others. A marketer's dream would be to positively influence a well-connected person who can then go on to influence many others. Such a person spreads the word via a viral word of mouth scenario leading to greater reach than would be possible with a standalone website. Sentiment analysis can be done to analyse better the positive and negative comments and the content, members are discussing.

Greater involvement is beneficial for a Gallery as repeat buying can result. Fresh content also gets generated more often. Keen members get higher frequency and volume of information. They can subscribe to specific topics or member's online feeds using RSS etc. Targeting of customers can be done by gleaning self-published data on areas of interests of members and their friends etc. i.e. at multiple levels.

Benefits for the buyer include greater variety online. Buyers achieve self-learning through exploration via members' comments and interactions, wherein trends regarding artists and affiliated subjects are discussed. Two-way communication via comments related to an interest field, leads to rich inputs on the domain, and thus satiates the need for self-learning. Comments and comparison with others is another way through which members remain engaged. This in turn determines involvement such as being excited and enthused. A member often views another content generated by other members and is thus retained in the virtual space for longer. Members want to know 'What are my friends doing?' I am interested in what my friends are doing/buying/discussing. This is the basis of social behaviour. Members are drawn towards what others are doing and also user generated content. Blogs, forums are available to increase the level of participation.

Fresh content and inputs from outside the OSN reach targeted users as is the case in dynamic websites. This is essentially a social web accessible by logging into an OSN with aggregated content from one's entire social circle. In many instances instead of searching, someone else gives us the up-to-date information and content. The effort involved is lower leading to improved access.

Artist: Instant audience among registered members. Comments and feedback on the artwork an artist displays is invaluable to the artist and helps him improve quality. Plug and play with larger social networks such as Facebook acts as a pipe between social networks and results in idea exchange and a flow of information occurs.

A Novel Mechanism for Art Sale

Sales through online social networks (OSNs) have some unique advantages. It has a novelty wherein the social context becomes more important even in terms of a brand positioning or a product. It doesn't matter if 100,000 people like product x. If the three people closest to you like an alternate product y, you want to see or buy that y. This can be utilized by marketers for OSN members who have a high curatorial function. Also the customized targeting of customers can be done based on self-published personal data. The viral marketing campaigns can yield greater sales by influencing buyers. Also a great deal of sentiment analysis can be done on the comments and qualitative data left consumers based on patterns of consumption and the consumption experience. It is becoming more acceptable to buy online now. The new generation thinks and behaves very differently and can be termed digital natives.

Aligning with New Trends in the Art Industry

Exhibitions within restaurants as a tie-up with galleries, preview shows at select locations and experiential events including performing arts are new offerings. Also some organizations often get the artists to meet each other

Authenticity of artworks is one major concern. Fakes can be eliminated by registering artworks online (with unique IDs). This was suggested by some gallery owners.

Enhancing the application of experiential marketing in the arts. The four 'realms' of experience include:

- the entertainment dimension involving sensing
- the educational dimension involving learning
- the escapist dimension involving doing
- the aesthetic dimension involving being

These four dimensions are not mutually exclusive and the richness of an experience is often a function of the degree to which all four dimensions are incorporated. Pine and Gilmore outline six key steps to 'staging experiences' as marketing strategy:

- Developing a cohesive theme
- Forming impressions
- Eliminating distractions
- Providing memorabilia
- Ensuring that all the senses are engaged
- Soliciting feedback for continuous improvement.

The key to remember is that, more sensory the experience, more memorable it will be. As a result, tailoring the online experience based on the interests and activities of the artist will help in increased involvement and heightened interest levels. Other significant findings include:

- Transparency angle Art world colonized by a pantheon of artists and an ecosystem that runs like a close, impenetrable system of galleries. Public ratings systems etc. built into the online offering can help bypass this.
- Democratization of art world akin to what happened to journalism model Web 2.0 usage effects such as blogs and wikis on journalism. This will help grow the market for arts. A hierarchy of buyers exists in individual and corporate segments so each category can be targeted.

• Young and budding artists can become entrepreneurs with the availability of Web 2.0 tools and create their own forums/virtual galleries.

In their initial stages an art entrepreneur usually focuses on the following:

- 1. Aesthetics in the art picking it up and promoting the right artists
- 2. Transparency with the artist and constant communication
- 3. Conveying jargons of business to artists.

Interior designers can be target segment online for selling art, as interviews with interior designers threw up these results (details in Appendix):

- 100% feel that art enhances the look of interiors
- 70% perceive that clients of Interior designers can be charged more if there is art displayed
- 80% of the Interior Designers feel the lack of expertise in Art and are willing to seek advisory services

A Framework for Creative Organizations

Art Market – Generic Constituents

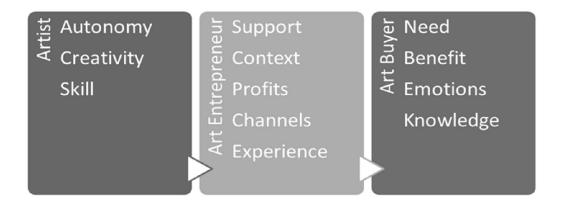


Figure 2: Characteristics of constituents of art galleries

We describe the characteristics of the constituents of an art gallery as shown in Figure 2. Artists are free agents who operate in their comfort zones and their own time slots. They are seldom given time lines except when an art fair is on the anvil. A time windows for creating art is then provided. Artists are provided autonomy by the gallery owner due to which their creativity flowers and goes beyond mere artistic skills. An artist is provided patronage along with monetary and non-monetary and emotional support. The art gallery owner provides market context which the artist may choose to take into consideration - market demands certain art works say installation art etc. This context, information, and knowledge are provided to hone the budding artist. However autonomy is provided for evolving new ideas, as replication happens overtime and artworks become stagnant and the artist's artwork does not evolve.

Most artists prefer to have online presence in addition to offline presence. Based on our interactions with artists, we found that they are willing to sell their art online if the online site can take care of protecting the copyright and protect them from abuse/spam. Our interaction with budding artists revealed that they find it difficult to sell their art to art galleries unless they have past history of successful sale or at least 10 paintings to showcase. There is information asymmetry in the ecosystem and art galleries, even in today's age of the Internet, have a stronghold regarding which artists get promoted!

Economic value is one key objective for each of the constituents shown above. Art itself is another key ingredient, the creation and appreciation of art for art's sake. Artists learn from peers, professors etc. An art entrepreneur is like the sports manager, artists like star talents. Art entrepreneur and artist work on mutual trust. Art entrepreneurs take care of the artists and their needs from time to time. Artists are autonomous. Art entrepreneur acts as a dealer, an agent. It should be viewed as a long term marriage in terms of a relationship between the gallery and the artists. Artists are emotional people, too much structure as in an organization does not work. Art is aesthetic and sublime material - low capital to start. Drive and tenacity needs to be there to succeed, and of course innovation too. Subjectivity exists in art selection and sales. Only if the entrepreneur likes a certain artist's works will he/she promote it. For starting up, the orientation has to be non-economic!

Distribution channels such as tie up with exhibition, retail, e-commerce sites such as E-Bay or even auction houses are utilized. Promotion channels are another advantage that entrepreneurs help establish.

Galleries also provide a wholesome sensory experience – for long term success they need to build brands. So experiential music, dance recital, discourses by art experts are an important ingredient as per Jaipuria (2010). The art buyer gets an enriching experience in the process.

Creating a gathering of art buyers who sit and chat in a preview show etc., alcoholic beverages and drinks are served. Alongside, background music is played, videos are screened. This atmosphere creates a better connect with the buyer. Buyers' needs are psychological in nature whereas benefits are more tangible.

In the online medium, blogs and other media are free of cost. Thus interesting thoughts can be obtained from it. Galleries take care of work, exhibit, and provide infrastructure and an important platform. Selection of art and artists by a gallery owner requires substantial background in arts, and its history. A gallery in its starting stages often decides on its strategy for differentiation, consequently build the gallery's specialty.

Some art collectors are drawn to a particular painting and want to live with and draw energy from it. Big buyers buy by seeing photos, jpegs images in high resolution especially serious buyers. Also with the new medium such as the completely online VIP Art Fair they can sell more works - 70 works on display which is impossible in any normal art fair in physical space as per Art Summit Authors (2011). Authentication document, customs issues in shipping etc. come up and these are handled by sending photographs of the art. Many prominent Indian buyers buy online.

Structural mappings to Art industry

Coherent behaviour in any system necessarily arises from competition and we feel to a larger extent from cooperation among the agents themselves and with the system. The basis for such cooperation within say an art gallery would include profits, business deals, higher status, showcasing their works in a peer evaluated system.

Another significant reason why we think entrepreneurs including art entrepreneurs should adopt OSNs is that it will help scale up and reach large number of people, interactively. This will result in increased creativity of artists on the network as they would have access to diverse information.

The relative autonomy, within online social networks and cultural industries are somewhat similar and hence the application of online social networks for a cultural organization is a perfect match and mutually reinforcing. Artist being independent minded and individualistic will be able to adapt with ease and comfort into an online social network. Artists from different locations rarely come together and interaction does not happen, wherein online social networks provide an additional advantage. This can be used for increased sharing and interaction among artists and result in valuable increase in knowledge function for the artists and may lead to art creations of far greater quality.

Usage of online social networks is proliferating. Users, especially artists are provided a diversity of ideas especially from people of different tastes and backgrounds and get newer ideas for the artworks. Also collaborative efforts can be driven towards content creation. Segment of buyers can be differently targeted based on the types of artwork created. Having no restrictions on social network usage enables getting ideas from different people and sources. Weak ties – acquaintance – leads to creativity, and ideas. Constantly interacting with each other people tend to act as conduits and intermediaries by sharing knowledge and ideas. Referential ideas get generated and also spread. Ideas from different domains come together. A catalytic process wherein at the boundaries between topics creativity resides. Free to interact, providing a playing field – not like a hierarchical organization. OSNs act as accelerators for increased autonomy.

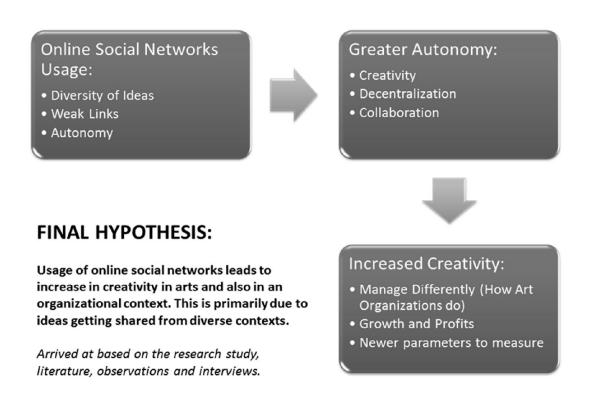


Figure 3: Processes for extended OSN usage in a creative organization

As seen in Figure 3 OSN usage leads to autonomy and this leads to greater creativity. Today's knowledge intensive organizations require constant innovation and thus a collaborative work environment. Chaotic stages may ensue due to heightened autonomy although art organizations have eliminated this chaos from a creative organization (art gallery). Performance in this form of an organization will be tracked through new parameters rather than just productivity.

Beyond Art Industries

Autonomy leads to creativity, autonomy in decision making, in taking forward your point of view, and in all other activities. Left to your own devices the organization acts more as a guiding beacon. The decision making power inherent in the employees helps them match up to the market demand and be nimble. This is necessary for a 'prospector strategy' defined as generation of revenues through seeking out new customer markets and developing additional offerings and going beyond existing or stable set of offerings as per Brock (2003).

Usage of Online

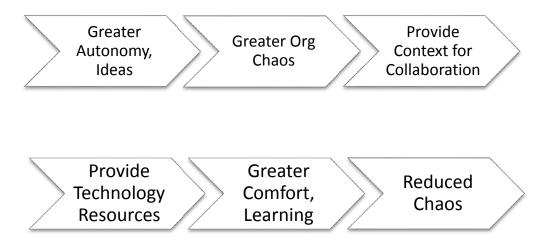


Figure 4: Organization chaos on introduction of OSNs

As the focus was control in the older economy, the new age knowledge intensive organizations are far more autonomy driven. Innovation is the key in such organizations – such organizations will need online social networks in order to enable autonomy as discussed in the previous section. If an online social network's benefits are forgone, the organization will not survive in the market. Allowing tools to get adopted, the knowledge centre will no longer be the CEO and he/she is not the know all. Knowledge in such a system will predominantly get distributed. Power shift is also a consequence, as everyone will have more knowledge and a say in the decision-making. Opinions may differ and this clash of opinions would lead to greater chaos. Questioning and disagreement also will add to this increased chaos. Collaboration will need to be enabled in such an atmosphere with the means of a context. New product/service offerings, innovations or technology also can themselves act as the context which will be used to win in the market. Tools and resources to reduce the chaos will be necessary. After the learning curve when a zone of comfort is reached chaos

will be subside. This will be a possible stable state towards which organizations move. The same is depicted as stages in Figure 4.

An Autonomy-driven Organization

In the normal organization there is hierarchy as part of the structure and thus there is no or very low scope for autonomy or independence. The dominant form of control is engaged in through competition so that self-interest is kept as the ultimate arbiter and to either get benefit from it incentives are provided or for deviation a punishment mechanism is used. This is to spur competition and also the results are somewhat artificial.

Here employees will get paid to be creative, to innovate, and to find new ways of doing things. Individual idea recognition and information gathering will be valued. With increased importance placed on information flow from diverse sources and joint decision making within the organization, top management in the hierarchy will cease to be decision makers and power wielders.

Centuries-old practice of managing people through incentive structures – both rewards and punishment as per Benkler (2010) is based on an assumption of individual selfishness is going to decay. Many successful institutions, specifically art galleries (as per our observations) have turned to human cooperation to achieve desired ends. Recent work in evolutionary theory, behavioural and brain sciences suggests that collaborative systems work better and are attuned to higher human capacities.

The complexity of the evolving operating environment consisting of OSNs demands a change in the management techniques. The homogenous composition of employees that companies thought they were dealing with has now disappeared. There is far more fragmentation and companies are operating in multi-contextual environments.

People who like social media are used to sharing, collaborating, trusting and being transparent with regard to information. They are also becoming the biggest influencers of organization-wide adoption of online social networking.

An OSN viewed as a radical change is a self-organizing system - people are much more independent and individuality may be expressed comfortably by logging into such a system and being a part of it. Although an OSN has its differences from a real set of friends or relationships in the real world, everyone is visible at the same time, unlike the physical world. Relationships are not necessarily authentic, or in some cases may lack any significance. True identities need not be revealed, leading to fake profile projections. Thus

we see that an OSN is akin to a cultural organization where there is independence and autonomy leading to holistic individuality of the performer/artist.

Autonomy may be defined as the degree to which one may make significant decisions without the consent of others. Low autonomy is associated with a low quality working life. Autonomy is a human need, in a sense similar to one of those in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. A better system would be

- i. high on independence, autonomy
- ii. low on competition as there are psychological costs for this
- iii. cooperation for profits and benefits
- iv. excel in what a person is best at
- v. low on behaviour change and control

The large, vertically integrated, hierarchical organization is one that has persisted throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. In these organizations, employees generally get paid to do what they are expected to do. They don't get paid to innovate or to find new ways of doing things. Where individual idea recognition and information gathering is not valued, top-down corporations give members an incentive to hide information and dissemble in order to keep the bar for performance low. With the decreased importance placed on information flow from a number of diverse sources within the organization, the information brokers closer to the top of the organizational structure become the sole decision makers.

As per Hilberts (2010) hierarchical systems find their roots in modernist models of creating systems of certainty and security through highly delineated boundaries of function, structure, order and logic. By tightly controlling workers' duties and influence, leaders emerged as the perceived knowledge holders. Perceived knowledge is the source of actual power. Quite simply, many leaders are reluctant to let go of their monopoly on power and/or mistakenly believe that relinquishing information control will harm the corporation.

It is a company's culture, leadership or structure that holds their organization back from adopting social media in a business context thus missing out on the benefits. The biggest challenge most companies face is the deepening complexity of their operating environment. The homogenous target audiences that companies were dealing with – or thought they were dealing with – have disappeared. There is far more fragmentation and companies are operating in multi-contextual environments.

The old rules of cause and effect within a business arena are breaking down. Companies are finding that they can't manage this with the old tools. Social media provides some new tools

and – more importantly – allows a switch in mind-set from the old command-and-control hierarchies to one where multiple stakeholders can collaborate, co-create and co-command. The ELP survey found a significant correlation between the use of social media and more collaborative working practices.

People who like social media are used to sharing, collaborating, trusting, being transparent with information. This must mean that their mind-sets, values and behaviours would be skewed towards this type of behaviour in the workplace (Hilberts, 2010). They are also becoming the biggest influencers of organization-wide adoption of online social networking.

Conclusions

Creative industries thrive on autonomy. This unique creativity-autonomy connection of art galleries and cultural enterprises has some lessons. Online social network usage can help assimilate these lessons.

This is particularly beneficial to knowledge-intensive organizations. The 'command and control' nature of these organizations needs to be eliminated in order to become more innovative - this is explained in the paper. Starting from existing organization structures involving hierarchical command and control, the paper identifies a resultant futuristic organization structure. We discuss a systematic OSN-based methodology that can operationalize such a structure.

We suggest that OSNs create weak ties that in turn enhance creativity. We also show that OSNs increase autonomy and autonomy enhances creativity. OSNs provide a basis for systematic harnessing of knowledge as knowledge management is a stated benefit of their usage. The proposed framework is an amalgamation of the above results. This is a novel contribution of the paper.

Advantages of our proposition include the transformation of creativity into organized innovation. Agglomerates of OSNs are the basis for this transformation. OSN agglomerates outside the organization can also drive innovation with external agencies. In our view, it has proved to be quite tedious to implement flat, non-hierarchical organization structures as it involves mind-set change. However, a system comprising an agglomerate of OSNs can help usher this mind-set change.

The end-result would be agile, connected and innovative organizations. Knowledge-oriented organizations will need to adopt OSNs for survival. This will generate a need for a new set of tools and resources to track and measure new organizational parameters redefining productivity and efficiency.

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