



Adjacent Opportunities: Social Networks Emerge —You Have Nothing to Lose but Your Loneliness!

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Social networks aren't becoming a part of our culture—they are our culture. And as never before, as societies and organizations are more connected, they are finding that they also have to be more responsive to the emergence of this new collective empowerment.

It is the underlying resonance within social networks that keeps them vital, connected and which provides their members access to emergent opportunities that in turn deepen the participant's own connectedness. Once that penetration space has been achieved, the interaction possible within the social network no longer needs to be influenced from outside, and the experience becomes addictive and self-generating. However, if the shared resonance were to end, the system would also decay or need to regroup under a new connective banner.

Identifying this resonance is not just about listening to language or conversation, although it is certainly expressed and manifest in those terms. The connective tissue of social networks is something more basic than patterns on a page. It has do with identity and not the kind that is easily stolen, but in this case willingly shared. Social networks are the antithesis of the image of the rugged individualist. They are more an appeal to recognize our interdependence, our collective need for each other to survive. The complexity of the information web we are weaving has increased to a level that it is actually pushing us closer rath-

er than isolating us further. And within that drawing together the normally background and inaudible resonance has found its voice.

The question I am asking, is will the product of our interaction within social networks—our conversations—experience a similar emergent propensity, out of which innovation can arise? Or will these networked conversations produce only a continued state of ordinary novelty?

I find it quite amazing that with the advent of Twitter, an extraordinary marketing tool gone haywire, we also find a proliferation of face-to-face networking opportunities, often documented in real time via Twitter. Go to a conference or gathering arranged by Millennials or anyone under the age of 35 for that matter, and three-fourths of the time is allotted to networking and one-quarter to more traditional forms of presentation. And 100 percent of the time tweeking to those not there about what they are missing.

It will be interesting to see if this continual state of social network connection can deliver the kind of emergent opportunities that are truly innovative. Oded Noy, the founder of a company that has produced a rather remarkable software product, called Social Approach that can identify what he calls “bonfire” conversations taking place within social networks, and then recognize the patterns in those conversations so that companies can use that information and market directly to that conversation, thinks that this new public discussion is filled with ample emergent opportunities.

The uniting force of these “bonfire” conversations for Noy, is the underlying resonance of the topic at hand. He believes that “the synchronicity of the individuals interacting within the network conversation provides a much broader group dynamic and opportunity for emergence, which ultimately will have a much greater impact on the world in which we are living.” The evidence he cites to support this idea was the emergence of the Iranian opposition, and the use of Twitter and other social devices and the rapid coming of age of the real-time web. This particular story is still in process so it’s too early to tell if the governmental forces will allow this conversation that is growing in resonance among the Iranian people to bring about real change. The change that could emerge is greater repression.

Still the social network was the means by which a movement was struck and couldn’t be stopped. It continues in spite of the bans and the bullets. The technology removed the friction allowing the insurgent and emergent population to discover where the conversation was taking place and where innovation was broiling.

What Social Approach, itself, has done to help harness the resonance is figure out how to better align the values of the conversation with what is being produced, whether those are manufactured goods or revolutions. And in doing so they are shifting the prevailing perception that organizations have traditionally used to put their message out into the world, commonly referred to as, Public Relations, into the far more interactive notion of *Public Relationships*. When an organization engages in building public relationships through these social networks they open themselves up to a whole new realm of opportunities that could never have emerged previously.

This is not a prediction of things to come. This is what is currently taking place in any enterprise where the average age of an employee is 35 and under. They are already connected and in being so connected, those within the once solidly secure borders of corporate structures have turned this bastion of impenetrability into a porous mesh that has blurred the boundaries of many of today’s leading en-

terprises. Their now public relationship means that they must be ready to interact more directly with the world in which they operate, because like it or not, they already do. They must also learn to build the relationships that are critically important to the enterprise, or if they fail to do so, run the risk of being out of step with the world around them.

The bonfire conversations that will last the night are those where the common resonance unites the participants and engages them at a level of active participation. If the resonance is lost, the search goes on for a new bonfire and a new set of interactions. Participating in these conversations alone won’t create an emergent event that is both new, and now that may produce an innovative game changing event. But when the Tweet-up goes out and the crowds gather, the readiness of the public discussion to take up what is resonating within the network, and the synchronicity of the agents involved, will invariably bring about a new level of collective novelty and emergent opportunity that we have never seen before. And by connecting into the network, we also increase our awareness of our natural interdependence, which as we see in times of crisis is critical to our mutual development and survival.