UNDER FIRE

TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE HAS MADE US MORE POWERFUL BUT ALSO VERY VULNERABLE

By Sergio Roitberg

Chief executive officers have seen technological advances trigger seismic shifts in their everyday realities. Operational changes, the challenges of keeping pace with innovation, the risk that an emerging technology will completely disrupt an entire industry. All are known consequences of the information age.

But a Newlink survey of more than 50 CEOs of multinational corporations and regional conglomerates based in Latin America and the United States also reveals two less apparent but equally pressing concerns: 82 percent of those executives say it is increasingly difficult to reach their customers, and 65 percent feel their organizations are very exposed in this world of ever-expanding social media platforms in which anyone with access to a smartphone can express their opinions to millions of people.

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The era **of hyperconnectivity**

These results show that the issues of greatest concern to top executives have shifted. The way we interact with others today has changed. Organizations no longer know how to reach their customers and also feel that they are the target of unexpected attacks.

This is the result of one of the greatest advances in information technology of the past 20 years: hyperconnectivity.

Ten years ago, we never could have imagined that 1.5 billion people would be able to communicate on a single platform (Facebook). Five years ago, it would have been impossible to believe that an app (Uber) could immediately connect someone with a car to a passenger in need of a ride. And yet these companies now are a part of our daily lives and show the extent to which technology has irreversibly altered our interaction with the world around us and our expectations of it.

Today, having instant access to thousands of people, ideas, services, and products from a device that fits in our pocket is taken for granted. In fact, for the youngest consumers, it would be odd to have to wait more than a few seconds to gain access to a car to take them to work, a movie to watch with friends, or the latest Beyoncé album.

And this new context also has changed us as people: no one is a passive target anymore. All of us are actors now.

We have new rights and responsibilities. We have the means to seek out what we need (and the expectation of finding it immediately), we can make ourselves heard, and we go out in pursuit of the causes that inspire us.

In this regard, a teenage girl's opinion can influence a multinational company's product development decisions,[1] and an ordinary person's advice has a much bigger impact on our decision to consume a product than millions of dollars invested in advertising.[2]

We all have power now.

This new context has very profound implications for both organizations and individuals. The democratization of power means that the powerful of yesteryear feel vulnerable. David now has many more ways of striking Goliath.

How do we interact in this new world in which we all have power – and the means and determination to use it?

[1] Hasbro to unveil black and silver Easy-Bake Oven after teen's petition – CNN, December 2012
[2] Nielsen: Global Consumers' Trust In 'Earned' Advertising Grows In Importance – Nielsen, April 2012

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Orbital **Thinking**

We need a new way of seeing reality, and that is the genesis of Orbital Thinking, a model which posits that we are all actors in this hyperconnected world and therefore the only way to achieve our objectives is to discover a common interest that can open spaces for collaboration.

We can no longer get others to "buy" our idea if we don't establish authentic engagement based on a shared interest.

But when a person or an organization achieves that connection, the effect is very powerful. It's like a gravitational force from which we cannot – and don't want to – escape. It rearranges all the actors, who become satellites of that common objective and orbit around it. They support it, they promote it, they become part of it.

It's the power of a shared purpose.

This is the key. The only way to be successful in this radically changed world is to understand that hyperconnectivity has awoken a skill that had been lying dormant within us: that of collaborating in pursuit of a shared objective.

That's why engagement is essential. It's the way of striking up a conversation that can later turn into collaboration.

The Millennials, the generation that grew up in the digital age, understand this particularly well. The apparent self-absorption of these young people (they are occasionally accused of being narcissists) is really evidence that they're responding to this new context: connecting with them requires interacting with them on their own terms.   No connection is possible with them if it is not based on overlapping interests, and no engagement can occur without a conversation.[3]

The campaign of new Argentine President Mauricio Macri is clear proof of this. He based all of his communications on the idea of conversation. His chosen platform to communicate with his supporters was Facebook (which lends itself much more readily to conversation than Twitter), and his campaign photos did not make the candidate the focal point but rather showed his interactions with voters. In some images, ordinary citizens even appeared in the foreground, in front of the candidate.

[3] Millennials: The Next Greatest Generation? – Time magazine, May 2013

The Four **Forces**

The rules have changed and are very different from those of the past: the hyperconnected world in which we live is governed by four forces: velocity, transparency, participation, and social conscience.

Accepting this shift in the rules of engagement requires great humility on the part of those who had always been powerful.

Velocity - Technological advances have reached what scientists call the "exponential phase." Progress during this century will be equivalent to what would have taken around 20,000 years to achieve under normal circumstances. [4]

It is therefore unsurprising that whereas the Hilton hotel chain needed nearly 100 years to hit the 700,000-guestroom milestone,[5] technological advances allowed Airbnb to reach 1 million rooms to rent in just six years. [6]

Failure to react quickly to the changes occurring constantly around us is the same as letting ourselves perish.

Participation - Connecting with others and being relevant in this new hyperconnected context requires us to participate in the conversation.

THE FOUR FORCES

[4] Hilton Worldwide Reaches 700,000th Room Milestone – Hilton, August 2014
[5] Hilton Worldwide Reaches 700,000th Room Milestone – Hilton, August 2014
[6] Airbnb Grows to a Million Rooms, and Hotel Rivals Are Quiet, for Now – Julie Weed, NYT – May 2015

Uber is perhaps the best example of an objective aligned with the common interest (offering an alternative transportation service that is efficient and reasonably priced) and constant social media engagement on the part of the company. The result has been that hundreds of users and drivers have been galvanized to defend the service and keep it running. [7]

Transparency - The hyperconnected world also demands transparent action because technology has created an environment in which everything is quickly known. It's no longer possible to say one thing and be another.

This is a lesson that was learnt the hard way by a former executive chairman of RBS bank, who was forced to resign after a message he sent to his daughter complaining about how bored he was at his job was made public. [8]

Social Conscience - We must conduct ourselves with a sense of social conscience. That's what people today expect both from individuals and organizations.

That's why Coca-Cola not only says that we need to protect the planet but also returns one liter of water back to communities and nature for every liter it uses to make its beverages. [9]

If we don't understand that these four forces are like a tsunami that can't be stopped, we'll end up being crushed by the wave.

[7] Uber se queda en la ciudad de México. ¡Gracias! – Blog Uber, July 2015
[8] RBS boss leaves weeks after these Snapchat pictures were put on Instagram by his daughter – Business Insider, March 2015
[9] Coca-Cola on Track to Meet 100% Water Replenishment Goal - www.coca-colacompany.com, August 2015

# ORBITAL COMMUNICAT-MMUNICAT

Orbital **Communications**

The lessons to be drawn from this new order spawned by hyperconnectivity are particularly clear in the realm of organizational, institutional, and government communications.

Whereas at one time only the big television networks or newspapers with a circulation in the millions could make themselves heard, an array of voices in today's world now have that same ability.

This democratization of communications has created an environment in which we're all senders and receivers of content. In this context, controlling what's being said about us is an enormous challenge. Today the weak have become strong, and the strong are immensely more vulnerable.

For organizations, the main change has occurred in what Orbital Thinking calls the Primary Orbit - our inner circle made up of employees, suppliers, and customers. In the past, it was possible to say one thing to our employees and another thing to our customers.

Today, the great wall that divided those audiences has been knocked down. To use an analogy, it's similar to the situation in Germany prior to the fall of the Berlin wall. The two Germanys knew of the other's existence, but they didn't converse. There was a barrier in the way.
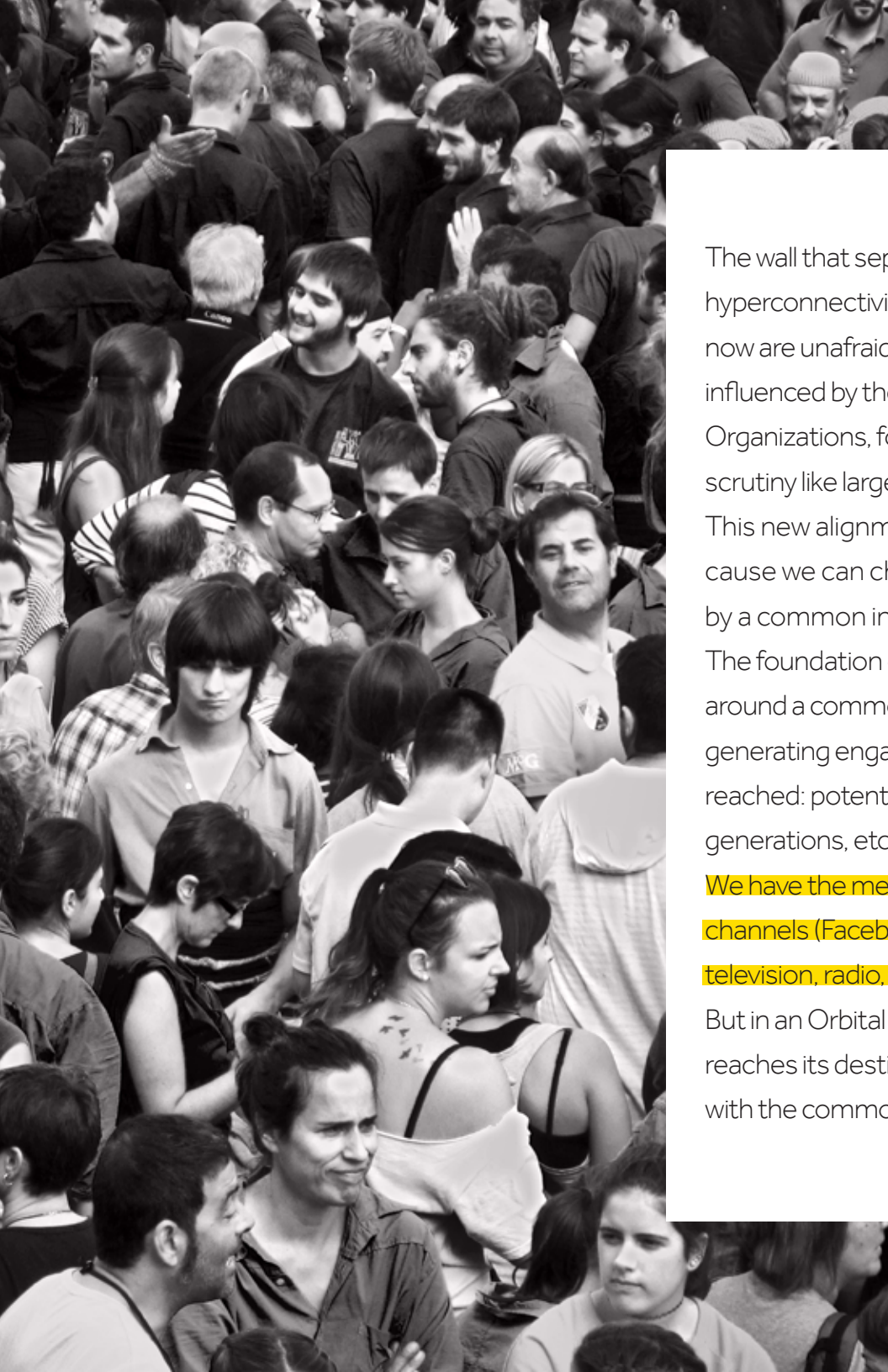
The wall that separated the Primary Orbit's actors has been torn down by hyperconnectivity, and there has been a rearrangement within that orbit. The actors now are unafraid to and interested in conversing, and they allow themselves to be influenced by the other's opinions.

Organizations, for their part, have been exposed to the public view and general scrutiny like large glass buildings. Everything is known.

This new alignment provides us with a unique opportunity. If in promoting our cause we can channel the power of all of the Primary Orbit's actors, who are joined by a common interest, our impact on our surroundings will be much greater.

The foundation of all engagement is the Primary Orbit. If we realign our inner circle around a common objective, we can roll out an impactful message capable of generating engagement with the Potential Orbit, or those actors we have not yet reached: potential customers, votes we don't yet have, intriguing markets, new generations, etc.

We have the means to do it. The proliferation of social and traditional communication channels (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, online and print newspapers, television, radio, etc.) offer us a menu of platforms for conveying our message.

But in an Orbital World the determining factor in whether or not that message reaches its destination will be its relevance to other actors: its point of connection with the common interest.
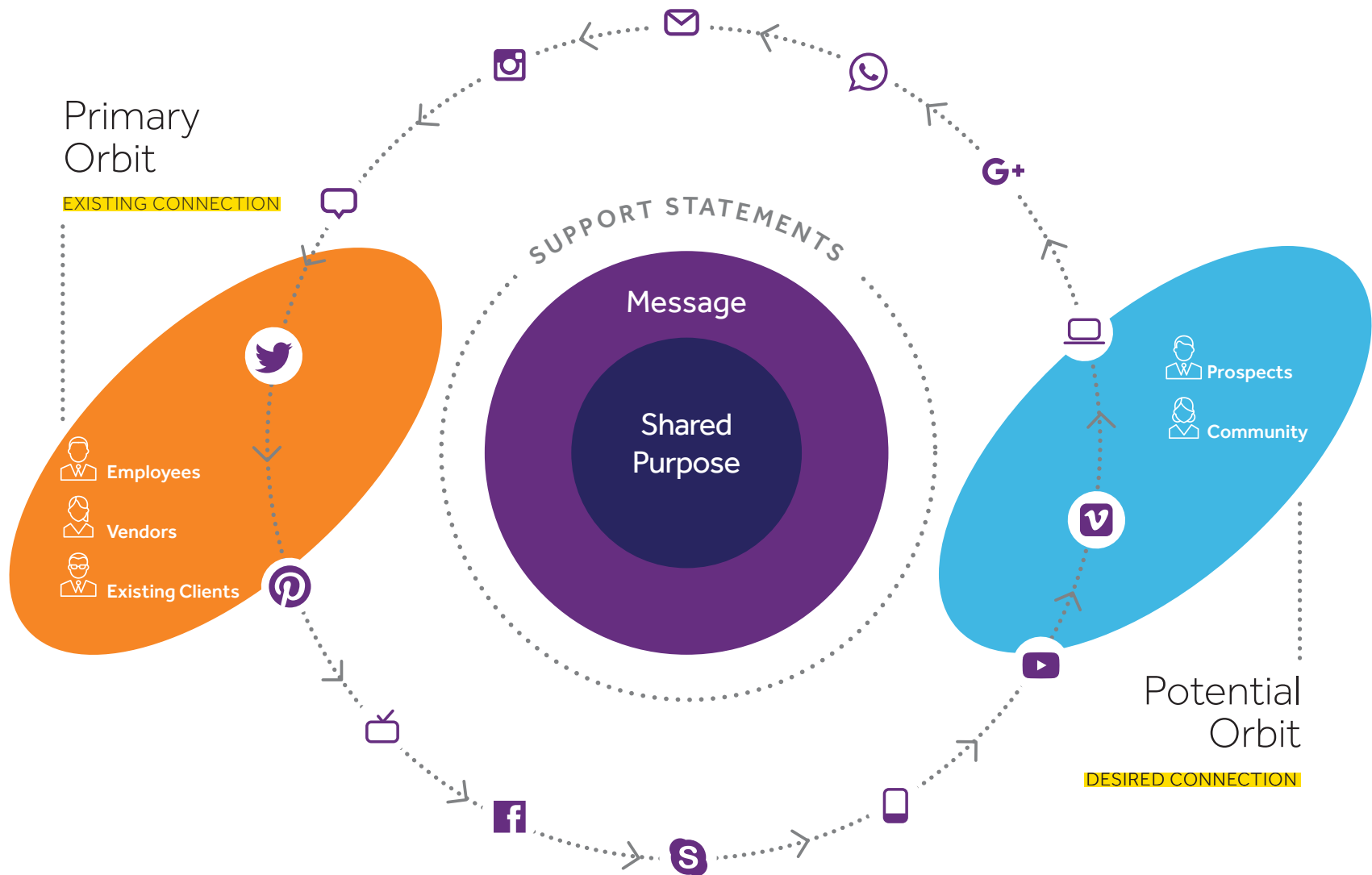
Conclusion

Orbital Thinking is a roadmap that allows us to understand today's world, enabling us to be effective in an environment of hyperconnectivity and constant change.

Today, top executives say they feel exposed, that reaching customers is increasingly difficult, and that innovation is occurring so quickly that many fear being left behind.

Orbital Thinking offers a comprehensive solution, providing the possibility of generating a real transformation in how we understand the world.

Its prescriptions for positioning oneself in this new context are:

1- Understand that we're all actors and have power. Today, people influence people.

2- Define a common purpose for connecting our objectives with the interests of others and thereby unlock the power of collaboration.

3- Keep in mind that we're exposed to the four forces that govern today's world: velocity, transparency, participation, and social conscience.