Relevance of Durkheim's Concept of Organic Solidarity in the Modern World

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Introduction

Greengard (2011) highlights that all of the humans in this world are urged by their innate souls to be connected with one another; this interconnectedness of humans with each other through digital devices, digital marketing services and media is known as the digital world. Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat (2011) that the digital world is characterised as full of opportunities, ideas and opinions and the major reason behind the development of this world is the "Internet". Greengard (2012, p. 17) specifically highlights that "*In fact, it's become increasingly difficult to go anywhere without getting caught in the tractor beam of digital technology*". However, people, in order to communicate effectively and safely, need some laws which can ensure cooperation among the individuals – argued by the Durkheim's Concept of Organic Solidarity (Abbott-Chapman, Johnston, & Jetson, 2014). Organic solidarity is classified as the high division of labour where significant differentiation exists in order to develop interdependence for the others regarding their very skills. Organic solidarity exists in larger populations where the society is more specialised, despite being less personal. In such societies, interactions between people are only because of specific needs rather than relationships and every person tried hard for their own determination and not for the needs of the society (Adair, 2008). Provided the definition of a digital world and organic solidarity, this essay aims to critically explore whether Durkheim's concept of Organic Solidarity is still relevant in this digital world provided the fact that this concept is only applicable to modern and technologically advanced societies.

Literature Review

Emile Durkheim – the renowned French sociologist – presented his major work "*The Division of Labour in Society*" in 1983 and the terms of 'mechanical solidarity' and 'organic solidarity' were derived from this work. Mechanical solidarity is defined in terms of collective conformity to such traditions which enforces social bonds or the traditional life in rural areas. Whereas, organic solidarity is referred to as interdependence and specialisation responsible for eroding the mechanical solidarity bought up by the urbanisation (Adolf & Deicke, 2015). Durkheim (1964a), in his work, presented an evolutionary relationship between collectivity and the individual in which the author uses social cohesion through the development of two major concepts of solidarity as highlighted above. Based on similarities, the traditional form of cohesion is known as the mechanical solidarity in which an individual is fully incorporated by collective consciousness (Durkheim, 1964a). On the other hand, the second society based on the division of labour makes use of such a solidarity embedded in difference: organic solidarity. Organic solidarity is discussed more in the context of modernity and is integrated within the ever increasing interdependency of the society rather than in resemblance. The specialisation of professions or the division of labour brings with it a reciprocal reliance of the numerous institutions and members of the society – as Durkheim (1964a) views it as the numerous organs of a human body. Wilde (2007) mentioned that in the modern world, the necessity of reliable exchange is emerging which then according to Adolf & Deicke (2015) might result in a new kind of organic solidarity that rather than focusing on similarities will focus on differences. Durkheim (1964a) argued that this transition will be classified as "progress" as the new type of organic solidarity provides the society with more individual freedom and increases flexibility.

In order to understand the relevance of organic solidarity in the digital world, one has to critically analyse the different aspects of the digital world; the network is one of them. Castells (2004) highlights that the modern digital society presents advents of the network society which then refers to social change as a whole and taken into account a significant number of societal developments. In this context, the result of "First modernity" is subsumed to be the internet technology (Beck et al. 1994). Adolf & Deicke (2015) mentioned that this technology is the main reason behind the individuals have removed out from their traditional social culture which in the context of a network society is the broadcast media model which was represented through limited channels, but centrally organised, television and various media of public interest. Adolf & Deicke (2015) put a strong argument that the broadcast media is a source of mechanical solidarity because this system facilitates the development of collective consciousness which is not applicable to the modern society (digital world) because Durkheim (1964a) mentions that in a modern society collective consciousness between individual decreases significantly. Relating it to the example of the internet which is a network of notes achieved its very identity through their "difference to each other" (Adolf & Deicke, 2015). Many have regarded this as the modal change of societal communication and the question under hot debate is whether or not it will lead towards the development of organic solidarity (Besnard, 2005). Inglis & Donnelly (2011) argued that this new media, as well as the new modalities to which it is giving rise to, represents an element which is similar to the *formal* reasoning of Durkheim. New ways of communicative engagement are emerging and are representing the similar level of change as depicted in the Durkheim's concept of organic solidarity mainly because of the fact that they did not tend to remove the differences between media usage and individualised life-world – recalling,

differences in roles is the major theme of organic solidarity. This represents that the new forms of media emerging, especially the Internet, are embracing the concept of organic solidarity as they are not removing the differences between individual roles.

Thijssen (2012) agreed with the comments of Inglis & Donnelly (2011) and added that rather than removing the differences, these new modes of communicative interaction are incorporating these differences and integrating them into various mediatized networks. Adolf & Deicke (2015) highlighted that this is a point where social cohesion and new modes of communicative interaction are differentiable from the traditional ones that were based on the broadcast media (mechanical solidarity). Durkheim's concept of organic solidarity posits that the latter embraces flexibility, whereas, the new modes of communicative and networked individuality tend to develop such types of social cohesion through which fragmentation is endured and it then accommodates ever increasing fluidity, otherwise flexibility (Thijssen, 2012). Communicative references for each individual were provided in the conventional model, whereas, the new model each individual might become a point of communicative reference.

Another example of understanding the relevancy of organic solidarity is comprehending the concept of "Virtual Teams" where the individuals through working together are not in the physical proximity of each other and where communication networks (such as e-mails, phone, video and so on) are responsible for facilitating communication between the individuals (Bergiel, Bergiel, & Balsmeier, 2008). Bergiel et al. (2008) also highlight that virtual teams have significant potential to benefit the business world, thus, are seen as of extreme importance in the contemporary digital organisations. Durkheim (1964a) identified for the division of labour, individualism is extremely necessary which also supports the development of organic solidarity

among societies. However, the author also recognised that the latter process can also result in the individual moving towards the paths of egoism which will result in social instability (anomie) because of a breakdown in values and standards (Sieh, 2012). Durkheim's concept of organic solidarity transforms into a new dimension when an organisation, or the society, comprises of such individuals that are dispersed ethnically, culturally, geographically and so on. It is strongly argued by Sieh (2012) that in order to comprehend the Durkheim's concept of organic solidarity, the ultimate laboratory is the virtual organisation. The leaders of virtual teams face various challenges out of which the significant one is to balance dichotomy among such individuals who are highly independent and have never seen each other. Another challenge is to avoid anomie-like instability in the workgroup while the collective workgroup should be kept productive and functional (Sieh, 2012). It can, therefore, be said that the theories of Durkheim regarding anomie and organic solidarity provide a significant opportunity for comprehensive studies on virtual teams provided the team members are isolated.

Another argument to support that organic solidarity is relevant in the digital world stems from the bonds that exist between society and the individual. Durkheim (1964b) categorised into these bonds as social – including customs, norms and values characterised by the support and mutual trust, moral – including spiritual, metaphysical or religious emotions and beliefs, and economic – having legal and contractual obligations linked with the division of labour (Durkheim, 1964a). Though all of the bonds can be present in a given society; whether traditional or contemporary, the social and moral bonds are associated with the rural or traditional society, whereas, the economic bonds are only predominant in the urban or modern society. The current world of business is made up of economic bonds, even the virtual teams, people interact with

each other because of work and that is the evidence of organic solidarity relevance in this digital world (Arbnor & Bjerke, 2009).

Conclusion

Conclusively, it can be said that the Durkheim's concept of organic solidarity which embraces differences in the individuals, flexibility, economic bonds, division of labour and interaction on the basis of work is highly relevant in this digital world. Durkheim already regarded this concept for the modern and the industrialised society and his hypothesis is becoming true in this era. The study explored the example of Internet which gains its identity through their differences and is an important example of organic solidarity. It was also found that the development of virtual teams in the digital world is another example of organic solidarity because of isolation in members and they communicate only for work. The presence of economic bonds in today's organisation also evidence the existence of organic solidarity, therefore, it can be said that this concept is still relevant in this digital world.

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