

Understanding Organisational Social Capital Building Benefits

Mojeed-Sanni, Bashir Aboaba¹

School of Management,
Cardiff Metropolitan University

Adeniyi Temitope Adetunji²

Department of Business Administration,
Bowen University Iwo, Nigeria

SANNI, Ganiyu Adisa³

University of Wales (Greenwich School of Management London)

Abstract

Among the primary concerns of any organisation are profit maximisation and employee satisfaction, and which have achieved through variety of means and outcomes. One path to ensuring organisations (including small and medium-sized enterprises-small and medium enterprises) not only increase its profit base, but also survive in a very competitive environment is to leverage on its internal resources (its people). Organisation comprises networks of people engaged to carry-out specific tasks and responsibilities. These responsibilities and tasks are executed within a negotiated framework, which involved formal (official relationships, organisational structures, job description, etc.) and informal (human social interactions, norms and culture) relationships. The informal relationships within the organizations have been accorded as 'social capital' by many scholars. These social interactions among the actors (Human resource personnel and employees) within organizational network has been established in academic literature to play crucial roles such as effective discharge of duties, employees moral and motivations, job satisfaction, commitment, and employees work life balance. However, there is paucity of knowledge in terms of what are the specific indicators for determine social capital building within an organisation. This paper reviewed literature on strategic human resources management, social capital, organisational behaviour, human resource practices in small and medium enterprises, organisational social capital and strategic management to give a robust understanding of social capital building in organisations, especially in small and medium enterprises, and how it can be stimulated through human resource practices and functions.

Introduction

Social capital is a multidisciplinary concept with links to many social and behavioural disciplines such as sociology, political science, psychology, developmental studies, economics, organisational behaviour, and employee relations and engagements. It refers to the resources available in and through personal and business networks. These resources include information, ideas, leads, business opportunities, financial capital, power and influence, emotional support, even goodwill, trust and cooperation" (Baker, 2000; Webb, 2008). Reed and Srinivasan (2005) pointed out that the "social" in the social capital context emphasised that these resources are not personal assets, no single persons own them, and these resources reside in networks or relationships. However, as for the "capital" in social capital centred on the relevance stem from the resource based view of the firm. Barney (2001) conceptualised 'firm' as a bundle of resources (both tangible and intangible). The author mentioned intangible resources as their distinctive capabilities and consist of many elements, but not limited to 'social complexity' – the routine of behaviours which

cannot be copied. This paper intends to maintain that the social relations and interactions among the actors within any organisational networks constitute a resource embedded in social complexity, and for this reason social relations and interactions are capital to that organization which yields benefits.

The notion of social roots in the social capital context is almost agreed upon by various scholars (O'Donnell et al., 2007; Granovetter, 2005; Reed & Srinivasan, 2005; Hooghe & Stolle, 2003). However, few scholars agreed upon when it comes to its position as a capital to the organization. Some sees it as another form of capital, although it is an intangible one. Lin (2001) emphasised that there is no dispute against the fact that it constitutes surplus value and investment generated and pocketed by an individual, group, community or organisation with expected returns. Fu (2004. 7) recognised social capital as a resource to the organization positing that 'social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors' and is therefore least tangible, unlike physical capital which is mostly tangible because it includes products and resources. He further buttress that human capital for instance constitutes both tangible and intangible resources. However, human capital constituted by indirectly observable skills and knowledge possessed by actors within the network themselves which is much less tangible. Fu's (2004) position echoes the previous position of the previous writers that the resources of economic or symbolic interest are embedded in, and captured through social relations (see Lin, 2001; Robison, et al. 2002). Nevertheless, like all other forms of capital it facilitates productive activity.

Lin (2001) embedded resources in social relations/networks to social capital with benefit that will enhance outcomes of actions. In other words, it will facilitate productive activities. The author suggested three explanations why such resources will facilitate productive activities thus:

- a. Social capital "facilitates the flow of information. For instance, in the usual imperfect market situations, social ties located in certain strategic locations and/or hierarchical positions (resulting in better information on market needs and demands) can provide an individual" (Lin, 1999. 31) or organisation with useful information about opportunities and choices otherwise not available to them. Such information may alert an individual or organisation about availability of rare individual or resources which may in turn lead to reduction in transaction cost in terms of either time or unnecessary search or recruitment exercise.
- b. Social capital exerts influence on the agents (e.g., recruiters or supervisors of the organisation) who play a vital role in decisions such as hiring and promotion, involving the actor (employees and subordinates). For instance, some social relationships and interactions in organisations due to their strategic location in the organisations are more valued resources, and exercise and confer greater power on the organisational agents' decision-making abilities. Social capital (social relationships) of an individual sometimes serves as recognition and affirmation of the individual's skills and ability to contribute to and carry out his responsibilities in the productive process of an organisation or community.
- c. Social capital means 'social tie resources and their acknowledged relationships to the individual may be conceived by the organisation or its agents as certifications of the individuals' social credential, some of which reflect the individual's accessibility to resources through social networks and relations – his/her social capital. Thus, reassures the organisation (and its agents) that the individual can provide "added resources" beyond the individual's personal capital, some of which may be useful to the organisation.' (Lin 1999. 31)

Without ignoring Lin's suggestions as to how social relations facilitate productive activities as outlined above, the multiple definitions adopted to examine social capital is the root problem of the controversies surrounding categorising social relations as a capital (Bozovic, 2007). However, it is not clear whether the value of this capital somehow resides under individual control, and for individual benefit, or if its value is an attribute of the group and thus generated through civic engagement, trust, or other outcomes of collective action. Uphoff and Wijayaratna (2000) pointed out that it is hard to make a distinction between the private and public good attributes of social capital, especially as it relates to mutually beneficial collective actions. In their opinion, unlike other forms of capital (physical and human) that are used mostly to benefit those persons who are utilising them rather than others, however, in contrast social capital is expected to produce goods, services and values that serve the collective. Hence, some scholars see social capital as a value and resources that one can access through social ties (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Adler & Kwon, 2002).

The "idea that social capital increases organisational performance; enables employees to get better jobs, better pay and faster promotions through the social capital that they build; is the driving force attracting businesses to further investigate and explore the opportunities and possibilities that social capital may present" (Akdere, 2005. 3). Scholars like Van Buren (2008) and Akpotu et al. (2010) share the same view. Cohen & Prusak (2001. 9) posit that 'social capital consists of the stock of active connections among people; tend to be self-reinforcing and cumulative. It involves trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviours that facilitate future collaboration between networks and communities and make cooperative action possible.' Also, Fu (2004. 6) confirm these connections as social networks, the social relationships between individual actors, groups, organisation, communities, regions and nations that serve as a resource to produce positive returns'.

Furthermore, in an entirely different view, Paldam (2000. 11) defines 'social capital as the glue that holds societies together' and propounded the theoretical 'approaches into three families of social capital' (Yaghoubi et al., 2011. 471), namely trust, cooperation, and network. In a relatively similar view, Lin (2001. 32) see social capital as a public good, in that, it is 'consisting of any social-structural features or resources that are useful to individuals for specific' actions. Putnam (1993), a renowned sociologist and political scientist concluded that the relationships, attitudes and values that govern interactions among people and institutions that contribute to the economic and social development of a society, constitute the social capital of such society, which can, aptly, be described as the shared values and rules governing social and personal relationships expressed through trust, understanding, and a common sense of "civic" responsibility.

In addition, looking at social capital from knowledge management perspectives, Manning (2010); (Webb, 2008) opine that social capital resources, embedded in the social fabric of organisations, provide company with the critical social assets, such as solidarity and norms of cooperation that are essential for the creation, sharing and management of knowledge. These authors (Webb, 2008 & Manning, 2010) infer that the social capital is seen as features of social life-networks, norms and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives. Ruiz et al., (2010. 44) suggested that the social capital is necessary 'to manage efficiently both explicit and tacit knowledge, which places all actors inside the' firm as principal contributors to the formation of internal social capital. In other words, actors inside a firm leverage on their relationships to seek better access to information. These opinions are alluding to the assertions of Bowles and Gintis (2002. 426) that "social capital focuses on members of communities who interact directly, frequently, in multi-faceted ways, thus, generating opportunities and potentials for members, who then gain a competitive advantage in pursuing their ends".

Coleman (1990) suggested that the most useful social capital building approach will be dependent on understanding and responded to contextual variables, rather than imposing a universal “blueprint”. Hence, social capital as a concept, revolves round social networks and social relations, and therefore can be defined as capital embedded in a social structure which can be accessed and/or mobilised in purposive actions. The quest for research on social capital building in organisations was entrenched in the work of Torrington et al. (2009); Omoadoni (2012), where history of personnel management was analysed through lenses of themes.

The first theme is social justice – that is, where 'employers promoted a welfare approach to managing people, by attempting to ameliorate working conditions and avoid adversarial industrial relations'. Second, **humane bureaucracy** - this involved adoption of a work study, incentive-based approach to managing people. Third, **Negotiated consent** – this contains union’s power and managing by representative systems and collective agreements; Organisation provided by personnel specialists– the development of career paths, opportunities for personal growth and workforce planning. Fourth, **human resource management**– where there is a focus on ‘performance management, planning, monitoring and control, flexibility and employees’ as individual as a result of the emergence of globalisation and neo-liberal economic policies (Omoadoni, 2012). Fifth, **new human resource**– a shift away from the ‘management of jobs’ by organisations to the ‘management of people’ comprising issues of international dimension, legal compliance, the emergence of ‘multi-employer’ networks, engagement of individual employees emotionally at work (which includes managing employees social relations at work), and a customer-centred focus in business. A thorough view of the features of the distinctive “new” human resource tradition reveals that it comprises a long-term perspective, and a unitary individual approach to managing employment relations. ‘New’ human resource is also viewed as a more organic devolved and flexible organisational structure and maximum utilization of human resources. It thus emphasis the need for 21st century organisations to not only worry about how to assess social capital inherent in their organisation, but to also take proactive action towards building and managing organisations’ social capital for a variety of outcomes (see Ofori & Sackey, 2010). Clearly put, in the people management perspective, human resource management views people as social capital capable of being developed and committed at work.

Organisational Social Capital Building Benefits

The imperative strategic policies of organisations, especially those operating in a competitive and dynamic environment like the small and medium enterprises sector, includes using its structures (departments, units, policies, programmes and processes) to ensure individuals within the organisation not only trust one another, but are willing to go ‘extra mile’ and sacrifice for the organisation. Therefore, in quest for sustainable organisation social capital building, firms must use their human resources practices to ensure the integration of individual trust with organisational trust leading to accumulating and harnessing commitment, identification and spirit of collectivism necessary for the achievement of organisational outcomes; that is, seeing organisation social capital building as a key human resources function. Ajonbadi & Mojeed-Sanni (2015) reviewed Van Buren’s (2008) definition and explanation of organisation social capital; relate it to Mishra (1996) model of organisational trust, Shockley-Zalabak, et al. (2000) extended model of organisational trust and concluded that organisational social capital building could be defined as the conscious and deliberate attempt and efforts by an organisation to integrate and synchronise individual trust and organisational trust for the purpose of inspiring commitment, identification and spirit of collectivism towards the attainment of organisational outcomes.

Mojeed-Sanni (2015) proposes and identifies indicators of organisation social capital

building in an organisation and stress that the human resource practitioners in medium enterprise's should use their recruitment and selection process to recruit individuals who are capable and of and able to; initiate and sustain effective and affective social interactions at work; ensure personal/dyadic trust exist between him/herself and fellow employees; engage in and sustain friendship relationships with colleagues; demonstrate commitment to organisation's mission and vision; understand and identify with organisation's purpose; be willing to helping other at work; and have the tendency and ability of cooperative and knowledge-sharing attitude. These expected actions from the organisations human resource practitioners with intent to build social capital for their firms were amplified by Mojeed-Sanni (2015) thus;

Encouraging effective and affective social interactions at work– this means human resource practitioners and managers must continuously seek policies, procedures and processes that at all times, so to say, force employees to interact with each other beyond their official lines. The establishment of common dining hall, open office layout in addition to organising weekly, monthly or yearly 'after work' get-together for the employees are some of the strategic decisions human resource can use to encourage affective and effective social interactions at work.

Existence of personal and dyadic trust amongst employees– a strong indicator of social capital building in any organisation is the sign that employees in the organisation have and exhibit total confidence in the abilities of their co-workers to discharge their responsibilities that in the long run affect other employees (organisational trust), and also have believe that such employees would discharge their responsibilities accordingly without prompting or need for others to take preventive actions (dyadic/personal trust). human resource must therefore ensure employees are well trained and equipped to perform in their assigned role and communicate the competence of each employee to the entire organisation through: regular update on training and skill-level completed by employees, briefings on completed assignments and projects by individual employees, and notification of available training and skill development of all employees.

Encouragement of friendship relationships between employees– human resource must promote initiatives that bind and bond individuals together. Policies and procedures that foster interpersonal relationship amongst employees must take priority over those that promote individualism and selfishness at work. For instance, organisations through their human resource should encourage job shadowing, allow the formation of communities of practice, allow the use of instant messaging programmes and social networking and chat rooms, as all of these tend to breed friendliness and friendship amongst employees.

Ensuring employees' commitment to the organisation's mission and vision– organisations must take proactive steps to communicate their mission and vision to employees in a manner that clears doubts as to the direction of the organisation in the minds of the employees. In other to demonstrate organisational social capital building tendencies, employees in the organisation must not only understand the mission and vision of their firms, they must be totally committed to them; employees must be in a position to project accurately every policy direction of their organisation, a feat only achievable if and when the mission and vision of the organisation have been well communicated through antecedents and present policy actions of the firm.

Employee's identification with organisation's purpose– identifying with the purpose of organisations entails willingness to showcase the pride in working for such organisation. Employees in an organisation engaged in organisation social capital building must be happy to identify with everything about the organisation, they must enjoy working for the organisation, they must be proud to use their product or service, and they must be happy wearing and using the

organisation's paraphernalia. In short they must take pride in being associated with the organisation both in deeds and thoughts.

Encouraged helping behaviours at work– organisations involved in organisation social capital building must praise and reward employees who lend their hand to colleagues in distress at work. They must pay special attention to those employees who are ready to share work responsibilities with others through appropriate incentives. For instance, organisations can establish a reward and compensation for those employees who help others in the achievement of their assigned projects and programmes. human resource must ensure less premium is paid to competition among employees, they must discourage 'silos' and independent achievers in the organisation, rather emphasis should be on team working and collective achievements, which invariably would facilitate helping. human resource in organisations seeking organisation social capital building must enact a control system reflecting employee-employee relationships which positively influence co-worker helping, such as use of internal and permanent/long term employment mode; emphasis on technical and social selection criteria; training focused on shared competence and social/relational nature of work; work design based on mutual interdependence, dense networks and teams; reward and compensation systems focused on shared outcomes, group based, compressed pay structure and evaluations based on group developmental appraisal (Mossholder et al., 2011).

Encouraging cooperation and knowledge sharing among employees– for organisations to be seen as engaging in organisation social capital building, they must design a work system that encourages employees to freely exchange relevant and useful information amongst themselves, they must emphasize and promote cooperation and cooperative attitudes. At recruitment/selection stage, candidates with cooperative tendencies must be given consideration over those that prefer to work alone and hoard information. At training/development stage, employees should be imbued with the culture of sharing information and cooperating with co-workers. Organisations must use job design to create and generate at least one of, if not all of, intrinsic motivation, introjected motivation and external motivation. Buttressing the need for cooperation and knowledge-sharing among employees, Foss et al. (2009) opine that job design as an human resource practice entails job characteristics such as autonomy, identity and feedback which in turn determines the level of employees motivation to share knowledge. Therefore, a key indicator of organisational social capital building is to a large extent dependent on the degree of autonomy given to employees on their assigned duties, 'the degree to which the job gives the employee the opportunity to undertake job tasks from beginning to end' (Foss, et al. 2009. 873) and the level and quality of feedback given to employees about their completed tasks and assignments.

Conclusion

Organisation social capital is an human resource phenomenon deserving attention from the human resource practitioners and top managers, and it is indeed important to look at it with respect to the size and dynamics of the organisation and their immediate operating environment- which are often distinctive, dynamic, and turbulent and with some elements of similarity, depending on the nature of business. In particular, small and medium enterprises human resource management practices should be geared toward building organisational social capital in order to compete favourably in their peculiar turbulent and highly competitive operating environment.

Organisations human resource departments or units are hitherto responsible for managing the formal and informal networks, alliances, groups and relationships that inherently exists in the organisations. human resource practitioners and managers in 21st century organisations should

direct and use their traditional human resource functions (recruitment and selection, training and development, employee relations and engagement, motivation, salary and compensation and many others) toward promoting, building and maintaining viable social networks within their structures in order to derive maximum benefit.

In a similar tone, it is belief that cultural context plays a significant role in managing an organisation's human resources effectively because, management practices can be influenced by a country's historical, social and political differences. As such, human resource practices can lead to long-term competitive advantage for the organization only when they align with these cultural and other contextual factors. More specifically, managers of small and medium enterprises do not pay attention to specific human resource management practices. Even though, it has been empirically proven that adherence to human resource management practices positively affects the small and medium enterprises worker's productivity. They concluded that since man is the driver of development (organisational policies, decisions and strategies), man's effort must be coordinated to achieve desired objectives through the vehicle of human resources units in the organisation.

Furthermore, Ulrich *et al.* (2012) in their 2012 human resource competency study identified new trends in contemporary human resource. They, thereafter, suggested three spheres of influence on human resource work, and indeed what is expected of human resource practitioners in the 21st century organisations. Ulrich *et al.* (2012) capture the roles and responsibilities of human resource practitioners in creating values from three perspectives: individuals, organisations, and context perspectives. From the individuals' perspective, the human resource practitioners build effective relationships and reputations within their organisation. From the organisations' perspectives, the human resource practitioners design, develop, and deliver human resource systems and practices that create capabilities, manage change and encourage innovations through an integrated human resource practice and deployment of human resource technology. However, from the context perspectives, what respected human resource practitioners do is to ensure understanding of the external trends and realities facing the organisation and responsiveness to external stakeholders.

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