

HR CONFIGURATION, SOCIAL CAPITAL & ORGANISATION PERFORMANCE - THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS & EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research which yielded more than 466 respondents from various Indian IT organisations randomly chosen was to identify and examine the HR designing and HR architecture of the same. The composite objective of the study is to analyse whether the existing HR practices and procedure of the organisations under consideration are acting as enabler to create, nourish and influence social capital of the organisations and to find out the role of social capital in organisation performance. The study conducted basically with the help of a well designed questionnaire on the basis of on line survey and found that, both Egalitarian HR configuration & a collaborative HR configuration creates a interactive and collective culture within the organisation, nourish organisational rationality and is positively and significantly related to organisations level of social capital, which again is instrumental for enhancement of organisation performance.

KEYWORDS- Egalitarian HR configurations, Collaborative HR configuration, organisational rationality, Social capital, Bottom-line

INTRODUCTION

HR configurations facilitate flow of knowledge, which leads to sustainable competitive advantage. HR is always on the front line in developing the knowledge base in the organisation as the people dimension play key role for human resource management and human resource development for effective

knowledge management practices. HR practices have a central importance in knowledge intensive industries because they have immediate effect on the organisation's key resource, its stock of intellectual talent. HR strategy drives the long term strategy of the business. HR practices if chosen deliberately and used strategically can maintain strong organisational boundaries and promote high levels of organisational and professional identity and more specifically it encourages the retention of staff in a highly competitive industry. The architectural perspective of HR can be extended to incorporate social capital as a critical component for managing the flow of knowledge between employees to serve as a competitive advantage. HR practices and processes influence creation and sustenance of social capital. HR practices directed at creating and sharing knowledge throughout the firm accounts for new value creation. In the knowledge era, the traditional factors of production of land, labour and capital are being replaced by the creation of value through knowledge (Drucker, 1993; Savage, 1996) and firms are becoming embedded within a complex web of interconnections that span markets, governments and communities.

In this world the concept of social capital can take on a whole new dimension for the "firm" as it focus on the nature and strength of relationships and the communication flows in which individuals and organizations are embedded. Organisation achieves excellent SC by collectively maximising its external, internal and human capital. Nahapiet and Ghoshal in his seminal work on "Social Capital, Intellectual Capital, and the Organizational Advantage" (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998) proposed that a firm's capability to create SC provides a conducive environment for IC creation and hence organisation performance. Hence Social capital requires attention to be paid to the relationships which shape the realisation of human capital's potential for the individual and collectively. With this backdrop the paper examines the effects social capital on organizational performance. At the

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organizational level, social capital has been used to describe both the aggregate form and nature of relationships among organizational members (e.g., Coleman 1990, Leana and Van Buren 1999), as well as the linkages between the organization and its external stakeholders, competitors, or partners (e.g., Kale et al. 2000, Uzzi 1997). The present study focuses on the relationships among individual members--referred to as internal social capital- and the basic premise is that HR Configuration and HR practices adds appreciably to organisation level of social capital and which again enhance performance at the organizational level. We test our hypotheses from six Indian IT organisations where we collected data from 466 respondents from lower, middle and upper level executives.

OBJECTIVE & METHODOLOGY

The study is conducted on the basis of field survey. Data for the study were collected both from primary and secondary sources. A broad group of Indian IT organisations are included in the study. The objective of the study is to analyse the HR practices and procedure practised in selected organisations of Indian IT sector and the specific purpose of the study is to examine how different HR configurations facilitate the development of social capital as a unifying managerial construct to manage and report on intangibles for future value creation.

A stratified random technique has been adopted to select the respondents for the study. 844 respondents were selected randomly from lower middle as well as upper levels management of the Indian IT organisation out of which 466 responses were used for the study. A 19 items questionnaire was developed to measure HR architecture of the organisations under study and strength of social capital are measured by a questionnaire consisting of 5 items and organisation performance is measured with a questionnaire having 10 items. Following three hypotheses were tested in the study.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Z_1 + \beta_2 Z_2 + \dots + \beta_n Z_n + \epsilon$$

Y (Y₁, Y₂, Y_n) are dependent variables

$\beta_0, \beta_1, \beta_2, \dots, \beta_n$ are unknown parameters

Z₁, Z₂, Z_n are independent variables

ϵ ($\epsilon_1, \epsilon_2, \dots, \epsilon_n$) are error terms

Simple regression equations are designed and tested with the help of excel to find out the influence of both egalitarian HR configuration variables and collaborative HR configuration variables to social capital and the same process reiterated to study the explanatory power of social capital to that of organisation performance.

OSC is f (Eg-HRC₁, Eg-HRC₂Eg-HRC₇)

OSC is f (Coll-HRC₁, Coll-HRC₂, Coll-HRC₃.....Coll-HRC₁₂).

OP is f (O-SC₁, O-SC₂,O-SC₅)

HYPOTHESIS 1: An Egalitarian HR configuration (Eg-HRC) focussed on eliminating status symbols, reducing hierarchical levels, minimising job classifications, flattening wages, and empowering employees is positively related to an organisation's level of social capital (O-SC).

HYPOTHESIS 2:- A collaborative HR configuration (Coll-HRC) focused on permeable and network intimate work structures, team development, and group incentives is positively related to organisations level of social capital (O-SC).

HYPOTHESIS 3:- An organisation's level of social capital (O-SC) is positively related to organisational performance (OP).

THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

From a competitive standpoint, theorists are quick to point out that organisations do not own human capital, employees do. Since those employees are free to leave the firm, there is significant risks organisations may incur a capital loss unless individual

knowledge is transferred, shared. This highlights the need for social capital to protect the investments of organisations in knowledge – based sources of advantage. Social capital builds the social networks together with shared norms, values, and understanding that facilitate co-operation within or among groups.

Building social capital requires a collaborative organisational environment in which knowledge and information can flow freely. Disclosure of information by firms to their employees and representatives is encouraged as good practice by academics focusing on voluntary behaviour and increasingly by policy makers focusing on legal requirement. Scholars from a variety of perspectives have argued that, social capital may play an important role in knowledge flows by providing a mechanism to share and combine the distributed knowledge among organisational members (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998; Adler and Kwon, 2002). Organizational knowledge creation too is dependent on the ability of the organisational members to exchange and combine existing information, knowledge and ideas through exchange process, teamwork and communication (Smith, Collins and Clark, 2005). Ghoshal and Bartlett (1988) argued that knowledge sharing could not occur without the existence of social connections. Value is embedded in the tacit knowledge and so there will be an interaction between their knowledge, skills and physical assets in the organisation to create value. "To use more of what people know companies need to create opportunities for private knowledge to be made explicit. It means knowledge can be articulated in formal language and transmitted across individuals formally and easily" (Stewart, 1997). Knowledge flows are necessary for creating firms dynamic capabilities to renew and integrate knowledge (Tece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997). It clearly states knowledge hoarding should be discouraged and knowledge processes should be inserted which assist in the flow of information. Information sharing or disclosure is an element in management transparency yielding benefits in employee satisfaction, commitment, and motivation thereby in

organisational performance (Lawler; 1995, Pfeffer; 1998).

But there are natural barriers to knowledge exchange and most of which centre around power relationships. Szulanski (1996) found that one of the biggest obstacles to the transfer of best practices in organisations is due in poor relationships between the source and recipient of information. Breaking down these vertical (hierarchical) and horizontal (cross-functional) barriers requires the cultivation of an open and trusting culture having a strong social network. These social networks are critical resource in building teams and transmitting and maintaining knowledge in organisations. 'Knowledge networks' is special case of social networks in which the links of net works represent shared or related knowledge. Knowledge network represents "who knows what", social networks represent "who knows who" (Contractor & Monge ; 2002). Therefore, Peter Drucker, the noted management thinker has suggested that a main organising principle of the new economy is networks, partnerships and collaborative ventures.

Eliminating vertical barriers to social capital- (EG-HRC)

An egalitarian organisation is a classless organisation with minimal power distances between the employees. Vertical hierarchy is flattened; organisation structure is created around work flows or processes rather than departmental functions. Management tasks are delegated and decentralised to the lowest level. In addition, while no organisation can truly function in a purely classless manner, numerous HR activities may help move organisations in these directions. Such HR activities broadly fall into five categories: eliminating status symbols, creating flatter organisations, minimising job classifications, empowering employees, and utilising flat pay structures (Pfeffer, 1994). All these HR activities help the organisation reducing barriers among various departments. Which ultimately builds better employee morale, administrative overhead is also reduced improving organisational efficiency.

Status symbols such as executive dining rooms, reserved parking spaces, and corner offices create physical barriers to

communication as well as social subdivisions. Accordingly, eliminating status symbols should promote cross - level interactions by breaking down barriers between people. In a like manner, many hierarchical levels can “also foster an environment of great power distances which create communications barriers”. There fore, flatter organisational structures with fewer levels of hierarchy should increase an organisation’s capacity to quickly share and leverage knowledge.

The minimisation of job classifications, sometimes referred to as broad-branding, should also create a more egalitarian environment where people move about and communicate much more freely. Likewise, flat pay structures de-emphasise pay in organisations and should facilitate quality information exchanges by reducing interpersonal competition and politics. Lastly, by giving employees autonomy and decision making authority, organisations increase employee involvement in organisational activities which, in turn, should lead to a greater willingness to share and transfer knowledge and information.

Eliminating Horizontal Barriers to social capital-(Coll-HRC)

Collaborative HR configuration enables the organisation to form social networks in which network nodes represent people and network area represent relationships (friendship, advice, supervisor-subordinate relations) says (Wasserman & Faust; 1994). This social networks also form a resource for collaborative knowledge management, creation and exchange and transformation of knowledge. Collaborative HR configuration characterised by group incentives, cross functional teams, and the like ensure greater integration and stronger relationships with the firm (Mathieu, Tannenbaum and Salas, 1992). McGill and Slocum (1994) argue that work structures in knowledge - based organisations need to be characterised by permeability, and network intimacy. A collaborative HR configuration provides nurturing environment that provides the support and encouragement that teams need for job performance (Margulies and Kleiner 1995). Collaborative HR configuration creates and facilitates trusting relations and these trusting

relationship allow transmission of more information as well as richer and potentially more valuable information. Members are likely to exchange sensitive information and they are less likely to fear opportunistic behavior on the part of their colleagues, enabling an environment of collaboration and exchange that can benefit both organizations and the individuals who work within them (Bradach and Eccles 1989, Rousseau et al. 1998).

That is, the lines between functional departments, between employees and customers, and between the company and its vendors need to be blurred (permeability), and employees need to be kept close together and close to key business processes (network intimacy). Perhaps one of the best ways to bring permeability and network intimacy to life is through organising around teams and networks, especially cross functional and joint employee - customer problem solving ones. Successful teams can able to balance between autonomy and decentralisation of power on the one hand, for the sake of both motivation and flexibility and centralised control on the other hand, for the sake of co-ordination (Argote and McGrath , 2001).

To develop the opacity for teamwork and collaboration, organisations may begin by reorienting staffing criteria to focus more on interpersonal skills, and complement this with team training and other cross functional interactions that facilitate broader knowledge networks. Formation of virtual teams can be also a very good means to facilitate knowledge sharing process. Participatory approach of HR configuration can be a mean to develop and engage people and organisations in substantive, creative roles rather than reactive and passive roles. In addition, performance feedback from peers, customers, team members, and even subordinates is likely to facilitate knowledge sharing. Each of these initiatives is likely to increase the capacity and opportunity for knowledge exchange and combination.

Major changes in incentives and culture may require motivating knowledge exchange. In many organisations, sharing knowledge dilutes an individual’s power base; as such,

strong incentives need to be put in place to engender collective exchange. Even in the best of circumstances, a “market for knowledge” exists and there are cost - benefit trade-offs in any person’s decision to participate in that market. Group incentives such as bonuses, profit sharing, and gain sharing may help ensure that employees interact and exchange ideas with others as their compensation depends on the performance of one another. The greater the opportunities for collaborative deliberation, the greater are the capacity of the organisation for social learning and joint action. Nahapiet & Ghoshal (1998) has rightly said different form of social capital might act as a sufficient coordination capability for individuals or organisations to share their knowledge with one another. Likewise, Kang, Morris and Snell (2007) argued that certain forms of social capital might optimise the ability, opportunity and motivation for knowledge sharing across groups.

Social Capital & Performance

Social capital enhance better group communication; more efficient collective action; enhanced stocks and use of intellectual capital; and better access to resources (Adler and Kwon 2002, Leana and Van Buren (1999), Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998, Hansen 2002) . Social capital can be linked directly to economic performance at very different levels –at the level of nation states (eg Fukuyama 1996), at the regional level (eg Maskell et al 2004) or between and within communities or organisations (Grootaert 1999). It also has wider outcomes, which includes the generation of further social capital, maintenance of social cohesion that contribute indirectly to enhanced economic performance. The economic value of customer relations is no more “invisible” than the market value of a house. According to Christian Grootaert (World Bank April 1987), “it has now become recognised that the traditional type of capital natural, physical and human determine only partially the process of economic growth because they overlook the way in which the economic actors interact and organise themselves to generate growth and development. The missing link is social capital”. Social capital has become a critical enabler of innovation. It represents the “stock” created when a network of organisations

develop the ability to work in collaboration to promote mutual productive gain.

Social capital, generally defined as the actual and potential resources embedded in relationships among actors, is increasingly seen as an important predictor of group and organizational performance (Adler and Kwon 2002, Leana and Van Buren 1999, Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). At the macro level, social capital can affect economic performance and the process of economic growth and development. Social capital is a leading driver and source of managerial heuristics for creating increased intangible assets value, subsuming a majority of other intangible concepts. An organisation exhibiting excellent social capital would be seen as one, where internal departments are heavily interconnected, sharing a common vision and objective. The firm would also exhibit similar traits externally, easily forming profitable alliances and partnership to improve its overall market performance. Human interaction is fundamental premise for building social capital. It has also been argued that the human dimensions accounts for at least half of all intellectual capital value to an organisation (O'Donnell et al 2006). Simon also acknowledges the important role that social and behavioural dimensions play in efficient communications and hence organizational performance (Simon, 2001). Social capital facilitates individual learning by sharing of information and such situated learning enhance performance. Particularly in knowledge-intensive organization, information sharing and exchange enhance cooperation and mutual accountability leading organisation performance. (Sparrowe et al. 2001).

There are largely a vast amount of quantitative studies, which have drawn correlations between social network and organisational performance. Social networks forms the foundation for collaborative knowledge management, which ultimately improves organisational performance by enabling individuals to capture, share and apply their collective knowledge to make optimal decisions at right time (Smith and Farquhar, 2000). Hazelton and Kennan (2000) put the case for social capital and organisational

advantage around the improved communication afforded to organisations with strong social capital. Reduced transaction costs, through less need to cheque transactions, improved productivity, efficiency, and quality and customer satisfaction are among the other benefits attributed to social capital.

Social capital may reduce organisational costs in many of the same ways human capital does. By identifying and managing different form of social capital across employee groups within the architecture, HR practices can facilitate the flow of knowledge within the firm, which ultimately leads to competitive advantage. The flow of knowledge both within and across firms is essential for innovation and continuous adoption leading to a more sustainable competitive position (Grant; 1996; Kogut and Zander; 1992, Nonaka and Takeuchi; 1995, Spender &Rob; 1996).

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCES

Demographic Analysis

Demographic profiles of the respondents consist of small, medium, and large organisation, where respondents from large organisation constitute almost half of the total population in the study. Female participants in the study was one third where as male participants consisted of two third of the total population. Age- wise distribution depicts 26-34 year age group dominates in the study consisting of more than 50% of the total sample. The respondents having 5-10 years of experience at current organisation is very well present in the study consisting of 51% of the total sample.

Regression Analysis

The causal relationship between set of variables of Egalitarian HR configuration and social capital of the organisations understudy are analysed with simple regression analysis (F1, 464 = 896.155, p < 0.0005. R² = 0.819, Adjusted R²= 0.818) and significant variables are shown below:

Predictor Variable	Beta	p
Intercept		

Egalitarian	HR	Configurations
0.34	0.9	p < 0.0005

Hence the regression equation O-SC = 0.34 + 0.9 (Eg -HRC) with standard error 0.07 and 0.01 respectively corroborate the hypothesis-1 ,which depicts an Egalitarian HR configuration is positively related to an organisations level of social capital.

The causal relationship between set of variables of Collaborative - HR configuration and social capital of the organisations understudy are analysed with simple regression analysis (F1,464=896.155, p< 0.0005) R² = 0.859, Adjusted R²= 0.858) and significant variables are described as follows.

Predictor Variable

Intercept	Beta	p
Collaborative	HR	Configurations
0.30	0.9	p < 0.0005

Hence the regression equation O-SC = 0.30 + 0.9 (Coll-HRC) with standard error 0.06 and 0.01 respectively corroborate the hypothesis-2 ,which clearly depicts an Collaborative HR configuration is positively related to an organisations level of Social capital.

The causal relationship between set of variables of Social capital of the organisations understudy and organisation Performance are analysed with simple regression analysis (F1,464=896.155, p < 0.0005. R² = 0.739, Adjusted R²= 0.738) and following are the significant variables.

Predictor Variable

Intercept	Beta	p
Organisation Performance		
1.76	0.54	p < 0.0005

Hence the regression equation OP = 1.76 + 0.54 (O-SC) with standard error 0.10 and 0.03 respectively corroborate the hypothesis-3 ,which entails that Organisation Performance is positively related to an organisations level of Social capital.

1. DISCUSSION

Social capital is generally referred to as the set of trust, institutions, social norms, social networks, and organisations that shape the interactions of actors within a society and are an asset for the individual and collective production of well being. SC has its historical roots in public welfare, but more recently is gaining the attention of the corporate sector (Cohen, D. and L. Prusak, 2001). Social capital is basically *"The stock of active connections among people, the trust, mutual understanding and shared values and behaviours that bind the members of human networks and communities and make co-operative action possible"* (Cohen and Prusak, 2001, p 72). Like any other forms of economic capital, social capital is argued to have similar although less measurable benefits. But unlike traditional forms of capital, social capital is not depleted by use, but in fact depleted by non-use. In this respect, it is similar to the well-established economic concept of human capital. Like other forms of capital social capital is productive. It makes possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible. Hence social capital must be considered as a resource to a person. In an organisation Social capital can be useful resource both by enhancing internal organisational trust through the bonding of actors as well as by providing resources through creating stronger link with other network members.

CONCLUSION

Social capital is a relational construct and is dependent on the interaction of individuals. Such interaction takes place within particular contexts. As defined by Fried (2001) and others (Cappelli and Sherer 1991, Johns 2003) work context can matter a great deal in shaping organizational behaviour. The study is undertaken in knowledge intensive sector of the economy, the goal of the organisation is to "hire and wire". The organisations put huge emphasis to hire the best people with best network and integrate them into the value chain so that their combined human and social capital provides excellent returns. On-boarding of new employees includes connecting them to knowledge sources and information flows so that they will be successful in their jobs. Social capital has some effect on productivity and innovation of the organisations too. It is not what individual

employees know that provides competitive advantage. It is unique interconnectivity of human capital available inside and outside of the firm that provide some economic players with advantage over those who are not so well connected. Human Resources focus not on individual employees but on emergent network of employees.

Social capital is found to be key driver in employee retention too. Women and minority engineers perceives it as an inclusion process to the communities which enhances their commitment to organisations. The final factor in effective social capital is enhancement in terms of weaving better organisation. Generally human resources are accustomed to examining at prescribed vertical relationships inside the organisation but these organisations move forward and HR considers horizontal and diagonal relationships within the organisation as well as external connections to stakeholders for sustenance as well as for future growth. Moreover through the culture of interaction of organizational actors, the organisations under study are creating collective mind and hence thereby experiencing organisational rationality and by this organised rationality, the individual subjectivities at workplace are unified into common objectivities.

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