

Role of Structural Social Capital for effective Knowledge Transfer – A Review of Literature

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Introduction and Review Approach

Four decades back, Granovetter (1973) postulated social capital as a collective resource to attain knowledge flow through weak bridging ties. Since then, scholarly work linking social capital with knowledge transfer has received attention of social researchers. Recent publications such as Bodin and Crona (2009) has focused more on structural dimension of social capital and how such networks facilitate collaboration among actors for generation, acquisition and diffusion of different types of tacit and explicit knowledge. In spite of the acknowledgement of structural social capital as a stimulus for effective knowledge transfer among different stakeholders in intra and inter organizational settings, literature reviews focused in this integration is yet limited in the body of knowledge. The primary objective of this paper is to perform an integrative literature review to explore the potential role of structural social capital for effective knowledge transfer in intra and inter organizational settings. The sources for this synthesis include refereed journal articles, book chapters, and other publications between year 2000 and 2015. The databases examined included Emerald insight, Jstor, EBSCO Host, Taylor and Fransis, Sage, Springer and Google scholar. The criteria for selection began with a search command that combined two key words “social capital” and “knowledge transfer”, which later enhanced to “social networks”, “structural social capital”, “knowledge management” and “knowledge sharing”.

Summary of the Literature Review

Research linking structural social capital and knowledge transfer between 2000 and 2015 were focused on few specific areas of interest. Several researchers focused on knowledge transfer in different network types (Burt 2000; Inkpen & Tsang 2005; Díez-Vial & Montoro-Sánchez 2014; Mu et al. 2008; Huggins et al. 2012; Walter et al. 2007). A handful of researchers validated the trust factor in networks and its impact to knowledge transfer (Díez-Vial & Montoro-Sánchez 2014; Mu et al. 2008; Filieri et al. 2014). However only a very few researchers paid attention to study the impact of social norms towards knowledge transfer (ex. Millar & Choi 2009). Some researchers focused on the impact of networks to knowledge transfer and innovation (Huggins et al. 2012; Filieri et al. 2014).

It could reiterate some significant research gaps in the linking of structural social capital, and knowledge transfer. Some scholars argued that inclusion of social capital into network analysis and knowledge transfer has not yet been addressed in the literature sufficiently (ex. Inkpen & Tsang 2005). Majority of the existing body of literature limits to knowledge transfer in an single network type (ex Inkpen & Tsang 2005; Huggins et al. 2012; Díez-Vial & Montoro-Sánchez 2014). Hence further

research can be suggested to explore the holistic view of networks comprise of different levels of networks such as inter-unit, intra-organizational and inter-organizational. Another research gap that is left untouched is the integration of relational and cognitive dimensions of social capital to explain knowledge transfer. Though there are several network characteristics to measure structural dimension, it can be seen that most studies depend on very limited number of measurements. For example, Walter et al. (2007) used centrality, Latora et al. (2013) clustering and effective size, and Allcott et al. (2007) effect of community size. Thus it can be suggested to derive further research a combination of network characteristics in different network levels. Another limitation that can be noted is the unavailability of empirical evidence on the evolutionary process of knowledge formation, acquisition, and diffusion. Another main research gap that can be located in the Sri Lankan context is unavailability of literature, which examines the multilevel view of social capital, and how knowledge is acquired, and transferred in different network types such as closure and brokerage.

Conclusion

This paper was aimed at conducting a literature review to explore the potential role of structural social capital for effective knowledge transfer. The review of literature emphasized that, most literature connecting structural social capital and knowledge transfer were focused on how knowledge is transferred in specific network types. However, more often empirical evidence of such literature was limited to study knowledge transfer within a single network type. Henceforth, further research shall be suggested to explore how social capital of different networks such as inter-unit, intra-organizational and inter-organizational setups collaboratively improve the organizational knowledge transfer capability. The literature review also pointed that studying the potential role of structural social capital on knowledge transfer would not be completed unless if the relational and cognitive dimensions of social capital is not integrated with the structural aspect. Conclusively, it can be emphasized the importance of developing empirical evidence in the Sri Lankan context to recognize how would structural, cognitive and relational social capitals trigger in different network levels to improve knowledge transfer among social actors.

References

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