

Facilitating achievement by social capital in Japan

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Received 10 January 2007; received in revised form 31 December 2007; accepted 6 February 2008

Abstract

Social capital, as a comprehensive concept, comprises structural components representing social networks and functional components, which register past and future help, reciprocity, and trust. One assumption is that these various components interact and reinforce one another to enhance an individual's expected achievement. To validate the conceptualization and examine the consequences of social capital, the present study analyzed a set of data collected from 201 residents based in Japan. The results demonstrated that conceptualization proves to be valid in view of its adequacy in internal consistency and stability in the confirmatory factor model. The structural equation modeling likewise revealed contributions of the social capital components both individually and interactively. Notably, the Japanese respondents expected greater achievement with higher levels of both structural social capital and anticipatory functional social capital, which consequently tapped expected help, trust, and reciprocity. Structural social capital appeared to be a basis for functional social capital.

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JEL classification: J60

Keywords: Trust; Social interaction; Friendship; Achievement

Like economic capital, social capital is perceived to enable individuals to increase income, perform well in work, succeed in career, and accomplish other achievements (Aldridge and Halpern, 2002; Krishna and Uphoff, 2002). However, empirical support for this supposition is deemed difficult due to confusion in the composition of various components of social capital (Hawe and Shiell, 2000). Social capital is a multidimensional concept, and empirical studies do not fully agree with their component assessments (Ishida, 1993; Narayan and Cassidy, 2001; Wang, 2006). For instance, some studies have focused on the benefits of friendship (Torsvik, 2000), whereas others have examined the contributions of trust (Hayashi and Yamagishi, 1998), both of which have been criticized for the weak and selective effects of social capital (Jackman and Miller, 1998). Such criticisms reveal the problem in the fragmentary examination of social capital in different studies. To integrate and reconcile various findings, a comprehensive measurement of social capital incorporating trust and other components is provided for the present study. Accordingly, the study is not a fragmented examination of any of the components, but is one that places the various components in a contest.

Social capital is a composite concept typically composed of the cohesiveness of social networks and the expected help derived from the social networks. Despite limited theory and research about the merit of social capital (Grootaert and van Bastelaer, 2002; McCracken, 2003), the extents and ways of the effects of the components of social capital

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on the individual's achievement have not been transparent. To provide empirical evidence for the merits of social capital, the present study examines the effects of the structural and functional components of social capital, and their combination on the expected achievement of the respondents from Kobe, Japan. The structural component herein refers to the cohesiveness of social networks, including participation in voluntary associations, and the density, homogeneity, and proximity of social networks (Wollebaek and Selle, 2002), while the functional component involves received help from and investment of help in the networks (Hofferth et al., 1999). The effects of these two components can operate singularly and synergistically. Accordingly, social capital can become more beneficial if it encompasses social networks, which are more cohesive or helpful in the past and the expected future. Overall, the study aims to verify the structural model of social capital, incorporating its components, antecedents, and consequences (Corral-Vergugo, 2002), thus serving as a holistic construal to expound the conceptualization of social capital (Bagozzi, 1982).

It is important to clarify the components of social capital because of the sizable expected impacts of social capital (Putnam, 2002). As a whole, social capital is valued as a key to the attainment of democracy, well-being, and achievement in various aspects for the individual and society (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2002). Trust, as a component of social capital, is evidently essential to democratic consciousness (Kunioka and Woller, 1999). However, social capital has been viewed to decline in most parts of the world wherein studies have been undertaken (Cote, 2000; Holliday and Tam, 2001; Putnam, 2002) and considered responsible for the breakdown of their democratic reform (Gregory, 1999). Social capital is also valued as a kind of public good worthy of promotion (Coleman, 1988). Accordingly, social capital not only benefits people in the private context, but it also contributes favorable spillover effects or externalities to the public. However, despite the plethora of expectations on the impacts of social capital, its conceptualization and measurement register unresolved issues, making social capital a nebulous concept, as its conceptualization and components have become too confusing and uncertain (Rothstein, 2005) while incorporating even those concepts without definite criteria (Pawar, 2006). Similarly, some conceptualizations are considered too narrow since they only deal with components functional to certain perceived outcomes (van Deth, 2003). These hinder the empirical testing of a social capital's impact. In effect, a definite conceptualization of social capital is deemed necessary.

1. Conceptualization of social capital

Social capital refers to the potential of achieving valuable resources through social connection. This capital can accrue to the individual as well as to the collectivity, although the present study only analyzes social capital at the individual level. Conceptualization builds upon existing notions on a social capital's properties, particularly, in the (1) origin in social connection (Angelusz and Tardos, 2001), (2) getting potential resources (Portes, 1998), and (3) to transform them into benefits of its holders (Krishna and Uphoff, 2002), individually or collectively (Grootaert and van Bastelaer, 2002). Furthermore, the conceptualization incorporates various components identified so far as follows.

The concept of social capital was first introduced in the early 20th century to exhibit goodwill, fellowship, and sympathy arising from social intercourse (Putnam, 2002). Since then, a myriad of alternative conceptualizations began to emerge, describing social capital as a collection of social attention, trust, and associability (Offe and Fuchs, 2002); giving and receiving help and investment, and drawing of time and money (Hofferth et al., 1999); togetherness, sociability, connection, and volunteerism (Narayan and Cassidy, 2001); association and interaction with the community and family (Teachman and Paesch, 1997); civic engagement, stock, and investment of time and money (Stone, 2001); trust, norm of reciprocity, and structural networks (Krishna and Shrader, 1999); potential resources linked to networks and relationships, including reciprocity, organization, and embeddedness (Portes, 1998); ties, social contact, association, and network resources (Angelusz and Tardos, 2001); trust and civic engagement (Scheufele and Shah, 2000); or extensity, range, and upper reachability (Lin et al., 2001).

In summary, the various conceptualizations lead to the following definitions.

Defining social capital ontologically in terms of its nature suggests that it is a combination of "social" and "capital." Capital is a resource that is tradable and transformable to generate other resources. As such, social capital is the capital that operates in the social environment. The dynamic, fluid, and regenerative nature of capital is the characteristic that differentiates it from the usually static and exhaustible nature of resources.

Defining social capital in terms of its composition suggests that it comprises a structural part and a functional part. The structural part is the construction of social networks, including kin, friends, and voluntary organizations. The strength or cohesiveness of social networks rests on the frequency of participation or interaction, density, proximity, and homogeneity characterizing the networks: Density refers to mutual relationships among the network; proximity,

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