

Chapter III

Social Capital Use–Case Application Areas

INTRODUCTION

Despite lack of meticulousness, social capital continues to occupy a central position in many discussions about community, trust and social networks. The multidimensionality and multivariate nature of social capital provides a foundation for explaining, although sometimes vaguely so, various social issues in communities and social networks. In most of the discussions in scientific work, social capital is continuously treated as either an output or an input. Researchers write about communities performing better due to higher levels of social capital, others attribute superior performance of social amenities such as national economy to the prevalence of higher social capital. Some writers mentioned the construct as a circumventing term to mean one or more of its core variables (trust, shared understanding, social protocols etc.) and their application to specific areas of interests, while others take a holistic view to describe all of its variables and their utility to addressing social problems anchored in communities.

This chapter discusses the application of social capital in a variety of contexts to solve community problems. This is by no means a complete comprehensive coverage of cases in which social capital is currently utilized, rather the cases presented here are considered sufficient to illustrate the growing relevance of social capital to many application areas. The goal of the chapter is to expose the reader to key application areas and to think about the practical and theoretical relevance of social capital to research and practice in other emergent cases.

MODERN APPLICATION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

The increasing inspiration attracting the wide use of social capital is the nature of its elasticity in helping researchers to integrate ideas from various disciplines in order to tackle community problems. Concrete examples of researchers who have contributed to individual application areas mentioned in the Chapter are: policy and civic engagement (Putnam, 1993); economic investment (Sobel, 2002) and community development (Gittell & Vidal, 1998); Cohen and Prusak (2001) analysis of organizational development within business entities. The Organization for Economic Corporation and Development (OECD), the World Bank and The International Monetary Fund are three of the major organizations that have done a fair amount of work on social capital as measure of development and economic growth and as an indicator of educational achievement.

There is also a growing interest in employing social capital as a springboard for addressing the digital divide. Social capital has also been used as a way to illuminate the relationship between the micro level of educational experience and the macro level of social structures such as community contributions to educational achievement. Both Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) are instrumental in this regard. Daniel, McCalla and Schiwer (2002) presented work on the extension of social capital to examine social issues in technology enhanced learning environments. This chapter will elaborate on some of the major use-cases of social capital in modern life.

Community Development and Governance

In Economic discussions, the degree of development in most countries is determined by economic indicators such as gross domestic product (GDP) and total factor productivity. In the last decade, alternative indices covering various facets of social life and community associations are introduced into the equation of economic growth and productivity. Leading Economists and other researchers, principally, from the World Bank and elsewhere, pointed out social indicators such as community participation, are crucial to economic development and growth. They describe these indicators in terms of social capital which encompass multiple aspects of the social indicators that are decisive to community development.

Social capital promotes collective action which consists primarily of community-organized activities for building and maintaining infrastructure and for providing related public services. For example, instead of development experts engaging in building civil institutions in isolation from the communities in which these institutions are situated, social capital help them to include local mandates and take into account the contribution of voluntary participation in community activities. These

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