



Building Professional Connections and Networking to Enhance Social Capital

Sandra Sessoms-Penny, Ed.D.

Center for Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Research

College of Doctoral Studies

University of Phoenix

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Introduction

There are practical skills employees and business owners should use to enhance their professional networking connections and maximize their social capital. These strategies include connecting with people they know in their work professional connections. Social capital reflects the sum of formal and informal opportunities employees may use to add value to their employment and career opportunities (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu's (1984) interest focused on cultural capital and how power is possessed and transferred within society to maintain social classes; indicating the more capital you have the more powerful you are. Sources of cultural capital include objective, embodied, institutionalized (Bourdieu, 1984), technical, emotional, national, and subcultural connections and resources described as privileged intangible wealth (Bennett et al., 2009). Cultural capital and social capital promote the concepts of access to people, resources, information, and opportunities resulting in social and economic success. The roles between social and cultural capital overlap and sometimes includes economic capital. A two-way communication should occur within organizations wherein those who know and have connections help those within the organization connect with these resources and information to aid employees in various pursuits such as through mentoring and professional networking opportunities.

This process goes beyond sharing names and titles of people to know, but also sharing resources such as conferences, articles, videos, and the like. Technology has advanced to allow us to connect remotely to conferences, working groups, and webinars that focus on a variety of topics and actions. This paper will focus on interactions that should be forthcoming in organizations and by leaders and members of organizations to help employees connect with the

sources they need to promote personal and professional success and pathways to new possibilities in learning and in employment using professional social capital.

The Re-Emergence of Professional Networking and Connections

Although the pandemic reduced some professional networks, they are re-emerging out of necessity and organizations and employees are starting to reconnect at a higher level of importance. Some connections were forged during the pandemic out of necessity to keep businesses afloat. Networks offer the opportunity for personal and professional growth. Increased social capital is the result of effective networking and connections throughout the business realm and outreach into the community and access to potential employees. Networking supports building relations and bonds within and outside of organizations. The Great Resignation, Great Attrition, and Silent Resignation all reflect what happens when people do not connect and build unity or a sense of belonging within organizations. Social capital along with using authentic emotional intelligence reflect strategies to develop a continuous stream of motivated employees willing to build, grow, maintain, and exceed organizational and personal goals. Social capital is also a viable element in planning and developing a means of economic advancement and mobility (JFF, 2022). Social capital must be cultivated and used to realize the benefits of its sources and resources. Within organizations, it begins with the leadership's engagement to ensure a diverse and inclusive workforce. It means a shift in thinking and sharing growth opportunities with all employees, not just a select few and members of private networks within an organization. Employees often recognize who moves up within organizations and who does not have access to the same resources or opportunities for advancement.

Emotional Intelligence and Social Capital Theories Align

Professional and personal emotional intelligence components align with Jobs for the Future (JFF) five key strategies to building social capital (JFF, 2022). The key strategies involve organizations elevating their current assets; building relationships; making connections and introductions; career onboarding, and emphasizing the continuous learning journey (JFF, 2022). The key elements of emotional intelligences advocate self-awareness; self-management and regulation; motivation; empathy/understanding/compassion; and social skills awareness and relationship management (Goleman, 1997; Mayer & Salovey, 2004). With both concepts, organizational leaders can enhance the skills set and opportunities for employees culturally, socially, relationally, and economically. Emotional intelligence is needed to build and foster trustworthy relationships in all segments of society. Multi-dimensional aspects of transparent human engagement are needed to enhance social capital. Employees can seek out resources for potential growth using a myriad of strategies, resources, and opportunities just as leaders can intentionally provide leads and relevant information to help employees. Each concept reinforces value for the employee and for the organization. Emotional Intelligence strategies along with inclusive social capital practices also help to build trust within the organization. Once the trust is established, organizations and employees begin to create and understand their shared values, enhance belongingness, work as a team, and strengthen connections and relationships (Claridge, 2022; JFF, 2022).

Benefits of Effective Leadership in Promoting Social Capital

Transformational leaders resolve to help employees get what they need to support the organizations and the employees' success and growth (Goleman et al., 2002). The challenge for leadership is discovering and responding to the needs of the employees. A part of the process begins through conversations, demonstrating genuine concerns, and developing initiatives for

employees to express their needs and engage in the discovery process. The benefits increase for both the organization and the employees when the organization is intentional in sharing social capital resources and including all members of the organization. Leaders must recognize the barriers primarily influencing people of color, women, frontline workers, and other marginalized groups of employees. The barriers or challenges to social capital are often disguised in some organizations but the outcome is reflected in discriminatory practices that limit or deny access to growth opportunities.

Employees and organizational leaders looking for additional resources and improving their level of social capital are using the internet to help them navigate this path. The internet offers global resources. Some resources must be scrutinized in some instances to ensure the resources are legitimate. There are opportunities to participate in online conferences, workshops, and planning sessions. Diverse networking is favorable and includes strategically managing your online engagement and it requires purposefulness wherein the networkers focus on mutually beneficial partnerships through their connections. Different generational employees respond to using the internet differently. Generational differences can be more challenging for senior adults desiring to increase their social capital by bonding and bridging gaps (Barbosa Neves et al., 2018). Support systems are needed when using the internet to build social capital. This is an area for future research.

Conclusion

According to the 2023 Career Optimism Index (COI), 53% of American employees surveyed anticipate leaving their jobs within the next six months and 74% of employees indicated they are stressed about their jobs (2023). Employers have been given notice of what employees need to remain connected to organizations. To retain their employees, organizations

and employers need to invest in employee development through a series of intentional actions and best practice strategies which include professional development, mental health initiatives, coaching, and mentoring opportunities (COI, 2023). Deeper engagement with employees includes building professional social capital and transforming organizational cultures and norms. Enhancing social capital will change the dynamics of employee recruitment, retention, trust, satisfaction, growth, and development. Building professional connections and networking opportunities is a way to increase employee satisfaction and meet organizational objectives and goals. To increase the effectiveness of their efforts, organizations will need to align their emotional intelligence practices intentionally and transparently with their strategies to increase their social and cultural capital practices to achieve long term success. Inclusively, all employees need access to the resources that can be shared by organizational leaders.

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