Chapter 6
The Accrual and Use of Social Capital in Workplace Innovation:
A Conceptual Framework

Heidi Hughes
Central Connecticut State University, USA

Jan Myers
Northumbria University, UK

Philippa Ward
University of Gloucestershire, UK

ABSTRACT

Research has demonstrated the importance of social capital for individual and firm-wide success such as individual promotions and firm innovation. Much of the research on social capital examines how individuals or firms can utilize existing social capital, but there is little research that explores how capital credit is generated and accessed in the first place. This chapter proposes a new framework to explore processes of generating, accessing, and accumulating social capital in relation to workplace innovation.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7721-8.ch006

INTRODUCTION

The pace of change of digital technologies, the aftermath of financial crises, continuing austerity measures, and the increasing complexity of organizational forms, among other political, social, economic, and environmental factors, has placed increasing pressure on organizations to be both efficient and creative. In turn, this focuses attention on innovation and innovation management. Here, innovation is seen as the development, design, and implementation and diffusion of ideas, processes, products, and services. While resource-based theory of the firm (Barney, 1991; Barney, Ketchen, & Wright, 2011), for example, allows for exploration of embedded resources and organizational development and innovation, attention given to human capital (accessing, leveraging, and managing organizational knowledge, skills, and core competences for competitive advantage, and its accumulation, accessibility, and development) raises questions about the evolution and generation of such assets. The interaction between the individual and the organizational and contextual factors that support innovation also need to be examined. In this respect, interactional and relational perspectives support examination of both individuals and collective factors and emphasizes a renewed focus on 'neo-capital theories' (Lin, 1999), including social capital.

Social capital is an important resource for individuals, organizations, and communities (Dubos, 2017). Through personal and work-based networks, individuals are able to gain 'assets' such as knowledge, information, trust, and increased reputation, which can be exchanged, or utilized, to further personal career development (Siebert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001), innovation and firm growth, or community safety (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Many organizations try to capitalize on intra- and inter-organizational networks to increase innovation speed and processes, which can then lead to enhanced operational and firm performance (De Silva, Howells, & Meyer, 2018; Heisig, Suraj, Kianto et al., 2016; Sozbilir, 2018). However, despite social capital having been shown to be advantageous to individuals and firms (Bozionelos, 2015), there have been limited studies that look at how individuals *accumulate* social capital from their networks in the first place. Most research on social capital focuses on how this symbolic credit benefits the individual, organization, or institution by exploring or measuring social capital in its current existence. For example, Fonti and Maoret (2016) measure the relationship of existing social capital to the outcome of organizational performance and Direnzo, Greenhause, and Weer (2015) demonstrate how people with (existing) social capital are better able to obtain additional resources that result in increased employability. Research, such as Wesler and Niessen (2016), explores how purposefully shaping