

Prosocial Behavior as a Means of Improvement of Quality of Life and Accumulation of Social Capital

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Received: March 26, 2015

Accepted: May 17, 2015

ABSTRACT

Social capital could be defined as the sum of all the potential and real resources that are accumulated in a person or group of people towards having a lasting network of more or less institutionalized knowledge and mutual-recognition relationships. Social capital refers to social relationships, trust and reciprocity between people. It has a potential to improve and increase cooperation and mutually supportive relations in communities and nations and hence, could be a valuable means to reduce many of the societal harmful problems. It could be proposed that any kind of activity in which social relations be enriched and strengthened as well as no consideration of personal short-term benefit is a way to improve social capital in any given society. A brilliant example of such action would be *prosocial behavior*. Prosocial behavior is a set of actions which are performed to benefit others, rather than to benefit the self and usually requires risk or cost to the actionist. These actions are not considered as irrational or self-destructive to perform; in the long run, belonging to the group provides immense benefits for the individual. This paper tries to reveals tie between facilitation of prosocial behavior among society members and aggregation of social capital.

KEYWORDS: Social Capital, Prosocial behavior, Social Relations, Socialization.

INTRODUCTION

1- Social Capital

Social capital is could be considered as a capital which benefits from social relation (Krishna, & Uphoff, 2002). Alike financial capital which can afford the use of technology and labor in production and capital accumulation, social capital relies on efficient social relations in order to enable the acquisition of information, resources, and other forms of capital in productive work and the regeneration of capital (Flap, 2004).

Most of the authors agree that social capital could be defined as the sum of all the potential and real resources that are accumulated in a person or group of people (institutions, firms, associations, regions or countries) towards having a lasting network of more or less institutionalized knowledge and mutual-recognition relationships (Bourdieu, 1986). Hence, it appears that social capital may refer to social relationships, trust and reciprocity between people (Liñán, & Santos, 2007).

According to Bourdieu (1985), social capital is considered as a durable social network which enables individuals to access to resources. In this manner, capital will represent "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (p. 248). Later, Paxton (1999) proposed that social capital includes two components: First, an objective network structure that links individuals in a social space must exist; and second, a subjective element must be present. The relationship must be trusting and positive, so that network ties can be able to become social capital. Giddens (1990) argues that in this point of view there shall be some distinction between trust in specific individuals versus trust in abstract institutions or groups of people.

Social capital stems from a process of investment in humankind relationships. Therefore, according to the essence of its root, it requires resources and time (Lin, 2003). These relationships increase and reinforce other forms of capital, such as physical, technological, cultural, and/or human capital (Aggestam, 2012; Coleman 1988). Thus, the network of social relationships, that social capital relies on, tends to have such positive impacts on improvement of development processes (Woolcock, & Narayan, 2001). This is because the cooperation which has been activated by social capital is contributing to the reinforcement of the firms' competitive position and their territories' (Mainardes, Alves, & Raposo, 2011; Anandarajan, Chiang, & Lee, 2010). Social capital achieves this result is by take benefit of producing a set of benefits for the activity of firms and entrepreneurs (Bourne, 2011; Giaglis, & Fouskas, 2011; Alpkan, Bulut, Gunday, Ulusoy, & Kilic, 2010). These benefits include easier access to information, a better coordination of activities, a greater facility for collective decision-making, and/or the reduction of transaction costs (Lin, 2003). It appears that these benefits, which resulted from social

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relationships, provide a growing flow of income that facilitates the firms' success. The recognition and seizing of opportunities is perhaps the key role of social capital in different aspects of societal activities especially in business practices (Bergh, Thorgren, & Wincent, 2011; Curado, Henriques, & Bontis, 2011; Rezaeenour, Mazdeh, & Hooshmandi, 2011).

2- Improvement of Social Capital

According to Bourdieu (1986) social capital is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition". He argued that there shall be a concentration on the gains of possessors of social capital and the underlying sociability process of this resource. In addition to this point of view, According to Putnam, Feldstein, & Cohen (2004), social capital, basically and generally, could be considered as the collective value of all social networks which arise from these networks to act and react for each other and therefore, is a key component to build and maintain democracy in any given state.

The authors have put emphasis on the degree to which social capital, as a resource, should be utilized for public good or for the benefit of individuals. Social capital have a great deal of potential to improve and increase cooperation and mutually supportive relations in communities and nations. Hence, it could be a valuable means to reduce many of the societal harmful problems nowadays, such as criminal actions. In contrast to those focusing on the individual benefit derived from the web of social relationships and ties individual actors find themselves in, Putnam, Feldstein, & Cohen (2004) suggest that social capital is a means to personal access to information and skill sets and enhanced power. In this point of view, individuals, instead of the good of organisations, could use social capital to increase their own career prospects (Uzzi, & Dunlap, 2005). With this kept in mind, it could be proposed that any kind of activity in which social relations be enriched and strengthened as well as no consideration of personal short-term benefit is a way to improve social capital in any given society. Now a days, a brilliant example of such action would be *prosocial behavior*.

3- Prosocial Behavior

Prosocial behavior is called to set of actions which are performed to benefit others, rather than to benefit the self and usually requires risk or cost to the self (e.g., giving resources to others, waiting in line, asking for or paying a fair price, or risking life in battlefield). These actions are not considered as irrational or self-destructive to perform; in the long run, belonging to the group provides immense benefits for the individual. There are no known societies in which most of the people prefer to live in social isolation and instead, people most the time prefer to live with each other in social groups within specific cultural frameworks and/or bounds. Culture improves the biological outcomes (survival and reproduction) of individuals. Therefore, individuals do what is required to maintain the belongingness. Most cultures encourage and even require prosocial behavior; because, it is vital to the continuation of the societal system. Hence, humankind often performs the prosocial acts that are encouraged by their culture since such actions enable them to belong to it and to enjoy culture-specific rewards (Twenge, Baumeister, Dewart, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007).

Prosocial behavior indicates a spectrum of actions which have been announced as generally beneficial to other people by some significant segments of society and/or individuals' social group (Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005). Prosocial behavior stemmed from psychology and originated by McDougall (1908), who firstly argued that prosocial behavior is the result of "tender emotions" which created by the parental instinct. Gradually, this concept has evolved to encompass a broad range of biological, motivational, cognitive, and social processes (Dovidio & Penner, 2001).

The act of prosocial behavior appears to be straightforward and simple; there is one side that needs assistance, another side that can provide it, and when helping occurs, it seems to reflect the personality, altruistic values, and good intentions of the helper. Nevertheless, Studies on the long-run has demonstrated the complexity and ambivalent nature of prosocial behavior (Hirschberger, 2006).

Despite the highly value devoted to the act of prosocial behavior, and the social benefits gained by prosocial actions, most of the time there is significant unwillingness to engage in prosocial behavior in societies. The unwillingness is not uniform, and there are specific causes and circumstances that tend inhibit or promote compassionate and caring responses. Studies have shown that some simple and commonplace factors may prevent prosocial behavior to be occurred. Performance of prosocial action reinforces important social norms and values, and increases the helper's positive emotions and self-esteem. However, on the contrary, variables such as the presence of other people or the pressure of time constraints prevent individuals to do so (Darley, & Batson, 1973; Darley, & Latané, 1968). In addition, because large issues of actions are considered to be in the category of *prosocial*, it is not surprising that critics have noted that variables that predict prosocial behavior in one setting are unable to predict other types of prosocial behavior in other settings (Batson, 2002).

There are lots of action that could be classified as prosocial behavior. According to its definition, *prosocial behavior* is a voluntary action which is conducted to benefit other people, and hence, includes actions which benefit other people or society as a whole. Therefore, any action with this characteristics would be considered as an instance of prosocial behavior and, altruism would be the most common example of prosocial behavior. Other ordinary and routine instances of prosocial behaviors are sharing, voluntarily actions, donation (charity, organ donation, blood donation, etc.), helping, co-operating, friendliness, sharing, cooperation, sympathy, and even acceptance of others from different groups (Wilson, 2008; Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinard, 2007; Brief, & Motowidlo, 1986).

Prosocial action stems in many factors which could be generally divided into two fields: situational, and individual factors. Situational factors include individuals' analysis of the situation. An individual will consider whether or not the situation requires their assistance, if the assistance is the responsibility of the individual. Another factor is the number of individuals present in the situation requiring help; the more individuals are present, the less likely one particular individual give aid. This is because of a reduction in perceived personal responsibility (Latane, & Darley, 1970). The third factor would be the cost of helping; the lower cost (least time/least effort) will result in the more prosocial behavior. The main forth factor is the benefit; if helping would actually benefit the individual providing the help in some way, and if the rewards of providing the help are large the prosocial behavior occurrence rate would be increased (Dovidio, Piliavin, Gaertner, Schroeder, & Clark, 1991).

Furthermore, assisting other members of individuals' social group (in groups) is the other cause of acting prosocial behaviors. Altruist individual are more likely to provide help, on the basis that one dedicate more time and energy towards helping behavior within individuals of their own group, according to the sense of shared identity with the individual requiring assistance. The labelling of another individual as a member of individuals' "in-group" results in intense feelings of closeness, emotional arousal, and a heightened sense of personal responsibility for the other's welfare. As such, all these end in an increase in the motivation to act prosocially (Twenge, et al., 2007).

The second broad domain of effective factors on performing prosocial behaviors are individual/personal factors. Individuals could be encouraged to to act prosocially via learning and socialization. Operant conditioning and social learning positively reinforce the occurrence of prosocial behaviors (Grusec, Goodnow, & Kuczynski, 2000). Besides, social and individual standards and ideals (ideal types) also motivate individuals to engage in prosocial behaviors. Social responsibility norms, and social reciprocity norms reinforce those who act prosocially. Individuals reinforce and maintain their positive self-images or personal ideals, as well as help to fulfil their own personal needs during acting prosocial behaviors (Omoto, & Snyder, 1995).

4- Facilitating Social Capital via Promoting Prosocial Behavior

There are several ways which could be adopted to increase the rate of prosocial behaviors and actions and thus, facilitating the accumulation of social capital. One of the best possible ways to promote prosocial behaviors is to encourage such actions by educate society in primary and secondary socialization phases. To do so, in primary socialization steps, parents can set instances that children carry into their interactions and communication with peers, but parents are not present during all of their children's peer exchanges. The day-to-day constructions of fairness standards is done by children in collaboration and negotiation with each other (Santrock, 2011). It appears that parents are better not only teach and their children the concepts and figures, but also replicate and act in such ways that their next generation believe to do so in order to maximum expansion in probability of prosocial behavior and occurrence. According to studies, prosocial behavior in begins with questions of sharing and fairness in early childhood. In the second year of life, children usually begin to display prosocial behavior in presenting and giving their toys to their parents, without promotion or being reinforced by reinforcement or award. The process of performing prosocial actions continues throughout the second year of life, as children begin to make moral schema of the world (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinard, 2007). Throughout the development, as obedience to societal standards becomes important, child's ability to exhibit prosocial behavior strengthens, with occurrence and diversity of these behaviors increasing with age and cognitive maturity. In this stage, children develop a belief that sharing is an obligatory part of a social relationship and involves a question of right and wrong (Bouchard, Cloutier, Gravel, & Sutton, 2008).

However, for the secondary socialization phase, especially school age youths, there is no compiled and or comprehensive program which has the characteristic of global and general in nations. It would be sound to incorporate encouraging contents for prosocial actions and behaviour in educational materials in school curriculum. In these ages, nowadays the mostly affective figures are provided by media to the youth and therefore, there is an issue of interest and preference of the media owners in the degree and content of presentation of prosocial behaviors. It should be noted that some media messages can teach children positive, prosocial lessons, while others can lead children to be fearful or even to behave antisocially. The challenge is to differentiate the media messages that are potentially harmful from those that are positive or prosocial in nature (Wilson, 2008).

Nevertheless, leaving the guiding role of prosociality teachings to media seems not to be a sound decision, unless there would be strict, comprehensive and direct acts and guidelines for media on how to provide these issues. A good proposition for ensuring the uniform and global instruction of prosocial behavior would be incorporating it within the contexts of literature and history lessons during schooling. Because these lessons are aimed to provide children with examples of sound action figures, these themes will have their best effects of them. In doing so, there is precise point of cultural differences; in any given culture, and even subculture, there are different ways of acting in a prosocial manner and if some universal and international effort would take place in this issue, it shall be notified to present extended and culture-specific examples of such actions. In addition, this notion shall be regarded in countries and nations with different and varied cultures which are called multi-culture nations. It appears that there is still a great deal of effort needed to establish a framework in which instances and figures of prosocial behaviors and actions are incorporated in educational institutions publically in nations worldwide.

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