

Measuring and Evaluating Social Capital Outcomes

The intent of module 4 is to provide ideas and roadmaps to understand the presence of social capital within your organization. Further, the measurement of social capital through outcomes, how to understand trend lines and to evaluate future politics through a lens of how it will influence social capital across the organization.

Since social capital can influence a range of outcomes, if you have a specific purpose for applying social capital, it is useful to start by defining your desired outcome and then work backwards to identify the actions that bring about your desired outcomes (refer to Figure 1).

1. Start by identifying the desired outcomes.
2. What actions bring about the desired outcomes? Work backwards from the desired outcomes.
3. What factors influence, encourage, allow, and enable people to act in those ways?

You can identify the relevant factors by systematically considering the following:

1. What influences people's predispositions to act in those ways? If people are not predisposed to act in the desired ways, these actions are less likely to occur.
2. Who and how do people need to be connected? If people are not connected, there can only be incidental actions. The pattern of connections may not be conducive to the desired outcomes.
3. Don't forget the activation context. What other forms of capital and resources are necessary for the actions to occur and to produce the desired outcomes?

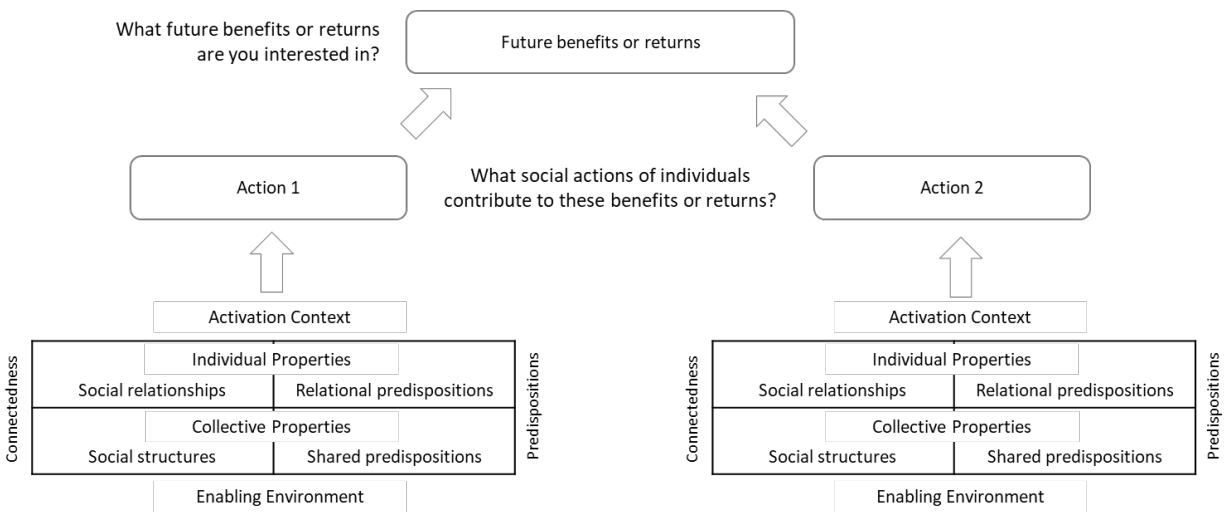


Figure 1. Schema for applying social capital to a specific purpose

Desired Outcomes

Increased social capital leads to a number of positive influences within the corporation or public sector agency. As social capital is not easily quantifiable, analysts measure the outcomes in a consistent manner to provide insight into the level of social capital and most importantly, view it over time, leveraging trend lines to understand whether the environment is becoming more positive, stagnant or negative.

This may be accomplished through surveys with the intent to measure desired outcomes, specifically:

- Institutional Trust by the employees
- Trust amongst departments
- Trust between employees
- Memberships in voluntary organizational groups
- Self Worth
- Empathy
- Sense of belonging in the organization
- Sense of Appreciation by organization
- Confidence in role
- Willingness to contribute to organizational mission
- Willingness to volunteer to support colleagues

This is not an exhaustive list, but examples that you may consider is determining the outcomes, the behaviours you wish to see in your environment. Some may already be present to a high degree and therefore need maintenance, but others may be waning, likely through a lack of direct effort to create the conditions to foster social capital.

With a known outcome, we move backwards to the social actions that contribute to the desired outcome, the behaviours that you wish to see fostered or created. For example, if the first desired outcome was more trust between employees, then applying the knowledge from the first two modules, we know that trust is fostered in enabling environments, permitted through activation context. Creating the space for employees to build connectedness and to foster trusted relationships is an option. Simply put, to build trust, they need to know each other. Reflect on the frequency and quality of situations where staff are afforded the opportunity to collide, interact, mingle, pause and speak. These are not formal meetings, agenda driven events, but situations with the sole intent to create the opportunity to connect.

A review of the module content on individual and collective predispositions and connectedness will provide the context.

An important component of relational predispositions is reputation, including reputation for trustworthiness and reciprocity. It is what people know about someone, from direct personal experience, observation, or reputation, that influences the nature of future social action towards them. It includes goodwill and obligations, various interpersonal norms that develop over time and relate to the specific relationship (within the context of wider social norms). It also includes predispositions related to empathy and solidarity towards the individual.

Strong social capital involves the development of positive reputation (knowing), goodwill, productive interpersonal norms, empathy, and solidarity. Relational predispositions are developed from social interaction and communication. Spending time with people and observing them develops understandings that shape the nature of our future actions towards or related to them. As such, there is no substitute for socialization, particularly when it involves communication that seeks consensus and consent.

People can be left to socialize, or socialization can be facilitated or directed to some extent. Many organizational activities may seek to build or improve relational predispositions and may undertake activities to encourage social interaction while attempting to direct the nature of that interaction towards positive outcomes. For example, many team- and trust-building activities involved facilitated social interaction that is intended to improve relational predispositions in specific ways.

Competencies

Many individual properties of social capital require or are improved by individual competencies. Some people seem to be able to effortlessly build strong and effective relationships. They have excellent communication skills and are great listeners. They have good emotional intelligence and empathy, making it easy to build strong relationships. They can easily remember people's names and details about them. They can quickly build rapport and goodwill.

For other people, they may want to build more and stronger relationships, but they lack the skills required to do it effectively. Fortunately, many skills and abilities that help build strong relationships can be learned. People can participate in effective communication training and undertake empathy and emotional intelligence training. Research suggests that these skills can be acquired and make a substantial difference in developing meaningful relationships.

Another big opportunity to make general improvements in the individual properties of social capital is to improve people's skills and abilities for building social capital. For many people, they may want to build more and stronger relationships, but they lack the know-how to do it effectively. There are various individual competencies, such as communication skills and emotional intelligence, that can make a significant improvement in the individual properties of social capital. These are exceptionally helpful in the chaotic environment of emergency management, maintaining calm during stressful events, with uncertainty and limited communications.

When seeking to improve people's understanding of the value and importance of social capital, it is vital to balance individual interests against collective interests and break through the dominant view that we are in competition with others and must act with self-interest. Social capital is not altruistic, but it is not exploitive or freeloading either. Social interactions should not be transactional. Social capital is strongest when people give, help, and share without expectations of immediate personal benefit. If people focus too much on what they can get for

themselves from others, it undermines the value of social capital. In these situations, social capital efforts may be ineffective for those individuals who are too self-interested, and they may fall back into previous patterns.

The collective properties of social capital relate to social structures and widely held beliefs, values, and attitudes that influence the nature of action towards known and unknown individuals to a greater or lesser extent. The collective properties do not relate to specific individuals or relationships between specific individuals. They relate to the nature of collectives, such as groups, teams, clubs, companies, organisations, communities, and even society.

As with the individual properties of social capital, the collective properties have aspects of connectedness and predispositions. The connectedness aspects relate to the nature of social structures and the roles, rules, and procedures that influence the nature of social connection between people in the collective. The predispositions are those beliefs, values, and attitudes that are widely shared by people in a collective. They are understanding about what is normal and appropriate, how most people will act, what it means to belong, and the nature of shared goals.

Establishing and strengthening social structures is a common approach to building social capital. This is because social structures can influence the nature of individual connectedness and, therefore, the nature of individual predispositions, which in turn can contribute to the development of collective predispositions. It is important to recognize that social structures can have positive impacts, but without organizational capacity, including effective leadership and sufficient funding, social structures can be ineffective and even damaging to social capital.

In economic development initiatives, it has been common to form new social structures such as cooperatives and various other forms of social organizations. These social structures bring people together, forming new relationships, engaging in social interaction, and forming a sense of shared goals, identity, belonging, and solidarity.

Applications of social capital that focus on collective connectedness tend to do the following:

- Establish and strengthen social structures.
- Strengthen organizational capacity, including leadership capacity.
- Evaluate roles and procedures and how they shape connectedness and the configuration of networks.
- Increase participation and engagement.

Focusing on collective properties of predispositions

Predispositions are (values, attitudes, beliefs, emotions, and understandings) that do not relate to specific individuals but are widely held by members of the collective and influence the nature of social action toward people within and external to the group.

These collectively held shared predispositions include:

- Social trust (a belief in the honesty, integrity, and reliability of others).
- Norms, obligations, and expectations.
- Shared goals, purpose, language, codes, and narratives.
- Social identity and belonging.
- Stereotypes and prejudices.

Every group (teams, clubs, companies, organisations, communities, and even society) develops shared predispositions specific to the group. The shared predispositions may not be held equally by all members of the group, so they can be somewhat intangible. However, they powerfully shape the nature of action and the nature of social relationships within and external to the group.

These predispositions do not exist in a social vacuum; they are shaped within the context of other social groups. For example, a team within a company will develop shared predispositions relevant to the team but influenced by the shared predispositions of the company, which in turn is influenced by the shared predispositions of the society within which it operates.

Social capital is built (and damaged) as a by-product of everyday activities. An important application of social capital is to inform the design and implementation of any activity that involves social action, which is almost everything we do. Any activity or project can be evaluated to identify how it could be modified, often in small ways, to improve social capital development and use.

Survey Evaluations

Every new process requires a baseline, a grasp of the status quo. While observant and attentive leaders can get an overall sense of the strength of social capital within an organization, leaders change. People move through and out of organizations and individual perceptions are not recommended for policy development.

Rather, we suggest conducting an initial survey of social capital across the organization, the first process for beginning a baseline. These questions should be derived carefully, as the strength of longitudinal research is that similar if not identical questions are recommended to protect the validity of findings. This mitigates the effect of personnel movements, exogenous shocks and policy changes.

Here is an example of a set of survey questions that may be considered:

- How would you describe your sense of belonging in the organization?
- How well do your personal values align with the organization?
- How likely are you to volunteer for a social committee in the organization?
- How well connected do you feel with the other members of your department?
- How well connected do you feel with members of other departments?
- How well does management value your role and outputs?

Each of these questions allow for a range of responses along a Likert scale:

- Very Low
- Low

- Average
- High
- Very High

The exact language chosen should reflect logical a logical response to the questions, but these allow the membership to respond across a spectrum. Over time trends in the responses will provide an insight into increased senses of connectedness or falling confidence, etc..

Theses questions are derived from the desired outcomes determined earlier, to mirror the goals of the investment in fostering social capital. If you wish a higher degree of trust, empathy, institutional trust, relationships, etc. then those should be the foundation of your survey questions. An old adage and truism in research is to never be quick about determining the right question, as fantastic answers to the wrong question is not conducive to productive outcomes.

Evaluation Policy impacts

Policy changes are necessary and important in organizations. They are products of both iterative and inclusive discussion or consideration, as well as ad hoc situational rapid adaptations. Policy influences people, it impacts the work they do, the setting, the environment and may have a positive, negative or neutral impact on the organization's social capital.

As your organization continues to foster enabling environments, conduct surveys and include social capital in business processes, we recommend evaluating potential policy implementations through a social capital lens. While this is not intended to approve the policy, this is to understand the potential impact and assess whether that is positive, or needs a mitigation to limit negative impact. Removing all negative influences on social capital is not possible, however identifying those potential situations in advance and including a strategy to mitigate and manage can protect the institutional trust, relationships and goodwill across the agency.

Reflective leadership questions may include:

- Does this initiative create or contribute to enabling environment?
- Will this policy improve the quality of life for employees across the organization?
- How will this impact our reputation, both internal and external?
- Is there a potential to create, sustain or improve customer relations with this policy?
- Will this hierarchal amendment impact existing relationships within the organization?
- Does this pragmatic change involve feedback from employees?

These are but a few examples to consider when drafting policy. As stated, the policy may be required for institutional reasons, however the social capital lens will provide valuable insight into the secondary and tertiary affects across the institutional fabric.

Alternate Assessment & Educational Methodologies

While we recommend commencing with a survey and to do so on an ongoing basis to understand overall social capital, there are a number of focussed methodologies available that may be more appropriate to the circumstances. These are both opportunities to understand the presence and influence of social capital within your organization, as well as provide educational opportunities to provide insight into the value of social capital, individual and collective.

One notable example is a SWOT evaluation.



It can be useful to structure the evaluation of social capital applications similar to SWOT analysis in strategic planning. A SWOT analysis helps us to build on strengths (S), minimize weaknesses (W), seize opportunities (O), and counteract threats (T). However, rather than considering strengths and weaknesses as internal and opportunities and threats as external, a social capital SWOT analysis should consider them all from internal and external perspectives.

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The social capital lens can help to do the following:

- Identify and maximize the strengths and opportunities to build and use social capital.
- Identify and mitigate the limitations, weaknesses, challenges, and barriers to the building and use of social capital.
- Identify and mitigate potential damage or loss of social capital.
- Identify and mitigate downsides or negative social capital.

An evaluation of social capital can illuminate multiple ways to improve social capital and your desired outcomes. In short, it allows us to do more of the strengths, start doing the opportunities, overcome limitations and weaknesses, break down challenges and barriers, do less of the things that may cause damage, implement strategies to reduce the risk of loss, and change the nature of social capital to reduce downsides or negative outcomes.

Formalized assessment processes can take the form of the following:

- Social Capital Impact Assessment – an assessment of a specific activity or project to assess its impact on social capital, providing opportunities for improvement and or evaluation of the activity or project.
- Social Capital SWOT Analysis – a systematic analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of social capital in a particular context.
- Social Capital Accessibility Assessment – an assessment of how accessible social capital and its use are for different members of a group or community.
- Social Capital Opportunity Appraisal – a review of the key opportunities to build or use social capital more effectively in a particular context.

Outside the SWOT analysis, there are numerous options available, each of these has merit in certain situations:

- Social Capital Sensitive Activity or Project Assessment – a systematic assessment of an activity or project to assess its impact on social capital and optimal use of social capital.
- Designing Social Capital Sensitive Activities Workshop – a workshop to help people such as project managers design activities more sensitive to social capital to improve both social capital and the desired outcomes.

Applications of social capital that focus on shared predispositions aim to strengthen or change the predispositions to facilitate more positive social action or to align with the specific actions that contribute to the desired outcome. This can include:

- Assess the nature of social trust and evaluate any signals that may undermine trust and the source of untrustworthy beliefs and actions.
- Evaluate the signals of norms, obligations, and expectations, ensure clear communication and consistency, and assess the alignment with individuals' beliefs.
- Develop strong shared goals, purpose, language, codes, narratives, social identity and belonging.
- Identify and address any unproductive stereotypes or prejudices.

Relevant programs may be called:

- Leadership Training in Social Capital – training that aims to strengthen the capacity of leaders to positively influence the nature of shared predispositions in their team or group.
- Unity of Purpose Workshops – a workshop that aims to develop shared goals or a sense of purpose within a social group. It can include the intentional development of various shared understandings such as identity, solidarity, shared language, and shared narratives.
- Social Identity and Belonging Workshops – a workshop that develops and strengthens a sense of shared identity within a social group while avoiding the formation of negative predispositions towards out-group members.
- Commitment and Legitimacy Programs – a program that develops and communicates the shared commitment of members of a social group and a strong sense of legitimacy for the shared purpose of the social group.
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Representation Programs – a program that develops an understanding and acknowledgement of the multifaceted nature of individuals and

communities. This helps move past perceived differences to find commonalities with others, providing a foundation for strong social capital.

- Conflict Resolution Workshops – workshops that strengthen the capacity of members of a social group to resolve conflicts. It can include facilitated resolution of existing conflicts or tensions.
- Normative Signalling and Evaluation – a systematic evaluation of the signals of what is normatively appropriate and the alignment of the signals with the desired behaviours.

The intent is to understand that social capital is fostered, it is present to some degree and when embraced, can become a force multiplier across the institution. Beginning with a baseline, evaluating specific elements that are influential to your agency's mission and to adopt a continuous improvement model all are conducive to maintaining and growing social capital across the organization.