

Social Capital and the HR Business Partner: Influence on Career Success and Participation in Developmental Activities

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Abstract

There is a growing interest in applying social capital theory to HRM as HR professionals are increasingly required to focus on strategic business issues and relationships are increasingly important (Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2006). The majority of studies focus on HR practices rather than on HR professionals. Therefore this study focuses on the process and influence of social capital on access to network benefits and career and participation in developmental outcomes for individual HR professionals. The results emphasise that weak ties facilitate access to those in a similar field but not necessarily in the same organisation while strong ties facilitate access to those in different functions. HR professionals need to maintain relationships with contacts of the same function as these contacts provide career sponsorship, which is in turn predictive of career satisfaction and participation in developmental activities. The results highlight how contacts in higher positions and in other organisations predict more influential network benefits for HR professionals. These contacts may be a key factor in HR professional's efforts to engage in business partnering. This study highlights the need for HR professionals to be aware of how the characteristics of their social capital impact career and development outcomes.

Introduction

Recently there is a growing interest in applying social capital theory to HRM. This is to be expected given the fundamental changes that have taken place in the way HRM is practiced in organisations and the changing role of the HR professional. HR professionals are increasingly expected to focus on strategic and business issues rather than what may be described as more operational HRM (Keegan & Frances, 2010). The effective HR business partner needs to mobilise resources, get buy-in, leverage HRM strategies and work effectively with senior management on strategic issues to be perceived and measured as successful in his/her role and career. Success in these activities is highly dependent on the HR professional's social networks, and those of the HR function, with line and senior managers and external contacts (Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-hall, 2006).

A number of studies to date have investigated the role of social capital in a HRM context, but the majority of these focus on HR practices rather than HR positions. Kase et al. (2009) focused on the impact of HR practices on social capital. Yamao et al. (2009) examined HR configurations as a basis to develop organisational social capital. Kang & Snell (2009) focused on HR configurations and social capital for organisational learning. These papers illustrate the usefulness of social capital in the HRM context but are limited in their implications for individual HR professional's careers. Therefore further understanding of individual HR professional's social networks and the implications for their careers and professional development is a necessary step for enabling development of their social networks and those of the HR function.

Additionally, given that there are challenges for HR professionals to adopting strategic business partner roles and indeed evidence that they are not moving toward the roles of strategic business partnering (Holbeche, 2008; Wognum, 2001), the question arises as to what competencies HR professionals need to enable them to succeed in their strategic and operational roles. Holbeche (2008) emphasized that HR professionals needed consultancy, relationship management, and

business acumen skills. Also, implicit in many of Ulrich's (2008) role configurations is the need to ensure role legitimacy based on senior management acceptance of the HR professionals' expertise. Advocates of the various roles emphasize the need for HR professionals to develop top-class influencing, relationship and networking skills (Kenton & Moody, 2003) as there is the increasing need for HR professionals to develop multiple, more enduring, and reciprocal relationships with organizational stakeholders. The performance of the HR professional in these roles and particularly the strategic business partner role has significant implications for the career success of the role holder. HR business partners are more likely to and are expected to be exposed to and engage with a range of contacts at senior levels whom may be of value in advancing their careers. Conversely these contacts may serve to inhibit the career of the business partner where issues of competence or non-delivery on expectations is concerned. Caldwell (2007) argued that many HR business partners are required to spend a lot of time on routine or expert advice activities, rather than value-added HR activities. He also argues that the HR business partner role may inhibit the career satisfaction of the business partner due to role ambiguity and conflict issues. Thus HR professionals are walking a tightrope (Kahnweiler, 2006) in both responding to multiple roles, multiple expectations and performing in positions as strategic business partners at management level and also as an employee advocate. Their success in this balancing act is strongly dependent on both the managers and employees they work with as well as those whom can advise them in this complex role. The HR business partner role also makes significant demands of the role holder's competencies. Business partners are expected to understand the wider business issues as well as having specialist knowledge. Participation in development activities is therefore important for HR professionals. There are few studies concerned with the influence of social capital in explaining participation in development activities for HR professionals.

The Research Model

The research model focuses on the process through which social capital facilitates access to network benefits, career and participation in developmental outcomes. It is a mediated model consisting of two layers of mediation. The research model identifies four key components: the network structure, social resources, network benefits, and career and professional development outcomes. The research model utilises a composite construct of social capital proposed by Seibert et al., (2001), that is the strength and existence of ties in the network structure determine the social resources accessed. We define social resources to include contacts at higher levels and contacts in other functions (Seibert et al.'s, 2001) and contacts in other organizations as these are equally important for role performance and career outcomes (Sparrowe & Popielarz, 2004). The social resources subsequently determine the network benefits that can be accessed. First, role-related network benefits, namely role support, resources, information and knowledge. Second are career network benefits of career sponsorship and “career pull”. Career pull includes both the career information and career influence benefits, thereby accounting for the varying degrees of career assistance that contacts can provide (Smith, 2000).

The model specifies four outcomes: career satisfaction (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990), participation in developmental activities (Hezlett, 2004), hierarchical rank and salary. We consider it pertinent to recognize both the accessed and mobilized social capital models (Lin, 2001; Lin, Vaughn, et al., 1981). We regard the accessed social capital element of the model to be the social resources accessed in the individual's social network. The mobilized social capital element of the model is the use of the social resources and associated benefits for achieving career and professional development outcomes. The following sections outline the development of each of the research hypotheses and the research model.

Social Capital: Network Structure and Social Resources.

A crucial tenet of weak tie theory is that a weak tie is more likely than a strong tie to act as a bridge between two unconnected social groups (Granovetter, 1973). It is argued that weak ties should enable HR professionals to make contact with people of different social groups and results in the development of a larger and more diverse social network. Therefore;

Hypothesis 1: The proportion of weak ties in the HR professional's network will be positively related to the proportion of the HR professional's contacts at higher levels (1a), in other functions (1b), and in other organizations (1c)

A structural hole is said to exist between two contacts that are not connected to each other (Burt, 1992). Therefore;

Hypothesis 2: The extent of structural holes in the HR professional's network will be positively related to the HR professional's proportion of contacts at higher levels (2a), in other functions (2b), and in other organizations (2c).

Social Resources and Network Benefits.

Social resource theory explains whether the structure of an individual's network will result in access to valuable benefits. Social resources are defined as "the wealth, status, power, as well as social ties, of those persons who are directly or indirectly linked to the individual" (Lin, Ensel, et al., 1981, p. 395). The three social resources that are specified as key are contacts at higher levels, in other functions and in other organizations. The potential benefits mobilized through accessing social resources include greater and timelier access to information; greater access to financial, material, or human resources; and greater visibility, legitimacy, social support, or sponsorship within a social system (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973; Lin, Vaughn, et al., 1981). HR professionals require contacts at higher levels as these are a beneficial social resource because of the structural

or legitimate power associated with their hierarchical position (Pfeffer, 1981; Massie, 1965). This is also increasingly necessary as strategic business partner HR professionals are required to provide HR services and strategic advice to senior managers and force tighter links between HR work and firm performance (Keegan & Francis, 2010). Therefore;

Hypothesis 3a: The proportion of the HR professional's contacts at higher levels will be positively related to the HR professional's access to role information, resources, and support.

To function effectively, groups within an organization need to share and have access to information and resources that reside outside the formal group boundaries (Hansen, 1999; Szulanski, 1996). This is especially so given devolution of the responsibility for the implementation of HR practices to line managers (Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Brewster & Larsen, 2000) Therefore;

Hypothesis 3b: The proportion of HR professional's contacts in other functions will be positively related to the HR professional's access to role information, resources, and support.

It is increasingly necessary to draw on the knowledge of contacts *outside* of the organization such as customers, partner organizations, employees of other organizations (Anand, Glick, & Manz, 2002), and subsidiaries (Schweiger, Atamer, & Calori, 2003). HR professionals who can access this superior bank of knowledge and information can increase their levels of visibility, power, and influence both internal and external to the organization (Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2003; Martinez, 1998). HR professionals recognise the value of external contacts for accessing knowledge, information, support and advice to build HR capabilities (Sumelius, 2008) which ultimately can enhance their career success. It is argued that the resources of other organizations are not available for transfer unless contacts are at higher levels (Seibert et al., 2001). However, external organizations such as government agencies, professional associations and subsidiaries can provide career and role support, knowledge, role and job-opening information,

and resources such as human resources, materials, and financial resources. Access to these resources is not always dependent on those internally in higher positions. Therefore:

Hypothesis 3c: The proportion of the HR professional's contacts in other organizations will be positively related to the HR professional's access to role information, resources, and support.

The developmental network perspective argues that individuals should establish multiple developmental relationships, as it is unlikely that one person can provide all the mentoring roles needed (McCauley & Douglas, 2004) and multiple mentors facilitate access to better outcomes (Higgins, & Thomas, 2001). Studies find positive associations between contacts of higher status (Bozionelos, 2003; Whitely, Dougherty & Dreher, 1991), informal contacts (Okurame & Balogun, 2005), formal contacts (Joiner, Bartram & Garreffa, 2004), extra-organizational contacts (Higgins & Thomas, 2001) and access to career and psychosocial benefits. Therefore;

Hypothesis 4: The proportion of the HR professional's contacts at higher levels (4a) and in other organizations (4b) will be positively related to the HR professional's access to career sponsorship. The proportion of the HR professional's contacts in other functions (4c) will be negatively related to the HR professional's access to career sponsorship.

The preceding hypotheses consider the accessed social capital. It is also necessary to consider mobilized social capital, as a fundamental argument of weak tie theory is that a strong tie is more valuable than a weak tie in mobilizing or restraining others actions (Coleman, 1988; Hansen, 1999). Because of limited resources, organizations do not offer all employees development opportunities and seldom offer all employees the same amount of development opportunities. One key determinant of whether employees are likely to receive these opportunities is the nature of their social networks, as individuals who are socially skillful and who actively develop social relationships with members of the organizational elite are likely to be offered greater

amounts of valuable career assistance (Ferris et al., 2007). It is therefore expected that contacts in higher positions will provide the HR professional with career pull, most likely role information, resources, support, career information and possibly hiring. It is expected that contacts in other functions will provide elements of career pull, particularly with regard to the role but just as they are not likely to prioritize the career development and work of individuals outside of their function, it is not expected that they will provide these elements of career pull to the HR professional. Consistent with research on the influence of components of social capital on promotions and job mobility across organizations (Sparrowe & Popielarz, 2004; Zippay, 2001), it is expected that contacts in other organizations can provide the HR professional with elements of career pull, most likely career information or referrals. Unless the contacts are at higher levels, they are not likely to be in a position to hire. Therefore;

Hypothesis 5: The proportion of strong ties in the HR professional's network will be positively related to the extent to which the HR professional mobilizes career pull, mediated by access to contacts in higher positions (5a), in other functions (5b) and in other organizations (5c).

Role Network Benefits and Role and Career Outcomes.

Access to requisite information, resources, and support is very important for individual's work performance and career. Seibert et al. (2001) found a positive relationship between access to information and resources and career satisfaction and between access to information and number of promotions. Although support can equate to access to information and resources, individual's also require sociopolitical support (Kanter, 1983), which has a significant impact on subordinates' career satisfaction (Greenhaus et al., 1990; Jiang & Klein, 1999-2000), and lack of interest and support is likely to stunt an employee's professional growth in the job (Greenhaus, 1987). Support is related to feelings of personal power (Crozier, 1964) and empowerment (Spreitzer, 1996), which

can subsequently be linked to managerial effectiveness (Spreitzer, 1996) and performance (Ashforth, 1990). Therefore;

Hypothesis 6: The HR professional's access to role information, resources, and support will be positively related to career satisfaction (6a), current salary (6b), hierarchical position (6c), independent of other outcomes.

Career Network Benefits and Career Outcomes.

Granovetter (1995) argued that “those who co-ordinate the activities of several organizations with that of their own, or who co-ordinate subdivisions within an organization, are likely to know more about opportunities in each location than those working entirely within one” (p. 220). A HR professional whom can access and mobilize contacts with relevant career pull on job openings or tenders for assignments before the average person receives it can exploit the opportunity before it becomes widely known. Smith (2000) argued that the way in which a contact assists in the career mobility process is significantly correlated with career outcomes. She found a hierarchical ordering of assistance: hiring contacts were the most influential followed by contacts that talk to employers on the job seeker's behalf. The least effective form of assistance was from contacts informing the job seeker about job opportunities. Smith (2000) found some support that the use of influential contacts results in higher wages. Therefore;

Hypothesis 7: The HR professional's access to career pull will be positively related to career satisfaction (7a), current salary (7b), and hierarchical position (7c), independent of other outcomes.

Career sponsorship is an important aspect of mentoring and valuable network benefit (de Janesz & Forrett, 2008). Benefits reported in the broad mentoring literature relating to the protégé's professional development, include mobility (Scandura, 1992), promotion (Ragins, Cotton &

Miller, 2000), recognition (Aryee, Wyatt, & Stone, 1996), increasing income (Seibert et al., 2001), higher career satisfaction (Ragins et al., 2000), career development (Rosser & Egan, 2003), both intrinsic and extrinsic career success (Allen et al., 2004), and increasing individual performance (Egan & Rosser, 2004). A recent study by Hezlett (2004) proposed that “given that mentoring relationships are directed toward enhancing the professional development of protégés, it seems likely that receipt of mentoring also is related to participation in development activities” (p. 360). We argue that participation in developmental activities is an important career outcome. This study is interested in participation in developmental activities as an input to preventing skills obsolescence (Van Loo, 2006). Also, Wang and Wang (2004) highlight how individuals are motivated differently to participate in training, development and education one of which could be that they are driven by supervisor/mentor support and encouragement or by organisational requirements. Studies have emphasized the importance of skill development to remain employable and survive (Davis & Botkin, 1994; Nevis, DiBella, & Gould, 1995). Participation in developmental activities is also linked to career success (Burke & McKeen, 1994; Ohlott, Ruderman, & McCauley, 1994). Development opportunities may be created in order to develop the HR professional and enable the performance of the complex aspects of the role. Therefore;

Hypothesis 8/9: The HR professional's access to and mobilization of career sponsorship will be positively related to career satisfaction (8a), current salary (8b), hierarchical position (8c), and participation in developmental activities (9), independent of other outcomes.

Method

This study investigated a population of HR professionals. A combination of census and purposive sampling procedures were utilised to identify a population of HR professionals in Ireland. First, HR professionals were identified from professional HR membership databases and networks.

Then, a pilot version of the survey instrument was administered in paper-based form to 10 HR professionals. Each participant was interviewed to ascertain their understanding of the questions and items. This resulted in a number of items being rephrased to improve interpretation. The second pilot version of the survey instrument was administered on-line to a population of 20 participants from the main study population. These participants were then contacted via email and telephone to refine the questionnaire. This enabled verification that the questionnaire was appropriate for the chosen population. Finally, the on-line questionnaire was piloted a third time to ensure that the on-line technology operated effectively. The survey instrument was sent to 1520 HR professionals. A total of 304 usable questionnaires were returned, which is a 20% response rate. The study utilised the measures detailed in Table 1. to collect the data for testing the research model.

Data Analyses

The hypothesised structural equation model was tested using LISREL (Joreskog & Sorbom 1992) with the correlation matrix as input. Structural equation modelling (SEM) determines the overall model fit and parameter estimates. The first condition for measurement model identification is that the latent variables are scaled (Kenny, 2002). Because a latent variable is unmeasured, the researcher must fix its units of measurement. The observed variables utilised in this study were measured using scales or single items. As these are based on established theory and are already rigorously tested, validated and published in many previous studies, it was not necessary to conduct more rigorous testing using SEM and confirmatory factor analysis. Thus, traditional exploratory factor analysis using SPSS was considered sufficient.

Table 1. Measures

Variable	Item Explanation	Measure
Social Capital	Standard egocentric network survey techniques utilise name generator questions to identify alters (contacts) in a respondents' network. Egocentric network survey techniques utilise name interpreter questions to gather information about alters. The name interpreter questions were used to collect data for the variables weak ties, structural holes and the social resource variables.	
Social Network Contact Names	Respondents were asked to list (by initials) <i>“at least 5 people who have acted to help your career and/or work to-date by speaking on your behalf, providing you with career or work related information, resources, support, opportunities, advice or with whom you have regularly spoken regarding difficulties at work, alternative job opportunities or long-term career goals”</i> . Additionally, the definition of “people” was clarified to represent <i>“business or personal contacts, internal or external to your organisation, known to you in any capacity, whom have helped you at any point in your career, at work, in any job”</i> . Respondents could list up to ten people who acted to help their career or work.	For a population of 304 ego's, a total of 1744 contacts (alters) were cited by respondents, which is thus the number of ego-alter relationships identified using the name generator question. The mean number of alters cited by respondents was 5.74.
Alter Demographics	Respondents were required to evaluate the demographic information of five of their cited alters. Five was chosen based on previous recommendations for the cut-off point for identifying network boundaries (Lozar et al., 2004; Fischer, 1982).	This provided an alter population of 1520 (304 x 5) alters.
Weak Tie	As per Marsden and Campbell's (1984) recommendations, closeness was used to measure strength of tie for the purposes of the variable weak ties. Respondents were asked to indicate how close they felt to each alter on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “especially close” to “not close at all/strangers”. Consistent with Granovetter's (1973) distinction between strong and weak ties, the data was coded such that especially close (1) and close (2) responses represented strong ties and somewhat close/friends (3), not very close (4) and not close at all/strangers (5) represented weak ties.	The number of alters, as a proportion of all alters cited, which were coded as weak ties formed the variable <i>proportion of weak ties</i> . A variable <i>proportion</i> of weak ties was utilised and considered more appropriate due to the artificial truncation at five of the number of ties each respondent could name (Ibarra, 1995; Meyerson, 1994)

Structural Holes	Consistent with the measurement of weak ties utilised in this study, the closeness measure of tie strength (Seibert <i>et al.</i> , 2001; Hansen, 1999) was utilised to determine the number of ego's contacts, which were connected to each other. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from especially close to not close at all/strangers and coded as per the variable weak ties. The extent of structural holes was calculated utilised Borgatti's (1997) equation for calculating Burt's (1997) redundancy measure. The equation for redundancy used is $2(t)/n$ where t is the number of ties in the network (not including ties to ego) and n is the number of nodes (excluding ego). The equation for effective size is $n-2(t)/n$.	The data is such that if none of ego's alters were connected with any of the others, the effective size would be 5. The variable <i>effective size</i> provides a measure of the extent of structural holes in the ego-networks.
Contacts in Higher Levels	Respondents reported on each alter's position in their respective organisational hierarchies relative to him/herself ("higher", "same", "lower").	The number of alters as a proportion of all the alters cited, which were identified as being higher in organisational level constituted the variable <i>proportion of contacts in higher levels</i> .
Contacts in Other Functions	Respondents reported each alters organisational function relative to him/herself ("same function", "different function"). Function was further defined to highlight that " <i>this can be the same/different function within your employing organisation or in another organisation</i> ".	The number of alters as a proportion of all alters cited, which were identified as being in different functions constituted the variable <i>proportion of contacts in other functions</i> .
Contacts in Other Organisations	Respondents reported on each alters organisation relative to him/herself ("same organisation, "different organisation").	The number of alters as a proportion of all alters cited, which were identified as being in a different organisation constituted the variable <i>proportion of contacts in other organisations</i> .
Network Benefits		
Access to information, resources, support	This was measured using a scale developed by Spreitzer (1996). Responses were given on a 7-point Likert scale (7= agree very strongly, to 1 = disagree very strongly).	Due to the lack of discriminant validity between the sub-scales access to information, support and resources, in this study, the three access sub-scales were combined to form one scale on access to network benefits ($\alpha = 0.91$).
Career Sponsorship	This was measured using a scale developed by Dreher and Ash (1990) as part of an 18-item mentoring scale. Seibert <i>et al.</i>	The final 8-item scale ($\alpha = 0.91$) measures the extent to which mentors, sponsors and colleagues

	<p>(2001) selected eight of the original scale items to measure career sponsorship. These scales were adapted for this study in two ways. First, the introduction to the set of items was adapted to encourage respondents to consider developmental relationships outside of the traditional realm of direct supervisors and formal mentors. Second, an additional item was included to measure aspects of career sponsorship not specifically identified in the scale. This item was phrased “<i>acted as a mentor or sponsor for you and your career</i>”. Responses were given using a 5-point Likert scale (1= Not at all to 5= to a very large extent).</p>	<p>provided sponsorship, exposure, visibility, challenging assignments and protection.</p>
Career Pull	<p>Smith’s (2000) discussion on <i>how</i> contacts benefit an individuals’ career prompted the development of the variable <i>career pull</i>. Smith’s (2000) item measured the extent to which an individual has access to influential contacts for the purposes of job-seeking based on a hierarchical ordering of assistance. Within this hierarchy, hiring contacts are viewed as the most influential and those who tell the job seeker about opportunities are the least influential. This study focused more broadly on career rather than job, thus the variable <i>career pull</i> also measured the extent to which ego has access to influential contacts for the purposes of development and career progression based on a hierarchical ordering of assistance. Within this hierarchy contacts providing resources are the most influential, followed by contacts providing information or mentors. Finally, contacts providing support are considered to be the least influential.</p>	<p>The final measure of <i>career pull</i> in had nine possible responses. The data was coded such that each response was weighted according to its level of influence in the hierarchical ordering of assistance. For example, hiring contacts had a 5-point weighting whereas contacts who provided references or support had a 2-point weighting. The total amount of influence, which each ego mobilised, was calculated as a function of network size, which is the average amount of career pull mobilised. Although average amount of career pull differs conceptually from total amount of career pull, this study was concerned with the tendency for mobilisation of career pull in the ego-networks. Hayes James (2000) also utilised an average measure rather than a total amount measure in examining access to support. He found no significant differences in the results using either calculation.</p>
Outcomes		

Participation in Developmental Activities	This was measured using a scale developed by the Leadership Effectiveness and Research Network (LEARN), a research collaboration between Personnel Decisions International and the Department of Psychology at the University of Minnesota. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale (never to over-six). Respondents were asked to specify the number of times they engaged in each developmental activity over the previous six months. The data was coded to represent the mid-point of each range of possible responses.	Thirteen-items were selected from the original scale to form a scale on participation in developmental activities ($\alpha=0.81$).
Salary	This was measured from a list of twelve categories from which respondents were asked to select their salary. The data was coded to represent the mid-point of each salary range. Self reports of incomes have been shown to correlate highly with archival company records (Judge, Cable, Boudreau & Bretz, 1995; Turban & Doherty, 1994).	This was measured from a list of twelve categories from which respondents were asked to select their salary.
Hierarchical rank:	This study utilises data from respondents spread across a diversity of organisations. Therefore, respondents were not required to specify their organisational position rank, as the exact meaning of this rank would likely vary between organisations and industries. Respondents' were asked to indicate which job title most closely resembled their current role, from a list of fourteen possible generic options. A category for self-employed respondents was also included in the list of job titles and coded as self-employed.	The data was recoded to produce seven categories; secretarial/administrative, specialist/non-management, assistant management, manager, director, self-employed and other. Only the first five categories were used for the purposes of analysing the variable 'hierarchical rank'. The data was further coded such that a higher number was attributed to a higher-ranking position. This approach to measuring hierarchical rank is based on that developed by Stroh, Brett and Reilly (1992) but adapted slightly to suit the HR profession.
Career satisfaction	This was measured using a scale developed by Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley (1990). Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale (5= disagree strongly and 1= agree strongly).	The final scale utilised ($\alpha = 0.85$) measures general satisfaction with career progress as well as the extent of satisfactory progress towards goals for income level, advancement and development of skills.

For the variables, access to information, resources, support, career sponsorship, career satisfaction and participation in developmental activities, which were measured using scales, single scale-mean score indicators were used to measure the latent variables. To meet condition one, under these circumstances and scale the latent variables, the measurement path estimates were set equal to 1 (Bollen, 1989). The observed scale variable is thus utilised as a reference variable for the latent variable, in terms of origin and units of measurement.

The second condition for measurement model identification is that there are a sufficient number of indicators per construct. Again, because single scale-mean score indicators were used for those variables measured using scales, it was considered appropriate to set the error variances equal to the scale variance times 1 minus the reliability (Hayduk, 1987; Seibert *et al.*, 2001). Single items were used to measure the variables of proportion of weak ties, extent of structural holes, proportion of contacts in higher positions, other functions and other organisations, extent of career pull, salary, hierarchical position rank, age, gender, marital status, organisational tenure, workforce tenure, spouses working status and education. Kenny (2002) advises that these constructs are best handled by forcing their error variance to zero. This procedure accounts for measurement error (Kenny, 2002).

To assess the degree to which common method bias might present a problem, all the scale items for the variables used in this study were subjected to a factor analysis using varimax rotation (Harmen, 1967). From this analysis, thirteen factors emerged of which all represented the expected constructs. Network structure, access to network benefits, subjective career outcomes and objective career outcomes were clear constructs as expected. The variable participation in developmental activities also emerged as consisting of five factors. All factor items had loadings of greater than 0.28 (in a sample of 300, Stevens (1996) suggested that a loading of 0.298 is acceptable), with an

average factor loading of 0.615. The fact that two network structure constructs, three social resource constructs, three network benefit constructs, one subjective career outcome construct, two objective career outcome constructs and one career development construct, loaded onto separate factors provided evidence of the discriminant validity among these constructs.

In testing the theoretical research model a variety of model fit measures currently exist to assess the fit of models. Essentially, in studies where there is missing data, LISREL does not compute the complete set of measures of fit. This study has missing data cases and so, in this context, only those measures of model fit computed by LISREL are discussed here. There are two traditions in the assessment of model fit (Tanaka, 1993); the assessment of the absolute fit of the model and the assessment of comparative fit of the model. The assessment of absolute fit is concerned with the ability of the model to reproduce the actual correlation matrix. The assessment of comparative fit is concerned with comparing two or more competing models to assess which provides the better fit to the data. To account for some of the problems inherent in assessing the absolute fit of a model to the data, researchers have turned to the assessment of comparative fit. LISREL computes a number of comparative fit indices. The assessment of comparative fit in studies with missing data aims to determine if a model fits the data better than a number of other reasonable nested models.

Results

The literature highlighted a number of demographic and human capital variables that influence career and developmental outcomes. A number of these variables were included in this study as control variables. These variables collected the following demographic data: gender (n= 236), 47 percent were male, while 53 percent were female; the average age of respondents (n=304) was 38;

average organisational tenure of was just over 8 years; average number of years in the workforce was just over eighteen years; 89.8 percent possessed a third level education, 59.1 percent of respondents were married and 84.7 percent of respondents' spouses worked outside the home. Table 2 reports the means, standard deviations and correlations among the endogenous and exogenous variables.

Figure 1. displays the results of structural equation modelling and hypothesis testing on the research model. For the sake of clarity we excluded the paths for the control variables and the non-significant paths. The overall model fit statistics indicate, which of a number of alternative nested models based on the hypothesised model, best fit the data. The parameter estimates indicate if the hypotheses derived from the research model are useful for the purposes of prediction. The hypothesised model fits the data well ($X^2=162.08$, $df=78$, $p<.01$; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) =.06). Utilising the change in chi-square (Bentler & Bonett, 1980), the hypothesised model is compared to a number of nested models. This analyses identifies that partially mediated model 2 is the best fitting model ($X^2=133.33$, $df=66$, $p<.01$; RMSEA =.058, PClose= $p>.05$). This model specifies the same paths as the hypothesised model and also the direct paths from social resources to career and developmental outcomes. The change in chi-square test indicates that this alternative model is a significantly better fit than the hypothesised model ($\Delta X^2=28.75$, $\Delta df = 6$, $p<.01$). Thus, this model is retained and interpreted in order to examine the individual hypothesised relationships.

Examination of the standardised parameter estimates reveals that seven of the twenty-five hypothesised relationships are significant and in the predicted directions, when the control variables are included¹. A further three of the hypothesised relationships are also significant but in

¹ The seven control variables were allowed to co-vary with the independent variables. Paths from the control variables to the dependent variables were included in all the models estimated.

the opposite direction to that predicted when the control variables were included. Additionally, six other non-hypothesised relationships are significant. Hypotheses 1a, 1b and 1c positively relate the proportion of weak ties in the HR professional's network to contacts at higher levels (1a), in other functions (1b) and in other organisations (1c). The statistically significant parameter estimate ($b = -0.16$; $p < .05$) indicates support for hypotheses 1b but in the opposite direction. This result also provides partial support for hypothesis 5, which relates the proportion of strong ties in the HR professionals' network to access to career pull, mediated by access to contacts in other functions. There is no support for hypotheses 1a and 1c. Hypotheses 2a, 2b and 2c positively relate the extent of structural holes in the HR professional's network to contacts at higher levels (2a), in other functions (2b) and in other organisations (2c). There is no support for these hypotheses. Hypotheses 3a, 3b and 3c positively relate the proportion of contacts at higher levels (3a), in other functions (3b) and in other organisations (3c) to access to role information, resources and support. There is no support for these hypotheses. Hypotheses 4a, 4b and 4c positively relate the proportion of contacts at higher levels (4a), in other functions (4b) and in other organisations (4c) to access to career sponsorship. The statistically significant parameter estimate ($b = -0.36$; $p < .05$) indicates support for hypotheses 4b, as predicted. There is no support for hypotheses 4a and 4c. Hypotheses 5a, 5b and 5c positively relate the proportion of contacts at higher levels (5a), in other functions (5b) and in other organisations (5c) to mobilisation of career pull. The statistically significant parameter estimates indicate support for hypotheses 5a ($b = 0.32$; $p < .01$) and 5c ($b = 0.19$; $p < .01$). There is no support for hypotheses 5b. Hypotheses 6a, 7a and 8a positively relate access to role information, resources and support (6a), mobilisation of career pull (7a) and access to career sponsorship (8a) to career satisfaction. The statistically significant parameter estimate ($b = 0.25$; $p < .01$) provides support for hypotheses 6a. Hypotheses 8a is also supported ($b = 0.17$, $p < .05$). There is no support for hypotheses 7a. Hypotheses 6b, 7b and 8b positively relate access to role

information, resources and support (6b), mobilisation of career pull (7b) and access to career sponsorship (8b) to salary. The statistically significant parameter estimate ($b=0.031$; $p<.05$) provides support for hypotheses 6b. There is no support for hypotheses 7b and 8b. Hypotheses 6c, 7c and 8c positively relate access to role information, resources and support (6c), mobilisation of career pull (7c) and access to career sponsorship (8c) to hierarchical level. The statistically significant parameter estimate ($b=0.24$; $p<.05$) provides support for hypotheses 6c. Hypotheses 7c is also supported ($b=0.36$, $p<.05$). There is no support for hypotheses 8c. Hypotheses 9 positively relates access to career sponsorship to participation in developmental activities. The statistically significant parameter estimate ($b=0.41$; $p<.01$) provides support for hypothesis 9.

Partially mediated model 2 includes additional paths to those in the hypothesised model. The additional paths specified are from the social resource variables of proportion of contacts in higher positions, in other functions and in other organisations to the career outcome variables of career satisfaction, salary, hierarchical rank and participation in developmental activities. None of the paths from the social resource variables to career satisfaction are statistically significant. The analyses reveals a statistically significant parameter estimate ($b=-0.56$; $p<.05$) for the path from proportion of contacts at higher levels to hierarchical level. The negative sign associated with this parameter estimate indicates that the greater the proportion of the HR professional's contacts in higher positions the lower his/her hierarchical ranking. The path from proportion of contacts in other organisations to hierarchical level is only slightly significant. The path from proportion of contacts in other functions to hierarchical level is not statistically significant. There is a statistically significant parameter estimate ($b=0.098$; $p<.01$) for the path from proportion of contacts in other organisations to salary. The paths from proportion of contacts at higher levels and in other functions to salary are not statistically significant. None of the paths from the social resource

variables to participation in developmental activities are statistically significant. The path from proportion of contacts in higher levels and participation in developmental activities is only slightly significant.

Although not hypothesised in the original or partially mediated model 2, the analyses revealed other significant parameter estimates pertaining to partially mediated model 2. There is a significant parameter estimate for the path from salary to career satisfaction ($b=0.88$, $p<.01$). There is a significant parameter estimate for the path from hierarchical rank to salary ($b=0.023$, $p<.01$). The path from access to career sponsorship and access to information, resources and support is also statistically significant ($b=0.52$, $p<.01$). Finally, there is a significant parameter estimate for the path from proportion of contacts in other functions to proportion of contacts in other organisations ($b=0.32$, $p<.01$).

Consistent with previous findings in the career success and participation in developmental activities literature, several of the control variables are significantly related to the career outcomes. Career satisfaction is predicted by gender ($b=0.27$, $p<.01$). Salary is predicted by number of years in the workforce on a full-time basis ($b=0.0053$, $p<.01$), organisational tenure ($b=0.15$, $p<.01$) and education ($b=0.024$, $p<.01$). Hierarchical rank is predicted by spouses working status ($b=-0.28$, $p<.05$) and education ($b=-0.091$, $p<.05$), however the signs are negative. The negative sign of the regression coefficient for spouses working status as a predictor of hierarchical rank indicates that if the respondent's spouse works outside the home there is a 28 percent increase in the HR professional's hierarchical rank. The demographic and human capital characteristics did not predict participation in developmental activities.

In summary, partially mediated model 2, which includes the social capital variables, the control variables and the additional paths from social resources to career and developmental

outcomes, explains 28 percent of the variability in career satisfaction, 12 percent of the variability in participation in developmental activities, 30 percent of the variability in salary and 12 percent of the variability in hierarchical position ranking.

Discussion & Conclusions

This study utilised a rigorous research design to uncover the influence of and the process through which dimensions of social capital influence career success and participation in developmental outcomes. Specifically, the research model investigated the influence of social network structure, social resource and network benefit variables on career and professional development outcomes both directly and indirectly through one and/or two layers of mediation. The findings enrich our understanding of the complex role that social capital plays on HR professional's career success and participation in developmental activities. The results of this study provide partial support for the model of the influence of social capital on career and developmental outcomes, for HR professionals'.

Overall, the results of the study highlight that of the social capital variables, weak ties and social resources are important predictors of career and developmental outcomes. First, weak ties are useful for accessing contacts in the same function whereas strong ties are useful for accessing contacts in different functions. Weak ties facilitate access to those in a similar field but not necessarily in the same organisation. This may be because of the chosen sample of HR professionals whom reside in HR departments which tend to be small thus requiring HR professionals to reach outside their immediate social groups. Strong ties facilitate access to such social groups as line managers in technical and production functions.

Second, it is contacts in higher positions and in other organisations that provide the *more* influential network benefits to HR professionals rather than contacts in the same function. A key finding is the positive relationship between contacts in higher positions and in other organisations on access to career pull, which subsequently predicted access to extrinsic career outcomes. This emphasises the value in identifying and developing relationships with those who mobilise *more* influential benefits. The results also indicate that HR professionals need to maintain relationships with contacts of the same function as these contacts provide career sponsorship, which is in turn positively associated with career satisfaction and participation in developmental activities. Access to career sponsorship through contacts in the same function is important for its relationship to access to role information, resources and support. This in turn is positively related to career satisfaction, current salary and hierarchical position. Thus, contacts in the same function have an important role to play in terms of the HR professional's career.

Third, the results of SEM on the research model provide data on the specific network benefits of importance to objective and subjective measures of career success and participation in developmental outcomes. In summary, the results indicate that career sponsorship is predictive of intrinsic outcomes; career satisfaction, a finding which corresponds to Bozionelos's (2003) conclusion that expressive network resources display positive associations with intrinsic outcomes. Access to information, resources and support is predictive of both intrinsic and extrinsic outcomes. Career pull, while only predictive of hierarchical rank, has a stronger influence than the other network benefit variables on career outcomes. Career sponsorship is predictive of engagement in professional development activity and career satisfaction.

Fourth, this study is notable for the relationships which were found to be insignificant. The insignificant relationships between weak ties and the social resource variables of contacts in higher positions and in other organisations may possibly be explained by the fact that there is still

ambiguity surrounding the strength of tie proposition (Lin, 1990), the exact influence of weak over strong ties is argued to depend on what is flowing through the network (Bian, 1997) and it is also possible that the need, in this study, to combine the access variable sub-scales into one scale prevented these precise relationships from emerging. Other possible explanations relates to the strong independent effect of education on access to social resources, may negate the strength of tie-social resources relationship.

The analysis found no relationship between strong ties and access to contacts in higher levels and those in other organizations. The results show that strength of tie predicts access to contacts in other functions but these do not predict career pull, a measure of mobilisation. The social resource variables of contacts in higher levels and in other organizations do predict career pull but strength of tie is not predictive of access to these social resources. Hence, in line with Nan Lin et al.'s (1981) argument, this study finds that it is not the strength of ties that provide the benefits but the resources the ties provide access to.

This study revealed no relationship between the variable structural holes and other variables. This may be due to the aggregated variable of access to information, resources and support influencing the interaction terms between structural holes and the access variable and thus not accounting for the possibility for the benefits of structural holes relating to some but not all of these benefits (Podolny & Baron, 1997). This finding may also be explained by Soda, Usai and Zaheer's (2004) finding that the influence of structural holes can only be measured using longitudinal examination.

The results of this study reveal no relationship between contacts in different functions and network benefits. This result is contrary to findings of Ragins et al. (2000) whom reported that protégé's with mentors from other departments had more satisfying relationships. However, this finding could indicate that these contacts were not mobilised at the point in time of this study, thus

emphasising the need to conduct longitudinal research as social networks are not static in time and space. It may also be due to sensitivities associated with the HR context.

The insignificant relationship between career pull and salary may be due to the fact that a large number of control variables were included in the study and all of them are significantly correlated with salary and SEM analysis reveals that organisational tenure, workforce tenure and education are significantly related to salary when the other variables in the model are included. Thus, it is possible that utilising influential benefits can help to further the HR professional in the organisational hierarchy but it is human capital that determines his/her salary. Similarly this may explain the insignificant relationship between career sponsorship and salary. These explanations are consistent with the findings of Eddleston et al. (2004), who reported that efficacy of mentoring and exposure to powerful networks are significantly related to promotions but not compensation, whereas education is significantly related to compensation. The insignificant relationship between career pull and career satisfaction may be explained with reference to the findings of Bozionelos (2003). Bozionelos (2003) reports that instrumental network resources display positive associations with extrinsic outcomes whereas expressive network resources displayed positive associations with intrinsic outcomes. The insignificant relationship between career sponsorship and hierarchical position may be due to the fact that career sponsorship and thus the developers who provide this sponsorship are only likely to be able to influence the HR professional's hierarchical rank and indeed salary if they are in higher positions. As the other findings of the study suggest that HR professionals access career sponsorship from those in the same function and not from those in higher positions, then there is unlikely to be a significant relationship between career sponsorship and hierarchical rank or salary. Beyond this, career sponsorship is predictive of career outcomes only by the fact it facilitates access to information, resources and support which the mentee can then utilise to obtain greater career outcomes.

Limitations

This study possesses a number of limitations. First, although network research typically relies on single-item sociometric questions, multiple item measures could add robustness to the analysis, though some researchers argue that single-items measures can be just as reliable as multi-item ones (Wanous & Hudy, 2001). A number of measures were taken to improve the reliability of these items. The sociometric questions were designed to be as specific as possible to enhance accuracy of recall and questions focused on long-term relationships rather than brief, transient interactions. Both of these design considerations are considered valuable in improving the accuracy of recall (Seibert et al., 2001). Second, caution needs to be exerted in inferences regarding causality of findings. SEM requires that there is a theoretical basis for hypothesis causality. This paper presented this theoretical foundation, however path analysis cannot prove causation, it can just support a set of hypothesised paths (Tharenou et al., 1994). To be more certain of the causal direction of the results, longitudinal research needs to be conducted. Finally, common method bias can inflate relationships between variables. We took several steps to minimise this problem; the items for the independent, mediator and dependent variables were separated into different sections of the survey instrument; as the social capital variables are behavioural and the career outcome variables are factual or attitudinal, common method bias should have been minimised. All of the variables were subjected to factor analysis using the alpha factoring method and varimax rotation (Harmen, 1967) to determine the extent to which common method bias might present a problem. From this analysis, thirteen factors emerged of which all represented the expected constructs. All factor items had loadings of greater than 0.28 (in a sample of 300, Stevens (1981) suggests that a loading of 0.298 is acceptable), with an average factor loading of 0.615. Of the potential cross-loadings, 8 of the 44 items had cross-loadings of above 0.30, which indicates that varimax rotation

was an acceptable option. Two network structure constructs, three social resource constructs, three network benefit constructs, one subjective career outcome construct, two objective career outcome constructs and one career development construct, loaded onto separate factors provides evidence of the discriminant validity among these constructs.

Implications for Practice

Taken together the findings of this study build on current theoretical perspectives on social capital, career and developmental outcomes. In support of the social capital perspective the results illustrate that HR professionals need to develop contacts both within and external to their own functions and organisation and in higher positions due to the career benefits obtainable. Organisations too need to recognise the importance of organisational structures and culture in helping or hindering these inter-unit relationships and thus the success of HR professional's careers. In terms of the types of benefits obtainable, the results illuminate the need for HR professionals to have multiple developmental relationships which respond to their many developmental requirements. HR professionals need to be aware of the influence of different stakeholders to their career and professional development and also the extent to which these stakeholders are influential; it is important to recognise that power comes from and hence network benefits come from more sources other than just hierarchical position (French & Raven, 1959). Thus there is a strong need to ensure HR professionals develop their networking competence to achieve these ends (de Janasz & Forret, 2008). Finally, the HR professional's definition of career success is important in helping them identify the most influential social resources and most valuable network benefits. Essentially, where HR professionals value intrinsic measures of career success then expressive network benefits are more valuable, whereas those who define career success objectively achieve more

from instrumental network benefits. Additionally, human capital variables, in particular education, are still important predictors of salary, thus emphasising two key points; the need for HR professionals to still value education and continuously engage in continuous professional development.

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Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations and Intercorrelations of dependent and independent variables (Pearson)

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Weak Ties	Structural Holes	Contacts Higher Positions	Contacts Other Department/ Functions	Contacts Other Organisation	Access to Information, Resources, Support	Access to Career Sponsorship	Career Pull	Career Satisfaction	Salary	Hierarchical Rank	Participation in Developmental Activities
Weak Ties	0.62	0.25	-											
Structural Holes ²	104.67	23.77	.098	-										
Contacts Higher Positions	0.65	0.29	.038	.045	-									
Contacts Other Departments/ Functions	0.59	0.31	-.126*	.007	-.109	-								
Contacts Other Organisations	0.59	0.33	-.057	.093	-.138*	.298**	-							
Access to Information, Resources, Support	5.28	0.80	-.018	.031	.004	-.117*	.044	-						
Access to Career Sponsorship	3.33	0.71	.006	-.006	-.060	-.139*	-.004	.422**	-					
Career Pull	2.40	0.38	.033	.022	.211**	.048	.142*	.018	.062	-				
Career Satisfaction			.029	-.012	-.014	-.094	-.033	.355**	.314**	.079	-			
Salary ³			-.051	.094	-.135*	.068	.222**	.259**	.138*	.057	.271**	-		
Hierarchical Rank			.076	.012	-.109	-.021	.133*	.135*	.009	.073	.054	.198**	-	
Participation in Developmental Activities			-.071	-.075	.073	-.038	.071	.231**	.262**	-.005	.187**	.083	.006	-
** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level of significance (2-tailed) * Correlation is significant at 0.05 level of significance (2-tailed)														

² Cube Transformation

³ Log Transformed

Figure 1: Results of Structural Equation Modelling

