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Capitalising on the value in relationships: A social capital-based model for non-profit public relations

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Abstract

This paper proposes that a social capital-based model can assist under-resourced non-profit organisations in structuring their public relations efforts. Social capital is the idea that there is value in relationships. Because of a common focus on relationships, social capital and public relations share an ability to benefit non-profits. Using public relations activities to generate social capital offers non-profits with limited physical capital the opportunity to make use of the value generated from networks and relationships.

Introduction

In 2000, Harvard professor Robert Putnam renewed the now-popular discussion on the notion of social capital, which he defined as the value that exists in relationships between people. Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2000) amassed years' worth of sociological data about the social networking habits of Americans, concluding that today's Americans do not have access to the elaborate network of social connections that is established by group membership and community affiliation. Putnam argued that contemporary Americans were lacking a resource that their more involved, more networked predecessors were able to access – social capital.

The literature of social capital expanded rapidly after Putnam's 2000 study. Social capital was an appealing concept for many reasons: for its ability to somewhat quantify the otherwise nebulous value found in social networks, for its simplicity and accessibility when used in scholarly work, and for its applicability to practice and social action. The concept of social capital has been applied to a number of academic fields, and a recent article in *Public Relations Review* (Ihlen,

2005) advocated the application of social capital to the study and practice of public relations. Although Hazelton and Kennan (2000) had previously suggested that social capital was created by the type of communications that are facilitated by the public relations function, the potential instrumental value of social capital in performing the public relations function has not yet been explored.

Specifically, the concept of social capital has not been applied directly to the use of public relations in non-profit organisations, which are often lacking in physical capital (resources, funding) and may be able to use the resources derived from social capital as a substitute. From a fundraising standpoint, the idea of social capital has often been integrated into non-profits' strategy by the use of personal connections to secure money (physical capital) from donors. The significant body of literature that connects non-profit fundraising to the public relations function attests to the fact that non-profits have been informally organising their efforts around the use of social capital for quite some time now. This essay suggests that this informal perspective be formalised and enhanced by two additions: consideration of the value of social capital beyond fundraising dollars and use of social capital as an organising principle in the non-profit's strategic planning for public relations.

On an individual level, the concept of social capital is one that is familiar, although it is rarely labelled as such. You bake a pie for a new neighbour who moves in next door in the hopes that you can someday ask her to water your plants while you are out of town. When you add a new friend to your social circle, you make connections with that person's friends as well – which can be particularly useful if your car breaks down and your new friend's sister happens to be an auto mechanic. The larger

your network of personal and professional affiliations grows, the more opportunities you have to access the value in those relationships.

This essay suggests that organisations, and specifically non-profit organisations, can access social capital in much the same way as individuals. The current literature on social capital, including various definitions of social capital and how this concept can be applicable to non-profit organisations, is synthesised. By proposing a model for non-profit public relations that is grounded in the idea of generating social capital, this essay considers how social capital can be generated through an organisation's public relations efforts, with an emphasis on strategically identifying and creating relationships that will benefit the organisation. In creating a model for non-profit public relations that emphasises accessing the value in the organisation's relationships, this essay provides non-profit organisations with a practical model for strategically building social capital through public relations.

Literature review

As Putnam (2000) notes in his introduction, the concept of social capital has actually evolved separately over the years in at least six different contexts. While the definition of social capital has changed over time, the term itself implies a larger sociological and economic context: as a social concept, which involves the relationships between people in society, and as an economic concept (capital), which facilitates production and productivity.

There are several explanations for the sudden popularity of social capital in the academic literature of fields as diverse as sociology (Coleman, 1988; Portes, 2000), city planning (Ferman & Kaylor, 2001; Hutchinson & Vidal, 2004; Larsen, Harlan, Bolin, Hackett, Hope, Kirby, Nelson, Rex & Wolf, 2001), economics (Sobel, 2002), religion (Becker & Dhingra, 2001), and public relations (Hazleton & Kennan, 2000; Ihlen, 2005). Light (2004) identifies the "uniquely democratic accessibility" of social capital, contrasting it to other forms of capital

(physical, financial, human, and cultural) as having the most potential to benefit those without conventional means (p. 149). As a construct that uniquely fuses sociology and economics, social capital has value for both its descriptive abilities and its utility in praxis (Putnam, 2004).

Defining social capital

Definitions of social capital vary among researchers and across disciplines. Putnam's (2000) definition, perhaps one of the most popular, posits that the "core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value" (p. 19). Putnam defines social capital in contrast to physical and human capital – which he identifies at the individual level – by placing the "value" of social capital in the relationships between individuals and the social networks that are built by these connections. Social capital does not exist in a vacuum; it is "defined by its function," implying that the existence of social capital is dependent on its ability to produce some real effect (Coleman, 1988, p. S98). Light (2004) further suggests that the idea of social capital "postulates an instrumental and intentional aspect, as well as a spontaneous aspect" (p. 146), agreeing with Coleman that some production must occur and adding a dimension of intentionality. Unlike physical capital, unused social capital does not devalue over time and social capital does not diminish with use; in fact, networks may actually increase in value through the formation of new connections (Sobel, 2002).

The social network of individuals (and sometimes of organisations) is at the basis of the concept of social capital. Social capital's location in the network itself – rather than in the actors that are connected by it – differentiates it from other forms of capital (Coleman, 1988, p. S98). In this way, the value of social capital can be approximated by evaluating the network; as Putnam (2000) notes, "a well-connected individual in a poorly connected society is not as productive as a well-connected individual in a well-connected society" (p. 20). However, defining social capital as simply the sum of an individual's associations is an oversimplification; any

attempt to measure social capital must consider not only the existence of a connection between two actors, but also the qualities and overall effect of their interaction (Rohe, 2004). The difficulty of measuring social capital in a real-life context will be discussed in a later section.

Reciprocity and trustworthiness

Mere association between individuals is not enough to produce social capital. Putnam (2000) identifies *reciprocity* and *trustworthiness* within a social network as elements that must be present in order for the network to generate social capital (p. 19). Distinguishing between *specific* reciprocity (the fulfilment of obligations on a case-by-case basis) and a more *generalised* reciprocity (where individuals provide assistance to others with the expectation of being paid back in the future at an unspecified time), Putnam suggests that a “society characterised by generalized reciprocity is more efficient than a distrustful society,” adding that “frequent interaction among a diverse set of people tends to produce a norm of generalised reciprocity” (p. 21). Trustworthiness among those in a social network is an important part of fostering generalised reciprocity – individuals must believe that actions undertaken on behalf of others will be reciprocated even though it is unspecified how and when this will take place. The vital role of trust in the generation and continued presence of social capital means that trust is “at once a precondition, an indication, a product, and a benefit of social capital, as well as direct contributor to other benefits” (Cohen & Prusak, 2001, p. 29).

Structural factors affecting social capital

The structure of a social network can also affect its ability to generate social capital. When a social network is closed (i.e., all members in the network are associated with each other), the structure of the social network promotes trustworthiness and common expectations, and can lead to increased social capital (Coleman, 1988). A social network’s density crucially affects its

ability to generate social capital; if two individuals in the network have a high likelihood of encountering one another in the future, they are less likely to violate one another’s trust for personal gain (Putnam, 2000).

The culture and shared social norms of networks also help produce social capital (Briggs, 2004). If a tendency to help others is a characteristic of the network, individuals will be more likely to build social capital in their relationships in this sort of network. By encouraging such positive characteristics as mutual aid, community involvement, and shared responsibility, an organisation can help promote the growth of social capital. The relative looseness or tightness of a social network is also likely to affect how influential these shared norms will be in affecting individual behaviour.

Bridging and bonding social capital

Gittel and Vidal (1998) identified and defined two types of social capital as “the type that brings closer together people who already know each other (we call this *bonding capital*) and the type that brings together people or groups who previously did not know each other (Putnam (2000) called this *bridging capital* and we adopt his term)” (p. 15). Bridging capital is identified as a resource that promotes use of external assets and dispersal of information (ibid) and breaking down traditional barriers in diverse communities by focusing on the larger social identity (Briggs, 2004). Bonding social capital, on the other hand, can promote specific reciprocity and bring together a group based on its members’ commonalities (Putnam, 2000); furthermore, bonding social capital is often a key factor in the creation of bridging social capital (Gress, 2004; Larsen et al., 2001).

Measuring social capital

Efforts to measure social capital have often proven to be difficult. Empirically, social capital is a complex concept that involves the intersection of several things which are themselves difficult to measure: trust, reciprocity, relationships, and human behaviour. Potential problems arise at many

points when trying to measure social capital, among them disagreement over the actual definition of the term, data which may not reliably measure components of social capital, and a lack of attention to the interplay of these components with one another (Durlauf, 2002). Some studies choose instead to measure the outcome of social capital, rather than its existence within the network.

Organisational applications of social capital

The literature has discussed social capital as a resource at the individual, organisation, and community level (Briggs, 2004; Cohen & Prusak, 2001; Putnam, 2000). But according to Portes (2000), “the transition of the concept from an individual asset to a community or national resource was never explicitly theorized, giving rise to the present state of confusion about the meaning of the term” (p. 3). In the modern literature, social capital was originally designed as a way to measure the value of networks for individuals or, at the largest, small groups. Although Portes’s concerns are well-founded, it seems logical that the concept of social capital is inextricably linked with the community in which it is located. Coleman (1988) describes social capital as having a “public good aspect” (p. S119), adding that social capital may not always benefit those individuals who create it.

While the individual’s place in the social network is certain, the role of organisations in the kind of networks that generate social capital is a little less defined. As Portes mentions, the idea of social capital has transitioned from an individual to a community resource as new literature has developed the concept. Organisations play an important role in building social capital on both the individual and community level. Putnam’s (2000) study focuses largely on the membership numbers of civic organisations and the precipitous decline in membership these organisations have seen. Without the kind of connections fostered by group membership, Putnam argues, Americans are increasingly lacking the kinds of networked social groups that allow them to access social

capital. Most of the literature acknowledges the importance of connections made through formal associations in generating social capital.

Organisations are often recognised for their ability to assist individuals and other organisations in creating social capital by facilitating close and continued interaction among members through local chapters and regular meetings (Putnam, 2000). Research has found that social capital can be generated by religious organisations (Becker & Dhingra, 2001), in the workforce (Haslam, Eggins, & Reynolds, 2003), and in global community development organisations (Ferman & Kaylor, 2001). Connections established between organisations are a part of the social networking that leads to generating social capital (Briggs, 2004).

Scholars seem to agree that social capital can be consciously generated by an organisation for its own ends and for the members of its community (Cohen & Prusak, 2001; Coleman, 1988; Gittel & Vidal, 1998; Leonard & Onyx, 2004). However, while studies of communities or networks with high social capital have identified certain characteristics that are found in these communities, they have not focused on the actual process of producing social capital once these environmental factors are in place. As social capital is often produced as a by-product of existing relationships, conscious attempts to create this resource must be undertaken carefully. Any strategy of ‘investing’ in social capital must encourage the strengthening of existing social networks in an authentic way, as “social capital thrives on authenticity and withers in the presence of phoniness or manipulation” (Cohen & Prusak, 2001, p. 23).

Cohen and Prusak (2001) present four advantages of social capital in the organisation – improved knowledge sharing, lower transaction costs, low turnover rates, and greater coherence of action – and suggest that organisations should ‘invest’ in social capital much like they do in other forms of capital. Other internal benefits to the organisation generated by building social capital are advantages over other organisations and greater stockpiles of social capital which can be

accessed (Hazleton & Kennan, 2000). While these particular benefits are specific to the organisation's internal functioning, they can also positively affect the organisation's external relations.

Social capital and non-profit public relations

Communication, the natural link between the concept of social capital and public relations, is at the heart of the relationships that public relations practitioners attempt to build and maintain. Public relations necessarily includes the use of communication, and some sort of communication must occur in order for social capital to be built and eventually deployed (Hazleton & Kennan, 2000). The use of public relations activities to build relationships between an organisation and its publics creates the potential for the creation of social capital, but the mere act of communication does not automatically generate useful social capital. For instance, without the public's trust, an organisation's public relations efforts are unlikely to generate social capital that it can reasonably expect to access in a productive manner.

Scholars are increasingly recognising the connection between social capital and public relations and are discussing ways in which this concept can be used to benefit public relations. Ihlen (2005) argues for the use of social capital in the study of public relations, primarily because "public relations thinking...emphasises how relationship building has both short and long-term effects for an organisation" (p. 494). A social capital-based approach is also able to illuminate the power dynamic inherent in public relations by more accurately assessing the relative power of organisations involved in a particular field (Ihlen, 2005). Gress (2004) agrees that power must be considered when discussing social capital, as "building social capital and community capacity is made more difficult in contexts where there is a recognised power differential between the actors" (p. 181).

Because of its association with ideas such as civic participation and community involvement, social capital has a natural

connection with the non-profit world (Putnam, 2000). The idea of volunteering is a form of generalised reciprocity – giving to others in the hopes that someone would give to you if you came to need help. In a study of volunteering patterns in a church congregation, Becker and Dhingra (2001) found that congregants' decisions to volunteer with the church was based not on religious beliefs but on the social networks they had formed through the church. Similarly, social capital can also be generated by social movements, which are fuelled by social networks and can create new network associations as well (Putnam, 2000).

A review of social capital literature by King (2004) addresses the connection between social capital and non-profit organisations. Social capital can be used to "recruit and develop board members, raise philanthropic support, develop strategic partnerships, engage in advocacy, enhance community relations, and create a shared strategic vision and mission within the organisation and its employees" (p. 471) – some of the most basic organisational processes of a non-profit. Many external responsibilities of non-profit executives – community relations, fundraising, vendor relations, and advocacy, among others – involve the building and use of social capital.

Most discussions of non-profit public relations (e.g. Booth, 1995) have been oriented toward public relations practitioners in (often small) non-profit organisations. There has been a great deal of development in the field of non-profit management as these organisations have come to play a larger role in today's society and economy. However, there is a dearth of available literature that specifically examines the non-profit organisation's public relations efforts from a theoretical perspective. Many discussions of this topic address broadly the larger concept of organisational communication, arguing the benefits of a free information flow within the organisation and to its external audiences (Bernstein, 1997). Several books take a best practice approach to non-profit public relations, focusing primarily on media relations (Booth, 1995). Very few, however, address the complete combination of

communication and relationship management that is addressed by public relations.

Relationship management theory

In its recent history, the literature of public relations research has seen perceptions of the field shift from one with a primarily communicative function to one that emphasises the formation and maintenance of relationships with important publics. Because the application of social capital to non-profit public relations necessarily involves the relationships that these organisations can form to generate social capital, the literature that examines relationships in a public relations context is especially relevant.

Relationship management theory uses perspectives from interpersonal communication, psychotherapy, interorganisational relationships, and systems theory to examine the relationships an organisation develops with its publics (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997). A focus on the establishment and maintenance of these relationships, originally suggested by Ferguson (1984), helped move public relations beyond its original conception as a purely one-way communicative function (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). When relationship management theory is used to guide an organisation's communications strategy, public relations is necessarily a management function because of the amount of strategic planning required to successfully implement such a strategy.

This theory has been further refined to include three areas of focus: relationship antecedents, cultivation strategies, and outcomes. Existing research in relationship management theory provides a useful framework that organisations can use in their attempts to assess their existing relationships. Relationship management theory can also provide useful information for organisations as they attempt to create new relationships and cultivate those relationships to produce more successful outcomes.

Relationship antecedents, the conditions that precede the development of an organisation-public relationship, are

environmental factors that often include the possibility of the public to affect the organisation in some way (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997; Grunig & Huang, 2000). In this situation, the public's ability to generate social capital for a non-profit organisation would be considered a relationship antecedent. Without this potential, the organisation would be less likely to build and maintain this relationship than it would others with greater potential ability to generate social capital.

Hon and Grunig (1999) identified six ways in which organisations maintain their relationships once established: access, positivity, openness, sharing of tasks, networking, and assurances. Some of these cultivation strategies may be more or less promising for creating social capital: networking with other organisations important to a particular public, for instance, is likely to directly increase an organisation's social capital by strengthening the network. A strategy such as openness, the amount of disclosure and discussion about the nature of the relationship, may be helpful in improving and increasing trustworthiness, but might not directly generate social capital for the organisation.

Relationship outcomes are often used to determine the success (or failure) of an organisation's public relations efforts. Hon and Grunig (1999) created a series of 30 questions that organisations could ask publics to determine the level of six relationship outcomes: trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, commitment, and whether the relationship is an exchange or communal relationship. The existence of trust is, as mentioned previously, a key precondition for the generation of social capital, and the ability to measure this factor would be useful in attempts to measure social capital.

The identification of the relationship as an exchange or communal relationship parallels the concept of specific versus generalised reciprocity which is used in discussing the conditions which may generate social capital. In an exchange relationship, as defined by Hon and Grunig, "one party gives benefits to the other only because the other has provided benefits in the past or is expected to do so in the

future” (p. 20). In a communal relationship, “both parties provide benefits to the other because they are concerned for the welfare of the other—even when they get nothing in return” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 21). Therefore, the questions in this part of Hon and Grunig’s survey could be useful in measuring the degree of specific versus generalised reciprocity in an organisation-public relationship.

By using existing research in social capital and relationship management theory, this research proposes a model that can help non-profit organisations plan their public relations efforts. This model, which emphasises strategic planning and the practice of public relations as a managerial function, uses social capital as an organising principle to prioritise the creation of certain relationships that can benefit the non-profit by generating social capital. The principles of relationship management theory can then be used to build and cultivate these relationships to create positive outcomes for the organisation.

Social capital in practise: Proposing a model for non-profit organisations

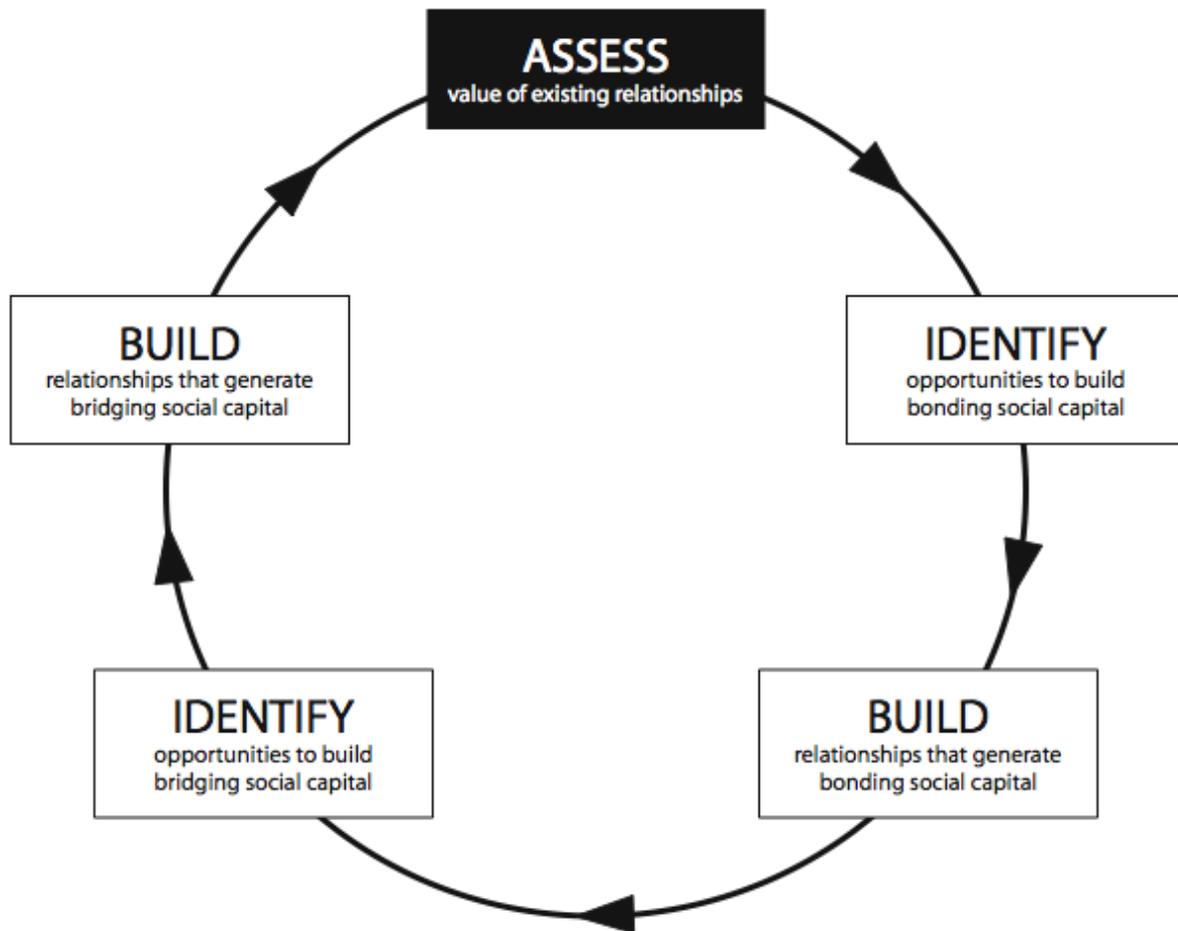
As we have seen, organisations are often very deeply involved in the production of social capital. Non-profit organisations can intentionally build social capital in two ways: by encouraging interaction and networking among their members, and by establishing trustworthiness and a feeling of generalised reciprocity in their community. Once

generated, social capital may be stored, but it is most valuable when it is used, preferably in a way that produces more social capital.

The public relations function, with its focus on communication as a way to build and strengthen relationships, is a natural means by which to generate social capital. Proper execution of the public relations function has the potential to foster trustworthiness between an organisation and its publics, a necessary prerequisite for building social capital. The public relations function is also able to inform the organisation’s involved publics of the accomplishments that have been generated by their donations of time, money, and other resources. Making these publics aware that their donations are being utilised productively can help reassure them that a system of generalised reciprocity is in place, setting the stage for further development of social capital.

Although circumstances vary, non-profit organisations are often characterised by a scarcity of physical resources. The model proposed by this research (Figure 1) is intended to address possible shortfalls in financial capital by focusing on the production of social capital, specifically through the public relations function. Although social capital may not always be able to serve an organisation’s needs in the way that physical capital can, it is assumed that the production of social capital with respect to non-profit organisations is generally an advantage for the organisation and can lead to the acquisition of important resources needed by the organisation.

Figure 1: Circular model of social capital-building process



Implementation of the model

This model suggests that organisations can begin the process of building social capital by assessing the value in their existing relationships. This includes relationships between the organisation and other organisations, between the organisation and its members, and between the organisation’s members and other individuals outside of the organisation. Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify the amount of social capital that exists in these relationships, it is reasonable to start by listing relationships of these three types.

Without generating a quantifiable amount, it is possible to roughly estimate the scope of an organisation’s social capital by determining the breadth of an organisation’s relationships with other individuals and organisations. During this

step, organisations should pay attention to the aspects of relationships which are likely to promote the generation of social capital: high levels of trust and generalised reciprocity in the relationship, as well as structural factors such as openness of the network and tightness of bonds within the network. This kind of thinking will also benefit the organisation as it proceeds to the next step and generates a list of potential new relationships to build and cultivate. Although it is impossible to predict the amount of social capital which can or will be generated by building relationships with specific publics, it is reasonable to strategically consider which relationships have the potential to generate social capital.

Following the assertion that the existence of bonding social capital promotes the building of bridging social capital (Gress, 2004; Larsen et

al., 2001), this model first suggests that the organisation identify opportunities to generate bonding social capital. This will help the organisation produce social capital and build a firm foundation for future efforts to create bonding social capital. In this step, organisations will attempt to identify like-minded individuals or organisations with which they share a commonality. This may include other non-profit organisations or individuals who are former or current non-profit volunteers; based on the non-profit's mission or the services it provides, they might be similar organisations outside of the non-profit realm. The model suggests that those relationships that generate bonding social capital should be established and/or strengthened first.

Once bonding social capital has been generated, an organisation can identify relationships that may yield bridging social capital. This will often take the organisation outside of the non-profit sphere and may suggest relationships that seem unlikely or unnecessary. For instance, the public relations practitioner for a local chapter of the Red Cross may instinctually think to establish relationships with local schools and other organisations in the health care community. However, relationships with seemingly unassociated organisations may prove more beneficial. As an example, consider a local Red Cross chapter that has a board member who is a high-ranking employee at the local campus of IBM, which donates all of the computers for the chapter's use. At first glance, there may seem to be little in common between a computer manufacturer and a non-profit providing first aid training and blood collection services. However, this relationship generates bridging social capital by providing the chapter with the computers needed to run its operations without spending valuable organisational funds.

This model is circular in order to emphasise the importance of continually re-evaluating an organisation's public relations efforts. In this situation, the model suggests that the organisation should periodically restart this process by assessing current relationships and the social capital that can be generated from them. Depending on the organisation's size and

resources, this may be done on a more or less frequent basis; for example, it would be appropriate to add an assessment of organisation relationships to the agenda at annual meetings of boards of directors or organisation staff.

Managerial aspect of the model

The model provides a framework for using the concept of social capital to inform the public relations function for a non-profit organisation. As an added benefit, use of this model encourages non-profit organisations to perform the sort of strategic planning that has been shown to be beneficial in organisational public relations. This model presumes an understanding of public relations as a management-level function. Dozier (1984) suggested that public relations could be practiced on two levels: that of the manager, whose strategic planning efforts influence not only the public relations function but also the larger trajectory of the organisation, and of the technician, whose individual actions provide incremental support for the strategic plan designed by the manager. Because this model is intended to drive strategic planning for the organisation's public relations efforts, it is a recommendation targeted specifically for those public relations practitioners whose responsibilities are on a managerial level.

As such, this model is less concerned with identifying specific communication strategies and tactics that should be employed in the use of this model. A great deal has been made about the potential of social media to build social capital for an organisation, although most of the research available thus far has focused on the ability of social networking sites to generate social capital for the individual. Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) found that intensity of use of the site Facebook was positively associated with both bridging and bonding social capital for college students at Michigan State University; Kennan, Hazelton, Janoske, and Short (2008) found that college students intentionally use social networking sites (as well as other communication technologies) for the purpose of generating social capital.

Initial, more anecdotal indications show that use of social media may be able to benefit non-profit organisations. Mainstream non-profit organisations such as the American Red Cross, American Cancer Society, and Lance Armstrong's Livestrong Foundation have established presences on Twitter, for instance, using that social networking site to disseminate information to tens of thousands of followers (Cohen, 2009). Local non-profits also have found that Twitter is a useful way to raise awareness about their organisations' efforts. Certainly some non-profits have been very successful in fundraising via social media and generating large numbers of Twitter followers and Facebook fans, but further research is needed to know if participation in social media generates the sort of characteristics that are likely to promote the creation of social capital. Future research may also indicate that certain types of social media are more or less conducive to generating social capital for an organisation.

Conclusions and further research

Although it first appeared in the early 20th century, the concept of social capital has become more popular in research since Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* brought the idea back into the national consciousness in 2000. As a popular concept, social capital is highly accessible – nearly all of us can point to an instance in which our social connections have produced some sort of value, often in an unexpected way. As a research construct, social capital is highly practical, bringing great value to praxis-oriented fields such as city planning and community development. This research applies the concept to non-profit public relations, advocating that a model for the development of social capital-generating relationships can prove a useful tool for non-profit organisations to use in generating value from their public relations function.

Empirical research on the model proposed here is required to determine whether social capital can be successfully used as an organising principle for a non-profit organisation's public relations efforts. By working with non-profit organisations to help

them implement this model, and assessing the short- and long-term success of their efforts, I hope to more accurately evaluate whether this model has value in practice and whether my suggestions for implementation of the model are practically resonant. Ultimately, this model was designed to serve as a practical tool for non-profit organisations that may be suffering from a resource deficiency; if it does not serve this purpose, it should be adjusted accordingly.

There is a great need for further research on methods for measuring the value of social capital for non-profits. Although there have been some efforts to measure social capital, primarily for the purposes of Third World development (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2002), it should be explored whether these methods are appropriate for non-profit organisations. Research is also needed on how non-profit organisations can maximise the value of social capital once it is generated.

Further research may also identify specific communication tactics (e.g. social media) that are particularly well-suited to generating social capital for non-profit organisations. These tactics would need to foster trust and reciprocity and contribute to the network characteristics (closed networks, tightly bonded actors, social standards of behaviour) that point to the production of social capital. Further research could also identify tactics that should be avoided because they may prevent the successful generation and use of social capital.

There is a great deal of potential for further research in the application of social capital to the practice of public relations by non-profit organisations. As an outgrowth of the recent popularity of social capital, the application of the concept to public relations may prove a fertile field for developments that will benefit non-profit organisations suffering from a scarcity of physical capital, allowing them to pursue their mission-based goals and hopefully change society for the better.

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